

“Were Those Bad Times for Women or What?”: The Practical Public Discourse of Mary Leite Fonseca, Massachusetts State Senator, 1953-1984

Jamie White-Farnham

Mary Leite Fonseca was a state senator in Massachusetts who served in office from 1953 to 1984. In her many years in the state house, she became well-known and well-loved by her constituents in Southeastern New England, especially the Portuguese-American families who have defined the character of the “South Coast” region of Massachusetts since the immigrant boom of the 19th century and in increasing numbers since the 1960s (Bloemraad 29). As a local politician, Fonseca is best known for the advances in education she helped to legislate, especially the establishment of Southeastern Massachusetts University (today known as UMass-Dartmouth), a comprehensive regional university that serves many immigrant, first-generation college students. Fonseca is not necessarily notable because she is a woman who served in the state legislature: she was neither the first in Massachusetts nor was she the only woman who served during her tenure. However, Fonseca has merited attention for her longevity in office, her legislative effectiveness, and her popularity, each of which are attributable to her unique combination of characteristics—her gender, her roles as a wife and mother, her high school-level education, her class status, and her family’s Portuguese immigrant background.

Fonseca also merits rhetorical attention as a female rhetor speaking and writing in the mid-20th century, an era ripe for study in its oscillation between two extremes: the end of formal legal inequality for women and the well-documented persistence of *de facto* sexism that even cost women with official power, like Mary Fonseca, jobs, respect, and dignity. Within such a context, we learn from Fonseca’s papers that her right to be heard on the senate floor or in conversations in meetings, though granted by the electorate, needed defending. Accordingly, in order to succeed amidst the sexism she perceived in her constituency and which was patently on display in the state house, Fonseca relies on what Drema R. Lipscomb calls a “practical public discourse,” a personal alternative to the belles-lettres tradition cultivated in educational institutions (231). Analyzing the rhetoric of Sojourner Truth, Lipscomb describes this type of self-sponsored rhetoric as practical in both its means and ends – its means drawn from Truth’s own personal knowledge and experiences (as a woman, a mother, a slave, a Christian), and its deliberative purpose, helping to effect equalizing social legislation. Lipscomb writes: “at no time, perhaps,

in the history of American speech and amidst mass social turmoil was there a period more conducive to a rhetoric of practical public discourse" (231).

In this essay, I will extend a comparison between the means and ends of Truth's rhetoric and that of Mary Fonseca, recognizing that Fonseca was a 20th century American citizen of European ancestry who enjoyed a high school education and paid employment. But, because these subjectivities did not automatically grant Fonseca privilege in the context of her career, "practical public discourse"—in terms of its development based on lived experience, its use in the context of social turmoil and change, and its purpose to effect legislation—is useful in considering Fonseca as a 20th century example. As evidence from her archive suggests, including speeches, campaign materials, press clippings, interviews, and correspondence between colleagues and constituents, Fonseca developed a practical public discourse drawn on her subjectivities amid an isolating political scene in which few to no contemporary female models existed.

Women's Domestic Roles in Women's Public Rhetoric

Rhetoricians have long studied the connection between women's domestic roles and responsibilities, especially motherhood, and rhetoric, asserting variously that such roles can inspire the content and strategies of women's rhetoric as surely as they can pose limits on women's rhetorical production. As Lindal Buchanan has recently stated in this journal, motherhood has a "paradoxical capacity to generate powerful persuasive resources and to reduce women to gender stereotypes" (33). Many examples of women rhetors, cutting across time, class, and race, exist in the literature, providing evidence to support each side of this paradox – whether motherhood "works" or not in terms of writing and rhetoric.

Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen, in *Imagining Rhetoric: Composing Women of the Early United States*, describe motherhood's role in rhetoric in the early United States as a supportive one in which mothers serve as their sons' literacy teachers "to instill in America's youth an intelligent respect for written laws and civic virtue" (13). This perspective suggests the figure commonly referred to as "The Republican Mother," famous examples of which are embodied in Abigail Adams and, across the pond, Mary Wollstonecraft, each of whom were attuned to the power of their biological, and by extension, ideological, contributions to society. Wollstonecraft's own argument regarding the relationship between motherhood and civic duty in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* appeals to upperclass women to take more seriously the political impact they can have as mothers through a heightened attention to their roles as caregivers and educators of their own children.

