UC San Diego
UC San Diego Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title
Wings to Their Heels: Self-Expression and Health and the Rise of the New Woman

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/80t5z98s

Author
Streeter, Carrie

Publication Date
2023

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Wings to Their Heels
Self-Expression and Health and the Rise of the New Woman

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Carrie Anne Streeter

Committee in charge:

Professor Rebecca Jo Plant, Chair
Professor Claire Edington
Professor Rachel Klein
Professor Lucinda McCray
Professor Steven M. Parish
Professor Linda Tomko

2023

Copyright

Carrie Anne Streeter, 2023

All rights reserved.

The dissertation of Carrie Anne Streeter is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2023

EPIGRAPH

“The aristocracy of eloquence is supreme
and in the land of the free can never be suppressed . . .
It rides on the wings of the breeze
and thunders in the storm.”

—Hallie Q. Brown
Elocution and Physical Culture, c. 1910

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dissertation Approval Page		iii
Epigraph		iv
Table of Contents		v
List of Figures		vi
Acknowledgements		x
Vita		xvii
Abstract of the Dissertation		xviii
Introduction	The Will to Breathe *Psycho-Physical Culture and the Women's Movement*	1
Chapter 1	Freeing the Channels of Expression *Women's Vocal Health and Reconstruction Era Elocution Reform*	19
Chapter 2	Ancient Antidotes Hot Off the Press *Publicizing Psycho-Physical Prescriptions for (White) Women's Well-Being*	86
Chapter 3	The Proof is in the Practice *Defending a Feminized Expertise about Mind and Body*	139
Chapter 4	Nothing Less than Organized Anxiety *Performing New Womanhood in Jim Crow Indianapolis*	199
Epilogue	For All Practical Purposes *(Mis)Remembering "Ladies' Gymnastics"*	261
Appendix	A Pedagogical Lineage of Boston University School of Oratory	267
Bibliography		278

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 — Relaxation Exercises in a Washington, D.C. Classroom, 1899 2

Figure 2 — A Schoolroom Arranged for Psycho-Physical Exercises, Washington, D.C., 1899 3

Figure 3 — Lewis Baxter Monroe, Founder of the Boston University School of Oratory........ 24

Figure 4 — Catalogue for Bridgewater State Normal School, 1873 29

Figure 5 — Hallie Q. Brown, c. 1889 30

Figure 6 — Illustrations of Breathing Exercises from Lewis B. Monroe’s 1869 Manual, 1869........ 34

Figure 7 — Triat Gymnasium in Paris, France, 1856 37

Figure 8 — Drawing of Diaphragm from Lewis B. Monroe’s 1869 Manual 44

Figure 9 — Comparing Waists—the *Venus de Medici* vs. a Modern Belle, 1858 46

Figure 10 — Dress Reform References to *Venus,* 1874 48

Figure 11— *Venus*, “The Favorite Cast,” in the House Beautiful, 1878 49

Figure 12 — Frances Stuart Parker, 1878 51

Figure 13 — Hallie Q. Brown’s *Bits and Odds for My Friends,* 1884 53

Figure 14 — Assembly Hall, State Normal School at Bridgewater, c. 1876........ 60

Figure 15 — Tensions Releasing Exercises from Lewis B. Monroe’s Manual, 1869........ 62

Figure 16 — Illustrations of Harmonic Gymnastics, 1891 67

Figure 17 — Caricature of François Delsarte, 1861 71

Figure 18 — “The Mystery of Emotion,” Steele MacKaye’s 1871 lecture on François Delsarte. 73

Figure 19 — Charting Delsarte’s Laws of Expression 74

Figure 20 — Steele MacKaye, c. 1860 and William James, c. 1858 79

Figure 21— Newspaper Advertisement for MacKaye’s Delsarte Lecture 79

Figure 22 — “The Winged Victory of Samothrace” in *Harper's Magazine,* 1890. 87

Figure 23 — Eliza Putnam Heaton, c. 1891........ 89

Figure 24 — “A Tall Greek Maiden in a White Robe,” News report by Eliza Putnam Heaton........ 89

Figure 25 — "Our Goddess of Liberty: What is She to Be?" 1870 92

Figure 26 — Genevieve Stebbins, c. 1887 99

Figure 27 — Detail from "Sorosis," a Caricature of the Club's Meetings at Delmonico's, 1869........ 102

Figure 28 — Delsarte Class for Members of Sorosis, Chicago, 1889 104

Figure 29 — "Delsartean Nuts to Crack," 1883 107

Figure 30 — *Venus De Milo* vs. the Fashionable Waist, 1883 109

Figure 31 — Photographs of Ancient Statues included in *Delsarte System of Expression,* 1891. 111

Figure 32 — Delsartean Attitudes of the Legs........ 112

Figure 33 — The Semiotic Stance of *Fighting Gladiator* 113

Figure 34 — Illustration of a Tableaux Vivant, 1858 115

Figure 35 — Anne Charlotte Botta, c. 1887 119

Figure 36— Instructors of Physical Education at the Chautauqua Institute, c. 1887 124

Figure 37 — Emily Mulkin Bishop and an Advertisement for Her Classes, 1889-1891 125

Figure 38 — Henry Grady and Marguerite Lindley 126

Figure 39 — Delsarte Posing in Charleston, South Carolina, 1890........ 129

Figure 40 — Delsarte: A "Wonderful Medicine for Nervous, Overworked Persons," 1890 130

Figure 41 — The Racial Meaning of Grecian Beauty as Described by Annie Jenness Miller, 1892... 131

Figure 42 — "The Great Work Unfinished," a Grecian Tribute to Henry Grady, 1889 133

Figure 43 — Frances E.W. Harper and Her Daughter Mary Harper, 1895 134

Figure 44 — Portrait of Minnie M. Jones and an Advertisement for Her Classes, 1890s........ 135

Figure 45 — News Reports of Minnie M. Jones's Delsarte Matinee in Atlanta, Georgia, 1893 137

Figure 46 — "The Delsarte Fad" in St. Paul, Minnesota, 1890........ 140

Figure 47 — "As Affected by Delsarte," 1892 141

Figure 48 — "The Camera and the Laryngoscope as Aids to a Natural Vocal Method," 1897........ 145

Figure 49 —Delsartean Semiotics of the Shoulder, Displayed by Mme. Géraldy, 1893 149

Figure 50 —Mme. Géraldy Demonstrating *The Gladiator* in New York City, 1892 151

Figure 51 — Emily M. Bishop demonstrating an exercise from Americanized Delsarte, 1896 152

Figure 52 — Emily Bishop with students at the Chautauqua Institute, c.1888-1896 153

Figure 53 — Measurement Charts Designed for Physical Educators, 1897 168

Figure 54— Illustrations of Psycho-Physical Culture, 1895 174

Figure 55 — View of the World's Fair in Chicago, 1893 178

Figure 56 — Newspaper Coverage of Stebbins' Dance at Wellesley College, 1893. 181

Figure 57 —Genevieve Stebbins and Others Leading Elocution Teachers, 1895 182

Figure 58 —Medical Gymnastics that Genevieve Stebbins Learned from Dr. George Taylor 184

Figure 59 — Genevieve Stebbins' Students in Costume for Eastern Temple Drill, 1895 185

Figure 60 — Newspaper Reports of Genevieve Stebbins' Miriam Dances 186

Figure 61 — Advertisements for Delsarte Corsets, 1890s 194

Figure 62 — Advertisement for Delsarte Shoes, 1898 194

Figure 63 — Lillian Thomas Fox, c. 1905 201

Figure 64 — Dayse D. Walker, c. 1905 203

Figure 65 — Lillian Parker Thomas, Local and Correspondent Editor for *The Freeman*, 1892 207

Figure 66 — Harriet Augusta Prunk, c. 1902 214

Figure 67 — Lucia Julian Martin, c. 1904 215

Figure 68 — Illustration for Lillian Parker Thomas's "Friendly Reminders" Column, 1892 220

Figure 69 — Dayse D. Walker in Grecian Costume, c. 1912 234

Figure 70 — Dayse D. Walker and Community Members at the Flanner Guild, 1902 237

Figure 71 — Flanner Guild Home, 1901 238

Figure 72 — Plans for the New Flanner Guild Building, 1902 238

Figure 73 — "Public Opinion," Column Illustration in *The Freeman* 245

Figure 74 — Masthead, *The Freeman,* May 23, 1891 246

Figure 75 — "The Fate of Virginia," in *Werner's Magazine,* 1899 247

Figure 76 — The Flanner Guild Delsarte Club performing "Fate of Virginia," 1902.......................... 248

Figure 77 — "First Parade of the New Woman's Society in Possumville," 1897................................ 251

Figure 78 — Women's Club at the Flanner Guild, c. 1904 258

Figure 79 — Relaxation Exercise, 1915 263

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I first landed in the world of American Delsartism in 2012, I was blown away by this vibrant culture of breathing exercises and Grecian statue posing. I also felt at a loss for words to describe what I was seeing. I recall Rebecca Jo Plant wisely prompting me to focus on answering basic questions: What was this movement? Who were doing these practices and why? How were these activities remembered? These well-timed questions not only helped me finish my first-year research paper, they also reoriented my work many times during what became a decade-long inquiry into the complex history of mind-body medicine and women's health.

Far from a solo journey, my explorations of American Delsartism have been sustained by the encouragement and camaraderie of academic mentors, colleagues, family, and friends.

I am an especially lucky benefactor of the expertise and kindness offered by each member on my dissertation committee. Of course, Rebecca Jo Plant has asked me plenty more well-timed questions over these past eleven years. Indeed, her inquiries and comments not only consistently helped get me "unstuck," they were also vital to shaping my understanding about the history and historiography of gender and therapeutic culture. Without her unwavering belief in my ability to add something worthwhile to this discourse, I'm sure I would have abandoned ship long ago.

My sensibilities about the cultural politics of the nineteenth century, and those involving Grecian aesthetics in particular, gained much from my studies with Rachel Klein. I remain ever grateful that she was my guide through complex and substantive historiographic questions about art and society.

From the very beginning of my PhD studies, I benefited tremendously from working with Linda Tomko. Without her generosity of time and expertise, I would certainly have been more at

sea regarding core questions in the field of dance history. Among other things, she helped me gain the habit of thinking about "audience" as well as performers.

Steven Parish has been the kindest outside reader anyone could hope for. I am appreciative of his reminder to think more clearly about matters of social class, and his warm encouragement to do something good with this work.

Many times over these past years, Claire Edington's enthusiasm and vision for this project buoyed and clarified my own. Conversations with her are always a joyful experience, especially because of the eloquent and empathetic way in which she approaches the work of telling very human stories. I was so fortunate to be at UCSD the year when she arrived, and assisting in her course on the History of Public History was a highlight of my PhD studies.

I was incredibly lucky to have Lucinda McCray's support while I researched and wrote this dissertation. As my first teacher in the history of medicine and health, she has literally been with me on every substantive step of this journey. I am ever grateful for her expert guidance on my MA thesis at Appalachian State University and for many subsequent years of conversations about bodies, disease, suffering, and healing.

If not for the tremendous encouragement I received from Lucinda McCray and others while I studied at Appalachian State University, I would never have even begun my work at University of California San Diego. My deepest thanks also to Neva Specht. After working with her on projects for the National Park Service, she practically insisted that I pursue a PhD. Over all these years, she has been unequivocal in her encouragement and I am thankful for her mentorship and friendship. Phoebe Pollitt also boosted my confidence early on, helped me overcome (or at least manage) my tendency toward perfectionism, and always delighted in having conversations about all things related to the history of health. Through Phoebe, I also

came to know Anna Cremaldi, a scholar whose kindness, curiosity, and expertise continue to enrich my life. The early collegiality of other ASU faculty also helped me prepare for PhD studies. I am grateful for all I learned from Andrea Burns, Beth Davison, Sheila Phipps, Lynne Getz, Mary Valante, and Bruce Stewart.

I also extend my thanks to Theodora Dryer, Hilary Coulson, Geoff West, Mary Klann, and Eden White, colleagues at UC San Diego whose own expertise and scholarly inquiries greatly enriched my PhD studies. I am especially grateful to Theodora Dryer for prompting me to keep writing during difficult times, and for regularly reading and commenting on early drafts. My warmest thanks also to Eden White, whose care and kindness are equally matched with the depth of her vision about the nature of the past and the complexity of human experiences.

My completion of this dissertation benefited tremendously from financial awards that afforded me the time to investigate mind-body dynamics within a broad array of cultural spaces. UCSD's History Department funded my first archive road trip in 2013, which took me to Nebraska, Iowa, Indiana, and New York, where I explored physical education records, saw for the first time the photograph of the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club, and read physical copies of *Werner's Magazine*. The findings from that trip also led to a successful application for a New York Public Library Short-Term Fellowship, an experience that gifted me time with remarkable records about nineteenth-century water-cures. The findings from that journey also aided a successful application for the New England Regional Consortium Fellowship, an experience that sharpened my understanding about American Delsartism and nineteenth century cultural investments in mind-body medicine. The scope of my research also benefited greatly from receiving UCSD's Chancellor's Research Excellence Scholarship, a reward that gifted me time for exploring mind-body medicine in the context of World War II.

As I began writing chapters, several opportunities stimulated my thinking and encouraged me to get words on paper. I am grateful for Lucinda McCray's prompting to share my work at the conferences of the Social Science History Association. I will never forget that first trip to Chicago in 2013, where I debuted my first paper on American Delsartism and fell into stimulating and enlightening conversations with Anders Ottosson. When I left that conference, I had not only gained greater understanding about the history and historiography of Swedish gymnastics and "movement medicine," I was also welcomed into a community of kind, curious, and brilliant scholars. My dissertation experience simply would not have been nearly as joyful without the collegiality of Anders Ottosson, Ulrike Lagerlof Nilsson, Sasha Mullally, Nancy Tatarek, Simone Caron, and Mallory Syzmanski. I am also thankful for Rebecca Jo Plant's encouragement to share my work at gatherings of the Western Association of Women Historians and the American Association for the History of Medicine.

I am especially grateful for the invitation to participate in the 2017 Emerging Scholars Workshop on the topic of "Historicizing Blackness: Sports, Performance, and Politics," which was organized by Amira Rose Davis and the George and Anne Richards Civil War Center at The Pennsylvania State University. It was here where I shared my first writing on the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club and received valuable critique and commentary from scholars Ava Purkiss and Crystal Sanders. Later that same year, at the invitation of Linda Tomko, I was fortunate to also share my work on the Flanner Guild at the University of California, Riverside's Dance History Colloquium.

In 2020, my acceptance to the Dance Studies Association's colloquium "Dance and Disruption: Science and the Body in the Long Nineteenth Century," also proved formative. For encouragement to submit an application to this event, my thanks go to Claire Edington. I am

grateful to Sariel Golomb and Lynn Matluck Brooks for their work in organizing this event, and for their subsequent editorial expertise in shaping an essay for publication.

I am also sincerely grateful for the opportunity to publish in the *Australasian Journal of American Studies* my essay, "Breathing Power and Poise: Black Women's Movements for Self-Expression and Health, 1880s-1900s," which was an early version of chapter four. My thanks go to Rebecca Jo Plant for encouraging my submission, to Carolyn Eastman for seeing and celebrating the essay's contributions, and to Frances Clarke for making such expert editorial improvements.

Whatever I have been able to contribute to the scholarship of American Delsartism also owes a debt to the tremendous kindness of several dance historians. When I finally managed to write that first year research paper, I reached out to Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter to see if she might be willing to read my paper. She not only agreed, she also invited me to UC Irvine for lunch. There, she gifted many things, including a well-marked-up copy of my paper, with her enthusiasm evident in many exclamation points and underlined phrases. She offered me provocative questions—sign-posts to ideas that remained unaddressed—and she candidly described aspects of her life as a scholar. I distinctly recall her speaking about the importance of living one's life even while sustaining one's intellectual work.

Not long after that first meeting, Nancy also began introducing me to other interlocutors of American Delsartism, including Kelly Jean Lynch. At the time, Kelly had finished her MA Thesis and was researching the extraordinary career of Genevieve Stebbins. Sensing we had much to discuss, Kelly and I scheduled a phone call. Three or four hours later, I knew I had just met a scholar whose own investigations would illuminate beautiful and needed aspects of the historical landscape that we were both so earnestly exploring. Kelly's camaraderie over all these

years has made this intellectual journey both more substantive and far less lonely. That has only become more true in recent years. In 2020, Kelly invited me to join an informal zoom conversation with Selma Odom, Maria Meindl, Libby Smigel, and Magdalena Kraler, scholars whose work on American Delsartism and other embodied movements engages myriad and diverse questions about self and society. Three years later, we are still talking. And for all the words we have exchanged, I am at a loss for sufficient words to describe my gratitude for this group and the ways that we think through, breathe through, and move through complex and compelling historical questions.

In the final years of writing this dissertation, I have been fortunate to work in the department that was essential to my formative training as a historian. Much thanks to James Goff for giving me the opportunity to teach U.S. history at Appalachian State University. It has been such a joy to work among so many kind and considerate colleagues. I am especially grateful for Kristin Baldwin Deathridge's support and enduring friendship.

My chances of completing this dissertation would have been significantly slimmer were it not for wide circles of support from family and friends in California, Utah, and North Carolina. My siblings—Marsey, Emily, Stephen, and Mark—never doubted that I would finish this work, even when it stretched on for many years. My thanks to Dereck Gibson and Shon Baxter for always making me feel more at home in San Diego. There is no doubt that my time in California was nourished by their good cooking and consistent encouragement. Nick Demas always seemed to know when to check-in and make sure I was not losing too much momentum. I am also grateful for so many years of motivational check-ins, yoga practices, walks in the woods, coffee-shop conversations, and global travels with Serena Crawford, Kelly Golden, Lori Ludwig, and

Valerie Midgett. Special thanks especially to Serena, my first yoga teacher in Boone and my dearest friend and collaborator.

I do not have the words to properly thank my parents, Stephen and Christine Streeter, whose steadiness and cheer sustained me during many ups and downs. This journey was also made imminently more fun because of my mother's presence. She joined me on several archive and conference adventures, tried out nineteenth-century psycho-physical exercises, transcribed hundreds of census records, and read (and re-read) several chapter drafts. By making the trek to my dissertation defense, my mom and dad also made the experience of crossing the finish line a more joyous and memorable day.

My family in Boone also celebrated that accomplishment from afar. Tremendous thanks to John and Pat Payne, Cinda and Scott Smith, and Elizabeth Payne for their enduring and constant encouragement.

Most certainly, this dissertation would not have been possible without the care and love that came into my life when I met Andrew Payne. Our home together has been—and continues to be—an anchor of safety and freedom, solitude and togetherness, conversations and quiet. As my most beloved adventurer and sentence-hearer, I am especially grateful to share this achievement with you, Andrew.

Chapter 4 is, in part, a reprint of "Breathing Power and Poise: Black Women's Movements for Self-Expression and Health, 1880s-1900s," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 39, no. 1 (2020): 5–46. The dissertation author was the sole author of this article.

VITA

2001	Bachelor of Science, Weber State University
2012	Master of Arts, Appalachian State University
2020-present	Lecturer, Department of History, Appalachian State University
2023	Doctor of Philosophy, University of California San Diego

FIELDS OF STUDY

U.S. History, 1700s-1960s; Cultural History of Health, Gender, and Race; Entertainment and Popular Culture of the Long Nineteenth Century; History of Dance and Physical Education.

PUBLICATIONS

"Exhibiting (Scientific) Grace: American Delsartism, Black Citizenship, and the Staging of the New South," chapter in *The Articulate Body: Science and Dance in the Long Nineteenth Century,* edited by Lynne Matluck Brooks and Sariel Golomb, forthcoming with University of Florida Press.

"Breathing Power and Poise: Black Women's Movements for Self-Expression and Health, 1880s-1900s," *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, December 2020.

"Amanda V. Gray," and "Maude B. Coleman," Biographical Database of Black Woman Suffragists, *Women and Social Movements in the United States*, 1600-2000. (Spring 2020).

"'The Spirit of Appreciation': Seeing Two Sister's Visions," in *Modern Visions, Modern Art: The Cone Sisters in North Carolina,* Blowing Rock Art & History Museum. 2019. Co-Authored with Dianna Cameron.

"Picturing the Cones: A Family Album from Baltimore to Asheville (and back again)," in *Modern Visions, Modern Art: The Cone Sisters in North Carolina,* Blowing Rock Art & History Museum, 2019. Co-authored with Neva J. Specht.

PUBLIC HISTORY SCHOLARSHIP

Curator and catalog director for *Modern Visions, Modern Art: The Cone Sisters in North Carolina*, an exhibition at the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum, 2019.

Author of an Interpretive Resource Manual for the Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, a project commissioned by the National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway, 2018.

*Flat Top Manor Historic Furnishings Repor*t, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, co-authored with Dr. Neva Specht and Jo Otto, 2012.

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Wings to Their Heels
Self-Expression and Health
and the Rise of the New Woman

by

Carrie Anne Streeter

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Rebecca Jo Plant, Chair

This dissertation investigates the development and influence of elocution pedagogy during the Reconstruction Era, a period when many U.S. citizens recognized the precarity and possibility of creating equitable opportunities for self-expression. In particular, it examines the embodied politics of American Delsartism, a repertoire of psycho-physical exercises designed to ease nervousness and cultivate confidence. By evaluating the gendered and racial messaging of this curriculum, *Wings to Their Heels* establishes American Delsartism's prominent role in shaping cultural ideas about whose voices mattered and where and how they should be heard.

INTRODUCTION

The Will to Breathe

Psycho-Physical Culture and the Women's Movement

"Before beginning any physical exercise
the pupil should first get in mind the vital sense of being alive,
and hold the thought of fullness of life.
The next thing is to breathe deeply,
expand the chest and stretch the muscles."

—Gwyneth King Roe, "Psycho-Physical Culture,"
New York Tribune, January 9, 1901

In March of 1899, teachers and students in Washington, D.C.'s public schools welcomed the world to their classrooms. That is, they welcomed a local photographer to record their daily activities for an exhibition at the world's fair in Paris, France.[1] Over several days, this collaboration captured hundreds of moments of exemplary instruction, including botanical dissections, drawing lessons, chemistry experiments, field trips to local zoos and museums, and classes in cooking, sewing, and carpentry. When the images were displayed in Paris the following year, millions of visitors viewed and admired this portrayal of modern schooling, including the U.S. Commissioner of Education. In his assessment, as *Ladies Home Journal* reported, these photographs constituted "the best expression, to date, of the new idea of education."[2]

---

[1] The photographer, Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864-1952), was a quintessential embodiment of the "New Woman." See Bettina Berch, *The Woman Behind the Lens: The Life and Work of Frances Benjamin Johnson, 1864-1952,* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2010).

[2] "The New Idea in Teaching Children," *Ladies Home Journal*, January 1900.

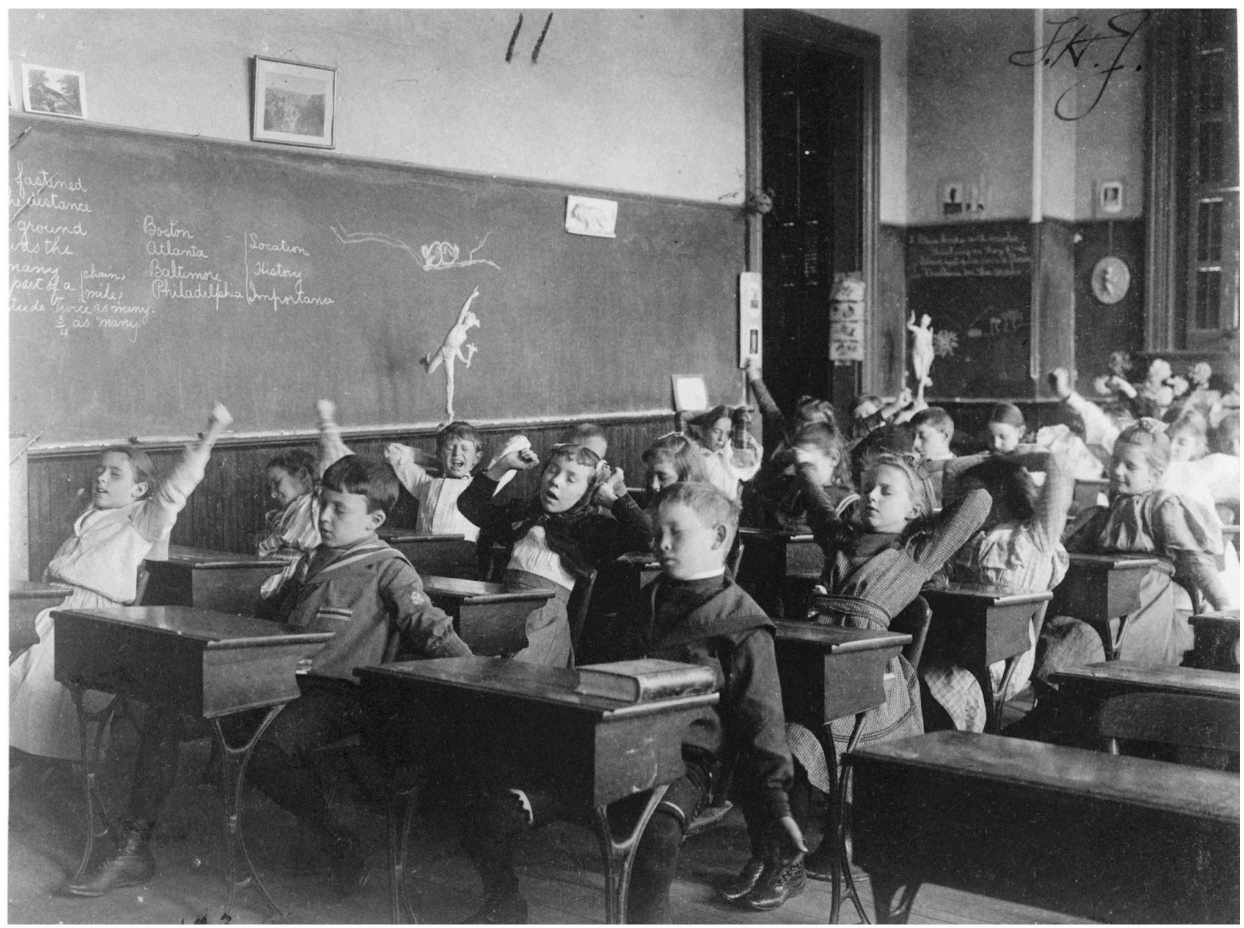


Figure 1 — Relaxation Exercises in a Washington, D.C. Classroom, 1899
Credit: Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-112555

The district's physical education curriculum was among these lauded "new ideas," and it too was well-represented at the world's fair. Photographs showed students playing basketball, strengthening their arms with pulleys and weights, and lifting their knees during callisthenic routines. In addition to highlighting a variety of activities for muscle-building and friendly competition, the photographer also documented the district's emphasis on exercises for relaxation and poise. In one image, students intentionally yawned and stretched (see figure 1). Some rested their heads on their desks. Behind them, a small replica of *Flying Mercury* (a sixteenth-century Roman sculpture) appeared as a visual reminder of exercises that were often practiced in a special room—a space that was itself the subject of yet another photograph. In that

Figure 2 — A Schoolroom Arranged for Psycho-Physical Exercises, Washington, D.C., 1899
Credit: Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-112556

room, a piano stood near a large replica of *Winged Victory of Samothrace* (a second-century Greek sculpture)*,* two classical-styled friezes, and another copy of *Flying Mercury* (see figure 2). Though no children were present at the time of this photo, its decor foretold what transpired when they were. For, in similarly-fashioned rooms across the United States, teachers and students regularly explored self-affirming exercises inspired by ancient aesthetics.

To many nineteenth-century viewers, this Grecian-adorned room would have been instantly recognizable as a space for practicing what was popularly known as "Delsarte" or "psycho-physical culture." As the later name implies, these practices built upon seemingly apparent observations about the dynamic relationship between mind and body. For example,

students were taught that because nervousness resulted in short breath, tight shoulders, and timidness, it could reasonably be alleviated by inhaling and exhaling deeply, stretching expansively, and embodying confident postures. For such practices, piano music and ancient statues were standard instructional aids. As they moved to the cadence of selected rhythms, students were encouraged to cultivate courage by broadening their chests like *Winged Victory* or strengthen their resolve by taking the stance of the *Fighting Gladiator*. Posing like *Flying Mercury* was especially recommended for warding off melancholy. As one prominent teacher put it, "Such an exercise requires a nice adjustment of the different members of the body. It concentrates the nerve-force on the act, starts the circulation, affects the respiration, and these material changes incite new thoughts and feelings." Referencing the statue's aesthetics, she claimed that by practicing this buoyant pose "the blues" would "take wings to their heels and fly away."[3]

How did such exercises come to embody what many U.S. citizens praised as the best "new idea in education"? What ideas about health did such practices convey? And what was the meaning of calling these psycho-physical exercises "Delsarte?" This dissertation explores these questions by analyzing Reconstruction-era efforts for reforming elocution curricula—the field of study that helped launch the careers of the very individuals who created such rooms and taught such practices.[4]

[3] Emily M. Bishop, *Self-Expression and Health: Americanized Delsarte Culture* (Chautauqua, New York: Self-Published), 175.

[4] At the time of these photographs, Rebecca Stoneroad was the director of physical education for Washington, D.C, Public Schools, though Black educators also directed this work within the district's Black schools. On the development of physical education in Washington, D.C., including a discussion of Stoneroad's elocutionary background as an English teacher, see Martha Verbrugge, *Active Bodies: A History of Women's Physical Education in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

By taking up such questions, *Wings to Their Heels: Self Expression and Health and the Rise of the New Woman* helps recover elocution's influential, though often overlooked, role in the formation of nineteenth century health culture. As a field of study focused around the cultivation of poised vocal and emotional displays, elocution prioritized the instruction of practical physical exercises for improving breathing power and calming nerves. As this dissertation demonstrates, many nineteenth century Americans recognized these elocutionary outcomes as beneficial to their personal and social wellbeing. This was especially true given the prominent role that self-expression played in daily life, whether one was conducting business and debating politics, engaging in casual conversation with neighbors or strangers, giving speeches in school programs, reciting poetry at parlor entertainments, or delivering public lectures at local lyceums.[5] For all these purposes, the ability to confidently "stand and speak" had obvious advantages. Yet, because demonstrations of vocal power could potentially increase one's social power, elocution instruction had historically not been an equal-opportunity experience. Like the laws and customs that policed the acquisition of literacy, the nineteenth century's cultural production of elocution had historically maintained social hierarchies that privileged the status of white Protestant men. Thus, as this dissertation demonstrates, Reconstruction-era efforts to

---

[5] The scholarship on elocution reform in this period is robust. Significant works that have informed my understanding are: Melanie V. Dawson, *Laboring to Pay: Home Entertainment and the Spectacle of Middle-Class Cultural Life 1850-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Jane Donawerth, *Rhetorical Theory By Women Before 1900: An Anthology* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); Carolyn Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public after the Revolution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009). Nan Johnson, *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life: 1866-1910* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois UP, 2002); Mary Kelly, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Marian Wilson Kimber, *The Elocutionists: Women, Music and the Spoken Word* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Paige M. Van Osdol, "The Women's Elocution Movement in America, 1870-1915," (PhD. diss., The Ohio State University, 2012);. Shirley Wilson Logan. *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008); Carol Mattingly. *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002); Angela G. Ray and Paul Stob, eds. *Thinking Together: Lecturing, Learning, and Difference in the Long Nineteenth Century* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2018).

reform the gendered and racial messaging of elocution curricula were, at their core, efforts to build new cultural beliefs about whose voices mattered and where and how they should be heard—beliefs that were also exhibited in that 1899 photograph of the Grecian-adorned exercise classroom in Washington, D.C.

Over the past forty years, scholars have documented myriad ways in which such exercises and spaces came to represent the "new idea in education" precisely because they embodied transformative ideas about selfhood and citizenship. Much of this work has been conducted by historians of dance and rhetoric under the rubric of American Delsartism, a name that references one of the primary sources of inspiration for elocution reformers: François Delsarte (1811-1871), a French voice and acting teacher. Though he never published his theories nor visited the United States, American elocutionists and actors investigated Delsarte's categorical mapping of body language and promoted his "Laws of Expression" as a scientific framework for exercises that claimed to "free the channels of expression."[6]

The liberatory potential of this semiotic science proved especially appealing to several generations women who sought to broaden the range of "respectable" feminine expressivity. Indeed, as dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter first argued, such desires were central to the very creation of American Delsartism.[7] As subsequent scholars have confirmed, the movement's leading women oriented their in-person classes, their published manuals, and their own performances of poetry and pantomime toward a broad goal: the normalization of New Womanhood, a gender ideal that rejected expectations of female timidity and subservience and

---

[6] The phrase "free the channels of expression" was common in the literature of American Delsartism. For example, see Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression* 6th edition (New York, Edgar S. Werner, 1901), 402.

[7] Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, *Reformers and Visionaries: The Americanization of the Art of Dance.* New York: Dance Horizons, 1979; Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth Century American Delsartism* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press), 1999.

celebrated independence, physical stamina, and exuberant self-confidence. Such actions not only made "Delsarte" a household word, but they also demonstrated the cultural value of linking scientific rhetoric with social reform. This was especially apparent through the proliferation of Grecian-styled posings, pantomimes, and dances that U.S. women claimed as scientific by popularizing them under the Delsarte moniker.[8]

As several studies of American Delsartism have documented, these psycho-physical exercises were resoundingly popular among generations of women from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances. From the 1870s through early 1900s, Delsarte-inspired elocution texts and techniques were implemented in most elementary schools and colleges across the country. They were also an important element in several organizations that shaped middle-aged women's lives: namely, a burgeoning number of newly-formed women's clubs and centers for adult learning and recreation, including the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Sorosis (a professional club first organized by newspaper women), the YMCA, the YWCA, and the Chautauqua Institute. In these spaces, women especially made Grecian-styled Delsarte practices a means for promoting self-expressive exercises that aided a range of reforms, from banishing corsets to advocating for suffrage and raising funds for a variety of civic projects. Outcomes such

---

[8] Linda Tomko, *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Joseph Fahey, "Quiet Victory: The Professional Identity American Women Forged Through Delsartism," in *Essays on François Delsarte* (Claremont: Pomona College Theatre Department, 2005), 43-84; Judy Burns, "The Culture of Nobility/The Nobility of Self-Cultivation," in *Moving Words: Re-Writing Dance*, ed. Gay Morris (New York: Routledge, 1996), 203-226; Lisa Kay Suter, "The Arguments They Wore: The Role of the Neoclassical Toga in American Delsartism," in *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education,* eds. David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 134-153; Paige V. Banaji, "Womanly Eloquence and Rhetorical Bodies," in *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education,* 154-176; Carrie J. Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Susan Taylor Lake, "American Delsartism and the Bodily Discourse of Respectable Womanliness" (PhD diss., The University of Iowa, 2002); Lynch, Kelly Jean. "Aesthetic Dance as Woman's Culture in America at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Genevieve Stebbins and the New York School of Expression." *Feminist Modernist Studies* 5, no. 3 (2022): 247-260.

as these are among the reasons why scholars acknowledge American Delsartism as an influential contributor to the era's rise of the New Woman.

With all that has been written about American Delsartism, there is much yet to explore. This has only become more true in light of the digitization of thousands of newspapers, school newsletters, Delsarte-inspired manuals, and *Werner's Magazine*—sources that effectively constitute the most substantive published archive of this cultural movement. While mining these digitized records can certainly yield greater details about lesser-known teachers and broader perspectives about familiar storylines, these sources also compel necessary revisions to foundational arguments. Especially consequential is the digitization of Black newspapers and educational publications—records that include abundant reports of Delsarte performances in Black schools, churches, and community centers. This evidence has widespread implications, not the least of which is its effective upending of the common argument that American Delsartism was exclusively practiced by elite white women. Additionally, by proving that Black women performed the full range of Delsartean aesthetics, such reports help establish a chronology of modern Black dance well before the more recognized period of the Harlem Renaissance.[9]

With improved abilities to visualize the demographic reach of American Delsartism, scholars now have better tools for evaluating the movement's cultural politics, particularly regarding the ways in which its refashioning of femininity influenced one of the most consequential projects of the era: the struggle to reconstruct the United States as a multiracial

[9] Other than notable studies on Hallie Q. Brown, the scholarship on American Delsartism has maintained that this phenomenon was of interest only to white middle-and-upper-class women. Dance historians have made similar assumptions, arguing that Black Americans did not engage in these styles of aesthetic practices until the Harlem Renaissance. See John O. Perpener, *African-American Concert Dance: The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001), xiii; Takiyah Nur Amin, "African American Dance Revisited: Undoing Master Narratives in the Studying and Teaching of Dance History," in *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies,* ed. Geraldine Morris and Larraine Nicholas (New York: Routledge, 2019), 44-55.

democracy. Recent scholarship has already begun work in that direction. For example, by connecting Delsartism to the rise of eugenic ideologies, theater historian Shannon Walsh has demonstrated how Delsartism's aesthetic productions legitimized and normalized white supremacy.[10] Colleen Daniher, also a theater historian, has observed similar outcomes in the movement's construction of whiteness, but her exploration of a Mohawk woman's Delsartean career offers an important caveat.[11] In Daniher's assessment, Delsartism's "rhetoric of bodily legibility" regularly reinforced the biopolitical power of whiteness, but its claims to universally-true laws of grace and beauty also provided "racialized and gendered subjects" with tools for contesting their marginalized status.[12] As this dissertation shows, such framing also provides an accurate depiction of the ways in which Black and white American women engaged Delsartism as they fashioned various ideals of New Womanhood.

To further explain why American Delsartism figured so prominently in the era's racial politics and the rise of the New Woman, my evaluation of this elocution reform movement focuses on one of its core features: namely, its position as a viable form of health care. Among other revelations, this focus recovers an appreciation for elocutionary expertise that was rather common in the era. Indeed, as this study shows, many nineteenth century Americans recognized elocution teachers as physiological experts with practical knowledge for cultivating a state of health popularly referred to as *"mens sana in corpore sano,"* a sound mind in a sound body. Yet, as I argue, elocution reformers, including those who created American Delsartism, also did something more with their expertise: they turned their exercises for health into serviceable tools

---

[10] Shannon L. Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance in the Progressive Era: Watch Whiteness Workout* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2020), 49.

[11] Colleen Kim Daniher, "Looking at Pauline Johnson: Gender, Race, and Delsartism's Legible Body," *Theatre Journal* 72, no. 1 (March 2020): 1-20.

[12] Ibid, 3.

for empowering the voices of those whom society had long marginalized or muted. Particularly impactful for purposes of social reform was their promotion of psycho-physical remedies for improving respiratory health and easing the effects of nervousness—conditions whose symptoms, such as shallow breathing or timidness, were frequently read in gendered or racialized terms as biological markers of "natural" inferiority.[13]

Consistent with other social movements, efforts to reform acceptable modes of feminine expression were not created or implemented overnight, nor did they remain static. Moreover, while Black and white Reconstruction-era elocution reformers proved successful in their empowerment of women's voices, the movement's racial politics still largely mirrored those of the broader women's movement. That is, from the 1870s to early 1900s, white women's organizational commitments to interracial activism shifted from a status of "present but precarious," to almost wholly non-existent.[14] By illuminating some of the ways that American Delsartism helped white women facilitate that shift and Black women defy it, this dissertation also contributes important understandings of the ways that racial segregation was enforced and resisted through embodied practices for self-expression and health.[15]

---

[13] In making this argument, I draw on scholarship that establishes a dynamic relationship between women's health and social movements. See, Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Sue Zschoche, "Dr. Clarke Revisited: Science, True Womanhood, and Female Collegiate Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 545-569;

[14] Martha S. Jones *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Alison M. Parker, "Frances Watkins Harper and the Search for Women's Interracial Alliances," in *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, ed. Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 145-171.

[15] My understanding of the era's embodied aesthetic politics draws upon Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Francis Martin, "To Ignore Is to Deny: E. W. Kemble's Racial Caricature as Popular Art," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40, no. 4 (2007): 655–82.

To better recognize the complexities of all of these dynamics, each of this dissertation's four chapters describes distinctive phases in the development and promotion of psycho-physical exercises. Starting with elocution reforms of the 1870s, **chapter one, "Freeing the Channels of Expression: Women's Vocal Health and Reconstruction Era Elocution Reform,"** provides, among other things, an explanation for the emergence of American Delsartism as a gendered practice. Existing scholarship commonly cites Steele MacKaye's 1870s U.S. lectures as the catalyst for popularizing the Frenchman's "science of expression." While there is truth to that claim, this chapter argues for a different framework—one that takes into account the cultural dynamics that made Americans especially receptive to Delsarte's theories in the first place. As a case in point, the chapter explores Delsartism's reception at Boston University School of Oratory (BUSO). Though it operated for only six years, from 1873 to 1879, this school became a pivotal center for investigating instructional methods and credentialing a new generation of elocution specialists. By highlighting the antebellum activism of the school's founder and supporters, this chapter illuminates the institution's historical connections with the struggle for abolition and women's rights—interests that also informed the program's postbellum efforts. Evident of this, the chapter highlights the experiences of two women, Mary Adams Currier (1833-1912), a white graduate of BUSO and a professor of elocution at Wellesley College; and Hallie Q. Brown (1850-1949), a Black educator who studied with one of BUSO's graduates and went on to become a world-famous elocutionist and professor of elocution at Wilberforce University.

Discussing their early careers helps illuminate one of Boston University School of Oratory's most influential social reform tactics: identifying and promoting the health benefits of elocution studies. This was especially apparent, I argue, through the BUSO's curricular responsiveness to widespread concerns about respiratory illnesses and nervous disease, concerns

that—not coincidentally—were also problematically gendered and racialized. Shallow breathing, loss of voice, or expressions of anxiety and awkwardness often confirmed racist and sexist assumptions about "natural" inferiority. Such symptoms could also foreclose academic studies and end teaching careers, among a whole host of other consequences. While popular scientific and medical theories often confirmed these prejudices, claims based in universality and objectivity also provided tools for dispelling them. Indeed, as chapter one documents, it was in service to these interests that Boston University School of Oratory prioritized scientific evaluations of the functional requirements for effective communication, including physiological expositions about the respiratory harms of tight-corseting and Delsarte's explanations for the correspondence of gesture and emotion. Such inclinations also led a rising generation of teachers, Black and white, to credit BUSO with helping formulate "the New Elocution"—a label that marked a pedagogical embrace of psychological theories (*à la* Delsarte), a rejection of prescriptive rhetorical styles, and a celebration of "natural" self-expression.

While BUSO granted a vital institutional endorsement of the Frenchman's "science of expression," my analysis makes clear that a core contingency of the program's female students (among whom was Genevieve Stebbins) were responsible for bringing Delsarte to the proverbial masses. As chapter one demonstrates, during their 1870s classroom collaborations and work with influential clientele (among whom were school administrators and leaders of newly-formed women's clubs) these women became uniquely attuned to the utility of citing the Frenchman's theories in their promotion of norm-defying expressive exercises. By 1879, when Boston University disbanded the School of Oratory (upon the death of its primary funder and founder), these women were well-poised to meet a growing demand for their expertise. As the 1880s began, they wasted no time in taking the next obvious steps for broadening the reach of elocution

reforms: setting up their own schools, writing articles for newspapers and magazines, and putting things in motion to publish the world's first Delsarte-inspired manuals.

Those 1880s instructional accomplishments and promotional activities comprise the subject of **chapter two, "Ancient Antidotes Hot Off the Press: Publicizing Psycho-Physical Prescriptions for (White) Women's Well-Being."** In particular, the chapter shines a light on the behind-the-scenes debut of Grecian-styled statue posing—the decade's star "Delsarte" exercise that was introduced by the decade's leading teacher, Genevieve Stebbins (1857-1934). Given her role in shaping American Delsartism, Stebbins' career has occupied a prominent position in the historiography of the movement. Much of that work has focused on discussing her aesthetic innovations as reflected through her publications, which in the 1880s comprised two books. In 1885, she published *The Delsarte System of Expression,* the first American-authored comprehensive treatise of François Delsarte's theories; and in 1888, *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture*, an abbreviated manual that she wrote specifically for women's clubs. Before the decade's end, both manuals had become standard texts in classrooms and clubs across the United States. By analyzing these works, as well as her later publications, scholars have illuminated Stebbins' talent in curating practical pedagogies from complex ideological and aesthetic concepts. While these studies have not entirely depicted Stebbins' accomplishments as "solo acts," they have also not sufficiently examined the social world that gave rise to her career. It is to that project that this chapter turns.

By analyzing the cultural interests of Stebbins' main clientele (elite white society women and educators), this chapter explores how their interests in mitigating nervousness informed her Grecian-styled pedagogy. The chapter also explores how this combination of science, health, and ancient aesthetics proved a powerful method for normalizing anew longstanding racialized social

hierarchies. By demonstrating how these psycho-physical practices facilitated cultural programming among white clubwomen across the country, this chapter recognizes American Delsartism's role in legitimizing the rise of racial segregation and the sectional reconciliation of white Americans.

As the 1890s began, the growing visibility of self-expressive and assertive women in parlors, schools, churches, and community centers was a source of celebration for many Americans and a cause of concern for many others. As it happened, the decade would offer some signs of encouragement for those who might have hoped that "Delsarte" would prove a passing fad. For instance, in 1892, François Delsarte's own daughter declared, much to the consternation of her American hosts, that much of what U.S. women instructed as "Delsarte" bore no resemblance to her father's original methods. She was especially disproving of their Delsarte-inspired Grecian-statue posing practices. By documenting how American teachers navigated this potentially devastating accusation along with other substantive challenges to the practice's status within public schools, **chapter three, "The Proof is in the Practice: Defending a Feminized Expertise of Mind and Body,"** explores how elocution reformers proactively worked to preserve women's access to these popular psycho-physical exercises for alleviating nervousness and cultivating self-confidence. Core to that work was a consistent legitimation of the experiential evidence women had gathered over a decade of teaching and practicing and developing these methods. As this chapter documents, such positionality contrasted significantly with the "objectively" measured fitness programs that were increasingly displacing elocutionists' psycho-physical methodologies in several public institutions. By focusing on the gendered dynamics of these curricular debates, this chapter documents a critical period in which the

instruction and practice of psycho-physical exercises became more firmly feminized as women's work and "lady's gymnastics."

While this development certainly displaced elocution expertise in some social settings, it did not diminish their value within "new education" programs for girls and women. Indeed, the decade also saw elocution teachers become more emboldened in promoting the health advantages of their aesthetic methods. Among the most notable signs of this development was the choice among leading teachers to stop using the "Delsarte" moniker for their work, favoring instead terms like psycho-physical culture, aesthetic gymnastics, or dynamic breathing. Rather significantly, this changing of terms did not reflect American women's full-on rejection of Delsarte's theories, but instead represented women's assertions of their own expertise about practical methods for experiencing a sound mind in a sound body.

This dissertation's final chapter, **"Nothing Less than Organized Anxiety: Performing New Womanhood in Jim Crow Indianapolis,"** provides a biographical and community perspective of elocution reform from the 1880s through early 1900s. The chapter explores the personal experience and social influence of two of the city's well-known Black elocutionists, Lillian Thomas Parker Fox (1854-1917) and Dayse D. Walker (1872-1953). In doing so it also demonstrates how the city's Black women engaged Delsartean pedagogy in their formation of society clubs and charities. That both women sought to broadcast the visibility of that work was also evident through the proliferation of news reports about Black women's Grecian-styled Delsartean performances and elocutionary eloquence. Moreover, through the work of Lillian Thomas Parker Fox, who developed an impressive career in journalism, those activities were also reported in the city's Black and white newspapers. As this chapter demonstrates, by ensuring that Black exhibitions of grace, poise, grief, rebuke, and strength crossed the color line,

these journalistic actions were one way that Black women united personal wellbeing with projects of social activism.

In addition to contributing new understandings about the teachers and practitioners who created American Delsartism, these four chapters also illuminate broader questions about the cultural history of health and mind-body therapeutics. This is especially true in terms of American Delsartism's provisions for the era's widespread concerns about nervousness and respiratory illnesses such as consumption/tuberculosis. Though several historians of medicine have recognized these conditions as catalysts for the professionalization—and specialization—of biomedical practices, such scholarship has largely neglected the relationship between these disease categories and women's burgeoning interest in psycho-physical practices.[16]

Considerations of American Delsartism are also largely absent in histories about the development of physical education, where its impact was especially relevant.[17] Indeed, recent scholarship on the history of yoga offers the most recognition of American Delsartism's role in constructing modern health culture. Yet such works have largely advanced teleological assessments of American Delsartism, largely defining it as important primarily because it "[paved] the way for the popular conception of yoga as another means to stretch and relax."[18]

---

[16] One exception is John M. Andrick, "Delsartean Hypnosis for Girls' Bodies and Minds: Annie Payson Call and the Lasell Seminary Nerve Training Controversy," *History of Psychology* 15, no. 2 (2012): 124-144. On the prevalence of nervousness, see: David G. Schuster, *Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011); F.G. Gosling, *Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American Medical Community, 1870-1910* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Anti-modernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1999); Barbara Sicherman, "The Uses of a Diagnosis: Doctors, Patients, and Neurasthenia," *Journal of the History of Medicine* (January 1977): 33-54.

[17] Roberta J. Park, "Physical Educators: Nineteenth Century Biology and Exercises, *Hygienic* and *Educative*," *Journal of Sport History* 14 no.1 (Spring 1987): 28-60; Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[18] Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).147. Similar teleological issues and contextual flatness exist in Anya P. Foxen's *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonialism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Modern Yoga* (2020), a recent scholarly work linking yoga and American Delsartism. For a useful and relevant discussion of the limitations of such a perspective, see

I would argue that, among other things, these omissions and frameworks broadly register the impact of the late-nineteenth century's feminization of mind-body medicine. For—as this dissertation endeavors to reveal—relaxation, breathing, and emotive-posture exercises became particularly gendered during this era, associated as they were with subjective forms of body knowledge and qualities of emotional sensitivity and receptivity. Because these mind-body therapeutics relied on consistent practice, the labor of psycho-physical exercise also became highly associated with feminized domestic spaces: homes, schools, community centers.

In making these observations about the gendered dynamics of mind-body medicine, my study of American Delsartism also engages broader questions about the historical framing of therapeutics more contemporarily known as "self-care," or "complementary and alternative medicine." In particular, I consider how women's late nineteenth-century experiments with mind-body therapeutics represent an approach to health that was displaced during the development of biomedicine and medical professionalization. Such thinking has received growing attention from medical historians in recent years. For example, Charles Rosenberg suggests that techniques now categorized as "complementary and alternative medicine," (CAM) are historically less alternative than modern biomedicine likes to acknowledge. He argues that these "unorthodox" modalities are in fact "an index to aspects of health care that largely remained unaddressed by modern medical advances, including non-life threatening conditions like sleep disorders, depression, irritable bowel syndrome, and chronic back pain."[19] Other scholars confirm this view. Historian Robert Johnson calls for re-examining the "central

---

Magdalena Kraler and Kelly Mullan. "Review of *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonalism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Modern Yoga* by Anya P. Foxen." *Correspondences* 9, no. 1 (2021): 141-147.

[19] Charles E. Rosenberg, "Complementary to what? Alternative to Whom?: On the Scientific Project in Medicine," in *Our Present Complaint: American Medicine, Then and Now* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2007), 130. It is worth noting that the health conditions Rosenberg discusses are largely the same concerns addressed by Americanized Delsarte.

assumptions" that have often guided popular discussions of "alternative" therapies—assumptions that perceive a supposed "dark age" for alternative medicine and thus interpret the twentieth and twenty-first century popularity of alternative medicine and as an unprecedented "golden age." He suggests that the historian's task "is no longer to account for the recent explosion of interest in CAM, but rather to explain unexpected continuities." [20]

Wings to Their Heels works in that direction. By recognizing American Delsartism as an influential space for the development of health culture in the Reconstruction-era, this study shines light on an important "unexpected continuity" and invites greater recognition of the ways in which gender and race played a leading role in shaping historical understandings about mind-body medicine and women's health.[21]

a note on terms

The exercises at the center of this study were known by several names during the late nineteenth century. In this dissertation, I most often refer to these practices as psycho-physical exercises, a slight variation of one of the popular labels of the period: psycho-physical culture. Other terms that were, to a great extent, interchangeable with each other include, American Delsartism, "Delsarte," aesthetic exercises, relaxation exercises, aesthetic or interpretive dance, harmonic or aesthetic gymnastics. As a further point of clarification, unless I specifically identify François Delsarte (the man), my use of the term "Delsarte " references the psycho-physical exercises that Americans popularized under the Frenchman's name.

---

[20] Robert D. Johnston, ed. *The Politics of Healing: Histories of Alternative Medicine in Twentieth-Century North America* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2. Anne Harrington investigates causes for similar omissions in *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008). Her study demonstrates how desires for physical evidence impacted modern support for mind-body medicine, but it does not discuss how gender influenced these processes.

[21] On the gendered production of medicine, see: Regina Morantz-Sanchez, "Feminist Theory and Historical Practice: Rereading Elizabeth Blackwell," *History and Theory* 30, no. 4 (Dec., 1992): 51-69; Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom,* 240; Anders Ottosson, "One History or Many Herstories? Gender Politics and the History of Physiotherapy's Origins in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Women's History Review* (2015): 1-24.

CHAPTER 1

Freeing the Channels of Expression

Women's Vocal Health and Reconstruction Era Elocution Reform

"The production of voice is a muscular operation."

—Lewis B. Monroe, *Vocal and Physical Training,* 1869

Boston University broke precedent in more ways than one when it opened its School of Oratory in 1873. Not only was it the nation's first college department dedicated entirely to the study of the voice, the school also admitted women—a move with deliberate and far-reaching implications. As one announcement in a New Jersey newspaper put it, the department's "primary work," involved "the training of liberally educated men and women for professorships of oratory in colleges and professional schools."[1] It was an understated yet bold statement, for such a move was sure to expand women's influence in foundational social institutions.

While many Americans perceived this development as a sign of progress, others most certainly did not. Indeed, had readers of that same New Jersey paper glanced slightly left, they could have read a strongly-worded warning. Under the title, "Co-Education of the Sexes," a minister decried such collegiate arrangements, believing they would degrade white women's very "womanliness" by transforming them into "men in women's garbs" and thus foreclosing their chances of fulfilling their "natural" "crowning achievement"—namely their ability to bear

[1] *The Saturday Gazette* (Montclair, N.J.), July 12, 1873. Though the school used the label "Oratory," it also emphasized the study of elocution, a medium that was more associated with entertainment than with legal or political speech.

children and become mothers. Though he was known for also espousing "liberal" views himself, the minister clearly drew the line at this unnerving change. Thoroughly convinced that collegiate co-education undermined society's very foundations, he declared, "What spoils [American women] ruins the hopes of humanity!"[2] Medical experts also confirmed the gravity of such concerns. For example, in the same year that Boston University opened its co-ed School of Oratory, one of the city's leading physicians sounded an alarm about the rising demographic of white women attending college. Taking particular aim at white women's "natural" predisposition for suffering nervousness while speaking publicly, the physician predicted pernicious outcomes if women expended their energy doing activities that had long been the province of white men. Echoing a growing refrain, he too proclaimed that, "the hope of the race lay in one simple physiological motto: Educate a man for manhood, a woman for womanhood."[3]

This juxtaposition of views about women's education captured prominent sentiments in an enduring debate about gender, race, and citizenship. Indeed, behind Boston University's norm-defying leap stood decades of activism for broadening women's social opportunities as well as rebuke from those who opposed such moves.[4] Accordingly, proponents of the School of

[2] Henry W. Bellows, "Co-education of the Sexes," *The Saturday Gazette*, July 12, 1873. Bellows was a Unitarian minister, editor of *Liberal Christian,* and an organizer of the U.S. Sanitary Commission.

[3] Dr. Edward Clarke, the physician in question, was the author of the 1874 text, *Sex in Education.* For analysis of his substantial influence on the era's debates about womanhood, see Sue Zschoche, "Dr. Clarke Revisited: Science, True Womanhood, and Female Collegiate Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 545-569.

[4] The following studies illuminate cultural dynamics that shaped and changed women's expressive norms before the Reconstruction Era: Mary Kelly, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Carolyn Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public after the Revolution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009: David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs, ed. *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education: American Women Learn to Speak* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Nan Johnson, *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life: 1866-1910* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois UP, 2002); Shirley W. Logan, *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America*. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008); Carol Mattingly, *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002); Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005).

Oratory could rightly claim that admitting women met “demands which have long existed in the community,”[5] while objectors—like the aforementioned minister and physician—enjoyed the company of many others who decried anything that undermined “true womanhood,” a nineteenth-century ideal that venerated white bourgeois women’s domesticity, purity, piety, and selfless conduct.[6] Though such highly publicized expert warnings posed challenges for advancing new visions of womanhood, their claims about women’s “nature” and “natural” fortitude also surfaced useful points of contention for debating women’s education and public roles.[7] And, not surprisingly, on the matter of women’s fitness for self-expression, teachers who specialized in the art of elocution had a lot to say, and even more to offer.

With Boston University School of Oratory (BUSO) as a focus, this chapter explores the development and influence of elocution reform in early years of the Reconstruction era, a period when many Americans recognized the precarity and possibility of establishing more equitable opportunities for self-development. As an institution committed to disrupting cultural norms that had long reproduced exclusive privileges for white male speakers, BUSO was one of several postbellum schools that pursued curricular methods for amplifying a broader demographic of American voices. Indeed, in the 1870s, several new diploma-granting schools for expression opened in cities across the country.[8] An even greater number of elocutionists also began

---

[5] University Council, ed. *Boston University Yearbook*, *Volume I* (Boston: H.O. Houghton and Company, 1874), 85.

[6] There is a broad literature on “true womanhood” and the advocacy for “new womanhood. Prominent works that have informed my understandings of these developments include, Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” American Quarterly 18, no. 2 (1966): 151-174; Nancy Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Karen J. Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980).

[7] On the relationship between women’s health and social activism, see Regina Markell Morantz, “Making Women Modern: Middle Class Women and Health Reform in Nineteenth Century American,” *Journal of Social History* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1977): 490-507; Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Sue Zschoche, “Dr. Clarke Revisited.”

[8] Many of these schools shared Boston University’s ethos for education reform, including the Philadelphia-based National School of Oratory, a school that began in 1875 under the direction of a former agent of the Freedmen's

providing classes in the schools and parlors of many American towns. By 1879, this booming labor force of elocution teachers had grown large enough to warrant the inaugural publication of the nation's first professional journal for such specialists. It was aptly titled *The Voice.*[9]

As a growing number of Americans took up the work of helping individuals find and strengthen their voice, Boston University School of Oratory's credibility and curriculum proved especially influential—particularly for those interested in refashioning expressive norms. Indeed, though it would ultimately only operate for six years, BUSO became a celebrated center for communication revolutions. It was here, for example, where faculty member Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone.[10] While that technology certainly transformed how Americans heard each other, no less significant was the school's influence on transforming *how* Americans learned about their expressive powers. For both purposes, the campus became a vital space for scientific investigations into invisible energies. Students observed Alexander Graham Bell's experiments (and success) in harnessing the power of vibrations moving along wires.[11] They were also among the first in the nation to hear Steele MacKaye describe how François Delsarte, a French voice and acting teacher, had solved "the mystery of emotion." In MacKaye's telling, this new "science of expression" accomplished two revelatory tasks: it delineated myriad

---

Bureau and his Quaker wife. This formalization of elocution training also coincided with a proliferation of medical schools and therapeutic institutions that accepted women, immigrants, and African Americans. See Paul Starr, T*he Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Regina Morantz-Sanchez, *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians and American Medicine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). Beryl Satter, *American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1999).

[9] Edgar S. Werner of Albany, New York began *The Voice* in 1879. For a study of this publication see Francine Merritt, "*Werner's Magazine*: Pioneer Speech Journal" (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1954).

[10] Lewis Monroe hired Alexander Graham Bell to instruct visible speech, the phonetic system invented by his father Alexander Melville Bell. Monroe also helped finance some of Bell's telephone experiments. On visible speech, see Jill Lepore, *A is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 162-186.

[11] Anna N. Kendall, a student at BUSO, wrote of her delight in witnessing Bell conduct his telephone experiments. See, Letter from Anna N. Kendall to Alexander Graham Bell, March 19, 1917, Alexander Graham Bell Papers, Library of Congress.

correspondences between gesture and emotion (or mind, body, and soul), and it provided the basis for exercises that could, as he put it, "free the channels of expression."[12] As this chapter demonstrates, these ideas and exercises not only resonated particularly strongly with the women in the program, but they also helped launch a pedagogical transformation known as "The New Elocution."[13]

Such commitments to communication innovation also reflected the interests of the school's founder, Lewis B. Monroe, and its proponents (see figure 3).[14] By 1873, Monroe had over twenty years of experience teaching elocution throughout New England, including a role as Boston's first Superintendent of Vocal and Physical Culture. In these positions, he formed influential alliances with prominent social reformers, many of whom supported his work as the Dean of Boston University School of Oratory. Indeed the roster of his program's guest lecturers reads like a who's who of white antebellum activists, including Lucy Stone, Mary Livermore, Theodore Weld, Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Lloyd Garrison, Henry Ward Beecher, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson.[15] After decades of struggling for abolition and women's rights, these individuals knew that challenging oppressive policies and ideologies required the physical empowerment of suppressed voices. Indeed, their abolitionist organizations had been among the first in the United States to break cultural rules that forbade public speeches

---

[12] The phrase, "free the channels of expression," was common in the literature of American Delsartism. For example, see Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression* 6th ed. (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1902), 402.

[13] Elsie M. Wilbor, editor for Werner's Magazine and a prolific author of many articles about the era's elocution reform, listed Lewis B. Monroe as a founder of the "New Elocution." See, Elsie M. Wilbor, "Delsartism in America," *Werner's Magazine* 14, no. 3 (March 1892): 59-60.

[14] "Lewis B. Monroe," in *Werner's Directory of Elocutionists,* ed. Elsie M. Wilbor (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1887), 254-258.

[15] On reformer's influence at Boston University, see Wesley T. Mott, "'America's Intellectual Morning': or, How the Transcendentalists Founded Boston University," *Resources for American Literary Study* 35 (2010): 95-138. Mary Livermore's involvement is particularly notable. Known as the "Queen of the Platform," she distinguished herself during the Civil War as leader and organizer of the Sanitary Commission. On her life and career, see Wendy Hamand Venet, *A Strong-Minded Woman: The Life of Mary A. Livermore.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005.

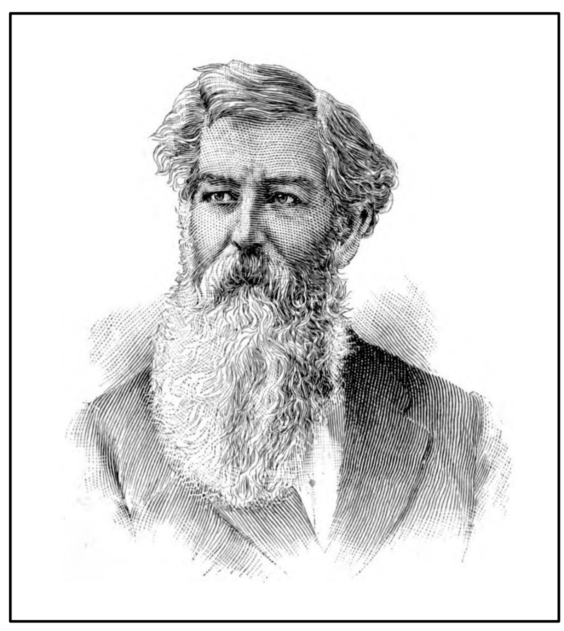


Figure 3 — Lewis Baxter Monroe, Founder of the Boston University School of Oratory
Credit: Elsie M. Wilbor, ed. *Werner's Directory of Elocutionists* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1887), 254-258.

by white women and all Black Americans.[16] In addition to affirming these groups' rights to speak, activists also had a record of prioritizing behind-the-scenes support through elocution training. In this light, their involvement with BUSO represented a significant postwar effort to mainstream bodily practices and perspectives that several Americans still regarded as subversive.

When it came to the work of ensuring that elocution reforms made their way out into American society, the program's graduates did not disappoint. From 1873 to 1876, the program awarded diplomas to 147 women and 113 men.[17] They were veterans of the Civil War, war widows, mothers and divorcees, daughters and sons of farmers, shoe manufacturers, tin smiths,

---

[16] On abolitionist commitments to elocution training and public speaking, see Peter Wirzbicki, "Black Transcendentalism: William Cooper Nell, the Adelphic Union, and the Black Abolitionist Intellectual Tradition," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 2 (2018): 269-290; Alex W. Black, "Abolitionism's Resonant Bodies: The Realization of African American Performance," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2011): 619–39.

[17] These numbers are derived from the university yearbooks, which included names enrolled students and graduates. See the appendix for the compiled list of those students. I gathered information about student demographics from U.S. census records via Ancestry.com.

school teachers, clergymen, lawyers, and physicians. By the 1880s, such individuals were instructing elocution at Wellesley College, Johns Hopkins University, Ohio State, and in numerous school districts and social clubs across the country. Several graduates also established their own influential schools, where they trained another generation of elocution reformers. Indeed, by 1900, many prominent U.S. teachers of expression could trace their pedagogical lineage back to Boston University's ground-breaking School of Oratory (see the appendix).

Though several of these graduates made concerted efforts to create interracial educational spaces, it is important to recognize that the school's Reconstruction-era reforms skewed toward unraveling "true womanhood" in ways that largely maintained social privileges associated with whiteness. For example, though the university declared commitments to admitting all individuals, regardless of "class, nationality, or sex," the student body of the School of Oratory remained overwhelmingly white. That Black Americans were not represented was certainly not an indicator of their lack of interest in the subject. Since the 1830s, Black educators and abolitionists had been prioritizing elocution studies in their schools, churches, and social clubs—and they continued to do so in the era of Reconstruction.[18] Thus, their absence from the School of Oratory more likely reflected the segregationist customs that prevailed even in these more "liberal" white spaces. That being the case, the school's emphasis on respiratory and nervous health did prove useful for dispelling racist perceptions about Black Americans, and—as this chapter shows—prominent Black educators were among those who leveraged the school's credibility and curriculum.

---

[18] For discussion of elocutionary commitments among Black Americans, I especially appreciate the following essay: Akasha (Gloria) Hull, "Introduction," in Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer* (New York: G.K. Hall, Co., 1996), xv-xxxxv.

Among the many ways that elocution reformers helped change the tone and tenor of American society, this chapter brings into focus one of their most influential tactics: the strategic promotion of the health benefits derived from elocution training. This was most evident, I argue, through elocutionists' attention to widespread concerns about endemic respiratory illnesses and emergent nervous etiologies—concerns that were also bound up with cultural ideas about gender and race.[19] Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, symptoms like shallow breathing, dyspepsia, timidness, anxiety, and fatigue were commonly cited as physiological markers of gender or racial inferiority.

