

## Ethos, Agency, and Pathos in Ida B. Wells's "Lynch Law in All Its Phases"

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In their introduction to *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones feature Utahan Terry Tempest Williams, a feminist environmental activist whose identity as a Native American Mormon woman creates notable challenges for her rhetorical practice, particularly her construction of ethos. "Like Williams," they generalize, "many women rhetors find that there is no comfortable ethos to employ if they want to shift the dominant discourse on a particular topic. Common, normalizing ethē (i.e., Mormon woman, mother, angel of the house, whore, bitch) ascribed to women do not lend themselves readily to public speaking. As such, new ethē must be created and defined to push against these socially determined ethē."<sup>1</sup> Emphasizing the complex, dynamic quality of rhetorical character as expressed in written and spoken texts, they argue, "Ethos is neither solitary nor fixed. Rather, ethos is negotiated and renegotiated, embodied and communal, co-constructed and thoroughly implicated in shifting power dynamics."<sup>2</sup>

Ryan, Meyers, and Jones also emphasize the vital role that place plays in the formation of a woman's ethos. This connection between place and ethos was essential to the ancient's understanding of the concept, of course.<sup>3</sup> However, because of their marginalized status, which compels them to work more diligently to construct authority in a world inherently skeptical of their right to participate in public rhetoric, women rhetors, we are coming to understand, rely particularly on specific locales for establishing credibility. Leaning mainly on Nedra Reynolds's work, Ryan, Myers, and Jones explore this position: "With a writer's acknowledgment of her location comes not only an authority to speak, but also a concomitant responsibility to speak from that position with the knowledge conferred by that location, where location refers to 'the space of the body, her geographical location, her shifting intellectual positions, her distance or closeness to others, to texts, to events.'"<sup>4</sup>

This study, a reading of Ida B. Wells's "Lynch Law in All Its Phases," presented at the Tremont Temple in Boston on 13 February 1893, is intended to enrich this discussion of women's construction of ethos with the variable of race.<sup>5</sup> As a relatively young, unmarried Southern African

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, eds., *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ryan, Myers, and Jones, *Rethinking Ethos*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, S. Michael Halloran, "Aristotle's Concept of Ethos, or If Not His Somebody Else's," *Rhetoric Review* 1, no. 1 (1982): 60; Michael J. Hyde, "Introduction: Rhetorically, We Dwell," *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, ed. Michael J. Hyde (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2004): xiii; Nedra Reynolds, "Ethos as Location: New Sites for Understanding Discursive Authority," *Rhetoric Review* 11, no. 2 (1993): 327–328; Risa Applegarth, "Genre, Location, and Mary Austin's *Ethos*," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2011): 48–49.

<sup>4</sup> Reynolds, "Ethos as Location," 335–36, quoted in Ryan, Myers, and Jones, *Rethinking Ethos*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> For previous accounts of Wells's speech, see Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 81; Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Style and Content in the Rhetoric of Early Afro-American Feminists," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72, no. 4 (1986): 434–45; Jacqueline Jones Royster, "To Call a Thing by Its True Name: The Rhetoric of Ida B. Wells," *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 167–184; Shirley Wilson Logan, *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century African-American Woman*, (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995); Linda O. McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The*

American woman delivering an oration before a Northern White public audience, Wells faces special constraints and—I will argue—leverages distinct opportunities that render her construction of ethos particularly significant. Wells’s racial status magnifies other variables of marginalization, as well as the salience of physical and generic location. Strikingly, Wells locates her body, her material presence, in the terrifying world she describes—thus vivifying the mortal peril she faced—and on the platform she occupies as an orator. Her strategy of both descending directly into sites of violence while also establishing for herself a more general perspective overlooking specific locations yields credibility for an individual who, in the White world of the 1890s, inherently had virtually none. Wells’s effort to “shift the dominant discourse”<sup>6</sup> on lynching, animated by a complex, flexible ethos, also demonstrates that the highly protean nature of the rhetorical construct applies not merely to a rhetor’s output over a career, but also in a single rhetorical event. I wish to explore why Wells adopted this particular approach to her ethos, as well as the positive rhetorical consequences of her choices. In addition, I will trace Wells’s efforts to kindle the emotions of her listeners, efforts that demonstrate her ability to transfer morally grounded anger and pity based in local conditions to the national lynching crisis she seeks to expose to her Northern audience.

### The Orator and Her Oration

Ida B. Wells (1862–1931), a courageous young female journalist making her way in a racist world and a decidedly masculine, chauvinistic profession, became personally involved in the anti-lynching movement in 1892. In March of that year, several men in the Memphis African American community in which she lived and edited the local Black newspaper, the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*, were lynched, essentially for the crime of successfully competing with local White businesses. Furthermore, when Wells sought to use her newspaper to expose the crimes committed against her community, her printing press and office were destroyed by a White mob, and she escaped serious physical harm only because she was out of the state at the time.<sup>7</sup> Wells’s intrepid response to this violence was to launch a one-woman crusade against lynching. Her pamphlet, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, published that fall, captured with great precision the stark reality of the mass terrorism practiced upon African Americans. In addition, she embarked upon speaking tours, both in the Northern states and Europe.

Clearly, Wells’s writing and speaking on behalf of African Americans flew in the face of Victorian norms. Writes Mia Bay, “Especially when it came to public appearances, middle-class

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*Life of Ida B. Wells*, (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 1998), 178–181; Paula J. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions; Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 236–256; Angela D. Sims, “Nooses in Public Spaces: A Womanist Critique of Lynching—A Twenty-first Century Ethical Dilemma,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 29, no. 2 (2009): 81–95; Richard W. Leeman and Bernard K. Duffy, *The Will of a People: A Critical Anthology of Great African American Speeches* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), 149–175. For accounts of Wells’s subsequent speaking tour in Britain, see Teresa Zackodnik, “Ida B. Wells and ‘American Atrocities’ in Britain,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 28, no. 4 (2005): 259–273; Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform: 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 24–26.

<sup>6</sup> Ryan, Myers, and Jones, *Rethinking Ethos*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of the tragedy in Memphis and Wells’s efforts to expose the wrongdoing, see Lisa A. White, “The ‘Saddle-Colored Sapphira’ Versus The ‘Slimy Rattlesnake’: The Rhetorical Melee of Ida B. Wells and Edward Carmack On the Subject of Lynching,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2003): 310–331; Wells, *Crusade* 47–67; Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2009), 82–108; McMurry, *Waters Troubled*, 130–149; Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett*, 75–79.

