

## INTRODUCTION

# WORKING WOMEN, WORKING WORDS

Having raised eight children on a mountaintop farm in West Virginia, Myrtle Tenney Booth, my grandma, was one of the hardest-working women I have ever known. At age thirteen, Grandma left school to nurse her mother through a serious illness. As a fifteen-year-old, she worked as a cook in a camp for railroad workers in Mock Hollow, and four years later, she was sorting tin plate at the Weirton Steel Mill in Clarksburg. At age twenty-one, she married my grandpa, who had saved enough money from his wages as a sawmill worker to buy a sixty-seven-acre farm up the road from Pickens. For the next forty-six years, Grandma made cheese, gathered eggs, chopped wood, butchered hogs, canned peaches, nursed sick children, pieced quilts, and coped with the unending cycle of chores that are part of raising a large family on a small farm.

In my earliest memories, Grandma is already an old woman who can barely hobble to the woodshed for kindling or wring a chicken's neck with her gnarled fingers. Her body told the tale of her lifetime of labor, and I learned the value of work in her kitchen and on her farm. She was too busy to chatter much with children, but in the countless grown-up conversations floating over my head, I heard women praised for being good workers. You could be pretty, slim, or even smart, but a worthy woman was one who knew how to work.

Despite her deep investment in the dignity of work—no matter how mundane, how messy—my grandmother never aligned herself with organized labor. As a young girl working to feed railroad workers while they laid and maintained the track that helped move timber and coal out of the mountains, Grandma would not have been a potential union member. Men employed by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in the early decades of the twentieth century had a proud tradition of organized labor activism dating back to the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, but Grandma was not employed by the railroad. Instead, she had a more informal employment arrangement with the woman who ran the camp where railroad workers were housed and fed. While working long hours

as a tin plate sorter in a steel mill, Grandma undertook dangerous and difficult tasks. According to Louis C. Martin, “Women in the assorting room used knives to pry apart sheets [of tin plate] that were partly welded together in stacks” (497). They would then inspect the tin-coated sheets of steel and pack them for shipping. Deemed “unskilled labor,” such work was hazardous, monotonous, and poorly remunerated. While her employment as a tin plate sorter was precipitated by economic necessity, Grandma also recognized that her sojourn in the industrial workforce would likely be brief. Like many, though certainly not all, young white women in her circumstances, her experience as an industrial laborer ended with her marriage, and she had little time to develop an opinion on Weirton Steel’s labor practices and its efforts to forestall unionization.

Once my grandparents settled on their own small subsistence farm, the idea of organized labor seemed even less relevant to Grandma’s working life. While tending a garden and raising livestock to sustain her growing family, my grandma had few, if any, opportunities to consider the possibility of formal organizational strategies that might have allowed Appalachian families to band together to gain a greater measure of control over their often precarious economic lives. Instead, like the generations of farm women who preceded her, Grandma relied as best she could on her own resources and the support of family and friends. When times were good she took advantage of opportunities to trade the cheese and butter she made to neighbors in exchange for goods and services her family needed, and she drastically cut household expenses when times were bad. She spent long hours preparing meals in the kitchen and making sure the farmhouse was a clean, comfortable space for her family, but her workspace expanded to the barn where cows needed to be milked and pigs needed to be fed when my grandpa found it necessary to work for wages off the farm at nearby strip mines or on road-building projects sponsored by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the 1930s. She took great pride in the fact that she was able to serve as a cook at the local one-room schoolhouse and provide a hot meal to all the children in her rural community on the limited funding provided by the state school board, yet she also accepted the fact that her own children—including my mother—would need to leave home to earn their own living before they turned sixteen.

Despite their hard work, my grandma and the generations of low-wage white women workers who, like her, were not affiliated with labor organizations have received scant attention from feminist rhetoricians. We know little about how they described themselves as workers within their communities or the discursive strategies they used to document their labor. The less formal types of collective activity they chose to pur-

sue to gain a greater measure of control over their economic lives remain hidden from our view, and the rhetorical labor that allowed them to build a sense of common cause and community has yet to be accounted for in histories of women's rhetoric. *Unorganized Women* addresses these omissions and enriches feminist histories of rhetoric by making space for the voices of low-wage white women workers who were not part of the organized labor movement.

I offer here four historical case studies of such unorganized women workers—the “mill girls” of Lowell, Massachusetts, who used the *Lowell Offering* (1840–1845) as a vehicle to share their lives and labors with a wider audience;<sup>1</sup> domestic workers in Boston who were hailed by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union (WEIU) through its Domestic Reform League and other initiatives designed to solve the “servant problem” in the final decades of the nineteenth century; Appalachian farm women who participated in the Moonlight Schools founded in Rowan County, Kentucky, by Cora Wilson Stewart in 1911; and the seamstresses who worked at Kansas City's Donnelly Garment Company (DGC) and spurned the overtures of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) in the 1930s. All these women workers undertook significant forms of rhetorical labor. By composing essays, stories, poetry, petitions, and letters, they crafted public representations of themselves as workers and as women. They constructed new communication channels or co-opted existing ones, such as periodicals, employment records, and legal documents, in order to generate and circulate information they found immediately useful. They recognized the need to address a range of audiences that included their employers and coworkers, family members, philanthropists, educators, government officials, members of the judiciary, union officials, cultural tastemakers, and more. They resisted the inscription of their lives and labor into broader economic and cultural narratives they did not find productive, including well-worn plots about the deleterious impact of industrial labor on white women's moral standing and about the promise of scientific advancements in housekeeping and agriculture to improve the lives of rural families and to usher their communities into the modern era. They engaged in a range of often unrecognized collective endeavors as they sought to gain greater control in their working lives and improve their financial circumstances and their communities. And at times, they created or reinforced discursive bulwarks that perpetuated white supremacy and preserved the modicum of social and economic privilege they enjoyed as low-wage white women at the expense of Black women workers and recent immigrants. The lives and rhetorical labor of these unorganized working women are the focus of this book.

### WHY THESE WORKING WOMEN?

The white women featured in this book earned their livings in a variety of occupational spaces and undertook diverse forms of labor—weaving cloth on power looms; cooking and cleaning in the homes of well-to-do families; working with livestock, raising crops, and feeding their own families on subsistence farms; and participating in the mass production of women's apparel. I refer to all these women as “low-wage” workers in recognition of the fact that economic precarity was a critical concern in their lives, whether they were paid to work on a factory floor or in someone else's home, or even if they didn't necessarily earn wages on a regular basis and instead bartered or traded goods in a rural economy. As low-wage workers, the women whose lives and labors are the focus of my attention netted minimal remuneration for tackling a variety of physically draining, mentally demanding jobs, and the money they earned or other resources they garnered were critical for their survival as well as the survival of their families. And like so many other people with limited financial resources, the low-wage women workers who animate the pages of this book also have in common the experience of producing considerable social consternation among the members of the cultural and economic elite, who have debated their moral standing, castigated their work habits, lamented their seeming failures to integrate themselves productively into the national economy, and questioned their decisions about how best to manage their working lives.