Lamenting the condition of women's minds, trained to focus only on clothing and social circles, Wollstonecraft writes: "the management of their household and children need not shut [women] out from literature [...] which strengthens the mind" (par. 64). Education is also a necessity for women so that they might impart in their children reason and virtue, the main values necessary for participation in society (par. 2). According to Eldred and Mortensen, early American women writers such as Judith Sargent Murray follow suit with a Republicanism such as Wollstonecraft's, since Murray supported classical rhetorical education for women. Murray, similarly to Wollstonecraft, outlines a mother's role in a nation that values and relies on written laws and legal discourse: women "could inculcate [their] children with the literate values of science and law, a wholly reasonable foundation for succeeding generations" (Eldred and Mortensen 12). This view couches women's rhetoric as available through their domestic subject positions.

Even into the 19th century, Nan Johnson, in *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life 1865-1910*, asserts that the rhetorical education offered to women in the popular conduct manuals and letter-writing guides of the day served mainly to enhance women's activities in the domestic realm, and more specifically, the parlor, where "gender propriety" was the watchword for rhetoric's usefulness (16). Even when women like Susan B. Anthony attempt to influence the public through rhetoric, their long-engrained ties to playing the mother don't break; Johnson argues that in Suffragette rhetoric, the women's rhetorical personas are limited to those of maternal teachers (112). She sums up the political rhetoric of Suffragettes as disappointing because it couldn't shake off women's connection to motherhood. She writes that

the prominent women of the 19th century were venerated in the public mind not because they were considered to be great orators but because they were represented as great women, a perception that left virtually unchanged the cultural assumption that women were only eloquent when they spoke from the moral authority of their roles as wives and mothers. (114)

Motherhood also plays a part in Frances Willard's rhetoric, according to Lisa Zimerelli, who highlights how Willard uses her maternal body to legitimate her rhetorical action as a Christian Socialist leader. In articulating her feminist theology, Willard's *Woman in the Pulpit* blends the expected either/or feminist arguments for women's status of the day; in other words, Willard's work does not rely strictly on the sameness of women to men or their inherent differences to argue for women's rights. Zimerelli writes that Willard "blends the common arguments based on difference and equality: it is precisely because of women's natural differences that they are equal with men"

(266). Furthermore, Willard's "rhetorical use of the domestic and the feminine did not necessarily indicate a worldview grounded in the separate sphere ideology" (356). By drawing attention to childbirth as a particularly feminine act of strength, for instance, Willard counters arguments that preaching is too physically strenuous a task for women. In this way, the "opposites" of femininity and strength are derailed.

Of course, gender and motherhood have as often been described as a precluding factor in women's rhetorical and otherwise literate pursuits. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* describes the double-bind women face when their "natural" place at home is used to both mandate unpaid domestic labor and limit one's opportunities to make money (for her, through writing) (par. 31). Thirty year later, Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" identifies economic dependence as a main problem for women's success as professional writers: "give her a room of her own and five hundred a year" (1269). The room is not a metaphor, as Anne Aronson reminds us; space away from the rest of the household and, more to the point, cash to pay substitute caretakers are necessary for writing (282).

A drastic example of the limits that domestic subject positions can have on rhetorical production is featured in Aronson's study of adult, undergraduate women, "Composing in a Material World: Women Writing in Space and Time," in which Aronson weighs Virginia Woolf's "room of one's own" argument against Ursula LeGuin's claim that writers, as mothers, only need a pen and paper to write. While Woolf acknowledges the materials necessary for writers such as time, space, and money, LeGuin welcomes the chaos of a household that surrounds women as inspiration for writing. While of course these arguments represent well their places in first and second wave feminist thought, Aronson eventually comes down on Woolf's side since Aronson's participants, as college students, struggle to write at home. They each face challenges in terms of time, space, and privacy, mostly because they are mothers.

Articulating the politics attendant to motherhood and rhetoric necessitates acknowledging that certain privileges must be present in order for one to tout one's domestic subjectivities as evidence of strength or remarkableness. Fonseca also benefited from privilege in her tight-knit family, but her rhetoric bears out the use of her motherhood in a way that reflects Lipscomb's practical public discourse in a 20th century context: in both its means and ends. Sensitive to gender politics of the day, Fonseca centers gender in her public persona in strategic ways, allowing the public's perception of domestic subjectivities as milquetoast to cover for her "real" political persona, what amounts to a legislative tiger. In fact, while the artifacts in Fonseca's collection at first glance represent her as conservative, vaguely sexist, and even clinging to the maternal role that Johnson describes in suffragette rhetoric, I suggest that

they are quite rhetorically savvy exploitations of feminine stereotypes and sexist assumptions about gender. After an analysis of this public persona, a second set of artifacts—communications between Fonseca and her constituents and colleagues centered on women’s working lives amid *de facto* sexism—complicate the story of Fonseca’s legislative success, further elucidating the deliberative ends of practical public discourse.