African American women were silenced by the ideals of womanhood that made it all but impossible to challenge the racism and sexism without compromising their own claims to femininity."<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, as I explore below, Wells—whom the African American *Indianapolis Freeman* dubbed (with a telltale combination of condescension and admiration) “this plucky little race lady from the South”<sup>9</sup>—skillfully confronted these significant rhetorical constraints through a variety of strategies, including her artful construction of ethos.<sup>10</sup>

Wells's speech at the Tremont Temple was not her first public speaking engagement. In fact, she identifies her initial speech as an address to African American women in New York that she reflects upon in a memorable passage in her autobiography,<sup>11</sup> although the precise text of the speech is no longer extant. The Tremont Temple oration, however, was particularly significant because it was Wells's first opportunity to address a White audience, the very people who held nearly all the power in late nineteenth-century American society and whose support she most needed to effect significant change. Wells identifies this speech as essentially the same text she read in New York and on other occasions,<sup>12</sup> although—as Linda O. McMurry notes<sup>13</sup>—she adjusted it to reflect current events and to meet the needs of her audiences. Paula Giddings characterized the Tremont Temple oration as a product of “her now-perfected rhetorical approach.”<sup>14</sup>

The speech was admired by the audience in attendance and received positive coverage in both the White and African American papers of the day. The Kansas City *American Citizen*, a Black publication, recirculates coverage from the White *Boston Herald*, which provides a glowing resolution produced by the audience of the speech that calls attention to Wells's “pathetic and unimpassioned recital of the horrible atrocities perpetrated in various parts of the South with alarming and growing frequency upon the members of the colored race” and “desires to express its thanks to the cultivated Christian lady for the important information she imparted, our admiration of her intelligent, reasonable and heroic advocacy of the rights of American Citizens and our sympathy with her and her people in the injustice they are suffering.” The explicit promise embedded in the resolution demonstrates the positive effect of Wells's rhetoric upon the audience present: “We pledge to [the colored race] our best endeavors to arouse public sentiment in indignant condemnation of the increasing prevalence of lynch law in our land, to the end that these symptoms of barbarianism may soon cease to disgrace our American civilization.”<sup>15</sup>

Just as this reproduced pledge demonstrates the speech's significant effect on the audience in attendance, its publication in the press exemplifies the further circulation of Wells's key arguments within African American and White society.<sup>16</sup> Wells also notes that the *Boston*

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<sup>8</sup> Bay, *Tell the Truth*, 118.

<sup>9</sup> “How Some Women Reason,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, 4 March 1893, 4.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion of the sexism Wells faced as a professional journalist, see Bay, *Tell the Truth*, 70, 75–76, 80, 112, 151; Patricia A. Schechter, “‘All the Intensity of My Nature’: Ida B. Wells, Anger, and Politics,” *Radical History Review* 70 (1998): 65–66; Glen McClish, “The Instrumental and Constitutive Rhetoric of Martin Luther King Jr. and Frederick Douglass,” *Rhetorica* 33, no. 1 (2015): 66.

<sup>11</sup> Wells, *Crusade*, 78–80.

<sup>12</sup> Wells, *Crusade*, 82.

<sup>13</sup> McMurry, *Waters Troubled*, 178.

<sup>14</sup> Giddings, *Sword Among Lions*, 254.

<sup>15</sup> “On Lynch Law. Miss Ida C. [sic.] Wells Lecture in The Charles Street M. E. Church.” *American Citizen*, 25 February 1893, 1.

<sup>16</sup> It is significant that the *American Citizen* article begins with coverage of a different speech delivered by Wells at an African American Boston venue, the Charles Street M. E. Church, a couple of days after the Tremont Temple oration. The *Herald* article, it is reported, “gives Miss Wells much praise” and attests to the effectiveness of her

*Transcript and Advertiser* “gave the first notices and report of my story of any white northern papers.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the oration was subsequently published in *Our Day: A Record and Review of Current Reform*, edited by Joseph Cook, pastor of Tremont Temple. As a result of increased interest in African American rhetoric in the late twentieth century, it has been reproduced in print numerous times and is readily available today on the internet.<sup>18</sup> Thus, although Wells wrote discouragingly of the speaking tour of which this speech was a part (“Only in one city—Boston—had I been given even a meagre hearing, and the press was dumb”<sup>19</sup>), the speech has come to occupy a place in the history of American rhetoric.

### **Marginalized Women’s *Ethē* and the Salience of Ethically Based Emotion in Persuasion**

As the publication of Ryan, Myers, and Jones’s collection and my introductory remarks suggest, a growing number of scholars of rhetoric are focusing on the complexity of ethos construction for women, whose marginalization requires them to develop innovative strategies for establishing their characters as authoritative female rhetors within their writings and speeches. Furthermore, for many such scholars, an attention to location is vital to establishing ethos in communities predisposed to challenge women’s credibility. Drawing on the work of Nedra Reynolds to study the autobiographical writings of pioneer women’s writing, for example, Julie Nelson Christoph argues that “it is crucial to look closely at the particular ways in which writers establish authority for themselves through defining and redefining their evolving positions in particular communities—that we look not only at *texts* but also at material, social, and political contexts.”<sup>20</sup> Christoph features what she calls women’s “strategies of placement,” specifically “identity statements,” “moral displays,” and “material associations.” Christoph explains that identity statements are those places in the text “in which a writer explicitly refers to some facet of her self-identity as a person affiliated with a particular place or community, saying in effect, ‘I am a \_\_\_\_.’” Closely related to identity statements, moral displays “attempt to connect with the moral standards of the community and to establish truth through demonstrating similar values.” Material associations, on the other hand, are references by writers “to specific elements of their material and social conditions,” which Christoph believes are “particularly significant to how [writers] convey *ethos*.”<sup>21</sup>

Like Christoph, Risa Applegarth explores links between location and ethos for women rhetors. In particular, she demonstrates how early twentieth-century nature writer Mary Austin, who competed for readers in a field of writing dominated by men, “drew on her location in the deserts of the U.S. west in order to create a persuasive ethos within a particular genre: the literary

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rhetoric, stating, “Already public sentiment is being deeply roused in the North over the southern troubles arising from the practice of lynch law.” This second speech is also reported in the *Indianapolis Freeman*, but is not elaborated upon. The *Freeman* article does not make mention of the Tremont Temple Oration. “On Lynch Law,” *American Citizen*, 25 February 1893, 1; “Ida B. Wells Lectures,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, 25 February 1893, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Wells, *Crusade*, 81.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Mildred I. Thompson, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett: An Exploratory Study of an American Black Woman* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990); Phillip S. Foner and Robert James Branham, *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787–1900* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 745–60; Leeman and Duffy, *Will*, 158–73; Logan, *With Pen*, 80–99.

<sup>19</sup> Wells, *Crusade*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> Julie Nelson Christoph, “Reconceiving *Ethos* in Relation to the Personal: Strategies of Placement in Pioneer Women’s Writing,” *College English* 64, no. 6 (2002): 668.