Dividing economically imperiled women into granular categories based on the type of work they perform or the sources of their income can occlude common obstacles they confront in seeking to provide for themselves and their families as well as the range of strategies they have deployed in seeking to improve their work lives. As economist Michael Zweig has argued, drawing sharp distinctions among people with few financial resources and limited control over their economic lives will do little to advance social equality or lead to a sustainable future (78–79, 92). In this book, I thus bring together a range of white women workers under the term “low-wage,” and I am able to document a wide spectrum of collective activities and alliance-building strategies that have appealed to them: participating in textual communities of writers and editors; engaging with philanthropists and educational reformers; fostering their own workplace-based identities and coalitions. My title, *Unorganized Women*, signals that the women under study here were not part of the organized labor movement while also inviting fresh consideration of the often unrecognized ways low-wage workers have come together to advance their economic interests.

I begin with the Lowell mill girls as my first historical case study because they were one of the earliest groups of industrial women workers in the United States who experimented with varied forms of collective action in the 1830s and early 1840s. I end with the DGC workers and their resistance to the ILGWU in the 1930s because they present a particularly knotty set of questions about low-wage women workers and their responses to organized labor. As I discuss in greater detail later in this introduction, the mill girls of Lowell and the DGC workers book-end a critical century—from the 1830s through the 1930s—in which women who earned their livings in the industrial workforce had a particularly fraught relationship with organized labor movements. During this time period, assumptions about the primacy of white men as wage earners for their families shaped the practices and policies of unions, workers' associations, and other labor organizations, leaving many low-wage women workers looking for other ways to gain a measure of control over their economic lives. Investigating the rhetorical labor that seemed efficacious to the women who contributed to the *Lowell Offering* and the women employed at the DGC affords feminist rhetoricians an opportunity to develop a more finely textured sense of how low-wage white women workers have sought to exercise power in industrial workplaces.

The two middle chapters of *Unorganized Women* move beyond the factory floor to bring forward questions about how white women who earned their livings in other spaces have grappled with workplace exploitation and financial precarity. The circumstances of women who were employed as household workers in Boston and women who lived and worked on subsistence farms in Appalachia did not lend themselves to typical forms of labor organizing. These low-wage women workers were, however, encouraged to engage in other forms of affiliative behavior and collective activity by philanthropic organizations and educational activists. Both historically and in the present moment, vast numbers of women have earned their livings as household workers and on farms. Placing such women workers alongside women working in industrial settings yields a fuller and more nuanced accounting of the varied forms that workers' activism can take.

Moving from industrial to domestic to agricultural workspaces also affords me the opportunity to study various forms of rhetorical labor—the publication of a periodical; the use of business genres including contracts and employment records; letters directed to a variety of audiences; and petitions and testimonials. Documenting the wide range of rhetorical labor in which white women have been engaged in the past makes it possible to trace a richer array of connections to the rhetorical labor of contemporary women workers and to better appreciate the sorts of col-

lective activities that seem most efficacious in the twenty-first century, both in the United States and around the globe. These are connections and questions I explore in the afterword to this volume.

The four historical case studies that comprise this book focus on workspaces dominated by white women. This may seem curious given that more than two decades ago historian Sharon Harley and the Black Women and Work Collective excoriated scholars working in labor history, Black studies, and women's studies, noting that they had "focused on black men and white women as workers, thereby continuing to slight black women's work" (xvii). In the late twentieth century, Harley, Tera W. Hunter, Jacqueline Jones, Dolores E. Janiewski, Kibibi Voloria C. Mack, and other historians had begun engaging in pioneering work that addressed this slight. They undertook critical research projects centered on the experiences of Black women and their labors. In doing so, they laid the groundwork for a burgeoning of vital scholarship in the twenty-first century on Black women workers in a variety of contexts, including domestic labor; industrial settings; service industries; food production; occupations deemed criminal, such as sex work and numbers running; and the prison-industrial complex (Green; Branch; Sharpless; Nadasen; LeFlouria; Blair; Gray; Harris).

By focusing on white women workers in this book, my intention is not to recenter or reassert their experiences as normative or to occlude the work experiences of women of color. Instead, my goal in selecting the four workplaces that are featured in this book is to bring forward the range of ways in which white women who grappled with financial precarity have sought to shore up their place in the labor pool and in the civic life of the nation through particular forms of rhetorical labor. Their rhetorical labor frequently involved the marginalization and oppression of Black women workers and immigrants. By attending to such patterns of privilege and oppression, I answer labor historian Dana Frank's call for greater exploration of white supremacy and for research that "situate[s] white working-class women within a racialized nation" (81). Racism and nationalism have shaped the economic landscape of the United States, and white women have historically had access to occupations unavailable to women of color. They have also been paid higher wages for performing the same labor and enjoyed greater job security than Black women. And though economically impoverished, low-wage white women have had access to property and assets through their relationships to white men (e.g., fathers, brothers, boyfriends, husbands, and sons)—property and assets that were not equally available to Black families and other people of color. It is important to acknowledge that all too often the white women workers featured in this book deepened divides based on race

and birthplace. They engaged in rhetorical labor that forestalled their association with women of color and newly arrived immigrants, associations they believed would undermine their economic prospects and their sociocultural status.

Throughout *Unorganized Women*, I argue that careful attention to ingenious, persistent rhetorical labors of white women workers as well as to their divisive discursive moves holds out the promise of imagining new kinds of coalitions among workers in the future. Though their rhetorical labor includes much that is disturbing, the women working in the Lowell textile mills, domestic servants in Boston, Appalachian farm women in the early twentieth century, and the DGC seamstresses who resisted the ILGWU in the 1930s merit a place in histories of rhetoric as we seek to develop richer understandings of the past and to imagine a future filled with greater economic justice for all.

### WORKING WOMEN'S RHETORICS: PAST AND PRESENT

The twenty-first century has seen numerous calls for rhetoricians to pay greater attention to women's work-related rhetorics. Michelle C. Smith notes that "studies of gendered labor help feminist rhetoricians to move beyond a sometimes limiting preconception with civic and political rhetorics" (144). And writing with Sarah Hallenbeck, Smith cogently argues that "workplaces, work tasks, and work arrangements are . . . sites where gender and work themselves are rhetorically contested and constructed." Hallenbeck and Smith go on to note that "workplaces and professions are often key axes in the maintenance or disruption of gendered, raced, classed, and ability-based differences" (201). Observing that labor historians have long "meditated on women's historical relationship to work," Jessica Enoch similarly points out that "feminist rhetoricians have only just begun to consider the question of how their scholarly perspectives and investments might add substance and perspective to this conversation" (*Domestic Occupations* 19). Through her study of women's workplaces and related spaces, including schoolrooms, domestic science laboratories, and childcare centers, Enoch deftly reveals how the spatial rhetorics of home and domesticity have historically enabled middle-class white women to take on new kinds of work.