In this context, elocutionists' focus on breathing and relaxation exercises represented a purposeful effort to undermine one of the most pernicious barriers to equitable citizenship: the entrenched belief that these seemingly "inferior" capabilities were actually "immutable" features of one's "nature." Not only did elocution reformers seek to expose the philosophical flaws of racist and sexist logics, but they also confronted and addressed the embodied consequences of such beliefs. It was, in essence, work that pursued social change at the pace of steady inhales and exhales. To be certain, the creation of more equitable opportunities for self-expression remained

---

[19] A robust scholarship on tuberculosis and nervousness explains the gender and racial dynamics that defined the social experiences and perspectives about these illnesses. On tuberculosis, see, Sheila M. Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1998), 187-218. On cultural dynamics of nervous disease, see Charles E. Rosenberg, "Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century Medicine: Some Clinical Origins of the Neurosis Construct," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 63 (1989): 185-197. David G. Schuster, *Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011); *Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American Medical Community, 1870-1910* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Anti-modernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1999); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 3 (Sept., 1973): 332-356; Barbara Sicherman, "The Uses of a Diagnosis: Doctors, Patients, and Neurasthenia," *Journal of the History of Medicine* (January 1977): 33-54; Anne Douglas Wood, "The Fashionable Diseases': Women's Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 1 (Summer, 1973): 25-52.

complex, contested, and wholly incomplete. But encouraging steps in that direction were put in motion during the 1870s, as growing numbers of "liberally educated men and women" created spaces for more Americans to breathe deeply, relax tense muscles, and share their voice.

Breathing Power

"The lungs should be trained to free, full, and vigorous action.
They are, so to speak, the very springs of vitality."

—Lewis B. Monroe, *Vocal and Physical Training,* 1869

Mary Adams Currier vividly remembered the day when she had first begun finding her voice. It happened in 1860, when, as a twenty-six-year-old teacher, she attended Lewis B. Monroe's class on "Respiratory and Vocal Training." Recalling this event some forty years later, Currier described a striking realization she and her colleagues made as they heard Monroe speak: "We knew we breathed and that we spoke, but of the relation of these two processes we were wholly ignorant." With hindsight, Currier understood why this discussion of respiration felt especially liberating for women like herself. As she explained, they were raised believing that there was little they could do to improve their vocal powers. "God had made us, and we were content to let nature work out her plan in our being." she observed. "If we had the power to stir others with our voices, that power was God-given, and we rejoiced. If we were weak in vocal expression, we accepted this condition, or only made it worse by unwise effort and tension."[20] In Currier's view, this instruction about the physiological basis of "unwise tension and effort" was a life-changing event that helped her recognize two vital things. First, that "talent" was less

[20] All quotes in this paragraph are from Mary Adams Currier, "The Past and Future of Elocution," *Proceedings of the Second Annual National Association of Elocutionists* (Chicago: Published by the Association, 1893), 127-128. A New England teacher's institute sponsored Monroe's 1860 course.

providential than she had assumed; and second, that social customs had not equally affirmed and strengthened all voices. In other words, this breathing lesson became a space for questioning—and even rejecting—inherited conceptions about "natural" womanhood.

For Currier and countless other women, claiming the right to breathe fully and freely would often signify a subtle, but profound, act of defiance. To better illuminate these personal meanings of elocution reform, this chapter highlights the experiences of two women who studied and implemented the techniques Lewis B. Monroe and Boston University helped legitimize: Mary Adams Currier (1833-1912) and Hallie Q. Brown (1849-1949). Though each woman worked in different social circles, their careers are representative of the influential role elocution teachers played in white and Black communities.

Like many white women in this period, Mary Adams Currier was a farmer's daughter who became the first woman in her family to work outside the home. She began teaching in New Hampshire common schools in the late 1850s, and her elocution training with Lewis B. Monroe from 1860 until his death in 1879 was pivotal to advancing her career. In 1870, she became the first elocution specialist at Bridgewater Normal School, one of Massachusetts's prominent centers for education reform (see figure 4). At age forty, she was also one of the students in his inaugural class at Boston University School of Oratory. By 1875, she was Professor of Elocution at the newly-opened Wellesley College, a position she held until her retirement in 1896.[21] During these years, she also helped organize elocution's professional associations, and offered valuable endorsements of innovative young teachers (such as the notable Genevieve Stebbins).[22] While

[21] Currier left her position at Wellesley for a brief period after she was married in 1876. She returned to Wellesley in 1881, a couple of years after she divorced.

[22] For example, Currier supported Genevieve Stebbins at a critical moment in her career. In the early 1890s, she began transforming her statue posing practice into interpretive dances. Several prominent elocution leaders roundly criticized Stebbins for promoting aesthetic activities that they believed posed a threat to white women's respectability. I discuss this more in chapter three.

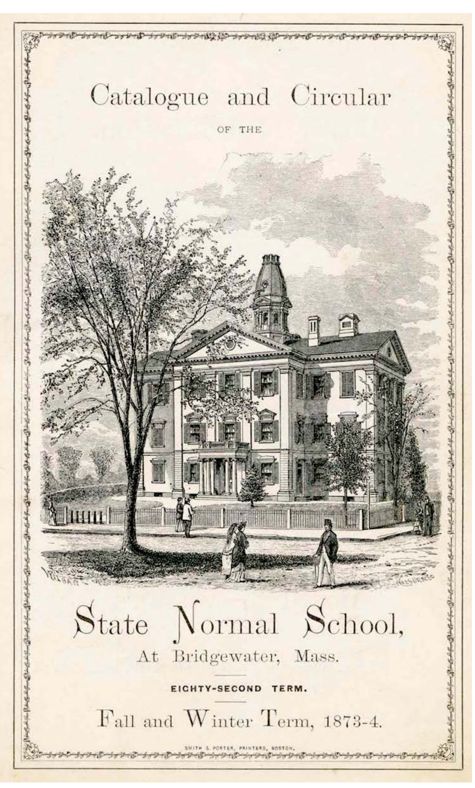


Figure 4 — Catalogue for Bridgewater State Normal School, 1873
Mary Adams Currier taught elocution at this school during the early 1870s.
Credit: The Clement C. Maxwell Library at Bridgewater State University

voice training was Currier's livelihood, it was also much more than a job. As her Wellesley colleague, Katherine Lee Bates (author of *America the Beautiful*) aptly put it, for Mary Adams Currier, "the development of the human voice was life."[23] It was a perceptive statement that conveyed Currier's deep understanding about the relationship between vocal power and vitality itself. This was especially true for the women Currier taught and supported—a generation that increasingly rejected what they experienced as the suffocating limitations of "true womanhood."[24]

[23] Katharine Lee Bates, "Mary Adams Currier and the Currier-Monroe Fund," *The Wellesley College News* 21, no. 1 (October 1912), 13.

[24] Patricia A. Palmieri, "Here was Fellowship: A Social Portrait of Academic Women at Wellesley College, 1895-1920," in *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching,* ed. Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 233-257.

Figure 5 — Hallie Q. Brown, c. 1889
Credit: *Proceedings Quarto-Centenary Conference of the African M.E. Church of South Carolina*, ed. Benjamin W. Arnett (Xenia, Ohio: Aldine Printing House, 1889).

Hallie Q. Brown also embraced elocution as a practice of liberation. She began her study of Monroe's curriculum during the late 1870s in Dayton, Ohio when she enrolled in a class taught by a student of Boston University School of Oratory. The daughter of parents who were born enslaved, Hallie Q. Brown became a well-known Black elocutionists (see figure 5). Her voice rang out for audiences at Black churches, esteemed universities, and humble country schools; she delivered speeches alongside Frederick Douglas, and recited poetry for the Queen of England.[25]

While these accomplishments increased Brown's personal fame, her elocutionary performances had a deliberate social purpose: she primarily recited prose to raise funds for the

[25] On Hallie Q. Brown's impressive career, see Susan Kates, "The Embodied Rhetoric of Hallie Quinn Brown," *College English* 59, no. 1 (1997): 59-71; Annjennette Sophie McFarlin, "Hallie Quinn Brown: Black Woman Elocutionist, 1845-1949" (PhD diss., Washington State University, 1975); Daleah H. Goodwin, "A Torch in the Valley": The Life and Work of Miss Hallie Quinn Brown" (PhD diss., The University of Georgia, 2014).

education of Black Americans. During the 1880s, her speaking tours built new buildings for Black colleges, including a library and two women's dormitories. In 1895, she became Professor of Elocution at her alma mater, Wilberforce University, a position she held until her retirement in the 1920s. Throughout this time, she also taught special elocution classes at Black normal schools across the country and helped found and lead the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. In all of these positions, Brown made it her life's work to affirm and amplify Black women's voices.

In what follows, I chronicle the early development of the pedagogy that women like Mary Adams Currier and Hallie Q. Brown practiced and promoted. As this pedagogical context makes clear, these methods for "easing unwise effort and tension" were very much part of an activist curriculum—one informed by the world view of abolitionism, women's rights, and secularism. This curriculum also strategically situated breath itself as a powerful resource for personal health and social change. Indeed, as evidenced through the experiences of Currier and Brown, the choice to center elocution's respiratory benefits offered powerful interventions for undermining restrictive customs and beliefs, from corseted fashions to racist and sexist ideologies of inferiority.

The leverage elocution reformers gained by aiding respiratory health derived much of its strength from the ways in which vocal power was inextricably entangled with the era's leading cause of death: consumption. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, this dreaded illness had an enormous impact on numerous aspects of daily life.[26] In New England, an entire culture developed around zealously monitoring one's health for troubling symptoms. A prolonged

---

[26] This was true both before and after the bacterial cause of tuberculosis was discovered in the 1880s, though, as Sheila Rothman and other scholars have documented, the cultural response experience of the disease would change drastically as diagnostic abilities changed.

cough, shortness of breath, a rapid pulse, a sunken chest, or a loss of appetite were all causes for alarm. Such conditions could, and often did, derail most personal and professional ambitions. If a student became frail or anemic during his or her academic pursuits, his or her studies often ended. White male sufferers of both modest and substantial means often received doctor's orders for sea voyages to Europe or journeys to warmer climates in southern and western states. Middle-and upper-class white women with "consumptive constitutions" were often relegated to invalid lives at home, a response that reflected and reinforced gendered assumptions about women's "natural" frailty and often foreclosed women's marital prospects.[27] For Black Americans, respiratory ill health was especially fraught with problematic implications. In the aftermath of emancipation, leading physicians claimed that high incidents of consumption in Black communities was evidence of racial inferiority and proof that Black men and women were "constitutionally unfit" for the privileges of citizenship.[28]

In light of such widespread surveillance and prejudice related to respiratory function, breathing power was clearly a poignant determinant of personal wellbeing and social opportunity. In this context, elocution lessons proved an especially reliable life-line for sustaining the careers of the growing numbers of women who became teachers in the postbellum era. For example, Mary Adams Currier cited the experience of a colleague whose flagging vitality left her with no choice but to leave her teaching position and, in her words, "go out and die with consumption."[29] After studying elocution with Lewis B. Monroe, and practicing his

---

[27]

[28] On race, tuberculosis, and respiratory health, see Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom,* 187-218; Lundy Braun, *Breathing Race into the Machine: The Surprising Career of the Spirometer from Plantation to Genetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); John Hoberman, *Black and Blue: The Origins and Consequences of Medical Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[29] Currier, "The Past and Future of Elocution," 130. The woman Currier mentioned was Caroline B. LeRow, an elocution teacher in Brooklyn, New York and the author of many educational texts.

recommended "regime of respiratory and vocal techniques," she gained hope for a different future. As Currier noted, her colleague's "new lease on life" was more than a personal victory, it was also a benefit to her community. By recovering her health through strengthening her voice, she was able to help others do the same. According to Currier, she went on to become one of the most, "honored teachers of elocution in one of the largest high schools of the country."[30]

Hallie Q. Brown also experienced her own lease on life after beginning elocution classes. Following her graduation in 1868 from Wilberforce University, Brown had answered the urgent post-war call for establishing educational opportunities in a new era of freedom for Black Americans. After five years of teaching in Mississippi, South Carolina, and Ohio, often in the face of violent threats to her life and those of her students, Brown's health had declined and she felt it necessary to leave the classroom.[31] As would be the case for many teachers in this era, the breathing exercises of her elocution lessons bolstered her vocal vitality and thus her physical ability to continue her career. Years later, when she published her own manual *Elocution and Physical Culture*, Brown articulated the foundational importance of breath work. "No student in elocution can make substantial progress [without giving] special attention to the exercises in breathing," she wrote, then poignantly declared: "It is certain that breath is life, breath is speech. It is the chief source of power."[32]

---

[30] Ibid.

[31] On Hallie Q. Brown's career, see Annjennette Sophie McFarlin, "Hallie Quinn Brown—Black Woman Elocutionist: 1845(?)-1949," (PhD diss., Washington State University, 1975); Daleah H. Goodwin, "A Torch in the Valley": The Life and Work of Miss Hallie Quinn Brown," (PhD diss., The University of Georgia, 2014); Susan Kates, *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education, 1885-1937* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001).

[32] Hallie Q. Brown, *Elocution and Physical Culture*: *Training for Students, Teachers, Readers, and Public Speakers.* (Wilberforce, Ohio: Homewood Cottage, c. 1900-1910), 14.

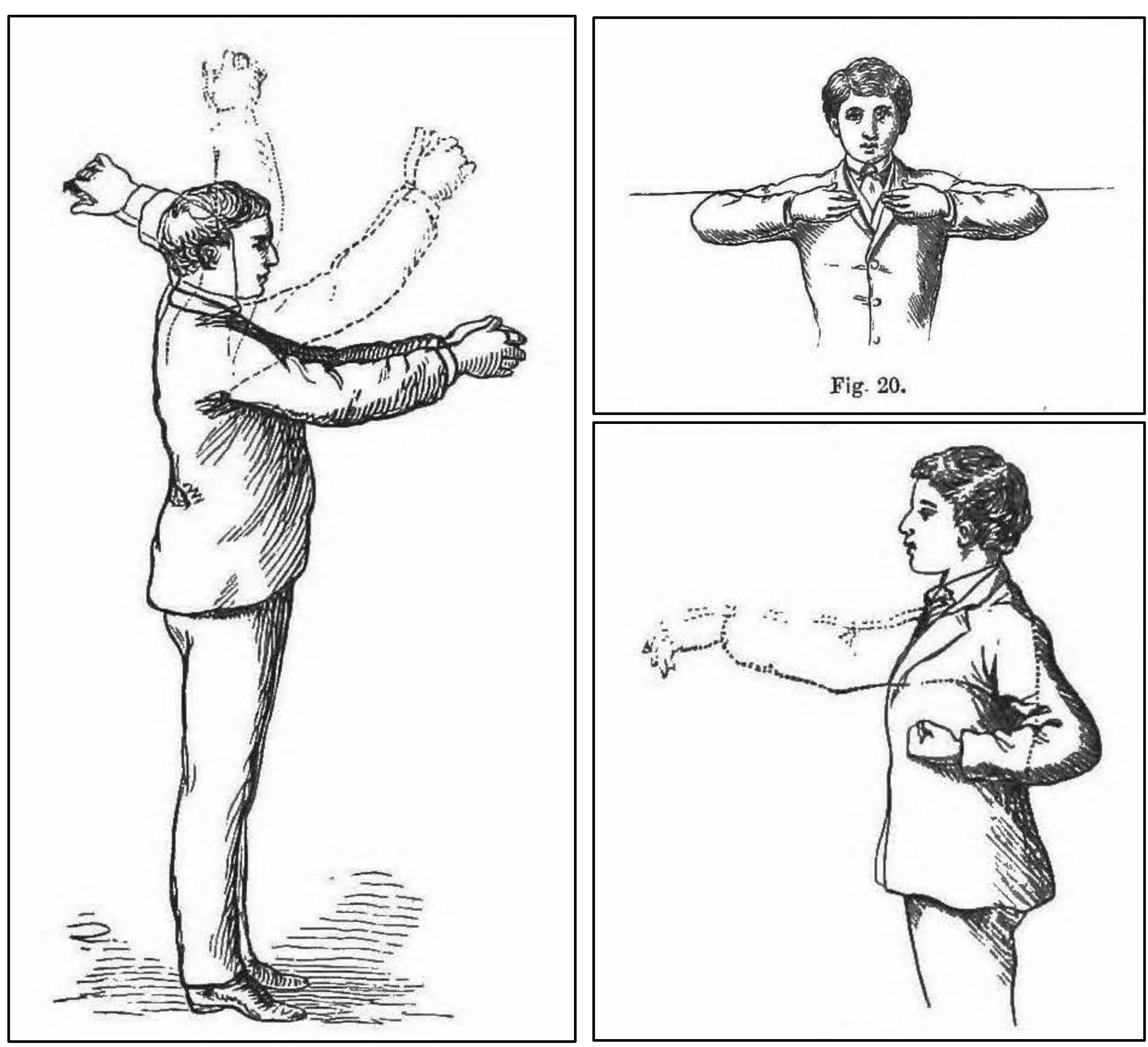


Figure 6 — Illustrations of Breathing Exercises from Lewis B. Monroe's 1869 Manual, 1869
Credit: Lewis B. Monroe, *Manual of Physical and Vocal Training* (Philadelphia: Cowperthwait & Co., 1869).

For something that could so profoundly benefit personal health and social opportunities, the breathing exercises that women like Mary Adams Currier and Hallie Q. Brown relied upon were actually quite simple. Because both women studied the exercises espoused by Lewis B. Monroe, his 1869 *Manual of Physical and Vocal Training* offers a good sense of what they

would have experienced (see figure 6). Accordingly, a typical session of breathing lessons would have begun with the following exercise:[33]

> *Deep breathing*
> Position. Arms akimbo [hands on hips]
> *First:* Inhale a deep breath slowly and tranquilly through the nostrils, taking care not to raise the shoulders.
> *Second.* Give out the breath tranquilly through the nostrils, holding the chest expanded with easy firmness.[34]

In addition to this deep breathing, Brown and Currier would have also practiced "abdominal breathing," a technique that focused on enlivening the organs of the lower belly; "Costal breathing," which brought attention to the lower chest; and "Dorsal breathing," an exercise that directed the breath and one's "will" to his or her low spine.[35] They also practiced more forceful breathing at a quicker pace. For example:

> *Seizing the Breath*
> *First.* Inhale through the nostrils.
> *Second.* Hold the breath a moment with a slight effort similar to that made in lifting a heavy weight. The muscles of the waist and abdomen will be firm and elastic like a drum-head.
> *Third*. Give out the breath as you please.
>
> *Expulsive Breathing*
> *First.* Inhale through the nostrils.
> *Second.* Expel through the mouth as if whispering the syllable *Hoo*! to a person at a distance.
> *Third.* Give out the breath in a firm and full column.
>
> *Abrupt Breathing*
> *First*. Catch the breath quickly through the nostrils.
> *Second.* Emit the breath with a sudden brief whisper—*Hoo!*[36]

---

[33] It is important to note a unique challenge involved with interpreting exercise instructions in elocution instruction manuals. Namely, authorship is not an equivalent to originality. The manuals functioned for purposes of being used for instruction in schools, clubs, and homes. It was not necessarily a priority for authors to list all the sources they had consulted, but to instead provide a tool that established their credibility as a teacher. It was not uncommon for phrases and instructions to be lifted verbatim from other texts and used without citation.

[34] Lewis B. Monroe, *Manual of Physical and Vocal Training* (Philadelphia: Cowperthwait & Co., 1869), 24.

[35] Ibid, 24-25.

[36] Ibid, 26.

Because these exercises strengthened the vocal organs, they were a logical fit for elocution curricula. But these exercises also purposefully addressed the most prevalent warning signs associated with consumptive illness: shortness of breath, a sunken or immobile chest, and a torpid constitution. Several other exercises also targeted these conditions. One practice called for taking a deep inhale, holding the breath, and then tapping on the chest in "rapid percussive blows." Other exercises called for elevating the chest in a "position of dignity and self-reliance," and then circling the shoulders and elbows in sync with slow, steady inhalations and exhalations.[37]

While these breathing exercises were indeed simple and arguably quite accessible, it was a far more complex endeavor to create and sustain the physical spaces and cultural ideals that prioritized and legitimized such activities. Indeed, the breathing curriculum that Lewis B. Monroe published in 1869 had been many decades in the making. Thus, to understand how these breathing exercises were made available to women like Mary Adams Currier and Hallie Q. Brown, it is instructive to look closer at the cultural contexts in which Lewis B. Monroe first began his investigations of breath and health—namely, the context of mid-1800s transatlantic health reforms, a time that profoundly altered what many Americans understood about their mind, their bodies, and their voices.[38]

Like many others who pursued antebellum health reforms, Lewis B. Monroe's introduction to breathing exercises began after he experienced a personal health crisis. The year was 1851, and at the time, Monroe was a twenty-six-year-old teacher in North Cambridge,

---

[37] Ibid, 9.

[38] Scholarship on water cures is particularly illuminating for understanding the transatlantic health reform and the therapeutic optimism nineteenth century Americans had for hygienic medicine, See Jane B. Donegan, *Hydropathic Highway to Health: Women and Water-Cure in Antebellum America.* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986). Susan E. Cayleff, *Wash and Be Healed: The Water-Cure Movement and Women's Health. Philadelphia.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

Massachusetts. As the son of a mechanic, Monroe was the first in his family to pursue a career in education—an opportunity made possible by New England's recent expansion of publicly funded common schools.[39] His talents seemed well-suited to the tasks at hand, and he had developed a local reputation as an endearing educator and a regal reader at parlor entertainments. But these professional and social activities took a toll on his body, and, as one biographer put it, his "constitution could no longer endure such a strain."[40] Monroe lost his voice, his chest sunk, and he became emaciated. As hallmark signs of onset consumption, these symptoms made Lewis B. Monroe step away from his teaching career in order to recover his health. Like others of his social standing, he followed a common prescription by traveling to warmer climates. After a rest in New Orleans, he sailed to Europe.

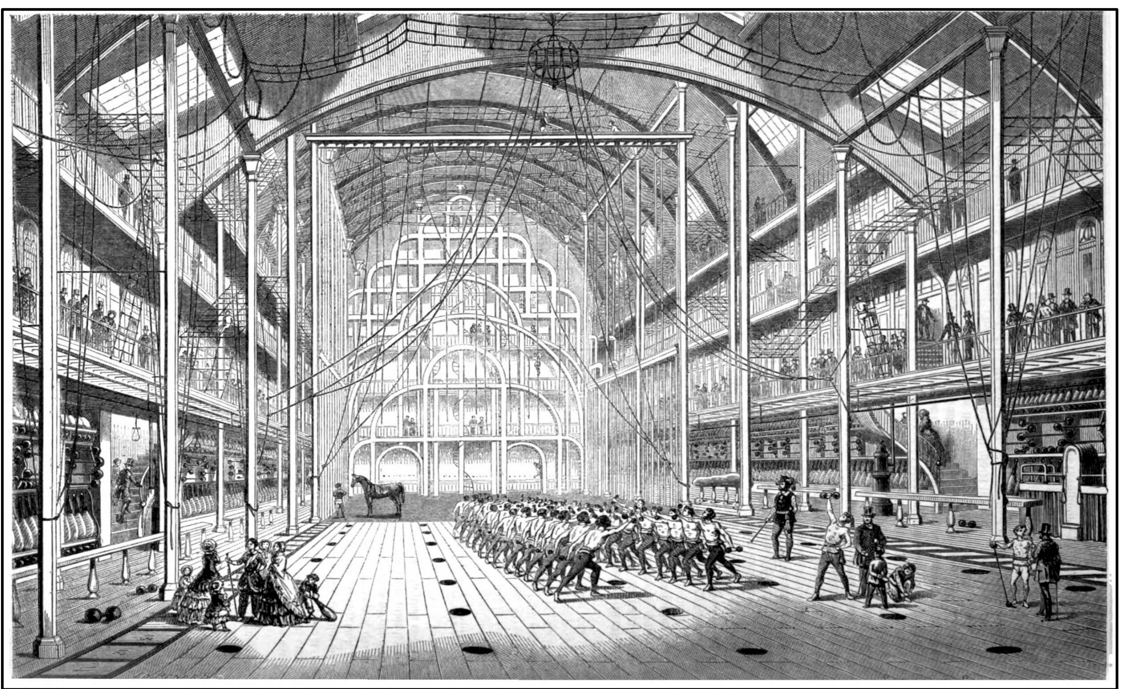


Figure 7 — Triat Gymnasium in Paris, France, 1856
Credit: "La Gymnastique Ancienne et Moderne: Le Gymnase Triat," *Les Musée des Familles*, 23 (May 1856): 249.

---

[39] On the development of common schools, see Johann N. Nheem, *Democracy's Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

[40] "Lewis Baxter Monroe," *Werner's Directory*, 255.

In Paris, Lewis B. Monroe found something that proved more salubrious than the sunshine: he became a student at a recently opened gymnasium.[41] In the 1850s, such facilities did not yet exist in New England, but that would soon change as American travelers took up European exercise routines and returned home with renewed vigor. Monroe was among them. At the Paris gymnasium, his regimen improved the tone of his muscles and led him to believe that specialized exercises might also help his voice (see figure 7). Back in New England, Monroe's interests in vocal anatomy and physical exercise were supported by a new generation of physicians and educators who popularized the health benefits of purposeful exercise. Throughout the 1850s, they built gymnasiums in cities like Boston and New York, conducted classes in medical gymnastics at water-cure sanatoriums throughout New England, and published many manuals for use in homes and schools.[42] These sources provided young Lewis B. Monroe with ample options for exploring how he could strengthen his voice with exercises for his lungs, throat, and chest.[43]

As Monroe practiced vocal exercises in the 1850s, he also became immersed in the broader social reforms that were modifying what truths Americans accepted about their corporeal nature. Throughout New England, Calvinist traditions among white Americans had long defined the body's vitality as an attribute of divine providence and experiences of suffering as tests of

---

[41] Monroe credited the Triat Gymnasium in Paris for awakening his interest in physical exercise. See, "Lewis Baxter Monroe," in *Werner's Directory*, 255. As historian Sun-Youn Park notes, this gymnasium was representative of a transatlantic movement to cultivate social regeneration in urban spaces. See, Sun-Young Park. *Ideals of the Body: Architecture, Urbanism, and Hygiene in Postrevolutionary Paris* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 281-282.

[42] Dr. George Taylor was among the most prominent of these movement-cure physicians, and he drew upon the medical research of Pehr Henrik Ling. On these developments, see Anders Ottosson, "The First Historical Movements of Kinesiology: Scientification in the Borderline between Physical Culture and Medicine around 1850," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no.11 (2010): 1899–1919.

[43] Many of the exercises he later included in his own manual were also prescribed in callisthenic manuals by antebellum authors, including Catherine Beecher and other leading advocates for women's health and education. including Catherine Beecher, Dio Lewis, Dr. George Taylor, and Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell.

piety. For many of the era's activists, hygienic laws of health offered appealing paths to different definitions of personal salvation.[44] While many continued believing in the power of prayer, reformers also promoted secular understandings of the body and the restorative properties of exercise, diet, and cleanliness. Among the vocal proponents of such physiological reforms was William Lloyd Garrison— a prominent abolitionist who would later champion Lewis B. Monroe's work at Boston University. In 1848, under the title, "Religion and Health," Garrison declared, "An impaired constitution is neither the condition nor the product of humility; bad digestion or spinal weakness is not promotive of repentance of sin." In his critique of Calvinism, Garrison urged Americans to recognize the flaw of appealing to "Christian graces" as the sole means of alleviating physical ailments. Such thinking was, in his words, "bad theology and worse logic."[45]

Disrupting these religious reasonings about physical and emotional ailments had wider cultural implications. In the antebellum era, social reformers in both white and free Black communities embraced physiology and hygiene as stabilizing pursuits in a world transformed by the opportunities and anxieties of industrialization, urbanization, and the constitutive formation of the middle class. According to historian Michael Sappol, physiological laws of health provided radical reformers with a "discursive vocabulary" that affirmed the universality of

---

[44] This emphasis on hygienic health was, of course, not new but a continuation of humoral views of health and illness**,** which largely promoted a psychosomatic therapeutic ethos. For a valuable discussion of how these views changed during the nineteenth century see, Charles E. Rosenberg, "Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century Medicine: Some Clinical Origins of the Neurosis Construct," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 63 (1989): 185-197. On nineteenth century conceptions of health and physical education, see Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change;* James Whorton, *Crusaders of Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

[45] William Lloyd Garrison, "Religion and Health," *The Liberator*, November 17, 1848. Garrison wrote the article after meeting a young woman during his stay at the Northampton Water Cure in western Massachusetts. She had endured many years confined to her bed. After visiting with Garrison, she asked him to write a message in an album she kept with advice and thoughts. As he did so, he read a letter she had enclosed from her Calvinist minister. So strong was his disagreement with the minister's outlook, that Garrison not only wrote a rebuttal in the woman's book but he also published it in his newspaper, *The Liberator*.

humanity in ways that dispelled racialized and gendered prejudices. Among those who were interested in more tempered social changes, hygienic practices held great appeal as a mechanism for, "producing morally ordered, physiologically self-governed individuals and thus a morally ordered, physiologically self-governing society."[46]

This logic of health reform—and its growing appeal among a demographic of influential New Englanders—provided Lewis B. Monroe with a useful foundation for launching a new phase of his career.[47] In 1857, he began sharing his approach to vocal health at teacher's institutes throughout the region.[48] These public appearances paid off. By 1861, he had garnered enough demand for his elocution classes to warrant the opening of a private school in Boston, a place he aptly called "A Vocal Gymnasium."[49] When a local educational journal announced the school's opening, it included an encouraging endorsement: "Scores of teachers in this vicinity have profited by his instruction, and we have no doubt many others will avail themselves of the opportunity now offered to them."[50] Mary Adams Currier was among them. Recalling these lessons some years later, Currier noted that it was not uncommon for women to arrive in Monroe's classes barely able to speak above a whisper, and, after only a few sessions, be able to shout out loud. In Currier's view, the "hygienic value" of these classes was especially

---

[46] Michael Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 6.

[47] It was during this time that Monroe also met his future wife, Adeline Frances Osgood, a music teacher who was involved with the school and later took over publication of Monroe's popular readers. She was also the daughter of a wealthy auctioneer in Boston, John F. Osgood. According to available census records, it seems clear that he married up. In the 1860 census, John F. Osgood listed $45,000 in real estate and $65,000 in personal estate. This may help explain why Monroe was in a position to fund most of the operations of the Boston University School of Oratory, including offering monetary support to Alexander Graham Bell's telephone experiments.

[48] "Lewis Baxter Monroe," *Werner's Directory*, 255-256.

[49] Advertisement for Monroe's Vocal Gymnasium, *The Massachusetts Teacher* 14, no. 1 (January 1861), 43.

[50] Announcements, *The Massachusetts Teacher* 14, no. 10 (October 1861), 400.

transformative for women. "The teachers entered [the classes] with enthusiasm," Currier recalled. In her words, their voice lessons felt like "a revolution."[51]

Monroe's career also benefited from postbellum state-funded efforts to improve the health of the nation's citizens. Though ideas about physical fitness would change significantly in future years (a development I explore in chapter three), elocutionists' understanding about respiratory health made their expertise highly valued.[52] In this context, Monroe's reputation and experience made him an appealing candidate for directing curricular decisions in public schools. In 1866, he became Boston's first Superintendent of Physical and Vocal Culture. In his new role, Monroe led strategic efforts for standardizing and implementing exercise programs. In addition to promoting his curriculum of vocal exercises, he also endorsed the callisthenic routines of Dio Lewis, a leading proponent of physical exercise and an ardent advocate of temperance and women's rights.[53] To support all of these efforts, Monroe also organized special classes that trained female teachers to become specialists in pedagogies of elocution and physical culture. The noticeable success of these programs inspired other school systems to follow suit, and administrators in New Jersey and Pennsylvania were among those who publicized their implementation of Monroe's programs.[54]

---

[51] Currier, "The Past and Future of Elocution," 127.

[52] For example, see the following passage *The Annual Report of the School Committee of the City of Chelsea* for 1863 (Chelsea: Printed for the Committee, 1864): "[Students] have but few opportunities to exercise, compared with the sons and daughters of farmers. . . Educators are everywhere calling attention to the subject. In our own community we have gone so far as this in recognizing physical circumstances as influences which have very much to do in giving tone to the mind and the feelings. . . The child must have exercises—and it must be appropriate . . . Because the Committee believed that excellence in all branches, and especially in reading, depends very much upon the bodily condition, they invited their associate, who has made a specialty of this department of training, to meet with our teachers. . . [they voted that Lewis B. Monroe, Esq. be requested to impart to the teachers in our public schools] "such instruction in physical and vocal culture as he may have opportunity."

[53] Martha Verbrugge frequently discusses Dio Lewis's influence on health reform. See Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood.*

[54] "Book Notices," *Pennsylvania School Journal* 18 (July 1869): 5.

The success of Monroe's curriculum also owed a good deal to the many women whose improved respiratory health made them enthusiastic practitioners and effective promoters of these techniques. In 1868, Mary Adams Currier experienced this firsthand when she accepted an opportunity to teach at the St. Louis Normal School—where her friend, Anna C. Bracket (1836-1911) was the principal. After witnessing teachers-in-training benefit from Currier's lessons in "chest-expansion and deep breathing," Bracket brought this curriculum to the attention of the district's Assistant Superintendent, William T. Harris.[55] At the time, Bracket and Harris were rising-stars in postbellum educational reform, and they were particularly interested in promoting curricula that affirmed women's capabilities. Seeing an opportunity to strengthen women's voices, William T. Harris arranged a meeting between Currier and the Board of Education.

Expecting that some members were skeptical about progressive programming, Harris specifically instructed Currier to emphasize the hygienic benefits of elocution training.[56] It was a telling move, and one that reflected the advantages derived from featuring respiratory health as a method for securing support from hesitant decision makers. It was also a successful strategy, and one that other educators would employ. For example, in 1874, Julia Thomas, a young public school teacher who went on to become a well-known instructor of psycho-physical culture, won approval from educators in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Vermont by arguing that vocal training for male *and* female students would not only help them convey their best thoughts, but would also help prevent consumption. This result alone, she argued, made elocution "one of the most useful and healthy of school-room exercises."[57]

---

[55] Currier, "The Past and Future of Elocution," 132. On Harris and education reform, see Kenneth Zimmerman, "William Torrey Harris: Forgotten Man in American Education," *Journal of Thought* 20, no. 2 (1985): 76–89.

[56] Currier, "The Past and Future of Elocution," 132.

[57] "Vermont State Teachers Association," *The Rutland Daily Globe,* January 19, 1874. At this point in her career, Julia Thomas had been teaching in New York common schools for fifteen years. Her advocate for elocution classes was based on a belief that girls as well as boys needed practical lessons in how to best convey their thoughts. By the

For Mary Adams Currier, teaching breathing exercises in St. Louis was a pivotal and empowering experience. In 1870, she returned to Boston with greater assurances about her own capabilities as an instructor. In her words, she knew that, "her work in the future lay along this line of teaching."[58] Her ambitions were soon met, for in short order, she became the first ever elocution specialist hired in Massachusetts' normal schools. Thus, just over ten years after she took her first class with Lewis B. Monroe, Mary Adams Currier was inviting others to experience their own elocution revolutions.

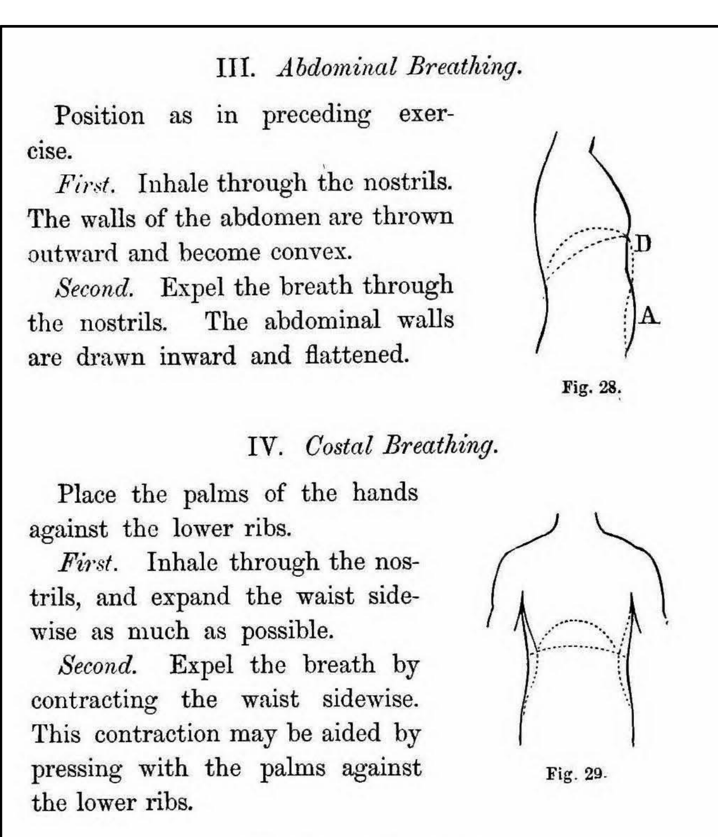
In light of these successes during the 1860s, it made complete sense that Lewis B. Monroe continued emphasizing breathing exercises when he opened Boston University School of Oratory in 1873. Such a focus had repeatedly benefited the multi-faceted project of strengthening individual voices in ways that also challenged restrictive cultural beliefs. To help achieve these goals, the university's curricula continued prioritizing exercises and discourses that dispelled prejudices bound up with respiratory health. For example, medical opinion frequently cited women's "smaller lungs" as evidence of their "natural" frailty. Lewis B. Monroe's curriculum harbored no such views. Instead, women and men learned that their breathing power was not determined by sex or race, but was instead a "muscular operation" that could be improved through repeated exercise routines.[59] Even when he drew attention to the female body, Monroe's anatomical discussions made no claims about any supposed gendered or racialized differences of internal organs (see 8). For example, next to line drawings of a female torso, Monroe printed the following description: "It will be understood that, in all modes of breathing,

---

1880s, Julia Thomas and her sister Annie were some of the best-known proponents of psycho-physical culture. They were also leading members of Sorosis. For discussion of their work, see Joseph Fahey, "Quiet Victory: The Professional Identity American Women Forged Through Delsartism," in *Essays on François Delsarte* (Claremont, California: Pomona College Theatre Department for the Claremont Colleges, 2005), 43-84.

[58] Currier, "The Past and Future of Elocution," 132.

[59] Monroe, *Manual of Physical and Vocal Training*, 6.



III. *Abdominal Breathing.*

Position as in preceding exercise.

First. Inhale through the nostrils. The walls of the abdomen are thrown outward and become convex.

Second. Expel the breath through the nostrils. The abdominal walls are drawn inward and flattened.

D
A
Fig. 28.

IV. *Costal Breathing.*

Place the palms of the hands against the lower ribs.

First. Inhale through the nostrils, and expand the waist sidewise as much as possible.

Second. Expel the breath by contracting the waist sidewise. This contraction may be aided by pressing with the palms against the lower ribs.

Fig. 29.

Figure 8 — Drawing of Diaphragm from Lewis B. Monroe's 1869 Manual
Credit: Lewis B. Monroe, *Manual of Physical and Vocal Training* (Philadelphia: Cowperthwait & Co., 1869), 25.

the diaphragm . . . performs an important part. It is drawn downward and flattened in inspiration and curves upward in expiration of the breath."[60]

Drawing attention to the anatomy of breath also helped elocution teachers address one of the more pernicious threats to many women's vocal stamina: the tight-fitting feminine fashions of corsets and crinoline that had long conveyed "true womanhood." By its very design, such clothing reinforced demure domesticity through fabricated restrictions of women's bodies. Because such clothing was a highly visible marker for reinforcing elite gender norms, creating social acceptance for more liberating women's fashions was a decades-long struggle.[61]

---

[60] Ibid, 27.

[61] Carol Mattingly, *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002).

By the 1870s, after nearly twenty years of trying to make women's trousers acceptable in bourgeois society, well-known activists like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had stopped wearing the "Bloomer costume" in order to deflect accusations that women reformers were necessarily "mannish." Even as such leaders stepped back into dresses, they remained committed to popularizing "hygienic" clothing that provided women with more room to breathe and move. That meant getting rid of tight-laced corsets, loosening up waistbands, lightening the weight of long skirts, and repatterning constrictive bodices that prevented easy movement of the torso and arms.

In support of these enduring dress reform efforts, elocution teachers were often cited for their valuable observations and expertise. In her 1873 text, *What to Wear,* Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, one of the era's best-known novelists and proponents of women's rights, quoted at length the observations of a professor of elocution who taught both men and women, a person who very well could have been Lewis B. Monroe:

> When I first gave lessons at the Young Ladies' Seminaries, I was greatly puzzled. Some of my exercises are callisthenic, and require active movements of the arms. To my surprise, the girls could not meet their hands above their heads; many of them could not raise them halfway to the required point. I was a young man, and did not know much about a lady's dress; and for some time the reasons for this did not occur to me. At length I bethought me, that their mode of dress was at fault. I have been obliged to discontinue entirely the use of those exercises in girls' schools, though I think them very important.[62]

Statements like these both reinforced elocutionary expertise and made the consequences of tight clothing clear: such fashions placed women at an unnecessary and unhealthy disadvantage.

---

[62] Quotes from Mattingly, *Appropriate[ing] Dress,* 135.

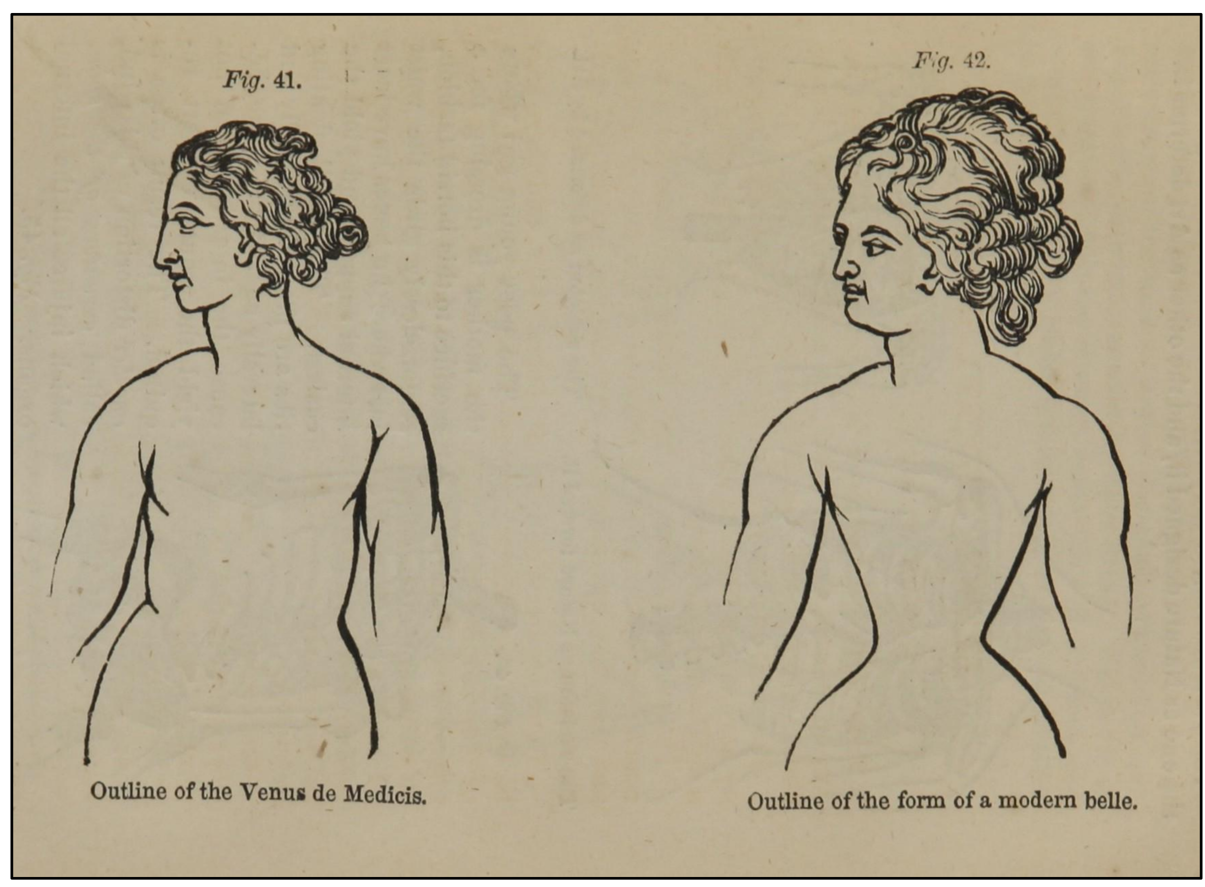


Figure 9 — Comparing Waists—the *Venus de Medici* vs. a Modern Belle, 1858
Credit: Catherine E. Beecher, *Physiology and Calisthenics for Families* (New York: Harper, 1858), 153.

As an institution committed to emboldening women's voices, Boston University School of Oratory made a point of speaking out for the physiological soundness of women's "hygienic" fashions. In his 1869 manual, Lewis B. Monroe denounced, "any form of dress . . . which constrains the base of the lungs and presses upon the stomach and intestines must do serious harm." Such clothing created what he described as," the most common fault in the use of the lungs," which was "the habit of breathing . . . from the surface, [and thus] not bringing sufficiently into play the costal and abdominal muscles."[63] Such admonitions dispelled "frailty" as a consequence of customs and not an immutable quality of women's "nature." Based on the

[63] Monroe, *Manual of Vocal and Physical Training,* 6.

laws of physiology alone, it was clear that by changing their dress, women's vitality was well within their reach.

To promote "hygienic" women's fashions, Monroe also adopted an established tactic in reform literature: he appealed to the revered aesthetics of ancient Greece.[64] It was "a strange inconsistency," he wrote, that "while we pay such tributes to [Grecian] excellence we ignore the means by which that excellence was attained! We praise and copy their statuary, but seem to forget that the models for these classical figures were furnished by their system of physical training."[65] He particularly called attention to the desirability of *Venus de Milo's* torso. Such a reference was no accident, as this statue was an enduring emblem for a "healthy" woman's form. Since the 1830s, Venus sketches had graced the pages of numerous health reform publications (see figures 9 and 10). By the 1870s, this statue had also become such a standard decoration in middle- and upper-class homes that one popular fashion guide simply referred to replicas of *Venus de Milo* as "the favorite cast"[66] (see figure 11).

---

[64] Since the 1850s, proponents of temperance and women's rights had strongly advocated for an end to corsets by framing the issue as a matter of women's health. Monroe's 1869 elocution manual included several of the same breathing exercises that had appeared in these earlier manuals by movement-cure proponents and social reformers.

[65] Monroe, *Manual of Physical and Vocal Training*, 2.

[66] Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful: Essays on Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1878), 165. My knowledge of Clarence Cook's work derives from Rachel N. Klein, *Art Wars: The Politics of Taste in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

Figure 10 — Dress Reform References to *Venus,* 1874
Credit: Abba Goold Woolson, ed. *Dress-Reform: On Dress as it Affects the Health of Women*, (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874), Frontispiece.

Figure 11— *Venus*, "The Favorite Cast," in the House Beautiful, 1878
Credit: Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful: Essays on Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1878), 165.

Students at Boston University School of Oratory also heard about hygiene and fashion from female medical experts. Dr. Helen O'Leary was one such guest lecturer. She was a long-time advocate for women's health reform and a leader of the Boston Lady's Physiological Institute, an influential women's club. This group itself had a notable record of promoting the remedial benefits of vocal studies, a fact that was not surprising given the club's origins. It formed in the 1840s, after several women in Boston became enthusiastic followers of C.P. Bronson, a popular elocutionist who gave many well-attended lectures on anatomy.[67] To pursue a deeper study of his methods, the women began regular classes with Bronson and purchased

[67] Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood*, 213.

their own copy of one of his most intriguing pedagogical tools: a life-size paper-mâché manikin made in France. In the subsequent years, the "French manikin" had proven an effective provocateur for encouraging women's interest in health reform. When Dr. Helen O'Leary presented the manikin at Boston University, the pedagogical ploy worked yet again.

Dr. O'Leary's demonstration had a particularly memorable effect on Frances Stuart (1848-1899), a woman who later taught elocution in Cook County Normal School alongside her influential husband and education reformer, Francis Wayland Parker (1837-1902).[68] In 1877, when she enrolled in Monroe's program, Stuart (who preferred to go by Frank), was a twenty-nine-year-old divorcee with two young daughters (see figure 12). Arguably already amenable to breaking conventional expectations of white bourgeois femininity, she was nevertheless particularly moved by Dr. O'Leary's exposition of the manikin. Recalling this event years later, Frances Stuart narrated her experience using language that would become standard to such "anatomical awakenings." First, she described the internal assault rendered by tight clothing. As she put it, the manikin exposed the ways that her dress made her "floating-ribs press into [her] liver," and crowded her stomach away from "the roomy home its Creator had given it." Describing the consequences of such an arrangement, she noted that her heart and lungs could only "protest as best they could by shortened breath and rapid action." For Stuart, these anatomical consequences justified decisive action. "The idea of heart, lungs, stomach, and liver, all deranged at once, made me strong in my determination to restore these much-abused organs to their natural rights," she declared. What did she do? After hearing Dr. O'Leary, she "went

[68] Jack K. Campbell, "Colonel Parker's New Woman and the New Education," *McGill Journal of Education* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1975): 150-168.

Figure 12 — Frances Stuart Parker, 1878
Frances Stuart studied at Boston University School of Oratory from 1875 to 1878 then worked as an assistant instructor during the school's final year. She later married Francis Wayland Parker, a prominent educator reformer. Credit: Frances Stuart Parker, *Reminiscences and Letters* (Chicago, Privately Printed, 1907).

home and took off my corset" and then began what she described as a surprisingly difficult process of procuring fashionable "hygienic" clothing from local dressmakers.[69] This was a bold move. Indeed, for bourgeois women like Stuart, freeing their breath by choosing new clothes was

[69] Frances Stuart Parker, *Dress and How to Improve It* (Chicago: Chicago Legal News, 1897), 2-3.

one of most visible protests against “true womanhood.”[70] That elocution classes helped inspire such moves only reinforced their perceived value for larger efforts of social reform.

Boston University School of Oratory’s pedagogy also affirmed Black Americans’ rights to breathe fully, a position that diverged from prominent medical studies that linked respiratory ill-health with racial inferiority. Historian Lundy Braun argues, “The idea that lungs were key indicators of [Black American’s] biological deficiency permeated medical thinking throughout the nineteenth century.”[71] In her study of the spirometer, a mid-nineteenth century invention that measured “lung power,” Braun demonstrates that spirometric studies of Black Civil War veterans were especially fraught. Based on seemingly-objective measurements of inferior lung capacity, they claimed to secure “proof” of Black Americans inherent weakness and unfitness for citizenship.[72] Though notable medical authorities contested the racial bias of such conclusions—arguing that the studies erased corporeal consequences of slavery and systemic social inequalities—the data’s utility for legitimizing scientific racism had an enduring influence on a range of political and economic policies for decades to come.[73]

[70] On dress reform and gender ideals, see Amy Kesselman, “The ‘Freedom Suit’: Feminism and Dress Reform in the United States, 1848-1875,” *Gender and Society* 5, no. 4 (1991): 495–510; Catherine Mas, “She Wears the Pants: The Reform Dress as Technology in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Technology & Culture* 58, no. 1 (January 2017): 35–66.

[71] Lundy Braun, *Breathing Race into the Machine: The Surprising Career of the Spirometer from Plantation to Genetics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 41.

[72] Ibid, 38-41.

[73] For example, Braun describes that Charles Darwin cited the Civil War spirometric studies as proof of “natural” racial hierarchies in his 1871 *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex.* She also notes that well into the twentieth century, insurance companies used this data as justification for denying policies to Black Americans. See, Braun, *Breathing Race into the Machine,* 41-42.

Figure 13 — Hallie Q. Brown's *Bits and Odds for My Friends,* 1884
Brown published *Elocution and Physical Cultural* between 1900 and 1910. Before that, she promoted elocution culture with this 1884 collection of "recitations for schools, lyceum, and parlor entertainment.
Credit: Courtesy of the Ohio History Connection, Hallie Q. Brown Collection - NAM MSS 5

In this context, prioritizing elocution classes in Black communities not only helped improve collective skills of eloquence, these classes also helped undermine prejudicial views about Black Americans' breathing power and overall health. A compelling example of such work is apparent in Hallie Q. Brown's collaborations with Peter Robertson, a graduate of Boston University School of Oratory and a Scottish immigrant who played bugle for the U.S. Army

during the Civil War.[74] After studying with Lewis B. Monroe in 1878, Robertson moved to Dayton, Ohio, and began offering elocution classes for Black and white citizens. It was there where he met Hallie Q. Brown, who attended an evening course for the city's school teachers.[75] For Brown, Robertson's class provided a timely opportunity for herself and her students. In addition to implementing these methods in Dayton, she also helped Peter Robertson share these elocution methods at her alma mater, Wilberforce University.[76]

Though there are no extant records documenting Hallie Q. Brown's specific experiences in Robertson's classes, a comparison of their manuals can illuminate key aspects of these courses. Robertson published his manual in 1880, not long after Hallie Q. Brown began studying with him. She published her manual in the early 1900s, over twenty years after developing a career as a celebrated elocutionist and teacher of elocution in Black colleges, normal schools, and churches (see figure13). In addition to demonstrating the pedagogical links between Brown and Robertson, comparing their manuals also demonstrates the influence of Lewis B. Monroe's curriculum, as both texts include techniques and ideologies that Robertson gleaned from his experience at Boston University.[77] Because Hallie Q. Brown published long after she studied with Robertson, her manual also provides some indication of the methods and discourses she continually found most valuable.

---

[74] The 1880 census lists Peter J. Robertson as a Teacher of Elocution living in Dayton, Ohio. According to a record of "Soldier Grave Registrations," available through Ancestry.com, he was born in Scotland, enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1861 as a bugler, and completed his service in 1865. According to *Boston University Year Book*, Peter J. Robertson attended Boston University School of Oratory from 1877-1878.

[75] Hallie Q. Brown noted this moment in her unpublished biography, quoted in Daleah H. Goodwin, "A Torch in the Valley," 21.

[76] "Wilberforce," *The Indianapolis Leader*, December 25, 1880. The article notes that Hallie Q. Brown performed elocution entertainments at Wilberforce and that, "Prof. R. Robertson of Dayton, is our teacher in elocution." It is unclear how long Robertson taught elocution at Wilberforce.

[77] His manual largely reproduced what he had learned through his studies with Lewis B. Monroe. See Peter Robertson, *Robertson's Manual of Elocution and Philosophy of Expressio*n (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1880).

Not surprisingly, both Robertson's and Brown's manuals include the discussions of respiratory physiology and breathing exercises that were a central part of the curriculum at Boston University School of Oratory. For example, the following passage from Robertson's 1880 manual echoes Lewis B. Monroe's explanations of respiratory anatomy and the affirmative influence of exercise:

> The solid contents of the lungs is not less than 200 cubic inches—600,000,000 of air cells, capable of almost indefinite expansion, which may be secured by a variety of respiratory gymnastics. Correct, full, deep, energetic breathing, in which the diaphragm moves downward with freedom and power, the diaphragmatic, abdominal, costal, dorsal, and chest walls all thrown outward, expanded in all directions, lies at the very foundation of good, healthy voice.[78]

Hallie Q. Brown's elocution manual articulated these same sentiments, and her lessons imparted a similar celebration of anatomical inner powers. She taught students about the function of the thorax, the ribs, the abdominal cavity, the diaphragm, the tongue, the palate, the lips, the pharynx, and the larynx. "Each lung is enclosed in a double bag of smooth, membranous tissue called the pleura," she explained. To provide students with an empowering visualization of their respiratory organs, Brown added, "The bronchi divide and subdivide, spreading out like the roots of a tree, until at last they end in the minute air-cells of the lungs."[79] Brown also taught the breathing exercises that Robertson, Monroe, and many others had relied upon for sustaining vocal health, including deep breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, and expulsive breathing. While her classes made time for these exercises in more formal settings, Hallie Q. Brown also encouraged students to incorporate breathing practices into the rhythms of their daily life. For

---

[78] Robertson, *Robertson's Manual*, 14; Monroe, *Manual of Physical and Vocal Training*, 6-7.
[79] Brown, *Elocution and Physical Culture*, 13.

example, in her manual, she praised the "excellent exercise" of practicing "tranquil breathing while walking."[80]

This quotidian encouragement for easeful inhales and exhales represented one of the subtle yet profound benefits of elocutionary reforms in Reconstruction Era schools. For, at a time when respiratory capabilities signified so much about one's fitness for citizenship, it was no small matter that educators like Hallie Q. Brown and Mary Adams Currier made it their job to affirm and strengthen their students' rights to breathe freely and fully.

Calming Nerves

"Raise the arm from the shoulder,
float the hand like a feather fastened to a rod.
Turn the hand over, palm upward as the arm descends.
Free the wrists. Free the fingers."

—Peter Robertson, *Robertson's Manual of Elocution*, 1880
—Hallie Q. Brown, *Elocution and Physical Culture*, c. 1901

When Hallie Q. Brown studied elocution with Peter Robertson in the late 1870s, she learned more than just the breathing exercises that Lewis B. Monroe had been teaching for nearly twenty years. She also learned exercises for easing nervousness and cultivating poise—exercises that largely addressed matters of body language, the inaudible dynamics of voice. Known by many names, including "Harmonic Gymnastics" and "Delsarte," these were fairly recent additions to Lewis B. Monroe's recommended curriculum. The methods were so new in fact, that they had yet to be published in any elocution texts.[81] That would soon change, in large part

[80] Ibid, 14.

[81] Outside of newspaper reports and public lectures, little had been published about Delsarte in 1880, the year that Robertson published his manual. This may account for the fact that Robertson misspelled the Frenchman's name as "Delsart" throughout his work.

because of students from Boston University School of Oratory. After sharing "Harmonic Gymnastics" by word of mouth in the 1870s, they began including the techniques in new elocution manuals during the 1880s. In the space of a decade, these promotional efforts effectively made such nerve-calming practices a standard feature in elocution classes across the country.

In this chapter and the next two, I explore how the ascendant popularity of these exercises demonstrated elocution reformers' profound influence on Reconstruction-era understandings of nervousness, gender, and race. As I hope to make evident, the growing demands for their expertise had much to do with the way that many elocutionists perceived nervousness itself. For, in their line of work, stage fright was a fairly standard phenomenon with fairly predictable outcomes (such as shortness of breath, fidgety hands, and upset stomachs). While elocutionists recognized that some people appeared to "naturally" embody ease, their methodologies also proved that behind-the-scenes preparation could benefit all. What's more, elocutionists were also inclined to acknowledge that many individuals had either been denied such training, or had been instructed in ways that reinforced hierarchical modes of conduct.

Indeed, part of what drove elocution reform was the recognition that white bourgeois men had long received the most support and encountered the fewest barriers for rehearsing and conveying self-assurance. Not only did such individuals enjoy unfettered access to speak in public—both formally and extemporaneously—their freedom of expression was also confirmed through oratorical styles that Americans considered exclusively masculine, including expansive movements of the arms and expressions of strong emotions like anger and rebuke.[82] Put another way, these men were trained to take up space. For all other populations, deference had long been

---

[82] Mattingly, *Appropriate[ing] Dress,* 5-10.

the norm—as well as the demand—in myriad places, including the parlors of nineteenth century white American homes. In these settings, Black Americans were largely banished from performing anything other than demonstrations of domestic servitude, even as disparaging depictions of their lives were repeatedly conveyed through blackface minstrel tunes and tales.[83] Social graces also kept the mannerisms of white bourgeois women in check. Though they were encouraged to ornament parlors with performances of song and poetry, their claims to "ladylike" virtue depended on making small gestures, speaking softly, and only expressing highly stylized sentimental emotions like love, devotion, and grief.[84]

As my discussion of elocution culture conveys, these restrictive expressive norms not only upheld social hierarchies, they also functioned like a form of emotional corsetry that narrowed confident, free expression. Similar to the advocacy required for reforming restrictive women's fashions, efforts to cast off these gendered emotional constraints also necessitated sustained appeals. Such work seemed both more possible and more urgent in the wake of the Civil War, a time when Americans were redefining the legal and cultural meanings of freedom and citizenship. Thus, in addition to attending to matters of respiratory health, Lewis B. Monroe and the students and faculty at Boston University School of Oratory were also at the forefront of finding and promoting practical and ideological tools that could transform Americans' experiences of nervousness—work that would especially lead them to investigate and promote "Harmonic Gymnastics" as legitimate techniques for self-development.

To understand this aspect of Reconstruction-era elocution reform, it is useful to recognize that this accelerated search for nervous remedies also coincided with larger ideological shifts

[83] Ibid, 6-11.
[84] Ibid.

about the very purpose of public education itself. After living through the cruelties of the Civil War, some teachers believed the time had come for kinder classrooms. In addition to calling for banishing the rod, they called to end classroom reliance on rote memorization—advocating instead for curricula that encouraged personal exploration. In their minds, social progress could be achieved through psychological thinking and holistic approaches to self-development. In the words of one influential school administrator and Civil War veteran, Francis Wayland Parker, the times demand for teachers to better recognize students "as human beings" each with their own "individuality, stream of thought, desires, hopes and fears, grief and joy."[85] As this impulse became more formalized, it became known as "The New Education." By the early 1880s, specialists in several fields attached that signifying moniker to their own disciplines. Indeed, Lewis B. Monroe's early and influential advocacy for psychological explorations of self-expression later earned him the recognition as a founder of "The New Elocution."

While these pedagogical reforms were conducted for the benefit of American youth, they also sought to affirm the "selfhood" of teachers. Lewis B. Monroe's 1870s efforts for advancing a "New Elocution" were significantly inspired by the vocal needs of the growing numbers of female educators. From 1870 to 1880 alone, their ranks increased from 84,000 to 154,000.[86] Most of these educators came from working-class and lower-middle class backgrounds—they were daughters of shopkeepers, cotton mill workers, shoe manufacturers, and farmers.[87] In many

---

[85] Francis Wayland Parker, "The Quincy Method," *Report of the Commissioner of Education,* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 240. Of note, Francis Wayland Parker married Frances Stuart, the aforementioned graduate of Boston University School of Oratory.

[86] Joseph A. Hill, *Women in Gainful Occupations, 1870-1920* (District of Columbia, U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1929), 42.

[87] Christine A. Ogren, "Enthusiasm and Mutual Confidence": Campus Life at State Normal Schools, 1870s-1900s," in *Rethinking Campus Life: New Perspective in the History of College Students in the United States,* ed. Christine A. Ogren and Marc A. Vanoverbeke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 91.

Figure 14 — Assembly Hall, State Normal School at Bridgewater, c. 1876
Credit: The Clement C. Maxwell Library at Bridgewater State University

communities, they were also the daughters of the formerly enslaved. While these women faced challenges that were specific to their diverse circumstances, they also shared a common interest in forging new styles of female authority.[88] For, though teaching was largely framed as an extension of white middle-class domesticity, the "ladylike" demeanor women needed for commanding a classroom was not quite the same type of "feminine" display that had long drawn admiration in the parlor.

For many young women, fashioning this new type of voice was an understandably anxiety-provoking process. In 1867 one New Jersey administrator observed several cases where teachers-in-training were "too quiet," "became embarrassed," "lacked energy and decision," and

[88] Christine Ogren, *The American State Normal School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

"were somewhat bewildered." In one classroom, the evaluator noticed that not only did "the pupils read badly," and make "many errors," the young teacher herself "seemed to be afraid of the class."[89] She spoke in "a very low tone," and failed to read a "single line" with any semblance of confidence. Educators from several other states voiced similar concerns about their teaching corps. Some even surmised that inadequate access to elocution instruction undermined the ability to attract and maintain a vital labor force. For, with so many young women struggling from the tell-tale signs of stage fright, it seemed logical that many students' performance would suffer as well—and students' lack of poise would, in turn, reflect badly on teachers. One administrator in Massachusetts warned that without access to better support, many women would abandon a job that eroded their "sense of professional dignity" and "self-respect."[90]

In the late 1860s, state governments began responding to these concerns by expanding their investment in normal schools, and normal school administrators began augmenting their programs with more opportunities for women to practice public speaking.[91] To help address teachers' and students' needs for self-affirmation, several New England normal schools began implementing Lewis B. Monroe's elocution curriculum (see figure 14). For example, it was during this time that Bridgewater Normal School hired its very first elocution specialist: Lewis Monroe's long-time student, Mary Adams Currier. After just a few months on the job, her expertise was already proving valuable. In 1872, for example, a local reporter commented on her student's "great power and control of voice."[92]

---

[89] John S. Hart, I*n the School Room: Chapters in the Philosophy of Education* (Philadelphia: Eldredge & Brother, 1868), 148.

[90] N.E.W, "The Normal Supervision of Schools," *The Massachusetts Teacher* 23 no. 1 (1870): 9-10.

[91] For example, from 1874 to 1879 alone, women's enrollment in U.S. normal schools noticeably accelerated, from 29,000 to over 43,000. Christine Ogren, *The American State Normal School,* 58.

[92] "Examination of the Bridgewater School," *The Boston Globe*, July 10, 1872. In attendance was the Superintendent of Boston Schools and the president of Tufts College.

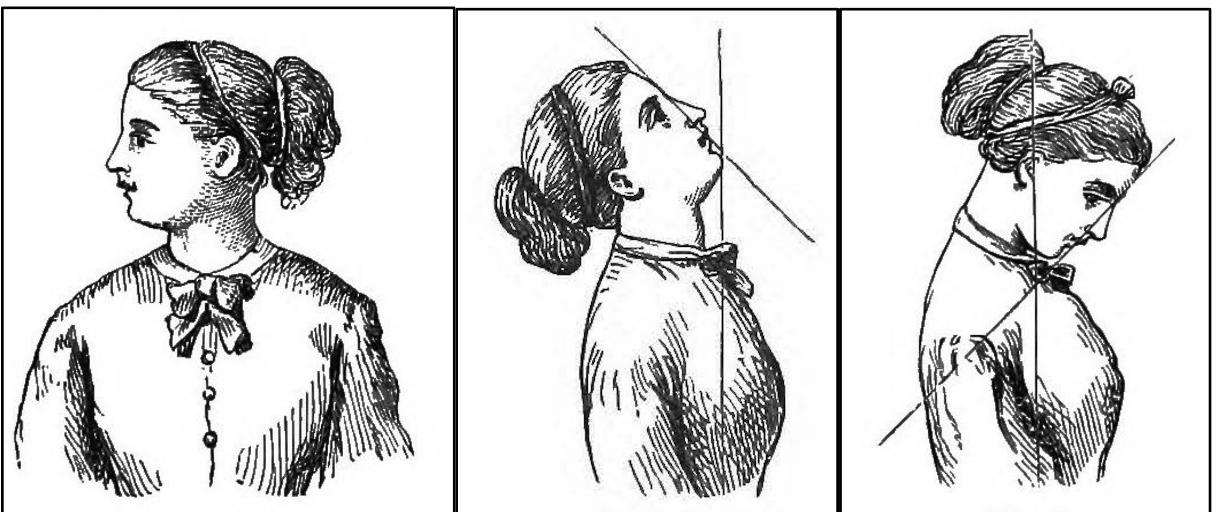


Figure 15 — Tensions Releasing Exercises from Lewis B. Monroe's Manual, 1869
Credit: Lewis B. Monroe, *Manual of Physical and Vocal Training* (Philadelphia: Cowperthwait & Co., 1869

This promotion would prove an instructive experience for Mary Adams Currier, especially when it came to increasing her own sensitivity to the complex problem of nervousness. For, even as she made strides in helping a new generation of teachers overcome what she called "unwise effort and tension," she found herself experiencing new strains on her own vocal powers. To sustain her energy and vocal strength, she continued taking private classes with Lewis B. Monroe. There, she regularly practiced around thirty minutes of breathing exercises and a few simple movements for releasing tension in her shoulders and neck (see figure 15). Though these methods had served her well for many years, they were now proving insufficient. As Currier would later recall, despite Monroe's consistent affirmation and encouragement "to be less tense," she had great difficulty feeling at ease.[93]

The opening of Boston University School of Oratory in 1873 offered a timely opportunity for Mary Adams Currier to collaborate with others who recognized the need for better methods

[93] Mary S. Thompson, "Discussion of 'The Delsarte Philosophy and System of Expression,' *Proceedings of the First Meeting of the National Association of Elocutionists* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1892), 75.

of addressing nervousness. Indeed, this mandate was evident at the very first class. To mark the moment's significance, Lewis B. Monroe asked Currier to "break the ice." Recalling this incident several years later, she jested about her initial response: "Mr. Monroe," she had replied, "I could break ice, but I can't read *here*."[94] For Mary Adams Currier and the other thirty women and men in the class, this kind of instinctual hesitancy was itself a confirmation of the need for the very program they were inaugurating. Even though she was forty years old and a highly respected teacher, Mary Adams Currier clearly still embodied the long-standing rules that governed where, when, and how a woman shared her voice—and speaking at a university had long been out of range. As the students and faculty at Boston University set out to influence rhetorical norms, it was clear that part of their success would hinge on addressing the cultural reasons for women's nervousness.