<sup>21</sup> Christoph, “Reconceiving *Ethos*,” 670–71.

nature essay."<sup>22</sup> Her review of the previous scholarship on place and ethos demonstrates the inherent links between them:

These scholars suggest that in ancient as well as contemporary contexts, rhetors learn to enact culturally specific notions of "good will, good sense, and good moral character" through their participation in particular communities and their habituation, within *places*, to shared norms that make *ethos* effective. Such scholarship understands *ethos* as location, grounded in material spaces and drawing persuasive power from the shared symbolic resonance of such spaces.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to physical space, Applegarth also considers rhetorical genre to be an important location women rhetors consider in order to establish ethos. More specifically, she argues that "by recasting *ethos* as *location within and among genres*, I offer a reformulation that captures possibilities for as well as limitations on a rhetor's capacity to shape *ethos* strategically."<sup>24</sup> Applegarth also reminds us that, as a construct comprising both given and selected variables, "*ethos* is a situated practice, neither fully and freely chosen nor yet thoroughly determined, but shaped through the interaction between individual rhetors and the social and material environments within which they speak."<sup>25</sup>

Drawing specifically on Reynolds, Applegarth, and Christoph in her study of Genevieve Stebbins, Suzanne Bordelon explores how this nineteenth-century American elocutionist established her ethos in a field dominated by Francois Delsarte and a host of male writers and teachers. Bordelon demonstrates how Stebbins, in her famous textbook, *The Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression*, establishes her ethos by attending to elements of location, both spatial/physical and generic. She concludes that Stebbins, through "strategies of location—which included physical, social, genre, and textual placement—militates against her marginalized embodied position to construct a powerful *ethos*."<sup>26</sup>

Extending Bordelon's analysis, which features the ethos of a nineteenth-century White woman and, necessarily, concepts of the body "limited to white, middle-class women,"<sup>27</sup> I explore the rhetorical constraints and opportunities available for a woman of color speaking in the same era. Although these constraints, I will argue, are significantly more challenging for Wells than for rhetors such as Austin and Stebbins, who rely on their status as members of the dominant culture, the former figure manages the rhetorical context in ways that demonstrate the potential to confront and overcome disadvantage and even peril. Through this approach to the construction of ethos, I aim to demonstrate that Wells's ostensibly uneven, frequently shifting ethos can be powerfully strategic, rather than merely uncontrolled or erratic.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to establishing her credibility as a Southern African American woman speaking to an audience comprising Northern Whites during the period of time known as the "nadir" of

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<sup>22</sup> Applegarth, "Mary Austin's *Ethos*," 43.

<sup>23</sup> Applegarth, "Mary Austin's *Ethos*," 43.

<sup>24</sup> Applegarth, "Mary Austin's *Ethos*," 44.

<sup>25</sup> Applegarth, "Mary Austin's *Ethos*," 49.

<sup>26</sup> Suzanne Bordelon, "Embodied *Ethos* and Rhetorical Accretion: Genevieve Stebbins and the *Delsarte System of Expression*," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2016): 127.

<sup>27</sup> Bordelon, "Embodied *Ethos*," 127.

<sup>28</sup> For additional discussion of the challenges faced by African American women in the construction of ethos, see Coretta Pittman, "Black Women Writers and the Trouble with Ethos: Harriet Jacobs, Billie Holliday, and Sister Souljah," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2007): 43–70.

African American rights, Wells has little hope in succeeding as a rhetor unless she is able to *move* her listeners—detached from the daily horrors of lynch law—to experience the pity, fear, righteous anger, and sense of loss felt by the African Americans it has terrorized. Recent scholarship on pathos, built on careful reassessments of rhetorical theory, both classical and modern, has increased our understanding of the essential role emotion plays in persuasion. When considering the components of argument, Laura Micciche reminds us, we should not approach emotions as “additive—which assumes that reason, logic, and rationality are normative, staple ingredients—but as integral to communication, persuasion, attachments of all sorts, and to notions of self and other.”<sup>29</sup> Such emotions are not automatic, arbitrarily evoked impulses, referenced in order to garnish an argument, feelings that “reside *in* things and people,” or appeals “that can be isolated and identified” as independent entities, but deeply felt experiences that emerge relationally, co-constructed between rhetor and audience.<sup>30</sup> Thus, pathos results from the performative nature of the speech or text, and is not some static entity, inserted preformed and packaged into one’s text for extra effect. Furthermore, Ellen Quandahl—drawing on the work of Lynn Worsham and others—emphasizes the vital link between the emotions and our ethical natures, explaining that the former “bind the individual to ethical commitments and to the sense of how things are and ought to be. People are ethicized and emotionalized at once, and so what are to them good reasons have the force of ‘goodness’ because goodness involves what one has experienced and what one feels.”<sup>31</sup> This approach to pathos will provide us with a better understanding of Wells’s rhetorical challenge in her speech at Tremont Temple; in effect, she must establish credibility as a marginalized speaker in order to coproduce powerful, ethically grounded emotions that enable White listeners to experience the devastation of lynch law, an experience that could mobilize them to support the anti-lynching movement.

### “Lynch Law in All Its Phases”

#### Introductory Conservatism

Wells begins her oration with considerable humility, explaining that she comes “before the American people to-day through no inclination of my own, but because of a deep-seated conviction that the country at large does not know the extent to which lynch law prevails in parts of the Republic, nor the conditions which force into exile those who speak the truth.”<sup>32</sup> As Jacqueline Jones Royster puts it, “Wells creates a comfortable seat for an audience with Christian and American values who happen (by whatever circumstance) not to know the truth, and she invites them to sit and to listen—all in one sentence.”<sup>33</sup> She downplays her own authority while extending goodwill to her audience: “far-sighted Americans” capable of “thoughtful consideration” and whose inaction concerning lynching is assumed to be the result not of racism or ill will, but simply a lack of awareness of the magnitude of the problem.<sup>34</sup> She is a somewhat hesitant witness, speaking before an audience of gracious Americans who in simple terms could benefit from her

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<sup>29</sup> Laura R. Micciche, *Doing Emotion: Rhetoric, Writing, Teaching*, (Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 2007), 24.

<sup>30</sup> Micciche, *Doing Emotion*, 50.

<sup>31</sup> Ellen Quandahl, “On a Rhetorical *Technē* of the Moral-Emotions,” *Rhetorical Agendas: Political, Ethical, Spiritual*, eds. Patricia Bizzell, Lawrence Erlbaum (2006), 154.

<sup>32</sup> Ida B. Wells, “Lynch Law in All Its Phases. Address at Tremont Temple in the Boston Monday Lectureship. February 13, 1893, by Miss Ida B. Wells, formerly editor of the *Free Speech*, Memphis, Tenn.,” *Our Day: A Record and Review of Current Reform* 11 (Jan.–June 1893): 333.

<sup>33</sup> Royster, “Rhetoric of Ida B. Wells,” 178.

<sup>34</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 333.

insider knowledge. Leeman and Duffy write, "It was important that [Wells] do everything possible to suggest that she had accepted the role of advocate only reluctantly, forced by circumstances to speak the truth because there was no one else in a position to speak as effectively to the issue at this time."<sup>35</sup> In this way, she establishes the respectful, deferential ethos of a doubly marginalized speaker, which harkens back to the rhetorical characters that inform the petitionary rhetoric of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century African American advocates such as Prince Hall, Absalom Jones, and Richard Allen.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, Wells quickly unveils a deliberately Anglocentric rationale for the speech centered on preserving "distinctive American institutions" and exposing lynching as "attacks imperiling . . . the foundation of government, law and order." Efficiently referencing the Gettysburg Address ("a government of the people, by the people and for the people"), the "Star-Spangled Banner" ("the land of the free and home of the brave"), and the Declaration of Independence ("life, liberty and happiness"), Wells establishes the conservative foundation for her speech, suggesting that the following discourse concerning lynch law will ultimately reveal perils that concern Whites just as much as African Americans. Declaring that she will not build her argument against lynch law from "a standpoint of sentiment" or even "a standpoint of justice to a weak race," she initially emphasizes the preservation of White culture and power.<sup>37</sup> For although she hopes that mob rule and attacks on innocent African Americans should in and of themselves deeply concern White Northerners—and she says as much in her opening words—at the outset she chooses to direct attention to the concern that such lawlessness undermines the traditions and values that ultimately protect Whites. If, as Ryan, Myers, and Jones suggest, "Individuals, audiences, values, written texts, and physical locations all constitute 'dwelling places' " related to the establishment of ethos,<sup>38</sup> Wells dwells in, and establishes her credibility through, traditional White power and privilege, as instantiated in traditional symbols of such power.