When feminist rhetoricians have focused their attention on the work-related rhetorics of women with limited economic resources, they have often gravitated toward the discursive innovations and accomplishments of women labor leaders and activists, including Nannie Helen Burroughs (Popp and Phillips-Cunningham), Dolores Huerta (Sowards), Rose Cohen and Elizabeth Hasanovitz (Goldman), Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (Tonn), Emma Goldman (Solomon), Mary Har-



ris “Mother” Jones (Tonn; Waggoner), Meridel Le Sueur (Boehnlein), Leonora O’Reilly (Triece), Rose Schneiderman (Glascott; Kvidera), Theresa Malkiel (Kvidera), Rosina Corrothers Tucker (Chateauvert), and Marian Wharton (Allen). Research on labor schools, such as the Brookwood Labor College and Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, and on the educational programs sponsored by unions, such as the ILGWU, has helped to amplify the voices of rank-and-file workers that might never have been entered into the historical record if they had not contributed an article to a school newspaper or composed an autobiographical essay for a class assignment (Kates; Hollis; Wan, *Producing Good Citizens*).

Doubly marginalized by both class and gender, women labor leaders and the workers they sought to mobilize challenged idealized notions of female behavior through their rhetorical performances. They marched on picket lines and delivered speeches at mass meetings. They authored textbooks and other pedagogical materials that interrogated the investment of the economically elite in definitions of standard English and opted instead to validate working-class vernaculars. They forged strategic alliances with men in the labor movement when it suited their purposes, and they took up the pen to ensure that their lives and work were made visible in union newspapers and bulletins. As Anne F. Mattina summarizes, “In the evolution of feminist rhetorical criticism, analysis of working-class rebels adds nuance to our understanding of women’s persuasive practices. . . . Freed from the constraints of middle-class ‘ladyhood,’ they demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the status quo not by adapting to those confines but by shouting, signing, and pushing back against them with all of their might” (66). Mattina’s description of the working-class women rebels who have become part of our rhetorical histories aligns with William DeGenaro’s perspective that working-class rhetorics “agitate and antagonize” and are defined by “a certain consciousness—an awareness that class (and, by extension, class division and class conflict) exists” (6). To be a working-class rhetor is to be consciously engaged in the struggle between labor and capital, between the economically elite and those who struggle to make ends meet.

Such a definition of working-class rhetoric, however, excludes many low-wage white women, including women like my grandma, from our rhetorical histories. While keenly aware of economic inequalities, many low-wage women have not always engaged in class-conscious “agitation and antagonism.” Low-wage women who gained visibility through unions and workers’ rights organizations were actually atypical in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Labor historian Alice Kessler-Harris estimates that “something like 3.3 percent of the women



who were engaged in industrial occupations in 1900 were organized into trade unions . . . [and] a reasonable estimate might place 6.6 percent of wage-earning women in trade unions by 1920” (*Out to Work* 152). The vast majority of women working in low-wage jobs in the time period covered by this study were not able to insist on the importance of their labor or advocate for their economic needs via the mechanisms of organized labor.

While labor unions have been essential for securing workers’ rights, many labor organizations born in the second half of the nineteenth century, like the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), were steeped in racist and patriarchal values. While there are notable examples of interracial organizing in specific industries or geographic regions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “most craft unions were openly racist, excluding Black members either formally or by custom” (Goldfield 5).<sup>2</sup> Black men were perceived as a threat to a white man’s right to a fair wage that would allow him to support his family. Similarly, women workers were viewed by the white men who ran unions as well as rank-and-file members as imperiling the relationship between white masculinity and economic power. For white women, their most important jobs were presumed to be as wives and mothers in their own homes. Union publications, including the AFL journal, *American Federationist*, “romanticized women’s jobs at home, extolling the virtues of refined and moral mothers, of good cooking, and even of beautiful needlework” (Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work* 154). For Black women, racist assumptions about their intelligence, work ethic, and moral character ensured they were largely “concentrated at the bottom of the economic ladder” and were viewed as “the most disposable segment of the American labor force” (Harley, Rusan Wilson, and Wilson Logan 4). Men involved in the labor movement thus had no qualms about excluding women by holding meetings in saloons late in the evening, charging initiation fees and union dues beyond the means of women who were paid lower wages, and mocking women who spoke publicly about the need for workplace reform (Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work* 158).

White women who did join unions and had the temerity to aspire to leadership roles often found themselves closed out of critical positions. Labor historian Philip S. Foner observes that even in industries where women dominated the rank-and-file membership, such as garment manufacturing, “men still monopolized all union offices, and male chauvinism expressed itself in a variety of other ways” (*Women and the American Labor Movement* 390). Rose Pesotta’s experience with the ILGWU serves as an example. As a seamstress, she joined the union in 1914 and became one of its most effective organizers, rising to the rank of vice president by the

mid-1930s. But Pesotta resigned from the union when ILGWU president David Dubinsky denied her request for more autonomy in running a local in Los Angeles. Pesotta had built strong working relationships with the Latina women who comprised most of the local's membership. In a scathing letter to Dubinsky, Pesotta noted that the "men to whom I have been so useful" did not seem "to recognize the fact that I was competent" (Laslett 36). Pesotta's experiences were not unique. Writing more broadly about the labor movement in the first half of the twentieth century, Foner observes that when local women organizers were about to lead a walk-out or strike, national union officials would typically send in men to direct the action (*Women and the American Labor Movement* 390).

In the early decades of the twentieth century, unions and labor organizations aggressively pursued important financial benefits for men (e.g., wage scales, seniority rights, pensions, life insurance policies), while the needs of women were often defined in terms of sociability—lunch/coffee breaks, recreational opportunities, employer-sponsored social services (Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit* 46–47). When the financial crisis of the 1930s forced legislators and government leaders to craft policies for unemployment insurance and other social safety nets, the labor movement resisted entitlement programs that would undermine the dignity and self-sufficiency of working men. Due in part to the influence of labor leaders, social security and unemployment insurance were linked to one's participation in the waged workforce, thus preserving patriarchal conceptions of masculinity and the status of men as breadwinners while effectively sidelining women (Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit* 68, 84). As Kessler-Harris notes, programs like Aid to Dependent Children and Maternal and Infant Healthcare, which served as safety nets for women, were based on need and were thus stigmatized as welfare, while a working man could accept a social security check with honor because it was based on his years of paid labor (*In Pursuit* 66).