This imperative was further compounded by the fact that nervousness was increasingly medicalized in ways that undermined liberal education reforms. In 1869, for example, physicians implicated "the mental activity of women" as one of the reasons for the alarming rise of a "new" illness: "neurasthenia."[95] According to its etiology, increased demands on white women's brain power diminished the health of their reproductive systems, resulting in a form of nervous exhaustion with dire consequences. Building upon this logic, in 1873, the same year that Mary Adams Currier "broke the ice" at Boston University, "the mental activity of women" also

---

[94] Currier, "The Past and Future of Elocution," 134. Paige Van Osdol also recognized this exchange as representative of the kinds of challenges and successes women experienced in this era of elocution reform. See, Paige Van Osdol, "The Women's Elocution Movement in America, 1870-1915," (PhD. diss., The Ohio State University, 2012), 72-73.

[95] Charles E. Rosenberg, "The Place of George M. Beard in Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 36, no. 3 (1962): 245-259. Though I focus here on neurasthenia and women, it is important to note that this was not understood as primarily a woman's ailment. As several scholars have discussed, urban white men were considered particularly susceptible to this disease of "over-civilization." See T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Anti-modernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

became the subject of a polemic medical treatise titled, *Sex in Education*. Its author, Dr. Edward Clarke (a retired Harvard medical professor), was perturbed by women's rising enrollment in professional schools and elite universities, and he cited patient cases as evidence that white women were biologically ill-equipped for such intellectual pursuits. In one example, he traced a married woman's infertility back to the nervousness she experienced while speaking in front of her class. "Miss A," he stated, had been a "healthy, bright, and intelligent girl," until she was forced to endure the strain of vocal exams. "She was always anxious about her recitations," he observed. "No matter how carefully she prepared for them, she was ever fearful lest she should trip a little, and appear to less advantage than she hoped."[96] According to Dr. Clarke, cases like this sent an important warning: If white bourgeois women were expected to perform the same as men, increased cases of infertility would lead to race suicide.[97]

The same patronizing thinking that projected fragility onto white women's nervous systems also racialized Black American's nervous systems in purposefully limiting ways. For example, from the 1850s through the 1880s, a popular American encyclopedia published the following "facts": "Negroes have less nervous sensibility than the whites, and are not subject to nervous affections; they are comparatively insensible to pain."[98] In the antebellum era, such arguments had been central to white Americans' justification of enslavement and anti-Black laws. In the postbellum era, white Americans continued citing these "facts" of biological inferiority as justification for the myriad cultural and political arrangements that solidified racial segregation. In both eras, these perceptions about Black Americans' inability to experience pain

---

[96] Edward H. Clark, *Sex in Education* (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874), 42.

[97] Clarke was far from alone in sharing this view. For the next several decades, similar arguments perennially appeared in elite cultural and medical journals. On the relationship between concerns about nervousness and race suicide, see Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization,* 77-121.

[98] George Ripley and Charles A. Dana, ed. *The American Cyclopedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1865), 172.

or nervous illness were also reinforced through popular entertainments, including minstrel music and vaudeville shows featuring stoic and docile Black mammies and emotionally-stunted Jim Crow characters.

Because opportunities of self-display were implicated in these problematic sexist and racist understandings of both nervousness and poise, elocution teachers were in a unique position to affirm or dispel cultural prejudices about an individual's capabilities. While white Americans largely resisted efforts for making such training interracial, many liberally minded elocution teachers in Black and white communities believed that addressing concerns about nervousness should not result in denying or withholding opportunities for self-expression. Rather, they advocated for the opposite, namely broader access to more equitable pedagogies. Elocutionists were not the only drivers of these changes; normal school students were themselves advocates for such experiences. One student at Bridgewater Normal (a seventeen-year-old farmer's daughter) declared, "Few can estimate the value of this experience . . . To mount the platform and brace feet, mind and heart for this difficult task called continually for a large measure of self-control and personal power." In her view, teachers in training were especially in need of experiences that helped them connect with, what she called, "hidden forces" in ways that "enlarged their withinness" and made them more prepared to share their "big self" with the world.[99]

Boston University School of Oratory's experiments with Harmonic Gymnastics during the 1870s would prove especially consequential for helping women navigate the practical and ideological difficulties of nervousness. Though, as I emphasize in chapter two, the program's female students would conduct the pivotal labor of first publishing and promoting the techniques,

---

[99] Arthur Clark Boyden, ed. *Albert Gardner Boyden and the Bridgewater State Normal School: A Memorial Volume,* (Bridgewater: Arthur H. Willis, Printer, 1919), 143.

their work also benefited a good deal from the institutional legitimacy with which BUSO endowed these techniques. To better understand women's work in the 1880s, it is instructive to establish some of the who, what, where, when, whys, and hows that shaped the technique's reception during the 1870s. And that story begins with Lewis B. Monroe's early support of an aspiring actor named Steele MacKaye. Starting in 1870, and throughout the decade, Monroe was a key sponsor of MacKaye's public lectures about François Delsarte and his expositions of Harmonic Gymnastics.[100] While Monroe's investment in these new methods for "freeing the channels of expression," derived from long standing personal interests, he also saw potential benefits for his students, especially the women. Confirming this assessment of Harmonic Gymnastics in particular, Mary Adams Currier would later describe these aesthetic exercises as the first reliable methods she had learned for remedying nervous tension.[101]

What were these Harmonic Gymnastics? Broadly speaking, Steele MacKaye presented two main types of movements: "decomposing exercises" and "recomposing exercises."[102] As the labels implied, these exercises promoted actions of breaking down and building up (see figure 16). "Decomposing motions," MacKaye explained, "are those whose aim is to increase the faculty of relaxation in the muscles." Their purpose was to undo "habits of action" and develop

---

[100] Lewis B. Monroe co-sponsored Steele MacKaye's debut Delsarte lectures in 1870. In 1874, Monroe arranged and promoted MacKaye's lyceum lecture series, then hired him as faculty at BUSO in 1877. MacKaye was also pursuing additional acting training during these years. After Delsarte's death in 1871, he returned to Paris and also studied in England.

[101] Mary Adams Currier's response to Mary S. Thompson's paper, "The Delsarte System of Expression," *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the National Association of Elocutionists* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1893), 75. It is not clear when exactly Mary Adams Currier first heard Steele MacKaye speak about Delsarte's theories and demonstrate the Harmonic Gymnastics. It could have been in 1871, at MacKaye's debut "Delsarte" lecture, which was co-sponsored by Lewis B. Monroe. It could have been at MacKaye's lyceum lectures in 1874, a series which Monroe also helped arrange and promote.

[102] MacKaye did not publish any manuals, but his students' notes and Stebbins' publications provide a record of his Delsarte instruction. In a letter to his wife dated February 9, 1890, MacKaye particularly noted his approval of May Monroe's notebooks as an accurate representation of his instruction of Harmonic Gymnastics. Steele MacKaye to Mrs. MacKaye, February 9, 1890. MacKaye Family Papers, box 8, folder 10.

Figure 16 — Illustrations of Harmonic Gymnastics, 1891
These illustrations are representative of the Harmonic Gymnastics that Steele MacKaye instructed as "Delsarte" at Boston University School of Oratory during the 1870s. They were included in the manual Charles Wesley Emerson, who graduated from BUSO in 1877, and opened his own school in 1880.
Credit: Charles Wesley Emerson, *Physical Culture of the Emerson College of Oratory* (Boston: F.H. Gilson,1891)

flexibility and ease. This undoing process was a key preparation for "recomposing exercises," activities that, according to MacKaye, helped individuals develop their abilities to "instinctively and effortlessly express any human emotion."[103]

In many ways, these Harmonic Gymnastics built off familiar principals about relaxation that had been common in elocution pedagogies for several decades, including Lewis B. Monroe's 1860s curriculum. In his manual, for example, Monroe stated that, "the best movements are those which give alternate tension and relaxation to those muscles which we wish to cultivate."[104] While MacKaye's encouragement for cultivating flexibility and ease would have been familiar to students like Mary Adams Currier, he also taught exercises that had not been part of Lewis B. Monroe's classes. Three sequences of exercises would have appeared particularly innovative. The first was a series that called for shaking various parts of the body, including the hands, arms, hips, shoulders, knees, ankles, feet. As transcribed in the notebook of one of MacKaye's students, the following instructions are an example of this kind of exercise:

Decomposing Motions of the Wrists

1st motion	Surrendering left hand completely at wrist, and taking hold of the left forearm with the right hand, shake the left hand freely, by the action of the right hand, in the following ways
2nd motion	With left hand hanging from wrist, palm down, shake it freely up, and down
3rd motion	With left hand hanging from wrist, palm up, shake hand freely up, and down
4th motion	With left hand hanging with the rim down, the palm perpendicular with the earth, shake it freely, up and down.[105]

[103] May Monroe's notebooks, dated 1885. Box 45 folder 14, MacKaye Family Papers.

[104] Monroe, *Manual of Physical and Vocal Training,* 7.

[105] May Monroe's notebooks, dated 1885. Box 45 folder 14, MacKaye Family Papers.

The second technique that was likely also new to Mary Adams Currier and other students at Boston University called for lying on the floor. The instructions, as recorded by one of MacKaye's students, were as follows:

Relaxing Exercise

1st motion	Lie upon the floor face upward, and relax the body completely from the top of head to the soles of feet.
2nd motion	Leaving the muscles not used in breathing as relaxed and heavy as possible, inhale the breath [through] the nose slowly and [by] exerting the least possible effort.
3rd motion	Exhale the breath easily out through the nose.[106]

In the coming years, (as I discuss in chapter two) these shaking movements and the practice of relaxing on the floor would become the most distinctive physical exercises of elocution curricula—and some of most recommended exercises for alleviating nervousness. As would the third series of exercises that Steele MacKaye shared with Boston University students. These were the "recomposing" explorations of postures, gestures, and facial expressions. They began with a standing pose that MacKaye called "Harmonic Poise" and taught as follows:

Harmonic Poise for Unity

Stand erect, with the weight of the body borne equally upon both legs, feet wide apart.

1st motion	Pass the weight of the body to the right leg.
2nd motion	Raise the right arm, elbow straight, hand pendant to earth, directly out, and up at the side, until the elbow touches the side of the head, and the hand, still pendant toward earth, is extended horizontally out at the right side.

---

[106] May Monroe's notebooks, dated 1885. Box 45 folder 14, MacKaye Family Papers. The instructions provided here are transcribed directly from May Monroe's notebooks. Though Stebbins did not include this relaxing exercise in either of her first two books, her colleague (Mary S. Thompson, who also attended MacKaye's 1870s lectures) included it in her 1892 text. In the 1890s, when debates transpired about the authenticity of claiming François Delsarte as the innovator of Harmonic Gymnastic, prominent elocutionists distinguished this recumbent exercise as something MacKaye instructed in his Harmonic Gymnastics. See Mary S. Thompson, *Rhythmical Gymnastics* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1892), 41, 94. On the 1890s debate and the discussion of this recumbent relaxation exercise in particular, see F. Townsend Southwick in response to Franklin H. Sargent's paper, "Delsarte and His Work," *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the National Association of Elocutionists* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1893), 141.

3rd motion	Keeping arm and hand in the same relation to each other, and to the head, as those attained at the end of the last motion, and balancing the body completely on the right leg, incline head, and shoulders, to the left, at the same time extend the hip out to the right in such a manner as to counterbalance the weight of the shoulders when inclined to the left.
4th motion	Keeping arm, head, and torso balanced in the same relations to the right leg as those attained at the end of last motion. Raise left foot, and place its instep upon the back of the ankle of the right leg.[107]

After embodying qualities of equilibrium, students then pantomimed what MacKaye phrased, "the gamuts of emotion," an array of over forty-three distinct expressions, including: indifference, grief, despair, agony, jollity, amazement, terror, madness, indignation, anger, curiosity, and astonishment. MacKaye likened these practices to learning how to play an instrument, through them one could "tune" their capabilities for spontaneously and effectively conveying any feeling.

What was it about these Harmonic Gymnastics that summoned such immediate enthusiasm from Mary Adams Currier, as well as from Hallie Q. Brown and countless other women? From their perspectives in the 1870s, as female teachers who were forging new public voices and helping others do the same, it mattered greatly that the exercises offered accessible physiological remedies for calming one's nerves. They delivered ease through muscular relaxation and cultivated assurance through experiments of embodying a wide range of emotions, including those that had been normalized as exclusively masculine—and in many cases as exclusively white. For Brown, Currier, and many of their colleagues and students, these results

[107] I transcribed these instructions from May Monroe's notebooks, dated 1885. Box 45 folder 14, Steele MacKaye Family Papers.

Figure 17 — Caricature of François Delsarte, 1861
Credit: Paul Hadol (1835-1875), *L'Album du Gaulois* (1861), Gallica Digital Library.

of increased flexibility in body and mind qualitatively delivered the desirable experience of "freeing the channels of expression."

Additionally, and perhaps precisely because these exercises could potentially disrupt expressive norms, teachers like Currier and Brown also greatly valued the ideological discourse that helped establish the technique's credibility. For this purpose, it would be impossible to overstate the significance of MacKaye's choice of attributing the techniques to François Delsarte, the French voice and acting teacher with whom he had studied (see figure 17). Though MacKaye would later change this narrative and claim for himself a much larger role in innovating the techniques, that was not the story he shared in the 1870s. Astutely aware that

upper-class Americans admired Parisian arts and culture; MacKaye knew this association infused the exercises with a certain kind of *je ne sais quoi.* Beyond providing an aesthetic appeal, linking the exercises to Delsarte also helped establish their "objective" legitimacy. For, according to Steele MacKaye, they were premised on Delsarte's "scientific" discoveries of universal laws of expression—laws which MacKaye claimed "solved the mystery of emotion"[108] (see figure 18).

Though confusion over the exercises' origins would become a rather contentious matter in the 1890s (something I discuss in chapter three), a belief in the legitimacy of François Delsarte's laws proved rather durable. This was especially true of Delsarte's foundational theory: "The Law of Correspondence." It stated: "to each spiritual function responds a function of the body. To each grand function of the body corresponds a spiritual act."[109] The law meant that every outward expression of gesture corresponded with an inner feeling. MacKaye explained that Delsarte had applied this law in ways that categorized and charted the technical distinctions of emotion's outward expressions. For example, Delsarte identified over sixty distinct emotions that manifest through different movements of the eyes and eyebrows. In MacKaye's telling, Delsarte made similar delineations about the gestures of the hands and fingers, the stance of the legs and feet, the movement of lips, and the positioning of the head and shoulders. In sum, MacKaye claimed that Delsarte's Laws of Expression provided a universal grammar for the body's gestural language (see figure 19).

---

[108] Advertisement for Steele MacKaye Lecture, "The Mystery of Emotion," 1871, MacKaye Family Papers, Box 8, folder 1. In the 1890s, MacKaye clarified that the Harmonic Gymnastics he taught were not invented by Delsarte, but were instead techniques that MacKaye shared with Delsarte. MacKaye also explained that during his 1870s Delsarte lectures, he did not see the need to differentiate between his own contributions to his studies with Delsarte because he believed that everything he shared legitimately embodied Delsarte's Laws of Expression. In many ways, I argue, this framing demonstrated MacKaye's ability to "read the room." By attributing everything to Delsarte's science, he had more leverage during the 1870s for securing broader economic and cultural support for his theatrical projects. I discuss this development in greater detail in chapter three.

[109] Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression*, 6th Edition (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1902), 420.

AN ILLUSTRATED LECTURE,

BY

J. STEELE MACKAYE,

A PUPIL OF THE FAMOUS

FRANCOIS DELSARTE.

SUBJECT:

The Mystery of Emotion,

AND

ITS EXPRESSION IN ART.

This gentleman makes his appearance after several years absence in France, pursuing his studies, and comes before the public with the most eulogistic and complimentary notices from the leading *literati* and dramatists of this country. His entertainment will be a rich treat.

The following explains itself:

Boston, March 13th, 1871.

Mr. James Steele Mackaye,

Dear Sir:

Knowing, either directly for ourselves, or through the testimony of good judges, how thorough a proficient you are in the science and art of dramatic expression, as developed by Francois Delsarte—acknowledged to be, in this department, the greatest master who has ever lived—we join in asking you to favor us, and our fellow-citizens, at your earliest convenience, with an illustrative lecture on this subject, showing especially the connection of the laws of dramatic expression, in the system of Delsarte, with character, morality, æsthetics and religion.

Wm. Gaston,
Louis Agassiz,
William R. Alger,
George B. Loring,
J. T. Trowbridge,
E. P. Whipple,
Henry W. Longfellow
J. T. Fields,
Joseph White,
William Claflin,
G. S. Hillard,
Horace B. Coolidge,

And many others.

A similar invitation in New York was extended, by the following prominent gentlemen:

V. A. P. Barnard, D. D., LL. D.,
Edwin Booth,
John Brougham,
E. H. Chapin, D. D.,
R. Ogden Doremus, M. D.,
Lawrence Barrett,
H. W. Bellows, D. D.,
Wm. C. Bryant,
Peter Cooper,
John Gilbert,
Marshal O. Roberts,
Lester Wallack.

Mr. Mackaye is to deliver TWENTY LECTURES in Boston during the present winter.

Figure 18 — "The Mystery of Emotion," Steele MacKaye's 1871 lecture on François Delsarte.
Credit: Courtesy Dartmouth College Library, The MacKaye Family Papers, Box 8 folder 1.

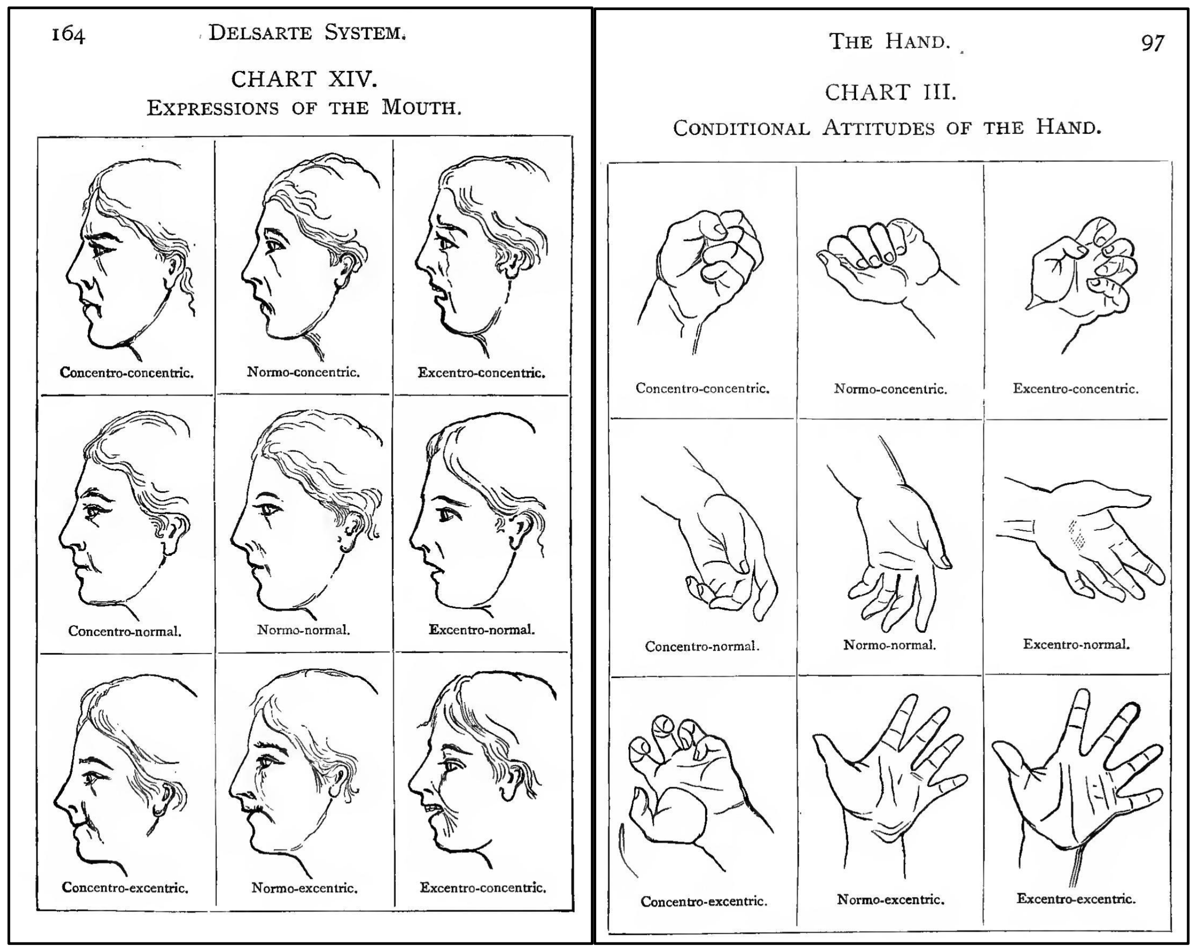

164 DELSARTE SYSTEM.

CHART XIV.
EXPRESSIONS OF THE MOUTH.

Concentro-concentric.	Normo-concentric.	Excentro-concentric.
Concentro-normal.	Normo-normal.	Excentro-normal.
Concentro-excentric.	Normo-excentric.	Excentro-concentric.

THE HAND. 97

CHART III.
CONDITIONAL ATTITUDES OF THE HAND.

Concentro-concentric.	Normo-concentric.	Excentro-concentric.
Concentro-normal.	Normo-normal.	Excentro-normal.
Concentro-excentric.	Normo-excentric.	Excentro-excentric.

Figure 19 — Charting Delsarte's Laws of Expression
Credit: Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression* 6th ed. (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1902)

Though many Americans would prove widely attracted to the universality of Delsarte's theories, they would also develop different sensibilities about the practical applications for this new "science of expression." For his part, Steele MacKaye believed Delsarte's discoveries provided an appealing "scientific" foundation establishing the nation's first professional acting school. Desiring to make acting a "respectable profession" and usher in a "new era for dramatic art," as he put it, MacKaye hoped that bourgeois Americans (including himself) could help transform theaters into universities "for the illustration of the humanities," and schools "of

manhood and manners."[110] Though MacKaye hoped François Delsarte would direct that work himself, this plan was dashed when the Frenchman died in 1871, just as MacKaye, Lewis B. Monroe, and other collaborators had raised the necessary funds for moving Delsarte and his family to America.[111] This loss was compounded by the fact that François Delsarte had also never published any of his findings.

While Delsarte's death and lack of publications resulted in logistical set-backs, these circumstances also created an opportunity for American enthusiasts to establish their own expertise about Delsarte's theories and implement them in ways that were relevant to their interests—and the students and faculty at Boston University School of Oratory would become some of the most influential investigators. Believing that the Frenchman's "science" could bolster elocution reform, they especially aided one of the most important first tasks: establishing the cultural credibility of Delsarte's theories. By 1874, just four years after MacKaye had delivered his first Delsarte lecture, these students were testing the effectiveness of Harmonic Gymnastics in their classes and featuring their results at events attended by prominent political and cultural leaders. For example, at the school's 1875 graduation, Boston University students demonstrated Delsarte's "philosophy of expression" by extemporaneously interpreting "figures representing different attitudes and postures."[112] Several graduates also began teaching these

---

[110] "A New Era for Dramatic Art in America," *New York Daily Herald,* March 30, 1871. Karl M. Kippola's work helps contextualize the cultural reasons for MacKaye's theatrical ambitions. His discussions of actors Edwin Booth and John McCullough are particularly germane. He argues that both actors made adjustments in their style in response to collective grief brought on by the Civil War and a desire for actors that could portray "great spiritual depth and the ability to endure hardship and tragedy." Indeed, McCullough developed these sensitivities by studying Delsartism with MacKaye. Similar to observations about cultural hierarchies made by Lawrence Levine, Kippola also observes a strong relationship between the vast differences in emotional preferences between middle- and upper-class men and the working class. See Karl M. Kippola *Acts of Manhood: The Performance of Masculinity on the American Stage, 1828-1865.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 147, 154-158; Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[111] Steele MacKaye interview in the *New York Mirror,* August 22, 1885.

[112] "Graduation Exercises," *Boston Globe*, May 21, 1875.

exercises and ideas in parlors and schools across the country.[113] All of these actions helped spread the word about these promising "scientific" theories and exercises.

This ascendant enthusiasm for Delsarte's theories during the 1870s likely came as no surprise to Steele MacKaye and Lewis B. Monroe. For, though the Frenchman's findings were surrounded with the aura of innovation, both men knew that Americans had an existing and growing appetite for psychological explanations of human experience. It was thus not insignificant that Monroe cogently defined Delsarte's theories as "Swedenborg geometrized," a phrase that referenced a Swedish mystic and scientist, Emmanuel Swedenborg.[114] In the antebellum era, Swedenborg's writings about the unity of mind, body, and spirit were a life-line for generations of men and women who were unsatisfied by religious doctrines of subjugation and sin.[115] Monroe was among them. His friend would later recall, Swedenborg's explanations about the "truth of correspondence between the inner and outer nature" had been a "beacon light" that ushered in a "new era in [Monroe's] life."[116] These philosophies also illuminated the thinking of some of the era's most transformative artistic, religious, and social leaders. Notably, when Ralph Waldo Emerson abandoned Calvinist traditions and articulated transcendental visions, he acknowledged his debt to Swedenborg. "To the withered traditional church, yielding

---

[113] Henrietta Russell Crane is an excellent example. After studying at BUSO from 1875-1876, she began promoting Delsartism at girl's schools and in parlor lectures throughout the region. For example, "Expression: The Delsarte System Explained by Mrs. Henrietta Russell Crane," *Times Union,* May 23, 1879. On her career, see Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, *The Cultivation of Mind and Body in American Delsartism* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 31-44; Richard A. Meckel "Henrietta Russell: Delsartean Prophet to the Gilded Age." *Journal of American Culture* 12 (Spring 1989): 65-78.

[114] Genevieve Stebbins recorded Monroe's observation in, *Delsarte System of Expression*, 6th edition (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1902), 114.

[115] Christopher G. White argues that this generation turned to "scientific psychologies to help them formulate new ideas about the self and new practices concerning spiritual growth," because they "found themselves unable to conform to their parent's evangelical Calvinism." Psychological sciences aided them with "new methods for mapping and controlling the emotional self." See Christopher G. White, *Unsettled Minds: Psychology and the American Search for Spiritual Assurance, 1830-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 2-3, 8.

[116] "Lewis Baxter Monroe," *Werner's Directory*, 253.

dry catechisms, Swedenborg let in nature again," he wrote.[117] Walt Whitman had also infused his defiant verses with Swedenborg's truths as he sang the body electric. "If the body were not the Soul, what is the Soul?" he had asked, and then answered: "If anything is sacred, the human body is sacred."[118] Such affirmations of the unity of body and soul were also instrumental to the rise of spiritualism—a theology that vitalized the interest of many who advocated for the civil rights of the enslaved and the subjugated.[119]

Steele MacKaye was also no stranger to Swedenborg; and indeed, his own youthful studies of the Swedish mystic arguably heightened his appreciation for François Delsarte. As the son of a wealthy abolitionist lawyer and leader of New York City's Underground Railroad, Steele MacKaye was raised in a domestic and social climate that embraced the era's more "radical" religious, political, and artistic reforms.[120] At age nineteen, he filled personal notebooks with several ruminations on physical and metaphysical realities. In addition to writing

---

[117] Quoted in Davin P. Zuber, *The Language of Things: Emmanuel Swedenborg and the American Environmental Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 75. He also stated on page 76 that, Swedenborg's "ideas of correspondence facilitated Emerson's dislocation of spiritual ethics away from organized religion." Dance historian Judy Burns makes a similar observation about the ways in which Delsartism offered American women a, "practical, secular, substitute for Calvinist theology." See Judy Burns, "The Culture of Nobility/The Nobility of Self-Cultivation," in *Moving Words: Re-Writing Dance*, ed. Gay Morris (New York: Routledge, 1995), 207. On the larger history of metaphysical and spiritualist developments, see Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); John S. Haller, *Swedenborg, Mesmer, and the Mind/Body Connection: The Roots of Complementary Medicine* (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2010); Leigh Eric Schmidt, R*estless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[118] David S. Reynolds, "Earth, Body, Soul: Science and Religion," in *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography.* New York: Vintage Books, 1996.

[119] Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 144-146; Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989).

[120] Steele MacKaye's parents hosted many of the prominent activists who would later also support Boston University School of Oratory, including William Lloyd Garrison, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Julia Ward Howe. In 1861, MacKaye became a painting teacher at Eagleswood Military Academy, an abolitionist school in New Jersey. His first wife was the daughter of the school's founders, Marcus and Rebecca Spring. They had a son before MacKaye enlisted in the U.S. Army during the Civil War. While he was on duty, their child was also cared for by John Brown's sister, who was staying at Eagleswood. On the school, see Carol Lasser, "Conscience and Contradiction: The Moral Ambiguities of Antebellum Reformers Marcus and Rebecca Buffum Spring," *Journal of the Early Republic* 38, no. 1 (2018): 1-35. On these matters of MacKaye's family history, see Percy MacKaye, *Epoch: The Life of Steele MacKaye,* volume 1 (New York, Boni & Liveright, 1927), 93-94.

contemplations about Swedenborg, MacKaye also wrote about his fascination with the nervous system, the "landscape of emotion," Emerson's Transcendentalism, and the social function of artists and poets. "Express boldly to yourself what you feel and think," MacKaye had written with verve, "seek a scientific system by which you can raise the weighty lift that burdens your spiritual eye."[121] MacKaye's personal quest for such a science was also clearly generational.[122] Indeed, he shared these interests with his childhood friend, William James—the future "father of American psychology."[123] As young men in the 1860s, they studied painting together and spent many hours in philosophical discussions (see figure 20). By the mid-1870s, both were recognized as explorers of the "science of the soul," Steele MacKaye through his Delsarte lectures on the "mystery of emotion," and William James through his first Harvard lectures on physiological psychology.[124]

With such broad interest in theorizing the connections between mind, body, and soul, Americans' stamp of approval for Delsarte's "science of emotion" seemed likely. Indeed, for many of the cultural gatekeepers who attended Steele MacKaye's 1870s "Delsarte" demonstrations, endorsing the Frenchman's theories required little persuasion. In addition to building on Swedenborg's philosophies, Delsarte's findings also aligned with the ascendant appeal of scientific secularism. For example, American interest in Delsarte coincided with

---

[121] MacKaye's son Percy reprinted portions of his father's notebooks from 1861, including the passage quoted here. See, Percy MacKaye, *Epoch: The Life of Steele MacKaye,* volume 1 (New York, Boni & Liveright, 1927), 89.

[122] See, White, *Unsettled Minds.*

[123] The scholarship on William James is robust. I have found the following study useful in understanding his life and work, Robert D. Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

[124] MacKaye was formally listed as faculty at Boston University School of Oratory in 1877-78 school year, but earlier catalogs list him as a guest lecturer. See, *Boston University Year Book, Volume 5* (Boston, University Offices, 1879), 112. William James began lecturing on physiological psychology at Harvard in 1875.

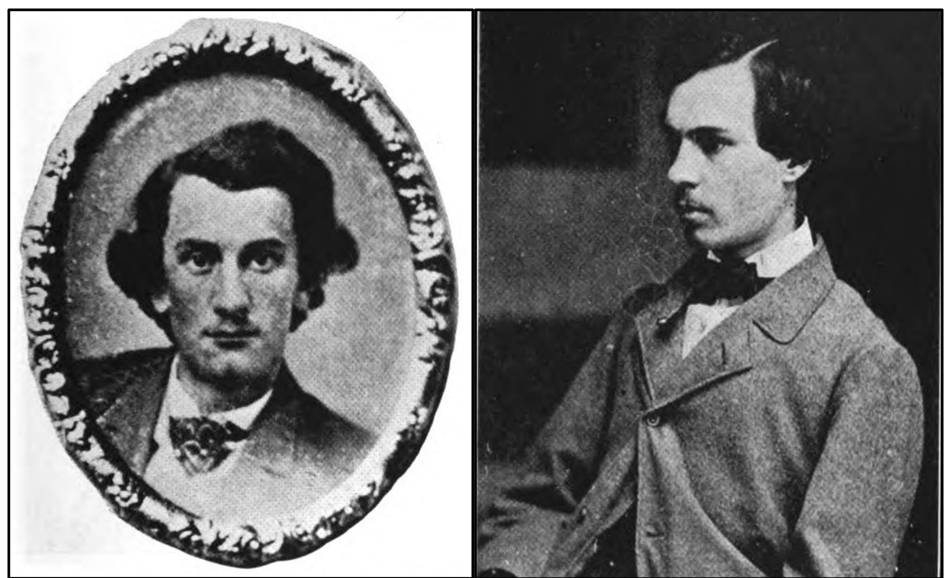


Figure 20 — Steele MacKaye, c. 1860 and William James, c. 1858
Credit: Percy MacKaye, *Epoch: The Life of Steele MacKaye,* volume 1 (New York, Boni & Liveright, 1927), 69.

P. T. BARNUM'S TRAVELING MUSEUM, MENAGERIE AND CIRCUS.
GRATEST SHOW IN THE WORLD.
Jersey City, April 20 and 21; Hoboken, April 22.
Two exhibitions daily, 1 and 8 P. M.

"DELSARTE'S SCIENCE AND ART OF DRAMATIC EXPRESSION."
An illustrated lecture by JAMES STEELE MAKAYE, given for the benefit of Mr. Delsarte, who has been a great sufferer by the war in France. The laws of facial expression, gesticulation and dramatic effect will be illustrated by personal representation. Steinway Hall, MONDAY EVENING, April 24. Admission, $1. Tickets for sale at the principal hotels, also at Schuberth & Co.'s, 820, Ditson & Co.'s, 711, G. Schirmer's, 701, Rullman's, 114 Broadway, and at the hall the day of the lecture.

PHRENOLOGICAL MUSEUM OPEN DAILY. Free to all. At No. 389 Broadway. EXAMINATIONS, with written descriptions, showing talents, defects and the best pursuit.

Figure 21— Newspaper Advertisement for MacKaye's Delsarte Lecture
Rather notable here is the placement of Steele MacKaye's "Delsarte" lecture between two of the century's influential manifestations of American culture: P.T. Barnum's circus and phrenology.
Credit: "Amusements," *New York Times,* April 21, 1871.

Charles Darwin's 1872 publication of *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animal*s; and several Delsarte enthusiasts, including MacKaye, made a point of emphasizing the similarities of the ideas.[125] In 1871, New York City newspapers also cleverly marketed MacKaye's "Delsarte" lectures next to notices for phrenological exhibitions (see figure 21).[126] Such placement correctly anticipated that phrenological enthusiasts would find the Frenchman's theories a compelling adjutant for ascertaining the "self" through physiognomic features.[127] This was indeed the case for those who joined Lewis B. Monroe in co-sponsoring MacKaye's early Delsarte lectures, including Boston's mayor and superintendent of schools, the governor of Massachusetts, the biologist Louis Agassiz, the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the actor Edwin Booth, and the minister Henry Ward Beecher. Drawing a connection between Swedenborg and spiritualism, Darwin and Delsarte, these men publicly praised the Frenchman's insights about "character, morality, esthetics, and religion."[128]

Such prominent endorsements, in turn, benefitted the reform efforts at Boston University School of Oratory. With Delsarte's scientific credibility arguably secured by the mid-1870s, the program's students and faculty had reasonable assurance that their promotion of the Frenchman's theories would be favorably received. They could also be confident that in doing so, they would satisfy Boston University's mandate for programs based on "principles of sound pedagogical

---

[125] "Musical and Theatrical Notes," *New York Herald,* December 16, 1872; May Monroe recorded notes about MacKaye lecturing on Darwin's *Expression of the Emotions in Man in Animals*. See, May Monroe's notebooks, dated 1885. Box 45 folder 14, MacKaye Family Papers.

[126] "Amusements," *New York Daily Herald*, April 21, 1871.

[127] There is great continuity between the cultural function of earlier physiognomic sciences and Americans Delsartism. These connections are certainly worthy of greater evaluation, especially in light of recent excellent work on phrenology. For example, see Rachel Walker, *Beauty and the Brain: The Science of Human Nature in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023); Carla Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself: Producing and Using Phrenological Knowledge in 19th-Century America," *Centaurs* 55 (2013): 104-130; Susan Branson, "Phrenology and the Science of Race in Antebellum America," *Early American Studies* (Winter 2017): 164-193.

[128] Quoted in Percy MacKaye, *Epoch: The Life of Steele MacKaye,* volume 1 (New York, Boni & Liveright, 1927), 149-150.

science" instead of "family traditions" or "ultra-conservative ideas of education and religion."[129] In 1877, demonstrating his belief that François Delsarte's discoveries fit this bill, Lewis B. Monroe elevated Steele MacKaye to a faculty position. This move was yet another sign of Boston University School of Oratory's commitment to a New Elocution. It was a curricular choice that also facilitated generative collaborations among the program's students. Their enthusiastic investigations of Delsarte would soon become a pivotal source for broadening the reach of these "scientific" methods for calming the nerves, cultivating poise, and "freeing the channels of expression."

Poised for Change

"If you would move others, put your heart in the place of your larynx."

—François Delsarte, quoted by Genevieve Stebbins, *The Voice*, December 1885 &
Hallie Q. Brown, *Elocution and Physical Culture*, c. 1910

The 1878 graduation ceremony at Boston University School of Oratory was one for the record books. In addition to awarding diplomas to nineteen students (the largest class to date), Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, the governor of Massachusetts, the president of Wellesley, and many other social leaders were all in attendance. As Lucy Stone (a long-time activist and editor of the suffrage newspaper *Woman's Journal)* noted, the room was "crowded with interested listeners, all feeling proud of our University."[130] There was much to celebrate, indeed. Just five years after opening its doors, this young program had not only helped many

---

[129] "Joint and Disjoint Education in the Public Schools," *Boston University Year Book* (Boston, University Offices: 1879), 19.
[130] Lucy Stone, "Boston University School of Oratory," *Woman's Journal,* May 18, 1878.

“liberally educated men and women” secure positions as elocution instructors in several influential educational institutions, but it had also earned an international reputation as a center for communication innovations. Alexander Graham Bell’s debut of the telephone at the 1876 world’s fair was the most notable splash, but, as the *Boston Globe* put it, the school was also “claiming attention of cultured people” for other reasons, too.[131] For example, it had recently hired Steele MacKaye as a faculty member—a curricular choice that signaled the school’s continued investment in François Delsarte’s theories about “the mystery of emotion.”

Among the witnesses to these exciting developments was forty-five-year-old Mary Adams Currier. Both personally and professionally, she too had experienced an eventful five years. After nervously “breaking the ice” at the School of Oratory’s first class, she had gone on to become Wellesley’s first elocution professor when the women’s college opened in 1875. One year later, she married; and, keeping with the custom of the time, she left her teaching position. But the marriage had not lasted, and in 1878 Currier began taking steps to revitalize her elocution career. That spring, she enrolled for a third year of study at Boston University School of Oratory.[132] It would prove a consequential decision, one that not only gave her more time with her longtime mentor, Lewis B. Monroe, but also afforded her a front-row seat to some inspiring new expositions of François Delsarte’s theories.

Indeed, when Mary Adams Currier began classes in the fall 1878, the enthusiasm for the Frenchman's “Laws of Expression” was literally keeping students up at night. This was certainly true of twenty-two-year-old Franklin H. Sargent (1865-1924). Like MacKaye, Sargent had grown up in a household that supported abolitionism and artistic reforms. He had also studied

---

[131] “Oratory as an Art,” *The Boston Globe,* September 26, 1877.

[132] In 1879, Mary Adams Currier accepted a position at the Girl’s Latin School in Boston. By 1881, she was once again Professor of Elocution at Wellesley College. She retired from that position in 1896.

elocution at his alma mater, Harvard University. While these experiences made him amenable to the spirit of Delsarte's theories, MacKaye's presentations nevertheless proved transformative. "What he said," Sargent later recalled, "was so condensed, so profound, so learned, that I found real difficulty in fully comprehending it all." After attending MacKaye's first lecture, Sargent was so moved by this "great world of a new wisdom" that he stayed up all night reading through his notes, stopping only at sunrise for a meditative stroll through Boston Commons. Sargent also made a point of sharing his amazement with Lewis B. Monroe. Recording their exchange years later, Sargent recalled that after asking Professor Monroe, "What is this?" the "patriarchal old man, with his white hair and glowing face, . . . looked up . . . and said, "My boy, this is the key to the universe!'"[133]

The school's 1878 Delsarte lectures were also inspiring several late-night conversations among the female students. But, unlike Sargent, many of them were less moved by Steele MacKaye and far more impressed with his assistant, Genevieve Stebbins (1857-1934). An aspiring actor herself, Stebbins had moved from San Francisco, California to New York City just a few years earlier. After studying Delsarte's theories with Steele MacKaye for a little more than a year, she had earned his endorsement as a capable exponent of Delsarte's "Laws of Expression" and Harmonic Gymnastics. What's more, because MacKaye was often otherwise engaged in directing and acting in a play, Stebbins delivered several of the Delsarte lectures at Boston University during the school year of 1878.[134]

---

[133] Percy MacKaye, *Epoch: The Life of Steele MacKaye,* volume 1 (New York, Boni & Liveright, 1927), 290. Franklin H. Sargent partnered with MacKaye 1884 in opening the first professional acting school in the United States, the Lyceum Theatre in New York City. Soon thereafter, MacKaye moved on to other ventures. It is still in operation today as the American Academy of Dramatic Art.

[134] Letter from Lewis B. Monroe to Steele MacKaye, March 8, 1878, MacKaye Family Papers, Box 7, folder 8.

Among those who particularly admired Genevieve Stebbins' Delsarte demonstrations was Frances Stuart, the divorcee who had stopped wearing corsets as a result of her studies at BUSO. When Stebbins arrived, Stuart had recently completed the program and was working as an assistant instructor. In the summer of 1879, after finishing their work at Boston University, they also vacationed together in a nearby seaside town. Recalling this time, Genevieve Stebbins later noted that "long into the midnight hours," she and Frances Stuart "talked, built fairy castles, and planned and dreamed realization of the artistic ideals" they hoped to achieve.[135] Like many of their female colleagues, Stebbins and Stuart saw how Delsarte's ideas could transform American theater, but they also believed that this "key to the universe" could perform another social function: the liberation of women's voices. For, after just a few years of investigating Harmonic Gymnastics and Delsarte's Laws of Expression, they had already witnessed how these physical practices and scientific claims disproved assumptions about women's "natural" unfitness for public speech. Had fate not intervened, it is likely that Boston University School of Oratory would have continued providing Frances Stuart and Genevieve Stebbins with institutional support for developing their pedagogical dreams. But, during that same summer of 1879, Lewis B. Monroe died; and without his generous funding, so too did the Boston University School of Oratory. As had been the case with Delsarte's death, this loss resulted in some logistical setbacks, but it also opened up new opportunities. Before year's end, several of the program's graduates and instructors were already putting things in motion to establish new schools.[136]

---

[135] Frances Stuart Parker, *Reminiscences and Letters* (Chicago, Privately Printed, 1907), 19.

[136] See the appendix for a more thorough accounting of the professional work accomplished by BUSO students and graduates. To name just a few here, Charles Wesley Emerson founded a school in 1880, eventually known as Emerson College of Oratory (still in operation today). Anna Baright Curry and her husband, Samuel Silas Curry, founded a school in the early 1880s. It is still in operation as Curry College. As the next chapter shows, Genevieve

For, amidst all this change, one thing was rather clear: the demand for elocutionary expertise was not diminishing anytime soon. From the vantage point of several female elocutionists in particular, the needs and the next steps were obvious. If they wanted to help more Americans "free their channels of expression" by breathing deeply, relaxing their muscles, and rehearsing a wide range of embodied emotions, it was time for women to not only teach more classes in prominent spaces, but to also publish elocution manuals of their own. In the 1880s, as many women set out to do this work, they were well-poised for success. Building upon strategies that Boston University School of Oratory had helped prove effective, they would continue promoting the health benefits of breathing and relaxation exercises, leveraging the cultural appeal of Grecian statuary, and citing the authoritative claims of Delsarte's "science. What's more, and perhaps most importantly, they would also engage two very strategic resources: the cultural influence of women's clubs and the power of the press.

Stebbins and Mary S. Thompson announced plans to open a new school by the fall of 1879. By 1893, when Stebbins opened the New York School of Expression, they had parted ways.

CHAPTER 2

Ancient Antidotes Hot Off the Press

Publicizing Psycho-Physical Prescriptions for (White) Women's Well-Being

"This gymnastic system will cure nervousness
by training the body to habitual poise,
and the mind to calm."

—Genevieve Stebbins
Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture, 1888

In 1884, an ancient statue made a very modern debut in Paris, France. Nearly twenty years after arriving at the Louvre in fragments, the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* took her place at the top of the museum's grandest staircase. From such a prominent position, it was not surprising that this eighteen-foot Grecian goddess soon became the subject of effusive words of praise (see figure 22). Admiring the exquisite "vibrating rhythm of her movement," one critic for *Harper's Magazine* deemed her a "masterpiece born of the new ideal."[1] Though his designator "new" referenced the passional Hellenistic period from whence the statue came, the critic's regard for her "resplendent . . . vigor" also extended a nod of approval to contemporary individuals who dared embody this same kind of bold femininity. And, as it happened, many women were doing just that.

Between *Winged Victory's* 1884 debut and this critic's 1890 review, it became increasingly commonplace for American women to don loose-fitting gowns, gather in parlors, schools, community centers, and churches, and practice broadening their chests like the vision of

[1] Theodore Child, "The Winged Victory of Samothrace," *Harper's Magazine* 80 (March 1890), 560.

·THE·WINGED·VICTORY·
·OF·SAMOTHRACE·
·BY·
·THEODORE CHILD·

SAMOTHRACE is an island on the northwest of the entrance of the Dardanelles, opposite the mouth of the Hebrus, and distant about thirty-eight miles from the coast. Oval in shape, and measuring some eight miles long by six miles broad, it stands very high above the water, and no island in the whole northern archipelago is so conspicuous except Mount Athos. The history of this brown rock is not rich in events; sterile and without ports, it never had either commercial or political importance; its name is rarely mentioned by the Greek and Latin writers; the only town on the island, the ruins of which are now called Palæopoli, derived its celebrity amongst the ancients from its very antique sanctuary of

Figure 22 — "The Winged Victory of Samothrace" in *Harper's Magazine,* 1890.
Credit: Theodore Child, "The Winged Victory of Samothrace," *Harper's Magazine* 80 (March 1890), 560.

beauty so recently installed at the Louvre. That was not all. They also embodied the sculpted postures of many other ancient heroes and heroines, including *The Fighting Gladiator*, *Hercules, Flying Mercury*, *Dianna*, *Minerva*, and *Atlanta*. As was the case with works of art exhibited in esteemed museums, modern women's live-action displays also elicited words of praise in the press—most notably through the work of newly-minted and increasingly influential newspaper women.

This included Manhattan-based Eliza Putnam Heaton (1860-1919), a reporter whose syndicated columns were popular across the country (see figures 23 and 24).[2] In the late 1880s, as New York City's women began embodying postures of winged heroines and fighting warriors, Heaton did not miss the beat. After observing women's graceful demonstrations in the winter of 1889, she celebrated these practitioners as "supple, vigorous, [and] alive!"[3] Believing that women's confidence in parlors and their ease on the streets invigorated civic life, Heaton also made a prediction. In her view, this up-and-coming statue posing generation would prove themselves "a race of women as strong [and] as beautiful as the goddesses of old."[4] To help bring about this idealized future, Heaton also made sure to let readers know where to look for more information. Should any modern American woman want to claim herself a rightful heir to ancient visions of power and grace, she need only seek out a teacher of "Delsarte."

---

[2] Alice Fahs, *Out on Assignment: Newspaper Women and the Making of Modern Public Space*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 36.

[3] Eliza Putnam Heaton, "The Athletic Maid," *The Savannah Morning News*, January 3, 1889. As Alice Fahs notes, Heaton was among the first group of newspaper women whose careers benefitted from the 1880s sudden rise of syndication. Her reporting, which primarily focused on women's professional and social lives in urban spaces, was frequently broadcast on the women's pages of newspapers all across the country. See Alice Fahs, *Out on Assignment*, 36.

[4] Eliza Putnam Heaton, "The Athletic Maid."

Figure 23 — Eliza Putnam Heaton, c. 1891
At the time of this story, Heaton was on the staff of the *New York Recorder* and was one of about sixty women working as journalists in New York City-based newspapers. In addition to being a member of Sorosis, she was also vice-president of the Woman's Press Club, a club founded by Jane Croly, the same woman who organized Sorosis. Credit: "Bright Danvers Girls," *Boston Globe*, August 16, 1891

THE ATHLETIC MAID.

INVADES THE GYMNASIUM AND PERFORMS ON THE TRAPEZE.

She Vaults the Bar and Flies on the Swinging Rings, and She Does It All in the Prettiest of Divided Gowns—The Ladies' Athletic Association, Miss Mabel Jenness' Gesture Drill and the Women Who Take to Indian Clubs for Their Complexions.

(*Copyright* 1888.)

NEW YORK, Dec. 29.—Swish, swo-op! Is there any word to describe the sure swift grace of a bird's dive through the air?

What a slender, powerful figure it is, supple, vigorous, alive; Greek in development with the outlines of Diana, instead of Helen. Both arms are lifted, full, round, white columns. The head is thrown back on the shoulders with the abandon of a wood nymph. The body is poised for a second spring, firm, straight, elastic, without an ounce of superfluous flesh or the visible outline of a bone.

Swo-op!

Akin to the gymnasium, though it employs no apparatus, is the system of physical culture of which Miss Mabel Jenness, a pretty sister of the pretty dress reformer, Mrs. Annie Jenness Miller, is making a success. Miss Jenness' disciples do not wear the divided skirt—which I neglected to say is the uniform of Dr. Bissell's gymnasts as well as of the Ladies' Athletic Association—they wear Greek gowns. Miss Jenness herself is a tall Greek maiden in a white robe embroidered with gold. Her long draperies cling about a lithe figure girdled and clasped in the graceful antique fashion. She has made an elaborate study of all the muscles, with regard to the special movements required to develop different parts of the body and the result is what she calls a "gesture drill," which is really a series of simple exercises in part modified from the Delsarte, by the intelligent practice of which a woman may learn to stand and sit properly and may cultivate bodily strength and graceful and pleasing proportions.

Figure 24 — "A Tall Greek Maiden in a White Robe," News report by Eliza Putnam Heaton
Eliza Putnam Heaton, "The Athletic Maid," *The Savannah Morning News,* January 2, 1889.

Understanding how and why U.S. women came to associate this Frenchman's name with Grecian-styled exercises comprises the subject of this chapter. Of the many possible ways to tell that story, I follow a few critical lines of inquiry. First, I explore the collaborative relationship between Genevieve Stebbins (the person who first linked Grecian-styled statue posing with François Delsarte's theories) and her 1880s clientele (reform-minded women among whom were directors of elite girl's schools, organizers of women's clubs, and—rather consequently—writers of the news).[5] Such an examination demonstrates that Stebbins' development and publication of Delsartean pedagogy not only purposefully addressed her clientele's ideological and practical concerns about nervousness, but it also built upon proven tactics of the previous decade's elocution reforms: namely, an attention to health, a reference to revered ancient aesthetics, and an effort to broaden the range of acceptable expressions beyond those bound-up with "true womanhood." While this work demonstrated Genevieve Stebbins personal talents and innovations, this chapter brings new attention to the pivotal role her reform-minded clientele played in promoting statue posing methods on the burgeoning numbers of women's pages and society columns of the nation's newspapers.[6]

Those journalistic broadcasts also inform this chapter's discussion of a common claim that, as Eliza Putnam Heaton put it, the proliferation of these exercises would produce "a race of women" as supple and vigorous as idealized ancient heroines. As this chapter demonstrates, this

[5] Stebbins' features prominently in the historiography of American Delsartism, and rightly so given her significant role in the movement's development. For two studies focused on her career, see Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, "The Intellectual World of Genevieve Stebbins," *Dance Chronicle* 11 no. 3 (1988): 381-97; Kelly Jean Mullan, "Forgotten 'New' Dancer of New York City's Gilded Age: Genevieve Lee Stebbins and the Dance as Yet Undreamed," *Dance Research Journal* 52, no. 3 (2020): 97-117.

[6] In making this observation, I also build up Kelly Jean Lynch's recognition of the relationship between women's clubs and the development of American Delsartism/aesthetic dance. See, Kelly Jean Lynch, "Aesthetic Dance as Woman's Culture in America at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Genevieve Stebbins and the New York School of Expression." *Feminist Modernist Studies* 5, no. 3 (2022): 247-260.

coupling of science, Grecian aesthetics, and racial language served a unique purpose in the 1880s. Namely, this triad of science, art, and rhetoric helped facilitate post-Civil War sectional reunions among white Americans.

For, while Delsarte-inspired statue posing was surrounded with an aura of innovation, the practice also deployed a familiar range of semiotic claims. Since the 1700s, Grecian aesthetics were central to scientific projects of constructing racial hierarchies.[7] By associating enlightened ideals with ideal statuary, like *Apollo* and *Venus De Milo*, references to Grecian aesthetics functioned as visual short-hand for buttressing claims of white supremacy. Before the Civil War, these semiotics helped legitimize slavery. In the Reconstruction-Era, they performed similar work by reinscribing a "biological" basis for undermining equitable citizenship. One of the more compelling examples is an 1870 political cartoon titled, "Our Goddess of Liberty: What is She to Be?" (see figure 25). The image placed a white lady liberty at the center, a representation of the "highest" state of ideal womanhood. Surrounding her were a well-trafficked cast of racialized "lady liberties," ranked according to their supposed "natural" aptitude for achieving "true womanhood."[8]

None of the most publicized sources of American Delsartism challenged these long-standing racialized rankings. Instead, white American women's promotion of Delsarte-inspired statue posing largely confirmed such views. Indeed, as this chapter argues, the cultural mainstreaming of these Grecian-styled practices during the 1880s embodied New Womanhood in ways that normalized anew the cultural appeal of white supremacy. Importantly, this

---

[7] For example, see David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[8] "Our Goddess of Liberty: What is She to Be?" *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 30, no.772 (July 16, 1870), 288.

Figure 25 — "Our Goddess of Liberty: What is She to Be?" 1870
Credit: *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 30, no.772 (July 16, 1870), 288.

development also reaffirmed racialized views about the matters of emotional and physical health such practices aimed to alleviate. In this light, American Delsartism can rightly be understood as a continuation of earlier nineteenth century efforts to engage physiognomic sciences as tools for constructing and promoting white feminism.[9]

Though this chapter focuses primarily on the Delsartean pursuits of white American women during the 1880s, it is important to note that Black women's Delsartean pursuits also took meaningful shape in this decade (a development addressed more fully in chapter four). This was particularly evident through the work of Black educators and elocutionists, women whose labor and voices were vital to establishing an era-defining expansion of educational systems and schools for Black Americans. Indeed, when these women reflected on their pioneering efforts, they took care to recognize themselves as early adopters of "the New Education," a curriculum that Josephine Silone Yates, a teacher of chemistry and elocution, described as "the most rational if not royal road to knowledge."[10] Hallie Q. Brown's 1880s educational activism exemplified such commitments. In an 1889 address to her peers, she recognized the curricula of elocution and psycho-physical culture as tools by which "Black women were organizing their strength" in order to also "compel a recognition of their rights."[11]

---

[9] In making this argument, I draw upon scholarship about women's antebellum embrace of phrenology and physiognomy as methods for fashioning beauty ideals that celebrate white "true womanhood." That the same tactics flourished in the period of Reconstruction only underscores the need for greater discussions of the similarities and differences of these self-defining cultural practices. On earlier nineteenth century physiognomy see, Mary Cathryn Cain, "The Art and Politics of Looking White: Beauty Practice among White Women in Antebellum America," *Winterthur Portfolio* 42, no. 1 (2008): 27–50; Rachel Walker, *Beauty and the Brain: The Science of Human Nature in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023); Carla Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself: Producing and Using Phrenological Knowledge in 19th-Century America," *Centaurs* 55 (2013): 104-130; Susan Branson, "Phrenology and the Science of Race in Antebellum America," *Early American Studies* (Winter 2017): 164-193.

[10] Josephine Silone-Yates, "Afro American Women as Educators," in L.A. Scruggs, *Women of Distinction*, 311.

[11] Hallie Q. Brown, "Address at Columbia Conference," in *Proceedings Quarto-Centenary Conference of the African M.E. Church of South Carolina*, ed. Benjamin W. Arnett (Xenia, Ohio: Aldine Ptg. House, 1889), 100–102; 142–143.

That Black women's voices and visions of New Womanhood were purposefully kept out of view in the newspapers and professional publications that mainstreamed American Delsartism further illuminates the ways in which one of the era's most popular practices for embodying feminine freedom also legitimized the rise of racial segregation.[12]

Expression Expertise on Demand

"We have found self-education very necessary,
and a woman's club a wonderful school . . .
Some have found in Sorosis a stepping-stone to a public career,
others a resting-place from labor and anxiety."

—Jane C. Croly, Newspaper Woman and Founder of Sorosis, 1886[13]

When Boston University School of Oratory closed in the summer of 1879, several of the program's students and instructors were already carrying on the school's work of elocution reform.[14] In 1880, Peter Robertson and Hallie Q. Brown were teaching elocution classes at Wilberforce University.[15] The following year she debuted her elocutionary talents at the prestigious Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City. "The audience was large and enthusiastic," she later recalled, adding that their praise boosted her "self-assurance."[16] Mary Adams Currier was shoring up women's self-assurance in other settings: through her elocution classes at Wellesley and through public lectures. Given her own revelatory experience

---

[12] In this outcome, American Delsartism's construction of whiteness was consistent with historian Elizabeth Grace Hale's observations about the centrality of "race," in the era's creation of "new collective identities." See Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 7.

[13] Jane C. Croly, *Sorosis: Its Origin and History* (New York: J.J. Little & Co, 1886), 27.

[14] See the appendix for details about these individuals.

[15] "Wilberforce," *Indianapolis Leader*, December 25, 1880.

[16] Quoted from Hallie Q. Brown's unpublished autobiography, As the Mantle Falls, which is discussed in, Daleah B. Goodwin, "A Torch in the Valley: The Life and Work of Miss Hallie Quinn Brown," 21.

from her first lessons about breathing power twenty years earlier, it was not surprising that she promoted her talks in local newspapers under the title of "Respiration."[17] Breathing lessons also featured prominently in the elocution programs other graduates were implementing at places including Johns Hopkins University, Colby College, Ohio State University, and Cleveland Public Schools.[18] A handful of graduates were also starting elocution schools of their own. In Boston, Anna Baright Curry named her new venture The School of Elocution and Expression, and Charles Wesley Emerson named his, the Boston Conservatory of Elocution, Oratory, and Dramatic Art. Finding her own Boston connection advantageous, Harriet Augusta Prunk also referenced the city as she opened the doors to her Indianapolis-Boston School of Oratory.[19]

Graduates' training in Delsarte's Laws of Expression and Harmonic Gymnastics also remained an advantageous source for launching their careers. Soon after his first sleepless nights studying "the key to the universe," Franklin H. Sargent began channeling his Delsarte enthusiasm into a partnership with Steele MacKaye. By 1884, they had opened the nation's first professional acting school.[20] The midnight-dreaming of Frances Stewart and Genevieve Stebbins would also generate new real-life opportunities. Though, as fate would have it, they would not build those Delsarte-inspired "fairy-castles" of "artistic ideals" together. After attending a summer educational program at Martha's Vineyard, Stewart met someone else with whom to partner: Francis Wayland Parker, a gregarious educator and the Superintendent of Boston Public

---

[17] *The Boston Globe*, February 4, 1881; "Local Lines," *The Boston Globe*, February 9, 1882.

[18] The individuals mentioned here are Charles L. Woodsworth (Professor of Elocution at Johns Hopkins); Lucius Alonzo Butterfield (Professor of Elocution at Colby College); Katherine Westendorf (Professor of Elocution at The Ohio State University); and Louis C. Force (Director Elocution for Cleveland Public Schools). For further details, see the appendix.

[19] For details on Prunk, see the appendix. I discuss this school in chapter four, as it was one of the schools of elocution where Lillian Thomas Fox studied.

[20] Percy MacKaye, *Epoch: The Life of Steele MacKaye,* volume 1 (New York, Boni & Liveright, 1927), 290. Franklin H. Sargent partnered with MacKaye 1884 in opening the first professional acting school in the United States, the Lyceum Theatre in New York City.

Schools.[21] By 1883, they had married and set out to Chicago for a different kind of joint venture, taking charge of bringing the "New Education" and the Delsartean lessons of the "New Elocution" to Cook County Normal School.[22]

On trend with her colleagues, Genevieve Stebbins also made moves to promote her Delsarte expertise. In October 1879, with a valuable letter of endorsement in hand from Steele MacKaye, she and Mary S. Thompson, another instructor from Boston University School of Oratory, announced plans to open a school of their own. Broadcasting this news in *The Chicago Tribune,* a reporter noted that these enterprising young women were "very happily and very truly" calling their new venture a "School of Expression."[23] In the reporter's telling, this distinguishing term "expression" was itself a trend-setting move. Nothing of the "old horror of elocutionary reading" would be found in this new school, she stated. "Out" was a sentimental insistence on "remarkable contortions, and grimaces, and rantings," and "in" was a commitment to the "highest idea of art training" according to the "famous Delsarte" system. Such methods, the report proclaimed, were sure to result "not only in confidence, but in ease and graceful movement" for "any and every awkward or self-conscious" person.[24]

---

[21] On Francis W. Parker's role in the development of education, see Flora J. Cook, "Colonel Francis W. Parker: His Influence on Education," *Schools: Studies in Education* 2, no. 1 (2005): 157–70.

[22]Jack K. Campbell, "Colonel Parker's New Woman and the New Education," *McGill Journal of Education* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1975): 150-168.

[23] N.P, "Boston," T*he Chicago Tribune*, October 9, 1879. To note, while both women advertised in Werner's Magazine their instruction at various locations in Manhattan, I have not found any evidence that they ever jointly launched a brick-and-mortar School of Expression. By 1892, they had also parted ways professionally, likely as a result of Genevieve Stebbins' divorce from Mary S. Thompson's brother. In 1893, Genevieve Stebbins opened her New York School of Expression, in partnership with her second husband, Norman Astley and other collaborators. Its first offices were at the newly built Carnegie Music Hall. For details of that school, see Norman Astley, *The New York School of Expression Prospectus* (New York: Edgar Werner, 1893).

[24] For the purpose of establishing their credibility, it was also common for teachers to cite their studies with, or endorsements from, prominent teachers. Such details were also emphasized in this announcement. In all capital letters, the report noted that Miss Stebbins was said to be "THE ONLY TEACHER OF THIS SYSTEM, EXCEPT MR. MACKAYE, IN AMERICA," and Miss Thompson's reading sensibilities were admired by "MR. LONGFELLOW AND MR. HOWELLS," two of America's most esteemed literati, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) and William Dean Howells (1837-1920).

While this announcement surely highlighted Stebbins and Thompson's talents, it also conveyed key arguments that a rising generation of elocution reformers made as they "pitched" their expertise. First, finding it advantageous to claim the scientific validity of their methods, they would consistently reference Delsarte. Second, to emphasize the health benefits of their classes, they would also highlight the nerve-calming effects of psycho-physical exercises—an assertion that was especially useful in expanding the demand for their services. For, it claimed for expression training a utility not only for aspiring actors or elocutionists, but also for all who desired more ease in everyday life (a.k.a "the stage of society").[25]

Based on their experience at Boston University School of Oratory, Stebbins and Thomas knew that this "pitch" was particularly well-tuned to the needs and desires of American women. That proved enormously true. Within a year of announcing their plans for a school of expression, leaders from the country's most prominent women's clubs were already endorsing Stebbins' classes. In September 1880, for example, the editors at *Woman's Journal*, the Boston-based periodical of the American Woman Suffrage Association, announced that "Miss Genevieve Stebbins has been giving a very fine course of lectures" at Mrs. Randall Diehl's Conservatory of Elocution on Long Island and would soon be giving more lectures at Mrs. Diehl's Conservatory in Manhattan. Confirming Stebbins' status as "Mr. Steele MacKaye's best pupil in the Delsarte method of expression," the report also praised her own expertise. "Miss Stebbins is young, has a graceful speech and manner, and is a good exponent of her subject."[26]

---

[25] N.P., "Boston" *The Chicago Tribune*, October 9, 1879. John Andrick also notes the significance of this transfer of knowledge and technique from the domain of theater and elocution to that of wider therapeutic culture. See, John M. Andrick, "Delsartean Hypnosis for Girls' Bodies and Minds: Annie Payson Call and the Lasell Seminary Nerve Training Controversy," *History of Psychology* 15, no. 2 (2012):133.

[26] "Concerning Women," *Woman's Journal* 11, no. 36 (September 4, 1880): 281.