It is important to note, of course, that members of her audience would no doubt know Wells was no neophyte activist, but the bold author of the powerful exposé *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, and this element of her reputation somewhat militates against, or at least complicates, the deferential, cautious ethos constructed in the introductory moments of her speech. Nonetheless, it is one thing for a nineteenth-century White person to read an African American woman's prose, whether timorous or highly assertive, but it is quite another to witness her address a live audience of White men and women in a public forum. Such an audience may be sympathetic to her cause, yet not entirely comfortable with the power dynamics and role reversals—particularly concerning gender and race—inherent in the situation. Thus, despite the fact that many members of her audience would recognize her activist character in advance of her speech, the particular

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<sup>35</sup> Leeman and Duffy, *Will*, 153.

<sup>36</sup> See Jacqueline Bacon and Glen McClish, "Descendents of Africa, Sons of '76: Exploring Early African-American Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2006): 1–29. In her study of female African American rhetors, Karlyn Khors Campbell argues that "in striking contrast to most other early feminist rhetoric, Wells's speech contains few indicators or markers of 'femininity' or 'womanliness.'" Likewise, Leeman and Duffy describe her rhetorical style as "confrontational and 'masculine.'" Whereas it is certainly true, as Campbell notes, that the speech contains instances of language that is "blunt," "authoritative," and "sarcastic," a reading of the speech as it unfolds in time reveals a shifting ethos, distinguished by—among other characteristics—instances of discourse informed by her female subject position, as I seek to demonstrate here. For the same reason, my treatment of the speech also differs from Shirley Logan's study of the oration, which suggests that Wells effects male objectivity while deemphasizing emotion. Campbell, "Early Afro-American Feminists," 440; Leeman and Duffy, *Will*, 149; Shirley Wilson Logan, "Ida B. Wells, 'Lynch Law in All Its Phases' (13 February 1893)," *Voices of Democracy* 2 (2007): 50.

<sup>37</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 333.

<sup>38</sup> Ryan, Myers, and Jones, *Rethinking Ethos*, 7.

rhetorical context in which she found herself—particularly her physical presence before a live audience—seems to have necessitated a more cautious beginning than her powerful print presence might suggest.

Having established her initial ethos by inhabiting the traditional texts and institutions of White America, Wells frames her discussion in terms of the larger issue of “the race problem or negro question,” a distinctly White, late nineteenth-century construction that placed the blame for African American poverty, illiteracy, and crime directly on the shoulders of the former slaves and their descendants. This formulation, in fact, is most likely the perspective adopted by many of her listeners, ostensibly sympathetic Whites who nonetheless viewed African Americans of the source of many, if not all, of their problems. Addressing this approach to the plight of Black America, Wells explicitly identifies the moral ground or mindset from which she must move her audience if her rhetoric is to succeed. Characterizing the “race problem” as “the Banquo’s ghost of politics, religion, and sociology which will not down at the bidding of those who are tormented with its ubiquitous appearance on every occasion”—a distinctly Shakespearean anthimeria suggesting its destructive tenacity—Wells fortifies her ethos by locating herself within *Macbeth*, a quintessential tragedy of the White literary pantheon. From this position, then, she has established sufficient credibility to rather assertively expose the destructive power of the White-formulated “negro question,” the rationale for systematic oppression of Southern Blacks, manifest most viciously in the “lynching bees” that commonly occur throughout the region.<sup>39</sup> Wells also calls attention to Southern Whites’ suspect rationalization of lynching as retribution for the purported epidemic of abuse and rape of White women by Black men. This small section of the speech, distinguished by a more assertive ethos, contrasts with the deferential opening, suggesting that the somewhat reluctant speaker who begins the speech will evolve significantly over its course.

#### Wells’s Embodied Account of the Memphis Tragedy

Wells’s complex, dynamic ethos inhabits iconic White texts while also enabling her to oppose dominant White thinking concerning racial inequality. With this ethos in place, she launches an extended personal narrative—including her upbringing in the South, her work as a teacher and dismissal from service, her editorship and part ownership of the *Memphis Free Speech*—that culminates in the tragic events that recently transpired in Memphis: the murder of three young men and the takeover of their popular business, People’s Grocery,<sup>40</sup> the subsequent destruction of her press, and the threats on her life that necessitate her flight from the South. At this point in her speech, Christoph’s “strategies of placement” become particularly germane to Wells’s ethos work. “Born and reared in the South,” Wells begins this section of the speech, “I had never expected to live elsewhere.” With this explicit “identity statement,” she establishes ethos through regional location. Wells then employs a “moral display” in order to emphasize her subject position within the narrative as an African American who idealistically placed stock in the doctrines of self-help and moral improvement that many late nineteenth-century Blacks such as Booker T. Washington, William Simmons, Thomas E. Miller, and Robert Smalls held were central to racial advancement. “Until this past year,” Wells confesses, she believed “that when wealth, education and character became more general among us,” prosperity and “justice” would be “accorded to all alike.”<sup>41</sup> This placement strategy, of course, firmly aligns Wells with the

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<sup>39</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 333.

<sup>40</sup> The African American establishment whose commercial success threatened local White businessmen.

<sup>41</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 334.

conservatism with which she began her speech, though—as her audience soon discovers—she quickly works to complicate it.

First, however, Wells pivots from morality back to identity, directly discussing her professional position as a Memphis journalist: "Three years ago last June, I became editor and part owner of the *Memphis Free Speech*. As editor, I had occasion to criticise . . ." This occupational affiliation is central to Wells's ethos, both at this moment in the speech and throughout the remainder of her performance, since it calls into being a respected public voice or mode of address for this doubly marginalized speaker to assume. Simply put, she stands before her White Northern audience and speaks *as a journalist*. This enables her—in Applegarth's terms—to inhabit the genre of journalism, a discourse that empowers her to speak authoritatively about the details of the murders and destruction that befalls the African American community of Memphis. Wells's explicitly embodied, eyewitness perspective enables her to specifically describe the thriving Black community in Memphis before the murders, her efforts to build a successful, socially responsible publishing business, the murders and mayhem that ravage the Black community, as well as its pragmatic response in the aftermath of the tragedy, which includes a mass exodus to the West and her eventual exile from the region. She also emphasizes her identity as an educator, stating, "I was in the employ of [the Memphis school] board at that time." This teaching role, in fact, inhabits her professional status as a journalist and furthers her conservative moral position. She reveals that as "advertising agent, solicitor, as well as editor," she had ample opportunity to encourage the African American community to embrace the doctrine of self-help. "Wherever I went among the people," she recalls, "I gave them in church, school, public gatherings, and home, the benefit of my honest conviction that maintenance of character, money getting and education would finally solve our problem."<sup>42</sup>

Emphasizing that the doctrine of self-help to which she initially adhered and for which she marshaled her press to advocate is not in itself futile, Wells provides evidence of its initial success among the African American community of Memphis. Here, strikingly, Wells's identity statements shift from "I" to "we," thus utilizing anaphora to demonstrate solidarity with the local inhabitants of the neighborhood and her firm placement within the community:

We had nice homes, representatives in almost every brand of business and profession, and refined society. We had learned that helping each other helped all. . . . With all our proscription in theatres, hotels and railroads, we had never had a lynching and did not believe we could have one. . . . We had confidence and pride in our city. . . . We were content to endure the evils we had, to labor and to wait.<sup>43</sup>

Her location in the African American community of Memphis, which is both physical and moral, warrants her credibility as a speaker or, more precisely, a spokesperson.