As World War II saw the entrance of women into industries traditionally dominated by men, women's relationships with labor unions became more complex. Kessler-Harris has noted that some unions, such as the International Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders, Welders and Helpers, remained highly resistant to women's membership on any terms, even as the war necessitated an increasing number of women working in these industries. Other unions welcomed women workers during the war but continued to treat them as second-class members and sidestepped their demands for equal pay, equitable job classifications, and seniority rights as well as their calls for unions to address issues like childcare and maternity leave. There is no doubt, though, that women's union membership increased dramatically during World War II. According to economist

Gladys Dickson, only eight hundred thousand wage-earning women were unionized when the war began, making up just 9.4 percent of organized workers. By war's end, more than three million women were union members, or 22 percent of trade union membership (cited in Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work* 291). Though many women left the workforce as men were demobilized from the armed forces in the mid-1940s, the next three decades would see a dramatic rise in women's participation in the waged workforce. By 1975, women would comprise 40 percent of wage-earning workers in the United States (Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work* 301), and these demographic changes were accompanied by alterations in the gendered imagination surrounding women, work, and their roles within labor organizations (Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit* 205–6).

Stretching from the 1830s through the 1930s, *Unorganized Women* thus focuses on a critical span of one hundred years in which traditional labor organizations presented complex opportunities to women workers. Most unions were deeply invested in racist and patriarchal conceptions about the centrality of white men as wage earners and as leaders in the labor movement and about the marginality of women in the workforce.

In addition to the patriarchal norms and white supremacy that governed labor unions in the time period under study here, the nature of the work performed by many women in this time period did not lend itself to formal organization. Domestic service was by far the most common occupation for women working outside their own home in the late nineteenth century. Historian David M. Katzman has documented that “in 1870, one-half of all women wage earners in the United States had been domestic servants” (53), and according to Lucy Maynard Salmon, the census of 1890 revealed that “one and a half million persons are actively engaged [in domestic service], to whom employers pay annually at the lowest rough estimate in cash wages more than \$218,000,000” (3). As individuals employed in private homes, domestic employees had limited opportunities to find common cause with other household workers.

The few organized labor actions undertaken by domestic workers in the late nineteenth century were led by Black laundresses in the South who lived with their own families, picking up soiled garments and household linens from their employers on Monday; washing, drying, and pressing the laundry in their own homes throughout the week; and returning clean clothes and linen to their employers at week's end. Tera W. Hunter has documented strikes by washerwomen in the nineteenth century in a number of southern cities, including Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; and Galveston, Texas. These were, though, largely isolated events. As Hunter notes, “domestic workers rarely organized strikes” (“Domination and Resistance” 206).

Similarly, the 53 percent of American households that were engaged in agriculture in 1870, according to the United States census, would not have been sites for labor organization. Women who lived and worked on their families' farms often did not necessarily think of themselves as "wage earners," nor did they typically hold title to land or financial assets. Their work in kitchens, gardens, fields, barns, and other spaces created the conditions of survival for their families, rather than fungible goods. When their labor did produce a surplus, it often flowed into networks of barter and exchange among neighbors, rather than the marketplace. Though women living on small farms built and maintained long-standing networks of solidarity among families in their rural communities, such networks are not typically considered as a form of organized labor.

Despite many working women's seeming lack of access to, interest in, or frustration with formal labor organizations, this book demonstrates that low-wage white women were keenly aware of economic disparities and invested considerable energy in rhetorical labors that would help them achieve a measure of control over their work lives. Taken together, the historical case studies assembled here underscore the importance of deploying a nuanced, feminist understanding of class that expands beyond the labor movement and traditional notions of class consciousness. As sociologist Joan Acker observes in *Class Questions, Feminist Answers*, many feminist scholars have come to eschew well-established methods for defining class. Included among the approaches to class that many feminists find inadequate are Marxist perspectives that identify a foundational set of class relations rooted in capitalist structures; historical materialist approaches that focus on structural change resulting from class conflict; and Weberian theories of class that account for social status and prestige as well as financial resources and economic power (6). Such approaches to defining class, according to Acker, conceptualize "class and capitalism as gender- and race-neutral structures or processes, while implicitly modeling the class actor on a male worker or capitalist" (5). As Acker notes, "Class theories . . . often assume a generic 'worker' and 'manager' who, it turns out, is not so generic for he is white and male" (170). The work experiences of women and people of color and their abilities to access financial opportunities and accumulate economic resources are shaped by the gendering and racialization of their bodies. Understanding how such workers understand and respond to workplace exploitation, financial precarity, and economic oppression requires different ways of thinking about class.

To acknowledge the work experiences of women and the diversity of their economic lives, Acker defines class as the "practices and relation-

ships that provide differential access to and control over the means of provisioning and survival” (68). Such a feminist definition of class creates space to acknowledge a wide range of both waged and unwaged labor; to trace how economic resources are distributed as well as produced; and to account for the broad web of intellectual and affective relationships in which workers, employers, the state, labor organizations, philanthropic social service providers, educators, cultural tastemakers, and others are all connected. Moreover, defining class as the “practices and relationships” that shape how people have differential access to the resources they need to survive and thrive makes possible a nuanced and intersectional understanding of class, gender, and racial processes that contrasts sharply with categorical approaches that assign individuals and families to theoretical or a priori class positions or identities and then correlates class with other variables (Acker 48). Working from the understanding of class that Acker offers makes it possible, for example, to interrogate how the DGC employees responded to their employer’s gendered and racialized business practices that were designed to create a strong sense of workplace community for the white women who comprised the majority of the workforce. Nell Donnelly paid wages above the market average, offered a rich array of employee benefits, ensured that her factory was a safe, comfortable workspace, and maintained sharp distinctions between jobs for white women at the DGC and jobs for Black men and women who were employed only as janitors and maids at the company. Similarly, the *Country Life Readers* that Cora Wilson Stewart authored for families living on farms in Appalachia called rural women into particular relationships with consumer culture and the market economy. Such a move in Stewart’s textbooks and in the broader country life movement of the early twentieth century helped to reinforce the mythology of the native-born, white yeoman farmer living on his own acreage with a wife and children and helped to eclipse both the presence of immigrants in many rural communities and the very different situations of Black farm families, many of whom were trapped in a system of sharecropping and tenant farming throughout much of the South. These types of material and representational practices create very different avenues to access “the means of provisioning and survival” among people with limited economic resources.