This was not the first time Stebbins had received published praise for her expressive talents, and her preparations for this particular success had also begun long before studying Delsarte's theories. Born in San Francisco to parents with Boston Brahmin status and wealth, and raised by a community of progressive educators and artists, Genevieve Stebbins youth was not wanting for encouragement (see figure 26). As her aunt and adoptive mother, Louise Amelia Clappe described, Stebbins' childhood was marked by an "atmosphere of adulation," and a "constant demand" from San Francisco's elite for her "youthful private theatricals, children's dances" and "statuary" pantomimes and poses.[27] Local newspapers also acknowledged her talents. At age eleven, for example, she received accolades for an "exquisitely recited" school performance of "Maud Muller."[28] At age sixteen, when she moved to New York City to pursue a career in acting, she continued enjoying broad and consistent support for her ambitions. In addition to her fans in San Francisco, her familial connection to the luminary Julia Ward Howe provided for advantageous connections to New England's social elites and influencers.[29]

In this light, the *Woman's Journal's* acknowledgement of Stebbins' 1880 elocutionary success represented a continuation of familiar validation. Yet, at this point in her career, such a report also signified an especially consequential nod of approval. For, in referencing Mrs. Anna Randall Diehl (1833-1909), the report signaled Stebbins' acceptance by a leading member of Sorosis, one the nation's most influential women's clubs. As the chairwoman of the club's Committee on Education and a well-known elocution teacher herself, Mrs. Anna Randall Diehl's

---

[27] L.A.C. [Louise Amelia Clappe], "Genevieve Stebbins, *Werner's Directory of Elocutionists* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1887), 280. For greater discussion of Louise Amelia Clappe and Stebbins, see Suzanne Bordelon, "'Private Letter' for Public Audiences: The Complexities of Ethos in Louise Clappe's The Shirley Letters from the California Mines, 1851-1852," *Rhetoric Review* 37, no. 8 (December 2017): 1-13; Kelly Jean Mullan, "Forgotten 'New' Dancer of New York City's Gilded Age," 102-103.

[28] "The Denman School Exhibition," *San Francisco Chronicle,* September 17, 1868.

[29] L.A.C. [Louise Amelia Clappe], "Genevieve Stebbins, 280.

Figure 26 — Genevieve Stebbins, c. 1887
Credit: Elsie M. Wilbor, ed. *Werner's Directory of Elocutionists* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1887), 289.

opinions carried some weight on matters pertaining to expressive training.[30] Moreover, when she began promoting Genevieve Stebbins' classes, Diehl not only boosted Stebbins' career, she also helped secure a role for "Delsarte" in the ongoing effort of empowering women's individual and collective voices.

For those who had dedicated their careers to elocution reform in the 1870s, Stebbins' affiliation with Sorosis constituted a significant win. Founded in 1868 by a group of New York City journalists, educators, and patrons of the arts, Sorosis was especially committed to

[30] Anna Randall Diehl was a teacher of elocution at State Normal School in Albany. In the 1860s, she also presented papers at educational conferences also attended by Lewis B. Monroe. This suggests that Stebbins' connections from Boston University School of Oratory likely played a role in Stebbins' introduction to Diehl. See, "Elocution," *The Buffalo Commercial*, February 23, 1867; "National Teachers' Meeting," *The Buffalo Commercial*, June 15, 1869.

sponsoring social activities that affirmed and elevated women's powers of self-expression.[31] Its very name conveyed this goal, as "sorosis" was a botanical term for a multiple flowering fruit.[32] To support this interest in aggregate growth, the club had been prioritizing elocutionary experiences for over a decade. Indeed, practical affirmations of women's vocal powers constituted some of the club's most consistent activities.[33] For, as historian Karen J. Blair describes, the club's focus on activities that could "free women from inhibitions about speaking publicly," were crucial to their larger goal of "[transforming] ladydom."[34] By engaging in casual conversations, delivering formal speeches, debating issues, and reciting poetry, clubwomen learned to step away from expectations of silence and self-consciousness and nurture instead "the skills that would enable [them] to demand reforms."[35] Praising the benefits of these vocal exercises, one clubwoman aptly stated, "Women no longer lose their head where they find their feet."[36]

By the 1900s, Genevieve Stebbins' classes had certainly helped many women "find their feet," but this late 1870s collaboration with leading members of Sorosis would prove enormously consequential to her career. This was especially true given the large numbers of newspaper women that constituted the club's membership. For, in gaining these journalists as clientele, she also kept company with individuals who could channel their enthusiasm for expression training

---

[31] On Sorosis and the era's substantial development of women's clubs, see Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (Teaneck, New Jersey: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980); Ann Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[32] "Queries," *Educational Notes and Queries* 4, no. 39 (November 1878):142.

[33] Clubwomen's interest in expression training is also addressed in Carol Mattingly, *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002); Carol Mattingly. *The Temperate Woman: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

[34] Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 15, 6-7.

[35] Ibid, 7.

[36] Quoted in Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist,* 6-7.

into positive press. They would not disappoint. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, their society notices and feature stories would not only broadcast praise for Genevieve Stebbins' pedagogy, but these reports also gave momentum to the larger project of transforming American ideals about feminine expressivity.[37]

In many ways women's elocutionary needs looked much the same in the 1880s as they had in the 1870s. The ideals of "true womanhood" still made corsets an appealing fashion and small gestures a firm expectation. Medical professionals and society leaders alike continued claiming that white women's professional and educational pursuits would ruin their health. Such concerns were certainly well-known among Sorosis members, as the crux of their organizational actions were directed at undermining and confronting the sexism that pervaded throughout social and professional life. It was, for example, the reason behind the club's first public demonstration. In 1869, they had conspicuously and strategically dined together at Delmonico's. That this public display rocked establishment norms was immediately evident in a full-page cartoon lambasting the clubwomen and their "masculine" self-interest (see figure 27).

By 1880, after ten years of organizing activities for women's empowerment, some of the early challenges Sorosis members faced had eased up. For example, the club had largely been successful in helping "respectable" white women confidently dine in restaurants without male chaperones. But members still faced a range of stubborn social criticisms and personal

[37] After Stebbins married Mary S. Thompson's brother (whom she later divorced), one story, celebrated their norm-defying upper-class life. "Miss Stebbins has more of a reputation for beauty than domesticity," it stated. Yet, even so, the couple had decided not to be reliant on live-in servants, favoring instead hiring such work out for just one-hour a day. Jointly in support of this domestic arrangement, the couple also supported each other's careers. She "is a very busy and successful woman," it noted, who "writes as well as teaches and has brought out a book since she was married." As for domestic responsibilities, the reporter noted "the burdens of it are taken up equally." In this claim, she offered evidence of Mr. Thompson's domesticity. "Last time I saw Monsieur," she noted, "he was declaring jubilantly that he had at last learned to make a Spanish omelet." A scene that, in many ways, referenced and reversed the message of so many anti-suffrage political cartoons depicting men as miserably burdened by their wife's non-domestic ambitions. See, Molly Bawn, "They Are Getting Married, "*The Philadelphia Inquire*r, December 1, 1889.

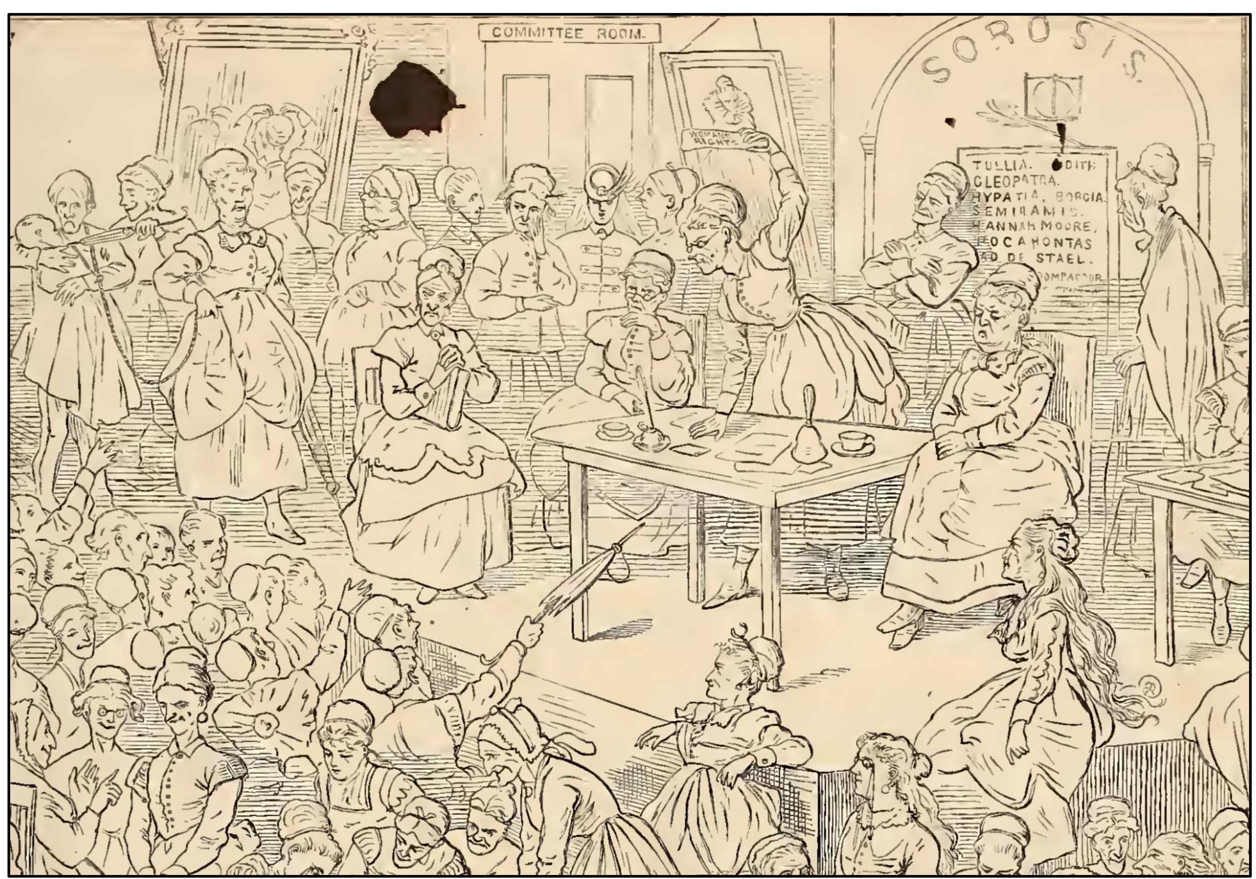


Figure 27 — Detail from "Sorosis," a Caricature of the Club's Meetings at Delmonico's, 1869
Credit: "Sorosis," *Harper's Weekly,* May 15, 1869.

difficulties in their efforts to speak out in new places and in new ways. In addition to being excluded from many aspects of public life, self-interested or politically ambitious white women were still regularly mocked as "mannish" figures, devoid of "womanly" or "motherly" charm.[38] While several women had cultivated the bravado necessary for combating such attacks, there was an ongoing need for experiences that bolstered women's self-confidence and speaking skills.

Though professional women who founded and belonged to Sorosis were a fairly bold bunch to begin with, they were not immune to the physical and emotional strains of their jobs. As Alice Fahs has observed in her studies of newspaper women, complaints and concerns about

[38] For a deeper discussion on the visual culture of women's movements, see Allison K. Lange, *Picturing Political Power: Images in the Women's Suffrage Movement.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020.

nervous exhaustion were commonplace. As Fahs put it, they "frankly acknowledged that newspaper work was a job in which many women eventually "broke down."[39] Though their rhetoric registered their awareness of sexist doubts about whether women were naturally "fit" for what had been "men's work," Fahs also observes that newspaper women were quick to attribute widespread fatigue among white women as a problem of culture rather than a personal failing. For, as they pointed out, they were performing work without the same kinds of domestic and social support that most men enjoyed.[40]

For addressing these needs, elocution classes offered more than just methods for strengthening voices and calming nerves, they quite importantly helped build social structures that professional women felt necessary for sustaining their health and career. In other words, by supporting the growing profession of elocution training, newspaper women and other professionals were also investing in the kinds of services that could provide them with space and time for relaxation and rejuvenation (see figure 28).

In the early 1880s, Sorosis was also far from the only meaningful group making demands for psycho-physical exercises, and Stebbins far from the only rising star in generating excitement for the liberatory potential of Harmonic Gymnastics and Delsarte's Laws of Expression. Because no manuals had yet been published about these methods, they were very much shared via word of mouth. For this promotional work, newspaper women also played a leading role. The newspaper trail for Henrietta Crane Russell (1849-1918), another student from Boston University School of Oratory offers a case in point.[41] After completing one year of study with Lewis B.

---

[39] Fahs, *Out on Assignment*, 41.

[40] Fahs, *Out on Assignment*, 42.

[41] On Henrietta Crane Russell, see Richard A. Meckel "Henrietta Russell: Delsartean Prophet to the Gilded Age." *Journal of American Culture* 12 (Spring 1989): 65-78; Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, *The Cultivation of Mind and Body in American Delsartism* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 31-44.

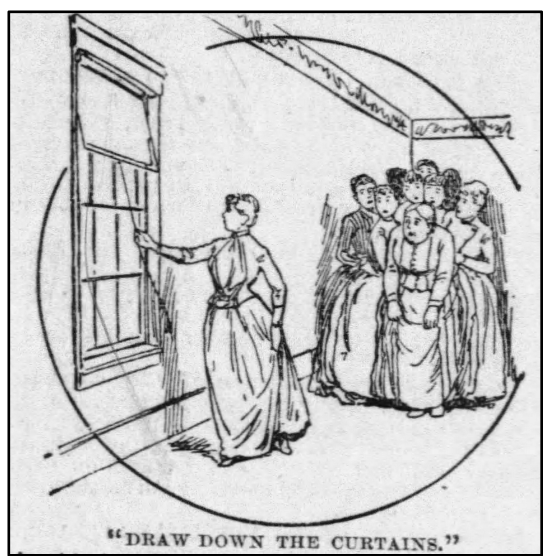


Figure 28 — Delsarte Class for Members of Sorosis, Chicago, 1889
Credit: "Not Meant to be Public: A Sister of Sorosis Instructing a Class of Chicago Ladies," *Chicago Tribune*, December 1, 1889.

Monroe, Russell traveled to Paris, France for additional training with François Delsarte's son. By the fall of 1878, Brooklyn newspapers were broadcasting praise for her "Delsarte" lectures at private residences of Brooklyn's literary-minded elites.[42] Not long thereafter, the papers of Buffalo, New York offered accolades for her sharing her Delsarte knowledge in their city. These "teaching in the art of expression," the paper affirmed, "were of the utmost importance to our happiness and common welfare."[43] Educational leaders were inclined to agree, including the principal of an elite girl's seminary outside of Boston. When she appeared before an audience of young women who aspired to futures at Wellesley and other women's colleges, Russell's Delsarte lectures were clearly a hit.[44] To help ensure the schools' continued instruction of these methods, the principal also arranged for one of their own teachers to complete specialized training with Henrietta Crane Russell. That student was Annie Payson Call, and this transfer of

[42] "Franklin Literary Society," *The Brooklyn Union*, April 1, 1879; "Expression," *The Brooklyn Union,* May 23, 1879.
[43] "Mrs. Crane's Lectures," *The Buffalo Commercial,* June 28, 1881.
[44] "The Art of Expression: An Interesting Lecture at Lasell Seminary," *The Boston Globe*, May 8, 1880.

knowledge would prove a transformative launch to her own illustrious career as a "nerve trainer."[45]

In 1880, Henrietta Crane Russell's word-of-mouth parlor lectures also helped launch the Delsarte-inspired career of Emily Mulkin Bishop, a young school teacher from upstate New York.[46] Though she learned of the methods from a friend who had attended one of Henrietta Russell Crane's parlor lectures, the lessons proved transformative. Recalling this experience, Bishop noted her early appreciation for the nerve-calming exercises and the science behind them. "I was a stoop shouldered, sunken chested, sharp-voiced woman until I began training in this way," she explained. After practicing the aesthetic gymnastics, she "improved so rapidly in health and spirits [that she was] firmly convinced of the system's value."[47]

In the early 1880s, Emily Mulkin Bishop also witnessed the same results in her own classrooms. As one of her students, Gwyneth King Roe (1868-1968), would later describe, these "Delsarte" exercises created "greater ease and harmony, "whether meeting the day's work, or at the social gatherings of the evenings or afternoon."[48] They also made for proud moments at home. Though parlor entertainments had been nerve-wracking events for her in the past, Roe credited her "Delsarte" practices at school with helping her gain "enough composure to respond to pressure." Such displays of confidence also made her parents fans of "Delsarte" exercises. For, as she recalled, "they puffed up with pride" as a result of their daughter's achievement.[49]

---

[45] On Annie Payson Call's career, see John M. Andrick, "Delsartean Hypnosis for Girls' Bodies and Minds: Annie Payson Call and the Lasell Seminary Nerve Training Controversy," *History of Psychology* 15, no. 2 (2012): 124-144; Hiie Saumaa, "Annie Payson Call's Training in Release and Somatic Imagination," *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 1 (2017): 70–86.

[46] Bishop's colleague was Frances Chamberlain Streeter, and is listed in attendance at following lecture Henrietta Russell Crane, "The Delsarte System," Buffalo Morning Express, September 28, 1880.

[47] "Mrs. Bishop and Delsarte Exercise," *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, February 3, 1894.

[48] Gwyneth King Roe, unpublished autobiography, box 4, folder 8, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

[49] Ibid.

Among those paying close attention to the growing enthusiasm for all things Delsarte was an enterprising New York-based publisher, Edgar S. Werner. In 1879, he had launched a professional journal titled *The Voice* primarily as a means for discussing the latest methods for curing stuttering. But the rapid expansion of teachers of expression and music quickly broadened the scope of his publication.[50] Within just a few years of that inaugural edition, he began prioritizing content that spoke to their interests, making this journal a space where teachers across the country could post their happenings, weigh in on methods, pose pedagogical questions, and submit answers. And in the early 1880s, the questions and answers regularly circulating throughout *The Voice* were those involving the meaning and practical uses of François Delsarte's Laws of Expression.

As elocution teachers began utilizing *The Voice* for professional discourse about methods and possibility, two things were increasingly clear. First, there was high demand for a comprehensive publication about Delsarte's theories. Second, there was a great interest for more investigations about the potential of utilizing Delsarte's theories for therapeutic remedies. In November 1883, for example, *The Voice* published such health inquiries under a rather clever title. According to the editor, questions about using Delsarte's philosophy for "remedying muscular and nervous weakness" or "developing the mental faculties," were among the top "Delsartean Nuts to Crack"[51] (see figure 29).

Given Steele MacKaye's personal studies with François Delsarte, he seemed the most obvious authority for writing such a treatise. Thus, Edgar Werner had turned to him first. Though MacKaye responded to Werner's requests, and at one point he even proposed a nine-volume

---

[50] The best study of this publication to date remains, Francine Merritt. "Werner's Magazine: Pioneer Speech Journal," (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1954).

[51] "Delsartean Nuts to Crack," *The Voice* 5, no. 11 (November 1883): 164.

DELSARTEAN NUTS TO CRACK.

A correspondent sends the following questions, which we should be pleased to have our Delsartean friends answer :

I.

The prevalent idea is that the Delsarte Philosophy is confined to expression, whether in language, painting, or sculpture. Does it, according to your interpretation, include more ?

II.

Does it enter the province of orthopedy and of medicine ? For instance, can it be used for remedying muscular and nervous weakness ?

III.

Can it be used for developing the mental faculties, strengthening the memory, sharpening and concentrating the thoughts, etc. ?

IV.

What is an æsthetic gymnastic ?

V.

Much is said about the central and peripheral action of the nerves in speech and gesture. Does the Delsarte Philosophy teach how efforts may be begun at the nerve centres ? If so, how can this be done ?

Figure 29 — "Delsartean Nuts to Crack," 1883
Credit: *The Voice* 5, no. 11 (November 1883): 164.

series on the subject, his follow-through waned.[52] For, by the late 1870s, Steele MacKaye had largely shifted his time and energy to the work of building new theaters and writing and directing plays.[53] When it came to the labor of teaching or writing about Delsarte's ideas, he had largely passed that baton to students— and, in the early 1880s, Genevieve Stebbins was among those who were willingly and successfully picking it up.[54]

---

[52] Letter from Edgar S. Werner to Steele MacKaye, September 15, 1890. He offered to publish MacKaye's proposed 9-volume series at a royalty of twenty percent. MacKaye countered on September 20 asking for $10,000 upfront. The result of the negotiation is unclear, but MacKaye never wrote the volumes.

[53] Among his most ambitious projects was Madison Square Theater, a state-of-the-art facility that included new stage technologies and elaborate décor by Louis Comfort Tiffany. On MacKaye's theatrical innovations and career, see J.A. Sokalaski, *Pictorial Illusionism: The Theatre of Steele MacKaye* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

[54] Steele MacKaye to Genevieve Stebbins, 3 September 1879. Stebbins often included MacKaye's endorsement in her own publications. For example, see *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture* 5th edition (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1895), 109. She included this letter in her publications even after they had a professional falling out. On those disagreements, see Mullan, "Forgotten New Dancer," 105-106.

Curating Aesthetic Remedies

"By a happy, judicious mingling of philosophy and drill-exercises,
the author has avoided making the book either
too metaphysical or too mechanical. . .
Every gymnastic has its philosophical explanation,
every principle its physical application."

—Advertisement for *The Delsarte System of Expression* by Genevieve Stebbins in *The Voice*, December 1885

Between 1879 and 1885, Genevieve Stebbins not only put things in motion to launch a School of Expression, she also wrote a manuscript based on her studies with Steele MacKaye and her own practical explorations of Harmonic Gymnastics and François Delsarte's Laws of Expression. Her writing incorporated recommendations for new exercises and thoughts from several other authorities on matters of art and science.[55] When she debuted her writing in *The Voice* from June to December 1885, readers resoundingly celebrated her explanatory style and her pedagogical approach. By year's end, Edgar Werner also published Stebbins' articles as a book: *Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression.* In the words of a colleague, this publication—well timed for the Christmas holidays—was an "era-making" "event in the elocutionary and artistic world."[56] In promoting her work, *The Voice* especially emphasized how Stebbins had "drawn from various additional sources, ancient and modern," and had thoroughly "taken all they had to give." By, "pruning, analyzing, comparing, adapting, formulating, constructing, and testing theories, principles, rules and methods," such advertisements declared, Stebbins had delivered a manual that was "Plain, Practical, and Helpful."[57]

---

[55] On her discussion of the "grammar of pantomime," see Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression,* 6th edition (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1902), 257-274.

[56] Elsie Wilbor, "A Glimpse at the Work of Genevieve Stebbins," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 13, no. 2 (February 1891), 29-31.

[57] Advertisement for *Delsarte System of Expression*, *The Voice* 5, no. 12 (December, 1888), 180. For Stebbins' distinctive rhetorical style, especially in the context of elocution instruction, see Suzanne Bordelon, "Female

WHICH IS THE BETTER?

These cuts are from *Dio Lewis's Monthly* for August, 1883, which number contains an excellent article on "Woman's Figure." Enough has been said upon the evils of cramping the torso to deter any common-sense woman from thus deforming herself or her daughters. We reproduce these illustrations and let them tell their own story, merely adding that those who would attain unto the best use of their voices must give free play to all their respiratory and vocal muscles. Any attempt to decrease the size of the body, and especially in the region of the diaphragm, is sure to impair the vocal power as well as to injure vital organs. Which is the better judge of the proper shape of your body, your Creator or your dressmaker?

I. Woman as nature made her.

II. Woman as fashion deformed her.

I. This statue, the Venus de Milo, has long been regarded by anatomists and artists as one of the best representations of a beautiful and perfect woman which the art world can show.

II. By its side is a picture from a fashion magazine.

Figure 30 — *Venus De Milo* vs. the Fashionable Waist, 1883
Edgar S. Werner's *The Voice* reproduced this image from *Dio Lewis's Monthly,* which had also reproduced the image from William Henry Fowler's 1881 text, *Fashion in Deformity.* In 1892, Genevieve Stebbins also included this same image, along with entire reproduction of William H. Fowler's essay in the appendix of her first edition of *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics.*
Credit: "Which is the Better," *The Voice,* 5, no. 11 (November 1883): 168.

Nothing exemplified this practical-minded ethos more than Stebbins' choice to instruct Delsarte's Laws of Expression by way of ancient statuary. The methods also clearly met a need. For, soon after Stebbins published her instructions for Delsarte-inspired statue posing, women across the country almost instantaneously took up such exercises and called them "Delsarte." As countless women increasingly relied upon these practices to gain strength and ease, Stebbins'

Embodiment, Contradiction, and Ethos Negotiations in Genevieve Stebbins' Late Nineteenth-Century Statue posing Arguments," *Rhetoric Review* 38, no. 1 (2019): 23-38; Paige M. Van Osdol, "The Women's Elocution Movement in America, 1870-1915," (PhD. diss., The Ohio State University, 2012).

pedagogical innovation helped establish her reputation as someone who was eminently capable of cracking those proverbial "Delsartean nuts."

To help foster approval for women's statue posing practices, Stebbins instructions methodically explained why every classical statue could legitimately function as a license for emotional experimentation. This included expressions that were associated with "ideal masculine" and thus largely considered out of bounds for "true women." For example, her manual began with recommendations to pose like *Venus de Milo* or *Venus de Medici*. In addition to referencing widely praised models of ideal femininity, this recommendation also reinforced the aesthetic activism of dress reform. Indeed, in a later book, Stebbins would reproduce the common visualization of a cramped and confined "corseted waist" next to the healthy, natural waist of the ancient statue (see figure 30).[58] Further recommendations amplified the usage of Grecian iconography as a method for encouraging women's freedom of movement. For example, Stebbins recommended that women "essay before the glass" the posture of Apollo—the ideal masculine—and any other heroic figure from the ancient pantheon, including the warrior *Athena*, the huntress *Dianna*, the eloquent and commanding *Demosthenes,* and the defiant *Fighting Gladiator* (see figure 31).[59]

Anticipating that women's adoption of these exercises might raise some eyebrows in several American homes and communities, Stebbins explained how Delsarte's theories made such posturing scientifically and spiritually sound. For example, her discussion and illustrations

---

[58] Genevieve Stebbins, "Delsarte System of Expression," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 7, no. 8 (October 1885): 40.

[59] The instruction to "essay" statues "before the glass" first appeared in Genevieve Stebbins, "Delsarte System of Expression, *Werner's Voice Magazine* 7, no. 12 (October 1885): 155. It was included thereafter in her book by the same name, *Delsarte System of Expression.*

Figure 31 — Photographs of Ancient Statues included in *Delsarte System of Expression,* 1891.
These are some of the statues that Genevieve Stebbins used to illustrate Delsarte's Laws of Expression. In 1891, she added these images to her sixth edition of her original 1885 publication, *Delsarte System of Expression.*
Credit: Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression,* 6th edition (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1902).

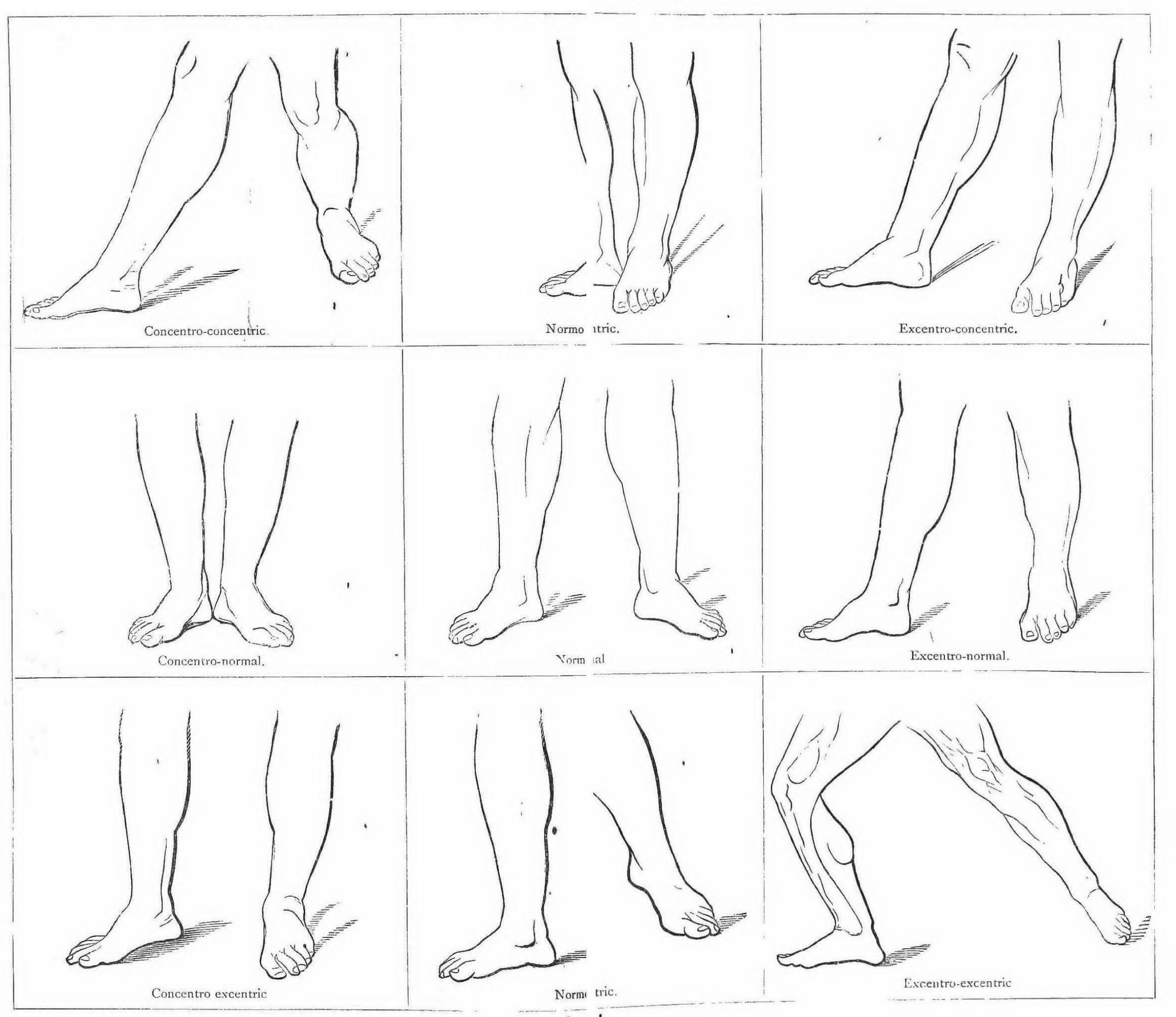


Figure 32 — Delsartean Attitudes of the Legs
Credit: Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression,* 6th edition (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1902).150-151.

of Delsarte's semiotic definitions for the "attitudes of the legs" purposely paired his technical terms with various stances of Grecian statuary (see figure 32). *Athena*, for example, personified the action of "normal-concentric,"; *Dianna* the action of "normo-eccentric,"; *Demosthenes* the actions of "excentro-concetric"; and *Fighting Gladiator* the actions of "excentro-excentric."[60] With these principles defined, she then described these "attitudes of the legs" in emotional terms.

[60] Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression,* 144-153.

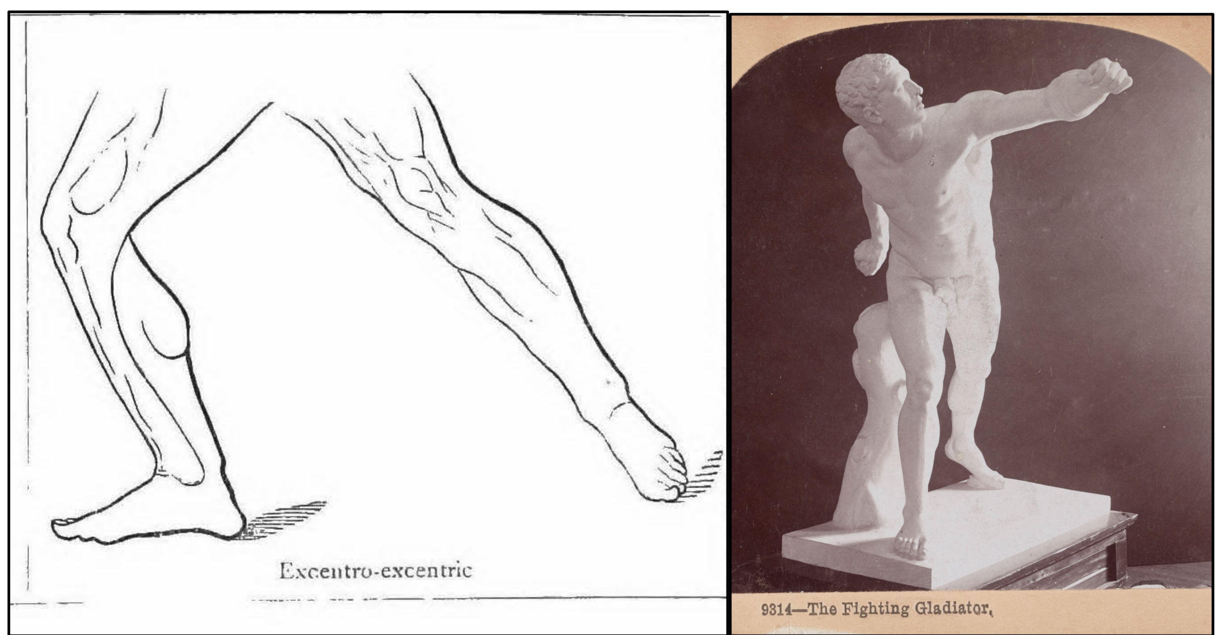


Figure 33 — The Semiotic Stance of *Fighting Gladiator*
In *Delsarte System of Expression*, Under the name, "Gladiator Oppositions," Stebbins provided the following instructions: "Take attitude *ex. ex* of the legs, signifying explosion; right leg strong."[61] Then, "Simultaneously raise left arm in front, right arm back." After encouraging readers to conduct the same actions on the other side, Stebbins emphasized a compelling benefit of practicing opposite actions (right arm forward, left arm back). Through such gestures, one could create "perfect equilibrium."[62]
Credit: (left) Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression,* 6th edition (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1902).150-151. (right) *Fighting Gladiator,* c. 1899. Library of Congress.

Athena conveyed "calm strength, reserved force, reflection," through her strong back leg, free forward leg with knee bent, and her front foot placed near her back foot. *Dianna's* leap showed her "vital presence," and *Demosthenes'* straight legs, slightly separated, showed his "self-assertion." The *Fighting Gladiator's* "great excitement" and "explosive nature" was evident in his kinetic back leg (see figure 33).[63]

These technical and emotional explanations, or what Stebbins called "the grammar of pantomime," also aided another strategic claim about statue posing—namely, that the practice of these physical movements constituted a spiritual act. For, in Delsartean terms, these ancient

[61] "Ex-ex" being short-hand for the technical term for a specific action, in this case meaning both right and left legs were eccentrically moving away from the center of the body.
[62] Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression* (New York, Edgar S. Werner, 1886), 102.
[63] Ibid.

models were proof positive of the correspondence between mind, body, and spirit.[64] This meant, as Stebbins put it, that artistic statue posing was not just an "external" exercise. It was "something infinitely greater. It [was] a creative work of intellectual love. It [was] a spiritual aspiration toward a superior and definite type of beauty, in which lives and moves a human soul."[65]

This blending of science and spirituality performed powerful work for reform-minded women. As Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter and several other scholars have demonstrated, such rhetoric secured qualities of respectability for statue posing in ways that could deflect concerns about the perceived sexual or moral impropriety of women's sensual displays. In other words, such rhetoric helped legitimize pedagogical practices that purposefully broadened the range of acceptable feminine expressions. Indeed, as elocution teachers frequently articulated, cultural customs that demanded women comport themselves through small movements and small voices not only functioned like a form of emotional corsetry, they were also to blame for much of the anxiousness that women felt as they navigated the "stages of society."

Among her well-read clubwomen clientele, Genevieve Stebbins' articulation of Delsarte-inspired statue posing also represented a powerful method for further mainstreaming earlier Grecian-styled projects of aesthetic activism.[66] Since the 1840s, middle and upper-class

---

[64] Stebbins, *The Voice*, September 1885, 141.

[65] Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression*, 461. She followed this assertion with a quote attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, which also described the gods of Olympus as an embodiment of nature that provided "an appendix to the soul."

[66] Exhibitions of sculpture based on idealized Greek statuary had been among the most popular public displays of art in the entire country. As historians Joy Kassan and Caroline Winterer have documented, these classic art forms provided an important cultural opportunity for nineteenth century women to explore issues of sexual, political, and social freedom. See Joy Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth Century American Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750-1900* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007).

Figure 34 — Illustration of a Tableaux Vivant, 1858
Credit: George Arnold, *The Sociable: Or, One Thousand and One Home Amusements.* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1858).

women had established themselves as "queens of the parlor" by performing a wide variety of *tableaux vivants* (see figure 34). Studying this phenomenon, scholar Monika Elbert observes that such entertainments advocated for a "kaleidoscopic vision" of womanhood. While some pieces celebrated "true womanhood" and dutiful motherhood, several compositions also encouraged

women to envision themselves as "daring, impulsive, rebellious, heroic, introspective."[67] In this context, the outspoken and eloquent Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), a prominent journalist and women's rights advocate, had especially encouraged women's cultivation of self-reliance by embodying ancient queens, biblical heroines, and "thinking goddesses," such as Minerva and Diana. In her advocacy for these expressions of "gender nonconformity," Elbert argues, Fuller's recommendations offered "women both a private and public sense of self that was empowering and liberating."[68] From the perspective of many women in the 1880s, the need remained for cultural programs that both advocated for and delivered this kind of confident femininity. Among Sorosis members in particular, many for whom Margaret Fuller's life was a living memory, Stebbins' pedagogy and her much anticipated 1885 publication, *Delsarte System of Expression,* built upon this ongoing campaign.

Having already gained favor among elite New York Society women, it was no surprise that in 1886, just one year after publishing the first American-authored Delsarte manual, Genevieve Stebbins secured a new teaching position at a prestigious Manhattan girl's school, owned and run since 1864 by Mrs. Caroline Gallup Reed (1821-1914). With over thirty years of experience instructing daughters from some of the nation's elite families, Caroline Gallup Reed had a unique vantage point on the opportunities and challenges facing women from even the most privileged of circumstances. In 1890, when she wrote about these issues for *Scribner's*, Reed took medical authorities to task for propagating harmful and inaccurate views about women's bodies. She specifically called out Dr. A. Hughes Bennett's 1880 article in *Popular Science Monthly* for trumpeting inaccurate "facts" about women's supposed "inferior" nervous

---

[67] Monika M. Elbert, "Striking a Historical Pose: Antebellum Tableaux Vivants, 'Godey's Illustrations, and Margaret Fuller's Heroines," *The New England Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (June 2002): 236, 256.
[68] Ibid, 264, 266.

systems. Like Dr. Edward Clarke had done in his 1873 work, *Sex and Education*, Dr. Bennett also called attention to the dangers posed by encouraging women's public speaking. It was wrongheaded, he argued, for those "well-meaning" and "energetic" female "speakers from the platform" to argue that women are "as capable as men of the highest mental culture." Women's biology proved otherwise, he asserted, while also arguing against those who claimed that a woman's nerves could be strengthened by "education or special cultivation." "In the competition for life, he wrote, "woman is the weaker vessel, and liable to be broken when too roughly handled."[69] Though women's educational and professional success were proving such medical authorities wrong, their "expert" conclusions still held weight in the court of public opinion.

Indeed, the persistent harm caused by, what Reed called, a "stereotyped tirade," had been her primary motivation for speaking out in *Scribner's.* In addition to defining women's capabilities, she also advocated strongly for a different explanation about nervousness—one that understood the condition *not* as an inevitable consequence of women's "inherent" weakness, but as something that could be remedied, and prevented, with the right support. Holding up her school as proof of this fact, she championed the type of women's education that prioritized the instruction of "practical habits" designed to "steady [women] through the vortex and over the dangerous strands of modern life."[70]

Had readers of Caroline Reed's 1890 *Scribner's* article inquired for details about her school's health-promoting curriculum, they would have most assuredly learned about the "practical habits" students were gaining after four years of taking Genevieve Stebbins' "Delsarte" classes. For, by 1890, Mrs. Reed had publicly endorsed Genevieve Stebbins'

---

[69] A. Hughes Bennett, "Hygiene in the Higher Education of Women," *Popular Science Monthly* 16 (February 1880): 520-530.
[70] Mrs. Sylvanus Reed, "The Private School for Girls," *Scribner*'s (October 1890): 524.

instruction. “The enthusiasm of my pupils was unbounded,” she stated. What the girls most appreciated, Reed continued, was the way in which Stebbins had delivered exercises that were so “interesting and health-giving” that even the “the most untutored and awkward girls soon [became] gentle and graceful.” [71] In a very telling nod of approval for Stebbins’ pedagogy, Reed also championed her successful instruction of methods that imparted “grace,” “flexibility of movement,” and a “dignity of presence which the Greek maidens must have been taught.”[72]

In the spring of 1887, after working with Genevieve Stebbins for one year, Caroline G. Reed also helped sponsor a “Delsarte Matinee” at Madison Square Theater—an event designed for generating more clients and good press for Stebbins and her health-giving “Delsarte” exercises.[73] Joining her in this endeavor were some of the city’s most recognized names: Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta (1815-1891), a poet and host of an influential literary salon and early advocate for Sorosis[74]; Susan Moore Fields (1859-1930), the daughter-in-law of the telegraph pioneer Cyrus Fields[75]; and Arabella Huntington (1851-1924), an art-collector and the wife of railroad tycoon C.P. Huntington. Stebbins’ reputation and the support of these prestigious women made for a successful venture, and one that would be repeated for several years to come. While the “Delsarte” matinee was certainly entertaining, it was also educational. After

---

[71] Caroline Reed to Genevieve Stebbins, in *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture*, Third Edition (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1891), 110.

[72] Ibid.

[73] “Musical and Dramatic Notes,” *New-York Tribune*, April 20, 1887.

[74] Botta’s home had been an important salon for the development of American literature. For example, it was there that Edgar Allan Poe delivered his first public reading of “The Raven.” Of note, Steele MacKaye’s family was also friends with the Bottas. For several references to their social engagements, see Percy MacKaye, *Epoch: The Life of Steele MacKaye,* volume 1 (New York, Boni & Liveright, 1927).

[75] Stebbins’ aunt, and mother-figure, Louise Amelia Clappe was a good friend of Cyrus Fields, and she traveled with his family to Europe. It is possible that Stebbins joined those journeys as well. See, “Mrs. Louise Clappe Dies,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 7, 1906.

Figure 35 — Anne Charlotte Botta, c. 1887
Credit: *Memoirs of Anne C. L. Botta, Written by Her Friends* (New York: J. Selwin Tait & Sons, 1893).

demonstrating "aesthetic gymnastics," *The Voice* reported, "Miss Stebbins went on through statue poses, pantomime and recitations." In doing so, the reporter added, she proved to the "audience of society and professional people" who filled the theater, that such psycho-physical exercises were not only "eminently practical," they are also "needed by all who wish to acquire grace and expression."[76]

This claim was also echoed by another of Stebbins' early, and highly influential, clients: seventy-three-year-old Anne Charlotte Botta (see figure 35). Shortly after sponsoring Stebbins' first matinee, Botta hired her to instruct a twice-weekly "Delsarte" class for herself and her

[76] *The Voice* 9, no. 5 (May 1887): 80.

friends, many of whom were surely members of Sorosis. Sharing her satisfaction in a letter (which Stebbins later included in her manuals), Botta echoed the common claims about health and self-expression that were often cited as reasons for investing their time and resources in psycho-physical classes. “Few of us in New York can deny that we live in a high state of nervous tension,” she began. “This chronic constriction of the nerves,” she explained, consistently prevented “the possibility of rest.” By teaching women “how to rest” and “how to train the nerves . . . to move and act . . . without wasting [one’s] vital powers,” Botta asserted, Stebbins had made a remedy out of “the system of Delsarte.” In a rather poignant statement, Botta also favorably compared the remedies of “Delsarte” to the “rest-cures” that so many society women pursued “by going to Florida or to Europe, to Lakewood or to Weir Mitchell,” an elite neurologist famous in this era for his creation of the “rest cure.”[77]

Moreover, like many other promoters of these psycho-physical practices, Anne Charlotte Botta drew attention to the personal and social implications of making these salubrious activities a normal part of women’s everyday life. She not only saw benefits for the present day, but for

[77] Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta, “Letter from Anne Lynch Botta to Genevieve Stebbins December, 1888,” in *Memoirs of Anne C.L. Botta Written by Her Friends: with Selections from Her Correspondence and from Her Writings in Prose and Poetry,* Vincenzo Botta, ed. (New York, NY: J. Selwin Tait & Sons, 1893), 308-309. By comparing Stebbins’ remedies to those of a prestigious neurologist, Weir Mitchell, Botta’s letter offers critical evidence for placing the practices of American Delsartism in context with Mitchell’s “rest cure,” a remedy that has predominated the scholarly discourse about nervousness in this era—especially because the feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s negative experiences under Mitchell’s care prompted her to write the exposé *The Yellow Wallpaper.* As many scholars have established, Mitchell’s remedy traded on the medical perception of inherent feminine weakness. As chapter three demonstrates with more detail, American Delsartism advanced an understanding of nervousness that contrasted in significant ways from Weir Mitchell’s “rest cure.” Instead of prescribing, cessation of activity, isolation, and submission to the authority of a doctor, American Delsartism pursued relaxation through purposeful physical actions. Instead of isolating women from their family and friends, Delsartism incorporated relaxation remedies into the rhythms and spaces of everyday life. And instead of placing authority in the hands of an elevated expert, teachers of American Delsarte largely championed an ethos of personal investigation, a type of embodied self-inquiry as a valuable and legitimate authority. These are some of the reasons why a study of American Delsartism powerfully reveals how gender factored into the cultural production of the era’s therapeutic culture. For discussion of S. Weir Mitchell’s rest cures and women’s health, see David G. Schuster, *Neurasthenic Nation: America’s Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011); Barbara Sicherman, “The Uses of a Diagnosis: Doctors, Patients, and Neurasthenia,” *Journal of the History of Medicine* (January 1977): 33-54; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Wild Unrest: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Making of “The Yellow Wall-Paper* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

many years to come. "In its wider and more general application to the young," she wrote, "the education of two or three generations in these great principles would do away entirely with round shoulders, hollow chests, and spinal curvatures." In her estimation, the broader implementation of "Delsarte" lessons could, "produce a race which in beauty of form and expression would compare favorably with [the] antique statues whose forms and attitudes [Stebbins herself had] so beautifully represent[ed]."[78]

Written just three years after Genevieve Stebbins published her first book, *Delsarte System of Expression,* Anne Charlotte Botta's declarations exemplified again why women especially recognized Stebbins' debut publication as "Plain, Practical, and Helpful." This praise also generated a growing demand for Stebbins' expertise. Having already penned an exhaustive and technical treatise on François Delsarte's theories, she took the liberty to write a "personal adaption of the Delsarte system as [she had found] it desirable to teach."[79]Published in 1888, her second book, *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture*, provided readers with a course of twenty-three individual lessons, complete with questions and answer sections and compositions of musical accompaniments that matched each lessons' rhythmic needs. It was, in essence, a manual that broadcast the very lessons she had been implementing in places like Caroline G. Reed's school and Anne Charlotte Botta's parlor. [80]

Given the mutual enthusiasm among teachers and practitioners alike for the aesthetic remedies offered in statue posing, Stebbins second publication made a point of emphasizing this element of her work. The gymnastics, she stated in the introduction, were not only in accordance

---

[78] Botta, "Letter from Anne Lynch Botta to Genevieve Stebbins, December, 1888," 308-309.

[79] Genevieve Stebbins, *Society Gymnastics and Voice-Culture* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1888), 96. The copyright in the first edition is 1888, but an advertisement in *Werner's Voice Magazine* in January of 1889 announced that Stebbins new work would be available in February of 1888.

[80] Music was offered for the following actions: Swaying for Pose, Deep Curtseying, Sitting and Rising, Arm Movements, Step-Movement, Walking. See Stebbins, *Society Gymnastics and Voice-Culture*, 97.

with François Delsarte's Laws of Expression, they were also "arranged after [her] close study of the antique, as shown in the Greek marbles."[81] The result, she asserted, was a "gymnastic system" that could "cure nervousness by training the body to habitual poise, and the mind to calm." Along with offering more detailed instructions for these health-giving exercises, this new manual also introduced readers to two catchy phrases that had resonated among her clientele: "Strength at the Centre, Freedom at the Surface," and "Repose in Action."[82] The first phrase described Delsarte's principle of action, and the second came from Johan Winckelmann (1717-1768), an admired and oft-cited eighteenth-century authority on Greek art.[83] In Stebbins' view the two maxims confirmed an important truth. "It is the law of equilibrium and poise," Stebbins wrote, which underwrote her recommendations to pose like statues. For in doing so, one could generate "repose in action" in real life.

In coming years, as Genevieve Stebbins' Delsarte-inspired methods became nearly ubiquitous in schools and society clubs across the United States, these two phrases would effectively function as slogans for the promotion and credibility of Grecian-styled statue posing. They were, in essence, a shorthand way of claiming scientific-soundness for "plain, practical, and helpful" aesthetic remedies. For, if one was feeling nervous or uneasy, she could find center and repose by putting her body in the posture of the buoyant *Flying Mercury*, the steady *Athena*, or the defiant *Fighting Gladiator*. In doing so, Stebbins claimed, they could cultivate the strength of those ancient "gods and heroes," beings who were "superbly calm in their inner nature, whatever might be the outer tempest."[84]

---

[81] Stebbins, *Society Gymnastics and Voice-Culture*, 8.

[82] Neither of these phrases was included in her 1885 edition of *Delsarte System of Expression.*

[83] Stebbins, *Society Gymnastics and Voice-Culture*, 8. Winckelmann's role in racializing Grecian aesthetics is also worthy of greater consideration. See, David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo,* 79-151.

[84] Stebbins, *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture*, 11-12.

Repose, Reconciliation, and a Dose of "Delsarte"

"Now that all the schools of the north, both public and private,
are paying as much attention to the subject of elocution and expressive reading,
we are pleased to see that Atlanta, with her progressive spirit,
is determined to keep pace with the progress of the age."

— "Southern School of Elocution," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 11, 1885

For those paying attention to the progress of elocution reform, 1888 proved another banner year. The publication of Genevieve Stebbins' second book, *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture* certainly signified this, as did the growing presence of Stebbins' Delsartean pedagogy in spaces beyond the elite schools and society clubs of New York City. In 1888, for example, when tasked with designing physical education for the children of Des Moines, Iowa, the woman in charge (who had studied with Stebbins) chose the "gymnastics and gestures" based on "Delsarte principles." This meant time was given to "decomposing" by shaking the hands and feet, standing at ease in "harmonic poise," and embodying an array of gestures for the cultivation of "statuesque repose," "self-control," and the "charming absence of self-consciousness."[85]

Indeed, women's popularization of Delsarte-inspired practices were proving so advantageous to women's health that they were also drawing the attention of men in charge of physical education training programs. In 1888, that included Dr. W.G. Anderson. He had recently taken charge of directing the physical education school at the Chautauqua Institute, a summer educational resort in upstate New York (see figure 36).[86] To support teacher's

---

[85] R. Anna Morris, *Physical Culture in the Public Schools Designed as a Guide for Teachers* (Des Moines, Iowa: Geo. A Miller, Printer and Publisher, 1888), 74. When she published this book, Anna Morgan was the Supervisor of Physical Culture and Declamation in the Public Schools of West Des Moines, Iowa. She also listed Genevieve Stebbins as one of her teachers.

[86] On the significance of this cultural institution, see Andrew Chamberlin Rieser, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism, 1874-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012)

Figure 36— Instructors of Physical Education at the Chautauqua Institute, c. 1887
W.G. Anderson is number nine, and Emily Mulkin Bishop in number eight.
Credit: Chautauqua Institution Photographic Collection, 2005.12.14.m

professionalization, the Institute's summer programs offered certification programs for those seeking advantageous specializations. Inclined to define fitness in terms of calisthenics or competitive sports, Anderson admitted that he had first laughed at the very concept and appearance of women's Delsarte-inspired practices. It was only after witnessing, what he described as, "results which only these exercises produce," that he became convinced of the health benefits derived from these relaxation and energizing techniques.[87]

In 1888, satisfied that this array of relaxation and Grecian-posing practices complemented the school's programming, Anderson hired Emily Mulkin Bishop as the director of the Chautauqua Institute's Delsarte Department (see figure 37). In the eight years since she had first begun practicing and teaching these psycho-physical methods, she had also completed

[87] Cedro Daymon, "Delsarte Echoes from Chautauqua," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 13, no. 10 (October 1891): 250.

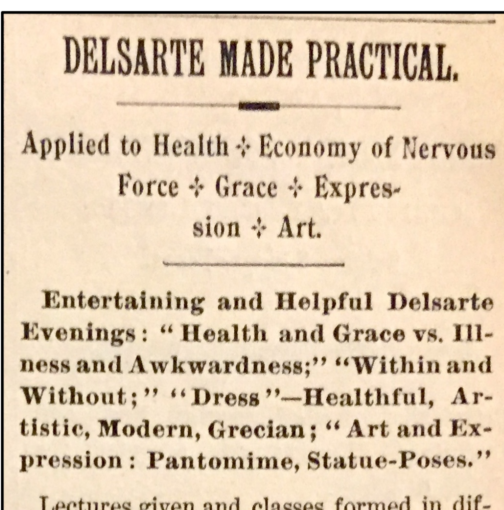


Figure 37 — Emily Mulkin Bishop and an Advertisement for Her Classes, 1889-1891
Credit: Advertisement for classes from Elsie Wilbor, ed. *The Delsarte Recitation Book and Directory*, (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1889), 327; Portrait of Emily Bishop from *The Richmond Item*, October 22, 1891.

additional training, including studies with Steele MacKaye and Genevieve Stebbins. This pedagogical lineage was reflected in the 1889 advertisements for her Chautauqua classes, which emphasized her "practical" instruction of "Delsarte," as applied to health, grace, and Grecian Statue-Poses.[88] Her endorsement of statue posing also informed the decor of her Chautauqua classroom, for as she set up the space, she made sure to furnish it with modest-sized copies of *Winged Victory* and *Flying Mercury.*[89]

[88] Advertisement for classes from Elsie Wilbor, ed. *The Delsarte Recitation Book and Directory*, (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1889), 327.

[89] Gwyneth King Roe, unpublished autobiography, box 4, folder 9, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

Figure 38 — Henry Grady and Marguerite Lindley
Credit: (left) Henry Grady, 1889 Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-93574; (right) Marguerite Lindley, *Akron Daily Democrat,* March 11, 1893.

In 1888, the aesthetic messages of Grecian statuary also proved inspirational for another newly-hired Delsarte teacher at a different Chautauqua location: the newly-opened Piedmont Chautauqua, located just outside of Atlanta, Georgia. W.G. Anderson had played a role in her placement too. For it was upon Anderson's recommendation that Marguerite Lindley, a former student, was hired by Henry Grady, the editor of *The Atlanta Constitution* and the man responsible for building this southern version of a popular northern educational resort (see figure 38).[90] Establishing this resort, located a short twenty-minute train ride from Atlanta, was just one of Grady's recent efforts to bring to fruition a vision of the New South as a region reborn through investments in industrialization, education, and the arts.[91]

---

[90] E. Marguerite Lindley, "Physical Education," *The Atlanta Constitution,* September 2, 1888.

[91] Doris Lanier, "The Early Chautauqua in Georgia," *Journal of American Culture* 11 no. 3 (Fall 1988): 9-18.

While this New South economic vision championed the end of the old south's plantation economy, it was predicated upon continuing the cultural and economic oppression of Black citizens. Just months before opening his Chautauqua, Henry Grady made that position crystal clear when he bluntly declared: "The white race is the superior race." Believing that the increasing visibility of Black prosperity in his city and elsewhere was an affront to this "natural fact," Grady also issued a rally cry. "The domination of the negro race," he proclaimed, "[must] be resisted at all points and at all hazards."[92]

Grady's claim not only offered a pointed justification for racial segregation and Black disenfranchisement, but it also cast a wide shadow over any activity through which Black Americans demonstrated self-assertiveness or accomplishment. As I have argued elsewhere, undermining Black Americans access to the "new elocution" curriculum being taught at the city's Black universities and teacher's colleges was among the myriad ways that white southerners attempted to stymie Black Americans accomplishments. In the late 1880s, concerted legislative and cultural efforts to defund the city's Black colleges and universities were motivated, to a large degree, by the white citizen's distaste for the rising visibility of Black eloquence and poise.[93] As one white New South booster put it, these self-affirming educational programs were "infusing into [Black Americans] the poison of social equality."[94] Henry Grady's

---

[92] This claim was part of Henry Grady's speech, "The South and Her Problems," an address at the State Fair of Texas on October 26, 1887. See Edwin Shurter. *The Complete Orations and Speeches of Henry W. Grady.* (Norwood: South-West Publishing, 1910), 33.

[93] I provide a much closer analysis and chronology of Atlanta's Black and white Delsartean productions in a forthcoming essay, "Exhibiting Scientific Grace: American Delsartism, Black Citizenship, and the Staging of the New South." It is part of an edited volume under advanced contract with University Press of Florida, titled *The Articulate Body: Dance and Science in the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Lynne Matluck Brooks and Sariel Golomb.

[94] This claim was printed in an 1890 Atlanta newspaper and was directed at Atlanta University, which had refused to comply with the state's request to end its practice of allowing the faculty's white children to attend classes (and recite) with the university's Black students. See, "Anger in Atlanta," *The Atlanta University Bulletin* n. 20 (June 1890): 5.

investment in elocution training for the city's white society women and white educators was just one way he and his peers sought to combat this "hazard," while also procuring national approval for this New South vision. Through embracing "Delsarte," as one elite educator put it, Atlanta demonstrated its commitment "to keep pace with the progress of the age."[95] Delsarte-inspired statue posing helped facilitate these claims of sectional unity. Among other things, this aesthetics facilitated a mutual erasure of recent discord and violence, and a mutual admiration for a lauded "white" past. As Marguerite Lindley asserted in *The Atlanta Constitution,* "Greece was the radiating point of both intellectual strength and personal beauty," she declared. By stepping into those ancient aesthetics, she also assured the city's white women that they too could cultivate the "essential" qualities of "grace and eloquence. As they did so, *The Atlanta Constitution* broadcast the news. Such displays, one article declared, were the "the most beautiful and artistic entertainments ever given in the south." For, in their Grecian-styled robes, the article explained, these women of the New South gracefully expressed "every emotion of the human soul."[96]

Thus, by 1890, just five years after Genevieve Stebbins had first linked Delsarte-name to this aesthetic exercise, Grecian style-statue posing had not only become synonymous with the Frenchman's name, it had also become a ubiquitous activity for white American women across the nation—north, south, east, and west. Society columns regularly celebrated their Delsartean displays, and *The Voice* prominently featured photographs of women expressing a range of emotions in their Grecian-styled attitude studies (see figure 39). As they "made their bodies talk," claimed one Boston news story, these women were not only "cultivating grace," they were also proving the practice "Delsarte" to be a "wonderful medicine for nervous, overworked,

---

[95] "Southern School of Elocution," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 11, 1885.
[96] "Delsarte Pictures at Chautauqua," T*he Atlanta Constitution,* July 26, 1891.

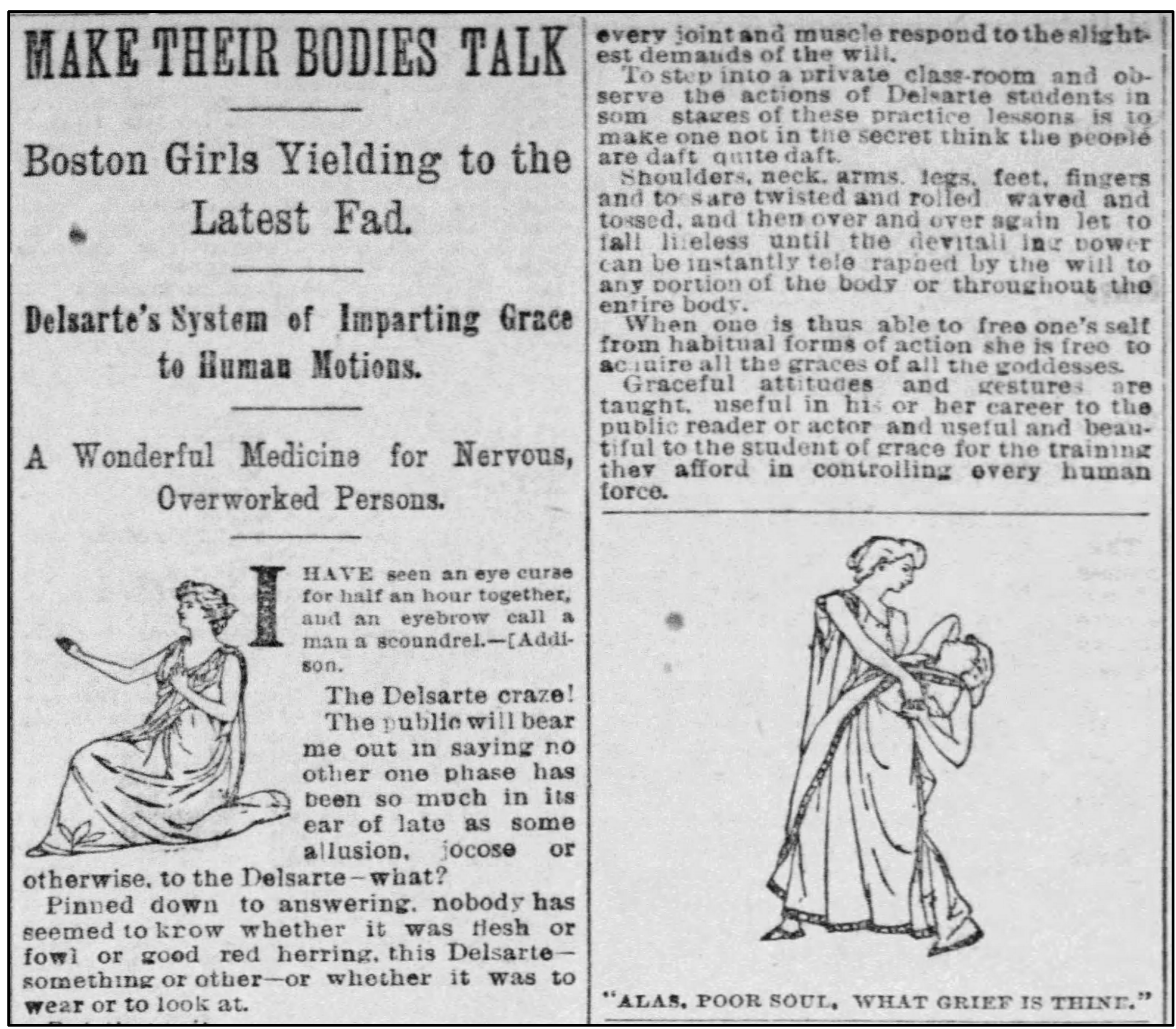
Figure 39 — Delsarte Posing in Charleston, South Carolina, 1890
Photograph from an entertainment given by pupils of the aesthetic physical culture class at Charleston Female Seminary, titled "A dream of Ancient Greece" Included their display of nine attitudes*: Repose, Ceremony and Respect, Indecision, Reflection, Defiance, Despair, Animation, Suspense, Vehemence.*
Credit: "A Study in Attitude," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 12, no. 2 (February, 1890): cover.

persons"[97] (see figure 40). As increasing numbers of women were charming their parents, neighbors, and friends with this vision of women's health, it seemed, in myriad ways, that the predictions made by literary leader, Anne Charlotte Botta and newspaper woman, Eliza Putnam Heaton, were indeed coming to fruition: American women were proving themselves "a race of women as strong [and] as beautiful as the goddesses of old."[98]

This common refrain did more than celebrate the beauty and vitality of Delsartean practitioners, its proclamation about this "race of women" constituted a not-so-subtle validation of long-standing racial hierarchies. Throughout the nineteenth century, whiteness had

---

[97] "Make Their Bodies Talk," *Boston Globe*, August 17, 1890.
[98] Eliza Putnam Heaton, "The Athletic Maid."



MAKE THEIR BODIES TALK

Boston Girls Yielding to the Latest Fad.

Delsarte's System of Imparting Grace to Human Motions.

A Wonderful Medicine for Nervous, Overworked Persons.

I HAVE seen an eye curse for half an hour together, and an eyebrow call a man a scoundrel.—[Addison.

The Delsarte craze! The public will bear me out in saying no other one phase has been so much in its ear of late as some allusion, jocose or otherwise, to the Delsarte–what?

Pinned down to answering, nobody has seemed to krow whether it was flesh or fowl or good red herring, this Delsarte—something or other—or whether it was to wear or to look at.

every joint and muscle respond to the slightest demands of the will.

To step into a private class-room and observe the actions of Delsarte students in som stages of these practice lessons is to make one not in the secret think the people are daft quite daft.

Shoulders, neck, arms, legs, feet, fingers and to s are twisted and rolled waved and tossed, and then over and over again let to fall lifeless until the devitali ing power can be instantly tele raphed by the will to any portion of the body or throughout the entire body.

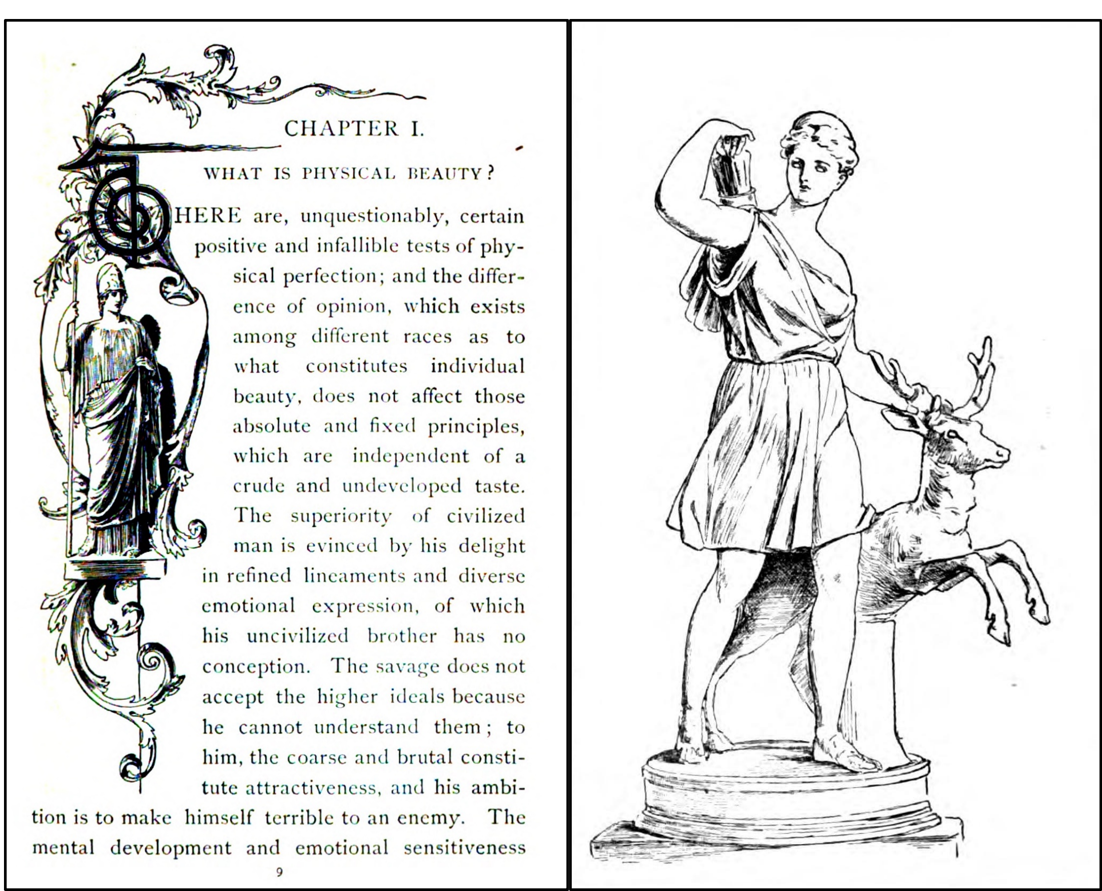
When one is thus able to free one's self from habitual forms of action she is free to ac uire all the graces of all the goddesses.