Practical Means: Exploiting Sexist Assumptions

A quite striking group of artifacts housed in Fonseca’s collection reflect stereotypical and sexist notions of women and their roles in the home to portray Fonseca as a woman her constituents can understand: one who, even while pursuing full-time work, is not neglecting her home duties. As cases in point, two human-interest stories in particular make significant use of her domestic subjectivities. Generous and sympathetic in spirit, both the *Fall River Herald News* and the *New Bedford Standard-Times* offer upbeat profiles pieces on Fonseca. In particular, in the 1958 *Standard-Times* piece entitled, “Mary Fonseca – Working to Change an Image,” staff writer Barbara Ashton describes Fonseca as neither “militant” nor “fuzzy-minded,” but as a powerful women in politics who is helping to “change minds and remove barriers that are remnants of a bygone era” (Ashton 25). That the profile writer is a woman presumably lends to the angle of the piece, yet the two accompanying photographs slightly undermine Ashton’s tone. In the first, Fonseca poses holding a soup tureen at the dining room table as if about to serve her family. In the second, she stands before a mirror adjusting one of her famous Jackie Kennedy-style hats, ostensibly getting ready to depart for the State House. Her husband can be seen sitting behind her in the mirror’s reflection. The suggestion of Fonseca’s presence in both the domestic and the public spheres is notable, but her physical presence in her home and seeming “approval” of her husband does little to bolster an image of her as powerful in the political realm, though the text suggests as much.

Another, similarly dichotomous depiction of Fonseca appears in an undated *Fall River Herald News* photograph whose caption reads: “Mary Fonseca Proves Good Homemaker, Senator.” In addition to the order of the roles in the text, the photographs accompanying this piece are printed as if on a split-screen, side-by-side. The proximity of the images suggests a more direct comparison between “home” Fonseca and “work” Fonseca. This time, the right-hand Fonseca wears a floral-print apron and a smile while she stirs a large stockpot. The left-hand photo shows Fonseca holding a document in one hand and the telephone to her ear with the other. The caption notes: “State Sen. Mary L. Fonseca, who has one of the best attendance records in the State Senate, is shown in her Webster Street home transacting government

business by telephone (left) and – one apron later – at the usual task of every homemaker, preparing supper for her family” (Box 3, Folder 33A). Again, this set of photos represent Fonseca in a pantomime of her work while actually at home; they rely on the suggestion of competing domestic/public spheres, yet the message of each piece is that Fonseca successfully moves between or even elides the distinction between her roles as homemaker and senator.

Fonseca relies on the public’s belief in this impossible elision in her own use of her gender and domestic roles in her practical public discourse. For instance, a campaign speech exemplifies a sort of rhetorical misdirection, aligning with common assumptions of a dominant audience while delivering simultaneously liberalizing meanings to a minority audience. In a 1952 campaign speech for her very first campaign, Fonseca introduces herself straightaway as a mother: “May I call your attention to certain qualifications and experience which I think should help you determine my fitness. I am a life-long resident of this city, born here and educated in its schools. I am married, and the mother of two children” (Box 4, Folder 65). Having served as a member of the school committee, a common first step for a local politician, Fonseca has little experience in politics. Therefore, in running for a state-level office, she links her subjectivities to qualification for office. This statement asserts her credibility as a citizen of Fall River, Massachusetts, the political center of the South Coast of Massachusetts.

But, motherhood perhaps stands out as a curious qualification. On one hand, Fonseca articulates her vested interest in her district because she and her family rely on its infrastructure, especially because her children go to public school. Fonseca mentions her marriage and motherhood despite their potential as a liability, establishing an ethos of local knowledge and experience and characterizing herself as someone for whom policy in her district has been and will be a life-long and personal priority. Moreover, given the full political picture of the 1952 campaign, this seemingly neutral mention of being married is actually quite strategic; Fonseca is well-known for supporting the so-called Married Teachers Bill, which would end the war-time practice of limiting jobs for women who didn’t “need” them. In this subtle way in her campaign, she paints her family life as a simple fact for the dominant audience, while sharing her sympathy for the minority audience of professional women and suggesting, rather than claiming it out loud, that a vote for her at the polls means a vote for them on the senate floor.