Investigating class as such ever-shifting “practices and relationships” requires scholars to focus their attention on the lived experiences of contemporary women and historically specific accounts of women’s lives and labors in decades past. Attending to the concrete experiences of women in specific circumstances reveals the range of ways in which women have been able to pursue their material interests; how their work was been

organized and what opportunities they have had to shape their labor; and what gendered and racialized images and stereotypes have informed their understandings of themselves and others as workers (Acker 68–69). The dynamic practices of low-wage white women workers and the web of relationships in which they are positioned are at the heart of *Unorganized Women* and my efforts to understand their rhetorical labors.

### WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Each of the upcoming chapters demonstrates that many white women workers were particularly concerned with their complex and contested relationships with women of a different economic status and of different races and ethnicities—not necessarily between labor and capital. As Michelle C. Smith has demonstrated in her study of utopian communities in the 1840s, gendered rhetorics of labor all too often “function to increase divides among women and preclude alliances on the basis of gender” (5). Some women, like those working in the textile mills of Lowell and farm women in Appalachia, responded to disparaging comparisons between themselves and women of more elite economic status that circulated widely in periodicals and textbooks. Taking their pens in hand, they worked to disrupt linkages between female citizenship and gentility and the consumption patterns of more economically privileged women. Other women, including domestic servants and the workers at the DGC, were more directly engaged with women employers who provoked a range of emotions, from frustration to admiration. To mediate their employment relationships and document their labor, these low-wage women workers produced texts in a wide variety of genres, such as letters, standard contracts, and employment records, that directly addressed the women who employed them.

Charlotte Hogg has rightly called for feminist historians to attend more closely to relationships among women’s rhetorics across the ideological spectrum. For Hogg, exemplars of such relational studies include Erin Kempker’s work on both women who opposed initiatives linked to second wave feminism and those who supported such initiatives. Hogg also points to the work of literary and rhetorical scholars, such as Theresa Gaul and Julie A. Bokser, who acknowledge, rather than sidestep or “overcorrect,” stubborn elements of women’s writing that may be difficult to assimilate into the ideological frameworks of contemporary feminist scholars (400, emphasis in original). As Hogg insightfully concludes, focusing on the “interplay” of diversely positioned women’s rhetorics yields “more robust insights into both [conservative and feminist agendas] and more closely resembles the realities of our wider culture (400). Feminist rhetoricians have yet to pay close attention to the sometimes agonistic re-

relationships between women whose relationships are defined by economic disparities. Studying the rhetorical performances that emerge from these vexed relationships among women with varied access to material resources usefully expands our understandings of the roles that affect plays in the workplace and challenges the adequacy of framing women's grasp of their economic agency in purely cognitive or intellectual terms.

While the low-wage white women workers in this study invested much of their rhetorical labor in defining and mediating their relationships with women who commanded more economic resources and social capital than they did, they were also deeply concerned about their relationships with Black women and people who had recently immigrated to the United States. White supremacy, enforced segregation, and nationalism dictated that the workspaces I study here were dominated by white women who considered themselves to be deeply rooted in America. As members of a racial majority, the women featured in this book enjoyed economic and social prerogatives accorded to them based on their skin color, and they often chose to remain silent about the exclusion and/or exploitation of Black women workers and other minorities. For example, the mill girls who contributed to the *Lowell Offering* rarely addressed slavery and the forced labor of Black people in the South in the pages of their periodical. Similarly, the white Appalachian women who attended the Moonlight Schools encountered textbooks and other pedagogical materials that defined the white farm family as normative, and there is a little evidence that they chose to use their expanded literacy skills and rhetorical repertoires to cross the color line as they wrote letters that reinforced their traditional networks of solidarity and support in their rural communities. Moreover, there is no archival evidence that they challenged the idea that their Black neighbors should attend segregated Moonlight Schools.

The silence of low-wage white women on issues of race would not surprise rhetoricians who have called attention to the need to study whiteness and white supremacy. Krista Ratcliffe has observed that “out of necessity, non-whites have been quite savvy in articulating the power, privilege, and violence of whiteness throughout US history. Out of privilege, many whites have refused to see it, let alone critique its dysfunctions” (103). Ratcliffe argues that “whiteness is a privileged norm split from other cultural categories in ways that render it invisible, hiding its violence behind parlor manners and polite language” (39). The dysfunction and violent invisibility of white supremacy is not, though, confined only to the parlor. Workplaces and spaces are crucial sites for studying how a wide range of rhetorical performances—not just polite language—creates and sustains white supremacy and structures rela-



tionships between women of different races, ethnicities, and nationalities. Interrogating how low-wage white women workers engage in rhetorical labor to structure their relationships to Black women workers and immigrants is a theme in each of the chapters to come, just as are the relationships low-wage white women create with economically elite and socially privileged women.

### HERE WE GO AGAIN . . . AND AGAIN . . . AND AGAIN

Workers' activism and its associated rhetorical performances have often been defined by dramatic moments—strikes, sit-downs, walkouts, fiery speeches on factory floors. For example, Clara Lemlich is remembered for her impassioned speech at Cooper Union that helped spark the Uprising of the 20,000 in 1909. Mari Boor Tonn has productively analyzed how Mary Harris “Mother” Jones staged spectacular “pageants of poverty” as she advocated for workers' rights and child labor laws in the early twentieth century. Before she was martyred in the Gastonia Textile Strike of 1929, Ella May Wiggins, a single mother of five children, was known for drawing upon her maternal ethos as well as her talents as a balladeer as she ardently addressed her fellow workers about the importance of unions. As organizers and orators, such women labor leaders seized kairotic moments to deliver noteworthy performances. Their original speeches, pageants, and songs were immediately consequential for the movements they helped to lead, and they reached even wider audiences as their rhetorical performances were reported in the media.

But the women workers under study here made no such speeches, organized no pageants, and performed no original songs for enraptured audiences. Instead, they relied on the cumulative force of a wide variety of iterative rhetorical activities—the publication of a periodical to sustain a relationship between author and audience through repeated interactions over time; the use of unvarying, standardized language in employment documents; the everyday circulation of letters to family and friends that reinforce long-standing community norms; and the collective stockpiling of shared workplace experiences in order to achieve evidentiary heft. Their efforts bring to mind Kenneth Burke's admonition that “we must think of rhetoric not in terms of some one particular address, but as the general *body of identifications* that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily reinforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill” (26, emphasis in original). Sidestepping the lure of exceptional rhetorical performances and focusing instead on the power of “trivial repetition and dull daily reinforcement” allows feminist historians to expand our view beyond well-known women labor leaders and activists and provides us with a point

of entry for analyzing the rhetorical lives of a wider range of women workers.