Graceful attitudes and gestures are taught, useful in hi or her career to the public reader or actor and useful and beautiful to the student of grace for the training they afford in controlling every human force.

Figure 40 — Delsarte: A "Wonderful Medicine for Nervous, Overworked Persons," 1890
Credit: "Make Their Bodies Talk," *Boston Globe*, August 17, 1890.

consistently been constructed through references to idealized, graceful, Grecian sculpture.[99] With few, if any, exceptions, the mainstream sources of American Delsartism reinscribed this "scientific fact." Genevieve Stebbins' teachings are further evidence. For example, her descriptions of the statues at the Louvre characterized their harmonic poise in terms of

[99] On nineteenth century aesthetics of scientific racism, see Mary Cathryn Cain, "The Art and Politics of Looking White: Beauty Practice among White Women in Antebellum America," *Winterthur Portfolio* 42, no. 1 (2008): 27–50.



CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS PHYSICAL BEAUTY?

THERE are, unquestionably, certain positive and infallible tests of physical perfection; and the difference of opinion, which exists among different races as to what constitutes individual beauty, does not affect those absolute and fixed principles, which are independent of a crude and undeveloped taste. The superiority of civilized man is evinced by his delight in refined lineaments and diverse emotional expression, of which his uncivilized brother has no conception. The savage does not accept the higher ideals because he cannot understand them; to him, the coarse and brutal constitute attractiveness, and his ambition is to make himself terrible to an enemy. The mental development and emotional sensitiveness

9

Figure 41 — The Racial Meaning of Grecian Beauty as Described by Annie Jenness Miller, 1892
Credit: Annie Jenness Miller, *Physical Beauty: How to Obtain and How to Improve It* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1892).

Delsartean principles and racial science. “The race,” of the idealized god or hero, she described, was visible by his display of “divine lines of opposition.”[100]

Another advocate for American Delsartism, Miss Jenness Miller, placed her racial claims on the front page of her widely popular manual (see figure 41).[101] “The superiority of civilized man is evinced,” she wrote, “by his delight in refined lineaments and diverse emotional expression, of which his uncivilized brother has no conception. The savage,” she declared, “does

[100] Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression,* 458.

[101] Heaton was among the journalists that consistently praised Jenness Miller, whom she described as a “tall Greek maiden in a white robe embroidered with gold.” See, Eliza Putnam Heaton, “The Athletic Maid.” *The Savannah Morning News*, January 3, 1889.

not accept higher ideals because he cannot understand them."[102] In addition to reinforcing new scientific claims taking shape under the rubric of social Darwinism, this language also embodied the perspectives of the Reconstruction-Era's most popular depictions of Black life: coon songs and cakewalk dances, aesthetics that purposefully promoted a Black aesthetic of awkwardness and emotional simplicity.[103]

While these racialized claims and stereotyped images were nothing new, their amplification during the 1880s supported cultural projects that were distinctive to the Reconstruction Era: namely, the political reunion of former political enemies, national acceptance for a "New South" vision, and a broad retreat from hard-won commitments to Black citizenship. White women's leading role in forging and reinforcing these racialized alliances was acknowledged in myriad ways, not the least of which was the decade's celebration of women's Grecian-robed expressive activities. One rather poignant example took form in a post-humous tribute to Henry Grady, titled *The Work Unfinished* (see figure 42). Appearing on a two-page spread in *Judge* magazine, Grady was depicted as a vanquished artist seated near his incomplete creation: a sculpture of the United States personified as two Grecian-styled women, North and South, demonstrating an act of "perfect unity and love."[104]

---

[102] Annie Jenness Miller, *Physical Beauty: How to Obtain and How to Preserve It* (New York: Charles L. Webster, & Co., 1892), 9.

[103] Francis Martin, "To Ignore Is to Deny: E. W. Kemble's Racial Caricature as Popular Art," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40, no. 4 (2007): 655–82. On Delsartism and Social Darwinism, see Judy Burns, "The Culture of Nobility/The Nobility of Self-Cultivation," in *Moving Words: Re-Writing Dance*, ed. Gay Morris, (New York: Routledge, 1995): 203-226; Shannon L. Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance in the Progressive Era: Watch Whiteness Workout* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[104] For a discussion of this image, see Deborah C. Pollack, "Atlanta: New South Brilliance Ascending from Embers of Civil War," in *Visual Art and the Urban Evolution of the New South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 11–62.

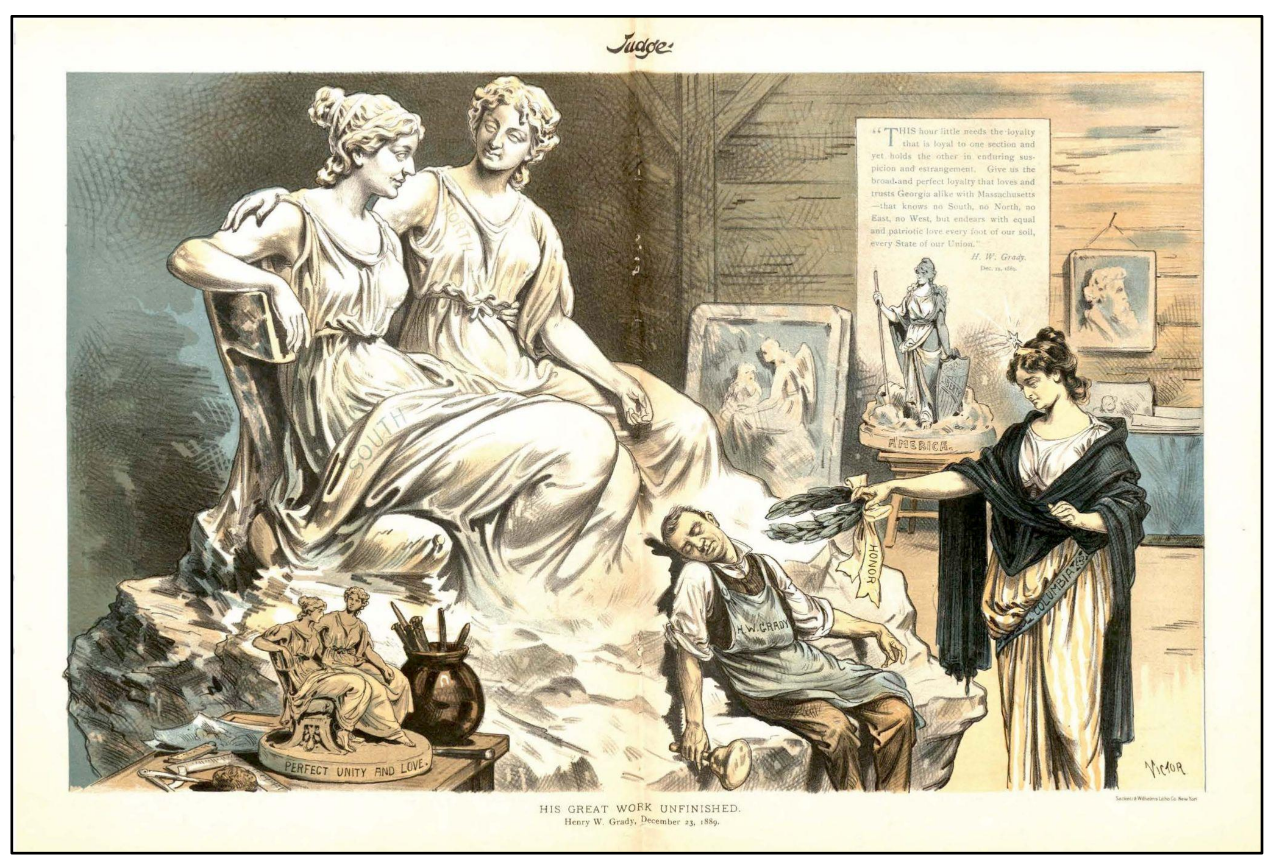


Figure 42 — "The Great Work Unfinished," a Grecian Tribute to Henry Grady, 1889
Credit: Victor Gillam, *His Great Work Unfinished*, *Judge*, January 11, 1890.

In the context of American Delsartism, these representations of white cultural reconciliation were also accomplished through specific actions of prominent teachers and clientele. During the 1880s, members of Sorosis and other prominent women's clubs, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), began recruiting white Southern elites to their clubs and subsequently abandoning both their commitments to interracial membership.[105] In one of the most notable examples, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a member of both Sorosis and the WCTU, was effectively removed from leadership positions she had held for years (see figure

[105] For a discussion of the collapse of white club women's commitments to interracial work during the 1880s, see Alison M. Parker, "Frances Watkins Harper and the Search for Women's Interracial Alliances," in *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, ed. Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 145-171.

Figure 43 — Frances E.W. Harper and Her Daughter Mary Harper, 1895
From the 1870s through 1880s, Frances Harper was a member of Sorosis and its affiliate group, the American Association for the Advancement of Women. She and her daughter, Mary were also members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Mary Harper also became an elocutionist, and conducted formal training with Julia and Annie Thomas, Sorosis members and the operators of a Psycho-Physical Conservatory. She also graduated from the National School of Elocution and Oratory, studying with Mrs. J.W. Shoemaker.
Credit: Frances E.W. Harper, *Atlanta Offering: Poems* (Philadelphia: George S. Ferguson, Co, 1895).

43). No stranger to such ploys, Harper spoke eloquently and pointedly about these issues at multiple club gatherings. It was well known that southern white women refused socializing as equals with Black women, but northern women, she asserted, were not immune to a different manifestation of this issue—they were proving themselves uninterested in seeing Black women as more than just "inferior, pitiable, objects of charity."[106]

In this context of this Reconstruction-era's racialized struggle for social power, the Grecian styled aesthetics of American Delsartism became cultural remedies for white women in

[106] Quoted in Parker, "Frances Watkins Harper and the Search for Women's Interracial Alliances," 155. On her daughter's elocution career, see "Mary E. Harper," in *Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character* (Raleigh, NC: L.A. Scruggs, Publisher, 1893), 323-324.

ELOCUTION, DELSARTE SYSTEM,
MINNIE M. JONES, Teacher and Lecturer,
1710 CHESTNUT Street.

Physical Culture.

In addition to her regular classes in Elocution and Voice Culture, Miss Jones has arranged a special course of physical development to include Educational Gymnastics, Swedish system, and Æsthetic and Society Gymnastics, Delsarte method.

The Æsthetic Gymnastics differ from the usual training in that they seek relaxation, repose, economy of nervous energy and graceful action, rather than special physical development. The Swedish Gymnastics are both educational and hygienic and give a consciousness of power which inspires courage and confidence. The Society Gymnastics train the body to habitual poise, and are specially helpful for all in search of self possession and ease of manner.

The course is designed to meet the demands of every one in need of health, strength and grace.

Miss Jones will be at her Studio during the week of September 21st, from 10 A. M. to 4 P. M., to answer inquiries, organize classes and enroll students.

Figure 44 — Portrait of Minnie M. Jones and an Advertisement for Her Classes, 1890s
Credit: Minnie M. Jones, *The Columbian Exposition and World's Fair Illustrated* (Chicago: The Columbian Engraving and Publishing Co., Chicago, 1893), 359.The advertisement for Minnie M. Jones' studio was published in the Educational Classifieds *of The Philadelphia Inquirer,* September 26, 1891.

yet another way. In addition to providing a "scientifically-endorsed" license for embodying a liberating range of emotions, white women created "Delsartean" depictions of subservient Black life. A notable example of this development transpired during an 1893 Delsarte matinee at Atlanta's whites-only YMCA featuring Minnie M. Jones, an established teacher from Philadelphia and one of Genevieve Stebbins' successful students (see figure 44). In the publicity for her performance, local newspaper women playfully engaged the politics of cultural reunion by framing the event as an invasion: "Crinoline chanced to reach Atlanta first, but now it is Delsarte, and Atlanta falls a victim with easy willingness."[107] Dressed in a Grecian-robe, Minnie M. Jones not only depicted Delsarte's Laws of Expression as a science of grace, she also demonstrated their application in a variety of pantomimes and statuesque displays (see figure 45). As one woman reporting the event noted, the audience was especially enthusiastic about one

[107] "Delsartean Laws," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 2, 1893.

performance in particular. The "most luminous and tender" part of the program, she observed, occurred when Minnie M. Jones pantomimed a Black mammy rocking a child to sleep. Reportedly, her personification of a "real dark" was performed so "correctly" that the "society queens of Peachtree Street" longed for the restful summer days of their youth, when their own "Black mammy" sang to them "through [their] dreams."[108]

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, these blackface uses of American Delsartism became increasingly commonplace in the society columns and feature stories of the mainstream American news. That such stories were often written by reform-minded white newspaper women was itself another manifestation of the ways in which white Delsartean practitioners reinforced their era's aesthetic politics. As Alice Fahs observes, this cadre of newly-minted newspaper women found it socially and economically expedient to report only the kinds of images and stories that comported the racial logics of segregation.[109] In the 1880s, the very decade when white and Black women—North, South, East, and West—practiced American Delsartism as a quotidian expression of feminine liberation, such reporting very strategically kept out of view Black women's elocutionary accomplishments and graceful Grecian-styled displays.[110]

---

[108] "Social News," *Atlanta Evening Herald,* April 5, 1893.

[109] Alice Fahs, *Out on Assignment,* 74-75.

[110] While I have focused this chapter on the 1880s, it is worth noting that the racial dynamics on display in this decade's development of American Delsartism became more entrenched in the coming decades. This was especially apparent when new women's clubs, such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), engaged these aesthetic practices for promoting white supremacist pageantry and Lost Cause views of history. Of note, and certainly worthy of more discussion, is the fact that in the late 1890s and early 1900s, Genevieve Stebbins pointedly promoted her work with southern white elites when she advertised her New York School of Expression. On at least one occasion, Stebbins also performed in Asheville, North Carolina under the auspices of an UDC chapter. This was during a time when she also taught summer classes to segregationist educators at a Chautauqua program in Monteagle, Tennessee. See, "Are You a Progressive Teacher," *The Progressive Age,* June 5, 1902; "Miss Stebbins Recital," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 19, 1904. On the influence of the UDC, see Karen Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture.* Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003; Joan Marie Johnson, "'Drill into Us ... the Rebel Tradition': The Contest over Southern Identity in Black and White Women's Clubs, South Carolina, 1898-1930." *The Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 3 (2000): 525–562.

DELSARTEAN LAWS.

The Great French Master of Expression and His Aim.

MISS MINNIE JONES TALKS OF IT.

A Very Pretty Little Woman in Atlanta to Tell About the Wondrous Revolutions of Delsartean Philosophy

Delsarte and crinoline have taken the country.

Crinoline chanced to reach Atlanta first, but now it is Delsarte, and Atlanta falls a victim with easy willingness and all the grace she can command.

Now we shall all be devoting ourselves to society gymnastics. Yes, all of us. Young woman in all your bloom and beauty and Easter joy, doff your crinoline frock for

awhile and don the Grecian costume, flowing robes and light, easy drapery for a little healthful exercise and the cultivation of grace.

SOCIAL NEWS.

Miss Jones' Delsartean Entertainment Last Night.

Various Bits of Social and Personal News About Town.

Everybody was charmed by the appearance, the posing, the recitations, the aesthetic effects in drapery and the pantomime of Miss Jones at the Young Men's Christian association last night.

The brightest star—no, the most luminous and tender in the array—was the last that was partly said and partly chanted. It was "Mammy's Little Baby Boy," and pictured the hearty and true delight of a black mammy in her infant charge.

The singing and hushing the child to sleep was real "darky," although done by such a dainty pink and white darling of Delsarte as Miss Minnie Jones.

It was enough to make anyone long to be a child again on a long summer afternoon for the delight of having a black mammy put him to sleep on a pallet and sing through his dreams.

Figure 45 — News Reports of Minnie M. Jones's Delsarte Matinee in Atlanta, Georgia, 1893
Credit: (Left) "Delsartean Laws," *The Atlanta Constitution,* April 2, 1893.
(Right) Excerpts from "Social News," *The Atlanta Evening Herald,* April 5, 1893.

The examples discussed in this chapter encourage greater recognition of the ways in which the publicity surrounding American Delsartism powerfully reinscribed scientific racism during a particularly vulnerable period in the struggle for American democracy. For, by seeing how such developments facilitated the cultural work of sectional reunion, it is clear that this aesthetic movement for women's self-expression and health had contradictory and consequential outcomes. While white women found it expedient to challenge sexism by claiming as universally true a set of scientific and aesthetic principles, they largely refused any application of these Laws of Expression for dispelling the "facts" that upheld white supremacy. In this outcome, the rising popularity during the 1880s of white women dressed in Grecian-styled robes delivered a telling response to one of the era's most charged questions: "Our Goddess of Liberty: What is She to Be?"[111] The answer: whiteness could remain at the center—affirmed once again as a foundational metric in determining whose beauty and capabilities were celebrated and whose nervousness and ease was supported.

[111] "Our Goddess of Liberty: What is She to Be?" *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 30, no.772 (July 16, 1870), 288.

CHAPTER 3

The Proof is in the Practice

Defending a Feminized Expertise about Mind and Body

> "There is something in learning what to avoid by observing the mistakes of masculine systems."
>
> — "Do You Breathe Properly," *The Sun* (New York), October 20, 1895

By the 1890s, in countless U.S. towns and cities, if a woman suffered from nervousness, insomnia, indigestion, or dyspepsia, it would not have been unusual for her to give "Delsarte" a try. It had also become rather commonplace for such activities to draw the attention of local news reporters. For example, after observing society women practice "Delsarte" in St. Paul, Minnesota, one journalist offered an endorsement for the curious activity. "The system is all right," she wrote after witnessing the wholesome effects of harmonic poses and deep breathing exercises.[1] To help her readers picture what she had seen, the reporter also included a drawing of three students dressed in Grecian-style gowns (see figure 46). The caption below read: "You Know Them?" Though the answer for many readers would likely have been, "Yes," several readers may have still questioned what exactly these women were trying to accomplish.

For by the 1890s it had also become common for news stories about "Delsarte" to feature some rather odd activities. In one syndicated story from New York City, a society woman's first lesson reportedly taught her the "Delsarte" way to eat olives. After first moving her hand in a straight line toward the tray, the teacher shrieked then sternly corrected the gesture. She insisted

[1] Eva Gay, "The Delsarte Fad: St. Paul Ladies Study Ease and Grace for Society Effectiveness," *The Saint Paul Globe*, September 21, 1890.

Figure 46 — "The Delsarte Fad" in St. Paul, Minnesota, 1890
Credit: Eva Gay, "The Delsarte Fad: St. Paul Ladies Study Ease and Grace for Society Effectiveness," *The Saint Paul Globe*, September 21, 1890.

that a true lady would only retrieve an olive by moving "slowly downward in a gentle curve," placing her finger tips "on the olive like a butterfly on a rose," then bringing the morsel to her mouth in a "parabolic motion," with the slightest turn of her wrist at her lips.[2] Claiming such a move was in accordance with "Delsarte," the teacher defined this as a scientifically-sound exhibition of gracefulness. Other reports described similarly prescriptive lessons about the "Delsarte way to walk," the "Delsarte way to stand," and the "Delsarte way to sit."[3] In Chicago, a school-teacher's "Delsarte" class reportedly made her so obsessed with using her hands in just the *right* way that her neighbor concluded that taking "Delsarte" had the undesirable effect of

[2] "Graceful Motion, A Woman's Account of her First Lesson in Delsarte," *Wisconsin State Register*, April 25, 1891.
[3] Emily M. Bishop, "Americanized Delsarte Culture," *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education at its Seventh Annual Meeting* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Press of Springfield Printing, 1892): 81.

Figure 47 — "As Affected by Delsarte," 1892
Credit: "No Delsarte for Her," *Chicago Tribune,* August 28, 1892.

making one appear "stagy and ridiculous."[4] (see figure 47) Such outcomes were surely not what many teachers had in mind when they encouraged women's scientific explorations of "natural" expression. Indeed, these kinds of scripted mannerisms smacked of what elocution reformers viewed as repressive "finishing school" etiquette.[5]

Spurred on by what they deemed misappropriations of François Delsarte's ideas, many U.S. teachers entered the 1890s with a heightened interest in weeding out "high-sounding gush and nonsense" from what they deemed "true Delsartism."[6] But doing so was not a clear-cut task. Teachers were not always in agreement about how to implement Delsarte's theories, and there were no simple metrics or certifications in place to help new students distinguish "true"

---

[4] "No Delsarte For Her," *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1892.
[5] Emily M. Bishop, "Americanized Delsarte Culture," 81-82.
[6] F. Townsend Southwick, "Delsarte Definitions," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 12, no. 4 (February 1890): 106.

instruction from “false.” To support precisely this kind of work, elocutionists from around the country took a step in 1892 that also reflected the professionalizing spirit of their times: they founded the National Association of Elocutionists. This development produced the intended actions: increased discourse, especially via annual conferences where teachers gave presentations, debated best practices, and discussed instructional challenges. Selecting *Werner’s Magazine* as the association’s official “organ” also meant that such conversations reached an ever-growing audience of elocution practitioners and instructors.

Drawing primarily from the discourse recorded in *Werner’s Magazine*, this chapter chronicles and analyzes how elocutionists navigated substantive professional hurdles and opportunities during the 1890s. In doing so, it places the decade’s concerns about authentic “Delsarte’ within the context of a broader array of cultural dynamics that both increased and reduced social demands for their expertise. For, while elocutionists could confidently expect a steady clientele among women’s clubs and colleges, their leadership in matters of public-school physical education programming was proving far more precarious.

A growing shift away from elocutionary expertise in physical education programming was especially notable at an 1889 conference in Boston organized by civic and social leaders for the purpose of selecting (and funding) the “best” physical education curriculum for the city’s public schools. Though Lewis B. Monroe had directed such decisions thirty years earlier, elocutionary expertise no longer occupied such a privileged status. Indeed, Monroe’s former students, Samuel Silas Curry and Charles W. Emerson were invited only as commentators. Though brief, Curry’s comments in particular spoke volumes about the subtle, yet distinctive values between elocutionary training and the kinds of fitness programs in consideration at the conference. “In your deep researches in physiology, do not forget that there are other ways of

looking at man," he stated. To clarify, he reminded attendees about something the ancient Greeks knew well: the value of studying "a man artistically," and developing "forms of harmony which are greater and deeper than muscular proportion."[7] Despite this plea (and others like it), programs based on measurements of "muscular proportion" carried the day—especially as members of another newly-organized professional group, The American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education, gained positions of leadership in schools and colleges. While some of these fitness proponents saw value in Delsarte-inspired exercises, the organization by and large placed its professional weight behind physical education curricula that emphasized competitive sports, activities of exertion, and measurable muscular results. In other words, its picture of health looked more like charts that recorded inches lost and inches gained.

By drawing out the gendered dimensions of these pedagogical debates this chapter provides insight into complex dynamics that informed the era's cultural production of body knowledge and physical education. It argues that disagreements over what constituted "true Delsartism" and "best methods" were more than just parochial projects of clarifying techniques, they also revealed a broad feminization of psycho-physical exercises and elocutionary expertise.[8] That is, by the 1890s, both the instruction and practice of psycho-physical exercise had quite solidly become normalized as women's work and "ladies' gymnastics."[9] While this development

---

[7] *Physical Training Conference, 1889*. (Boston: Press of George H. Ellis, 1890), 117. S.S. Curry was the elocutionist invited for comment. For analysis of this conference, see Roberta J. Park, "Physiologists, Physicians, and Physical Educators: Nineteenth Century Biology and Exercise, *Hygienic* and *Educative*," *Journal of Sports History* 14, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 28-60; Shannon L. Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance in the Progressive Era: Watch Whiteness Workout* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 38.

[8] On the gendered "hidden curriculum" in physical education programs, see, Martha Verbrugge, *Active Bodies: A History of Women's Physical Education in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8, 164.

[9] This gendered assumption is pervasive in the literature of American Delsartism. That the phrase "ladies' gymnastics" was in common usage is evident in the remembrances of Gwyneth King Roe, an assistant teacher to Emily Bishop for several years. After being asked one summer to instruct "Delsarte" to a group of male lawyers, she recalled their surprise realization that these techniques for relaxation and balance were not "frivolous ladies'

often constrained and demoted elocutionist's labor, the losses were far from total. For, in the 1890s and in many decades to follow, psycho-physical practices largely retained social approval in gendered spaces where women's expertise was less questioned, places such as homes, schoolrooms, churches, art and community centers, and society clubs.

The gendered dynamics this chapter observes are largely consistent with similar observations made about the era's gendering of "objective science" as a "masculinized" method for establishing social authority.[10] Scholars have observed such developments in myriad fields, from public health and medicine, to anthropology, psychology, sociology, and physical education. Elocution was not immune to these dynamics either, but it also never wholly subscribed to these metrics. The engagement with Delsarte's theories exemplified this tension. While teachers of expression often celebrated "scientific" categorizations of emotion and technological inventions that made visible the interiority of the body, they did not see these as totalizing methods of procuring self-knowledge. The voice itself seemed to hold together these dueling dynamics. For example, in the late 1890s, when voice teachers gained access to the laryngoscope, they appreciated this new way to observe the muscles of the throat, but, as one humorous illustration in *Werner's Magazine* conveyed, they also recognized that such a tool was incapable of helping someone learn how to sing *with feeling* (see figure 48). Fact and faith, science and art, the visible and the invisible, thus operated like fault lines in elocutionists' efforts to establish and sustain their expertise. This was especially true of the cultural work required to

---

gymnastics." See Gwyneth King Roe, unpublished autobiography, box 4, folder 3, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

[10] On dynamics of masculinization and feminization in the era's production of body knowledge, see Regina Morantz-Sanchez. "Feminist Theory and Historical Practice: Rereading Elizabeth Blackwell," *History and Theory* 31, no. 4 (December 1992): 59; Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 187.

Figure 48 — "The Camera and the Laryngoscope as Aids to a Natural Vocal Method," 1897
Credit: *Werner's Magazine* 19, no. 1 (Jan 1897): 74.

affirm women's voices. Indeed, for those teachers who had seen their aesthetic remedies help countless women ease the myriad effects of nervousness, the 1890s became a particularly vital time to defend their approach to self-expression and health.

This being true, it is important to acknowledge the incompleteness of the very record upon which this chapter is based. Through its reporting about economically secure white women managing a crisis of evidence and authority, *Werner's Magazine* archived a remarkable record of the ways in which these groups confronted systemic sexism. Such reports also normalized the extent to which these epistemic battles reinforced long standing racialized views about moral white womanhood.[11] For, entirely unheard in *Werner's Magazine* are the voices of Black

[11] In many ways American Delsartism reproduced the gendered productions of whiteness and racial othering that prevailed in women's engagement with earlier physiognomic sciences. On these developments, see Mary Cathryn

elocution teachers and practitioners, many of whom subscribed to the magazine and expressed elsewhere their criticisms of the field's reproduction of social hierarchies and its demeaning racialization of supposedly universal theories.[12] As I explore more in chapter four and elsewhere, this absence was not accidental.[13] Instead, it purposefully conformed to the aesthetic politics that justified the era's endorsements of racial segregation. In that regard, Black women's absence is also archives of a broader systemic embrace of cultural norms that determined whose nervousness, grace, confidence, and ease were deserving of social affirmation and support.

At Odds with Authenticity

"Everyone is a Delsartean who has Delsartean knowledge,
and who adheres to Delsartean principles,
even though the work bears the stamp of her own personality.
No teacher worthy of the name would blindly follow a beaten path of methods."[14]

—Miss M. Frances Boice, a Philadelphia elocution teacher, 1892

In the early 1890s, one of the most publicized attacks on American Delsartism came from a rather unexpected source: François Delsarte's own daughter, Mme. Marie Géraldy. But, as the story of her U.S. tour indicates, this was most certainly not the outcome her well-known hosts had expected.

Cain, "The Art and Politics of Looking White: Beauty Practice among White Women in Antebellum America," *Winterthur Portfolio* 42, no. 1 (2008): 27–50; Rachel Walker, *Beauty and the Brain: The Science of Human Nature in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023); Carla Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself: Producing and Using Phrenological Knowledge in 19th-Century America," *Centaurs* 55 (2013): 104-130.

[12] I make this claim about subscribers based on advertisements *Werner's Magazine* placed in Black newspapers for purposes of requesting information about activities of Black elocutionists and performers. See *The Freeman* (Indianapolis) September 29, 1900; *Colored American*, (Washington, D.C.), September 22, 1900. They published the gathered information in "Expressional Power of the Colored Race," *Werner's Magazine* 26, no. 6 (February 1901): 459-478.

[13] Carrie Streeter, "Exhibiting Scientific Grace: American Delsartism, Black Citizenship, and the Staging of the New South," in *The Articulate Body: Dance and Science in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Lynn Matluck Brooks and Sariel Golomb. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, forthcoming.

[14] Quoted in Fanny Edgar Thomas, "What Philadelphia Teachers Think of Mme. Géraldy's Visit," *Werner's Magazine* (May 1892): 138.

Mme. Géraldy sailed from France to New York City in December of 1891, where she was welcomed as the guest of Mrs. Louisine Havemeyer (1855-1929), the wife of a wealthy sugar industrialist. The prestige of Géraldy's hosts and the fame of her father made this a newsworthy event, and thus a reporter arrived at the Havemeyer's 5th Avenue mansion promptly after Géraldy had disembarked. Seated in the Tiffany-decorated parlor, with its stunning stained glass and finely crafted furniture, the reporter listened to Mme. Géraldy described the purpose for her visit. The byline, printed the next day, did *not* bury the lede. In bold print, it declared that the daughter of Delsarte was there to "Expound the System of Her Father. Having Heard that His Method Had Become a Sort of Acrobatism, She Crosses the Sea to Set Americans Right. "[15]

To establish herself a worthy proxy of her father's work, Mme. Géraldy went on to describe her own involvement in his career. As a child, she had not only accompanied him to his lectures, she had also been the one to demonstrate emotional gestures while her father explained the expressive laws behind them.[16] To generate buzz for her forthcoming lectures, Géraldy also let the press know that she would be displaying her father's original instructional charts and illustrations, and she also promised to sing her father's unpublished "songs and pieces . . . exactly as [she] used to when [she] assisted him at his course." The message was clear: Mme. Géraldy was qualified to deliver the "truest" Delsarte instruction available.

As if her familial association was not appealing enough, Géraldy's hosts also boosted the desirability of her lecture series. In addition to being welcomed by Mrs. Louisine Havemeyer in New York City, she was also sponsored by Miss Emily Sartain (1841-1927) in Philadelphia. Both women were highly involved with arts societies and institutions. Havemeyer was a notable

---

[15] "The Daughter of Delsarte," *The Sun* (New York), December 22, 1891.

[16] Ibid.

collector, and an important patron of painters like Mary Cassatt. A respected artist in her own right, Sartain was the president of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women.[17] These shared artistic interests were actually the reason these American women knew each other in the first place. They had met in the 1870s, while studying in Paris and renting rooms at the house of François Delsarte's widow. In summary, not only did these cultural leaders have a personal connection with the Delsarte family, they also had a personal vantage point for witnessing American society's ascendant fascination with François Delsarte's Laws of Expression. Thus, as sponsors of Mme. Géraldy's American tour, they anticipated a great demand for her authenticated expertise. On this matter, their instincts were right.

On January 9, 1892, esteemed elocutionists like Genevieve Stebbins and other members of the New York Association of Teachers Oratory filled the auditorium at the Lyceum School of Acting in order to hear Mme. Géraldy expound her father's theories. Speaking through a French translator, she began with a very brief outline of her father's confirmation of man's triune nature (life, mind, and soul). She then proceeded to explain his principles of gesture and his theorization about the relationship between muscle and moods.[18] In his system, the shoulders functioned as "thermometers of passion" that rose and fell with strong emotion. Similarly, the elbows were "thermometers of pride and humility" that jutted out only when insecurities caused one to "puff" up (see figure 49). These concepts were certainly nothing new for most of the audience, nearly

---

[17] Emily Sartain's father, John Sartain (1808-1897) was instrumental in establishing Philadelphia as a cultural capital for art production. His daughter continued this work while also creating new paths for women to be trained and employed in careers in the arts. See Katharine Martinez, *Philadelphia's Cultural Landscape: The Sartain Family Legacy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

[18] "Acting for the Actors: Mme. Delsarte Illustrates Her Father's Theory of Gesture," *The Sun* (New York), January 9, 1892.

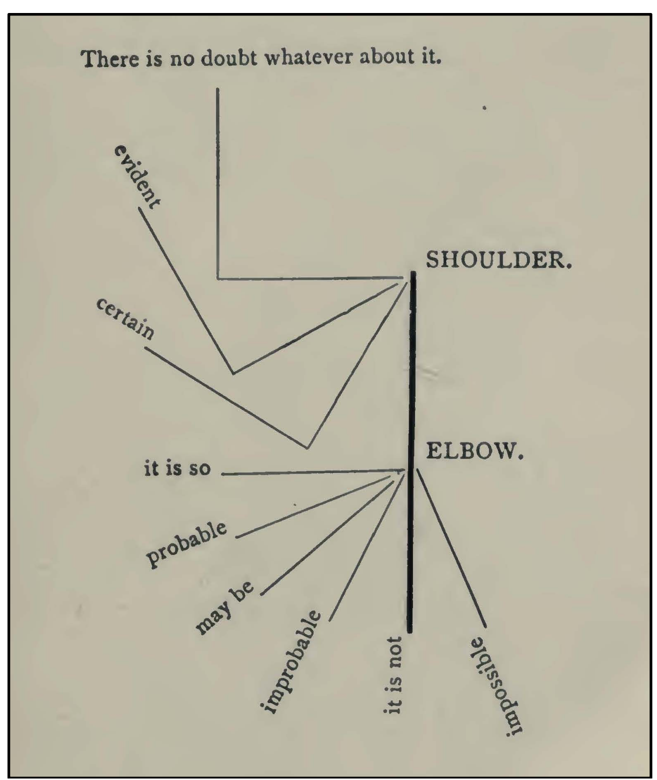


Figure 49 —Delsartean Semiotics of the Shoulder, Displayed by Mme. Géraldy, 1893
Credit: "The Course of Lessons Given in America by Mme. Géraldy," in *Delsarte System of Oratory*, Fourth Edition (New York City: Edgar S. Werner, 1893), 547.

all who had reportedly read about them in what they considered the standard "textbook" on the subject: Genevieve Stebbins' *Delsarte System of Expression.*[19] So far, it seemed that the American experts and Delsarte's daughter were on the same page.

However, as Géraldy's lecture continued, the sense of common ground weakened. Most pointedly, U.S. teachers did not share Géraldy's opinion regarding appropriate gestures for women. For example, Géraldy claimed that it was "horribly ugly" for a woman to take a stance of defiance, even though she felt that the same stance for a man "[was] all right."[20] She revealed

---

[19] Elsie M. Wilbor, "Delsartism in America," *Werner's Magazine* 14, no. 3 (March 1892), 59. Wilbor wrote that Stebbins' *Delsarte System of Expression,* had "become the standard work on the subject, and is used as a text book in every progressive school and college in the land."

[20] Mme. Marie Géraldy, "Lecture and Lessons Given by Mme. Marie Géraldy in America," in *Delsarte System of Oratory*, Fourth Edition (New York City: Edgar S. Werner, 1893), 537.

these views while discussing her father's thoughts about *The Gladiator*. In her telling, he had admired the ancient statue because it perfectly exemplified his Law of Opposition, a semiotic theory that associated opposing actions (right arm forward, left leg back) with qualities of equilibrium and balance. To demonstrate the principle, she arose and took the attitude by stretching one arm before her and the other behind.[21] Capturing this moment in her lecture, a news report included a sketch of Mme. Géraldy's gladiator demonstration along with her commentary about the gesture (see figure 50). "It isn't a very imposing attitude for a woman," she remarked, "but for a man I think it is a splendid pose. You will observe how the forward arm expresses strength and power."[22]

While many in the audience surely agreed with Géraldy's description about the gesture's embodiment of power, they were likely far less receptive to her assessment about its gendered appropriateness. In the seven years since Genevieve Stebbins had included gladiator exercises in her published manuals, this pose had become a staple feature in "Delsarte" classes across the country.[23] Indeed, most women in attendance likely practiced this pose with some regularity and appreciated the resultant self-assurance and empowerment it provided. By expressing her disapproval of this popular statue posing exercise, it seemed that Delsarte's daughter might be at odds with her father's American admirers.

---

[21] In her chapter, "Grammar of Pantomime," Stebbins explained the Law of Opposition as "the law of harmony in music; symmetry in form, grace in movement; equilibrium; repose in action; sex; unity; as illustrated by the magnetic poles, or by the necessity of opposition of form in things that are to unite." See Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression,* 173.

[22] "Acting for the Actors," *The Sun* (New York), January 9, 1892.

[23] Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1885), 101-102.

Figure 50 —Mme. Géraldy Demonstrating *The Gladiator* in New York City, 1892
Credit: "Acting for the Actors," *The Sun*, January 9, 1892.

Emily Mulkin Bishop was among those perplexed by this first lecture. By 1891, she had been studying and teaching François Delsarte's theories and psycho-physical exercises for a decade. Just a few years earlier, she had also taken charge of the Delsarte Department at the Chautauqua Institute in upstate New York, a summer resort that featured educational programming for school teachers and society folk (see figures 51 and 52). In that position, she witnessed first-hand how young, middle-aged, and elderly women alike had gained poise and ease through these practices. Indeed, owing to such positive results, her classes had become one

Figure 51 — Emily M. Bishop demonstrating an exercise from Americanized Delsarte, 1896
Credit: The Chautauqua Institution Archives, 2006.01.02.M

Figure 52 — Emily Bishop with students at the Chautauqua Institute, c.1888-1896
Emily Bishop is the third from the left, above her in the center is Gwyneth King Roe, her longtime assistant and collaborator in teaching Americanized Delsarte.
Credit: Wisconsin Historical Society, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Image 147130

of the institute's most popular courses.[24] To help meet the growing demand for her expertise, Bishop had also begun writing her own Delsarte-inspired manual, the manuscript of which was nearly finished at the time she attended Mme. Géraldy's lectures. Clearly, both she and her many students had a lot on the line in affirming the credibility of this curriculum.

Given these high stakes, Emily Bishop decided to follow-up privately with Géraldy after her first lecture. Describing this exchange later for *Werner's Magazine*, Bishop noted that she

[24] For data about enrollment and the great popularity of Bishop's Delsarte course at Chautauqua, see Gwyneth King Roe, unpublished biography, box 4, folder 9, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

had first asked: “Did [your father] not base his expression-work upon the Law of Correspondence?” To American proponents of Delsarte’s theories, the Law of Correspondence was the most basic premise of his work; it was the logic behind his categorical approach to the meaning of gestures. It was also the evidence teachers cited for claiming a therapeutic basis to statue posing. Even if Géraldy did not support their interest in posing like *Fighting Gladiator*, Bishop assumed they would share similar pedagogical views about the Law of Correspondence. But to her dismay, Bishop noted that “the lady was completely at sea. She said she had never heard of the law.” Because Géraldy only spoke French, Bishop thought her question may have been muddled in translation, so she reframed what she meant—namely, that there was actionable power in the relationship between inner emotions and outward expression. Bishop then restated the question in a different way: “Does not the outer expression influence the inner condition? Or if I were to take the exact expression of defiance and hold it for some time, would not that position tend to create a similar feeling?” This explanation, however, did not change Géraldy’s answer: “Never in the world,” she declared.[25]

Discouraged by this exchange and wearied by the prospect of hearing more jargon from Mme. Géraldy, Emily Bishop skipped the final lecture and instead ventured to the nearby Metropolitan Museum of Art. Having received no validation from Delsarte’s daughter, Bishop chose to surround herself with the evidence of antique statuary—marble proof about the correspondence of gesture and emotion. These ancient works conveyed what appeared obvious: that a broadened chest embodied feelings of victory, that buoyant action embodied bright spirits, that steady legs embodied equipoise. To help her own students appreciate these correspondences, she had even procured copies of *Flying Mercury* and *Winged Victory* for her own classroom at

[25] Emily M. Bishop, “Delsarte Culture—Shall it be Restricted or Expanded,” *Werner’s Voice Magazine* 14, No. 3 (March 1892): 62.

the Chautauqua Institute.[26] Seeing the Law of Correspondence etched into these figures had long helped her, her students, and many others corroborate the claim that embodying feelings of confidence, dignity, or resolve could legitimately cultivate these desirable emotions. Did it really matter that Mme. Géraldy did not see the same possibilities?

Géraldy had certainly failed to impress the teachers who attended her New York City lectures, and things proved just as troublesome at her next location. In mid-January 1892, she traveled to Philadelphia. Her hosts, Miss Emily Sartain and Miss Minnie M. Jones (1860-?), had arranged a much-anticipated public lecture and several private lessons. The events took place at Miss Jones's studio at 1710 Chestnut Street, where she had been teaching the Delsarte System of Expression for nearly ten years. According to advertisements for her studio, Jones's classes emphasized "relaxation, repose, [and] economy of nervous energy."[27] Like many of her colleagues, including her own teacher, Genevieve Stebbins, Jones claimed these exercises produced "health, strength, and grace," "courage and confidence," "self-possession," and "ease of manner."[28] By the 1890s, Miss Jones's services were in such demand that she had hired several assistants to help carry out the work.[29]

As in New York City, Miss Jones and Miss Sartain easily filled the studio to capacity on the day of Géraldy's first lecture. Claiming to present the most authentic instruction, François Delsarte's daughter delivered the same content as she had before. News reports also mentioned

---

[26] Gwyneth King Roe, unpublished biography, box 4, folder 9, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

[27] Educational Classifieds, *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* September 26, 1891.

[28] *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* September 23, 1891. In her 1892 pamphlet about the New York School of Expression, Stebbins listed Minnie M. Jones as one of her students. The two had also collaborated in several performances. For example, in May 1890 they delivered an "An Evening of Delsarte" at the Broad Street Theatre in Philadelphia. The program included statue poses, Delsarte gymnastics, Spanish dance, Greek dance, pantomime and recitations. Tickets were one dollar each. See, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 5, 1890.

[29] "Miss Minnie M. Jones," in *The Columbian Exposition and World's Fair Illustrated* (Philadelphia: The Columbian Engraving and Publishing Co., 1893), 359.

her advice for the most effective way to practice Delsarte: namely, that one should "untiringly" repeat prescribed gestures in front of a mirror. To those in the audience, this was surely a disappointing instruction. They believed that repeating a pose could be beneficial to emotional health, but they were wary of instructions calling for strict adherence to "correct" gestures for specific emotions. Such a method seemed apt to generate the "artificial manners" that were subjecting "Delsarte" to mockery. And so, as had happened in New York City, Philadelphia's teachers left Géraldy's lectures feeling more irritated than inspired.

Though Mme. Géraldy's U.S. tour had seemed a timely opportunity for educating the public how to better spot "imposter" varieties of Delsarte; she actually ended up generating more confusion. Instead of validating the pedagogy of the most-respected Delsarte teachers, Mme. Géraldy had flatly rejected their expertise. She was especially outspoken in her disdain of their efforts to develop health practices based on her father's aesthetic theories. Such a purpose, she believed, debased her father's primary interest in elevating the social status of the performing arts. Adamant that U.S. women had strayed far from her father's original intent, she particularly decried their choice of attaching her father's name to statue posing and other aesthetic exercises that he had never taught. In Géraldy's view, there was simply no basis for naming these practices after her father. For many U.S. elocutionists, this accusation was not only perplexing, but it also threatened to discredit their claims to expertise. What did it mean that they had applied François Delsarte's theories in ways that his own daughter would not endorse?

To gauge how teachers were navigating the fallout from Géraldy's visit, *Werner's Magazine* hired a special reporter to follow-up with sixteen of Philadelphia's leading Delsarte proponents, including Minnie M. Jones and Emily Sartain. The reporter's opening line communicated the dramatic feelings among the group. "Like a comet sweeping a starlit sky, the

daughter of the famous François Delsarte . . . swept through the elocutionary firmament, shedding behind her a scintillating trail of interjection and interrogation mixed with about equal parts of explanation and indignation." When asked what they had learned from Géraldy's lectures, the women declared: "Very little indeed! Not a single thing! Much less than we expected! and "A few gestures but no new principles."[30]

Moreover, Philadelphia's elocution teachers clearly disagreed with Géraldy's attack on the validity of their aesthetic gymnastics. Minnie M. Jones was disappointed that Géraldy had failed to recognize that the exercises U.S. women promoted did *not* distort François Delsarte's principles, but put them to good use. For in their hands and outstretched arms, they had endowed the study of expression with an advantageous side effect: improved health. Jones surmised that cultural circumstances were to blame for Géraldy's lack of vision. Her "view of the subject is wholly French," Jones told the reporter, "while ours is projected through an American mind, and adapted to the American body." Based on her observations, Jones believed that "rigidity" was a prevailing quality of the American mind and body. Attributing this stiffness to a "heritage of puritanical and pioneer expression of thought," Jones explained that because Americans were "apt to repress their expressions," they could not "devitalize (limber up) enough." "We must have gymnastics," she asserted.

Minnie Jones's statements underscored the ways in which American women framed self-expression as a project of health—a project for which claims to Delsarte's science of gesture and emotion had helped them validate activities that challenged several cultural norms of "respectable" womanhood. Like others who had been teaching this curriculum for almost a decade, Jones had seen the therapeutic value of psycho-physical exercises first hand. So too had

---

[30] Fanny Edgar Thomas, "Delsartina: What Philadelphia Teachers Think of Mme. Géraldy's Visit," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 14 no. 5 (May 1892): 138-139.

several physicians in Philadelphia, some of whom had recommended their nervous patients to her classes.[31] With countless individuals benefiting from these practices, Minnie Jones was one of many who believed there was no reason to stop teaching these exercises only because Delsarte's daughter did not condone them.

Mme. Géraldy had clearly not succeeded in her stated mission to "set Americans right," and the frustration surrounding her lectures meant that her departure from the United States occurred with much less fanfare than her arrival. There were no final interviews in Mrs. Havemeyer's Fifth Avenue mansion, and no public events celebrating the completion of her lecture tour.[32] The absence of the latter was not an accident, but a choice. The New York Association of Teachers of Oratory had actually planned a reception to honor Mme. Géraldy, but her lectures had been so demeaning that they decided to revisit the matter. Mary S. Thompson (a graduate from the Boston University School of Oratory and Genevieve Stebbins' collaborator at the time) cast the deciding "Nay" vote and the event was canceled.[33] Writing about her decision for *Werner's Magazine*, Thompson observed that, while Géraldy was generally a kind and sincere woman, she had "greatly misunderstood" the American teachers.[34] Rejecting Géraldy's assertion that U.S. teachers had "degraded or belittled" François Delsarte's name by linking it to their aesthetic gymnastics,[35] Thompson claimed quite the opposite. American women, she

---

[31] "Miss Minnie M. Jones," in *The Columbian Exposition and World's Fair Illustrated* (Philadelphia: The Columbian Engraving and Publishing Co., 1893), 359.

[32] I was unable to locate Mrs. Havemeyer's thoughts about Géraldy's lecture, but plenty of evidence exists as to where she ultimately landed regarding questions of appropriate feminine expression. If her future actions in the 1910s were indicative of her politics in the 1890s, it is worthwhile to note that she became one of Alice Paul's most significant funders, and provided critical financial backing to the National Woman's Party.

[33] At this point, Mary Thompson was also likely Genevieve Stebbins' sister-in-law. Stebbins was married to her brother for four years. She divorced him in 1892, shortly before she married Norman Astley.

[34] "An Interview with Miss Thompson," *Werner's Magazine* 16, no. 5 (May 1894): 194.

[35] Mary S. Thompson, "The Relation of Gymnastics to Expression," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 14, no. 3 (March 1892): 60.

declared, had *elevated* Delsarte's theories by applying them toward innovative exercises for health.

Illustrative of the gravity of this matter, in 1892, nearly every issue of *Werner's Voice Magazine* dealt with Géraldy's claims in some fashion. Practitioners were particularly interested in gaining Steele MacKaye's clarification about Delsarte's methods, as he was the one American who had personally studied with the Frenchman. By 1892, after helping popularize Delsarte in the 1870 and early 1880s, MacKaye had largely moved on from teaching and was devoting all his energies to building theaters and directing plays. At the time that Mme. Géraldy delivered her lectures on the East coast, MacKaye was in Chicago absorbed in planning stages for what was to be the largest public theater in America (it never came to fruition). Finding himself too busy to respond to Géraldy's accusations about MacKaye's "false" teachings, his wife wrote an article clarifying that the Harmonic Gymnastics MacKaye had helped popularize were actually derivative of his collaborations with Delsarte. Accordingly, Géraldy was correct in stating that her father's original methodology never included such gymnastics. Moreover, MacKaye claimed that much of what he himself had promoted as "Delsarte" were exercises that the French teacher had approved of but had certainly not invented.[36] Some readers of *Werner's Voice Magazine* appreciated this clarification, for they too had been applying Delsarte's ideas in new ways (like statue posing), but others expressed outrage. In one dramatic example, a teacher called MacKaye's first "Delsarte" lecture, the "original deceit of 1870," and she shared her disdain for the ways in which this revelation now made popular practices seem less scientifically sound.[37]

---

[36] Mrs. Steele MacKaye, "Steele MacKaye and François Delsarte," *Werner's Magazine* 14, no. 7 (July 1892): 187-189.

[37] Charlotte Winterburn, "Delsarte-MacKaye vs. Science," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 14, no. 10 (October, 1892): 288-289.

Though Géraldy's critique of American teachers sent a shockwave through elocutionary circles, many teachers emerged from this experience feeling more determined than defeated. Her visit had "shown us our own advantage," said one teacher in Philadelphia. In a blunt message to readers of *Werner's Magazine*, Emily Bishop wrote, "Candidly, Mme. Géraldy added nothing to the Delsarte work as taught in this country, but she would take much that is of value away from it."[38] Unwilling to abandon the exercises that had helped her own health and that of countless women, Bishop then declared, "If what has been given to us by Mme. Géraldy is "the real, original Delsarte teaching . . . then the 'American invention,' as Mme. Géraldy calls our Delsarte teaching, seems to me far more desirable than the French original."[39] Such a statement from an influential leader was more than a personal opinion, it was a proclamation to the many teachers of expression who offered their services in rural communities and bustling cities. They should stand by their expertise. They should confidently continue teaching techniques that were helping so many women relax their nerves, strengthen their resolve, and speak their minds.

Genevieve Stebbins reinforced this position during her first public speech after Mme. Géraldy's departure. Addressing the same group of professionals (New York Association of Teachers Oratory) that had first welcomed Delsarte's daughter just two months earlier, Stebbins urged them to support each teacher's rights to survey François Delsarte's work and "make a selection for American needs."[40] "It does not follow," she stated, "that because an American teacher does not teach all that Delsarte taught, that what she does teach is, therefore, not Delsartean." This advice was also the path Stebbins had been taking.

---

[38] Emily M. Bishop, "Delsarte Culture—Shall it be Restricted or Expanded?" *Werner's Voice Magazine* 14, no. 3 (March 1892): 61-63.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Elsie Wilbor, "Discussion at the March Meeting of the New York Association of Teachers of Oratory," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 14, no. 5 (May 1892): 140-141.

In the five years since she published *Delsarte System of Expression*, Genevieve Stebbins had continued curating her curriculum by observing the experiences of her students, studying with other experts, and experimenting with an array of relaxing, strengthening, and energizing exercises. At the time of Géraldy's lectures in January 1892, Stebbins was in the final stages of opening her own school—The New York School of Expression—and finishing the completion of her next book, *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics.*[41] Given the recent shake-up with Mme. Géraldy, Stebbins new instructional manual attentively narrated the origin story of her latest recommendations. While she made a point to define the principles and methods she had learned from studying Delsarte with Steele MacKaye, she also called attention to many new elements she had incorporated from all her subsequent explorations. These additions especially focused on techniques designed to alleviate nervousness and its myriad effects on mind and body. They included several therapeutic exercises she had learned from a seasoned practitioner of medical gymnastics, Dr. George H. Taylor (1821-1896); and breathing techniques she had learned from someone she described as a "Hindu" pundit.[42]

[41] *Werner's Magazine* first advertised this text in November 1892 under the title *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Poise.* By January 1893, advertisements listed it under the final title *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics.*

[42] Genevieve Stebbins, *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1893), vi, 21. Among others, she also cited British psychiatrist Henry Maudsley (1835-1918) and thanked Dudley Allen Sargent (1849-1924) director of the Harvard Gymnasium. As for the identity of the person she described as a "Hindu pundit," this remains a mystery, though details about her social engagements offer some relevant context for this claim. By 1891, her classes in Manhattan were already including the yoga breathing method she claimed to have learned after watching a "Hindu pundit" teach the technique at Oxford. It is possible that she met this person after publishing *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture* in 1888. Within this time frame, it is relevant to note that Stebbins began lecturing and teaching at the Seidl Society in 1890. This club was named for Anton Seidl, a famous Wagnerian conductor. Its founder, Laura Langford, was a Brooklyn resident and one of the leading U.S. proponents of Theosophy. She also made several trips to London during this period. Perhaps Stebbins met this "Hindu pundit" through Langford? Another theory is that this unnamed friend was actually her second husband, Norman Astley. This is not implausible, but I have my doubts. A good deal of mystery surrounds him too. He supposedly had been a Captain in the British Army, and may have traveled to India. For discussion of these individuals, see Diane Sasson, *Yearning for the New Age: Laura Holloway-Langford and the Late Victorian Spirituality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Magdalena Kraler, "Yoga Breath: The Reinvention of Prana and Pranayama in Early Modern Yoga" (PhD diss. University of Vienna, 2022), 176-182.

While these additions reflected new strategies for authorizing her curriculum, elocution teachers who studied *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastic* did not need to read between the lines in order to see that Genevieve Stebbins had moved well beyond Delsarte. Indeed, her new school and new book signaled her vision of the tasks at hand. While elocution reformers had labored during the 1880s to publish and promote practical applications of François Delsarte's theories, the 1890s called for something else. It was time for U.S. teachers of expression to further develop and defend their own expertise.

In Defense of Relaxation

"Energization, only, in physical education is insufficient
to meet the needs of this hurried nineteenth century
. . . it is as essential to relax as to stimulate."

—Emily M. Bishop, "Americanized Delsarte Culture," *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education,* 1892

The dust had certainly not settled from the Géraldy kerfuffle, when, in July of 1892, Emily M. Bishop had occasion to defend her application and interpretation of Delsarte's theories in front of a consequential audience: the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education (AAAPE).[43] Founded by Ivy League male physicians in 1885, this group was very much invested in shaping the national dialogue about all things related to physical fitness.

---

[43] To a large degree, the establishment of the AAAPE reflected post-Civil war concerns about improving the fitness of the nation's male citizens. Conference proceedings from its first meetings show that the physicians and citizens in charge were largely concerned about making sure that the country's public school systems would include sufficient physical training programs for the male population. Among their chief considerations were the usage of military drills and the need for athletic competitions. On these developments, see Roberta J. Park, "Physiologists, Physicians, and Physical Educators: Nineteenth Century Biology and Exercise, Hygienic and Educative." *Journal of Sport History* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 28-60; Roberta J. Park, "Physiology and Anatomy Are Destiny!?: Brains, Bodies and Exercise in Nineteenth Century American Thought," *Journal of Sport History* 18, no. 1 (1991): 31–63; Martha Verbrugge, *Active Bodies: A History of Women's Physical Education in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15-16.

Though their opinions would come to dominate the field, for a brief period of time in the early 1890s, their advocacy for muscle building, competitive athletic sports, and military drills had to contend with the physical training programs that elocutionists had helped school systems implement during the previous three decades.

As Emily Bishop prepared her talk for the organization's seventh annual meeting, she knew that her audience would include both skeptics and allies of elocution's popular relaxation exercises. Those whom she expected would require some convincing included Dr. Dudley Allen Sargent (1849-1942), director of Harvard's Gymnasium and its Normal School for Physical Training, and Dr. Edward M. Hartwell (1850-1922), AAAPE's president and the director of the gymnasium at Johns Hopkins University. Among those whom Bishop knew shared her views, especially on matters involving relaxation, were William G. Anderson (1860-1947), her colleague at the Chautauqua School of Physical Education. She likely also anticipated great support from Francis Wayland Parker (1837-1902), a highly esteemed leader of progressive education and principal of Chicago's Cook County Normal School. Indeed, he had been an earlier admirer of Delsartism after learning more about the system from his wife, Frances Stuart Parker, a graduate from Boston University School of Oratory and student of Lewis B. Monroe, Steele MacKaye, and Genevieve Stebbins.

When it came time to deliver her address, Emily Bishop began by first clearing up the confusion that had been stirred up by Mme. Marie Géraldy's recent visit. "The application of any truth to utilitarian ends needs no defense," she stated. "Therefore, I make no apology for presenting much, under the name Delsarte, that François Delsarte probably never taught."[44] She then proceeded to delineate the reasons why Delsarte's principles had valid therapeutic

---

[44] Emily M. Bishop, "Americanized Delsarte Culture," *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education,* 126.

applications. "It is legitimate to apply the principles of his work to health promotion," she stated," for health is the basic physical condition that must underlie all true expression of man's true nature." Of course, health and nature were both cultural terms, so she sought to clarify matters further by stating what "true nature" was not. It was *not* a "set method" of motions, she stated. It was not "an aimless waiving of the arms." It was not "making eyes." She continued: "There is no Delsarte walk, no Delsarte standing-position, no Delsarte way to breathe, no Delsarte way to rise and sit, no Delsarte mode of carrying the head, no Delsarte way for doing anything. The only way sought is nature's way."[45]

With this matter addressed, she then proceeded to focus her talk on the topic of relaxation. At recent conferences, AAAPE leaders had decidedly favored fitness programs that emphasized exertion and muscle building. In their view, physical education should get students moving, not provide time for inactivity. Emily Bishop encouraged attendees to recognize that such preferences were physiologically and mentally inadequate. "Energization only," she said, "is insufficient to meet the needs of this hurried nineteenth century." Adopting rhetoric common to her specialization, she compared the body to an instrument and claimed that many Americans were too high-strung. It was critical, she declared, that physical educators also prioritize an "undoing process." Moreover, contrary to common misconceptions, she also clarified that her advocacy for relaxation exercises was not a call for inertia. Instead, these techniques were organized around actions that "release[d] organs and tissues from tension." In her words, relaxation meant "the husbanding of the nerve-force; the habitual muscular repose of any part . . . of the body when it is not in action."[46]

---

[45] Ibid, 81.
[46] Bishop, "Americanized Delsarte Culture," 81, 83-84.

Hoping to win-over the relaxation-skeptics in the room, Bishop then made a point of discussing how Delsarte-inspired "undoing" exercises drew upon common understandings about the unity of mind, body, and soul. This rhetoric was itself another strategic move. For though most of the men in the room were not accustomed to citing Delsarte in their own work, Bishop knew that many of them were highly invested in scientific studies and cultural practices that affirmed mind-body connections. Indeed, such thinking had recently been embodied in the emblem for the YMCA's physical training programs: an equilateral triangle bearing the words, "Spirit, Mind, Body." Its designer was Luther Gulick (1865-1918), the physical education director for the YMCA and a recently appointed Vice-President of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education.[47] The emblem represented Gulick's effort to champion "muscular Christianity," a movement that encouraged greater celebration of the body by linking spiritual power with physical strength. Recognizing the spiritual soundness of caring for the body was also of high interest to Emily Bishop and many of her colleagues, but their advocacy of psycho-physical culture was less concerned with muscular strength and more interested in matters of poise.[48]

Despite these differences, Bishop believed that advocates of physical education could find common ground in their shared enthusiasm for the interconnectedness of mind, body, and

---

[47] In 1887, Luther Gulick took charge of physical education at the YMCA's International Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts. He created the triangle emblem in 1891. See, Luther M. Gulick, "What the Triangle Means to Me," *Young Men's Era*, January 18, 1894. On Muscular Christianity and Gulick's substantial influence in shaping Progressive Era physical education, see Christopher G. White, *Unsettled Minds: Psychology and the Search for Spiritual Assurance*, 118-123.

[48] There's certainly more to explore here, particularly in the implication that American Delsartism could be understood as a feminine equivalent to Muscular Christianity. Emily Bishop spoke to this dynamic in an interview with *Werner's Magazine.* She stated: "In other days the body was but a poor thing compared with the soul. It was the husk, the soul was the kernel. It dragged the pure aspiring spirit downward. Hence it was to be mortified with fasting and watchings and even scourged into submission. The newer teaching avoids self-indulgence no less, but it emphasizes more its faith that the body is also a sacred thing." See, "Bodily Responsiveness: An Interview with Mrs. Emily M. Bishop, a Pioneer in the "Psychologic" Training of the Body for Health and for Self-Expression," *Werner's Magazine* 20, no. 2 (April 1899): 89.

spirit. If so, skeptical leaders might be able to recognize that Delsarte's Law of Correspondence provided a scientific basis for popular exercises that aimed to alleviate nervous tension. For, as she and other proponents claimed, this theory helped identify the remedial properties of shaking one's hands, feet, and arms; or lying supine and breathing deeply. By proving a connection between mind and body, the theory established that freeing muscles from tension could generate inner states of calm and poise. This outcome, she stated, also corroborated another Delsartean principle, the Law of Control: "Strength at the center, freedom at the periphery." This theory could be interpreted as saying that if anxiety was a state of being scattered, the cure came through finding a mind-body sense of center. If such theories were not enough for the skeptics in the room, Bishop also cited the observations she had made after ten years of teaching these techniques. Time and again, she had seen individuals cultivate steadiness and ease by practicing a curriculum that judiciously blended relaxation techniques with exercises for strength and harmonious, graceful energization.

While Emily Bishop's speech revealed how elocution teachers understood and responded to common criticisms of their methods, the debate that followed also revealed a good deal about the professional (and highly gendered) dynamics at play in shaping how physical educators would vie for authority. Perhaps surprisingly, none in attendance voiced any angst about determining what exercises *had* and *had not* specifically been taught by Delsarte. They did not question her explanations about mind-body correspondence, nor did they challenge her claims that many women experienced practical benefits from these techniques.

Instead, they took aim at the technical terms Emily Bishop had used in her definitions of relaxation. "I do not know what is meant by 'relaxation,'" Dr. Edward M. Hartwell stated. "I do not know what is meant by 'inner tension' and 'outer tension.' These are "not the terms of the

physiologist," he concluded. Dr. Francis Wayland Parker attempted to clarify the psycho-physical nature of the concept by stating, "Awkwardness is a knotted muscle," adding that Bishop's relaxation exercises aimed to remove the "tension" of self-consciousness.[49] Dr. Hartwell was intrigued by Parker's metaphor, but he remained unconvinced. In order to back relaxation as a component of physical education, Hartwell sought anatomical physiological evidence of relaxation's effects "in terms of nerve and muscle."[50] In his view, Bishop's usage of Delsarte's laws did not meet this burden of proof.

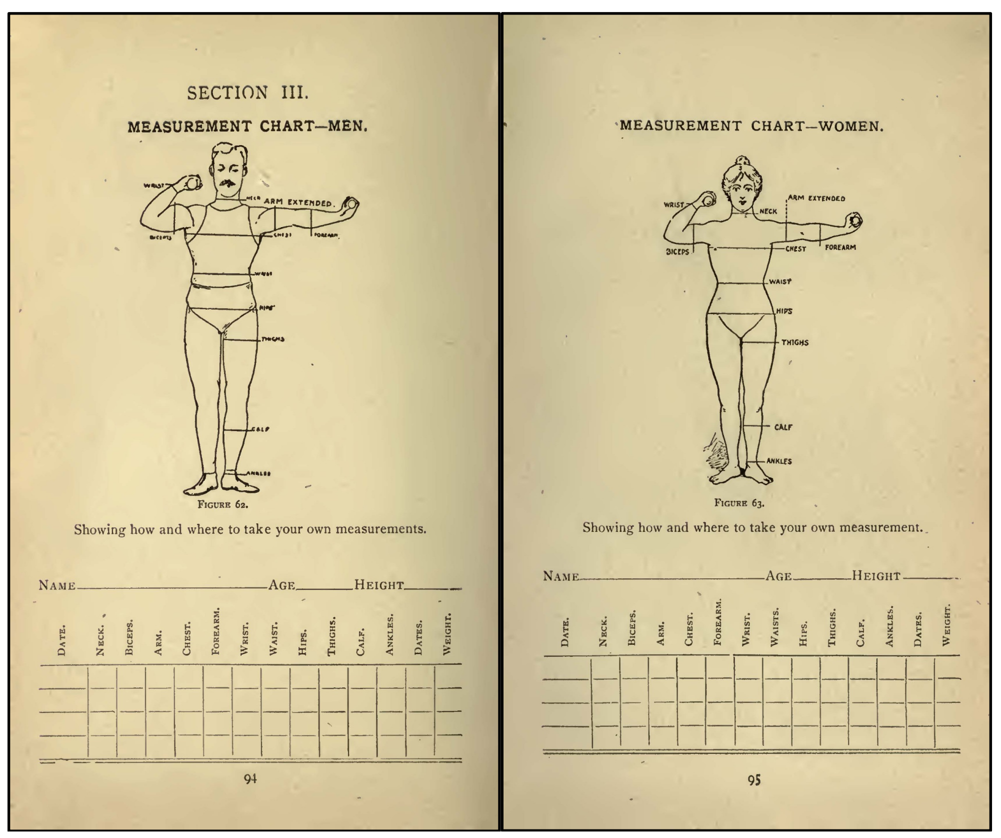
Subsequent discussions further underscored this insistence that relaxation exercises did not square with the "scientific" parameters that many AAAPE leaders believed were essential to the field's credibility. In this meeting, and many to come, they expressed a willingness to back only those exercises that reliably generated measurable results—the kinds of evidence that appeared in inches of change more than feelings of ease. In their view, such metrics mapped out objective markers of health, things like reduced waistlines and broadened chests and biceps. Indeed, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, their championing of this anthropometric methodology resulted in broad collegiate investments in programs that measured thousands of students' bodies, compiled the data, and generated modern norms for defining healthy proportions and perfect bodies (see figure 53).[51]

---

[49] Francis Parker in discussion of Emily Bishop's paper, see *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education at its Seventh Annual Meeting* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Press of Springfield Printing, 1892), 87. On Francis Parker's relationship with his wife, Frances Stuart Park, and their contributions to education reform see, Jack K. Campbell, "Colonel Parker's New Woman and the New Education," *McGill Journal of Education* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1975): 150-168.