In a later re-election campaign, Fonseca puts her domestic circumstances to use in a far slier example of rhetorical misdirection; consider her slogan on a bumper sticker: “Re-elect Mary L. Fonseca / Your Full Time State Senator” (Box 3, Folder 33A). Remembering that the *Herald News* article noted her excellent attendance in legislative sessions, this bumper sticker calls attention

to Fonseca's ability, as someone who does not have a "real" full-time job like the men who serve in the state senate do, to focus her attention on her duties as an elected official more carefully and oftener, as well as to be more available during the day to her constituents. Describing herself as "your full time senator" reminds the audience that her political opponents' attention will be divided between their professional lives and their public service. She expects voters to reason that a committed senator is more effective than a half time or absent senator, even if she is a woman.

In touting a status that the male senators, who practiced law and held down other jobs, cannot, Fonseca makes a rhetorical move that begs the question: how was she able to maintain such high professional standards and also what is represented as an uncompromised commitment to homemaking? Like many critics of a belief in "having it all," the answer reveals the privilege attendant to one's circumstances. And, though hard working, Fonseca did benefit from the privilege in her life, mainly in the form of a supportive family. In an oral life history collected by UMass-Dartmouth undergraduate student Yvonne Levesque in 1987, Fonseca credits her mother and her husband for their support, noting especially that housework fell to her mother while Fonseca worked: "I couldn't have done it without my mother. I lived in the tenement above her and she took care of my children when I needed her to [...] she fixed my husband's supper when he came home" (Levesque).

In drawing attention to how much time she has on her hands, Fonseca plays into assumptions about what housewives do all day and instills confidence in her constituents that, as a homemaker and mother, she brings this unique and desirable qualification, time, to the job. The campaign slogan exploits the elision of the material support necessary to taking on full-time employment as a main caretaker at home. Fonseca is confident that those audience members who take for granted the demands of homemaking will not wonder how she is able to work "full-time."

Practical Ends: Confronting *De Jure* and *De Facto* Sexism

In her 2005 obituary, Fonseca is described as "a precursor to the feminist movement at a time when there were far fewer [feminists] than there are now" (Brown A8). Yet, Fonseca's legislative record also reflects the political interests of Portuguese-Americans in Southeastern New England generally, especially the previous century-long reformation of working conditions for laborers in the textile industry, the area's historic mainstay (Reeve 340). Even into the early 21st century, "Portuguese-Americans remain staunchly loyal to the Democratic party and the economic tenets of New Deal liberalism" (Barrow

303). Therefore, while Fonseca's allegiance to the party and her Portuguese-American constituents are evident in the larger story of ending *de jure* sexism, the conversations and efforts among Fonseca and her contemporaries, both constituents and colleagues, document the difficulty of pursuing these social changes amidst the *de facto* sexist conditions of the day. Accordingly, the historical record reflects Fonseca's role in the passage of two pieces of equalizing social legislation, Senate Bill No. 93, the Equal Pay for Teachers Bill, and Senate Bill No. 184, the Married Teachers Bill, as a matter of party politics. Yet, the ends do not reflect in full the means of this legislation.

As the bills' names suggest, the legislation changed the conditions for women to work as teachers in the state, protecting them from being fired if they got married and eliminating sex as a factor in commensurate wages a good decade ahead of the Civil Rights Act. On this issue in particular, examples of constituent correspondence are stirring; their jobs threatened, teachers address the urgency of the situation for them. As an example, a woman from Winchester, Massachusetts writes: "You see, if I should decide to get married, I'd want to be sure that I would not be dismissed!!" (Box 3, Folder 30). Several responses of Fonseca's remain mimeographed and stapled to constituents' notes, sometimes hand-written and sometimes typed on two-cent postcards, tattered stationery dotted with ink from fountain pens, and even an index card in one case. In responding to letters to the state house, Fonseca assures the writers that she is working for them, articulating her position on the issue clearer than in any public message housed in the archive. A typical letter dated March 17, 1953 reads: "Needless to say, I am in favor of allowing teachers to continue working after marriage [...] I intend to do all I can to ensure passage of this legislation" (Box 3, Folder 30).