With the murders of the three innocent Black members of the community and the subsequent lawless treatment of the African Americans in the city, however, it becomes clear to Wells that mere hard work and morality are not enough to secure safety and peace for African Americans in the racist South, and she employs the next section of her speech to convey this conviction to her audience. Wells the eyewitness journalist provides vivid detail of the initial confrontation at the People's Grocery, in which a White competitor assaults Cal McDowell, who

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<sup>42</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 334.

<sup>43</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 334.

subsequently “gave him a good thrashing.”<sup>44</sup> This violent exchange provokes another, more serious encounter at the store in which defensive shots were fired by the African Americans, which led to their arrest and eventual murder at the hands of a hysterical White mob.

One of the particularly powerful elements of Wells’s account of the tragic assault on the Memphis Black community is, as Shirley Logan has discussed, her deployment of strategies such as *enargeia*, which vividly locate her within this persecuted subculture.<sup>45</sup> Consider, for example, Wells’s description of the family of murdered African American Tom Moss:

The baby daughter of Tom Moss, too young to express how she misses her father, toddles to the wardrobe, seizes the legs of the trousers of his letter-carrier uniform, hugs and kisses them with evident delight and stretches up her little hands to be taken up into the arms which will nevermore clasp his daughter’s form. His wife holds Thomas Moss, Jr., in her arms, upon whose unconscious baby face the tears fall thick and fast when she is thinking of the sad fate of the father he will never see, and of the two helpless children who cling to her for the support she cannot give.<sup>46</sup>

In this plaintive passage and others resembling it, Wells—who as a pillar of the community knew this family intimately and was present at such moments in their lives—places her audience on the scene with her, inviting them to witness the tragic effect of an innocent man’s murder on his family. Her attention to the overpowering sadness experienced by the young widow and mother, as well as the unknowing innocence of her children, which epitomize and render authentic the emotional toll paid by the Memphis African American community, kindle sympathetic emotions of sadness and loss, but also righteous anger at the White perpetrators and strong feelings of responsibility—something needs to be done. Thus sparked by Wells, these emotions are intended to stoke in her audience corresponding feelings of sympathy, sadness, loss, anger, and responsibility, feelings firmly rooted in the very ethical tradition located in texts such the National Anthem, the Gettysburg Address, and the Declaration of Independence, which Wells references at the outset of her speech. Such emotions, co-constructions of speaker and audience, to use Micciche’s characterization, constitute powerful arguments profoundly integrated with—rather than merely added to—other forms of proofs marshaled by the rhetor.

Thus, although Wells’s initial move is to downplay the rhetorical value of “standpoints” of “sentiment” and “of justice to a weak race,”<sup>47</sup> she has at this point in the speech established the credibility required to occupy such emotional-ethical locations (“standpoints”) with some hope of success. In effect, Wells’s marginalized status requires her to work gradually into—to earn, in effect—these powerful means of persuasion, initially downplaying but eventually evoking emotions and emotion-based arguments in service of social justice rhetoric. Wells’s careful movement toward strong emotions is particularly important considering the norms of the era, which required women to avoid expressing vehemence associated with men. Discussing the

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<sup>44</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 335.

<sup>45</sup> Logan, “Ida B. Wells,” 58.

<sup>46</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 337.

<sup>47</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 333.

rhetorical challenges Wells faced, both Patricia Schechter<sup>48</sup> and Bay<sup>49</sup> cite Carol and Peter Stearns's point that "anger and femininity were antithetical" in the Victorian era.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, Wells utilizes the self-effacing strategy of *occultatio* to humbly magnify the pathos of the tragedy she describes while once again placing herself, as journalistic eyewitness and reflector of ethically grounded emotion, at the center of the scene. "I have no power to describe the feeling of horror," she proclaims, "that possessed every member of the race in Memphis when the truth dawned upon us that the protection of the law which we had so long enjoyed was no longer ours."<sup>51</sup> Through a rhetoric of immediacy, humility, and professional instinct, Wells builds a case not so much for the defense of White institutions, her initially stated intention, but for the value of the Black lives both destroyed and under threat in Memphis and—as she will soon demonstrate—across the South. This diachronic approach to Wells's use of pathos, in effect, glosses what Leeman and Duffy identify as "the employment of language that was paradoxically dispassionate even as Wells's expressed strong, emotional appeals."<sup>52</sup>

Wells's eyewitness testimony, which informs this section of the speech and reflects her career as journalist and local community member, helps to effect a feminine, place-specific ethos that would have been expected, almost demanded, of her, as a late nineteenth-century woman of color speaking before an audience dominated by Whites. Thus, at this point in the speech, Wells's highly situated ethos supports her explicitly personal perspective on the issue at hand, her profession, and her intimate connection to Memphis, the specific locale in question. In addition, her speech-based character provides an effective platform from which to build powerful, value-based emotional appeals that invigorate her case against Southern White terrorism against African Americans.

Wells further enhances her narrative of the tragic plight of the African American community in Memphis by including telltale selections from newspapers that she and her White attackers published in response to the ongoing crisis. To demonstrate that there was widespread knowledge in the White community of the identity of the murderers, for example, she provides this account of the press's response: "'It was done by unknown men,' said the jury, yet the [White owned and managed] *Appeal-Avalanche*, which goes to press at 3 a.m., had a two-column account of the lynching. The papers also told how McDowell got hold of the guns of the mob, and as his grasp could not be loosened, his hand was shattered with a pistol ball and all the lower part of his face was torn away."<sup>53</sup> Here, with the precision of an able reporter, she marshals the journalistic record to demonstrate that the White community clearly understood who committed this criminal act.

In order to vivify the war of words that leads to her exile from the South, Wells inserts the text of the provocative 21 May 1892 *Free Speech* editorial debunking the widespread claim, discussed above, that African American men pose a major threat to White women and are thus responsible both for their slaughter at the hands of White mobs and for the wretched conditions under which they live. The editorial's take on "the race problem" includes an intrepid challenge to White society that would come as a significant jolt to the White audience of her speech, unaccustomed, perhaps, to such *parrhesia* concerning the morality of White women delivered by

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<sup>48</sup> Schechter, "All the Intensity," 57.

<sup>49</sup> Bay, *Tell the Truth*, 118.

<sup>50</sup> Carol Zisowitz Stearns and Peter N. Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 47.

<sup>51</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 337.

<sup>52</sup> Leeman and Duffy, *Will*, 151.

<sup>53</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 336.

an African American woman, even though it comes second-hand through an editorial: “Nobody in this section of the country believes the old threadbare lie that negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful they will overreach themselves, and public sentiment will have a reaction. A conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.”<sup>54</sup> Wells then meticulously traces the recirculation of this statement in the White press, as it is reprinted and commented on in *The Daily Commercial* and the *Evening Scimitar* in order to whip up White anger. Their success in stimulating the White population to lawlessness is documented in yet another journalistic artifact Wells includes in her speech, a sustained article from *The Commercial* detailing—from the White perspective, of course—their community’s attack on the *Free Speech* and its allies.