[50] Edward M. Hartwell in discussion of Emily Bishop's paper, see *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education at its Seventh Annual Meeting* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Press of Springfield Printing, 1892), 95.

[51] Lundy Braun's work demonstrates the centrality of anthropometry in the professionalization of physical education. Her analysis also establishes the racializing function of this seemingly "objective" field of physiognomic analysis. See Lundy Braun, "The Professionalization of Physical Culture: Making and Measuring Whiteness" in *Breathing Race Into the Machine: The Surprising Career of the Spirometer from Plantation to Genetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 55-82.



SECTION III.

MEASUREMENT CHART—MEN.

FIGURE 62.

Showing how and where to take your own measurements.

NAME________________ AGE______ HEIGHT______

DATE.	NECK.	BICEPS.	ARM.	CHEST.	FOREARM.	WRIST.	WAIST.	HIPS.	THIGHS.	CALF.	ANKLES.	DATES.	WEIGHT.

94

MEASUREMENT CHART—WOMEN.

FIGURE 63.

Showing how and where to take your own measurement.

NAME________________ AGE______ HEIGHT______

DATE.	NECK.	BICEPS.	ARM.	CHEST.	FOREARM.	WRIST.	WAISTS.	HIPS.	THIGHS.	CALF.	ANKLES.	DATES.	WEIGHT.

95

Figure 53 — Measurement Charts Designed for Physical Educators, 1897
Credit: W.G. Anderson, *Anderson's Physical Education* (New York: A.D. Dana, 1897).

At the 1892 conference, it was actually with regard to such measurements that Dr. Dudley A. Sargent voiced his objections to a wholesale endorsement of relaxation exercises. Though women had been the primary practitioners of "Delsarte" exercises, Sargent thought this enthusiasm was misplaced. Based on the data he had gathered from numerous schools, he argued that, "Women have muscles more relaxed than men."[52] Because of this, Sargent felt they needed more exercises that increased tone, not reduced tension. Though he expressed an inclination to

[52] D.A. Sargent discussing Emily Bishop's paper, *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education at its Seventh Annual Meeting* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Press of Springfield Printing, 1892), 92.

consider offering relaxation exercises as an aid to men's "inelastic muscles," his subsequent gymnastic programs failed to deliver such an emphasis for this demographic.[53]

Not all in attendance disregarded the principles that Emily Bishop espoused, and several members made a point of addressing what they perceived as misunderstandings. For example, Rebecca Stoneroad, the director of physical education for Washington D.C. Public Schools, encouraged Dudley Sargent to revisit his perception of "tension" and defended her decision to prioritize relaxation in the capital city's public schools. For, contrary to Sargent's insistence, teachers like herself did not think of relaxation only in terms of stretching muscles, they also believed relaxation exercises were useful for creating mental ease. "The development of strength of muscle has always been a secondary consideration," she stated. "We have thought more of the effect of muscular action on nerve centers." From her experience in numerous classrooms, Stoneroad surmised that because children lived "in a nervous age," they needed exercises that were "soothing to their overwrought nerves."[54]

Other prominent leaders also encouraged their colleagues to cultivate greater epistemological flexibility. "Let us get rid of the bigoted man who says, 'My system is the only one: there is nothing good in any other," declared William G. Anderson, Emily Bishop's colleague at the Chautauqua Institute. Indeed, his remarks expressed sharp frustration with the field's acceptance of dogmatic men who dismissed "Delsarte"—individuals whom, he asserted, could be "found in every school of gymnastics in the country." In his estimation, the entire cause of physical education would greatly benefit from leaders that supported "broader and more

---

[53] D.A. Sargent's influence and opinions loomed large in this era's development of physical education. See, Thomas J. Finnegan, "Dr. Dudley Sargent's Summer at Chautauqua: Evangelizing the Gospel of Physical Culture," *New York History* 86, no. 1 (2005): 29–49.

[54] Rebecca Stoneroad, "Report of Physical Culture in the Public Schools of Washington, District of Columbia," *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education at its Seventh Annual Meeting* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Press of Springfield Printing, 1892), 171.

liberal" sensibilities about health and exercise."[55] Speaking to this need, Francis Wayland Parker, the esteemed champion of the New Education, also addressed limitations that came from relying so heavily on anthropometric metrics. While such charts provided appealing assurances that fitness programs could shape a body, he encouraged physical education leaders not to lose sight of the less "measurable" aspects of human experience, aspects that were prioritized in the aesthetic programs of teachers like Emily Bishop. Echoing sentiments that she, Stebbins, and many others had voiced, Francis Parker stated: "The beauty of Delsarte is that it is not a system dependent on line upon line and precept upon precept and muscle upon muscle. It is a principle which you have to study yourself, and apply yourself."[56]

These debates about the utility and legitimacy of relaxation exercises and other psycho-physical techniques would surface again and again in subsequent years. Consistent with the sexism women faced in other professional fields, critiquing the merits of the practice's "objectivity" was a favored method for undermining women's authority and the ideals of New Womanhood they espoused. In 1890, for example, physicians accused a teacher from Lasell Seminary (an elite girl's school near Boston) of hypnotizing her students through relaxation exercises. As historian John Andrick has argued, the anti-scientific insult actually registered anxieties about an activity that encouraged white women to engage in norm-defying self-explorations.[57] While some YMCA leaders were inclined to acknowledge the practical benefits of Delsarte exercises, the organization's professional journal also gave credence to similar

---

[55] Dr. W.G. Anderson quoted in *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education at its Sixth Annual Meetings* (Ithaca, NY: Andrus & Church, 1891), 200.

[56] Francis Parker discussing Emily Bishop's paper, *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education at its Seventh Annual Meeting* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Press of Springfield Printing, 1892), 95.

[57] On this incident see John M. Andrick, "Delsartean Hypnosis for Girls' Bodies and Minds: Annie Payson Call and the Lasell Seminary Nerve Training Controversy," *History of Psychology* 15, no. 2 (2012): 124-144.

"medical-malpractice" accusations against "Delsarte." In one review of Emily Bishop's 1892 manual *Americanized Delsarte Culture,* an esteemed medical doctor insisted that Bishop's unscientific understanding of "tension" and her panacea-like promotion of relaxation smacked of another type of therapeutic quackery: patent medicines.[58] Other physicians concurred. In 1895, Edward M. Hartwell once again took issue with Delsartean exercises, describing their remedies for nervousness as "humbug" exercises. Among the "men who shape and guide the course of public education," he declared, "Delsarte's" "standing [was] insecure and precarious."[59]

Such claims certainly did not go unchallenged, especially by those who had come to appreciate the health benefits of psycho-physical exercises. The administrators at the elite girl's school, for example, publicly denounced the doctor's accusation of hypnotism and praised their teacher's selection of modern psycho-physical methods.[60] The editors of the YMCA's professional journal also published a rebuke of the physician's derisive review of Emily Bishop's manual, written by Anne Brearly, a twenty-two-year-old woman from New Jersey who had also attended Emily Bishop's recent talk at the AAAPE conference. In her view, it was the physician's conception of "science" that was misguided. For, based on the evidence of her personal experience and the results she had witnessed from teaching "women in various walks of life," it was undeniably true that Delsarte exercises successfully met "the needs of busy women and practical mothers." Making a point to also praise Emily Bishop's new book, the New Jersey teacher concluded: "Her little work is doing good."[61] In 1897, Frances Willard, the president of the nation's largest women's club—the Women's Christian Temperance Union—also publicly

---

[58] George Diehle Stahley, "Vital Force and Tension," *Physical Education* 1, no. 9 (November 1892): 175-177. This was the journal for the YMCA, and its editors were Luther Gulick and James Naismith. G.D. Stahley (1850-1939) was a specialist in nervous diseases and a Professor of Biology and Hygiene at Pennsylvania College.

[59] E.M. Hartwell, "Current Topics," *Physical Education* 4, no. 2 (April 1895): 2.

[60] John M. Andrick, "Delsartean Hypnosis," 128-130.

[61] Anne Denike Brearley, "Americanized Delsarte Culture," *Physical Education* 2, no. 1 (March 1893): 4.

endorsed Emily Bishop's manual, *Americanize Delsarte Culture*, by declaring her wish that "every American woman, young and old," could own a copy.[62]

Other prominent social and intellectual leaders not only agreed, they also made public efforts to rally the public's defense of psycho-physical exercises. Writing for *The Atlantic* in 1895, Michael Vincent O'Shea (1866-1932), Professor of Education at the University of Wisconsin, spoke in praise of "poising movements" and other exercises that "predisposed the mind to composure and restfulness."[63] Concerned that leading physical educators were discrediting Delsarte-inspired exercises and displacing psycho-physical culture in public schools, he also asked the public to "calmly examine [the] nation's ideals" and understand more clearly what was at stake. "It is not too much to expect that the character of our physical training will shape in a certain measure the destiny of our nation," he asserted. Did Americans really want programs that only emphasized "mere muscular development and military actions"? Shouldn't they choose instead programs that taught exercises for "self-poise and deliberation"?[64]

William James (1842-1910), the founder of American psychology and Steele MacKaye's childhood friend, joined Michael Vincent O'Shea in defending American Delsartism. During the 1870s, he too had been an ardent investigator of the mystery of emotion, and his academic theories on gesture and emotion shared much in common with Delsartean understandings of mind, body, and soul.[65] By the 1890s, he became a veritable champion of American women's "Delsarte" exercises. In an 1896 address to physical educators, aptly titled "The Gospel of

---

[62] Frances Willard, *Occupations for Women* (New York: The Success Company, 1897), 98.
[63] M.V. O. Shea, "Physical Training in Public Schools," *The Atlantic* (February 1895): 253.
[64] Ibid, 254.
[65] William James published his theory on emotion in 1884, the same year that Stebbins finished her manuscript on *Delsarte System of Expression.* In narrating these 1890s developments, I am intentionally depicting Delsarteans and William James as simultaneous investigators of the same phenomenon. Indeed, it would be a fair argument to recognize women like Stebbins, Bishop, and myriad others as part of the same social movement that produced academic psychology.

Relaxation," James endorsed Delsartean methods for successfully delivering therapeutic "practical applications" of psychological truths.[66] That same summer, he also attended Emily Bishop's classes at Chautauqua. According to Bishop's colleague, Gwyneth King Roe, at the end of the class he congratulated Bishop and exclaimed, "Madame, you are teaching what I have been preaching."[67] The admiration was surely mutual. For, as King also noted, Emily Bishop's took comfort and delight in learning about William James's psychological theories of emotion. In her view, they further corroborated the scientific facts of mind-body correspondence. As King put it, Bishop felt more assured in the claim "that through right use, body and mind could be lifted out of ruts; that emotions influenced bodily function, but, also bodily habits influenced emotions."[68]

In a climate where prominent male physicians publicly discredited the scientific soundness of psycho-physical exercises, these endorsements from local teachers, revered social leaders, and respected intellectuals went a long way in placing these approaches to self-expression and health on legitimate cultural footing. They also gave newspaper women fodder for publishing celebratory stories about the personal and social benefits of these "ladies' gymnastics." As one reporter put it, psycho-physical exercises had successfully "avoided" the "mistakes of masculine systems." In her estimation, some men's "unbounded enthusiasm for football and rowing and track athletics" had blinded them to the "needs of women" and the "mass of students." Such was not the case, she declared, in spaces that prioritized relaxation

---

[66] William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1899), 223. He delivered this talk in 1896 to graduates of the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics. He named Delsarteans in general, but his praise for these practices is one and the same with the specific praise he gave to Annie Payson Call and her book, *Power Through Repose.* On James and Call, see Donald Capps, "Relaxed Bodies, Emancipated Minds, and Dominant Calm." *Journal of Religion and Health* 48 (September 2009): 368-380.

[67] Gwyneth King Roe, unpublished autobiography, box 4, folder 3, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

[68] Ibid.

Figure 54— Illustrations of Psycho-Physical Culture, 1895
Without giving any credit to Stebbins or her book *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics*, this newspaper article printed her instructions for "Yoga breathing/Dynamic Will Breathing" verbatim. It is a good example of how these exercise techniques circulated widely in ways that often did not maintain references to the origins of their introduction.
Credit: "Do You Breathe Properly," *The Sun* (New York, New York) October 20, 1895

exercise and "vocal and breathing gymnastics." For, based on her experience, these techniques were giving rise to a new generation of "wholesome-looking women."[69] Not surprisingly, among the illustrations that accompanied the story was one of a modern girl, relaxing in "Grecian pose" (see figure 54).

[69] "Do You Breathe Properly?" *The Sun* (New York), October 20, 1895. Of note, this article reprinted, without crediting, several sections from Genevieve Stebbins' *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics*, including her instructions for "yoga breathing."

Standing by Statue Posing and Dignifying Dance

"[Delsarte] has been to modern teachers what Hahnemann
was to the system of medicine which reveres his name.
He gave a practical formula capable of infinite expansion
in the hands of those who should follow in his footsteps."

— Genevieve Stebbins, "Modern Delsartism," *Werner's Magazine,* 1894

In the summer of 1893, the dust still had not settled from Mme. Géraldy's visit the previous year. Among other effects, her denouncement of American methods had especially surfaced a good deal of social intrigue and ire about Grecian-styled statue posing. Indeed, by the 1890s, most Americans would have been hard pressed to have avoided a sighting of this "Delsarte" phenomenon. In solo acts or group tableaux, women were donning loose-fitting white gowns and giving exhibitions of emotional expressions in schools, parlors, and clubs all across the country.

While many such performances reportedly received hearty applause, not everyone was admiring what they saw. For example, in 1891, one of Emily Bishop's students at the Chautauqua Institute admitted that she "had jested and laughed with intelligent people over school exhibitions of Delsarte classes, clad in baggy cheese-cloth gowns—flatteringly styled 'Greek,' posing in impossible attitudes and, wildly waving their bare arms to an accompaniment of slow, sad music."[70] While such an impression indicated a level of silliness on the stage, this same woman later admitted that her distaste was more derivative of not fully appreciating the intent behind the actions. For, by the end of her lessons with Emily Bishop, she no longer ridiculed women's attempted "Delsarte," but instead recognized these displays as women's

[70] Cedro Daymon, "Delsarte Echoes from Chautauqua," *Werner's Voice Magazine,* (October 1891): 250.

sincere efforts to gain “nerve-control,” renew their energy, and gain greater confidence to present their “individuality to the world.”[71]

As publicity of women’s statuesque declarations of physical and emotional freedom increased, the practice became a lightning rod for cultural debates about what constituted appropriate displays of femininity.[72] Some saw the practice as a dignified expression of a woman’s poise, while others saw it as a distasteful display of a woman’s vanity or a dangerous undermining of white women’s claims to moral superiority. For such critics, these scandalous shoulder-revealing Grecian-robes were proving insufficient in helping women establish the practice’s wholesomeness.

To steer public opinion on the matter, opponents and proponents both pursued evidence to back their views. Mme. Géraldy’s verdict had helped tip the scale in favor of the opposition. By discrediting statue posing, she had raised new questions about the degree to which the practice was “scientifically” sound. If Delsarte had not taught statue posing himself, could women rightfully cite his laws of expression? And if not, then what proof could justify a practice that was gaining a public reputation as an act that was either graceful and healthy or ridiculous and immoral? Discussions of these questions certainly played out in the press, but statue posing was also a charged topic among elocution teachers—especially in light of recent organizational efforts to nationalize their profession and establish their own metrics in determining pedagogical best practices.

---

[71] Ibid, 253.

[72] For a useful discussion of the cultural dynamics at play in Grecian-styling, see Lisa Kay Suter, “The Arguments They Wore: The Role of the Neoclassical Toga in American Delsartism,” in *Rhetoric, History, and Women’s Oratorical Education,* eds. David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 134-153.

To that end, in the summer of 1893, Genevieve Stebbins made a point of addressing statue posing skeptics and supporters at the second meeting of the National Association of Elocutionists.[73] After all, she had positioned herself the innovator of this Delsarte-inspired statue posing method and she was thoroughly committed to serving as its outspoken defender. She was also a recognized authority within this new organization, having recently been elected as a Board Member and a member of its Literature Committee, working alongside Mary Adams Currier and many other women with whom she had collaborated and taught.[74]

To shore up concerns about statue posing's shaky scientific soundness, Stebbins focused her talk around the issue of evidence, a matter she conveyed in the very title of her address: "Identity of the Principles Underlying the Greek Statues and the Delsarte System of Expression." The scene for her presentation was also quite fitting, for the association's meeting in Chicago coincided with the World's Columbian Exposition, a grand fair that deployed Beaux Arts architecture (which often referred to Greek forms) in its Court of Honor as a symbol of the nation's democratic status and global prominence (see figure 52). Herself adopting the leverage of that esteemed ancient culture, Stebbins stood at the podium dressed in a creamy white, loose-fitting gown— a fashion statement that strategically matched the bold revelations of feminine power and white womanhood that prevailed at the world's fair.

As she began her speech, Stebbins re-affirmed that statue posing was a legitimate "method for embodying the *principles* taught by Delsarte." This simple distinction was an important clarification: the aesthetic exercises Americans knew as Delsarte were *inspired* by his

[73] For discussion of this professional organization see, Marian Wilson Kimber, *The Elocutionists: Women, Music and the Spoken Word* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Paige Van Osdol, "The Women's Elocution Movement in America, 1870-1915." (PhD. diss., The Ohio State University, 2012).

[74] *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the National Association of Elocutionists* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1892): end sheets.

Figure 55 — View of the World's Fair in Chicago, 1893
Credit: H.D. Higinbotham, *Official views of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Press Chicago Photo-gravure Co., 1893.

theories, *not* necessarily techniques that he had taught himself. Next, she explained that Delsarte's Laws of Expression were not original to him, but were also found in the art of the ancient Greeks who had "crystallized" the correspondence of emotion and gesture in "mute marble statues." In Stebbins view, these statues were sufficient proof that the relationships of mind and body were not a "riddle of the Sphinx." The statues required "no verbal explanation of their mystery in order to be clearly understood," she continued. Their gestures, "form and poise," and "facial expressions," clearly embodied a recognizable ideal." Ceres embodied "bounty and plenty;" Athena: "balanced repose," Venus: "voluptuousness"; Mercury: "active will"; Jove: "royal authority." The ideals were so distinct, Stebbins explained, that they functioned like

artistic hieroglyphics or "letters of an alphabet."[75] Stebbins argued that ancient statues did more than communicate ideals—they also provided pedagogy. If one wanted to experience these emotions, she could learn how to "speak" this statuesque language.

And if her colleagues had been unconvinced by her philosophical reasoning, Stebbins offered them an opportunity to observe the proof of correspondence through her personal demonstrations of fifteen statues: *Venus with the Apple*, *Ceres*, *Augustus*, *Cupid with his Bow*, *Apollo*, *Dianna of Versailles*, *Mercury*, *Minerva*, *Hebe*, *Ariadne*, *The Quoit Player, Atlanta*, *The Fighting Gladiator*, and *The Amazon*, and *The Winged Victory*. Altogether, the impressive repertoire portrayed playfulness, dignity, resolve, and grace; as well as qualities that were perceived as more masculine, including strength and defiance. To many in the audience, her performance of *The Fighting Gladiator* likely struck a pleasing nerve, as Mme. Géraldy had decried this defiant pose as unfeminine and thereby unsuitable for a woman's practice.

Of course, the transgressive nature of adopting such masculinized stance had, in many ways, been the point—a dynamic that Stebbins' also addressed in her closing discussion of statue posing's cultural impact. By helping transform whom in society had permission to embody steadiness and power, statue posing was also helping more women overcome timidity, awkwardness, or self-consciousness. While such outcomes aided individuals on a personal level, Stebbins posited that society benefited as well. To clarify, she offered (not surprisingly) an ancient precedent for such a claim. During the era when artists had created Greek statues, the images had "revived a burst of artistic enthusiasm that startled the fossilized mentality of orthodox Rome."[76] Perhaps these statues could do so again in the modern age—but with a twist.

---

[75] Genevieve Stebbins, "Identity of the Principles Underlying the Greek Statues and the Delsarte System of Expression," in *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the National Association of Elocutionists* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1893), 277.
[76] Ibid, 278.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, loosening up the "stiffness" so commonly attributed to America's Puritan heritage would not necessitate sculpting marble: women could revitalize both themselves and the nation by embodying these forms in real life. Through statue posing, she once again affirmed, women could experience embodied liberation, and thus build mental, physical, and emotional strength to challenge cultural limitations that barred them from wider participation in social and political life.

Though criticisms of her speech were not recorded in the organization's minutes, it seemed rather clear that Genevieve Stebbins was victorious in her 1893 defense of statue posing.[77] Over the next few years, her New York School of Expression became a preeminent center for elocution professionals; her first two books remained as the standard texts in classrooms across the country, and her new book *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* was lauded for further developing psycho-physical techniques.[78] At the invitation of prestigious clubwomen, she also toured her Delsarte matinee in several new spaces. Emily Bishop invited her to the Chautauqua Institute.[79] Sorosis members hosted her in Cleveland, Ohio.[80] Minnie M. Jones arranged for a performance at the New Century Club in Philadelphia; and Julia Ward Howe joined other leading women in sponsoring Stebbins' performance in Boston.[81] Mary Adams Currier,

---

[77] On Stebbins' development and defense of dance, see Kelly Jean Mullan, "Forgotten 'New' Dancer of New York City's Gilded Age: Genevieve Lee Stebbins and the Dance as Yet Undreamed," *Dance Research Journal* 52, no. 3 (2020): 97-117; Kelly Jean Lynch, "Aesthetic Dance as Woman's Culture in America at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Genevieve Stebbins and the New York School of Expression," *Feminist Modernist Studies* 5, no. 3 (2022): 247-260.

[78] For example, one of the more outspoken critics of American Delsartism, Dr. E.M. Hartwell, still positively reviewed Stebbins book in *Physical Education*, the YMCA's magazine. *Werner's Magazine* also reprinted his statements in several editions. He stated: "The book is well written, the periods being well rounded, the ideas admirably expressed. The logical connections between the different parts of the work are admirable."

[79] For a chronology and discussion of Stebbins' dance performances, see Mullan, "Forgotten 'New' Dancer," 97-117.

[80] In Cleveland, Stebbins reportedly lectured on Delsarte and demonstrated "oriental dances," see "Sorosis Meeting," *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio), October 19, 1894.

[81] On Stebbins' dance in Boston, see Kelly Jean Mullan, "Forgotten 'New Dancer," 101-103.

WILD OVER DELSARTE.

Mrs Stebbins Dances for Wellesley Girls All the Dances Danced Since Adam's Time and Makes a Great Hit.

The Wellesley girls yearn for grace as well as strength of body. If these progressive young women continue in this path of wisdom they will by and by evolve the perfect woman, and then let the men beware, for she will be irresistible. Think of it! A woman who is learned in Latin and all the ologies, and yet has not a weak back, is not awkward, angular or unshapely, but who carries about with her a body which is the true index of her beautiful, well-ordered mind, in its free elasticity and supple grace.

GENEVIEVE STEBBINS.

This is the Wellesley girl's ideal whom she saw in the flesh lately in the person of Mrs Genevieve Stebbins of New York, the well-known leader and teacher of Delsarte's principles. Mrs Stebbins was invited by Prof Currier of the elocution department to address the students on artistic physical culture.

Figure 56 — Newspaper Coverage of Stebbins' Dance at Wellesley College, 1893.
Stebbins' performance at Wellesley likely came at the invitation of Mary Adams Currier, the college's Professor of Elocution. Currier had also studied with Genevieve Stebbins at Boston University School of Oratory.
Credit: "Wild Over Delsarte," *The Boston Globe*, November 5, 1893.

Stebbins' colleague from their days at Boston University, also welcomed her to Wellesley, where students reportedly became wildly enthusiastic in their appreciation of "her body," describing it as "the true index of her beautiful, well-ordered mind, in its free elasticity and supple grace"[82] (see figure 56).

[82] "Wild Over Delsarte," *The Boston Globe*, November 5, 1893.

Figure 57 —Genevieve Stebbins and Others Leading Elocution Teachers, 1895
Stebbins' authority in the field was certainly personified by this juxtaposition of portraiture in December 1895. Hers was the only full-page portrait in the magazine. Among the women represented in the composite portrait are, Mary Adams Currier, Anna Baright Curry, Mrs. Anna Randall-Diehl, Minnie M. Jones, Harriet A. Prunk, and Mary S. Thompson.
Credit: *Werner's Magazine* 17, no.12 (December 1895), 870, 878.

Demonstrating their own admiration for Stebbins' work, *Werner's Magazine* also regularly featured her accomplishments and commissioned her to write a monthly "Delsarte" column, a space where she could directly answer questions sent in from teachers and thus further distribute her expertise about psycho-physical methods. All of these actions made it clear that Genevieve Stebbins' voice was the one to follow in "setting Americans right" on anything regarding Delsarte (see figure 57). As *The New York World* put it in 1894, "Genevieve Stebbins is a woman with a mission, and that mission is psycho-physical culture. A very credible mission it is."[83]

[83] Quote attributed to the *New York World*, printed in a review of *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics*, *Werner's Magazine* 16, no. 2 (February 1894): 74.

All of these activities strengthened Stebbins' status among cultural elites, and they also provided forums for her to continue the work of corroborating her therapeutic claims about statue posing. For example, in one interview with the editor of *Werner's Magazine*, Stebbins described her recent studies with Dr. George Taylor, a well-regarded physician who specialized in medical gymnastics. Among his prominent clientele was Harriet Beecher Stowe—a luminary of the era who, around the time that Stebbins' began working with Taylor, had just endorsed his most recent medical text. Having benefited from his movement cures many times, Stowe declared her wish that "all women" had access to knowledge of these "principles and manner of treatment."[84] As Taylor was winding down his practice, and the rising generation of male medical professionals no longer viewed such therapeutics in the same progressive light as they had done decades earlier, Stebbins work with Dr. Taylor signaled to her own elite clientele that she was helping the rising generation of movement-cure proponents carry out such a wish.[85]

Of course, Stebbins' work with Dr. Taylor yielded more than rhetorical benefits; it also introduced her to new strength-building movements and breathing techniques for easing nervous tension (see figure 58).[86] By incorporating these exercises into her curriculum, Stebbins also boosted her own credibility. In addition to citing Dr. Taylor's work, she also gained expertise about Pehr Henrik Ling (1776-1839), the lauded nineteenth-century Swedish investigator of

---

[84] Harriet Beecher Stowe's endorsement of Dr. George Taylor's 1888 *Pelvic and Hernial Gymnastics* was published in *The Homoeopathic News* 18, no. 2 (March-April, 1888): iv.

[85] This transfer of knowledge from Dr. Taylor to Genevieve Stebbins is rather significant, and it warrants further research. I think it demonstrates the degree to which popular nineteenth century movement therapies were becoming feminized not only in terms of their epistemological ethos, but also because the labor itself was highly associated with domesticate spaces.

[86] For discussion of Dr. George Taylor, including his influence on Stebbins, see Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, *The Cultivation of Mind and Body in American Delsartism,* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 83-98; Mullan, Kelly Jean. "Somatics: Investigating the Common Ground of Western Body-Mind Disciplines." *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy: An International Journal for Theory, Research and Practice* 9, no. 4 (2014): 253-265; Mullan, Kelly Jean. "European Antecedents to Somatic Movement," In *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action,* edited by Martha Eddy, 63-82. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2016.

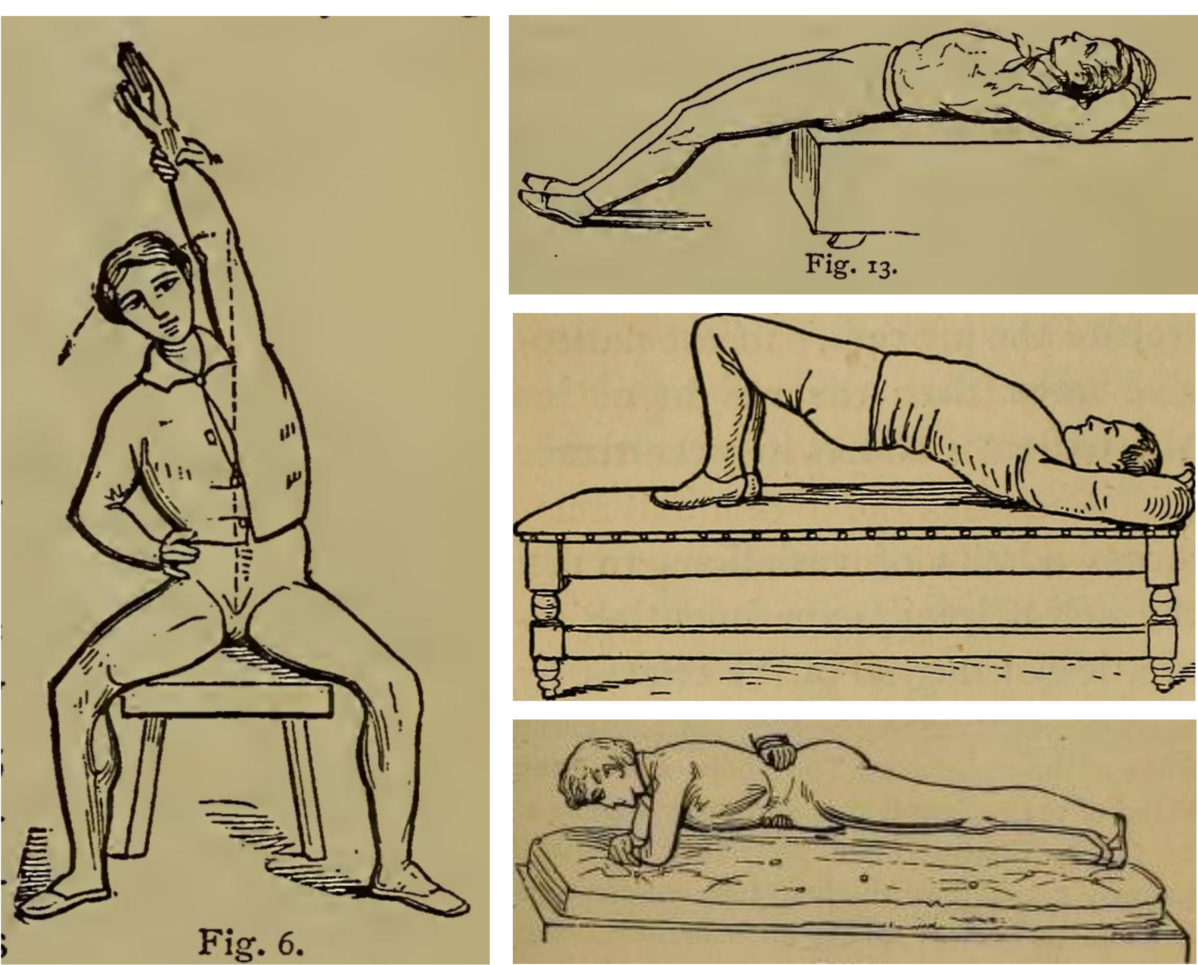


Figure 58 —Medical Gymnastics that Genevieve Stebbins Learned from Dr. George Taylor
Stebbins included these exercises in her 1892 manual, *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastic.*
Credit: George Taylor, *Pelvic and Hernial Therapeutics* (New York: John B. Alden Publisher, 1885).

therapeutic exercise whose system Taylor had studied.[87] Thus, Stebbins could now also state, as she did for *Werner's Magazine,* that her recommended curriculum could rightly be called "Ling-Delsarte," because it embodied both men's scientific work.[88] Given the swirling debates about statue posing, this was an especially advantageous pronouncement. As she put it, practitioners of

[87] On Pehr Henrik Ling and the development of kinesiology, Anders Ottosson, "The First Historical Movements of Kinesiology: Scientification in the Borderline between Physical Culture and Medicine around 1850," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no.11 (2010): 1899–1919.

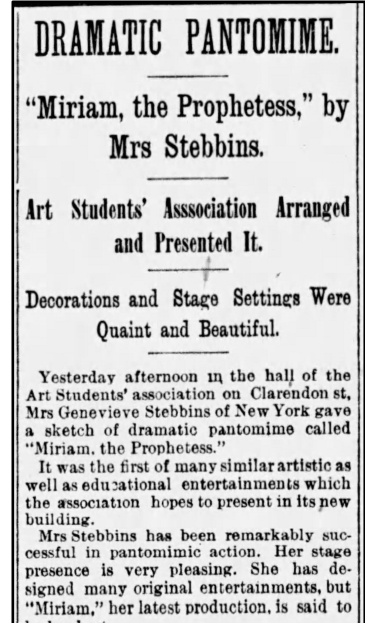
[88] Elsie M. Wilbor, "Ling-Delsarte: Some Reasons Why Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins Thompson Has Adopted this Title For Her Work," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 14, no. 6 (June 1892): 181.

Figure 59 — Genevieve Stebbins' Students in Costume for Eastern Temple Drill, 1895
Credit: Elise M. Wilbor, "New York School of Expression," *Werner's Magazine* 17, no. 10 (October 1895): 783.

this aesthetic exercise could be assured that their statue posing experiments exemplified what Dr. Taylor and Pehr Henrik Ling both considered "the great gymnastic truth," namely, "that slow motion is muscular nutrition and nerve-conservation."[89]

In the mid-1890s, with her reputation and curriculum on rather solid footing, Genevieve Stebbins also took this opportunity to promote another rather daring form of expressive exercise: dance. While her 1880s Delsarte matinees of statue posing-set-to-music had always included dance-like elements, she had also carefully avoided the problematic "d" word (dance), favoring instead terms like "pantomime," or "drills" in order to distinguish the practice from its association with what "respectable" individuals viewed as low-class entertainments or burlesques (see figure 59).

[89] Ibid.


DRAMATIC PANTOMIME.

"Miriam, the Prophetess," by Mrs Stebbins.

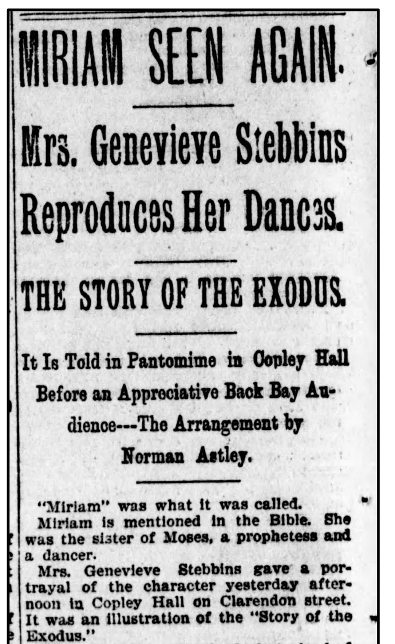
Art Students' Asssociation Arranged and Presented It.

Decorations and Stage Settings Were Quaint and Beautiful.

Yesterday afternoon in the hall of the Art Students' association on Clarendon st, Mrs Genevieve Stebbins of New York gave a sketch of dramatic pantomime called "Miriam, the Prophetess."

It was the first of many similar artistic as well as educational entertainments which the association hopes to present in its new building.

Mrs Stebbins has been remarkably successful in pantomimic action. Her stage presence is very pleasing. She has designed many original entertainments, but "Miriam," her latest production, is said to be her best.


MIRIAM SEEN AGAIN.

Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins Reproduces Her Dances.

THE STORY OF THE EXODUS.

It Is Told in Pantomime in Copley Hall Before an Appreciative Back Bay Audience---The Arrangement by Norman Astley.

"Miriam" was what it was called.

Miriam is mentioned in the Bible. She was the sister of Moses, a prophetess and a dancer.

Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins gave a portrayal of the character yesterday afternoon in Copley Hall on Clarendon street. It was an illustration of the "Story of the Exodus."

Figure 60 — Newspaper Reports of Genevieve Stebbins' Miriam Dances
These reports, issued by two papers about the same event, offer a useful window into the freighted language about "dance." To maintain the respectability of these aesthetic displays, it was common for them to be called "pantomime" or "drill."
Credit: (Left) *Boston Globe* February 25, 1894, (Right) *Boston Post*, February 25, 1894.

But, in the 1890s, Stebbins and her students more regularly, and more brashly, identified their interpretive choreographies as beautiful forms of artistic dance. This was apparent during her Delsarte matinee tours of the early and mid-1890s. In Boston, for example, her rhythmic embodiment of ancient statues such as *Winged Victory, Venus*, and *Fighting Gladiator*, was no longer the matinee's main event—it was, as *Werner's Magazine* noted, just "the prelude."[90] The feature piece of the evening was Stebbins' dramatization of Miriam's exodus from Egypt, and a multi-part piece that included several dances (see figure 60).[91] Reporting on this event, the editor of *Werner's Magazine* called it a "daring experiment," yet something so

[90] Elsie M. Wilbor, "Genevieve Stebbins' Matinee," *Werner's Magazine* 16, no. 2 (February, 1894): 69.

[91] There is more to explore in Stebbins' selection of Miriam's story. Not only did the biblical reference aid in an effort to dignify her interpretive dances, but the references it made to slavery and freedom were highly resonant with nineteenth century social movements. Abolitionists in the antebellum era cited Miriam's dance when they defended women's rights to speak at public gatherings. (See William Lloyd Garrison, "Female Liberty of Speech," *The Liberator* October 20, 1837).

beautiful that even the “most prudish” would not have been shocked. In one dance, Stebbins held an oil lamp and moved in ceremonial gestures; in another she held cymbals and rang the bells with “the utmost abandon of joy.” The performance was quite simply, as the editor put it, “a marvel of grace and beauty.”[92]

Yet, not everyone felt similarly a glow; for those who were already concerned about statue posing, this promotion of dance was a step too far. Writing to the editor of *Werner’s Magazine*, some teachers accused Genevieve Stebbins of being a “blot on Delsarte,” and they decried her Grecian-styled displays as “vile.”[93] Critics claimed they were compelled to sound the alarm because they believed such practices put women’s reputations and moral purity at risk. In their view, these sensuous expressions of the body would lead women down a dangerous path. Such objections even surfaced in some of the spaces where Stebbins was invited as a presenter, most notably at the Chautauqua Institute in the summer of 1894. Though her host, Emily Bishop, and many students in the institute’s Delsarte programs had previously performed Grecian-styled pantomimes, the administration deemed Stebbins’ new dances too risqué and forbade her from performing these pieces. After the outcry of many women—some of whom had traveled great distances just to see Stebbins—administrators reversed course and allowed the dances to proceed.[94]

In professional circles, Stebbins also worked to address the predictable criticisms of her aesthetic advocacy. In her May 1894 column in *Werner’s Magazine*, she made a point of discussing a letter she had received from Miss Adelaide Addison Pollard (1862-1934), an

---

[92] Elsie M. Wilbor, “Genevieve Stebbins’ Matinee,” 69.

[93] “Professional Jealousy: Delsarte Letter-Box,” *Werner’s Magazine* 15, no. 10 (October 1893): 355.

[94] “Chautauqua Gossip,” *The Buffalo News,* July 27, 1894.

elocutionist from Iowa who also wrote hymns and gospel songs.[95] Distressed by Stebbins' performances and her promotion of an aesthetic kind of spirituality, Pollard asked: "Are there no enlightened Christians among the elocutionists?"[96] In Stebbins view, this critique was "narrow-minded," and displayed a "superficial" point of view about principles of beauty and belief.[97] She maintained that one could celebrate the body and still be Christian—the two did not have to necessarily counteract each other. As with other health reformers of the nineteenth century, Stebbins sought to persuade doubters by bringing in evidence of physiology as a source for common ground between the secular and the sacred. "My articles are concerned with the development of the brain and body . . . and not in any sense with a person's religious convictions," she wrote. "I try to make what I write, and personally teach, as valuable to Jew as to Gentile. I profoundly respect any persons' religious belief, when it is sincere, no matter what it may be; and I never seek to undermine or insult things that are sacred to the human heart."[98]

This kind of discourse spoke to the complex ways in which views of the body were entangled with the cultural power of America's Protestant religious traditions, a dynamic that also fueled a heated exchange after Stebbins' address at the 1897 gathering of the National Association of Elocutionists. Four years after Mme. Géraldy's visit, teachers were no longer as shaken by concerns about statue posing's status as "authentic" Delsartism. In light of the emerging trend toward dance, objectors now voiced concerns about the moral position of statue posing. As she prepared her address, "The Relationship of Physical Culture to Expression," Stebbins also knew that the respondent to her paper, Anna Baright Curry (1854-1924), was one

---

[95] "Christian Alliance Meets," *Belvidere Daily Republican,* October 26, 1905; "Adelaide A. Pollard," The Central New Jersey Home News, November 6, 1934.
[96] Genevieve Stebbins, "The Delsarte Letter Box," *Werner's Magazine* 16, no. 5 (May 1894): 177.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Genevieve Stebbins, "The Delsarte Letter Box," 1894.

of the more outspoken critics of Grecian styled statue posing. Like Stebbins, Curry had also developed a loyal following, and, along with her husband, Silas Samuel Curry, she had established the Boston School of Expression.[99] Indeed, their knowledge of each other's work dated back to 1878, the year when all of them had studied with Lewis B. Monroe at the Boston University School of Oratory.[100] Since then, they had witnessed the rising interest in elocution reform, but their opinion about statue posing practices revealed their different ideas about the proper ways to empower American women's voices. Simply put, the Curry's thought that statue posing broke too many rules of respectable female decorum.

As she had done in years past, Stebbins' defended her curricular approach by reiterating its basis in science—a discussion that now emphasized both François Delsarte's Laws of Expression and Pehr Henrik Ling's physiological findings.[101] But this address also made a robust appeal to the uplifting cultural power of art and beauty. To counter those who believed statue posing was too "low-brow," she questioned: "Is it true art to put statue posing on the platform as a number in an entertainment?" Her answer: "What is the aim of the artist before the public? Is it not to interest, move or persuade? Then has not beautiful expressive motion its place as well as beautiful music?"[102]

---

[99] On Anna Baright Curry, see Suzanne Bordelon. "'Please Cherish My Own Ideals and Dreams about the School of Expression': The Erasure of Anna Baright Curry," in *Remembering Women Differently: Refiguring Rhetorical Work*, ed. Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Helen Gaillet Bailey (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2019), 118–34.

[100] Genevieve Stebbins, Anna Baright Curry, and S.S. Curry were at Boston University School of Oratory during the same years, 1877-1878 (See the appendix). In 1893, Stebbins' also included their names in a list of her students. See, Norman Astley, *The New York School of Expression Prospectus* (New York: Edgar Werner, 1893), 23.

[101] Stebbins' speech at the 1897 gathering stated, "The Swedish system is based on the same presumption of the value of slow motion and held attitude as giving time for nutritive changes in the cellular tissues. An exclusive use of the Swedish system is detrimental to expression, but combined with the aesthetic it proves valuable. It is because of this valuable element that such teachers of physical training as Drs. Anderson, Seaver, and Taylor have recognized its use and counseled its practice." See, Genevieve Stebbins, *The Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training,* 139.

[102] Genevieve Stebbins included this speech, "The Relation of Physical Culture to Expression," in the appendix of her 1898 text *The Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training.*

Stebbins' arguments satisfied many in the audience, but Anna Baright Curry's response made clear that she had not been persuaded. Dismayed by Stebbins' encouragement of such statuesque escapades, Curry blamed these activities for advancing a wrong-headed view of female beauty. "The beauty referred to in statue posing is the physical beauty of the woman," Curry stated. Stebbins had argued that physical beauty was a manifestation of spiritual enlightenment; Curry found this message deceptive. In her view, Stebbins' argument was "an excuse for vanity to trade upon the public platform . . . that which should be most sacred to womanhood."[103] Dressed in such skimpy attire, how could women gain respect for their ideas, let alone have anyone seriously consider their appeals for educational, social, and political rights? Grecian-styled displays, Curry maintained, would never be rid of their association with the variety stage—a low-class venue where women were often cast as objects of sexual desire.[104] Urging her colleagues to renounce these displays and omit the exercises from their curricula, she pleaded: "Be true to your own womanly instincts, and do not drift with a tide in the support of that which must retard the intellectual and professional liberty of women."[105] Others agreed. Franklin H. Sargent stated bluntly, "Pantomime and physical culture are not high art."[106] Curry's husband voiced his objection just as plainly: "This pantomime belongs to the circus alone."[107]

According to a reporter who witnessed this drama, Stebbins remained calm while her opponents became flustered. Their concerns, of course, were quite familiar to her. An adept

---

[103] "All Had Their Say: National Association of Elocutionists Battled for and Against High Art of Statue Posing," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* June 30, 1897.

[104] These accusations reflect similar dynamics facing advocates of antebellum tableaux vivants. See, Monika M. Elbert, "Striking a Historical Pose: Antebellum Tableaux Vivants, 'Godey's' Illustrations, and Margaret Fuller's Heroines," *The New England Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (June 2002): 235-275.

[105] "All Had Their Say," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* June 30, 1897.

[106] Ibid.

[107] "All Had Their Say: Varying Views of Woman on Physical Culture: National Association of Elocutionists Battled For and Against High Art in Statue Posing," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 30, 1897.

student of cultural politics, she had seen how the rhetoric of "high art" was used to wield power and elevate the status of "professionals" at the expense of the "amateurs."[108] This was essentially what Mme. Géraldy had tried to accomplish in her efforts to "set Americans right." Stebbins was undeterred by such criticisms. With the poise of those many statues she had displayed, she delivered her rebuttal by opening with a qualification, "I decline to be judged by an opponent until he can show in himself, as a result of his own theories, a noble voice and a commanding presence." She clearly felt that her "breathless opponents" had not met this mark.[109] Sensing that scientific theories would not change their opinions, Stebbins did not hearken back to a review of Delsarte or Ling, nor did she expound the lessons of ancient Greek. Instead, she elevated the visible evidence of their routinized practices: "Everyone who appeals to art should be able to show forth his life-study in himself, for it is by such proofs alone that we finally we must stand or fall." And with those words, as one reporter put it, Stebbins "snatched victory from the jaws of defeat."[110]

Not surprisingly, this debate did not end at the conference; it continued on in the pages of *Werner's Magazine.* Framing the issue as one of either supporting expression or encouraging repression, many elocutionary leaders voiced their support for Stebbins. For example, Mary Thompson encouraged her colleagues to recognize that they were uniquely positioned to help Americans cast aside a cultural tradition of moral responsibility that had regarded "everything

---

[108] These accusations against statue posing and aesthetic dance are representative of the era's politics of "taste" in matters involving art, theater, and popular entertainment. For understanding the class and gendered reasoning behind such struggles, the following studies offer useful context, Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Rachel N. Klein, *Art Wars: The Politics of Taste in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

[109] "All Had Their Say," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 30, 1897.

[110] Ibid.

that appeals to the senses as forbidden fruit." Pointing out a fallacy in such logic, Thompson wrote, "ugliness does not necessarily symbolize truth, any more than beauty universally covers deception and vice." If they doubted this fact, she encouraged them to "investigate the facts in the case with an open mind and a contrite heart" and make a sincere study of the solid evidence of beauty etched in the ancient Greek statues. By doing so, they would surely see for themselves that the dignity women had embodied in a revered past could be put to good use again in modern times.[111]

Different Names for a Different Kind of Medicine

The Athenian Drill
Attitude: *Fighting Gladiator* (Louvre, Paris)

"Forward right leg advanced as in running, left arm out as if seizing a bridle.
Head looks to left arm.
Right arm back right oblique, hand holds short sword.
Hold this pose two counts.
. . . Always look to the front in reverse attitudes over advanced arm.
If needed, finish in victory attitudes."

— Genevieve Stebbins, *The Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training*, 1899

Throughout the 1890s and well into the 1900s, even as teachers of expression debated what leverage they could gain by citing François Delsarte's theories, the public largely continued associating the Frenchman's name with women's activities for health. In the parlance of the day, "Delsarte" was a moniker for relaxation and a term that evoked images of women posing and dancing in Grecian-style gowns. As countless women experienced improved well-being through these practices, "Delsarte" also became short-hand for a different kind of medicine, as evidenced in a syndicated joke published in 1896: "A young society belle of Winchester [Kentucky] told

[111] Mary S. Thompson "Expression or Repression," *Werner's Magazine* 19, no. 12 (December 1897): 767-768.

one of her gentleman callers a few evenings since that her health had greatly improved since taking Delsarte. He wisely asked: 'Did you take it internally or rub it on?' [112] Late nineteenth-century Americans would have gotten the humor—for even if they had not taken "Delsarte" themselves—they surely knew that this type of medicine was not a pill, tonic, or cream.

This "joke" also demonstrated the degree to which Delsarte-branded remedies of relaxation exercises, statue posing, and aesthetic pantomimes, drills, and dances were readily available across the entire country. One could "take Delsarte" in schoolrooms, in parlors and bedrooms, at women's club gatherings, or YWCAs. One could also buy "Delsarte shoes" and "Delsarte corsets," fashion items that traded on the ways that American women associated the Frenchman's name with healthy expressions of feminine poise and self-assurance (see figures 61 and 62). Instructions for "Delsarte" practices were also easily located in several manuals, some of which were becoming more deliberately prescriptive.[113] For example, Emily Bishop's 1895 edition of *Self-Expression and Health: Americanized Delsarte Culture* added a new section that listed specific exercises for specific ailments. At a glance, one could locate practices aimed "for muscular freedom," "for harmony of movement," "for invigoration," "to promote digestion," "to allay nervousness" and "to relieve insomnia." [114]

---

[112] "Delsarte in Kentucky," *The Daily Inter Ocean*, February 6, 1896.

[113] In most Delsarte-inspired manuals, remedies for nervousness were among the most common prescriptions. Most of them are variations on the same kind of techniques. For example, in a program designed for Mormon women, the author stated: "If you are of a nervous temperament practice the first exercise for harmonic poise, and your excited nerves will become calm." See Maude May Babcock, "Physical Culture Department," in *Guide to the Second Year's Course of Study in the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association.* (George Q. Cannon & Sons Company: Salt Lake City, Utah, 1896), 70.

[114] Emily M. Bishop, *Self-Expression and Health: Americanized Delsarte Culture* (Chautauqua: Edgar S. Werner, 1895), 15.

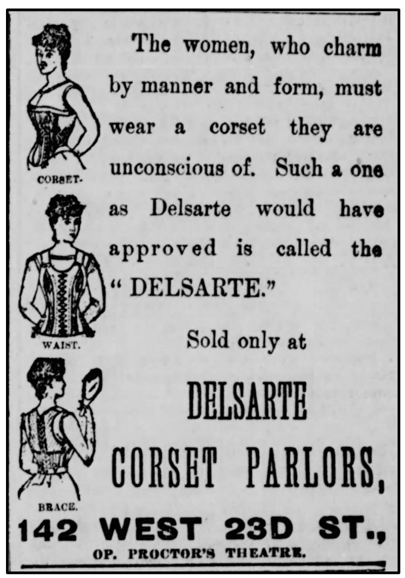


Figure 61 — Advertisements for Delsarte Corsets, 1890s
Credit: (Top) *New York Tribune,* November 23, 1890; (Botton) *Chicago Tribune,* April 3, 1892.

Figure 62 — Advertisement for Delsarte Shoes, 1898
In 1898, this company sold approx. 104,000 pairs of shoes. To put that number in perspective, in 1900, the census recorded that the number of 327,614 women were employed as teachers.
Credit: *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier* (Bangor, Maine), May 27, 1898.

Yet, despite this widespread familiarity of the name "Delsarte," many of the teachers who had helped launch this movement were also moving away from using the Frenchman's name. Why? After years of contending with questions about authenticity, measurement, and morality, women like Genevieve Stebbins, Emily Bishop, and many more felt confident that they had proven themselves as experts on matters of health and self-expression. They had studied muscle and nerves, breath and body, emotion and gesture. They had assimilated François Delsarte's Laws of Expression, the embodied ideals of ancient sculpture, the medical principles of Pehr Henrik Ling, and much more. They had also emboldened the expertise that came from their own experiences as teachers and practitioners. In light of all this, it seemed evident that "Delsarte" was now an insufficient descriptor of their work.

Mme. Géraldy's accusations had certainly not helped, and neither did it sit well with teachers that many "imposter" varieties often made light of more sincere methodologies. As one teacher put it, Delsarte's had become "hopelessly charlatanized."[115] Speaking to this matter in 1899, Emily Bishop also expressed her wish that the practices had been popularized under a different name. "It is most unfortunate," she noted to a reporter from *Werner's Magazine,* "that the second instead of the first name given by Steele MacKaye to his teaching, as long ago as 1872, did not prevail." Had that occurred, she claimed, Americans would know this approach simply as "aesthetic gymnastics" and everyone could have avoided the confusion caused by the name "Delsarte." As it stood though, "Delsarte" now called to mind "posturing, posing, mechanical gesturing, and almost literally in 'reeling and writhing and fainting in coils' as the Mock Turtle told Alice in Wonderland." "It is no wonder," she continued, that "there is

[115] "Interview with Mr. F. Townsend Southwick," *Werner's Voice Magazine* 14, no. 5 (May 1892): 140.

considerable prejudice among educators and sensible people against anything labeled Delsarte."[116]

In light of all of these developments throughout the 1890s, several leading teachers began advertising their expertise in new ways. Emily Bishop favored labels like Americanized Delsarte, practical Delsartism, or the gymnastics of expression. As a long-form title she also liked "A Psychologic Training of the Body," stating that this phrase gave "dignity to the teaching and in itself suggests somewhat the fundamental principles of our work."[117] As for Genevieve Stebbins, after a brief experiment with the term "Ling-Delsarte," she landed on labels such as psycho-physical culture and harmonic gymnastics. Like others, she also used straightforward terms for distinctive actions: poise exercises, breathing exercises, relaxation exercises, and energizing exercises. The title and content of her 1898 manual, *The Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Culture,* also made her positionality clear. Delsarte's name was mentioned only in the appendix, a marker of just one of many sources she had engaged during her nearly thirty-year career.[118]

These actions constituted a rather remarkable, and very intentional, disappearing of the very name that had helped launch many women's careers. In some ways, this facilitated future evaluators of their work to characterize American Delsarte as simply a "craze" or a "fad."[119] But

---

[116] "Bodily Responsiveness: An Interview with Mrs. Emily Bishop," *Werner's Magazine* 23, no. 2 (April, 1899): 89.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Genevieve Stebbins, *The Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1898), 134.
[119] For example, Emmett A. Rice, et al., *A Brief History of Physical Education* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1958), 222. He wrote: "[Delsarte] was characterized by a series of relaxing, 'energizing,' and deep-breathing exercises augmented by poses to denote various emotions. Without sound principles back of it, this system proved but a fad, and it soon died out although it enjoyed much acclaim in its day." This dissertation demonstrates that such a verdict was more representative of professional preferences for objectivity and consensus than an accurate assessment of the knowledge-basis and influence of American Delsartism. In making this argument, I draw upon scholarship about this era's feminization of body knowledge and healthcare professions and the subsequent impact on historiography, see Anders Ottosson, "One History or Many Herstories? Gender Politics and the History of Physiotherapy's Origins in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Women's History Review* (2015): 1-24; Regina Morantz-Sanchez. "Feminist Theory and Historical Practice: Rereading Elizabeth Blackwell," *History*

such assessments missed the point of a more consequential shift. For, as American women began using descriptors other than "Delsarte," they were not just re-branding their work—they were also asserting their authority to select and validate techniques based on their interests and expertise. Moreover, the aesthetic systems and psycho-physical understandings upon which they drew stood in stark contrast to the era's swelling authority of anthropometric evidence, and other forms of "objectively" measured aspects of health and illness. Indeed, for all ways in which elocution teachers valued body knowledge based on scientific facts, their interests in the artistic dynamics of self-expression also made space for a healthy respect of subjective experience. As this chapter has endeavored to demonstrate, this orientation was itself a method for defending women's access to experiences that purposefully affirmed their voices, eased their anxieties, and empowered their capabilities of mind and body.

As she had done before, Genevieve Stebbins also modeled this potentially subversive approach to self-knowledge. "Experience has taught me that a teacher must be eclectic to the highest degree," she wrote in her column for *Werner's Magazine*. "Take the good wherever and whenever you find it. Do not stop to consider whether Delsarte or any other man agreed with it. If you find it true and productive of valuable results, adopt it at once. Make it part of your stock in trade."[120] In surveying a culture she had helped create, Stebbins could be assured that many women were indeed "taking the good" wherever they found it and adopting it as their own. In her own lifetime, techniques that she had helped popularize were distributed throughout several manuals with no mention of her at all. For example, in 1900, Frances Pogle (1875-1944), a

---

and Theory 31, no. 4 (Dec., 1992): 51-69; Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

[120] Genevieve Stebbins, "Practical Delsartism," *Werner's Magazine* 16, no. 2 (February 1894): 62.

teacher of expression nearly twenty years younger than Stebbins, published the following exercise in a popular manual for parlor recitations and entertainments:

> **Relaxing Exercise for the Whole Body**
> (all tight or stiff clothing should be removed for this movement)
>
> 1. Lie flat on the back on the floor, with arms at sides and eyes closed.
> 2. Lift the head and hold it off the floor while you count to ten.
> 3. Let it drop, relaxed.
> 4. Lift right leg and hold aloft while counting twenty.
> 5. Let it drop relaxed.
> 6. Lift the left leg, and hold aloft while counting twenty.
> 7. Let it drop relaxed.
> 8. Lift right arm straight up while you count thirty.
> 9. Let it drop, relaxed.
> 10. Lift left arm straight up while counting thirty.
> 11. Let it drop, relaxed.
> 12. Lie quietly five minutes until thoroughly relaxed.
>
> This exercise is often given to produce sleep, and is much more restful to the body and mind than two hours of unrelaxed sleep. If you are at all nervous, lie down quietly and *relax* yourself. It will soothe you more than any amount of restless turning and twisting in trying to get to sleep. Before I give a recital I always go through with the relaxing exercises, and then lie down quietly for thirty minutes. It makes me feel delightfully refreshed.[121]

Though Pogle's instructions were essentially the same as similar exercises in other manuals by different authors, her presentation of the exercises is significant.[122] While she listed this technique under the broad rubric of "Delsarte," she had also presented it simply as a "relaxing exercise;" and, as the source for her claims about of the exercise's benefits, she simply cited her own experience. In other words, for those who wondered if her recommendation was a credible remedy for nervousness, Pogle's message was clear. She was satisfied that sufficient proof could be found in the practice itself.

---

[121] Frances Putnam Pogle, *The New Popular Reciter and Book of Elocution,* (Philadelphia: International Publishing, 1900), 31

[122] See for example, Stebbins instructions for "yoga breathing" or what she also labeled, "concentrated-will breathing." Stebbins, *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics*, 86.

CHAPTER 4

Nothing Less than Organized Anxiety

Performing New Womanhood in Jim Crow Indianapolis

"There are women plain, beautiful, charming,
bright conversationalists, fluent, resourceful in ideas,
forceful in execution . . . The woman thus portrayed
is the real new woman in American life.
This woman, as if by magic,
has succeeded in lifting herself as completely
from the stain of meanness of slavery
as if a century had elapsed since the day of emancipation . . .
This woman is needed as an educator of public opinion."

— Fannie Barrier Williams,
"The Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," 1900

On June 3, 1888, a writer for *The Indianapolis Journal* confidently predicted that local women would prove uninterested in "the Delsarte system." Describing the city's "society people" as the type who were "slow to take up ideas in art," the author claimed that "Delsarte will not be taught here, at least for the present."[1] Such a claim could have been a provocation in disguise, or simply wishful thinking that Midwestern women would refuse such cosmopolitan trends. Either way, the author was simply wrong. Not only were several women in the capital city already about the business of teaching and practicing "Delsarte," countless more would explore these methods for self-expression and health during the coming decade.

Previous chapters have documented the ways in which U.S. women in northern cities developed this "Delsarte" curriculum. This chapter's focus on American Delsartism in

[1] "Personal and Society," *The Indianapolis Journal,* June 3, 1888.

Indianapolis offers a vantage point for seeing psycho-physical culture at play in a different setting. Because these practices gained favor among the city's Black and white citizens, a study of American Delsartism in Indianapolis also provides a clearer picture of the ways in which this pedagogy addressed two of era's most consequential debates about "natural" fitness for political and social citizenship—the discourses colloquially termed "The Woman Question" and "The Negro Question."

To illuminate how these dynamics of race and gender informed the development of American Delsartism, this chapter chronicles the cultural biographies of Lillian Parker Thomas Fox (1854-1917), and Dayse D. Walker (1872-1953). As an elocutionist and journalist, Lillian Parker Thomas Fox was an influential chronicler of the views, grievances, and accomplishments of Indianapolis's Black citizens (see figure 63). In addition to being the first Black graduate from two local schools of expression in the early 1890s, she was also the first Black reporter for the *Indianapolis News,* earning a salary from the prominent white paper until her death in 1917.[2] Throughout these years, she also performed numerous elocution entertainments and "Delsarte" demonstrations, many of which were fundraisers for Black churches and community organizations. In the late 1890s, she also became a pivotal organizer of local, state, and national Black women's clubs, and in 1912 she was also a founding member of Indianapolis' branch of the NAACP.

[2] *Indianapolis News* hired Fox as a salaried reporter in February 1900. She worked at this position until 1914. For these many years, she was responsible for a column that varied slightly in name, including "News of Colored People," "Among the Colored People," or "Colored Notes." She also reported several additional stories. Neither her regular column nor her feature stories appeared with her byline. To acknowledge but not perpetuate this erasure of her work, I include a parenthetical reference of her name when citing stories that she most assuredly authored.

Figure 63 — Lillian Thomas Fox, c. 1905
This photograph of Lillian Thomas Fox was included in story about a gathering of the Negro Business League. It included the following accolades by Mr. Gurley Brewer, editor of *The Indianapolis World*: “Mrs. Fox had demonstrated her interest in the welfare of the race, since it is due to her sagacity and perseverance that the way was opened for colored people to have their news reported and also an honorable position given a member of the race. She has made the colored news a permanent feature of the paper and worked out a great benefit to the colored people throughout Indiana. . . In short, Mrs. Fox has by the success she has made in a field until recently closed to women, removed the false idea of the intellectual and executive inferiority of women, and has shown that fame is attained by a single standard, the standard of excellence she has demonstrated the fact that she is a woman of great force of character indomitable will and strong intellectuality.”
Credit: *The Recorder*, August 12, 1905.

Given her prominent role in these significant social movements, Lillian Thomas Parker Fox has featured prominently in historical studies about Black life in Indianapolis. While scholars have documented her activism and journalism during the early 1900s—the period of time in which she organized Black women’s clubs and reported Black activities for the white press—her earlier foray into elocution training has largely been overlooked. As this chapter shows, the activism she engaged later in her life was greatly informed by her earlier

commitments to strengthening and articulating her public voice. This, I argue, was especially evident during the years 1890 to 1900, a span of time bookmarked by the start of her formal elocution training and the beginning of her career as the first Black columnist for the *Indianapolis News*. In what follows, I chronicle the ways in which her rising influence in Indianapolis can best be understood as a convergence between her own ambitions for self-expression and social opportunities for elocutionary studies that emerged during the Reconstruction era.

Like Lillian Thomas Fox, Dayse D. Walker used her expressive talents in ways that benefitted the health and welfare of the city's Black citizens (see figure 64). Born and raised in Galesburg, Illinois, Walker graduated in the mid-1890s from Knox College, a school founded by abolitionists during the 1830s. These accomplishments helped her secure a position at the Tuskegee Institute, where she taught geography and reading from 1898 through 1900. Around this time, she also studied elocution and physical culture, training that she later described as, "a course of private study which fitted her for work as an instructor in the higher branches."[3] Like many other Black women of this period, these aesthetic and self-expressive pursuits often conflicted with the patriarchal conservatism that predominated in Black educational institutions.[4] This seems to also have been the case for Dayse D. Walker. Indeed, during a time when many

[3] On Walker's education, see "Funds a Home to Aid Colored Women," *Indianapolis Star*, February 10, 1907; "Negro Woman to Speak Here Today," *The Decatur Herald*, October 23, 1907; J. Howell Atwood Manuscript Collection (box 9), Knox College Special Collections and Archives.

[4] There is certainly much more that could be said about the role of elocution reform in the era's debates about Black education. In referencing the conservatism of Booker T. Washington and his Tuskegee Institute, I do not intend to collapse the impact of white philanthropists and liberal elites. By primarily educational models that failed to challenge the logics of racial segregation, these groups demonstrated the pervasive and multifaceted manifestations of white supremacy. On the larger topic of education and race, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Jarvis R. Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2021).

Will Start Club House

MISS DAYSE D. WALKER, ELOCUTIONIST.

Figure 64 — Dayse D. Walker, c. 1905
This article refers to Dayse Walker's founding of the Young Colored Women's Protective Association. The article noted, "There is a reading room, dining room, and sleeping accommodations for three. Classes are already being conducted in sociology, Bible study, domestic science, current topics, negro literature. A number of colored girls from the two high schools have also formed a class in gymnastics."
Credit: "Will Start Clubhouse," *The Indianapolis Star*, November 26, 1905.

U.S. educational leaders sought to remove expressive training from Black schools, she was part of a teaching force that wholeheartedly moved in a different direction.[5] This was especially apparent, I argue, through her efforts in Indianapolis to instruct and promote Grecian-style statue posing. In the parlance of the era's educational debates, this type of expressional activity defied the widespread implementation of educational policies that emphasized "industrial education" for Black Americans and downplayed or undermined their access to the full range of "New Education" curricula.

By focusing on the expressional pursuits of Lillian Parker Thomas Fox and Dayse D. Walker, this chapter helps connect the history of American Delsartism with a much larger history about Black women's embodied practices for self-care and social activism. Indeed, as scholars have already established, Black feminism during the 1890s through early 1900s was especially affirming of self-exploration. Paula Gidding's foundational study *When and Where I Enter* noted that Black club women's priorities were "reform, to aid the poor, and fulfilling what psychiatrists call self-actualization."[6] Earline Rae Ferguson's specific study of Black clubwomen in Indianapolis confirms this assessment. She argued that a central purpose of their social work was to "reclaim Black women's pride, dignity and self-esteem, and to construct psychological bulwarks against the larger society's best efforts to define them as inferior, immoral and therefore unworthy or marginal human beings."[7] Stephanie J. Shaw's work added an important

---

[5] I discuss these issues at greater depth in my forthcoming publication, "Exhibiting Scientific Grace: American Delsartism, Black Citizenship, and the Rise of the New South."