Her political conviction was not what Fonseca's constituents needed to worry about. As a woman in the state house, Fonseca had very few political resources at her disposal to influence policy. Fonseca describes her exclusion from other senators in Levesque's oral history interview: "You see, the male senators wouldn't talk to the women, so I studied the rules hard and learned them myself. That's why I know so much about senate rules and was able to get so many bills passed" (Levesque). "The rules" to which she refers are comprised of the State Constitution, Session Law, and General Law, each of which outline laws of the state and the laws of the legislature. Today, the processes and procedures a member of the government or a citizen must follow to introduce a bill or a petition for a hearing are available online. In 1953, when Fonseca first entered the state house, she faced a large law library, rather than a friendly face, to orient her to such policies and procedures. However painful this treatment by her colleagues may have been, Fonseca took huge advantage of being ignored. Whereas rules suggest limits on one's actions,

Fonseca used them to gain footing; she notes in a 1984 *Boston Globe* profile, "I soon learned that in order to find out anything, I had to find out for myself [...] I learned the rules" (Negri 66). Fonseca became highly regarded for her detailed knowledge of the rules; in a 1987 "Golden Dome Citation," State Senate President William Bulger notes Fonseca for "her preparation, her knowledge of the rules" (Box 18).

Twenty years later, when feminist messages become more mainstream, Fonseca's rhetoric becomes more direct and relies on her personal experiences that counter traditional, idealized notions of "what women do" with what women of her class *actually* do: work for a paycheck. A *Boston Globe* article recounts a moment, in 1974, when she speaks on behalf of a day care bill whose detractors claimed that state-funded day care "would destroy family life in the state" (D32). Tom Long quotes Fonseca and describes the scene:

'I resent the senator's remarks, and I resent them on behalf of all women and working women in Massachusetts,' she said, her voice cracking with emotion. 'If we can find money for welfare, we can find money to assist women who want to work, who MUST work to help support the needs of a growing family.' (D32)

Fonseca, herself having been employed immediately following high school as a secretary to help her parents support her eleven brothers and sisters, no longer allows assumptions to operate as they will in regard to women's working lives.

Fonseca's own working life exemplifies the political shift of the intervening twenty years; even after passing successful anti-sexist legislation, *de facto* sexism prevailed, and women who worked at the state house continued to deal with mistreatment. In a 1966 interview, for instance, Fonseca describes the scrutiny she and her female colleagues faced:

A woman in politics and government must be more sure of her position on issues, because people tend to be more critical of a woman's performance. For instance, when a man makes a mistake in his job, no one says 'what else would you expect from a man/ People just note that he's made a mistake. When a woman makes the same error, the female sex is indicted. They ascribe her mistake to the fact that she is a woman, not simply that she's a human being. Therefore, each of us has to prove herself deserving of equal treatment by her professional performance" [...]I think men rather enjoy having a few women in the legislature. They'd be disturbed, though if the ratio ever approached one to one. (Box 19)

The conditions in which Fonseca and her colleagues worked is further illustrated by a piece of personal correspondence. The letter is typed on state house letterhead and dated June 4, 1962. Across the top of the page, written in ink in loopy handwriting is a brief note from a colleague of Fonseca's named Ann dated 1998. The whole thing is a black and white photocopy. If I might stitch together how this document came into existence: it seems that in 1962 Fonseca sent Ann a personal letter congratulating her on a promotion within the state house. Ann found the letter years later, made a copy to show Fonseca, and jotted a note at the top to reminisce with her. I quote Fonseca's 1962 text and then Ann's 1998 note in full:

Please accept my sincere congratulations on your long deserved promotion, and be assured that I was most happy to be of service to you in this instance. In my opinion, the State Department is, at times, unkind to women, but I am indeed happy that in this instance we were able to make some progress.

