

Women, Work, and Success: *Fin de Siècle* Rhetoric at Sophie Newcomb College

Christine Jeansonne and Lillian Bridwell-Bowles

Abstract: *"Women, Work, and Success: Fin de Siècle Rhetoric at Sophie Newcomb College," identifies a kairotic moment in the current conversation about gender in all-women's colleges. We look to a now-closed (a year after Hurricane Katrina in 2006) women's college in New Orleans to understand how faculty, students, and alumnae used rhetoric at the fin de siècle and early part of the twentieth century to construct a successful vision for women's education. In calling their public rhetorics "epideictic," we note that they were strategic rhetoricians who praised the institution of women's education in documents like the student and alumnae-run magazine, The Newcomb Arcade, and in promises made by faculty in their speeches about education, and even in alumnae's oral histories that were supposedly more candid. Together, we've written this article because it affords the field of Feminist Rhetoric with historical data and documents from female students and alumnae who were making a case for women's education when it was in its incipience. The research we have done will help modern-day rhetoricians see and reflect upon the rhetorical foundations of women's education in the South and in general, to then go forth to interpret the broader future of women's education and an expanded sense of women's gender.*

Keywords: *women, work, success, rhetoric, New Orleans, New South, reality, gender, art, pottery, education, students, teachers, alumnae*

The title for a *New York Times* feature story asks, "Who Are Women's Colleges For?" As many women's colleges are closing (their numbers dropped from two hundred in the U.S. in 1960 to forty-six today, according to Feldman),¹

1 Since June 2015, six women's colleges (Barnard College, Bryn Mawr College, Mills College, Mount Holyoke College, Simmons College, and Smith College) have broadened their admissions policies to include the enrollment of transgender applicants who identify as female. Some women's colleges have closed down altogether due to a major drop in enrollment, while other schools have merged with their brother institutions or have chosen to keep their names but become coeducational.

the colleges that remain continue to tout advantages for a particular environment for women's education. Not uncommonly today, applicants to women's colleges define their identities as "female" or "woman" in new terms, and the *Times* author, Kiera Feldman, reviews the complex terrain of gender definition, particularly transgender identification. Leaders of women's colleges continue to consider how such discussions of gender will influence their missions and enrollments.

In addition to the question of "who" should enroll in women's colleges, other crucial debates will affect the kinds of environments we provide in the 21st century in order to insure that women are educated to become leaders. In particular, the rhetoric surrounding leadership at women's colleges provides a particular lens through which to analyze gender and other crucial questions: What are these colleges' goals vis-a-vis women? Should women's education prepare them for a culture that continues to place constraints on them? What transformations are necessary to move from a rhetoric that merely promotes women's education to a rhetoric that offers a critical account of what happens after students become alumnae? Should women's education prepare them as agents of change in the culture?

Through an examination of rhetorical arguments for the existence of a women's college at the fin de siècle and in the early years of the 20th century, we suggest that these questions were not successfully answered then, nor have they been now. And yet, as in so many cases in the past, a visionary rhetoric often precedes real social reform. Although rhetorical arguments for the founding of women's colleges in the late 19th century contained few explicit discussions of gender identity, they frequently enforced culturally normative behaviors for women. At the same time, however, they advanced idealistic proposals for what a woman *might* do in society. Founders and first generation women students used what we call a "rhetoric of success" to promote a positive rationale for women's education, even though the colleges frequently failed to deliver on all of their promises.

We examine the trope of success for women at one such college, H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College, founded in 1886. Newcomb provided education for women for over one hundred years in the Deep South, but often did not (or could not) fully deliver on the promise of new opportunities for women, evident in the stories of early graduates' lived experiences. We also explore its innovative experiment in women's work at the Newcomb Pottery, which opened in 1895. Even though the women's pottery is not the primary focus of this study, the works of art produced by these women led us to this study because we have long admired it and wondered about its meteoric rise in popularity. If we read art (in this case pottery) as text, what does it "say" about women's work and women's artistic achievement? Kenneth Burke offers one



Figure 1 Newcomb pottery decorators depicted at work in a 1902 woodcut, *Special Collections, Howard Tilton Library*

explanation with his idea of “symbolic intensity...‘charged’ by the reader’s experience outside the work of art” (63) itself.² The themes and motifs in the pottery capture the flora and fauna of the Deep South, but they also reveal much to contemporary audiences about women and work at a time when opportunities were severely restricted.

Some of this symbolic intensity derives from a tension between the visionary rhetoric of the founders and the students and the powerful gendered barriers that the earliest graduates faced when they sought to become independent artists. In their arguments for the founding of the college, for its purpose, and for the Pottery,

these Newcomb rhetors were self-consciously trying to make the case both for the college and for women’s opportunities. They show an acute rhetorical awareness of the need to establish the case for Newcomb in New Orleans and to carve out room for a female presence in the workforce. Hardly a bastion of suffragist resistance to patriarchy, the Deep South did, in fact, need educated women workers in roles that clashed with the dominant trope of what an educated, middle or upper-middle class “lady” could do in the world. We discuss the economic influences below in the section on cultural conditions in New Orleans.

We investigate arguments in the school magazine, *The Newcomb Arcade*; in speeches by administrators and faculty members on the efficacy of a woman’s education at Newcomb; and in later interviews by three alumnae about their

2 We are indebted to M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer for this use of Burke. They use Burke’s “symbolic intensity” to explain the impact of Rachel Carson’s rhetoric *Silent Spring* on the environmental movement during the time of the Cold War.

experiences at Newcomb. Dagmar LeBreton, Olga Peters, and Sadie Irvine, all early graduates of Newcomb College who studied and worked in the arts in varying capacities, each provides a different perspective on women's artistic work. In their stories, they grapple with the rhetoric of success that urged them on, while at the same time their college was imposing conventional ideas about professional success, limiting their constructions of female gender, underestimating their artistic capacities, and restricting their personal freedom.

As an institution established to educate white women in the Deep South after Reconstruction, Newcomb College is certainly different from women's colleges in other regions;³ nevertheless, we assert that rhetorical practices at Newcomb resemble those at other institutions in the United States during this time, particularly the arguments aimed to convince skeptical audiences of the need for women's colleges to train women for leadership.⁴

Kairos: Setting the Stage for Women's Education in New Orleans

Josephine Louise Le Monnier Newcomb endowed Newcomb College in honor of her young daughter who died at age fifteen. Newcomb College was unique because of its practice of educating young women for professional futures alongside men at Tulane University. Unlike other women's colleges established in the 19th century as independent schools, Newcomb was the first to grant degrees to women at a coordinate college in the U.S.; others, e.g., Radcliffe and Harvard, would later adopt the model of separate colleges sharing resources.