[6] Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 96. Other foundational studies also confirm Black women's efforts for self-affirmation, while also demonstrating class and racial tensions that they confronted: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptists Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves*, 1894-1994 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Martha S. Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[7] Earline Rae Ferguson, "A Community Affair: African-American Women's Clubs in Indianapolis, 1879-1917," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1997), 88.

differentiation to this psychological work by characterizing Black women's self-interest as "socially responsible individualism," a commitment reflected in the rally cry of Black clubwomen, "Lifting as We Climb."[8] The nature of this work, as Brittney Cooper argued, was about more than the pursuit of respectability, it was about fundamentally empowering "the Black female body as a form of possibility and not a burden."[9] My focus on one community's engagement with Delsarte-inspired pedagogies confirms these assessments while also illuminating some of the specific mind-body theories and practices Black women adopted in their quest for psychological and physical well-being.

The Eloquent Activism of Lillian Parker Thomas Fox

"In this, a day of great possibilities,
the feminine heart
yearns for broader paths
wherein to walk."

—Lillian Parker Thomas, *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities,* 1892

In the spring of 1890, thirty-six-year-old Lillian Parker Thomas took a bold step and *The Freeman* took note: "Mrs. Thomas has just now entered the training school of expression. . . and will take up the study of vocal and physical culture." Remarking that she was already one of Indiana's "leading elocutionists of the race," the newspaper heartily endorsed her plan for turning her talents into a profession. "She is in every way deserving, and with her characteristic

---

[8] Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

[9] Brittney C. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 3. I also find Imani Perry's discussion of "Black formalism" a compelling term for describing Black American cultural practices that affirmed and celebrated their self-hood. See, Imani Perry, *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

pluck and zeal is bound to succeed."[10] The following summer, when Thomas went on an elocutionary tour in Black churches across Indiana, Iowa, and Illinois, the verdict was clear. "Those who are the best judges have pronounced Mrs. Thomas's gifts phenomenal, which we deem no exaggeration," *The Freeman* reported. "She is a woman of very great native ability, supplemented by fine scholarly attainments and indomitable will power."[11] That same year, Lillian Parker Thomas also put her voice to work as *The Freeman*'s newest correspondent editor. Thus, in 1891, the paper that had already lauded her expressive abilities, now became a direct beneficiary of them (see figure 65).[12]

Those who witnessed Lillian Parker Thomas's early successes in elocution and journalism described her as an "unflagging delver after knowledge" and "a creature of luminous ideas."[13] To convey her adeptness and depth of perspective, one biographer turned to poetry:

> With nature's self,
> She seems an old acquaintance,
> Free to jest at will,
> With all her glorious majesty.
> Then turns, and with the grasshopper,
> That sings its evening song,
> Beneath her feet converses.[14]

Commenting on the source of her strength and easeful manner, another biographer acknowledged that Thomas's powers of expression were "neither an accident nor a bequest," but a result of "her own weaving, with a filling thread of energy in warp and woof."[15] As the record

[10] "Local Life," *The Freeman* (Indianapolis), March 22, 1890.

[11] "Lillian Thomas: Indiana's Distinguished Reader," *The Freeman*, August 22, 1891.

[12] "Personal," *The Freeman*, September 17, 1891.

[13] "Lillian May Thomas," in L.A. Scruggs, *Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character* (Raleigh, NC: L.A. Scruggs, Publisher, 1893), 235.

[14] Ibid, 240. With a change of gender, "he" to "she," the lines are from the Scottish poet Robert Pollock's, 1827 poem "Lord Byron."

[15] It is likely that Lillian Parker Thomas wrote these words. They were first published in *The Freeman*, as a feature story about her (September 17, 1892). At the time, Lillian Parker Thomas was an editor at that paper. The following

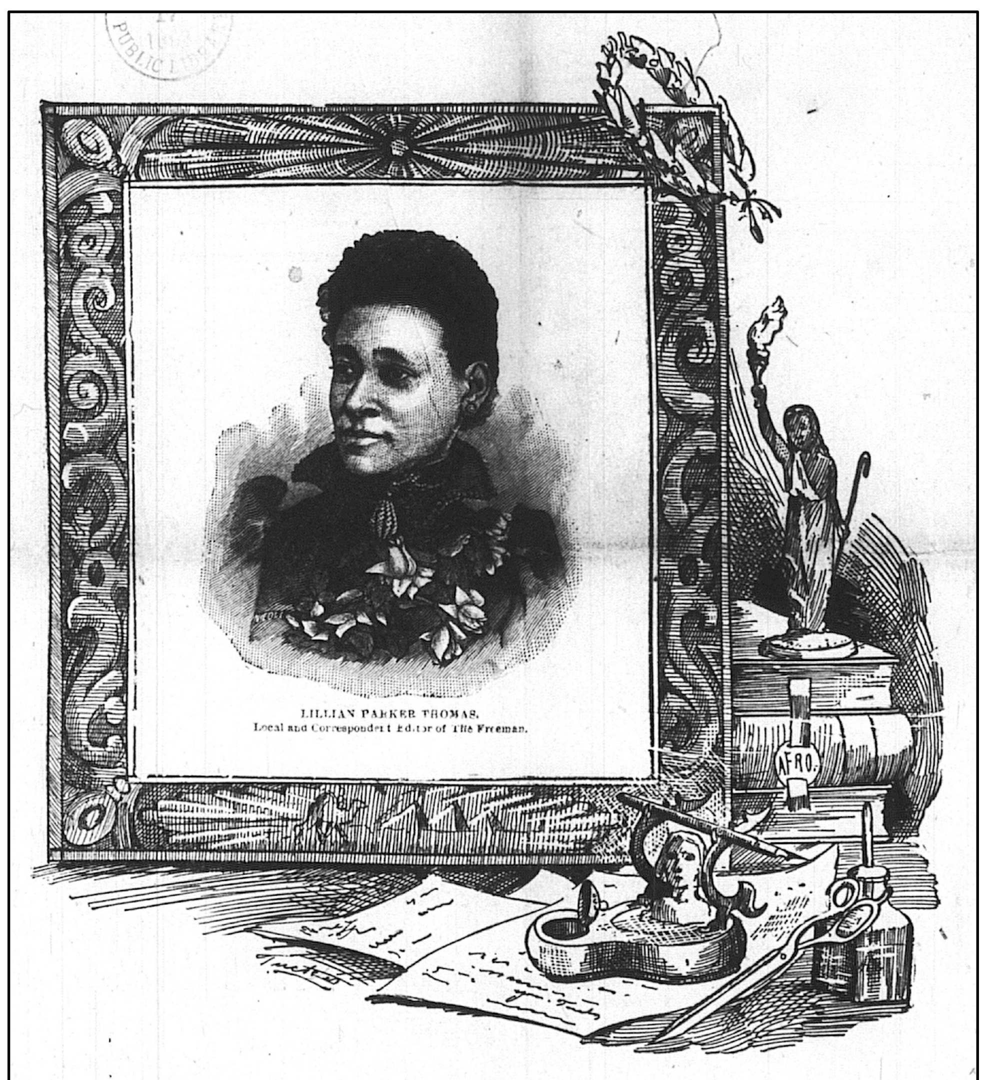


Figure 65 — Lillian Parker Thomas, Local and Correspondent Editor for *The Freeman*, 1892
This portrait was included in a front-page feature story on Lillian Parker Thomas. At the time, she had been an editor at *The Freeman* for a little over a year. She had also recently graduated from the Indianapolis Training School of Expression
Credit: *The Freeman*, September 17, 1892.

of her life bears out, this was an apt description of the perseverance she displayed in pursuing her education in the art of rhetoric and self-expression.

Indeed, Lillian Parker Thomas' 1890s investments in expression training were, in many ways, an extension of lessons about vocal power that she first learned from her own parents.

---

year, this text was also published in Alpheus Majors, ed. *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry Printers, 1893), 204-207.

Both born enslaved, Jane (1831-1894) and Byrd Parker (1814-1860), were devoted advocates for improving Black Americans' access to education and securing their rights as citizens. After gaining her freedom in the early 1850s and attending a Quaker school, Jane Johnson became the "first pay-teacher of the colored youth in Indianapolis."[16] When she married Byrd Parker and left that position a few years later, she continued these priorities in her own household. Indeed, she and Byrd Parker raised their daughter Lillian in Oshkosh, Wisconsin during the same years that he helped organize the first Colored Conventions in Illinois, completed speaking tours throughout Wisconsin in support of Black men's suffrage, and worked as an agent for *Frederick Douglass' Newspaper.*[17] Described as an "orator, but little inferior to Fred Douglass," Byrd Parker's rhetorical powers were also acknowledged by his antagonists.[18] Taking aim at his eloquence, they derisively labeled him a "freedom shrieker."[19] Lillian remembered her father's voice rather differently. In her words, she "inherited to a marked degree her father's controlling traits of mind."[20]

Though he died when she was just six years old, Byrd Parker's publications in *Fredrick Douglass' Newspaper,* also offered Lillian a written record of her father's eloquent activism. A passage written in 1854, just months before her birth, stands out as an exemplary representation of his sharp rhetoric against injustice. "It seems necessary to convince the world of our

---

[16] Notes about her teaching are located in *The Salem Weekly Advocate* (Salem, Illinois) May 25, 1854; and in Scruggs, *Women of Distinction*, 235.

[17] Details of Byrd Parker's enslavement are noted in *The Salem Weekly Advocate* (Salem, Illinois) May 25, 1854. The report mentions that "Mr. Ruggles" in North Carolina (a slave owner) gave Byrd Parker a "pass" in 1846 that allowed him to travel and earn money. According to this report, Parker bought his freedom in 1846. For more on Byrd Parker, see Edward Noyes, "Byrd Parker: 'Freedom Shrieker' of Oshkosh," *The Post–Crescent* (Appleton, Wisconsin), 17 November 1968; "Byrd Parker." Black Organizing in Pre-Civil War Illinois - Accessed December 19, 2022. https://coloredconventions.org/black-illinois-organizing/delegates/byrd-parker/. On the Colored Conventions, see P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Patterson, eds. *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

[18] "Free Suffrage," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, September 22, 1857.

[19] *Horicon Argus,* May 7, 1858.

[20] Scruggs, *Women of Distinction*, 236.

individuality, and that we are men and women," he began. While his message was oriented toward hope, Byrd Parker also knew this wearying struggle would require prophetic strength. "Like Moses," he wrote, "We shall have to try in ten different ways" to convince Americans that "God has made us capable of living and breathing, reading, writing, hoping and believing, seeing and feeling, and existing and enjoying our health if we [have] the chance."[21] In the years after her father's death, Lillian Parker Thomas Fox would indeed carry out many of those proverbial "ten different ways" to compel recognition of Black Americans selfhood and humanity.

As a student in the public schools of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, she particularly excelled in literature and grammar. Outside of the classroom, she astutely observed the social dynamics of the streets. Her neighbors were masons from Prussia, day laborers from Ireland, tailors from Sweden, draymen from Württemberg, and lumbermen, Blacksmiths, carpenters, and coopers from New England.[22] This community shaped her understanding of the white working class, and her ability to empathize with and critique white immigrant cultures was evident several years later. For example, when she embarked on elocutionary tours in the 1890s, her performances of Irish and German dialect were among the pieces that drew notable praise.[23]

She continued this kind of informal education after completing school, which, according to her own account, ended much too soon.[24] After her junior year of high school, she set aside her studies, married a local barber, and gave birth to her daughter, Maude.[25] Eight years later, she

---

[21] Byrd Parker, "Letter from Byrd Parker," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (Rochester, NY), February 3,1854.

[22] These details are noted in the 1870 census; Census Place: Oshkosh Ward 4, Winnebago, Wisconsin; Roll: M593_1746; Page: 337A; Family History Library Film: 553245.

[23] "Our City People," *The Freeman*, August 23, 1890.

[24] Scruggs, *Women of Distinction,* 236. The line reads: "With completion of the junior course of the Oshkosh High School, her days of schooling ended, in a palpable sense, by her marriage, which, in lieu of her youth and the probable distortion, from a practical stand-point of a brilliant literary career, was regarded by her friends as a lamentable incident."

[25] Her public biographies never mentioned her first marriage to her first husband, William James, and her second marriage, to Charles Thomas, was only mentioned in one biography: "Colored Professionals," *Indianapolis News*,

divorced, won custody of her daughter, and made ends meet by working as a seamstress.[26] In 1881, she married again, and became Lillian Parker Thomas.[27] Details about this period of her life are spare, in large part, because she chose not to discuss these years in any of her public biographies. One of the few comments she did offer spoke volumes: even after she left school, she was a "veritable 'book-worm.'"[28]

As a young mother, Lillian Parker Thomas continued in her father's footsteps by calling public attention to social injustices. For that purpose, at age twenty-nine, she wrote and published her first letter of protest—an editorial for the *Oshkosh Northwestern* entitled, "Rights of Colored People."[29] It was the fall of 1883, and the U.S. Supreme Court had just nullified the Civil Rights Act of 1875. Rightly stating that most white citizens were, "ignorant of our opinion," her editorial constituted a strategic effort to "keep [the colored] cause before the people" and ensure that Black voices were not omitted from the "wily" formation of "public-sentiment." She hoped that "through the channel" of this local white newspaper, her neighbors would be moved by her "earnest appeal to [their] sense of reason, justice, and humanity of the American people." Though the Supreme Court had diminished crucial legal protections for Black Americans, Thomas urged her fellow citizens to rise above this ruling and condemn all forms of prejudice. "What we want is to bring about that state of feeling in which there will be no desire

---

June 18, 1892. After moving to Indianapolis, Lillian secured a divorce from Charles Thomas in 1888. See, "The Court Record," *Indianapolis News*, November 15, 1888; November 16, 1888, November 17, 1888). By 1889, she was listed as a widow in the *Indianapolis City Directory.* None of her public biographies refer to her children, but the 1910 census indicates that she had given birth to two children, neither of who were living. My thanks to Denise and Rick Anderson-Decina for helping me locate key records about Lillian Parker Thomas Fox and her daughter.

[26] In June 1880, the U.S. Census in Oshkosh, Wisconsin records Lilly M. James, age twenty-five, seamstress, living with her daughter Maude, age seven. On September 10, 1880 *The Oshkosh Northwestern* recorded that the court had granted her a divorce, and that as the plaintiff in the case, she had also won custody of her child.

[27] Her second husband, Charles Thomas, was also a barber.

[28] Scruggs, *Women of Distinction,* 237.

[29] Lillian May Thomas (listed as "L.M.T, a colored subscriber"), "Rights of Colored People," *The Oshkosh Northwestern*, November 21, 1883.

to trample under foot our rights as citizens," she wrote. Like her father had done nearly thirty years earlier, she promised to continue voicing this demand. "We believe it our bounden duty to keep our cause before the public until we shall have, we hope, voluntary redress."[30]

In the coming years, Lillian Parker Thomas would "keep that cause" before the public eye even as she navigated personal loss and discrimination. The time preceding her editorial had been particularly challenging. She had lost her younger sister to typhus, and her younger brother had died suspiciously after being wrongfully convicted of using a counterfeit bill.[31] Soon after this tragedy, Lillian's stepfather also died. While her mother and stepsiblings had enjoyed modest financial stability from his barbershop in Oshkosh, much of that had been lost a few years earlier when the shop was destroyed during a citywide fire.[32] Lillian faced other setbacks, as well. By the mid-1880s, her second marriage ended in divorce, perhaps owing to her husband's reported struggle with alcohol.[33]

Searching for greater stability in a new space, Lillian Parker Thomas moved to Indianapolis with her daughter Maude in 1886, and continued making a living as a dressmaker.[34] Joining her were also her mother Jane, and two stepbrothers. Though they were new residents in the city's growing Black community, they were far from strangers. Several residents had known

---

[30] Ibid.

[31] *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern,* May 28, 1877. On the conviction of Byrd Parker, Jr., see *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 10, 1877. On his pardon and death, see *Oshkosh Northwestern*, May 23, 1878 and June 10, 1878.

[32] "Death of a Former Oshkosh Man," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, April 13, 1880.

[33] Thomas had had some encounters with the law before and after his marriage to Lillian. In 1879, he was implicated in a robbery, though it seems he was cleared of the charge. In 1891, he was arrested for "painting the town" and causing ruckus at a local saloon. See, "Charles Thomas, The Neehah Barber," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, December 4, 1879; "Costly Painting," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, July 26, 1892.

[34] *The Indianapolis City Directory* of 1888 lists her as: "Mrs. Lillian M. Thomas, dressmaker, 124 Indiana Ave." She divorced her second husband, Charles Thomas, in 1889. Her divorce was reported in Circuit Court notices of *The Indianapolis Journal* on February 13, 1889, though she would continue listing herself as a "widow" in city directories. For example, the 1889 directory recorded the following: "Lilly M. Thomas (widow Charles)." At the time, Charles Thomas was still living in Wisconsin. He died in 1909. See, "Charles Thomas," *The Neehah Daily Times*, October 15, 1909.

Jane and Byrd Parker when they lived in this city thirty years earlier, Jane as a teacher and Byrd as a preacher at the Bethel A.M.E. Within this community, Lillian Parker Thomas made quick friends, especially among those who shared her interests in literature. In January 1887, *The Indianapolis World* reported that she had presented a paper at the Douglass Literary Society. The next month, the same paper sang her praises, noting that she was "a new planet in our literary heavens."[35]

In the midst of these encouraging new beginnings, heartbreak struck again. On the last day of November 1889, *The Freeman* noted that, "Miss Maudie Thomas, the only daughter of Mrs. Lillian Thomas, died of consumption," at the age of seventeen.[36] While Lillian Parker Thomas would go on to live a very public life, she did not discuss in her public biographies any details about her first two marriages nor her experiences as a mother. Those who knew her well spoke to this aspect of privacy she maintained. "She was greater than those most intimate with her knew," one friend wrote, then added: "[People] saw her eccentricities and smiled. They should have seen that soul struggling to keep afloat and wept."[37]

It was during this period, as she grieved the death of her daughter, that Lillian Parker Thomas made a momentous choice for her future career and her wellbeing. In March 1890, buoyed by the encouragement of her friends, she became a student once more when she began a two-year course in elocution and physical culture at the Indianapolis Training School of

---

[35] *The Indianapolis World,* January 28, 1887 and February 5, 1887, as cited in Frances A. Toler, "Lillian Thomas Fox: Black Woman Journalist of Indiana" (MA Thesis, Ball State University, 1978), 6-7.

[36] "Local News," *The Freeman* (Indianapolis), November 30, 1889. While Koch had identified the tuberculosis bacilli in 1882, social references to the disease did not immediately change. This change occurred throughout this period, as did the social response to treatment. When her mother and brother died of the same illness in 1894, the cause of death was also listed as consumption, though the city's death records listed tuberculosis as a cause of death of other individuals on the same pages. On the cultural meaning of this illness, see Sheila M. Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (*Cambridge: Harvard University, 1998),* 187-218.

[37] "Mrs. Lillian Thomas Fox Dead," *The Freeman*, September 8, 1917.

Expression.[38] After graduating from that program at age thirty-eight, she also completed a year of study at The Indiana-Boston School of Expression.[39] In addition to satisfying her lifelong interest in literature and rhetoric, these actions also had the potential for practical benefits. Across the country, growing numbers of women had begun earning modest incomes as elocutionists. It was reasonable for Lillian Parker Thomas to believe she could do so as well, especially because her talents were already widely admired in her community. There were other advantages, too. By attending these schools, Thomas would be regularly practicing exercises that eased her nerves, strengthened her muscles, and cultivated her poise. In this sense, her enrollment in schools of expression was also a way of claiming time for her health.

Of course, the availability of this opportunity was itself an outcome of larger developments; and in this case, both of the schools she attended had direct lines to the era's influential centers for elocution reform. Harriet Augusta Prunk had opened the Indiana-Boston School of Expression in 1878 after studying with Lewis B. Monroe at the Boston University School of Oratory; and Julia Lucia Martin had opened The Indianapolis Training School of Expression in 1885 with the backing of influential leaders in the Women's Christian Temperance Union.[40] (see figures 66 and 67). Both women also subscribed and contributed to *Werner's Magazine,* and they also traveled to New York City and Boston for additional studies.

Through their own professional activities, Prunk and Martin brought to Indianapolis an approach to elocution that deliberately aimed to help all women gain social advantages that they had long been denied. Speaking to this purpose, Julia Lucia Martin described why she provided

---

[38] "Local Life," *The Freeman*, March 22, 1890.

[39] "Indianapolis Department," *The Freeman*, May 2, 1891; Scruggs, *Women of Distinction*, 239.

[40] On Julia Lucia Martin, see Edyth Ashmore, ed. *Lest We Forget, Detroit Training School Alumni* (Detroit: Eby & Stubbs, 1904), 77-78. In addition to a record of interracial organizing, the WCTU had an enormous influence on the expansion of elocution training. See, Carol Mattingly, *The Temperate Woman: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

Figure 66 — Harriet Augusta Prunk, c. 1902
Lillian Parker Thomas attended Mrs. Prunk's school between 1891 and 1893. In 1878, Harriet Augusta Prunk graduated from Boston University School of Oratory, where she studied with Lewis B. Monroe and Genevieve Stebbins.
Credit: *Werner's Magazine*, May 1902.

her students with regular opportunities to practice public speaking, "both with and without previous preparation." She believed this cultivated "individuality as nothing else could" and resulted in "self-control, self-reliance, [and] self-expansion." Martin also believed women had been greatly disadvantaged because such opportunities had largely been the cultural norm for

Figure 67 — Lucia Julian Martin, c. 1904
Lillian Parker Thomas studied with Lucia Julian Martin at her Indianapolis Training School of Expression from 1890 to 1892.
Credit: *Lest We Forget, Detroit Training School Alumni,* edited by Edyth Ashmore (Detroit: Eby & Stubbs, 1904), 77.

men only. To remedy this, Julia Lucia Martin gave women numerous physical experiences of standing on their feet and expressing their thoughts. "This broadening, deepening process," she argued, "is what I understand to be demanded by the advocates of the so-called 'New Elocution.'" In addition to advocating for pedagogical experiences that championed the ideals of New Womanhood, both schools also admitted Black and white students during a time when segregation was on the rise.

While no syllabi or course records have survived for either of these schools, Prunk and Martin's pedagogical lineages offer a good indication of what Lillian Thomas Fox learned. As proponents of the New Elocution, Julia Lucia Martin and Hattie Augusta Prunk promoted François Delsarte's science of expression as a legitimizing tool for their advocacy of norm-defying elocution practices. Both women were also early implementers of Genevieve Stebbins' statue posing curricula. Indeed, the summer before Lillian Parker Thomas began her schooling, Martin studied statue posing at the Boston School of Oratory.[41] Around the same time, Prunk's students produced a "Grecian Phalanx" at the city's opera house, a performance that featured "a series of beautiful and graceful marching movements by sixteen young ladies, dressed in flowing robes."[42]

In the three years she studied with Julia Lucia Martin and Harriet Augusta Prunk, Lillian Parker Thomas likely also practiced graceful Grecian movements, along with a full range of other psycho-physical exercises. In her classes, deep breathing and muscular relaxation would have been go-to methods for easing nervous tension and freeing the channels of communication. She would have learned that such movements not only aided her powers of expression but also benefited digestion, sleep, and stamina. Given her daughter's recent death from consumption, it is also not difficult to imagine Thomas gaining a particular appreciation for regular opportunities to practice deep breathing exercises.[43]

---

[41] Martin's name is listed among those who had arrived for summer studies at Boston School of Oratory. *Boston Sunday Globe,* 14 July 1889. Clara Power Tileston Edgerly (1864-1896), a notable proponent of statue posing, was instructor at this school and her recent writings on statue posing were featured in *Werner's Magazine*.

[42] "Mrs. Prunk's Entertainment," *The Indianapolis Journal,* April 25, 1899. Based on their interests and their professional associations, it is likely Genevieve Stebbins' and Emily Bishop's publications were used in their schools.

[43] Genevieve Stebbins, *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1892), 72. Note, Stebbins cites Dr. George H. Taylor as her source for breathing's remedial benefits for consumption. See chapter one for a discussion of Taylor.

Her training would have also affirmed her freedom to explore a range of emotions. Through pantomimic posturing of joy, grief, despair, victory, hope, and independence, she would have explored emotion as a scientific principle explained by Delsarte's Law of Correspondence. To underscore the power of this psycho-physical relationship, her teachers likely shared the oft-cited Delsarte motto, "Strength at the center, freedom at the surface," and Lillian Parker Thomas would have investigated what this felt like in her own body. She would have regularly practiced slow-paced movements that engaged her abdomen, lengthened her spine, and broadened her chest. She would have done all of this while also discussing literature—especially Shakespeare—surveying recitation manuals, selecting pieces she wanted to memorize, and then rehearsing her performances in front of her colleagues and teachers.

In the early 1890s, even before she completed her coursework, Lillian Parker Thomas was already broadcasting evidence of Black women's powers of expression. In her elocutionary concerts throughout Indiana, and her work as a correspondent editor for *The Freeman*, she celebrated Black's women's voices and advocated for increasing their access to higher education. For this cause, she also wrote an essay for *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities,* a book that placed her own accomplishments among the impressive lives of more than 250 women. Completed in 1892, the volume was itself an act of feminist advocacy—a chronicle of Black women's achievements designed to dispel common prejudices.[44] Each biography offered proof of Black women's intellectual and artistic accomplishments, evidence that also helped establish the soundness of their claims to resources for self-development. Lillian Parker Thomas spoke bluntly to this need: "We believe that what ought to interest women the most is

---

[44] On the significance of these biographical volumes, see Akasha (Gloria) Hull, "Introduction," in Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer* (New York: G.K. Hall, Co., 1996), xv-xxxxv.

woman."[45] In her view, studies of "science, philosophy, and art" were strategic and necessary remedies against the "untoward odds which operate, in many instances, to stultify [women's] aspiration."[46]

Reflective of her knowledge of elocution and physical culture, Thomas used corporeal terms for describing the importance of such pursuits. In her words, these subjects of higher education "leavened" the mind and created "windows" for women to "behold and appreciate the beauties of nature." She continued:

> . . .in this, a day of great possibilities, the feminine heart yearns for broader paths wherein to walk, an intellectual highway whereon all nations or sex may walk abreast. This granted, the son and daughter go hand in hand to the halls of learning, and on common ground prepare for the arena of life and for the time when, should fickle fortune, whose mandate bears no creed or sex, decree the undoing of their success, they have won alike a safeguard against wreck or ruin as a result of helplessness.[47]

In many ways, her personal experiences informed this plea. It reflected the ways that literature, philosophy, and science had helped her stay afloat as she struggled to survive. But, her plea for "a broader path wherein [women could] walk" was also much more than personal. It spoke to the necessity of a larger social movement.

In service of that transformation, Lillian Parker Thomas would consistently champion any project that elevated the visibility of Black women's gracefulness and expressive talents. For example, in March 1891, Thomas weighed in on a debate regarding Black Americans' representation at the upcoming 1893 Chicago World's fair. White organizers had announced that Black Americans would not be allowed to exhibit their accomplishments in the same buildings as

---

[45] This essay was included in *Noted Negro Women*, an anthology comprised of over 250 biographies. It is likely that Lillian Parker Thomas wrote the piece specifically for this publication, see Majors, ed. *Noted Negro Women*, 206-207.

[46] Lillian Parker Thomas included this essay as part of her biography. See, Majors, ed. *Noted Negro Women*, 206.

[47] Majors, *Noted Negro Women*, 207.

the rest of the country's extensive cultural and economic demonstrations. Key Black leaders strongly opposed this decision and suggested boycotting the fair all together. Lillian Parker Thomas thought differently, and she voiced her opinion in an article for *The Freeman*. Such a move, she argued, would be "saving from the faucet and wasting from the pipe." She believed the visibility the fair offered to the race would still be worthwhile, even if the impact was tempered by separate placement. "If we have an Edison, a Morse, a Jacquard, a Rose Bonheur, we want to know it. If the productions of Edmonia Lewis and others who have become famous, rightfully belong to the Negro race, we want them," she wrote, then continued:

> The Negro is the only race of people whose primitive methods have been swallowed up. If we possess genius our white brother assumes that the fact has not been established to his satisfaction, and in lieu of this assumption relegates us to menial spheres indiscriminately. Under this condition can we afford to forgo any and all legitimate means to make a place for ourselves?[48]

Her answer was clear, and so were her own actions. Indeed, within days of publishing this opinion, Lillian Parker Thomas demonstrated one of the many ways in which her elocutionary training was helping her broaden that proverbial path.

In March 1891, she joined her white classmates on stage at the performance hall of the Indianapolis Training School of Expression, an act that bluntly defied segregationist customs.[49] She had done the same thing the year before, and her talents had subsequently caught the attention of the white press.[50] In the fall of 1890, placed among notes about a coffee social at the German Ladies' Aid Society and a merchant meeting at the YMCA, the *Indianapolis News* not only announced her upcoming performance at a local Black church, but later followed up with a

---

[48] Lillian Thomas, "A Woman's Plea for Distinct Recognition," *The Freeman*, March 21, 1891.

[49] "Round of Entertainment: Pupils of the Training-School of Expression Give Elocutionary Recital," *Indianapolis Journal,* March 15, 1891.

[50] "A Pleasing Entertainment," *The Indianapolis Journal*, May 21, 1890.

FRIENDLY REMINDERS.

This colume, by Lillian Thomas of The Freeman staff, is especially dedicated to the women of the race.

Figure 68 — Illustration for Lillian Parker Thomas's "Friendly Reminders" Column, 1892
From September 1891 through August 1893, Lillian Parker Thomas wrote several columns at *The Freeman,* including "Friendly Reminders," "Race Gleanings," "Stage," and "Church."
Credit: *The Freeman*, September 17, 1892.

report on her success: "Lillian Thomas, a colored elocutionist, drew an audience which filled Bethel A.M.E. last night. She gave a number of recitations in an intelligent manner."[51] A different white newspaper shared similar accolades, "Her audience was greatly pleased, and her work was unusually well done."[52] Such reports bespoke the ways in which Thomas's expressive

---

[51] "Meetings and Announcements," *Indianapolis News*, September 27, 1890; "Miss Lillian Thomas's Entertainment," *Indianapolis News*, September 30, 1890.

[52] *The Indianapolis Journal*, September 30, 1890. Though I do not discuss the content of her recitations in detail, there is more to be said about this. Newspaper reports often included the titles of her pieces, and many of them can be located in popular elocution texts of the period, including manuals and books published by Edgar Werner of *Werner's Magazine*. This aspect establishes her engagement with national elocution pedagogically sources, while also providing insight into the content of her selections. For example, from 1890-1891, she performed the following pieces: "The Black Regiment" (about free and enslaved Black soldiers at Port Hudson), "Katrina Goes to New

talents aided ongoing efforts to challenge the logics of "inferiority" that upheld racism and justified segregation.

As she completed her formal elocution studies, Lillian Parker Thomas not only performed recitations and pantomimes, she also shared her knowledge of psycho-physical practices and philosophies in ways that empowered her community. She organized opportunities for Black women to "speak on their feet," including one notable event when they gathered at Bethel A.M.E. and debated the political agendas of U.S. presidential candidates.[53] From 1891 through 1893, her "Friendly Reminders" column in *The Freeman* also promoted affirmations of mind-body correspondence—statements that drew upon the Delsartean principles she had gleaned from her schooling (see figure 4.6).[54] For example:

> Perseverance, success's most essential motor, brings into activity attributes which invigorate mind, body, and soul.
>
> Affability without exuberance, respectfulness without obsequiousness, pliancy without absorption, reflects mental equipoise.
>
> Utter isolation from society is deleterious to the physical, no less than the mental wellbeing. Removed from scenes tending to quicken the sense of emotion, the spirits become lethargic and contribute nothing to the invigoration of the general system. The vital reservoir undergoes absorption without replenishment and physical disruption is the result.[55]

York" (in German dialect), "Irishman's Lament" (about temperance). That year at the national conference of the AME, she also recited the "Painter of Seville" (about a seventeenth century painter whose talent was discovered while he was enslaved) at the special request of the Bishop. She was also acknowledged as the city's "only colored pantomimist," a descriptor that meant she often posed emotional gestures, likely to the accompaniment of music or to spoken words. This type of practice was commonly associated with Delsarte's Laws of Expression, and it had mixed meanings in this period. It could also mean movement that was akin to dance, but called "pantomime" as a way of suggesting it was not an entertainment for the "morally-questionable" variety stage.

[53] "The Long Contest Settled: Female Orators Decide the Political Issues of the Day," *Indianapolis News*, October 29, 1892.

[54] The following line was often printed in her column, "Friendly Reminders": "This column by Lillian Thomas of *The Freeman* staff is especially dedicated to the women of the race." For example, see Lillian Thomas, "Friendly Reminders," *The Freeman*, September 3, 1892.

[55] Lillian Parker Thomas, "Friendly Reminders," *The Freeman*, August 20, 1892.

Placing such statements on the woman's page of a leading paper was one way Lillian Parker Thomas broadcast the psycho-physical principles that had empowered her voice and her intrinsic poise. Such statements also provided physiological confirmation to acts of resiliency that had long helped Black women survive in an oppressive society. Knowing that such affirmations resonated with her community, Lillian Parker Thomas continued sharing such insights in the coming years. For example, in 1895 she delivered a special presentation on "the latest ideas in the art of dramatic, Delsarte philosophy," at a "Rescue concert" for the local AME Zion Church. In this case, her fundraising talk on the science of expression not only promoted an empowering lesson of mind, body, and emotion, it also offered a means for the community to help pay the church's mortgage.[56]

In the spring of 1893, after two years of writing for *The Freeman*, Lillian Parker Thomas made some news herself by marrying James E. Fox. He was forty-three and she was thirty-eight.[57] *The Freeman* noted that he was born in Jamaica and had operated a successful tailoring business in Pensacola, Florida. Since 1889, he had also owned a fashionable store in Indianapolis.[58] The announcement of the couple's marriage also came with the news that Mrs. Lillian Thomas Fox had "of her own volition" chosen to "close her desk and bid farewell" to her work as a correspondent editor.[59]

Though Lillian Thomas Fox stepped away from her work at *The Freeman* after this marriage, she kept up her elocutionary appearances. In August, she likely attended a much-publicized performance by Valetta D. Winslow, a celebrated Black Delsartist from Oakland,

---

[56] "Jones' Tabernacle's Good Fortune," *The Freeman*, March 23, 1895.
[57] The 1885 Florida Census lists James E. Fox as a tailor in Pensacola, born in Jamaica in 1850.
[58] "Thomas Fox Nuptials," *The Freeman*, June 3, 1893; *The Freeman*, November 30, 1889.
[59] "Thomas Fox Nuptials," *The Freeman*, June 3, 1893.

California. *The Freeman* noted that Winslow's "*Tableaux d'Art*" demonstrated her tremendous "power to express the emotions and passions of the soul."[60] Lillian Thomas Fox, who by this point was known as Indianapolis's own preeminent "colored pantomimist," surely took satisfaction in her community's praise for Winslow's demonstrations of "Anger," "Death" "Sauciness," "Justice" "Bashfulness" "Thought" "Horror" "Jealousy" "Surrender," "Blessing," "Lamentation, and "Disdain." Before the summer was over, Lillian Thomas Fox also made her own appearance as an opening act for Sissieretta Jones (1868-1933), a world-famous soprano known as "The Black Patti." Jones had performed for royalty in Europe, for the U.S. president at the White House, and had also recently become the first African American to perform at Carnegie Hall.[61] The *Indianapolis News* celebrated the impressive voices of both performers, noting that Lillian Thomas Fox had delivered her "two recitations with excellent effect."[62]

After a year of momentous occasions, she experienced another year of loss. In January 1894, her mother and step-brother died of consumption, the same illness that had taken her daughter just five years earlier.[63] In March, she also joined her community in grieving the death of Frederick Douglass, the great orator and statesman who had also published her own father's mighty voice many years earlier.[64] Then, in April, a little over a year after her second marriage,

[60] "Bright Particular Star: Valetta Linden Winslow, Elocutionist and Delsartist of San Francisco," *The Freeman*, August 19, 1893.

[61] On Sissieretta Jones, see Maureen D. Lee, *Sissieretta Jones: "The Greatest Singer of Her Race,"1868-1933* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012).

[62] "The Black Patti," *Indianapolis News*, September 22, 1893.

[63] The cause of death on their death certificates and burial permits was listed as consumption. Reporting on their deaths, *The Freeman* noted that Mrs. Jane Thomas was "highly esteemed by all the old families of the city and vicinity," adding that she was widow of Rev. Byrd Parker, who "in his day, was one of the foremost men of the A.M.E." "The Tomb," *The Freeman*, January 17, 1884.

[64] The memorial service for Frederick Douglass at Bethel A.M.E. filled the chapel "full to the doors." For hours, individuals recounted his biography. In telling his story from slavery to freedom, Lillian Thomas Fox spoke about his experiences as a fugitive. "Memorial Services at Bethel," *The Freeman*, March 8, 1895; "The Memory of Douglas," *Indianapolis News*, March 8, 1895.

James Fox moved his business to Kentucky.[65] The reasons for the couple's separation are unclear. While they never divorced, the couple remained estranged in the years to come.[66] In other words, as she approached her mid-forties, Lillian Parker Thomas Fox was once again largely on her own.

As she had done before in times of personal difficulty, she gathered strength from social activities that she prioritized with her friends. In the daytime, several of them worked as school teachers, one was a masseuse, and another a dressmaker.[67] They gave their leisure time to celebrating hearing each other's voices, seeing each other's emotive gestures, and engaging in a wide range of music and literature. In the previous five years, they frequently appeared in solo acts on the same concert programs. Lillian Thomas Fox would give a recitation, pantomime, or character sketch, and her friends would sing a solo or play the piano. They had also demonstrated their talents as the opening acts for nationally-renowned singers, including the "Colored Prima Donna," Mme. Marie Selika, and Flora Batson, the "Queen of Song."[68]

In the spring of 1895, these literary friends were particularly enthused by an announcement that the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) was coming to Indianapolis. They had already recited many poems from his first volume of poetry, and they saw in his work a profound affirmation of their own experiences.[69] Like many Black Americans of his

---

[65] "Personal," *The Freeman* (Indianapolis), April 24, 1894.

[66] Thomas E. Fox died in 1899 in Cripple Creek, Colorado. Lillian Thomas Fox received the news by telegram, see "Personal Mention," *The Freeman* (Indianapolis), September 23, 1894.

[67] Her friends referenced here are: Katherine Crossen Harper, Irene Bagby, and Sarah Hill (Mrs. J.T. V Hill).

[68] "Mme. Selika's Concert," *The Indianapolis Journal*, August 29, 1892; "Madame Selika's Songs," *Indianapolis News*, August 31, 1892. Selika performed at Blackford A.M.E Zion, following "a character sketch" by Lillian Thomas, and vocal solos by Lillian's friends, Irene Bagby, Sarah Hill, Nettie Maude Christy, and Kathryn Crossen. Several of these women also performed with Lillian at Flora Batson's concert, see "Flora Batson at the Second Baptist Church," *The Freeman*, November 26, 1892.

[69] Paul Laurence Dunbar published his first book of poetry, *Oak and Ivy*, in 1892. At the time of his arrival in Indianapolis, Dunbar was completing (or had completed) his second volume, *Majors and Minors*, which was published in the latter part of 1895.

generation, Dunbar was born free to parents who were born enslaved. His poetry gave eloquent dignity to this personal and shared past. He trumpeted messages of affirmation and hope: "Be proud, my Race, in mind and soul;/ Thy name is writ on Glory's scroll/ in characters of fire."[70] He lauded the fearless voices of women who stood in courts and spoke against injustice and women who stood in their kitchens and sang out Negro spirituals, that "real melojous music, Dat jes' strikes yo' hawt and clings."[71] His was the poetry that told the world "why the caged bird sings."[72]

In Indianapolis, Paul Laurence Dunbar gave his debut reading to a large crowd at Bethel A.M.E. Afterwards, Lillian Thomas Fox joined a private reception in his honor. Her friend, Nettie Maude Christy, a young dressmaker who was admired for her soprano voice, hosted the gathering at her "cozy home."[73] At some point in the afternoon, a local music teacher began playing the piano, and suddenly an "impromptu program" was underway.[74] There was no need to rehearse, for each guest knew many lines by heart, and they each took turns "repeating a quotation from their favorite poet." Paul Laurence Dunbar read his own compositions; and then Lillian Thomas Fox read some of Dunbar's poems, too. As guests departed, they each received a special hand-made souvenir: a "dainty card tied with ribbon on which were written verses from

---

[70] Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Ode to Ethiopia," in *Oak and Ivy* (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1893), 5.

[71] Paul Laurence Dunbar, "To Miss Mary Britton," in *Oak and Ivy*, 1893; and "When Malindy Sings," in *Majors and Minors* (Hadley & Hadley: Toledo, Ohio, 1895), 138-140. Dunbar included the following note about Mary Britton: "When the legislature of Kentucky was discussing passage of a separate coach bill, Miss Mary Britton, a teacher in schools of Lexington went before then and in a ringing speech protested against the passage of the bill. Her action was heroic, though it proved to be without avail."

[72] Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Sympathy," in *Lyrics of the Hearthside* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1899), 40.

[73] The event took place at the home of Maude Netty Christy, who was listed as a dressmaker in the 1895 *Indianapolis City Directory*. "Poet Dunbar Entertained," *The Freeman*, May 18, 1895.

[74] The news report identified Mrs. Georgia Porter as the pianist. According to the 1900 Census, she was thirty-years old, a widow, and a music teacher. She lived with her brother and sister-in-law, in a household with three boarders.

Mr. Dunbar's *Oak and Ivy*." This parting gift was just one of the reasons why an attendee later described the whole event as an "intellectual treat."[75]

This gathering with Paul Laurence Dunbar illustrates well the reasons why Black women sustained their commitments to self-expression. In addition to relishing words that spoke to their experiences, they also recognized that standing tall, breathing deep, and speaking out was an exercise that put their lungs, muscles, breath, and mind to use in advantageous ways. This was knowledge that Lillian Thomas Fox had confirmed during her studies of elocution and physical culture and then shared with her community. To improve one's "mental well-being" and "invigorate the general system," she had prescribed social gatherings that "quickened the sense of emotion."[76] For this type of psycho-physical remedy, Paul Laurence Dunbar's poems were an especially potent ingredient. His words encouraged readers to embody a full range of emotions—including perseverance, that quality that Lillian Thomas Fox had defined as an "essential motor, [that] brings into activity attributes which invigorate mind, body, and soul."[77]

This bodily perseverance also functioned as a resource for facing racist humiliation and violence. In December 1895, Lillian Thomas Fox, for example, found it necessary to draw upon her well-cultivated "strength at the center," when she traveled to speak at the first National Congress of Negro Woman, a meeting organized in conjunction with Atlanta's hosting of the Cotton States and International Exposition.[78] She boarded the train in Indianapolis seated in first class, but soon after passing through Chattanooga, the conductor demanded that she go to the "smoking car, reserved for colored passengers."[79] She knew the confrontation was an attempt to

---

[75] "Poet Dunbar Entertained," *The Freeman*, May 18, 1895.
[76] Lillian Parker Thomas, "Friendly Reminders," *The Freeman*, August 20, 1892.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Lillian Thomas Fox, "A Visit to Atlanta, Ga.," *The Freeman*, January 25, 1896.
[79] "Indignity of Jim Crow Cars," *The Indianapolis Journal*, February 18, 1896.

throw her off balance, and she refused. The conductor responded by throwing her off the train. Though her poise had aggravated the conductor, a later report noted that this display of dignity had a different effect on several white passengers. Upon their demands, the conductor reversed course and allowed her back on the train, but only under the condition that she would go to the smoking car. To this, Lillian Thomas Fox, drew upon her inner strength once again and "spunkily refused to conform to the silly custom." For "fifty miles [she] rode on the platform" between the cars until she grew too cold and took shelter in the "Jim Crow Car."[80] Upon her return home, the Black community rallied around the injustice. Local lawyers moved quickly and filed a challenge to the constitutionality of the "Jim Crow" custom, but the case was likely dealt a fatal blow the following spring when the U.S. Supreme Court made "separate but equal" the law of the land.[81]

Like many Black Americans, Lillian Thomas Fox understood that *Plessy v. Ferguson* would embolden widespread violence, discrimination, and oppression in ways that would also make her community's commitment to self-expression more necessary and their activism more urgent. In the wake of yet another violation of their legal rights as citizens, she and her community—like her father and mother had done in decades past—would organize new campaigns to carry out those proverbial "ten different ways" of compelling recognition of Black freedom and personhood.

In this new era of activism, Lillian Thomas Fox gave her eloquent voice to the work of vehemently rejecting anything that narrowed Black American's opportunities and vigorously

---

[80] Ibid.

[81] "Mrs. Lillian Thomas Fox Will Test the Constitutionality of the "Jim Crow Car" Law," *The Freeman*, January 11, 1896. In March 1896, her case was reportedly pending in the Indianapolis municipal courts. See, "Miss Lillian Fox: Who Will Assist in the A.M.E. Church Entertainment is Plaintiff in a Big Damage Suit," *The Muncie Daily Herald*, March 5, 1896.

promoting activities that strengthened their rights as citizens. Throughout 1896, she and her fellow members of the Booker T. Washington Literary Society advocated for ending legal restrictions on interracial marriage.[82] She also wrote a searing editorial about the rising popularity of "cakewalks," a plantation-themed dance that poked fun at Black American's "attempts" at gracefulness. "A 'cake walk,'" she wrote, was "calculated to present to the world only a grotesque and semi-barbaric phase of conduct." In her words, these Jim-Crow style entertainments had only one purpose: to "stimulate the one-eyed misanthrope to proclaim it as typical of the negro's consideration and the high-water mark of his development."[83] To counteract these racial stereotypes, Lillian Thomas Fox urged her community to direct their energies toward performing and supporting more aesthetically uplifting entertainments. She recommended that they memorize and recite poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar, words that embodied their history of pain, endurance, and hope.[84] She also organized church events where Black youth could sing and express their emotions in "living pictures."[85] In her view, these were the kinds of exercises that embodied self-respect in ways that also compelled greater recognition of Black humanity.

In the summer of 1896, Lillian Thomas Fox also amplified her voice by helping launch the first national Black women's club. Six months after experiencing Jim Crow discrimination on

---

[82] "Black and Black Laws: Colored People Want Intermarriage Prohibition Removed," *Indianapolis Journal*, February 28, 1896.

[83] Lillian Thomas Fox, "The Cakewalk," *Indianapolis News*, February 18, 1896. More could certainly be said about her commentary, as it reveals social tensions within the Black community regarding the economic status and the extraordinary pressure placed on appearances. While she did convey some attitudes that read as elite, it is pertinent to recognize that though Thomas Fox consistently advocated for the power of self-respect as a force of compelling recognition of Black humanity, she also believed that "respectability" discourse unfairly placed the onus for racial discrimination on the shoulders of Black Americans. A notable example is found in her participation at the Indiana State Afro-American Convention in July 1899. She rejected an argument by a local farmer who asserted that "white prejudice is dying out in proportion as we strive to render ourselves worthy of respect." See, "Prompt to Respond," *The Freeman*, July 29, 1899.

[84] Lillian Thomas Fox, "How Long Will These Things Be?" *The Recorder*, November 11, 1899.

[85] "City Happenings," *The Freeman*, July 11, 1896; "Autumn Carnival," *The Freeman*, October 30, 1896.

the way to Atlanta, she traveled to Washington, D.C. to speak at a joint meeting of prominent Black women. The day of her speech was a momentous occasion for many reasons. Harriet Tubman addressed the group in the morning, advocating for more homes for the aged. In the afternoon, Ida Wells-Barnett spoke on prison reform, and Lillian Thomas Fox followed with her talk, "The Separate Car System as it Affects the Dignity of Afro-American Womanhood." Many other women filled the day with strong words about serious concerns. Reporting on the event, the local press characterized the gathering as a "rescue crusade . . . for the upbuilding of struggling human kind."[86] That evening, the women vitalized this fight by voting unanimously to organize their strength. Before day's end, they named their unity the National Association of Colored Women. Among the first to bless the moment with her weighty voice was, "the venerable Harriet Tubman," who "sang a plantation melody with excellent effect."[87]

As Indiana's representative to the newly formed National Association of Colored Women, Lillian Thomas Fox returned home in July 1896 with a new battle cry: "Lifting as We Climb." In many ways, it was familiar work now emboldened by broader alliances. It was also a principle of uplift she knew in her own body, as she had renewed her energy to rise, and rise again, through the physical strengthening of her center, the broadening of her chest, and the lengthening of her spine.

As she organized her community for this new project of eloquent activism, Lillian Parker Thomas Fox formed new local coalitions and continued speaking at local gatherings. In August 1899, she became president of the "Reciprocity Club," a group that secured employment for the city's Black women.[88] In March 1900, she recited a newly published poem, "Man with a Hoe," at

---

[86] "Colored Women," *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), July 20, 1896.
[87] "Pleading for Punk's Life," *The Evening Star*, July 22, 1896.
[88] "Reciprocity Club," *The Recorder*, August 12, 1899.

the home of friends, Albert and Lillie Henderson.[89] At the time, they shared their home with six young men and women who had moved to the city in pursuit of economic opportunity.[90] It was a fitting setting for a poem that had recently sparked worldwide empathy for the plight of exploited laborers. They were words that described burdens written in the body: "Through this dread shape the suffering ages look; Time's tragedy is in the aching stoop." They were words that called for change: "O masters, lords, and rulers in all lands. . . How will you ever straighten up this shape. . . make right the immemorial infamies, perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes?" They were words that identified one powerful way to initiate that change: "Give back the upward looking and the light; Rebuild in it the music and the dream." As she gave her own voice to these new words, Lillian Parker Thomas Fox affirmed again—for herself, for her community, for their cause—the revelatory impact of recognizing the humanity of the disadvantaged and downtrodden.

In 1900, when she recited these words, Lillian Parker Thomas Fox had been a public voice in Indianapolis for a little over a decade. She was in her mid-forties, and she was wholly prepared for what came next. That January, she accepted a position as a salaried reporter for the *Indianapolis News.* National and local leaders of the Black press lauded her achievement. *The Recorder* noted that it was, "not only a fitting recognition of Mrs. Fox's ability as a writer and all around newspaper woman, but tends to prove that real merit knows no color and will sooner or later meet substantial recognition."[91] In Washington, D.C., the editor of the *Colored American* described her as a, "literary woman of more than ordinary ability," and noted that she was now

[89] Edwin Markham, an Oregon poet, wrote "Man with a Hoe" in 1899 after Jean-François Millet's 1860 painting of the same name inspired him. The poem circulated in newspapers around the world, was translated into over thirty languages, and became a rally cry for critiquing governmental and corporate greed.

[90] According to the 1900 census, Albert (a porter) and Lillie Henderson shared their home with six roomers. Most of the roomers were in their twenties and had moved to Indianapolis from Kentucky. One woman worked as a school teacher, two as bell boys at a local hotel, one as a janitor. Mrs. Henderson was on the board of the Flanner Guild, and her boarder, Louise Shores (a school teacher), was a member of the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club.

[91] "Editor's Note," *The Recorder*, February 3, 1900.

the "first colored woman in the West who has thus been recognized by the white daily press."[92] She also made a point of sharing her own good news with *Werner's Magazine*, the main professional source for elocutionary studies and recitation selections. Responding to the magazine's call for stories about the accomplishments of "colored singers, lecturers, and public readers," she submitted the following: "Mrs. Lillian Thomas Fox, of platform experience, is now on the staff of the *Indianapolis News*."[93]

Lillian Parker Thomas Fox clearly took personal satisfaction in this amplification of her vocal powers. As a reporter, she could use her talents in ways that also aided her long-standing commitment to—as she had written years before—"bring about that state of feeling in which there will be no desire to trample under foot our rights as citizens."[94] Through her column, "News of the Colored People," she had a direct channel to compel empathy by chronicling the daily activities of the Black community—their comings and goings, their charitable activities, their accomplishments and challenges, and their constant performances of song, pantomime, and poetry. Such reports put before the white public evidence of Black Americans' individuality—evidence that the citizens who were increasingly being forced to sit in the back of street cars, barred from newly built hospitals, excluded from community gymnasiums, and refused service in hotels and restaurants were in fact men and women who, in her father's words, were "capable of living and breathing, reading, writing, hoping and believing, seeing and feeling, and existing and enjoying [their] health if [they have] the chance."[95]

---

[92] *The Colored American* (Washington, D.C), February 3, 1900. The editor of the paper, Edward E. Cooper, had moved to Washington, D.C. after founding and managing *The Freeman* in Indianapolis. Lillian Thomas Parker-Fox worked with him at *The Freeman* from 1891 until 1893.

[93] Werner's magazine published a call for this information in *The Freeman* on September 29, 1900. It also advertised the call in the *Colored American* in Washington, DC. Lillian Thomas Fox followed both papers. "Expressional Power of the Colored Race," *Werner's Magazine* 26, no. 6 (February 1901): 477.

[94] Lillian May Thomas, "Rights of Colored People," *The Oshkosh Northwestern*, November 21, 1883.

[95] Byrd Parker, "Letter from Byrd Parker," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (Rochester, NY), February 3, 1854.

In the coming years, she would continue cultivating her own powers of self-expression and drawing the public's attention to women who were doing the same. In the early 1900s, that included Dayse D. Walker (1872-1953), another Black elocutionist who was committed to helping more women breathe deep, stand tall, and speak out. In 1901, when Walker began teaching a local class in physical culture *à la* Delsarte, it came as no surprise that Lillian Parker Thomas Fox was among the first to report the news.

Dayse D. Walker and the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club

"The Delsarte Club, under the direction of Miss Dayse Walker,
meets each Monday evening at the Flanner Guild.
It is rehearsing several new poses and
will give an entertainment in the near future."

— [Lillian Thomas Fox], "News of Colored People," *Indianapolis News,* February 14, 1902

"It will thus be seen that from 1890 to 1895 the character of Afro-American womanhood began to assert itself in definite purposes and efforts in club work." So wrote Fannie Barrier Williams, a leader of said work, in 1900. These "real new women," she continued, were "aroused to courage, to hope, and self-assertion toward better things."[96] Dayse D. Walker was certainly among the many individuals who personified this description (see figure 69). In 1900, at age twenty-eight, she left her teaching job at the Tuskegee Institute and set out to see what she could make of her elocutionary talents.[97] By April 1901, she was giving performances in the Black churches of Owensboro, Kentucky. The announcements of her recitals strategically cited her experience at Booker T. Washington's esteemed school—an influential institution that inculcated

[96] Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," in *A New Negro for a New Century,* ed. Booker T. Washington and N.B Wood (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1900), 379.

[97] Dayse D. Walker taught geography in 1898-99 and reading in 1899-1900. In June 1899, Booker T. Washington also referred to her as Mrs. Washington's secretary. See, *Booker T. Washington Papers, Volume 5*, 132.

racial progress through personal discipline and moral respectability. She embodied these qualities too, but when Walker appeared on the stage, she was also anything but demure. She posed like Grecian statuary, pantomimed "Delsartean" attitudes, and transformed herself into "Zingerella," a Spanish gypsy girl with bold words:

> My childhood was a wild-cat life.
> From early morn until the stars
> Shone o'er the Mediterranean
> I nothing did but laugh, and sing, and dance with
> My wild gypsy bell'd tambourine, and fling
> Defiance in the face of death, and swing
> Far out from cliffs and mountain peaks
> Where sea gulls build and wild-cats shriek, —
> Shrieks that my wild heart lov'd to hear,
> Nor dreamd of such a thing as fear.[98]

It seems there was something of that defiant heart in Dayse Walker's spirit as well.[99] Around the time she left Tuskegee, Booker T. Washington published a stern criticism of what he perceived as a troubling trend. In his view, too many Black women were tempted by the prospects of teaching music or elocution. Believing that such pursuits were incompatible with financial responsibility, he urged women to focus their energies on teaching "foundational occupations," like millinery or domestic science.[100] While framed in economic terms, his argument veiled a deeper critique about the value of liberal arts curricula and the perceived lack of "respectability"

[98] Reports on her performances in Owensboro, Kentucky note that she performed "Grecian living pictures," "statue posing," and considered "Zingerella" one of her favorite recitations. See, "Colored Column," *Messenger-Inquirer* (Owensboro, Kentucky) March 17, 1901; March 31, 1901; April 7, 1901. The poem, "Zingerella," was first published in Anna Randall-Diehl, *Elocutionary Studies and New Recitations* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1887), 116.

[99] Walker was not the first teacher with similar inclinations to leave the school. After finding her vision of women's education incompatible with Booker T. Washington's expectations, Hallie Q. Brown left after just one year as Lady Principle (1892-1893). See, Daleah B. Goodwin, "A Torch in the Valley: The Life and Work of Miss Hallie Quinn Brown," 68-71. It is interesting to note that "Zingerella" was also one of Hallie Q. Brown's favorite poems to perform. See, "Expressional Power of the Colored Race," *Werner's Magazine*, 475.

[100] Booker T. Washington, *The Future of the American Negro* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1899), 339.

Figure 69 — Dayse D. Walker in Grecian Costume, c. 1912
Credit: "Dayse D. Walker as Mme. Beaucaire," *The Recorder*, July 6, 1912.

Black women exhibited by making such bold public displays.[101] It seems rather clear that Dayse D. Walker espoused a different view; for after leaving Tuskegee, she wholeheartedly set out to prove the practical and aspirational value of women's elocutionary pursuits.[102]

Shortly following her Zingerella performances in Kentucky, she took her act to Indianapolis and *The Freeman* took note: "Miss Dayse D. Walker, formerly a teacher of Tuskegee Institute . . . is in the city for an indefinite stay. Miss Walker is an elocutionist of rare ability."[103] As she explored the prospect of making the city her home, Walker wasted no time in sharing her talents and volunteering her services. By early August the paper announced that she was "preparing to give a grand Delsarte recital" along with a group of women from a local church.[104] The performance not only drew a large audience, it also garnished praise from the city's own esteemed elocutionist, Lillian Thomas Fox. Reporting on the event for one of the city's white papers, Fox noted that "Miss Walker gave a number which was well received."[105]

In addition to participating in these local entertainments, Dayse D. Walker also began working at the Flanner Guild, a newly opened settlement home for Black citizens.[106] The need for such a space had become especially apparent in recent years. Between 1880 and 1900, the city's Black residents grew from 6,500 to nearly 16,000, or roughly nine percent of the total

---

[101] Giddings, *Where and When I Enter,* 101-103.

[102] In spring of 1901, she was raising funds for an industrial school in Clarkesville, Tennessee. The circumstances for the project's failure or her departure are not reported. "Colored Column," *Messenger-Inquirer* (Owensboro, Kentucky), March 24, 1901.

[103] "City Notes," *The Freeman*, July 20, 1901.

[104] "City Notes," *The Freeman*, August 3, 1901.

[105] [Lillian Thomas Fox], "News of Colored People," *Indianapolis News*, August 9, 1901.

[106] What began as the Flanner Guild is now The Flanner House Mission. On its history, see Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1900), 92-93; Earline Rae Ferguson, "A Community Affair: African-American Women's Clubs in Indianapolis, 1879-1917," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1997); Ruther Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

population.[107] As was typical of similar developments in Midwestern and northern cities, many of these individuals had fled oppressive violence and economic deprivation in southern states. In Indianapolis, their arrival also overlapped with a period of industrial growth that had widened the gap between wealth and poverty. Such developments prompted religious, philanthropic, and political leaders to support the expansion of social services in new ways.

Consistent with the spirit of many Progressive Era developments, these charitable and civic projects often reinforced the racism of Jim Crow customs. In the early 1900s, new public facilities were almost always segregated, and the lion's share of these spaces (such as the YMCA and YWCA) bolstered the health and opportunities of the city's white population.[108] That being the case, city officials did make a small appropriation for a settlement home that served the Black community. In 1898, the Flanner Guild opened with a municipal pledge of $500 a year and startup funds from the Charity Organization Society (COS), a coalition of church leaders and philanthropists. Frank Flanner, a local white mortician, was among them, and he donated the land and the four-room home that quickly became a crucial support for Black citizens in need.

Within two years of opening, demand for the Flanner Guild's services had outgrown the capacity of that four-room building. Dayse Walker arrived just as the organization's leaders had begun planning for its growth.[109] Hoping to incorporate aspects of the esteemed Tuskegee model, they quickly recognized that their needs were a good match with Walker's skills. By September,

---

[107] Emma Lou Thornborough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

[108] Ruther Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

[109] "Colored Industrial School," *Indianapolis Journal*, August 21, 1901. This report helps establish a timeline for the planning of the Flanner Guild's expanded programs. It is useful for recognizing that they were pursuing the Tuskegee model at around the same time that Dayse D. Walker arrived in the city. Just two weeks later, a report acknowledged that Dayse D. Walker was leading those developments; see "Flanner Guild," *The Recorder*, September 7, 1901.

Figure 70 — Dayse D. Walker and Community Members at the Flanner Guild, 1902
This photograph was published in *The Freeman* on June 31, 1902. Dayse D. Walker, pictured in the center of the image, was the Guild's matron from 1901 until 1904. This photograph was later included in an early twentieth century exhibition at The Social Museum, a Harvard institution founded "to promote investigations of modern social conditions and to direct the amelioration of industrial and social life."[110] The Flanner Guild's association with the Tuskegee Institute is likely one of the reasons it was featured at Harvard.
Credit: Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Transfer from the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Social Museum Collection.

[110] Francis G. Peabody, *The Social Museum as an Instrument of University Teaching*. Publications of the Department of Social Ethics in Harvard University, no. 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1911), 2.

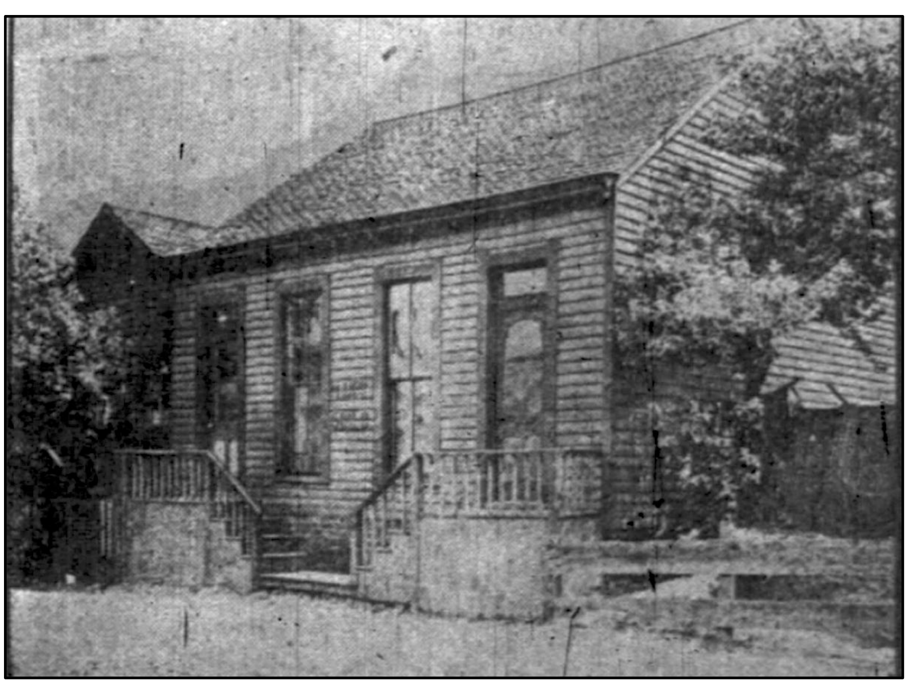


Figure 71 — Flanner Guild Home, 1901
Credit: [Lillian Thomas Fox], "Neighborhood House Here: Flanner Guild and the Work It is Doing Among Colored People," *Indianapolis News*, July 5, 1901.

Figure 72 — Plans for the New Flanner Guild Building, 1902
Credit: [Lillian Thomas Fox], "The New Flanner Guild Building," *Indianapolis News*, March 10, 1902.

she had accepted a position as the guild's matron and began orchestrating plans for securing a larger building and expanding the programming (see figure 70). In addition to making room for classes in carpentry, sewing, millinery, and domestic service, Walker also advocated for a gymnasium that could double as a space for aesthetic exercises and community entertainments (see figures 71 and 72). This vision met with the approval of the city's white leaders. In 1901, the Flanner Guild secured a $1,500 pledge from COS, contingent on the Black community raising an additional $500.

It was in support of this $500 fundraising effort that the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club came into existence. In the winter of 1901, Dayse Walker began instructing a class in Grecian-styled posing and pantomime for the specific purpose of conducting a charity entertainment. Sixteen women joined her. To publicize their efforts, they had valuable allies in local journalists. The city's Black newspapers broadcast announcements in their society columns, and Lillian Thomas Fox's reporting for the *Indianapolis News* also helped white citizens learn of these aesthetic pursuits. This effort to enlist interracial support was also evident in the choice of venue for their first "Delsarte entertainment." It strategically took place at Shortridge High School—the city's only interracial public school.[111] Building on the success of that event, the women gave additional "Delsarte entertainments" at local Black churches. After these early debuts, it seemed promising that their talents could raise even more funds for the Flanner Guild's new building. To that end, the group became more formalized. They elected officers and chose a name: "The Flanner Guild Delsarte Club." In February 1902, Lillian Thomas Fox stoked anticipation for future performances by reporting that the club was "rehearsing several new poses."[112]

---

[111] [Lillian Thomas Fox], "Flanner Guild Work," *Indianapolis News*, November 20, 1901.
[112] [Lillian Thomas Fox], "News of Colored People," *Indianapolis News,* February 14, 1902.

Walker certainly brought her personal flair to her new position, but she also followed pedagogical paths forged by an earlier generation of Black elocutionists and educators, women like Hallie Q. Brown. In the years following the Civil War, they had championed an ideal called "The New Education." The movement advocated for programs that centered on self-interest and self-expression. The tenets of the New Education were particularly significant for those who were interested in challenging the restrictive norms that governed gender and race. Josephine Silone-Yates (1852-1912) was among them. In the 1880s, she taught Chemistry, English Literature, and Elocution at Lincoln Institute, a Black normal school in Jefferson City, Missouri.[113] In 1892, when asked to reflect on Black women's powers as educators, Yates prefaced her comments with lines from Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Song of Nature":

> Yet whirl the glowing wheels once more,
> And mix the bowls again;
> Seethe fate! the ancient elements,
> Heat, cold, wet, dry, and peace and pain. [114]

Citing Emerson was Yate's eloquent way of stating that Black teachers were "stirring up" normative beliefs about human nature, especially those related to the body. To describe the importance of such agitations, Yates specifically engaged the discourse of gender. She declared: "The possibilities and general trend of social reforms and universal advancement largely depend, as society is now constructed, upon the cooperation of the feminine with the masculine element." This goal involved instructing women not just in subjects perceived as "feminine" but also in those that had long been understood as "masculine." That could mean, for example, teaching elocution and physical culture alongside domestic science and millinery. As she witnessed this

[113] Gary R. Kremer, *Race and Meaning: The African American Experience in Missouri* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2014), 44.

[114] Josephine Silone-Yates, "Afro-American Women as Educators," in L.A. Scruggs, *Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character* (Raleigh, NC: L.A. Scruggs, Publisher, 1893), 309-319.

happen, Yates believed Black women were, "transforming the atmosphere" at home, at school, and in society.[115] By physically emboldening Black women's powers of expression, women were disrupting staid norms of gender and race. They were reimagining what was possible and redefining what was practical.