Closely attending to the seemingly inconsequential, iterative texts produced by white women workers also adds texture to our understanding of the nature of repetition and its rhetorical functions. To date, discussions of repetition have centered on pedagogy, style, and, more recently, digital media. Rote learning—repeating after a teacher or copying material from an authoritative text—has typically been castigated as ineffective, even cruel, pedagogy. Debra Hawhee has, though, recuperated repetition as a central focus of rhetorical education and athletic training for the Sophists. She notes that Isocrates stressed that one’s ability to respond appropriately to others can be developed only through “repeated encounters with difference: different opponents, different subject matter, different times and places” (152). The mill girls of Lowell knew this lesson well. The pages of the *Lowell Offering* are filled with countless articles, stories, poems, and editorials that challenged the journalists, religious leaders, wealthy women, and other cultural tastemakers who castigated women laboring in industrial settings. Through their repeated efforts to defend themselves and their labor in the mills, the contributors to the *Offering* honed their rhetorical skills.

In terms of style and figures of speech, the list of rhetorical strategies that involve repetition is extensive—alliteration, assonance, anadiplosis, anaphora, epistrophe, mesarchia, expositio, palilogia, traductio, to name just a few (Burton). From the exact duplication of letters and sounds, to the repetition of words, phrases, and clauses, to the reiteration of ideas in new words, repetition draws upon the power of patterns for making meaning and building relationships. But how far can a text vary from the original and still be considered a repetition? Linguist Barbara Johnstone posits that the answer lies in audience perception and whether readers/listeners “can identify something as being ‘another one of those’” (3). Johnstone goes on to note that “repetition of particular words is the easiest kind to identify, and there is more difference of opinion about whether to use [the] term in cases of pragmatic repetition such as paraphrasing, in which there really is nothing palpable that’s the same” (3–4). Repetition’s range is on full display in the four historical case studies that make up *Unorganized Women*. The exact duplication of words and sentences is what makes the standardized contracts signed by domestic workers and written records of their employment histories rhetorically powerful, but it is the variation found in the letters penned by women workers at the Donnelly Garment Company that helps to establish their ethos as they address common themes, such as their knowledge of the labor market, their sense of agency as wage earners, and their affectionate loyalty for

their charismatic employer, Nell Donnelly Reed. By thus investigating the range of forms repetition can take and how it functions in particular contexts, I productively disrupt simplistic understandings of repetition as banal, unimaginative, and tedious.

I share this goal with many scholars who focus their attention on the (re)circulation of images and words through digital media. Laurie E. Gries's award-winning 2015 study of the "Obama Hope" poster, *Still Life with Rhetoric*, provides a powerful methodology—"iconographic tracking"—for studying the repetition (and variation) of images across time and space. Similarly, researchers who study memes often focus on how images and ideas are replicated and distributed at lightning speed around the globe (e.g., Jenkins; D. Johnson). In such studies, geographic and chronologic mobility tend to be privileged. The immediate circulation and uptake of the image/text/idea by diverse, digitally sophisticated audiences is of greater interest than the long-standing forms and functions of iterative texts within more local communities by people presumed to be working with their hands rather than their heads.

The women under study here were rooted in particular workspaces—the mills of Lowell, the middle- and upper-class homes of Boston; the farms of Appalachia; and Kansas City's Donnelly Garment Company—at particular moments of economic upheaval. Undertaking tedious tasks that imperiled their bodily well-being, these women workers also found themselves subjected to questions about their mental capacities and the sophistication of their judgment. Mike Rose has documented how this tendency to make assumptions about the intellectual abilities of people who undertake physically demanding jobs remains all too common in the twenty-first century. He calls for a greater recognition of the intelligence of workers and of the "various ways—even as work threatens body and dignity—people tend to seek agency and meaning within the constraints placed upon them" (xxviii). *Unorganized Women* is an attempt to answer Rose's call. Inquiring deeply into the local, historical contexts in which low-wage white women were situated and studying the iterative texts they produced reveal they constructed public representations of their lives and labors, rewrote their relationships with their employers, reinforced long-standing traditions and economic relationships in their communities, and resisted narratives about their work lives that they felt were inaccurate. All by saying the same thing, again, and again, and again.

### **WORKING BITS AND PIECES INTO NARRATIVES: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY FROM THE ARCHIVES**

As with any historically marginalized group of people, the voices of low-wage white women are difficult to locate in the archives. Jonathan Bue-

hl, Tamar Chute, and Anne Fields have made clear that “archives are repositories of records, but they are also repositories ‘of record’ and thus sites of memory and power. . . . We must be mindful that archives, like universities, are often ‘insides’ defined by what (and who) is ‘outside’” (298). Saidiya Hartman also eloquently argues that historians interested in marginalized populations must “grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor” (xiii). Low-wage women workers of all races are rarely considered historical actors and are typically seen as outsiders. For too long their work and their words were not deemed worthy of attention by libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural institutions that take as their mission the preservation of the nation’s heritage. But with careful, creative, and persistent effort, archival possibilities emerge. Repositories and records that were never intended as official spaces and places for documenting the repetitive rhetorical labor of low-wage women workers can be identified, though my process of locating such archives did not involve a straightforward, unerring research trajectory.

The influence of my grandmother and other women in my family spurred my abiding interest in how white women who face economic challenges have described their working lives and engaged in a range of collective activities. This attunement to and curiosity about the voices of white working women positioned me to locate the historical documents and materials that are the basis of this book in a variety of sometimes unforeseen ways. Like many of the scholars who chronicle their research experiences in Maureen Daly Goggin and Peter N. Goggin’s *Serenity in Rhetoric, Writing, and Literacy Research* (2018), I have learned, “through practice, through living on the edge of ignorance, [to] expect to find the unexpected . . . [and] to stay open to possibilities” (Goggin and Goggin 3). A willingness to dwell with my own ignorance while also remaining hopeful about the possibilities of unpredictable and seemingly fortuitous research opportunities ultimately afforded me fruitful occasions for engaging with the literacy practices and rhetorical performances of low-wage white women workers, even in archival spaces that were not designed to preserve their voices.

On a long-ago road trip through New England and the maritime provinces of Canada with my mom to celebrate the end of my first year as an assistant professor, we made an unplanned stop at the Lowell National Historical Park. There I was introduced to one of first populations of white women factory workers in the United States and how they used the publication of a periodical to establish their place in the civic life of the nation. My ears were still ringing from the deafening clatter of the

looms in the weave room at the Boott Cotton Mills Museum while I browsed the books on display in the visitor center and purchased a copy of Benita Eisler's slim anthology of articles excerpted from the *Lowell Offering*. Outstanding interlibrary loan specialists at my university then helped me acquire microfilm of a full run of all issues of the *Lowell Offering*, which allowed me to develop a richer, more textured understanding of the rhetorical labor undertaken by the *Offering's* contributors than I might have envisioned if I had restricted my investigation to the materials that Eisler excerpted from the periodical.