Audiences for feminist arguments of any kind in New Orleans were virtually non-existent before the Cotton Exposition of 1884 when Julia Ward Howe,

3 In contrast to Newcomb, which was founded for white women, Spelman College (<http://www.spelman.edu/about-us/history-in-brief>) was founded in 1881 as an educational opportunity for African American women and named in honor of Mrs. Laura Spelman Rockefeller and her parents Harvey Buel and Lucy Henry Spelman, longtime activists in the antislavery movement. As the seven sister schools emerged in the Northeastern United States, so, too, were seven white, all-women's colleges opening in the South: Agnes Scott College, Hollins University, Mary Washington College, Queens University of Charlotte, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Sophie Newcomb College, and Sweet Briar College.

4 See a contemporary example of collaborative rhetoric in the resuscitation of Sweet Briar College: <https://savingsweetbriar.com/> and <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/06/22/deal-will-save-sweet-briar-college>.

the famous suffragist and abolitionist, visited New Orleans. She spearheaded the first “Women’s Department,” a special showcase for women’s work at the 1884-85 World’s Industrial and Cotton Exposition. Miki Pfeffer describes the prospects following Howe’s visit: “If Southern ladies allowed themselves, they could exchange pedestals for fresh pathways” (207). It was this arts exposition that led Tulane President William Preston Johnston to advocate for a women’s college and to hire the Woodward brothers, Ellsworth and William, to teach arts classes. They had been influential teachers of the women in the Exposition, and they became the first teachers in the highly successful arts curriculum at the fledgling Newcomb College, established with Mrs. Newcomb’s gift a scant two years after the Exposition. In *The Arts of Crafts of Newcomb Pottery*, Sally J. Kenney points to Josephine Newcomb’s desire to “advance women in the practical side of life” (9). An advertisement in *The Newcomb Arcade*, the students’ quarterly magazine (to the right), touts it as “The Art School for AMBITIOUS YOUNG WOMEN” (qtd. in Poesch 48). Typical of the era, Newcomb limited the scope of “ambitious young women” to “the higher education of white girls”⁵ (Crawford 10).

Even for those unmoved by feminist arguments, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the First World War, massive fires, and disease made it clear that New Orleans’ women had to assume new roles. Ellsworth Woodward,

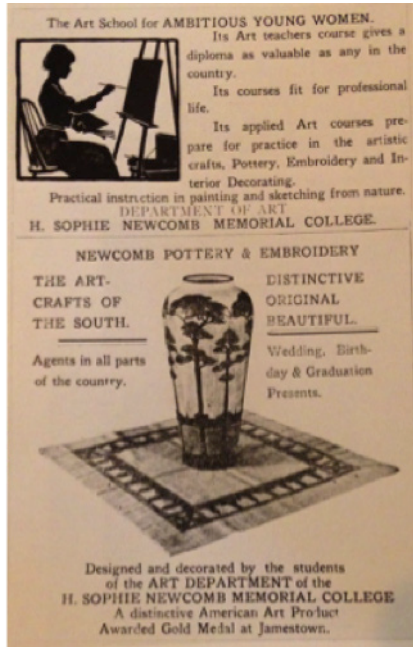


Figure 2 Advertisement printed in *The Newcomb Arcade* Volume 1, Number 1. January 1909

5 Women of color were admitted at Newcomb College in the years after desegregation in the South, but there were none during the period we are examining. Male African-American students were first admitted to Tulane in the 1960s, and the archivists we consulted believe that the same policy applied to women, but there is no documentation of a dual policy. We do know that African women were routinely accepted after the 60’s and until Newcomb’s closing.

the head of the Arts College and eventual founder of the Newcomb Pottery, knew that roles such as “the madonna of the hearth,” a common Victorian image familiar to him and to others, would not be sufficient to build a new economy for the region. In a 1909 issue of *The Newcomb Arcade*, Woodward argues, “Schools have come to realize that where one may be prepared to add to the sum of beauty and achieve personal success through the pictorial arts, a hundred may be trained to useful enterprise in the field of artistic craftsmanship—a limitless field in which the world of industry ministers to the needs of a refined civilization” (emphasis ours, 27). Young women outnumbered young men in New Orleans, and, as Kenney puts it, “New Orleans families were aware that their daughters needed employment” (10), and jobs for women producing decorative arts offered seemingly limitless opportunity.

Despite the relative privilege that the majority of Newcomb students enjoyed as white “Southern ladies,” the individual lives of these women in the South after the Civil War reveal struggles with gender and class identities; they were required to maintain feminine decorum, to give back to their communities in the spirit of “noblesse oblige,” and even to debate whether they could aspire to professional lives as artists. A few Newcomb students came from modest middle class backgrounds and needed jobs to contribute to their families and support themselves financially.

The Newcomb Art School is our specific focus for several reasons. First, arts education has been historically and continues to remain feminized. Producing decorative arts was considered a particularly acceptable pursuit for women. The Arts School and the Newcomb Pottery⁶ offered jobs to young women decorators and teachers, many of whom were Newcomb alumnae. Secondly, we assert that the arts and especially the Pottery—where men threw the pots and women decorated them—were not simply spaces where traditional gender roles were reinforced, but also places where gender could be explored and reconfigured. Sadie Irvine, for example, excelled in her role as a decorator, the “exceptional woman” so common in women’s histories. In order to succeed, she chose to focus on her art rather than to marry and assume a more conventional role in New Orleans’ society. Others—a majority, in fact—struggled to balance their pursuit of careers in the arts with the pressure to be “proper ladies,” as we shall discuss in more detail. Thirdly, women’s

6 Newcomb College itself was founded in 1886, but the Newcomb Pottery was not established until 1895; the founding of the Pottery marks the beginning of our interest in specific women’s lives; the Pottery was conceived as “part artist collective, part social experiment, and part business enterprise initiative under the auspices of an educational institution” (Conradsen et al. 9).

artistic achievements have been historically undervalued, and the history of Newcomb pottery provides an excellent example.