How I fought for that promotion! I was bypassed three times and the position was given to a man who had never passed a civil service exam. Were those bad times for women or what? (Box 5, Folder 80)

This type of archival find is what Michael R. Hill calls an "overlay channel," a document that conveys "two or more sequences of communication, possibly written at different times" (66). This particular overlay channel squarely imbricates the two colleagues' struggles with sexism in 1962 with their reflective knowledge of 1998, offering a fuller picture of the time and conditions in which the women worked. It also adds to our understanding of the work Fonseca undertook to improve the conditions for women: add everyday political jockeying to official state house work and maybe also housework. Together, the correspondence between Fonseca and her constituents and colleague interjects nuance and details into the broader story of Massachusetts at mid-century; they name and distinguish the individuals involved in social and political change, prefiguring the action of the state. They also demonstrate how Fonseca and her colleagues contended with both *de jure* and *de facto* sexism in their time by illuminating the ironic challenge of changing unfair working conditions while working in them.

Enriching Understanding: Massachusetts at Mid-Century

Archival research is well documented as a sometimes dusty proposition in which one is challenged to "read absolutely everything and try to make sense of what happened" (Gold 18). However, my experience is somewhat different;

in the cool, pleasantly lit Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese American Archives in the Claire T. Carney Library at UMass-Dartmouth, Fonseca's collection is a lot cleaner and neater than the conventional wisdom on archival research suggests, mainly because Fonseca's artifacts are relatively young, having been collected after her retirement in 1984 and available since the opening of this new archive in 2009. Therefore, only rarely were her artifacts stacked messily in the boxes, though the occasional three-dimensional object, such as her hats, were crammed in sideways.

Disorder has come to be both expected and welcomed in archival research; according to Marlene M. Kadar, the fragmented, postmodern nature of archival research allows researchers to represent resistance to patriarchal oppression in the form of commonly accepted cultural narratives about women (115). Similarly, Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan describe "how using these less frequently consulted resources can enrich our understanding of history, culture, and rhetoric" (2). To do this, Helen K. Buss argues that one must resist the temptation to "read from above," or impose one's own contemporary knowledge or understanding of a subject onto the archived materials, "resorting to narrative closure" (34). A similar methodological lens is offered by Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean: "material feminism," or a way of critically reading artifacts to resist "hometruths" with which a research subject is associated (230).

To resist narrative closure in terms of Fonseca, I have confronted the hometruths that draw me to her archive in the first place: she was a popular, effective state senator whose gender and longevity contribute to her legendary reputation. She wore fancy and fashionable hats that added to her persona a sense of glamour and good-humored eccentricity. In a time when "having it all" was not yet articulated as a goal or a problem for women, Fonseca seems to have been a protofeminist who stood up for women and immigrants on the South Coast, a region that competes for attention and resources with nearby, center-of-the-universe Boston. Lusophone scholar Clyde W. Barrow has noted that despite a perception that recent immigrants are not politically active, Portuguese-Americans have contributed greatly to progressive politics in Massachusetts, and the Portuguese "archipelago" of Southeastern Massachusetts in particular is home to a proportionately high rate of voter turnout and political participation compared to other immigrant ethnic groups (299). Impressively, Fonseca herself became politically active within one generation of immigration.

Studying Fonseca's archive results in a complication of her accepted narrative that I don't believe belittles her accomplishments or diminishes her reputation in any way. Instead, the materials offer a rare account of a rare 20th century female politician who builds for herself a practical public discourse.

Far different than the outspoken feminists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who worked as a collective for the vote and workers' rights, the 20th century woman politician operates in a context bereft of contemporaries and in conditions defined by gains in legal equality and yet pervasive with sexism. Attendant to these circumstances, Fonseca at first creates a feminine, non-threatening public persona complete with a selection of hats *qua* costumes to draw attention to her gender and domestic subjectivities and deflect attention from her political goals to change the status quo. Fonseca's practical public discourse therefore springs from her reality, grounded in local ethics and hometown knowledge of what will play and for whom.

And, while legislative success is the dominant historical narrative, the official state record, the writing and rhetoric of and between Fonseca, her colleagues, and her constituents offers an enlightening alternative story of the slings and arrows of social change. Pulling with and for her constituents and colleagues, Mary Leite Fonseca's archive evidences her commitment to legislate equal rights and to demonstrate the potential of gender equality to her family, colleagues both sympathetic and hostile, and admiring constituents with a practically suited mid-20th century feminist rhetoric.

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About the Author

Jamie White-Farnham is Assistant Professor in the Writing Program at University of Wisconsin-Superior, where she is also serves as Writing Coordinator. She teaches first-year writing and courses in the writing minor. Her research interests include writing and language use as they relate to women's working conditions, and her work has appeared in *Community Literacy Journal*, *College English*, and *Rhetoric Review*.