Anne Ruggles Gere's magisterial volume on women's clubs, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in US Women's Clubs, 1880–1920*, introduced me to the Women's Educational and Industrial Union of Boston as a "cross-class" organization whose leaders devoted "considerable attention to the problems working women faced" (76). Gere's meticulous endnotes revealed that the WEIU papers were housed in Boston-area repositories, and at the Schlesinger Library I found annual reports, research studies, publicity materials, and organizational records that were intended to document the organization's considerable accomplishments and civic contributions. But in those same documents I also found evidence of how domestic workers enlisted the organization's resources to gain a greater measure of control over their economic lives at the turn of the twentieth century.

Another unexpected discovery came when I was browsing the stacks of my university library, and I ran my finger across the spine of Willie Nelms's biography of Cora Wilson Stewart, the founder of the Moonlight Schools. Nelms's work pointed me toward the University of Kentucky, where Stewart's papers are preserved. Stewart was eighty years old when the university contacted her about acquiring her papers, and, filled with pride, she assembled the materials that now stand as the central archive of the Moonlight Schools (Baldwin 3–4). Her collected papers fill close to seventy boxes and serve as a remarkable resource for researchers interested in her lifelong career as an educator. But scattered throughout the materials are letters from some of the students who attended the Moonlight Schools, and these missives afforded me new possibilities for investigating the rhetorical labor of women living on small farms in Appalachia.

And I first learned of the Donnelly Garment Company at a fundraising event for my university library—the featured speaker was Terence Michael O'Malley. He was promoting his just-completed documentary and accompanying book on the DGC's charismatic founder, Nell Donnelly Reed, who also happened to be his great, great aunt. While chatting with O'Malley as I purchased a copy of his book and

a DVD of his documentary, I learned of the cache of letters written by DGC employees that could be found in the archives of James A. Reed, who was a US senator from 1911 to 1929. Nell Donnelly had taken Reed as her second husband in 1933, and the former senator served as one of the DGC's attorneys in the company's battle against the ILGWU and its organizing efforts. Fortuitously, James A. Reed's papers are stored at the Kansas City Research Center of the State Historical Society of Missouri, just across the street from my campus office. The scope and content description at the beginning of the finding aid for Reed's papers explains that "the bulk of the collection consists of correspondence, both personal and professional. Many letters are from admirers and critics on a variety of topics such as economic conditions, Prohibition, agricultural policy, the New Deal, judicial reform, and other political subjects." The description goes on to mention Reed's work as an attorney handling legal work for the Newman and Royal Theatres in Kansas City, an interstate railroad case, and a patent case for Universal Oil. Only when I scrolled through the entire forty-page finding aid—with its inventories of fifty-nine document boxes, two flat boxes of clippings, and three boxes of phonographic recordings—did I spot Box 34 and the perfunctory notation "Copies of letters by Donnelly Garment Co. employees, July 1937." Reed's voluminous collected papers serve to endow him with the "gravity and authority of historical actor" (Hartman xiii), but the briefly noted contents of Box 34 afforded me the opportunity to endow a group of garment workers from the 1930s with their own gravity and authority as historical actors.

*Unorganized Women* is thus crafted from my engagement with archives and other sources that I was fortunate to encounter at sometimes unexpected moments. The diversity of archives and sources that I draw upon in *Unorganized Women* has necessitated that in each chapter I deploy specific analytic methods and theoretical frameworks informed by the work of scholars in a variety of research areas. In chapter 1, I am indebted to the research and theoretical frameworks generated by scholars working in the interdisciplinary field of periodical studies. James Mussell, Margaret Beetham, and Fionnuala Dillane have all usefully theorized the repetitive nature of readers' encounters with journals, magazines, and other recurrent texts as well as about authors' efforts to capitalize on the serial nature of such publications. In chapter 2, sociologist Dorothy E. Smith's theorization of "documentary reality" informs my focus on the network of genres—circulars, contracts, receipts, employment records, diplomas—that domestic workers navigated in seeking to gain a greater measure of control over their work lives. In chapter 3, the work of educational historians provides me with strategies for in-

terrogating pedagogical materials that addressed Appalachia farm women as well as their responses. Jennie L. Vaughn's conception of a "living archive" that enhances researchers' interpretation of traditional archival sources plays a key role in helping me extend my analysis of epistolary artifacts contained in Stewart's archives. And in chapter 4, the short letters composed by the DGC workers lend themselves to the digital tools and forms of computational analysis associated with the digital humanities. Throughout *Unorganized Women*, I strive to articulate my own work processes as an archival researcher and historical scholar. Jessica Enoch has argued that when historians detail their research methods, "we attain a clearer sense of what . . . [they] are and are not doing when they compose their narratives. And, through this atomistic view, we have the opportunity to assess the practices that open up and close down historiographic possibilities, learning more about the methodological thruways and roadblocks that allow for and prevent alternative histories to be composed" ("Changing Research Methods" 49). In detailing my methods and the theoretical frameworks that inform each chapter, I hope I have contributed to the creation of a wider, smoother research path for other scholars interested in working women and feminist rhetorical studies, a path that can lead us all to more nuanced understandings of our shared past and better prospects for great economic justice in the future.

Taken collectively, the four chapters in this book stand as an argument for the methodological value of the collective case study (Stake 237–38). As a research method, the singular case study privileges concrete details over abstract theory and "afford[s] researchers opportunities to explore or describe a phenomenon in context using a variety of data sources" (Baxter and Jack 544). Ideal for asking *how* and *why* questions, the case study and other forms of qualitative research are rooted in a constructivist paradigm that "recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning but doesn't reject outright some notion of objectivity" (Miller and Crabtree 10). The dynamic tensions between the multiple perspectives of varied stakeholders and between subjective perception and objective reality provide the inquiry's energy. Indeed, each of the chapters to follow functions as a singular historical case study. I work to contextualize the circumstances under which my subjects labored, and I draw upon archival data sources that include periodicals, autobiographies/memoirs, organizational records, pedagogical materials, transcripts from legal proceedings, oral histories, letters, and other materials. These varied sources have enriched and complicated my arguments about why these low-wage white women were seemingly unorganized and how they labored with language to claim a measure of control over their economic lives.