The young women artists at Newcomb College decorated some of the most famous American artifacts in the Arts and Crafts Movement at the Pottery and sold them for modest prices. Newcomb women continued to produce pots after 1929, but the Pottery closed in 1940 as sales declined during and after the Great Depression. In the late 20th century, however, long after the Pottery closed, Newcomb pots became prized artifacts for collectors. Unless one is a wealthy collector of fine (and very expensive) ceramic art, an art historian, or an alumna of Newcomb, the names of even the most successful artists from Newcomb College are unrecognizable and unmentioned in women's histories. Today, however, the pottery and Newcomb women's pioneering efforts are currently being recognized and rediscovered, and are on display in a traveling exhibition entitled, "Women, Art, and Social Change: The Newcomb Pottery Enterprise" sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, the Henry Luce Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Writing about an earlier exhibition of women's pottery at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, curator Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen underscores the importance of including women's contributions in the canon of American Art: "The role of women in producing American art and studio pottery has always been understated. Everyone knew that women figured prominently in both movements. But actually they were more important than that—they dominated these movements from the 1870s to around 1915" (Reif).

The Pottery was heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, the trans-Atlantic rejection of the Industrial Revolution. John Ruskin, the leading English art critic in the Victorian period, articulated many of its major tenets as he decried the damaging effects of industrialization on artists and workers. The remedy that he and artists such as William Morris and J.W.M. Turner promoted was a return to nature for subject matter and to handcrafted products, designed and produced by individual artists. The famous "Mad Potter of Biloxi," George Ohr, who taught for a brief time at Newcomb, promoted handcrafted, anti-industrial arts with his slogan "No Two Alike." Ellsworth Woodward's art also included Arts and Crafts motifs, and he and the early teachers at Newcomb, including Ohr, found the fauna and flora of Louisiana extremely suitable subjects for a women's arts curriculum. Thus, a distinctive "Newcomb style" for the pottery, as well as other arts and crafts (e.g., stichery, jewelry, book binding), emerged from the Arts and Crafts movement and from the emphasis on local motifs.



Figure 3 Students decorating pots in the pottery decorating room, ca. 1902-1905, Poesch 36.



Figure 4 Joseph Meyer at the pottery wheel, Poesch 72

According to an 1881 article from New Orleans' *Daily Picayune* entitled "Women's Work—Which Our True Men Should Consider,"⁷ women of the time excelled in the decorative arts: "In decorating pottery and china painting, female artists have displayed more aptitude and taste than men, and no doubt this branch of work will afford

employment to many women in the future" (4).

Despite their alleged aptitude, they were not allowed to actually create the pots. They were not instructed in the skill, though a few taught themselves and some rare examples of their pots survive. In general they were restricted to traditional classrooms where they studied drawing and decorated the pots in their regular clothing covered by aprons. We include here a

7 For additional detail and background on the Pottery, its teachers, and the women's roles there, see Sally Main's "Conscious Freedom: The Newcomb Pottery Enterprise," in *The Arts and Crafts of Newcomb Pottery*.

photograph of Joseph Meyer, the potter who shaped most of the pots decorated the Newcomb artists, to illustrate the distance women were forced to keep from dirty work (Poesch 72). No doubt it was also perceived as unseemly for a woman to straddle a pottery wheel.

According to Jessie Poesch (1922-2011), Professor Emerita of the History of Art at Newcomb, these gender roles were universally “understood”:

It was assumed that a professional male potter would be needed to work the clay, throw the pots, fire the kiln and handle the glazing [all tasks done by both men and women today]. The women might do the designing and decorating, but a man would perform the other tasks, which were half-mechanical, half-artistic. The Newcomb Pottery was an enterprise designed to employ Southern women, but in this late Victorian period it was assumed that only the lighter work could be handled by the women.

Even with these restrictions and safeguards, many parents had to be assured that their daughters were not exposed to experiences they deemed inappropriate. A newspaper account entitled “Free Drawing Classes at Tulane,” cited in Sally Main’s history, reports that “many of the new members of the art classes were attended by their male protectors who brought them to the door and went off only when well-satisfied with the busy look of things” (8). Because of assumptions about gender roles at Newcomb, administrators and parents required that these students be monitored and restricted to pristine studios.

Newcomb Epideictic Rhetoric of Success

The founders, administrators, faculty, students, and alumnae at Newcomb invoked what we call a rhetoric of success: an epideictic mode of rhetoric that declared success for women, celebrating women’s potential and often embellishing these young professionals’ accomplishments in the workforce well beyond the reality. This rhetoric of success warrants contemporary scrutiny because we can now see clearly the gendered constraints, constraints that did not apply to male artists. Its promises of professional achievement during the period were unrealistic. By propagating a rhetorical narrative that did not consider the failures and disappointments in finding work in a “man’s world,” Newcomb faculty and students unwittingly misled one another and some of the female students who followed. The statistics and firsthand accounts of their professional successes reveal a disconnect between the rhetoric and the realities of lived experiences, as we will illustrate later in this essay.

The faculty, administrators, and Mrs. Newcomb initiated this epideictic rhetoric of success in order to galvanize support and enthusiasm for women's education. Woodward expresses it this way in a 1901 report: "I am hopeful that we can here provide a livelihood for that large number of women who have artistic tastes, and who do not find the schoolroom or the stenographer's desk or the counter altogether congenial" (qtd. in Conradsen et al. 181). Over time, the rhetorical trope of women's success, particularly in this women's college, was instantiated in nearly all public documents produced at Newcomb. Heavy-handed epideictic praise of Newcomb's promise began as early as the college's first graduation when President Preston Johnston presented the diplomas, saying,

Young Ladies: You are presented to me by your honored President as duly, truly and fully prepared to receive the Baccalaureate Degree of this University. You constitute the first graduating class of the H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College. You are the firstlings of our flock, as the rare primroses in the springtime of its college existence, the first flowers of its morning...you will look back with a tender regret and a modest joy on this school where you early found a standard and incentive for aspiration (qtd. in Crawford 55).

These women, newly minted as professionals, would require new rhetorical skills in order to promote their ethos as female professionals in a male-dominated society. While college leaders and alumnae constructed a visionary ideal for women's education, the female students also had to use a new kind of rhetoric as they moved into new arenas. Newcomb women proved to be sophisticated rhetors, deploying a rhetoric of praise and echoing their teachers in order to establish a strong reputation for the college.