Following her presentation of this lengthy article, Wells deftly reinterprets the events reported in the White account from her own perspective, which—like the original editorial from the *Free Speech* that so angered the White establishment—gives the lie to racist reasoning. In her own account of the events reported in *The Commercial* article, she unpacks the brute violence and intimidation that lurk just beneath the surface of the White version. Wells’s layering of this series of escalating accounts (both from the White press and of her own) of the mob murder of innocent African Americans and its meaning in Memphis enables her, through a sophisticated rhetoric strategy of accretion, to explore and ultimately expose the pernicious discourse and the physical violence inflicted upon its Black community. As Bordelon has demonstrated in her study of Genevieve Stebbins, although accretion has been characterized as a strategy used by men to reframe women’s rhetoric, artful women have also used the strategy to reframe or contextualize men’s discourse to their own advantage.<sup>55</sup> Wells’s multilayered account of the press’s treatment of her own rhetoric enables her to exercise explicit control over the narrative itself, while still accounting for its many voices. This ownership further establishes the ethos of the situated expert witness and interpreter of news, who ferrets out the truth with the eyes and ears of a master journalist on location.<sup>56</sup>

Having established her subject position within—but by no means overwhelmed by—the horror of lynch law and presented through rhetorical accretion her treatment of the multiple journalistic accounts concerning the purported rapes of White women at the hands of African Americans, Wells includes a highly personal passage in which she discloses that she is indeed the author of the 21 May 1892 editorial in the *Free Speech* that spurs the angry outpouring in the White community and the destruction of her press, as well as the fact that she escapes the deadly violence of the White community of Memphis only because she was in New York during the window of time in question and was warned by friends not to return. Given all that she witnessed and experienced, she is now able to (re)present the motivation for her aggressive activism on behalf of African Americans, which she initially formulated dispassionately in her opening statement, discussed above, in highly personal, emphatic terms: “Knowing the many things that I do, and . . . seeing that the whole race in the South was injured in the estimation of the world because of these false reports, I could no longer hold my peace, and I feel, yes, I am sure, that if it had to be done again . . . I would do and say the very same again.”<sup>57</sup> Here is the reporter speaking of a moral

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<sup>54</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 338.

<sup>55</sup> Bordelon, “Embodied *Ethos*.”

<sup>56</sup> For a related study of the power of Wells’s quotation practice in her pamphlets, see Simone W Davis, “The ‘Weak Race’ and the Winchester: Political Voices in the Pamphlets of Ida B. Wells-Barnett,” *Legacy* 12, no. 2 (1995): 77–97.

<sup>57</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 341.

imperative to bring the truth, regardless of the personal cost her forthrightness may exact. Wells builds her case for speaking from the ground up, with all specific details directly before her audience. Furthermore, her strong sense of responsibility, grounded in the outrage caused by the atrocities in Memphis, which for her culminate in the extreme danger to her person that compels her exile, models for her audience how ethically based emotions stimulate intrepid moral action, the precise process she hopes will be reproduced in her audience.

### Wells as Sectional Journalist

Wells's ethos further evolves as she transitions her speech into a regionwide account of the lynching crisis. As the skilled reporter, she proceeds to focus on specific cases and outrages, thus continuing to locate her character as a speaker in the journalistic enterprise. Her audience is exposed to the grim deaths of Ed Coy of Texarkana, Texas, Henry Smith of Paris, Texas, an unnamed man from Indianola, Mississippi, two women accused of poisoning White women, and so forth, yet she is no longer the eyewitness reporter, but the expert compiler and analyst of second-hand reports and evidence. Wells's ethos in this section of the speech more closely resembles the authorial character that distinguishes *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, in which she does not situate herself as a witness-agent within the accounts and chooses not to employ what could be called a feminine style of presentation. Although in this section of the speech Wells employs the ethos of an outsider rather than a personally involved reporter tied to a particular place, a compiler rather than a leading actor in her account, her presentations of regional murders are graphic and emotionally powerful, and through them her audience best experiences the magnitude of the violence inflicted on Southern African Americans. Furthermore, although she is not an eyewitness to the atrocities she recounts in this section of the speech—since she inhabits the role of the professional journalist reporting on a regionwide crisis—she is not in any sense of the word impartial toward or detached from the violence. Her vehemence, anger, and outrage are carefully controlled, yet rise to a level unattempted in earlier sections of the speech—she willingly supplies the sense of “great indignation”<sup>58</sup> that she points out is currently not aroused by the stories and trumped-up reports that emerge from the South.

For example, Wells's audience is invited to co-construct her contempt as she reports on the very different response stimulated by the murder of eleven (White) Italians in New Orleans: “A feeling of horror ran through the nation at this outrage. All Europe was amazed. The Italian government demanded thorough investigation and redress, and the Federal Government promised to give the matter the consideration which was its due.”<sup>59</sup> Her harsh irony is palpable when she compares the current violence of Southern Whites with that of the torture perpetrated by ancient pagans and much-maligned Catholic Inquisitors: “We have turned heretofore to the pages of ancient and medieval history, to Roman tyranny, the Jesuitical Inquisition of Spain for the spectacle of a human being burnt to death. In the past ten years three instances, at least, have been furnished where men have literally been roasted to death to appease the fury of Southern mobs.”<sup>60</sup> Precise statistics are also supplied to provide an exact accounting of the scope of the crisis and to detail the nature and frequency of the occurrence of the accusations made against the victims.<sup>61</sup> As

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<sup>58</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 341.

<sup>59</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 341.

<sup>60</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 342.

<sup>61</sup> Leeman and Duffy note, “Rhetorically, the precision of Wells's statistical evidence stands in stark contrast to the apologists' sweeping and typical declarations that lynching is an ‘understandable’ response to the crime of rape, which Wells also cites specifically in her speech so that the differences between her evidence and their claims cannot be overlooked.” Leeman and Duffy, *Will*, 154–155.

a whole, this section of the speech demonstrates the development of Wells's ethos from the witness-reporter-agent, who inhabits a particular community and performs its emotional responses to tragedy and outrage, to the regional expert and national reporter-compiler: the former ethos provides moral, community-based grounding for the latter, which expands the scope and authority of the former. In much the same manner, the carefully situated pity, moral indignation, and other strong emotions—amplified by strategies such as *enargeia*—that distinguish Wells's co-construction of emotion in the Memphis section of the speech constitute a kind of pathos-based moral lens that magnifies the emotions the audience experiences when Wells exposes them to the less thoroughly contextualized cases of Ed Coy, Henry Smith, and the other victims. The audience is invited to view them as they saw Tom Moss and is implicitly urged to imagine the mourning family they left behind. Wells concludes this section with a well-placed *zeugma* demonstrating the ubiquity and breadth of the crime: “It will be thus seen that neither age, sex nor decency are spared.”<sup>62</sup>

### Appropriating the Platform Ethos of the Nineteenth-Century Male Orator

Having presented this broad compilation of the devastating effects of lynch law, based on vivid eyewitness accounts, horrific details from murders across the South, and statistical evidence, Wells orients her audience toward action and steps away from her reporter persona. In doing so, she appropriates an oratorical character more typical of a nineteenth-century male, such as her elder colleague Frederick Douglass, as she launches a series of more general arguments, claims, and refutations concerning the tragedy of lynching and the need for action. This is not the ethos distinguished by identity statements, personal references, the feminine rhetorical style, the deference with which she begins, or the journalistic persona that inhabits much of the speech, but the bold character of the platform orator, supported by oratorical *topoi* and rhetorical strategies more typical of masculine speechmaking.