When aligned, the four individual case studies assembled in this book reveal noteworthy consistencies and common patterns in how low-wage white women have helped construct and respond to the complex web of class relations and practices in which they were “enmeshed” (Ackler 47). In particular, they have sought to assert control over public representations of their lives and labors, using a variety of genres and addressing a range of audiences. In doing so, they have consistently challenged the invisibility that Barbara Ehrenreich deems an unfortunate condition of the lives of women working in low-wage jobs (216). Moreover, their rhetorical labor was often invested in defining their relationships to other women, including well-to-do or middle-class women who were held up as models of feminine virtue; women who were minoritized based on race, ethnicity, or place of birth; and women whose views differed from their own about how best to gain power in the workplace. Rather than a teleological narrative of women’s economic progress and empowerment over the course of a century, this collective case study speaks to the enduring obstacles that low-wage white women workers have faced and their persistent ingenuity in striving to engage in collective activity they find meaningful and efficacious.

Chapter 1, “Weaving New Identities: Mill Girls and the *Lowell Offering*, 1834–1845,” demonstrates how some of the young white women employed in the nation’s textile mills in the 1840s capitalized on the rhetorical affordances of the periodical and the power of often repeated cultural commonplaces to sidestep the criticism generated by mill girls’ early strikes and walkouts in the 1830s. By publishing poems, narratives, and essays that affirmed their commitment to widely shared values, editor Harriet Farley and the textual community of mill girls who published in the *Offering* seized control of their public image as working women and countered arguments that women working in industrial settings were a threat to the health and welfare of the nation. The *Offering*’s contributors also opted to remain largely silent in the pages of their periodical about the enslaved women in southern states who picked the raw cotton that was spun into thread and then woven into cloth in the Lowell mills. Focused on their own precarious status as industrial workers, the mill girls were unable or unwilling to acknowledge how their ability to earn a living was predicated on the labor of enslaved human beings. As conditions in the mills deteriorated, some mill workers opted to align themselves with the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA), which published the *Voice of Industry* in partnership with the New England Workingmen’s Association. Farley and the women workers who maintained their affiliation with the *Offering* forswore the more agonist approach of Sarah Bagley, who edited the *Voice of Industry*, but

they still saw their work as contributing to campaign for workers' rights, rather than competing with the LFLRA.

Chapter 2, "Service(able) Rhetorics: Repetition, Standardization, and Household Workers, 1877–1902," shows how women who earned their livings as domestic workers responded to the possibility that routine, standardized documents—contracts, account books, receipts, employment records—might give them a greater measure of control over their working lives. The WEIU, founded in Boston in 1877 to promote cross-class alliances, advocated for such repetitive rhetorical performances through its Committee on Protection, Domestic Reform League, and School of Housekeeping, initiatives that were all designed to address the vexed relationship between well-to-do women and the household workers who prepared their meals and cleaned their homes. Capable of transforming often complex relationships and shifting realities into seemingly stable textual artifacts that could be referenced by a range of readers, such documents gave household workers some measure of control over representations of their labor and their working lives. For women with only rudimentary reading and writing skills, and for those less familiar with the English language as spoken in the United States, the sort of documentary systems advocated by the WEIU could be efficacious, allowing them to gain a greater measure of control over their working lives. The rhetorical labor of documentation and systematization did little, however, to foster collective activities among household workers, even though archival traces suggest women who attended the WEIU's School of Housekeeping deeply desired a sense of common cause and community with their fellow workers. Ultimately, domestic workers' most impactful rhetorical labor may have been their refusal to participate in initiatives that did not serve their needs and desires.

Like domestic workers employed in private homes, women living on subsistence farms in Appalachia in the early twentieth century were a group of workers whose circumstances made them unamenable to traditional forms of labor organization. Chapter 3, "Revisiting *Imitatio*, Reinforcing Neighborly Networks of Solidarity: Appalachian Farm Women and the Moonlight Schools, 1911–1920," shows how women living and working in rural communities responded to opportunities to acquire basic literacy skills and expand their rhetorical repertoires at the Moonlight Schools, which were founded by Cora Wilson Stewart in Rowan County, Kentucky, and quickly spread across the nation. Grounded in *imitatio*, a pedagogy of repetition, Stewart's educational program was specifically designed for rural residents. Stewart both celebrated agrarian lifestyles and traditions and urged farm families to engage in new economic activities and formally organized community activities. Though segregated

Moonlight Schools separately served both Black and white students, the visual rhetoric of Stewart's textbooks focused on white farm families, and like the broader country life movement, the Moonlight Schools did not address challenges of Black families trapped in racialized systems of sharecropping and tenant farming. Archived copies of students' letters reveal, though, the iterative nature of rural women's epistolary efforts. Typically brief, the letters repeat expressions of affection and gratitude that served to reinforce the networks of family and friends that have long sustained farm women and their communities. There is little evidence that increased access to rhetorical education realigned rural women with the "modern" white housewife who was held up as an aspirational model in Stewart's textbooks or to form the sorts of formal organizations that many rural reformers advocated for in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Chapter 4, "Piecework: Rhetorical Accrual at the Donnelly Garment Company, 1933–1937," examines the repetitive rhetorical labor of women workers at the DGC in Kansas City as they aligned themselves with Nell Donnelly Reed, the founder and president of the company, and resisted the unionization efforts of the ILGWU in the 1930s. This chapter centers on more than seven hundred letters written by DGC employees in 1937. My close reading of these letters and other DGC-related documents is supplemented with the practice of "distant reading" enabled by tools from digital humanities. My analysis reveals that many of the women workers at the DGC factory were not opposed to labor unions in general, nor were they dupes who failed to recognize "their own self-interest" (Ancel). Instead, they were pragmatic women, capable of reading the material realities of their working lives and of inscribing those realities in repetitious texts that they hoped would function as a persuasive body of evidence to justify their rejection of the ILGWU. In a process I name as "rhetorical accrual," the women workers consistently offered their assessments of the local labor market and repeatedly asserted that their membership in the DGC's workplace community was deeply satisfying in both financial and emotional terms. While the voices of the majority of DGC employees suggest that they were able to use repetition to craft a workplace identity they found as comfortable and practical as the garments they stitched, both the powers and limits of rhetorical accrual come into view most sharply when I turn to the voices of Black workers at the DGC, whose job opportunities were limited to custodial roles at the factory, and to the voices of the limited number of women workers who publicly declared their interest in the ILGWU's overtures.

In this volume's afterword, I connect lessons from this collective case study of low-wage white women workers in decades past with current

and future forms of workplace solidarity and collective activism that serve women with few economic resources. As sociologist Bent Flyvbjerg argues, narratives, such as those that emerge from historical case studies, “not only give meaningful form to experiences we have already lived through. They also provide us a forward glance, helping us to anticipate situations even before we encounter them, allowing us to envision alternative futures” (138). With the ever-widening income gap of the twenty-first century, the movement of labor and capital around the globe, new work arrangements (e.g., the “gig” economy, outsourcing), and ongoing threats to the viability of traditional labor unions, visions of richer, more sustainable futures for low-wage women workers, and all people, are very much in need.