In particular, the students' quarterly magazine, *The Newcomb Arcade*, promulgated an idealistic vision to a public audience. Throughout the Arcade's twenty-five year existence from 1909 to 1934, students and alumnae collectively exhibited a deep self-awareness of their shared rhetorical spin on the value of the college and its promise of success. In the March 1916 issue, Jane L. Gibbs, a graduate in 1905, describes the value of her alma mater and the strides made by her fellow alumnae. In a section entitled, "An Alumnae Appreciation of the Art School," Gibbs contends that the Art School provided the economy with working, self-sufficient artists: "While many graduates go out each year as teachers of art, others prefer an occupation which is both remunerative and congenial, so we find some following the designing of pottery, others are filling orders in the jewelry-craft, while those who are skillful with the needle are kept busy with the art needlework..." (45). She echoes Mrs. Newcomb's vision of the self-supporting Newcomb woman when she

asserts that “the aim has been to provide opportunity for *self support* through congenial occupations which otherwise would not be offered in the community” (emphasis ours 46). In the February 1924 issue of *The Newcomb Arcade*, Elizabeth Harris describes another skill necessary in order to become self-sufficient: “Newcomb trains us to be financial geni as well, perhaps financiers of a lower order than bankers, but financiers just the same. We become auctioneers par excellence” (111). Harris provides an account of their working habits and skill sets throughout her article, echoing Mrs. Newcomb’s well-known financial prowess and business sense.

Appeals for Financial Support

Student and alumnae writers in the *Arcade* illustrate their financial acumen by asking their readers to contribute to their school. While fundraising is an ongoing enterprise for all educational institutions, not unique to women’s colleges, writers in the *Arcade* solicited donations using appeals specifically for women’s education. Pleas for donations appear in a section of the November 1915 issue written by the alumnae community. Members ask for donations to the loan fund for the upcoming Vaudeville show: “...even if this *Arcade* comes to you when it is too late to inform you of this particular event, won’t you, you Alumnae who weren’t there, won’t you remember that although the show only takes place once a year, the Loan Fund, for which the show is given, is with us always? And won’t you as individuals help that worthy cause?” (27). This type of appeal continues in a section entitled, “Of Alumni Interest” in the March, 1916 issue, in which the author contends, “You have just spent four years finding out how tremendously deep are the wells of knowledge and what a scanty drop thereof you have tasted. That is a most wholesome gift from one’s Alma Mater, and indeed, if you have not received it, you have practically wasted your years trying to increase coils of gray matter, where no gray matter really grows” (45). Like many others, Erma Stitch connects the general theme of success with the financial responsibility for their alma mater in the February 1924 issue: “Girls who have already achieved a name, and those who are ‘doing things’ in other parts of the country or abroad are a credit to Newcomb. If you are one of these, you will be giving back to Newcomb something of what she has given you by letting others know something of what she is...” (125).

Dagmar LeBreton promotes financial responsibility in a 1969 letter to her fellow 1912 alumnae in a letter, saying,

And the great thing is that you, individually, can be a part of the intellectual evolution we are engaged in at the University, even though it has been fifty seven years since you flipped the tassel on your mortar

board from right to left, or was it left to right? You can really be a part of that continuing progress if you make sure that your name is included in the list of contributors to the annual Alumni Fund.

In *The Arts and Crafts of Newcomb Pottery*, Main emphasizes the rhetorical significance of Newcomb women's efforts to communicate a collective and public vision of their school. She explains that Newcomb's "students, particularly its art students, gave voice to the possibilities and aspirations that an education can provide" (39). Beth Ann Willinger and Susan Tucker report, "the students created ways of imprinting their own social and intellectual engagement onto the landscape of the College" in *The Newcomb Arcade* (266).⁸ The appeal of preservation was successful in persuading fellow alumnae to donate money so that Newcomb College could be sustained. It was only in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, with its drastic impact on the whole economy of New Orleans, that Newcomb was dissolved as an entity separate from Tulane in 2006.

Resistance to Success Trope

Not surprisingly, beneath the narrative of success there were some quiet, privately expressed caveats and resistance to gendered constraints. While Mrs. Newcomb and the faculty insisted that the college was not a finishing school but rather a college with rigorous courses, expectations, and boundless opportunities for women, there was an underlying sense within the campus community that women could only go so far; they could succeed and *strive* to be self-reliant, but only within acceptable limits. Chloe Raub, the Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections Librarian, asserts in a recent interview that many of the women artists at Newcomb realistically planned to marry and/or become teachers after graduation. Students might have majored in art thinking they would become professional artists, but upon graduation, they more often sought careers in teaching because this job was viewed as more suitable for women. Raub also suggests that the college wanted women to excel only in particular kinds of disciplines. While languages and the arts were considered suitable areas for women, the sciences were not encouraged as often, despite Newcomb's notable record of preparing some of the region's first women physicians. Newcomb women were expected to amass educational expertise, with training that equaled the rigor of male students, but they were nonetheless expected to be "adequately feminine" (Raub). Teachers and administrators alike told them to maintain proper feminine behavior and

8 The name of *The Newcomb Arcade* comes from the Arcade Building, a popular meeting place for Newcomb students.

make the appropriate personal and professional choices befitting a proper young woman. A Newcomb education was not to alter, attenuate, or dismantle a woman's femininity, but it was expected to be demanding in its professional preparation, especially after 1919 when President Pierce Butler phased out programs in "domestic science" and education in favor of the liberal arts and sciences.

Self-Reliance as Artists vs. Service to the Community

Newcomb women who wanted to embody this narrative of success—a job in the arts, self-reliance, money—often found themselves unable to find careers as artists. The broad strokes of the rhetoric elide critical differences specific to various individuals, groups, and classes. The success trope was effective in fundraising and strengthening an argument for the college and women's education, but it did not accurately describe the majority of the art students' lived experiences. Neither did it fully represent the actual, on-the-ground policies at Newcomb or the barriers newly trained female students encountered in the workplace. No doubt their strategies were necessary, if not sufficient. It would take more than rhetoric at women's colleges to change the social and cultural conditions for Southern women during this period.