However, even here Wells does not go so far as to adopt the sage ethos of Douglass's late oratory. As he accrued the status of a seasoned male veteran of many decades of social justice activism (collecting unofficial titles such as the “Nestor of Freedman” and the “Sage of Cedar Hill” along the way), he became empowered to fashion a detached, worldly ethos on behalf of his argument, inhabiting the genre of the public lecture in a rather abstract, timeless fashion. Specifically in his famous oration condemning lynching, “Lessons of the Hour,” delivered a little less than a year after Wells's Tremont Temple speech, Douglass—as I have noted in an earlier study—“deemphasized the personal, specific details of individual injustices or acts of brutality in order to focus on general arguments, identify key lines of reasoning, and scrutinize the nature of evidence as well as the assumptions undergirding arguments.” Furthermore, he “assumed the role of general advocate or dialectician, rather than eyewitness or aggrieved party, skillfully employing metadiscourse to highlight for his audience the intellectual trajectory of his rhetoric.”<sup>63</sup>

Nonetheless, Wells—at this late stage in the speech—inhabits the site of conventional male oratory, rather than the embedded reporter or the sectional journalist. For example, in order to establish this more traditional platform ethos, she marshals an impressive pair of periodic sentences, the first right-branching and the second left-branching, both structured through

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<sup>62</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 343.

<sup>63</sup> Glen McClish, “Frederick Douglass's ‘The Lessons of the Hour’ and the Ethos of the Sage,” “Frederick Douglass's Rhetorical Legacy,” eds. Jonathan P. Rossing and John R. McKivigan, *Rhetoric Review* 37, no. 1 (2018): 52.

anaphoric clauses. Through this passage, she equates contemporary disbelief in the seriousness of lynch law with misguided antebellum assurances that slavery was unnecessarily demonized:

In a former generation the ancestors of these same people refused to believe that slavery was the "league with death and the covenant with hell." Wm. Lloyd Garrison declared it to be, until he was thrown into a dungeon in Baltimore, until the signal lights of Nat Turner lit the dull skies of Northampton Country, and until sturdy old John Brown made his attack on Harper's Ferry. When freedom of speech was martyred in the person of Elijah Lovejoy at Alton, when the liberty of free discussion in the Senate in the Nation's Congress was struck down in the person of the fearless Charles Sumner, the Nation was at last convinced that slavery was not only a monster but a tyrant.<sup>64</sup>

With this moral equivalence eloquently established, Wells turns the stylistic tables, declaring succinctly, "*The very same forces are at work now as then.*"<sup>65</sup> She authoritatively reviews the destructive actions of Southern White men since the end of the Civil War, employing *antimetabole* to deftly characterize their successful efforts to deny African Americans of basic human rights: "Having destroyed the citizenship of the man, they are now trying to destroy the manhood of the citizen." She also presents a key assertion concerning political motive, claiming that Northern public sentiment—which, by "its silence in press, pulpit and in public meetings," seeks "to heal the breach" caused by the late war—has "encouraged this state of affairs, and public sentiment is stronger than law."<sup>66</sup>

This position leads directly to Wells's central claim, framed by the previously established analogies to antebellum conditions: "A public sentiment strong against lawlessness must be aroused . . . When a sentiment against lynch law as strong, deep and mighty as that roused against slavery prevails, I have no fear of the result."<sup>67</sup> It is significant that this central claim is explicitly stated in the section of the speech in which she appropriates that platform ethos typical of male speakers of the era, for it is here that the journalist—first embedded and then sectional—becomes the orator. Furthermore, the specific construction of her thesis—particularly the terms "sentiment" and "aroused," as well as her previous declaration that "sentiment is stronger than law"—demonstrates that, indeed, the kindling of emotion is central, rather than peripheral, to Wells's rhetorical project, as well as her general view of civic activism and political action. Unless she is able to move her audience in the classic Ciceronian sense (*permovere*), her speech, and the movement it exhorts her audience to join, will fail. Significantly, this call for the arousal of sentiment explicitly overrides her initial statement that she will not build her case from "a standpoint of sentiment,"<sup>68</sup> once again demonstrating the dynamic nature of Wells's ethos, which evolves from constrained to impassioned. This emphasis on the salience of emotional proof suggests Wells's keen understanding of rhetoric as a *technē* or art. Demonstrating her keen understanding of the political machinations of Southern politics and a willingness to speak frankly about them, Wells engages in proleptic discussion of the ostensible goodwill of politicians who

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<sup>64</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 344.

<sup>65</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 344.

<sup>66</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 345.

<sup>67</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 346.

<sup>68</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 333.

offer rewards “for the apprehension of lynchers.”<sup>69</sup> Although such offers seem well intentioned, she explains the backstories that discredit the White political figures involved.

### Wells’s Bimodal Peroration

Then, rather suddenly, in the midst of a sharp critique of the Republican party, which she argues has cynically forsaken its long tradition “as the champion of human liberty and human rights,”<sup>70</sup> Wells pulls back from this masculine, Douglass-like oratorical voice and reprises the deference of the speech’s first lines (“I am before the American people today through no inclination of my own”<sup>71</sup>): “I am no politician . . . I long with all the intensity of my soul for the [William Lloyd] Garrison, [Frederick] Douglass, [Charles] Sumner, [John Greenleaf] Whittier, and [Wendell] Phillips who shall rouse this nation.”<sup>72</sup> With this striking identity statement (formed in the negative), Wells reminds the listener once again of her status as a woman of color performing a public role usually reserved for powerful White men or the exceptional African American male. Having moved from a reluctant advocate of White institutions and traditions, to confident, intrepid local reporter, to expert journalistic compiler of sectional atrocities, and finally to eloquent platform orator, she returns for the moment to where she began, as if assuring her White audience that she understands late nineteenth-century conventions of race and gender and that she does not intend—in this speech, at least—to entirely reject or supplant them.

To complete this sentence, however, and for the remainder of her speech, Wells reappropriates a more conventional form of platform eloquence and the ethos that informs it:

. . . to a demand that from Greenland’s icy mountains to the coral reefs of the Southern seas, mob rule shall be put down and equal and exact justice be accorded to every citizen of whatever race, who finds a home within the borders of the land of the free and the home of the brave. Then no longer will our national hymn be sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, but every member of this great composite nation will be a living, harmonious illustration of the words, and all can honestly and gladly join in singing:

My country! ’tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty  
Of thee I sing.  
Land where our fathers died,  
Land of the Pilgrim’s pride,  
From every mountain side  
Freedom does ring.<sup>73</sup>

The closing quotation from a well-known American hymn and the sweeping geographical references—which for later audiences uncannily predict King’s “I Have a Dream” speech—along with the quotation from 1 Corinthians 13:1 and the repetition of the line from the “Star-Spangled Banner,” work together to arouse the morally based sentiment Wells believes is essential for dismantling lynch law.<sup>74</sup> In these final moments of the speech, there is little hesistance, personal

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<sup>69</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 346.