Despite notable exceptions such as Sadie Irvine, the famous pottery decorator who successfully sold her work after her graduation from Newcomb, the majority of graduates struggled to find and maintain careers in the arts, even though arts and artistic careers had been emphasized from the founding of the College. In her thesis entitled "The Founding of H. Sophie Newcomb College: An Experiment in Southern Higher Education for Women," Katy Coyle reports data on the occupations of the first ten graduating classes of Newcomb College. According to these records, there were over 130 students in the first ten classes. Their degrees ranged from the arts to the sciences, and of these graduates, only thirty-seven women are listed as having occupations. Of these individuals, twenty-two had jobs as teachers, and the others had careers in the school board, government, law, music, business, writing, and secretarial work. Only two graduates, one of whom was Annette McConnell Anderson, the mother of the famous Mississippi artist Walter Anderson, reported careers as artists.

As we learned in the interview with Raub, a sizeable number of graduates were content, despite Woodward's views previously mentioned, with finding careers in traditionally "female" jobs or with being active members in society clubs and organizing events for the community. They could do so because they were supported financially by their families or spouses if they married. Many of those who married had children and ceased to pursue work outside

the home. So to say that all Newcomb graduates were aiming to gain impressive jobs as professional women would be an inaccurate claim. While some graduates found themselves disappointed in the lack of professional opportunities, others were not interested in professional careers.

To showcase the disconnect between the rhetoric about women's education and the reality of lived experiences, we look in more detail to the on-campus Pottery. From the Pottery's beginning, the Art Department hired Newcomb art graduates and decorators from outside the school to teach art students and to decorate pottery thrown by men. After graduation, art graduates were given the opportunity to work as designers at the Pottery. The work they decorated could be sold to the public for an income in the school's salesroom. Too often, however, the decorators were unable to earn sufficient incomes to support themselves. In *The Arts and Crafts of Newcomb Pottery*, Spinozzi contends, "In spite of these idealistic goals, of the dozens of decorators who contributed to the pottery's output over its fifty-year existence, very few were actually gainfully employed or able to support themselves on their earnings" (181). She continues, saying that at the turn of the century: "...the once-attractive prospect of working as decorators no longer enticed the art students at Newcomb College" (192-193).

A combination of problems beset the young decorators who tried to work at the Pottery. First, decorators had to buy their own materials and were only given half of the profits. When the Pottery first opened, they were guaranteed an income regardless of the outcome of the sales. But quickly, their pay became contingent on the sales of their wares. After the decorators expressed dissatisfaction with this system, the school returned to their original plan and placed all of their wares in the salesroom for the public to buy. However, the decorators were still grossly underpaid because Woodward would lowball the price of their pots. Even the most exemplary works were underpriced. This happened, as Elizabeth Kemper Adams explains in her 1921 book, *Women Professional Workers: A Study Made for the Women's Educational and Industrial Union*, because "Salaries in applied art work [such as pottery] are so unstandardized, and are changing so rapidly, that it is unsafe to give any figures" (324). Because there were not thresholds for artistic salaries, and because women's labor was substantially undervalued, it was easy to pay them less than male artists required.

Woodward made promises to potential employees that they would make \$150 per month, but even the most successful artists did not make the promised \$150. The cost of living in New Orleans also created a strain on the artists (Conradson et al. 182). For example, Sabina Elliot Wells expresses her frustration as a decorator in a letter to her mother: "...I am almost in a state of open rebellion. I am supposed to be one of their clever designers and I will make

this month \$40.00 and last month \$30.00—and that at a pottery where the theoretic pay is \$100.00 per month!” (qtd. in Conradsen et al. 182). Despite her talent, Wells could not support herself with the inconsistent salary and resented the promises made when she was hired.

In *Newcomb Pottery & Crafts: An Educational Enterprise for Women, 1895-1940*, Jessie J. Poesch, Sally Main, and Walter Bob stress, “...the pay they received was probably woefully inadequate unless it was supplemented by aid from their families or they cut expenses by living at home. The women who worked at the Newcomb Pottery were possibly paid as well as some of the women of their generation who went into the working world, yet it was hardly enough to genuinely provide a livelihood...” (108). The Pottery underpaid them, and they were often over-worked (Poesch et al. 111). Poesch, Main, and Bob also report that only one full-time employee received a regular salary:

By 1913, the alumnae saleroom was sufficiently profitable to support one regular employee, who was paid \$15.00 a month to take care of the showroom. The income of the pottery was cited as being about \$6000.00 a year at this time...A writer explained the purpose of this saleroom and these ‘industries’ as ‘not to make money for the association, but to help the girls become self-supporting in their chosen work’ (86).

In their 1976 book, *Newcomb Pottery and Craftworks: Louisiana's Art Nouveau*, Suzanne Ormond and Mary E. Irvine explain that wealthy women were more likely to reap the benefits of their Newcomb education by work in the Pottery than women who depended on their education for a livelihood: “If a woman did not marry and raise children, there was little for her to do at home except read, tea party, or play a musical instrument. The Woodward brothers felt that these women could make an artistic contribution to the community” (71). Those who were not New Orleans’ gentry, however, typically relied on the traditional, gendered occupations listed above by Katy Coyle if they continued to make artistic contributions to the Pottery.

The rhetorical strategies of the founders, administrators, and selected Newcomb women reveal much about what success *could* mean for women in their era, how a career as an independent artist could be possible, and the pioneering role that women’s colleges *did* play in higher education. As we looked for the opposing or counterbalancing rhetorics of failure in alumnae interviews conducted many years after graduation, we did not find many public expressions of disappointment. There are individual hints of dissatisfaction with gender roles in the personal accounts below, but their public rhetoric in the *Newcomb Arcade* emphasizes their common desire to promote the benefits of their college. The women who contributed to the archives or were solicited for



Figure 5 Dagmar LeBreton's graduation photograph, 1912, Newcomb Archives Oral History Project

interviews by Newcomb historians, were, of course, leaders on campus and promoters of success. Many of the women valued the experiences they had whether or not they actually became self-sufficient artists, and they had vested interests in making Newcomb look progressive.

Dagmar LeBreton: Professional Success and Women's “Special Mission”

While most extant accounts of the early Newcomb experience are positive, the College's digital archives contain oral histories of a few former art students who resisted the rhetoric and the gendered limitations at the College. In her interview on March 18, 1985, Dagmar LeBreton, a 1912 graduate of Newcomb, reveals that she had internalized the unspoken assumptions about success for women. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree of Design from the Art School in 1912, she attended Columbia University to obtain a Master's degree. Once she returned to New Orleans, she began teaching foreign languages at Newcomb College and later established the Department of Italian there.

In the interview, LeBreton contends that Newcomb College was not a finishing school but an institution with rigorous expectations. She recalls, “You were on your own, and you had to make good. It was a challenge of trying out yourself against the group.” LeBreton has fond memories of the Art School, saying that they “had a great many potentialities right here in the South and that we needn't copy snow scenes anywhere...all of the effort in the art school was to awaken us to the artistic potentialities...to awaken people to open their

eyes to see what's around them." LeBreton explains that the Dean kept in touch with private schools in the Northeast and selectively modeled Newcomb's curricula on the progressive and rigorous examples he found there.

When asked about the purpose of an education for women, LeBreton responds that a college education "helps you to grow up... and to extend your point of view...and that you owe a certain bit or a lot of your talent to be developed for the good of others," aligning with a more classical view of the purpose of education as training for citizenship. According to LeBreton, "All of the leaders in community work are Newcomb graduates," echoing contemporary claims for women's colleges as training grounds for leadership roles.

The interviewer then asks her how education has benefited her personally, and she responds that she would not have pursued her career in teaching Latin at Newcomb and the romance languages at Tulane if it were not for her husband's death in his twenties. She was widowed a year after she graduated and was soon thereafter offered a position at the Art School. However, she had to go back to school to earn an advanced degree because the Art School at that time only granted the bachelor of design degree. The art degree was not sufficient to allow her to teach languages, even in that era. The interviewer asks her: "Why did you go to college?" She responds, "I thought we had to be educated." At the end of this interview, she expresses her views on women's work: "I don't want Newcomb to become too ERA because I think women have a special mission in life, and I think that women who are trying to be like men are making a mistake...I think that women who don't have to work...are perhaps losing a lot....and of course, there are some women who have to work." She asserts that women "cannot combine—that is a full mission—the mission of motherhood and wifehood...I think that's what a woman is made for—combine that with interest—a woman has to work so hard to equal a man—" When the interviewer remarks that she worked and was married and raised a child, LeBreton insists that she "had" to work. Because her husband died so young, she had no choice but to raise her child and have a career. Nevertheless, she says that she does not regret her career.

Olga Peters: Critic of Gender Roles

Olga Peters graduated from Newcomb College in 1920, after World War I. To support her education, Peters worked as a dancer for the troops during World War I. Like so many other Newcomb students, she aimed first for a career as a teacher, completing a B.S. in education from Tulane University; she went on to complete a master's degree in ballet from Newcomb. She tried decorating pottery for a while during her time at Newcomb but never found that work adequate to support herself. After graduation, she taught

in various public schools in the city, teaching dance and art classes. She also designed costumes for Mardi Gras carnivals for over thirty-eight years.

LeBreton, in the interview discussed above, subscribes to a traditionally gendered understanding of a woman's role in society, while Olga Peters subtly conveys skepticism about the conservatism at Newcomb and in New Orleans. She does not outwardly criticize the sexism of the time and the unrealistic promises of success, but neither does she accept them.



Figure 6 Olga Peters decorating, Newcomb Archives Oral History Project

When she discusses both women's clothing and artistic freedom, Peters reveals a strong awareness of the conservative expectations for Newcomb students.

Mid-way through a recorded interview in January 5, 1983, Peters is asked, "What about attitudes toward women?" She responds with dismay, "We had to wear black stockings to the gym class" with tennis shoes, adding that they weren't allowed to wear their gym suits on campus. She says, "[you had] to know how to take care of your hair and your skin and your nails," and they were regularly given physicals to check on their hygiene. The interviewer asks her to think about the political implications behind gender and attitudes toward women, and Peters avoids the question and instead remarks upon the social politics within the school and her community. She says that there was "an uprising in the sororities" and draws attention to a social hierarchy that was in place at Newcomb, claiming that the sororities at the top were often given advantages.

Art classes were very small, so everyone knew one another and fostered relationships. Despite the sheltered environment in the studios, Peters remarks that the artists had to have a letter from home saying they could draw nudes. Many of the female models were also modest. On the subject of Sadie Irvine, one of the few artists from the era who is recognizable today, Peters minces no words: "I just could not stand Sadie Irvine...she was engrossed in her own situation. She was superior." Peters' attitude suggests a common attitude toward women who are deemed "exceptional."

Sadie Irvine (Sarah Agnes Estelle Irvine), Consummate Artist: The Rhetoric of Success Made Reality



Figure 7 Sadie Irvine posing “in a way to evoke the fluidity and the formality of art nouveau,” ca. 1912, “Sadie Agnes Estelle Irvine.”

The most enigmatic of the women we investigated is Sadie Irvine, arguably the most famous Newcomb decorator, educated at Newcomb College and employed as a decorator and instructor there for decades after her graduation. Surprisingly little of her direct testimony about the Newcomb experience survives, given her significance today; her larger pots sell for tens of thousands of dollars at prestigious art auctions around the world.⁹

Irvine was born into a Catholic family in uptown New Orleans, and her mother died at a very young age. When Irvine was a child, her stepmother noticed an artistic propensity in her and encouraged her to pursue artistic education seriously, over-

seeing her enrollment at Newcomb College in 1902. She lived with her parents for most of her life and was buried with them when she died in 1970. In addition to her career as a teacher of pottery decoration at Newcomb, Irvine maintained strong friendships with many of the Newcomb students, employees, and with her teacher Ellsworth Woodward, long after she and Woodward

9 Sales records from 2008 at the Rago Auction House in New Jersey show the sale for \$80,000 of an early pot from 1909. The pre-auction estimate was between \$45,000 and \$65,000 with an opening bid of \$22,000. Even smaller pieces command significant prices at auction. A pair of candlesticks decorated by Irvine in 1925 sold at Neal’s Auction in New Orleans for \$10,900 in 2007. A single tile from 1933 with the Newcomb Fountain and Louisiana irises sold for \$4,830 in 2001.

retired. Irvine continued to work collaboratively with local artists, pursuing and exchanging other art forms such as cards, tiles, and painting. She also mentored art students and taught at The Academy of Sacred Heart in New Orleans. Throughout her life, Irvine had a strong presence in the artistic community and in women's education. At that time, and even now without evidence, it is impossible to describe the connection between her personal life and her success as an artist; however, she does illustrate the kind of intense, singular dedication to a profession that might have been a requirement for success in her era, and even today.