<sup>70</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 346.

<sup>71</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 333.

<sup>72</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 347.

<sup>73</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 347.

<sup>74</sup> For further discussion of these allusions, see Robert James Branham, “‘Of Thee I Sing’: Contesting ‘America,’” *American Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1996): 640–642.

identification, or political conservatism (such as the "distinctive American institutions" and "the foundation of government, law and order" with which she began<sup>75</sup>)—only the powerful oratorical burst of emotion intended to kindle like feelings in her audience.

In this sense, the ethos present in the final moments of the speech is distinctly bimodal. Although the confident character of the platform orator dominates the peroration, the deferential female persona is inhabited briefly, reminding the audience that Wells's oratorical character, although transgressive of the rhetorical norms governing it, is not entirely in rebellion. As a speaker, Wells balances these two sides, thus suggesting, but not entirely committing to, radical rhetorical change.

### Conclusion

Wells's speech constitutes a sophisticated journey of change and adaptation, enabled by a complex, shifting ethos reflecting the constraints and possibilities faced by women rhetors of the era—particularly those of color—and the evocation of powerful emotions, co-constructed by rhetor and audience. Feminist rhetorical analysis, as represented by the work of Ryan, Myers, and Jones, as well as Christoph, Reynolds, Applegarth, and Bordelon, helps to shed new light on the ethos management of marginalized nineteenth-century African American women such as Wells. She begins, as she must, simply and humbly, with the help of an ethos constructed through identity statements and personal narrative, an ethos located in a specific community's culture and values and in the genre of community journalism. She tells the story of a woman who was "born and reared in the South," who "had never expected to live elsewhere," who set up shop in Memphis as a teacher and journalist, yet eventually flees her homeland for the North. She establishes her initial belief in "the doctrine of self-help, thrift and economy,"<sup>76</sup> which she had faith would bring equality to African Americans, only to demonstrate the futility of this belief in locales across the South, where burgeoning Black success becomes an intolerable threat to White supremacy that is countered by ruthless terrorism. The Southern teacher and editor becomes a sectional journalist, then a reluctant yet impassioned national spokeswoman for social justice for African Americans, and her oration enacts her evolving consciousness and professional-civic role as a powerful argument for her overall case. Through this narrative of change, Wells invites her audience of "observing and thoughtful" Whites—who begin in the comfortable complacency and the covert racism inherent in the mindset that characterizes racial injustice in America as the "negro question"<sup>77</sup>—to evolve with her, to co-create the emotions or "sentiments" that fuel the movement intended to end lynch law in America and to establish equal rights for African Americans. Her own metamorphosis, detailed in her oration, vivifies and hence humanizes the change Wells urges in her White audience. Thus, she stands before her audience in Tremont Hall as the embodiment of her argument, modeling the change she wishes to effect—in a less dramatic sense—in her audience.

Wells's oration at Tremont Temple reminds us that, for nineteenth-century women, ethos construction relies upon tangible associations with locations, communities, professions, habitats, and genres of discourse. Furthermore, the speech demonstrates that for women of color, the responsibility of establishing these linkages, of constructing an ethos that explicitly situates the speaker and avoids the strategy of presenting a national character unmoored from community,

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<sup>75</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 333.

<sup>76</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 334.

<sup>77</sup> Wells, "Lynch Law," 333.

location, or specific identify, may be even stronger. Yet, as Ryan, Myers, and Jones—with whom we began this exploration—so clearly state, the “feminist rhetorical perspective challenges us to examine women’s ethos with the acknowledgment that it is culturally socially restrictive for women to develop authoritative *ethē*, yet acknowledges that space can be made for new ways of thinking and artful maneuvering.”<sup>78</sup> Wells demonstrates this ability to establish such new space, for if expectations concerning ethos can constrict the rhetor’s choices, and particularly those of a nineteenth-century woman of color, then they can also be profitably tested and transgressed by the artful rhetor who understands their dynamic properties and potential. For example, just as accretion can be powerfully employed by woman rhetors, who have conventionally been disadvantaged by the strategy in the hands of men, so women of color can construct dynamic *ethē* comprising unconventional characteristics, including those more commonly employed by male rhetors.

In particular, Wells demonstrates that the ethos of a woman of color who wishes to challenge boundaries and establish an authoritative voice need not be a static entity, but may—perhaps should—evolve with the shifting requirements of complex speeches, particularly those that must manage constraints placed upon rhetors by resistant or potentially unsympathetic audiences. Wells’s art enables her both to affirm and transcend the expectations and possibilities that initially inscribe her, and thus the rhetorical mechanisms she employs are worthy of our careful study. She demonstrates that rhetorical negotiation and renegotiation of cultural conventions occur not merely from text to text and from rhetor to rhetor, but *within* individual rhetorical creations. In this way, her speech reinforces the importance of approaching texts not as atemporal artifacts that can be dissected—specimen like—for meaning, but as vibrant rhetorical performances unfolding in time.

Wells’s speech also reminds us of the primary importance of pathos as a co-constructed means of persuasion and group identity, for indeed the performance relies on her ability to effect a powerful emotional connection between the victims and her audience. Demonstrating a perspective on the emotions akin to those described by scholars such as Micciche and Quandahl, Wells attempts to kindle emotions in her audience fueled by values held in common. Clearly, Wells marshals copious statistical evidence to support her claims concerning the widespread nature of lynching, but it is ultimately shared emotions that culminate her argument. As the language of the resolution reproduced in the *Boston Herald* and subsequently recirculated in the *American Citizen* article featured above demonstrates, the reactions of those who heard and reported on the oration bear this out. Indeed, the declaration emphasizes how her audience thanked her for her “heroic advocacy of the rights of American Citizens” and expressed their “sympathy with her and her people in the injustice they are suffering.” Furthermore, it includes the audience’s pathos-laden promise—in language echoing Wells’s explicit references to the emotions she evokes (“A public sentiment strong against lawlessness must be aroused”<sup>79</sup>)—to extend the reach of their co-constructed feelings: “We pledge to [the colored race] our best endeavors to arouse public sentiment in indignant condemnation of the increasing prevalence of lynch law in our land, to the end that these symptoms of barbarianism may soon cease to disgrace our American civilization.”<sup>80</sup>

In her study of anger in Wells’s writing, Schechter, building on the work of Audre Lorde, declares, “Anger can be the beginning of knowledge and politics.”<sup>81</sup> Extending this line of exploration, I have suggested that in “Lynch Law in All its Phases,” Wells’s co-construction of

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<sup>78</sup> Ryan, Myers, and Jones, *Rethinking Ethos*, 2.

<sup>79</sup> Wells, “Lynch Law,” 346.

<sup>80</sup> “On Lynch Law,” *American Citizen*, 25 February 1893.

<sup>81</sup> Schechter, “All the Intensity,” 67.

## Ida B. Wells's "Lynch Law in All Its Phases"

strong emotions, including anger, skillfully constitutes her audience's collective consciousness, enhancing their understanding of Southern atrocities and calling them into community as nascent activists.