What little we do know of Irvine's personal life is that she took her work seriously, and that art "formed the focus of all of Irvine's life" ("Sarah Agnes Estelle Irvine"). Letters from the archives illustrate that she was well connected. She wrote often to her brother and her sister-in-law, Mary Irvine, her collaborator as an author. Excerpts from "Notes on People at Newcomb" ("Notes") show that she knew the community at Newcomb very well and had opinions about almost everyone.

Writing about Bemis Sharp, a Newcomb graduate who returned to teach in the Art School with her, Irvine says, "she bummed around Europe" and started painting again in Paris when "Matisse was just getting started...followers were dirty, bearfooted (sic) and more mother hubbardly...never signed pottery or paintings" ("Notes"). Irvine's depiction of Matisse's followers contrasts sharply with images of the women artists at Newcomb, photographed in long skirts and white, high-necked Victorian blouses, protected by starched black aprons. Newcomb women were certainly never dirty or "bear-footed" in their classrooms because men, notably Joseph Meyer, threw all of the pots (See Figures 3 and 4). Given the precise rules for signing art works at Newcomb, the foreign practice of unsigned work was also unthinkable to her.

Irvine is well known for creating the pots decorated with a moon shining through moss hanging from a live oak tree, a motif that has become synonymous with Newcomb arts. In later years, she rued creating this most famous design: "I have surely lived to regret it. Our beautiful moss draped oak trees appealed to the buying public but nothing is less suited to the tall graceful vases—no way to convey the true character of the tree. And oh, how boring it was to use the same motif over and over though



Figure 8 Vase with Sadie Irvine's Popular Moon Motif

each one was a fresh drawing" ("Sarah Agnes Estelle Irvine"). The images of Deep South flora and fauna were immensely popular at the time, but they were also "appropriate" subjects for Southern women artists in this period, unlike the partially nude figures so often depicted by Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939), for example. Like other artists, Irvine also found herself constrained by the demand to be a "production potter" individually reproducing the limited range of motifs. Only long after her death did her work command prices that might have afforded her more creative freedom.¹⁰ Perhaps because she was engaged in a collaborative women's art enterprise, she was not well-rewarded financially in her day, and yet the Newcomb Pottery was the only lucrative venue available to her.

Irvine did, however, experience one moment in the spotlight when one of her pots was chosen as a gift to the actress Sarah Bernhardt, who claims to have "found her artist soul in a congenial atmosphere" when she visited the campus on March 31, 1911. Irvine's pot was an early one, described as "one of the new matte glaze pieces, with a design of white narcissus on a blue-green ground, made by one of the most talented of the decorators, Miss S.A.E. Irvine" (*Picayune*, as qtd. in Poesch 61). Miss Bernhardt, wearing "a heavily embroidered net tunic of peacock blue, a boa of silver sable, and a dark velvet hat which 'was almost buried in smoky gray plumes,'rose' and held the vase aloft, and clasped it to her heart with characteristic enthusiasm" (*Picayune*, as qtd. in Poesch 61).

Despite her contributions to Newcomb, there are no oral interviews with her as there are with other alumnae, perhaps because of her ongoing employment as a decorator and teacher long after her graduation. She was successful in her profession, arguably the most successful, and therefore the embodiment of the self-reliant artist dreamed of in the early days of Newcomb. We don't know how she felt about her own success, other than what we can infer from the comments about taking herself "seriously." We can speculate that because she did not conform to the roles of matriarch, society clubwoman, or community leader that, to some, she did not fully perform the role of the "Newcomb lady"; nevertheless she succeeded as a "Newcomb woman." She

10 In the Spring 2014 catalogue for Neal Auction Company, auctioneers and appraisers of antiques and fine arts in New Orleans, only two very small pots of Irvine's were available, one made in 1925 and estimated in value at between \$1,500 and \$2,500 and another made in 1926, with some restoration, valued at \$1,000 to \$1,500. When Irvine's larger pots are put up for auction they appraise in the tens of thousands of dollars, but very few of them ever appear; museums now own most of the finest ones.

is the most interesting of our cameos, the clearest exemplar of the success narrative, and in the future we hope to find more letters or documents that reveal her own assessment of her success.

Conclusion

In her 2009 article on rhetorical imagery of women workers in WWII, a study that is reminiscent of our own work, Jordynn Jack offers a “rhetoric versus reality explanation.” As she argues, “wartime propaganda (rhetoric) suggested that women’s opportunities were unlimited but actual industrial practices related to women’s work (reality) failed to change” (286). Despite the fin de siècle rhetoric of success that masked the complexities behind lived experiences and gendered limitations in the workforce, we nevertheless regard Newcomb College as a noble experiment that succeeded in providing a progressive vision of women’s education. Not only at Newcomb, but at other early women’s colleges, the rhetoric of success was necessary, if not sufficient to prevent the inevitable disappointment many graduates felt when they failed to find jobs in the arts professions. As with many other social movements, the visionary rhetoric about women’s independence served as a precursor for substantive social change.

As we compare the late-19th century, fin de siècle rhetorics of women’s work and women’s success to those in the early 21st century, we are again struck by similarities. Women’s colleges continue to argue that their *raison d’être* is to provide success and leadership roles for women. At least the question is now what it means to be a “woman,” as opposed to what it means to be a “lady.” One only has to look at 21st century popular films such as *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), *The Proposal* (2009), and *I Don’t Know How She Does It* (2011) to see that models for women’s success are highly conflicted. For some, success means trying to “do it all”; some opt to preserve a certain kind of “femininity,” something Newcomb women were required to do. These films depict an ongoing anxiety about women’s roles in professional and leadership positions. *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The Proposal* depict powerful women as cold and alone. The premise of the third film, as the title suggests, is that it is impossible to have a rich private life, a family, and a demanding career unless you are a Superwoman (and miserable).

The tension between the rhetoric of progress for women and lived realities remains unabated. We have much to resolve regarding success, both in education for women and in lived experience. As was the case for Newcomb women over a hundred years ago, the gap between equal opportunities for women and men cannot be closed merely by asserting rhetorical tropes of success. We will never argue that visionary rhetorics of success for women are empty,

in the popular sense of “empty rhetoric,” for women have long used creative arguments to pave the way for change. As far back as the Classical period, we have had exemplary women who, like Sadie Irvine, forged a place for themselves in history, and their stories remain important as arguments. However, as we ponder the social transformation still needed, we seek new variations on success for more women, both in rhetoric and in lived experience.

Works Cited

- Adams, Elizabeth Kemper. *Women Professional Workers: A Study Made for the Women's Educational and Industrial Union*. New York: Macmillan, 1921. Print.
- Brackett, Anna C. *The Education of American Girls Considered in a Series of Essays*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1874. Print.
- Briggs, Le Baron Russell. *To College Girls and Other Essays*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911. Print.
- Burke, Kenneth. *Counter-Statement*. 2d ed. Los Altos, CA: Hermes, 1953.
- Butler, Josephine Elizabeth Grey, George William Johnson, Lucy A. Nutter. Johnson, and Carrie Chapman Catt. *An Autobiographical Memoir*. Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1928. Print.
- Conradson, David H., Ellen Denker, Martin P. Eidelberg, Sally Main, Adrienne Spinozzi, and Kevin W. Tucker. *The Arts & Crafts of Newcomb Pottery*. New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2013. Print.
- Cooley, Winnifred Harper. *The New Womanhood*. New York: Broadway Publications, 1904. Print.
- Coyle, Katy. *The Founding of H. Sophie Newcomb College: An Experiment in Southern Higher Education for Women*. Thesis. Tulane University, New Orleans. 1996. Print.
- Crawford, Mary Caroline. *The College Girl of America and the Institutions which Make Her What She Is*. Boston: L. C. Page, 1905. Print.
- “Dagmar LeBreton (NC 1912).” *Newcomb Archives Oral History Project*. Newcomb Alumnae Association, 18 Mar. 1985. Web. 14 Aug. 2015.
- Feldman, Kiera. “Who are Women’s Colleges For?” *New York Times*. New York Times, May 2014. Web 16 July 2015.
- “Free Drawing Classes at Tulane,” *Times-Democrat*, 7 January 1886: 8. Print.

- Gilmore, Martha, ed. *The Newcomb Arcade* I. Jan. 1909. Print.
- Hardesty, Amelia, ed. *The Newcomb Arcade* XVI. Feb. 1924. Print.
- Hardesty, Amelia, ed. *The Newcomb Arcade* XVI. April 1924. Print.
- "History in Brief." *Spelman College*. Web. 07 Dec. 2015.
- Irvine, Sadie. "Sadie Irvine's Notes on People Who Worked in Newcomb Pottery." MS. *Newcomb Pottery Notes*. NAB-022. Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, New Orleans.
- Jack, Jordynn. "Acts of Institution: Embodying Feminist Rhetorical Methodologies in Space and Time." *Rhetoric Review* 28.3 (2009): 285-303. Web.
- LeBreton, Dagmar. Letter to Alumnae Association. Feb. 1969.
- May, Stephen. "Women, Art And Social Change: The Newcomb Pottery Enterprise." *Antiques and the Arts Weekly*. N.p., 4 Feb. 2014. Web. 25 Mar. 2014.
- Neal Auction Company. *Important Spring Estates Auction: April 17-19, 2014* (Catalogue). New Orleans, LA. (see also www.nealauction.com)
- Poesch, Jessie J. *Newcomb Pottery: An Enterprise for Southern Women, 1895-1940*. Exton, PA: Schiffer Pub., 1984. Print.
- Poesch, Jessie J., Sally Main, and Walter Bob. *Newcomb Pottery & Crafts: An Educational Enterprise for Women, 1895-1940*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2003. Print.
- "Olga Peters (NC 1920)." *Newcomb Archives Oral History Project*. Newcomb Alumnae Association, 5 Jan. 1983. Web. 14 Aug. 2015.
- Ormond, Suzanne, and Mary E. Irvine. *Louisiana's Art Nouveau: The Crafts of the Newcomb Style*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1976. Print.
- Pfeffer, Miki. *Southern Ladies and Suffragists: Julia Ward Howe and Women's Rights at the 1884 New Orleans World's Fair*. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2014. Print.
- Raub, Chloe. Personal Interview. 12 June 2015.
- Reif, Rita. "Proving That Pottery Was Women's Work." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 26 Jan. 2002. Web. 14 Aug. 2015.
- Salm, Martha Barr, ed. *The Newcomb Arcade* VII. Mar. 1916. Print.
- Salm, Martha Barr, ed. *The Newcomb Arcade* VI. Nov. 1915 Print.

- "Sarah Agnes Estelle Irvine." *Sarah Agnes Estelle Irvine*. Tulane, n.d. Web. 14 Aug. 2015.
- Sartisky, Michael, J. Richard Gruber, and John R. Kemp. "Newcomb Pottery." *A Unique Slant of Light: The Bicentennial History of Art in Louisiana*. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2012. 405-11. Print.
- Schirmacher, Käthe, and Carl Conrad Eckhardt. *The Modern Woman's Rights Movement: A Historical Survey*. New York: Macmillan, 1912. Print.
- Stankiewicz, Mary Ann. "From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement." *Studies in Art Education* 33.3 (1992): 165-73. JSTOR. Web. 25 Mar. 2014.
- "The Newcomb Archives." Tulane University, 2001. Web. 1 Nov. 2013.
- Tucker, Susan, and Beth Ann Willinger. *Newcomb College, 1886-2006: Higher Education for Women in New Orleans*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2012. Print.
- Woodward, Ellsworth. "Needlework in Newcomb Art School." *Brush and Pencil* 15.6 (1905): 313-16. JSTOR. Web. 25 Mar. 2014.
- "Woman's Work—Which Our True Men Should Consider," *The Daily Picayune*, 11 June 1881: 4. Times Picayune Historical Archives. Web. 1 July 2015.

About the Authors

Lillian Bridwell-Bowles is a Professor of English at Louisiana State University where she advises students in the Rhetoric, Writing & Culture Concentration and a faculty affiliate of Women's and Gender Studies. She was the founding director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing at the University of Minnesota (now the Center for Writing), a past chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), a co-chair of the 1999 Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) Conference, and the founding director of Communication across the Curriculum (CxC) at LSU. Her most recent scholarship explores rhetorical responses to technologies for literacy from antiquity to the present. She is also a practicing potter with a passion for the Newcomb pottery described in this essay.

Christine Jeansonne is a PhD candidate at Louisiana State University, studying Rhetoric and Composition and Women's and Gender Studies. She has served as the writing program's assistant director and taught courses in composition, feminist rhetoric, and women's and gender studies. Her research interests include women's rhetorical histories, composition practices in virtual communities, and multi-modal pedagogy.