Dayse Walker was among the proponents of this "New Education." In addition to "transforming the atmosphere" through her emphasis on aesthetic activities, she also worked to address tensions and prejudice between the city's Black elite and the poorer Black citizens whom the Guild supported.[116] When reflecting on her first weeks as the Guild's matron, Walker recalled: "I got down on my hands and knees and scrubbed and [did] all sorts of work before I could convince my neighbors that I did not intend to patronize them."[117] By holding her Monday night Delsarte classes at the Flanner Guild, Dayse Walker also made a point of bringing together people from differing economic and social backgrounds.

Like Walker, Most of the women in the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club lived in middle-class households, yet they also fit historian Earline Rae Ferguson's characterization of clubwomen as "coalition builders who regularly ignored objective class demarcations."[118] The oldest member, fifty-five year old Julia Smith, worked as a laundress and had raised five children with her husband, who worked as a day laborer.[119] The youngest member, fifteen year old Jessie

---

[115] Ibid.

[116] On class and racial tensions, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham*, Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptists Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture During the Twentieth Century* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

[117] Dayse D. Walker, "Work Among the Colored People," in *The Indiana Bulletin of Charities and Correction* (Wm. Buford, Primer: Indianapolis, 1903), 201-204.

[118] Earline Rae Ferguson, "A Community Affair," v. The club member names are listed in [Lillian Thomas Fox], "Flanner Guild Delsarte Class," 12 April 1902; and "A Class in Physical Culture," *The Recorder*, April 19, 1902. All details about their ages, families, and occupations are derived from the 1900 and 1910 census records.

[119] "Society Notes," *The Recorder*, April 5, 1902.

Darneal, helped care for her two younger siblings while her father and older brother worked as porters. Married women in their mid-twenties comprised the club's leadership. The president, Jennie Cooper, was married to a clerk. Daisy Smith, the vice-president, was married to a porter. Margaret Worthington, the treasurer, was married to a letter carrier. Lucretia Knox, the secretary, was married to a newspaperman and her father-in-law was editor of *The Freeman*. She had also studied music at Fisk University and shared her talents by providing voice lessons and giving concerts in the city's Black churches.[120]

Other members of the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club included Allie Beard, a single twenty-two-year chiropodist; Ora Dunlap, a stenographer married to a barber; and Genevieve Bagby, a student at the local Normal school.[121] Mamie Shelton, thirty, cared for her husband, a clerk, and their four-year old daughter. Daisy Poe, twenty-four, worked as a servant and lived with her employers—a white surgeon and his wife. Clara Easton, twenty-two, cared for her six younger siblings while her father worked as a fireman. Emma Hillman, thirty-two, was widowed and worked in a bottling laboratory. Two young school teachers also joined the club: Louise Shores, twenty-three, was a recent arrival from Lexington, Kentucky; and Lillie Hill, who also organized another group for forward-thinking women: the Twentieth Century Club.[122]

While their involvement with the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club may have afforded these women with a new type of aesthetic exercise, it also mobilized their talents in familiar ways. Over the previous decade, several of them had performed as singers and reciters in the city's Black churches. Lillie Hill gave regular concerts at Ninth Presbyterian and taught music and

[120] "Many Musicians Among Negroes," *Indianapolis Morning Star*, August 31, 1903.
[121] "City Notes," *The Recorder*, February 16, 1901.
[122] "The 20th Century Club," *The Recorder*, May 28, 1904.

dance classes for the church's youth.[123] At Corinthian Baptist, Allie Beard's singing voice was so admired that she was encored on at least one notable occasion.[124] Genevieve Bagby had organized a reading club for her local church. Her mother, Irene Bagby, was also a respected schoolteacher and an influential social leader. Mrs. Bagby's approval of Dayse Walker's efforts at the Flanner Guild would have carried important weight among the city's Black elite. She was also a close personal friend of Lillian Thomas Fox, and a highly regarded singer, frequently appearing on church stages as Queen Sheba and Esther.[125]

As she joined this community of talented women, Dayse D. Walker also had much to offer, especially through her choice to focus on the instruction of statue posing. At the time, these methods were widely recognized for their value in helping women develop entertainment in ways that also aided their health. Through statue posing, women engaged in a range of psycho-physical movements that many practitioners acknowledged as effective remedies for insomnia, indigestion, headaches, melancholy, and anxiety. As knowledge of the *tubercle bacillus* transformed the social understanding of consumption, women also continued promoting their deep breathing exercises as a preventative for tuberculosis.[126] By 1900, these presumptions about the health benefits of Delsarte exercises were as present in Indianapolis as they were elsewhere across the country. As one of the city's leading white teachers put it, the Delsarte exercises of deep breathing and "moving the arms, body, legs, in easy, graceful turns," were helping women, "dodge doctors' bills." In her words, these aesthetic exercises created a

---

[123] "Musical and Humorous Concert," *The Recorder*, November 17, 1900.

[124] George P. Knox, "Successful Entertainment," *The Freeman*, December 3, 1898.

[125] "Cantata of Queen Esther," *The Recorder*, December 23, 1899. On the significance of Esther in Black musical programs of this era, see Juanita Karpf, "An Opportunity to Rise: Reinterpreting Esther, The Beautiful Queen," *Black Music Research Journal* 30 no. 2 (Fall 2010): 241-272; Juanita Karpf, "'As with Words of Fire': Art Music and Nineteenth Century African-American Feminist Discourse," *Signs* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 603-632.

[126] *Werner's Magazine* included discussions of breathing exercises and tuberculosis. Emily Bishop also discussed this in, *Self-Expression and Health*, 97.

"healthful and normal adjustment of the body," and were particularly effective at alleviating "lung, stomach and nervous disorders."[127]

It appears that the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club viewed their classes in similar terms. As Lillian Thomas Fox reported, "the class is being trained in physical culture and especially in Grecian poses."[128] When *The Recorder* covered the group's activities, it also noted its emphasis on physical culture.[129] These are small, but mightily significant details. They establish that women of the Delsarte club recognized their weekly gatherings were more than a preparation for artistic performances, they were also opportunities to practice exercises that benefited their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. The salubrious side effects of this social activity were also apparent to the community. For example, when *The Freeman* reported on the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club's successes, it noted that their entertainments were "lucrative, while [also] developing the physical body."[130]

This attention to statue posing also brought to life similarly-styled illustrations that were regularly visualized in *The Freeman*, an Indianapolis-based yet nationally-syndicated Black newspaper.[131] In one notable example, a Black woman boldly stood at the head of the paper's "Public Opinion" column (see figure 73). Her stance conveyed undeniable authority, and on her

---

[127] "Physical Culture and Women's Mental Power," *Indianapolis News*, January 31, 1905. Jennie Ormbsy, the teacher cited in this report, operated a school of elocution and physical culture in Indianapolis and in Fort Wayne.

[128] [Lillian Thomas Fox], "The Flanner Guild Delsarte Club, *Indianapolis News*, April 12, 1902.

[129] "A Class in Physical Culture," *The Recorder,* April 19, 1902.

[130] "The Good Work of the Flanner Guild," *The Freeman*, June 21, 1902.

[131] In many ways, their engagement with classical aesthetics continued in the tradition of Black literary societies that utilized classical literature to make public arguments against slavery. Caroline Winterer. *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750-1900.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007): 180-190.

Figure 73 — "Public Opinion," Column Illustration in *The Freeman*
Credit*: The Freeman*, January 30, 1892.

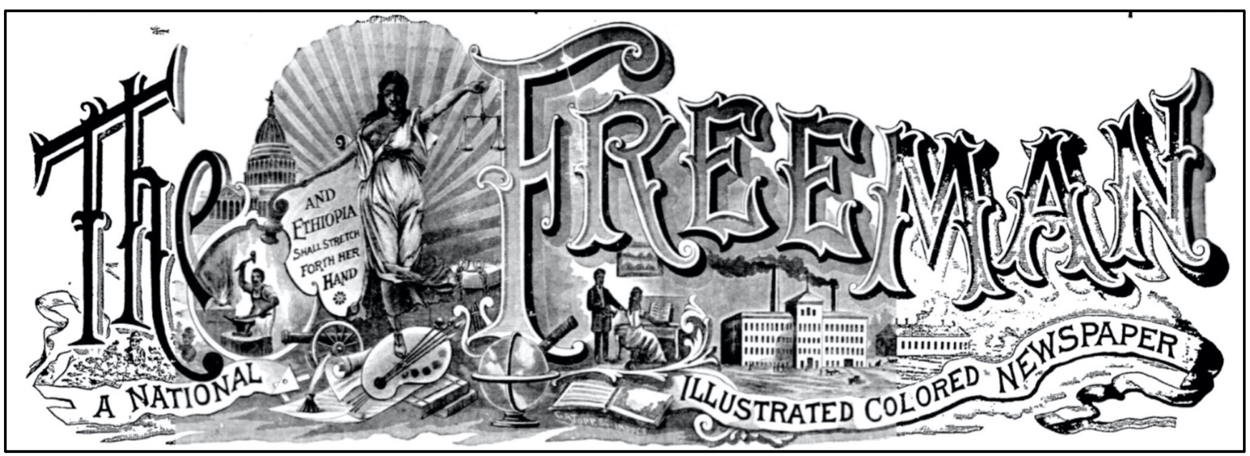


Figure 74 — Masthead, *The Freeman,* May 23, 1891

crown was emblazoned the word, “Justice.” Another illustration of a Black woman holding up the scales of justice also appeared on the front page of every paper (see figure 73). Next to the title, *The Freeman*, this enrobed Lady Liberty stood next to a shield that bore a biblical prophecy: “And Ethiopia Shall Stretch Forth Her Hand”[132] (see figure 74). When the women of Flanner Guild Delsarte Club performed their tableaux, they were also contributing to this ongoing visual campaign for civil rights and dignified representation.

While statue posing was often an aspirational exercise, the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club also used this practice to validate personal and historical experiences of pain and trauma. This is evident in their tableaux “The Fate of Virginia.” Set in ancient Rome, the scene depicted the death of a young woman who had been purchased by a wealthy tyrant. Powerless to stop the transaction, Virginia’s father intervened. To save her from a life of servitude and sexual defilement, he stabbed Virginia in the heart. As the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club prepared their interpretation of this scene, they likely drew upon resources published in *Werner’s Magazine*,

---

[132] On the significance of this biblical reference, see Schmeisser, Iris Schmeisser, “Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands”: Ethiopianism, Egyptomania, and the Arts of the Harlem Renaissance,” in *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination*, ed. Geneviève Fabre and Klaus Benesch, 263-286. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 263-286.

Figure 75 — "The Fate of Virginia," in *Werner's Magazine,* 1899
Credit: *Werner's Magazine*, 23, no. 3 (May 1899): Frontispiece.

including poems about this tragedy and suggestions for its staging (see figure 75). Following the common methods for such exercises, the women would have discussed the emotions of each person in the scene: Virginia's immense suffering, the "nurse who called down vengeance from the gods," and "sympathetic friends expressing pity, fear, and love."[133]

The club's choice of this tableaux suggests that in addition to practicing postures that were aspirational and uplifting, they also made space in their Monday classes for validating personal and historical experiences of pain and trauma.[134] While articles in *Werner's Magazine*

---

[133] Throughout this period, *Werner's Magazine* included teaching ideas for this tableaux, and contemporary poems depicting the scene. For example, Clara Tileston Power Edgerly, "Tableaux Mouvants and Poses Plastics Arranged and Presented at the Boston School of Oratory," December 1891, *Werner's Magazine*, 316. Her composition of the "Fate of Virginia" bears many similarities with that depicted by the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club.

[134] In making this assertion, I draw from similar arguments made about later pageants. See David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre and Drama and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 82. Alessandra Lorini, *Rituals of Race: American Public Culture and the*

Figure 76 — The Flanner Guild Delsarte Club performing "Fate of Virginia," 1902
On April 19, 1902, this photograph was also published in The Recorder, one of the city's Black newspapers, under the title "A Class in Physical Culture."
Credit: [Lillian Thomas Fox], "Flanner Guild Delsarte Class," *Indianapolis News*, April 12, 1902.

may have been helpful for the club's study, the women assuredly summoned personal knowledge, too. As daughters and granddaughters of enslaved Americans, this scene was not just a tragedy from an ancient past. Self-sacrifice in the face of sexual exploitation was a reality that lived in the memories of their parents and grandparents. In 1904, Addie Hunton, a national leader in Black women's clubs, spoke to this truth, writing: "there is hardly a daughter of a slave mother who has not heard of the sublime and heroic soul of some maternal ancestor that went

---

Search for Racial Democracy (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), Claire Corbould, *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

home to the God that gave it rather than live a life of enforced infamy."[135] As the women of the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club exercised their right to feel and interpret this common cruelty of slavery, they made their personal history a vital source for their self-expression.

In light of all this, when Lillian Thomas Fox published a photograph of the club performing "Fate of Virginia" in the *Indianapolis News*, she also made this entertainment an act of social criticism (see figure 76). Through its depiction of Black power, grace, and grief, it qualifies as, what historian Shawn Michelle Smith terms, a "contestatory image."[136] That is, it counteracted the claims of widespread racial stereotyping that depicted Black women as awkward simpletons, over sexualized jezebels, or docile mammies.[137]As many historians have recognized, the Reconstruction-era rise of this coon-song culture performed an essential role in justifying racial segregation, lynching, voter suppression, and myriad other cultural and social actions that undermined Black citizenship. This function of racist imagery also helps explain why photographs of Black Delsartean practices were non-existent in white media. On the rare occasion when white media acknowledged Black women's aesthetic activism, it did so in predictably mocking ways. This was the case, for example, in an 1897 front-cover illustration for *Leslie's Weekly* titled "New Women of Possumville." In this scene, a young girl aptly identified as "Venus" donned a tattered Grecian gown and awkwardly led a disheveled assembly of illiterate Black suffragists (see figure 77).

The photograph of the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club did more than challenge racist aesthetics, its depiction of "white" slavery in an ancient democracy also made a provocative

---

[135] Addie Hunton, "Negro Womanhood Defended," *The Voice of the Negro* (July 1904), 281.

[136] Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 6-9.

[137] Francis Martin, "To Ignore Is to Deny: E. W. Kemble's Racial Caricature as Popular Art," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40, no. 4 (2007): 655–82.

historical statement. Behind the vision of this tragic scene was an opportunity to understand that Black Americans' enslavement was not a "natural" condition of their inferior fitness (as was widely assumed); but was instead a cultural production of racialized oppression. In this way, the image also offered an opportunity for the newspaper's white readers to confront multiple truths about the legacy of enslavement in their own democratic nation.

The Flanner Guild's Grecian-styled portrayal of pain also challenged prevalent narratives that deliberately erased the profound violence that Black Americans had endured for hundreds of years—views that were also pervasive in the very pedagogical literature that Dayse Walker and other Black elocutionists read. For example, just months before the Delsarte Club performed "The Fate of Virginia," *Werner's Magazine* featured a story titled, "The Expressional Power of the Colored Race." [138] Constituting a rare effort by the magazine to acknowledge its significant number of Black subscribers, it featured several biographies and photographs of well-known Black orators and elocutionists, including Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Mary Church Terrell, and Hallie Q. Brown. Yet, even as the story praised its subjects' talents, its narration of the "Negro's progress" continued to perpetuate long-standing myths of black inferiority. Slavery was a "school for childlike virtues," the author wrote, and a system that kept Black individuals "safe from sword, pestilence, and famine." Implying that the achievements of a few notable individuals could not make up for the stolidity of the Black majority, the author followed up with a cruel swipe, charging that "Other peoples have risen from slavery by force of inherent qualities. Not so the negro."[139] Placing the responsibility

[138] "Expressional Power of the Colored Race," *Werner's Magazine* 26, no. 6 (February 1901): 459-478.
[139] Ibid, 459.

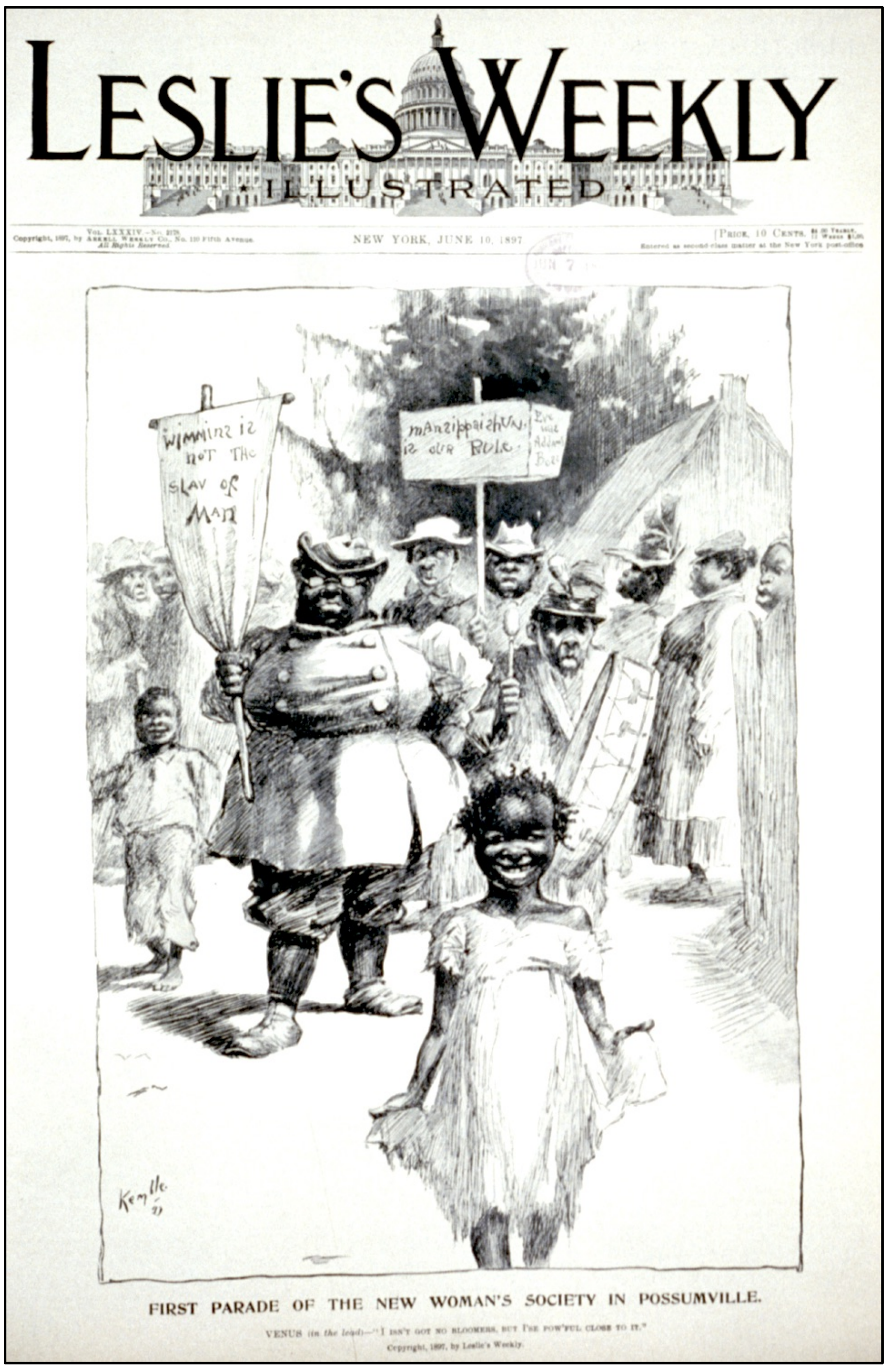


Figure 77 — "First Parade of the New Woman's Society in Possumville," 1897
In addition to deriding the political power and dignity of Black clubwomen, whom the year before had established the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, this artist's depiction of the girl, which he aptly named "Venus," referenced a fashion associated with women's suffrage and the Grecian-styled exercises of American Delsartism. The caption, written from the voice of "Venus" read, "I isn't got no bloomer, but I'se pow'ful close to it."
Credit: E.W. Kimble, *Leslie's Weekly,* June 10, 1897.

for slavery squarely on the enslaved themselves, the author suggested that it was a "scientific fact" that "Negroes have less nervous sensibility than whites," being less "subject to nervous affections" and "comparatively insensitive to pain."[140]

These statements—some of which were drawn from abolitionist-authored encyclopedias—demonstrated the extent to which white supremacist views pervaded cultural perceptions of Black history and medical views of Black bodies.[141] In Indianapolis, these views played out daily in real life; indeed, they were foundational to the logic of segregation and to the many Jim Crow entertainments available throughout the city, regularly offered up in charity entertainments staged for white audiences. During an event held for the Fresh Air Mission, a rest park for struggling white mothers and their children, the program included Grecian-styled butterfly dances and flower drills alongside musical performances of "Every Race Has a Flag but the Coons," and "I Don't Understand Ragtime."[142] It was a telling juxtaposition, and far from an isolated event. Indeed, society programs throughout the city regularly featured entertainments that affirmed the free expressions of white girlhood alongside blackface performances that purposefully caricatured Black Americans as individuals without country, culture, worries, or cares.[143] That such performances were also often fundraising tools for recreation centers and hospitals underscores one way that racist discourse helped legitimize inequitable health care.[144]

---

[140] Ibid, 478.

[141] *Werner's Magazine* printed these claims about the Negro's "nervous sensibilities" in their 1901 article "Expressional Power of the Colored Race." Though they did not cite their source, these very same statements were originally printed in *The American Cyclopedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge,* ed. George Ripley and Charles A. Dana (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1865), 172.

[142] "Musical Romances," *Indianapolis News*, June 25, 1900.

[143] For example, countless examples of this type of program took place at The Propylaeum, the headquarters of the Indianapolis Women's Club and a prominent venue for performances of American Delsartism. See, "Halloween Vaudeville," *Indianapolis News*, October 31, 1903.

[144] On health disparities and race, see Keith Wailoo, *Pain: A Political History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); John Hoberman, *Black and Blue: The Origins and Consequences of Medical Racism* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2012); Susan L. Smith, *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women's Health Activism in America, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Darlene Clark Hine,

Dayse Walker also advocated for these issues in other settings too. As matron of the Flanner Guild, she had opportunities to speak about racism with state and local leaders. In November 1903, for example, she addressed a gathering of the State Conference of Charities and Corrections. Among those in attendance were social workers, leaders of aid societies, directors of soldiers' homes, and managers of prisons and hospitals. She opened her address with a plea: "I wish we could get such a bond of sympathy between the two races that you could forget the blackfaces."[145] While insisting on Black citizen's underlying desire for self-reliance, Walker also urged greater appreciation for the circumstances they were forced to navigate. "It is not our fault that we are here, or that we are ignorant," she stated. "Don't you know that in the days of slavery the recompense for learning the ABC's was the lash? And when people speak of the virtue of a colored woman, remember that fifty years ago virtue in a colored woman was a thing to be ridiculed."[146]

Given Walker's efforts in her Delsarte classes to validate and alleviate women's experiences of nervousness, her comments on mental health were particularly poignant. Playing on the idea that Black Americans were insufficiently "civilized" to go crazy, Walker framed the increase of Black Americans in insane asylums as a "sign of progress."[147] It was, of course, a joke. Yet, it was a subversive one, for it spoke to the double-edged sword that Black Americans held. While racist diagnoses and economic deprivation were largely responsible for this increase, Walker was partly right that "being crazy" was a privilege: only white patients at this time received widespread sympathy or support for nervousness and its associated symptoms.[148] In this

---

Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). Martin Summers, "Diagnosing the Ailments of Black Citizenship."

[145] Dayse D. Walker, "Work Among the Colored People," 203.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

sense, access to a mental institution represented both the perpetuation of racism and its loosening, but only for those who were already suffering the impact. In closing her speech, Walker spoke directly to the foundational shift in perception that was necessary for creating "bonds of sympathy" between the city's Black and white citizens. "Remember that the people are here because of a chain of uncontrollable circumstances, and then treat them as if they were human beings."[149] As the city's entrenchment of segregation made evident, this plea would by-and-large go unaddressed.

In this tense and oppressive climate, Black women in Indianapolis became adept celebrators of small, yet critically subversive, victories. In 1902, that included celebrating the success of the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club. Six months into their fundraising campaign for the Flanner Guild, the Delsarte Club had sold at least 200 ten-cent tickets to their performances. In July 1902, when Lillian Thomas Fox reported on their accomplishments, she noted that the Delsarte club had raised $19 (the equivalent of about $600 today).[150] It was the largest amount raised by a social group. Their Grecian performances not only generated funds, they also compelled the broader community to support the Flanner Guild. Indeed, the publicity they generated was so crucial that the president of the Guild stated he felt "it would be impossible for him to get along without their assistance," for they had "done much to mold public sentiment in favor of the [charitable] work."[151]

Less than a year after they made their association official, the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club had played a crucial role in helping Black organizers meet their $500 fundraising goal. When construction of the Guild's new building was completed in May 1903, the women gave

---

[149] Ibid.
[150] [Lillian Thomas Fox], "For the Flanner Guild," *Indianapolis News,* July 25, 1902.
[151] "The Good Work of the Flanner Guild," *The Freeman*, June 21, 1902.

another significant performance at the dedication ceremony.[152] Joining them to mark the occasion was an audience of 1,000 people and a special speaker, Booker T. Washington, the esteemed principal of the Tuskegee Institute. The press noted that Washington, "expressed his pleasure at being able to witness the dedication of a building designed for the uplifting of the colored people"[153]

Given Booker T. Washington's stated opinions on Black women's elocutionary interests, it is not difficult to imagine that Dayse D. Walker took her own pleasure in witnessing her former boss recognize the good work of the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club. Their accomplishments had proven that aesthetic pursuits could indeed deliver inspirational *and* practical results. By creating space for the practices of elocution and physical culture, Dayse D. Walker and her "Zingerella" heart had affirmed Black women's talents in ways that also benefited personal health and social welfare. As she continued teaching Delsarte classes, her community continued demonstrating their approval of these Grecian-styled aesthetic exercises. In the fall of 1903, one reporter aptly stated: "A series of entertainments by the Flanner Guild is being planned by Miss Dayse Walker, who has the work in hand."[154] And indeed she did.

The Work at Hand

"Mrs. Lillian Thomas Fox addressed the Amazons
at a regular meeting Monday evening . . .
They are preparing for a program
to be rendered at the Jones Tabernacle."

— "Flanner Guild Items," *Indianapolis Recorder,* May 22, 1909

---

[152] [Lillian Thomas Fox], "Addresses at Flanner Guild: Booker T. Washington Spoke to Large Crowds," *Indianapolis News*, May 7, 1901.

[153] Ibid.

[154] *Indianapolis Star*, September 1, 1903.

Throughout the 1890s and well into the 1900s, if a Black woman in Indianapolis suffered from nervousness, insomnia, indigestion, or dyspepsia, it would not have been unusual for women in her community to recommend that she give "Delsarte" a try. To aid that opportunity, Lillian Thomas Fox, Dayse D. Walker, and the women of the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club had played an instrumental role in sharing and teaching these psycho-physical pursuits, but they were far from the only promoters of these activities for self-expression and health.

From the 1890s through early 1900s, Black women and youth in Indianapolis continued donning Grecian-styled robes and taking the stage in several community productions. Dr. Beulah Porter, the first Black woman in Indianapolis to earn a medical degree, taught rainbow drills and flower dances to her seventh and eighth grade classes.[155] At Bethel A.M.E., Elizabeth Stewart, the wife of the editor of *The Recorder*, demonstrated her Grecian poise as "Columbia," while her friends embodied "Minerva," and "Flying Mercury."[156] Her daughter also gracefully danced as a peach blossom, while others in the program depicted tulips, sunflowers, and snowdrops.[157] In Black churches, several programs featured "Delsarte pantomimes" set to the hymn "Rock of Ages."[158] In 1909, a new "Delsarte" club formed at the Flanner Guild; it was aptly named, "The Amazons."[159] Local newspapers also recorded such activities in other cities. For example, in

---

[155] [Lillian Thomas Fox], "News of Colored People," *Indianapolis News*, June 11, 1901. On Dr. Beulah Porter, see Earline Rae Ferguson, "The Woman's Improvement Club of Indianapolis: Black Women Pioneers in Tuberculosis Work, 1903–1938," *Indiana Magazine of History* 84, no. 3 (September 1988): 237-261.

[156] "Court of Fame at Bethel Church," *The Recorder*, November 14, 1914.

[157] "The Flower Garden: Beauty, Art and Grace," *The Recorder*, March 28, 1914.

[158] There are several mentions of such performances. These are a few: "Cantata of Queen Esther," *The Recorder*, 23 December 1899; "Corinthian Baptist Church," *The Recorder,* March 16, 1901; "At the Flanner Guild," *The Recorder*, June 4, 1904.

[159] The Flanner Guild's "Delsarte" statue posing activities continued even after Dayse Walker left. For example, on January 1, 1910 *The Recorder* reported that the Flanner Guild was preparing a special performance of Delsarte poses by Miss Ruthie Guthrie," the daughter of one of the members of the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club.

April 1902, *The Recorder* printed the following statement next to the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club's photograph: "Miss Victoria Overall, dramatic impersonator, delsartist, danseuse, and actress of wonderful versatility at Kansas City, Missouri, is a rising star in the galaxy of America's noblest type of negro womanhood."[160]

These ever-present reports from the 1890s through early 1900s offer compelling evidence of women pursuing and implementing practices that empowered their minds, their bodies, and their voices in ways that also benefited the health of their communities. In 1900, when reflecting on the notable rise of such activities, Fannie Barrier Williams, an educator and leader of the National Association of Colored Women, aptly characterized the previous decade of Black women's club work as "nothing less than organized anxiety."[161] As this chapter has demonstrated, the embodied language of this assessment was far from rhetorical. Indeed, it aptly describes the ways in which Black women prioritized psycho-physical practices as they launched and sustained collective projects of social activism.

As they entered a new century and a new era of national alliances, Black women would also continue engaging statue posing, deep breathing, and relaxation as methods to launch and sustain many more projects. In January 1904, for example, Lillian Thomas Fox and Dayse Walker called a meeting at the Flanner Guild for the purpose of establishing a new club "for self-improvement and for the general welfare and interest of negro women."[162] They adopted the

---

[160] "Woman's Work and World," *The Recorder*, April 19, 1902. In 1906, Victoria Overall offered her expertise in a new setting, when she bought a small house and converted it into a studio with two departments: dancing and cooking. *The Rising Son*, April 12, 1906.

[161] Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," 379-405.

[162] "What our colored citizens are doing," *Indianapolis Journal,* January 31, 1904. It is unclear how long Dayse Walker was a member of the Woman's Improvement Club, but she does not appear on the club's rosters in 1909, which are part of the club's records at the Indiana Historical Society. It is possible that Walker left the club soon after establishing the Young Women's Colored Protective Association.

name, “The Woman’s Improvement Club.”[163] With Lillian Thomas Fox as President, and Dayse Walker and Dr. Beulah Porter as vice-presidents, the club prioritized their weekly gatherings for the familiar rituals of recitation, discussion, and song (see figure 78). These were the exercises of self-expression that had long buoyed their spirits, steadied their hearts, and, in the words of Lillian Thomas Fox, “invigorated the general system.”[164] Such exercises also helped the club perform fund-raising entertainments of their own, including for a notable project that established an outdoor rest space for Black sufferers of tuberculosis.[165]

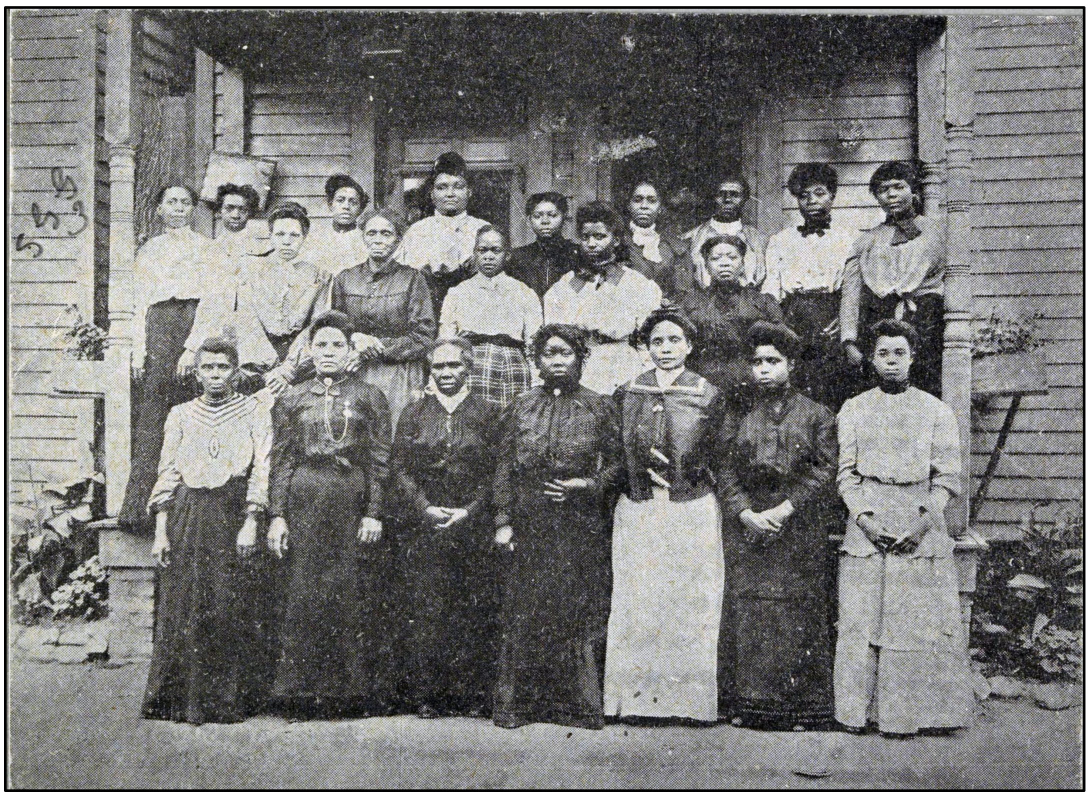


Figure 78 — Women’s Club at the Flanner Guild, c. 1904
The woman are unidentified, but a woman who bears resemblance to Lillian Thomas Fox stands in the back row, the fourth woman from the right. This was about the time that she, Dayse D. Walker, and Dr. Beulah Porter established the Woman’s Improvement Club, and some of its early meetings were held at The Flanner Guild. This photograph was included in an early twentieth century exhibition at Harvard’s Social Museum.
Credit: Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Transfer from the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Social Museum Collection.

[163] The earliest newspaper report of the Women’s Improvement Club is in *The Recorder*, March 12, 1904.

[164] Lillian Parker Thomas, “Friendly Reminders,” *The Freeman*, August 20, 1892.

[165] [Lillian Thomas Fox], “In Colored Circles,” *Indianapolis News*, October 29, 1904.

In April 1904, Lillian Thomas Fox also called to order the first meeting of Indiana's State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. As the president of this organization, she became a powerful advocate for Black women's urgent concerns. She joined other women in decrying lynching, affirming Black American's dignity, and advocating for ending the discriminatory laws and social customs that impoverished Black communities. In this work, she also had occasion for frequent visits to Black women's clubs across Indiana. Her reports on their activities spoke to the many ways that women were transforming the atmospheres of their communities. Not surprisingly, women's performances of songs, Delsarte pantomimes, and eloquent recitations were a consistent feature.[166]

In 1905, after four years as matron of the Flanner Guild, Dayse D. Walker took another bold step and created a new space to support the city's Black women. She founded The Young Colored Woman's Protective Association. "There is one whose needs seem to call to me the loudest," she declared, "and she is the brave, energetic honest young woman known as the "working girl."[167] In Indianapolis, white working girls had the support of the YWCA, but no such organization, including the Flanner Guild, had yet to provide such a place for Black women. To meet those needs, Walker enlisted the talents of her friends from the Flanner Guild Delsarte Club.[168] Funds from their entertainments opened a modest home that provided short-term lodging, aided job placement, and organized evening programs for studies of literature, and classes in physical culture and elocution.

---

[166] Ferguson, "The Woman's Improvement Club of Indianapolis," and "African American Clubwomen and the Indianapolis NAACP, 1912-1914."

[167] "Will Start Club House," *The Indianapolis Star*, November 26, 1905; "Thanks People of Cleveland," *Cleveland Journal,* December 9, 1905.

[168] "Will Start Club House," 1905.

While these impressive social projects certainly owed their success to myriad individuals and institutional commitments, the prioritization women gave to psycho-physical culture was far from insignificant. For, as the experiences of Lillian Thomas Fox and Dayse D. Walker demonstrate, these practices offered vital methods for claiming sovereignty and dignity during a particularly anxiety-provoking era. By helping make aesthetic exercises available throughout the community—and by reporting such activities in the local papers—Lillian Thomas Fox, Dayse D. Walker, and many others most assuredly gave rise to an uplifting representation of the New Woman. Visible in the city's schools, churches, and community centers, this powerful force for change adeptly channeled defiance, cultivated courage, and compelled a recognition of her rights by breathing deep, standing tall, and sometimes posing like a Grecian statue, with strength in her center and wings to her heels.

Chapter 4, in part, is a reprint of material as it appears in "Breathing Power and Poise: Black Women's Movements for Self-Expression and Health, 1880s-1900s," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 39, no. 1 (2020): 5–46. The dissertation author was the sole author of this article.

EPILOGUE

For All Practical Purposes

(Mis)Remembering "Ladies' Gymnastics"

In the 1920s, when physical educators began writing the first histories of their profession, the verdict on American Delsartism was rather blunt. "The fad of Delsarteanism barely outlived the nineties. It left almost no trace in either art or education."[1] This characterization persisted for several decades. In 1969, an updated version of the same text added a brief explainer to this reasoning. "Without sound principles back of it, this system of "relaxing, 'energizing,' and deep-breathing exercises augmented by poses to denote various emotions" proved but a fad, and it soon died out although it enjoyed much acclaim in its day."[2]

Not surprisingly, the women who had taken seriously the practices and instruction of American Delsartism recorded rather different assessments. This was certainly true of Gwyneth King Roe (1868-1968), a long-time collaborator and co-teacher with Emily Bishop. Having been involved with the movement from the early 1880s, she had witnessed many of its successes, twists, and turns. At age fifteen, after enjoying "greater ease and harmony" as a result of her classes with Emily Bishop, Roe was among those whose Christmas holiday of 1885 was brightened by the publication of Genevieve Stebbins' *Delsarte System of Expression*.[3] When Bishop organized and led the Delsarte Department at the Chautauqua Institute from 1888 to the early 1900s, Gwyneth King Roe was there every step of the way—assisting and teaching classes

---

[1] Emmett A. Rice, *A Brief History of Physical Education*, 1st edition (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1926), 182-183.

[2] Emmett A. Rice, John L. Hutchinson, Mabel Lee, eds. *A Brief History of Physical Education*, 5th edition (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969), 182.

[3] Gwyneth King Roe, unpublished autobiography, box 4, folder 8, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

and witnessing the feelings of liberation women experienced after posing like *Flying Mercury* and *Winged Victory*. She also had the experience of teaching these techniques to a few gentlemen, and delightfully recorded their surprise in learning that these were no "frivolous ladies' gymnastics."[4] In 1892, she had been in the room when François Delsarte's daughter scorned American teachers, and in 1896 she witnessed William James praise Emily Bishop for instructing practical exercises that made good use of modern psychology.[5] Gwyneth King Roe also joined her colleagues in moving beyond the name "Delsarte." From 1899 to the early 1900s, she taught psycho-physical exercises in New York City, advertising her space as a "Studio for Health and Efficiency."[6]

In the subsequent decades, Roe also witnessed her generation's aesthetic exercises show up in new spaces such as silent films and suffrage pageants, in YWCA exercise classes, and in the exuberant modern dance choreographies of Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and many others (see figure 80). She also paid attention to the medical profession's investigations and re-packaging of the relaxation exercises her generation had popularized. Most notably, she kept abreast of Dr. Edmund Jacobson's "Progressive Relaxation," a sequenced routine with acknowledged inspiration from Delsarte-inspired techniques.[7] Perhaps she also recognized the

[4] Gwyneth King Roe, unpublished autobiography, box 4, folder 3, Gwyneth King Roe Papers.

[5] In Emily Bishop's account of Mme. Géraldy's lectures, she noted that one of the few compliments Géraldy gave was directed to Gwyneth King Roe. After "Miss King had finished [her] recitation," Bishop noted, "Madame spoke favorably of her French accent, and delightedly of the *expression of her figure."* Emily M. Bishop, "Delsarte Culture—Shall it be Restricted or Expanded?" *Werner's Voice Magazine* 14 no.4 (March 1892): 62-63. On William James's statement, see Gwyneth King Roe, unpublished autobiography, box 4, folder 3, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

[6] Gwyneth King Roe, unpublished autobiography, box 6, folder 8.

[7] Her personal archives include a pamphlet promoting Edmund Jacobson's Progressive Relaxation techniques. See, Box 7 folder 1, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

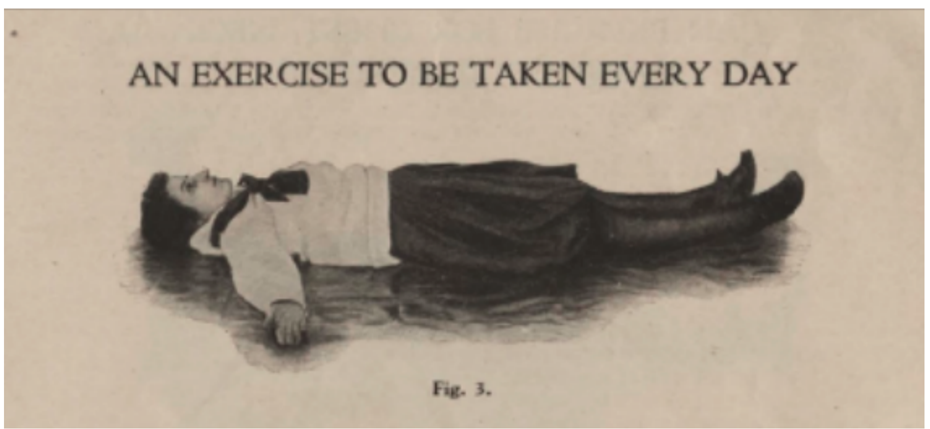


Figure 79 — Relaxation Exercise, 1915
During the 1880s and 1890s, proponents of American Delsartism popularized this relaxation exercise. Throughout the early 1900s, it remained a common feature in women's physical education programming.
Credit: Laura Sharp (Directory of Physical Education for the YWCA), *Beauty and Health Through Exercise*, 1915

rather gendered language that Jacobson used by describing his methods as "scientific" and characterizing women's methods as "practical."[8]

Suffice it to say, Gwyneth King Roe understood well the broad and diverse significance of American Delsartism. Though her archives do not include a direct rebuttal of the "practical" and "faddish claims" that proliferated in physical education textbooks and popularized medical methods, her writings and statements certainly took to task the characterization of American Delsartism as something without "sound principles." In 1968, on the occasion of her 100th birthday, for example, she offered an octogenarian's perspective on the dignity and sincerity of

[8] Edmund Jacobson acknowledged that Delsartean practices (via Annie Payson Call) had been successful in helping "nervous persons cultivate poise." But in boosting his own methods, he also dismissively categorized women's work as "practical rather than scientific." See, Edmund Jacobson, *Progressive Relaxation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1929), 4. This rhetorical distinction was yet another example of the gendered language that delimited women's expertise on matters of psycho–physical culture. I think it also bespoke the broader gendered vulnerability of the mind-body exercises in general, and, is in many ways, compelling evidence of the ways in which this therapeutic modality struggled for inclusion in professionalizing health cultures. Another example of this, I would argue, is also evident in Jacobson's later insistence on deflecting the claim that his "scientific relaxation" was a form of yoga. For details on Jacobson's career and methods, see Kenton Kroker, "The Progress of Introspection in America, 1896-1938), *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 34 (2003): 77-108. This language of credibility certainly warrants greater discussion, especially because in more recent years similar claims arguably also informed the debates surrounding the scientific credibility of social psychologist Amy Cuddy's "Power Posing." On the rise and fall of her work, see Susan Dominus, "When the Revolution Came for Amy Cuddy," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 18, 2017.

her generation's psycho-physical pursuits. "Our theory," she stated, "was based on the principle of relaxation and release from nervous tension, not as an end in itself but as a means to finding the basic centers of feeling and being."[9] After describing how these practices helped women of her era advocate for important social and emotional freedoms, she then drew a connection to similar interests of 1960s youth: What women had accomplished at the closing of the nineteenth century had, in her words, "anticipated" contemporary interests in yoga.[10] It was, in many ways, a stunning observation about the continuity of psycho-physical methods in counter-cultural movements.[11]

For contemporary scholars investigating American Delsartism, Gwyneth King Roe's life and perspective constitutes an index of topics worthy of greater discussion and research. Her centenarian observations also illuminate the cultural context in which scholarly re-assessments of American Delsartism first began. For, in many ways, the social movements of the 1960s gave momentum to broader efforts of uncovering overlooked histories of women's lives and social power.

Working within the emerging academic field of dance history, Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter's 1970s publications on American Delsartism not only corrected misreadings that had become mainstreamed in physical education textbooks, she also placed American Delsartism in

---

[9] "Vivid Memories of a Centenarian," *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), March 29, 1968; box 9, folder 3, Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

[10] Roe referenced "the followers of Guru Dev," also known as Maharishi Yogi. In 1968, newspapers included several stories of his American and British followers, including the Beatles, the Beach Boys, and Mia Farrow. For example, William K. Wyant, "The Go-Go Guru," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 10, 1968.

[11] Roe's observation offers a remarkable confirmation of the connections between American Delsartism and twentieth-century yoga, especially in terms of an interest to validate the perceived connections of mind and body. This is an area of inquiry I hope to develop more as I expand this project.

its rightful position as the cultural origins for modern dance.[12] Through attentive analysis of the intellectual worlds, career accomplishments, and aesthetic activities of Genevieve Stebbins, Emily Bishop, and many more, Ruyter's work established a rich record of women's creativity and their organizational successes in normalizing embodied practices that redefined cultural norms of feminine expressivity at the end of the nineteenth century.

Over the past fifty years, scholars of dance and rhetoric have continued to illuminate the cultural, biographical, and transnational contours of this transformative aesthetic movement. Their impressive and considerate works have proven that far from being a fad with no "sound principles back of it," American Delsartism creatively integrated and embodied modernizing conceptions of psychology, physiology, and aesthetics. Beyond analyzing the movement's pedagogical underpinnings, these works also establish the movement's broad reach into schools, settlement homes, women's clubs, YMCAs, YWCAS, Chautauquas, and more. Such work has further established American Delsartism's consequential role in bringing embodied practices for free self-expression into the everyday life of countless Americans.

This dissertation has endeavored to continue the work of widening the lens on American Delsartism. In addition to teasing out the gendered messaging behind the rhetorical framing of "sound methods," it has sought to place this movement for self-expression and health more firmly within the cultural politics of the Reconstruction Era. In so doing, it has also surfaced a more complicated legacy for the movement's liberatory accomplishments.

[12] Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, *Reformers and Visionaries: The Americanization of the Art of Dance.* New York: Dance Horizons, 1979; Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth Century American Delsartism* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press), 1999.

There should be no doubt that American Delsartism provided countless women with vitalizing experiences of ease and self-assurance in ways that helped them confidently express their voices and compel greater recognition of women's individual and collective rights.

A study of American Delsartism also demonstrates women's centrality in the development of American psychology. For, though women were largely excluded from the academic settings commonly associated with this new field of study, teachers like Hallie Q. Brown, Genevieve Stebbins, and Emily M. Bishop were no mere observers to this emergent "science of the soul." Rather, their development of American Delsartism can rightly be characterized as a simultaneous production of mind-body theories and therapeutic methods.

All this being true, there can also be no doubt that the most publicized aspects of American Delsartism articulated contested visions of citizenship. On balance, white women promoted their Delsartean displays in ways that advocated for new gender ideals that also reinscribed scientific racism and justified segregation. In this context, Black women's psycho-physical demonstrations of grace and poise not only functioned as activities for self-cultivation, they also signified political claims of self-possession and citizenship. Moreover, that American Delsartism advanced racialized conceptions about nervousness and ease further underscores the movement's impact on the era's divestments from equitable systems of public health.

Such outcomes demonstrate just a few of the ways that American Delsartism offers a vital space for ongoing scholarly inquiries regarding the embodied politics of the Reconstruction Era. For, as these pages have hopefully made clear, the varied and widespread nature of this psycho-physical movement for self-expression and health rather profoundly—and consequentially—shaped American's beliefs about whose voices mattered and where and how they should be heard.

APPENDIX

A Pedagogical Lineage of Boston University School of Oratory

Lewis B. Monroe opened the Boston University School of Oratory in 1873. After his death in 1879, Boston University continued offering elocution courses, but they did not continue the School of Oratory.

Though it is far from comprehensive, this chart offers some sense of the school's interests and influence. For a complete listing of faculty and students, see the *Boston University Year Books* from 1873 to 1879.

Notable Faculty, Lecturers, & Instructors				
NAME	**POSITION AT BUSO**	**TIME at BUSO**	**CAREER NOTES**	**PUBLICATIONS**
Lewis B. Monroe (1825-1879)	Dean and Founder; Professor of Philosophy of Expression; Aesthetics of the Voice; Oratorical and Dramatic Action	1873-79	1860: Opened a "Vocal Gymnasium" in Boston 1865-1873, First director of physical education for Boston schools, worked with Dio Lewis 1873-1879: Dean of Boston University School of Oratory	*Manual of Physical and Vocal Training for the Use of Schools and for Private Instruction* (Philadelphia, 1869) Throughout the 1870s, Monroe also published many popular readers for parlor and school recitations. Mary Adams Currier recalled reciting from his text, *The Fifth Reader* (1871) at Boston University.
A. Graham Bell (1847-1922)	Professor of Visible Speech, a phonetic alphabet created by his father, A. Melville Bell	1873-79	Conducted experiments in voice transfer over wire while a professor at BU. Debuted telephone at 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.	
J. Wesley Churchill (1839-1900)	Professor of Rhetoric; Expressive Reading; Lecture and Sermon Delivery; Bible Reading	1873-74 1877-79	Taught elocution at Andover Theological Seminary from 1868 and for many years thereafter.	
Henry N. Hudson (1814-1886)	Lecturer, Shakespeare	1873-74 1877-79	Shakespeare critic[1]	Published many critical editions of Shakespeare plays.
Bronson Alcott (1799-1888)	Lecturer	1877-79	Prominent Educator and reformer, father of Louisa May Alcott.	Authored several pedagogical and philosophical texts.

[1] John Stafford, "Henry Norman Hudson and the Whig Use of Shakespeare," *PMLA* 66, no. 5 (1951): 649–61.

Notable Faculty, Lecturers, & Instructors				
NAME	**POSITION AT BUSO**	**TIME at BUSO**	**CAREER NOTES**	**PUBLICATIONS**
Henry W. Beecher (1813-1887)	Lecturer	1877-79	Prominent minister, well-known for his oratorical skills. Brother of Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe.	Authored several philosophical and religious texts.
A. Melville Bell (1819-1905)	Lecturer, Defects of Public Speakers	1877-79	Professor of Vocal Physiology at the University of Edinburgh and the University of London	*Visible Speech, the Science of Universal Alphabetics* (London, 1867)
Moses T. Brown (1827-1900)	Lecturer, specialist in the literature of Charles Dickens	1877-79	1866-1890: Professor of Oratory at Tufts University 1884-1890: Established and taught at Boston School of Oratory[2]	Wrote several articles in *Werner's Magazine,* including "The New Elocution," *Werner's Magazine,* 5, no. 1 (January 1882): 1-2.
Joseph Rhodes Buchanan (1814-1889)	Lecturer, Physiology of Expression	1877-79	1851-1856: Professor of physiology at the Eclectic Medical Institute of Cincinnati, Ohio	*Therapeutic Sarcognomy (Boston, 1891)* *Manual of Psychometry* (Boston, 1893)
Ephraim Cutter (1832-1917)	Lecturer, Laryngoscope	1877-79	1881-1901: Boston based U.S. Physician	Published medical articles on laryngology.
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)	Lecturer, Eloquence and Oratory	1877-79	Prominent lecturer and philosopher, social leader	Author of many philosophical texts, including an 1870 essay titled "Eloquence."
James T. Field (1817-1881)	Professor of English Literature	1877-79	Prominent Boston-based publisher, *Ticknor and Fields*.	Among other things, his firm published *The Atlantic Monthly* and many texts by well-known New England authors.

[2] "Moses True Brown," *Werner's Magazine* 26, no. 1 (September 1900): 172-173; Marion Howard, "Prof. Moses True Brown," *The Granite Monthly* 14, no. 4 (April 1892): 97-100.

Notable Faculty, Lecturers, & Instructors				
NAME	**POSITION AT BUSO**	**TIME at BUSO**	**CAREER NOTES**	**PUBLICATIONS**
Mary A. Livermore (1820-1905)	Lecturer, Topics of Interest	1877-79	Popular lecturer, reformer, journalist, leader in the U.S. Sanitary Commission. 1868: co-founded the Chicago Sorosis Club. 1869: co-founded the American Woman Suffrage Association 1878-1895: President of the Association for the Advancement of Women.	Wrote many reform-minded articles and texts, several of which documented women's history and advocated for women's rights.
John D. Philbrook (1818-1886)	Lecturer, Topics of Interest	1877-79	1856-1878: Superintendent of Boston Public Schools	Author of several educational texts and articles, including *The American Union Speaker* (Boston, 1865)
Robert R. Raymond (1813-1887)	Professor, Delineation of Shakespearian Characters	1875-79	1840s-1870s: Taught at Brooklyn Collegiate and Polytechnic Institute. After Lewis B. Monroe's death in 1879, he established a private school Boston School of Oratory.[3]	*The Patriotic Speaker* (New York, 1866) *Melody in Speech* (New York, 1880)
Theodore Weld (1803-1895)	Lecturer, Dramatic Art	1877-79	Prominent abolitionist, husband of Angelina Grimké	*American Slavery, As It Is* (New York, 1839).

[3] "Robert Raikes Raymond," *The Voice* 10, no. 12 (December 1888): 201

Notable Faculty, Lecturers, & Instructors				
NAME	**POSITION AT BUSO**	**TIME at BUSO**	**CAREER NOTES**	**PUBLICATIONS**
Steele MacKaye (1842-1895)	Lecturer, Aesthetics and Dramatic Art, especially the theories of François Delsarte	1877-79	Playwright, actor, theater manager 1869: Studied with François Delsarte 1870s: Delivered several lectures about Delsarte throughout New England 1880s: established three theaters in New York City. Co-founded Lyceum Theatre school with Franklin H. Sargent	Never published instructional manuals, but wrote some articles in *Werner's Magazine.* Known for his plays, *Won at Last* (1877) and *Hazel Kirke* (1880)
Genevieve Stebbins (1857-1934)	Assisted J. Steele MacKaye as an instructor of Delsarte's theories of expression. Stebbins also studied voice with Lewis B. Monroe and Mary S. Thompson	1877-79	1870s: Pursued acting career, began teaching lessons of expression to women's clubs 1880s: Published the first American-authored Delsarte manuals and performed "Delsarte Matinees" in New York City. 1892-1906: Owned and taught at the New York School of Expression	*Delsarte System of Expression* (New York, 1885) *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture* (New York, 1888) *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (New York, 1888) *Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training* (New York, 1898) Stebbins also published several articles in *Werner's Magazine.*

Notable Students and Graduates of BUSO

Note: The School of Oratory offered a certificate of graduation at the competition of two years of study. Some students also completed a special third year of study. Additionally, a few students also took on roles as instructors, as noted below.

NAME	HOME	YEARS ENROLLED	CAREER NOTES	PUBLICATIONS
Jennie E. Ireson (1852-1928)	Boston, MA	1873-75 1877-78	Taught elocution at Wellesley, the Framingham State Normal School, Newton High School[4]	
Henry W. Smith (1849-_)	Williamstown, MA	1873-75, Instructor, 1877-78	Professor of Elocution at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1878 until 1911 (at least).[5]	
Mary S. Thompson (1850-192?)	Princeton, IL	1873-75, Instructor, 1876-79	1880s: Collaborator with Genevieve Stebbins, together they perform several "Delsarte matinees" in New York City. 1890s-early 1900s: Taught private elocution classes in New York City.[6]	*Rhythmical Gymnastics: Vocal and Physical*. (New York: E. S. Werner, 1892). Thompson also published several articles in *Werner's Magazine.*
Mary A. Currier (1833-1912)	New London, CT	1873-74 1878-79	1860s: Teacher in New Hampshire and Massachusetts common schools, studied elocution with Lewis B. Monroe 1875-1896: Professor of Elocution at Wellesley (short break when she married in late 1870s)	"The Past and Future of Elocution," *Proceedings of the Second Annual National Association of Elocutionists* (Chicago, 1893): 127-128.

[4] "Miss Jennie E. Ireson," *The Boston Globe,* December 4, 1928.

[5] *After Forty Years: Class of Sixty-Nine at Williams College* (Mineola, New York, 1911), 78.

[6] "Mary Sophia Thompson," in *Woman of the Century,* ed. Frances Willard and Mary A. Livermore (Buffalo: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893), 713-714; "Mary S. Thompson," *Werner's Magazine* 16, no. 5 (May 1894): 194.

Notable Students and Graduates of BUSO Note: The School of Oratory offered a certificate of graduation at the competition of two years of study. Some students also completed a special third year of study. Additionally, a few students also took on roles as instructors, as noted below.				
NAME	**HOME**	**YEARS ENROLLED**	**CAREER NOTES**	**PUBLICATIONS**
Charles L. Woodworth	Watertown, MA	1873-75	1875-1880s: Professor of Elocution at Johns Hopkins.[7]	
Lucius Alonzo Butterfield (1846-1922)	Wilmington, VT	1873-75, 1877-78; Instructor, 1878-79	1880s: Professor of Elocution at Dartmouth.[8]	*Manual of Elocution and Voice Culture* (Brattleboro, 1874) *Manual of Practice in Oratory and Expression* (Boston, 1887)
Louis C. Force	Drakesville, NJ	1874-76	1870s-1880s: Elocution teacher in Cleveland Public Schools.[9]	
Anna N. Kendall (1857-1939)	Lamoille, IL	1875-77	Leader in Women's Club movement, Philanthropist.[10]	
Anna Baright (Curry) (1854-1924)	Poughkeepsie, NY	1875-77; Instructor, 1878-79	Opened an elocution school in Boston in 1879. After marrying Samuel Silas curry in 1882, they ran The School of Expression until the 1920s. It is now Curry College.	

[7] *Johns Hopkins University Circulars*, 5, no. 44 (November 1885):16

[8] *Catalogue of Dartmouth College* (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1889), 6.

[9] *Ohio Educational Monthly* 27 (1878): 395.

[10] "Pioneer Lady of Bureau County Dead at Age of 92," Bureau County Tribune (Princeton, Illinois), January 20, 1939.

Notable Students and Graduates of BUSO Note: The School of Oratory offered a certificate of graduation at the competition of two years of study. Some students also completed a special third year of study. Additionally, a few students also took on roles as instructors, as noted below.				
NAME	**HOME**	**YEARS ENROLLED**	**CAREER NOTES**	**PUBLICATIONS**
Samuel Silas Curry (1847-1921)	Boston, MA	1876-79	Married Anna Baright in 1882. Together they ran The School of Expression until the 1920s. In the late 1890s, he also taught at Harvard, the Chautauqua in Monteagle, TN, and at a School of Expression in Asheville, NC.	*Province for Expression,* (Boston, 1891) *Lessons in Vocal Expression* (Boston, 1895)
Charles W. Emerson (1837-1908)	Boston, MA	1875-77	1880: Opened the Boston Conservatory of Elocution, Oratory, and Dramatic Art. 1881, he changed the name to Monroe Conservatory of Oratory, in honor of Lewis B. Monroe. In 1890, he changed the name again to Emerson College of Oratory. The school is still active, operating under the name Emerson College.	*Physical Culture of the Emerson College of Oratory* (Boston, 1891) *Psycho Vox: Or, the Emerson System of Voice Culture* (Boston, 1897)
Hattie Augusta Prunk (1840-1911)	Indianapolis, IN	1877-79	Opened Indiana-Boston School of Expression in 1878, which she ran until her death	
Frances Stuart (Parker) (1847-1899)	Boston, MA	1875-78, Instructor, 1879		*Order of Exercises in Elocution, Given at Cook County Normal School* (Chicago, 1887) *Dress, and How to Improve It* (Chicago, 1897)

Notable Students and Graduates of BUSO				
Note: The School of Oratory offered a certificate of graduation at the competition of two years of study. Some students also completed a special third year of study. Additionally, a few students also took on roles as instructors, as noted below.				
NAME	**HOME**	**YEARS ENROLLED**	**CAREER NOTES**	**PUBLICATIONS**
Peter S. Robertson (1846-1925)	Doune, Scotland	1877-78 (completed one year)	Taught elocution in Ohio during the 1870s -1880s By 1900, he is listed in the census as a preacher in Cincinnati.	*Robertson's Manual of Elocution and Philosophy of Expression* (Dayton, Ohio, 1880)
Katherine Westendorf	Cincinnati, OH	1875-77	Instructor of Elocution at Ohio State University, 1885-1887 Ran a School of Elocution in Cincinnati during the 1890s	
Georgia Eva Cayvan (1857-1906)	Boston, MA	1874-76	Regarded in her time as "the brainiest actress on the American stage." Member of NYC Sorosis club, in 1899 she was the Officer of Drama	
Henrietta Crane Russell Hovey (1849-1918)	Boston, MA	1875-76 (completed one year)	Began teaching expression in the late 1870s, influential in several women's schools and society clubs. Known especially as an important teacher for Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis	*Yawning* (1891)
Harriet E. Stanton [Blatch] (1856-1940)	Tanfly, NJ	1878-79 (completed one year)	Lecturer, Suffragist leader, Daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton	*Mobilizing Women's Power* (New York, 1918)

Notable Individuals Who Studied with Students/Graduates of Boston University School of Oratory NOTE: For additional details on the many students who studied with Genevieve Stebbins, see Kelly Mullan, "Harmonic Gymnastics and Somatics: A Genealogy of Ideas," *Currents: Journal of the Body-Mind Centering Association* (2016): 26-27.				
NAME	**TEACHER from BUSO**	**YEARS OF STUDY**	**CAREER NOTES**	**PUBLICATIONS**
Anna Randall-Diehl (1833-1909)	Genevieve Stebbins	Late 1870s, early 1880s	1860s: Teacher of elocution at Whitewater and Platteville Normal Schools in Wisconsin. 1870s: Early member of NYC Sorosis Club, Late 1870s: Chairwoman on Education for Sorosis	*Exercises in Elocution* (Albany, 1868) *Reading and Elocution: Theoretical and Practical* (New York, 1869) *Elocutionary Studies and New Recitations* (New York, 1887) *A Practical Delsarte Primer* (Syracuse, 1890) Editor of the *American Shakespeare Magazine* Editor of *The Quarterly Elocutionists*
Emily Mulkin Bishop (1858-1916)	Henrietta Crane [Russell Hovey], Steele MacKaye, Genevieve Stebbins	Early 1880s	Director of Americanized Delsarte classes at the Chautauqua Institute, 1888-early 1900s	*Americanized Delsarte: Self-Expression and Health* (New York: 1892, 1895) Also authored articles in *Werner's Magazine*
Hallie Q. Brown (1849-1949)	Peter Robertson in Dayton, Ohio	1878-1880	Prominent elocutionist in the 1880s and early 1900s; Lady's Principal at Tuskegee Institute, 1892-93; Elocution Professor at Wilberforce University, 1893-1920s; Founding Member and Leader of National Association Colored Women's Clubs	*Bits and Odds for My Friends* (Ohio, 1880) Elocution and Physical Culture (Ohio, c. 1910) *Homespun Heroines* (Ohio: 1926)
Annie Payson Call (1853-1940)	Henrietta Crane Russell at Lasell Seminary	Early 1880s	Instructor at Lasell Seminary through 1880s Author of popular relaxation and "nerve-training" manuals through the early 1900s	*Power Through Repose* (Boston, 1891) *Nevers and Commons Sense* (Boston, 1909)

Notable Individuals Who Studied with Students/Graduates of Boston University School of Oratory NOTE: For additional details on the many students who studied with Genevieve Stebbins, see Kelly Mullan, “Harmonic Gymnastics and Somatics: A Genealogy of Ideas,” *Currents: Journal of the Body-Mind Centering Association* (2016): 26-27.				
NAME	**TEACHER from BUSO**	**YEARS OF STUDY**	**CAREER NOTES**	**PUBLICATIONS**
Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta (1815-1891)	Genevieve Stebbins	Began lessons in 1888	Antebellum society leader in New York City, held an important literary salon in her home. An early influencer of Sorosis, She co-sponsored Stebbins’ NYC Delsarte Matinee in 1887.	*Memoirs of Anne C.L. Botta* (New York, 1894)
Minnie M. Jones (1860-?)	Genevieve Stebbins	1880s	Operated a school of expression in Philadelphia from the 1880s through early 1900s	
Anna Morgan (1851-1936)	Steele MacKaye and Moses True Brown	1880s	Lyceum Speaker and Drama teacher at New Chicago Opera House in the 1880s; Owned her own Conservatory in Chicago in the 1890s-early 1900s.	*An Hour with Delsarte* (Boston, 1889)
Lillian Parker Thomas Fox (1854-1917)	Harriet Augusta Prunk at Indiana-Boston School of Expression	Early 1890s	Did elocutionary tours in the Midwest during the 1890s; Journalist at *Indianapolis Freeman,* and *Indianapolis News*, 1890s-early 1900s Founded Woman’s Improvement Club in 1903 and Indiana State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs in 1904	Journalist for *Indianapolis Freeman,* and *Indianapolis News*

Notable Individuals Who Studied with Students/Graduates of Boston University School of Oratory NOTE: For additional details on the many students who studied with Genevieve Stebbins, see Kelly Mullan, "Harmonic Gymnastics and Somatics: A Genealogy of Ideas," *Currents: Journal of the Body-Mind Centering Association* (2016): 26-27.				
NAME	**TEACHER from BUSO**	**YEARS OF STUDY**	**CAREER NOTES**	**PUBLICATIONS**
Coralie Franklin Cook (1861-1942)	Charles Emerson at Emerson School of Oratory	1901	1881: Graduated from National School of Elocution, Philadelphia. 1882-1893: Elocution Teacher at Storer College; 1893-1898: Taught elocution at Howard University. Later, a member of Washington, DC Board of Education. Leader in the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs and the NAACP	
Adrienne McNeil Herndon (1869-1910)	Silas and Anna Curry at their Boston School of Expression; Franklin H. Sargent at the New York School of Dramatic Arts	Late 1890s and early 1900s	Teacher of Elocution at Atlanta University from 1895-1910, the university's first Black female faculty member. Colleague of W.E.B. Du Bois, helped sponsor early meetings of the Niagara Movement	"Our Work in Elocution," *The Bulletin of Atlanta University* (May 1897): 1
Ada Crogman (1886-1983)	Charles Emerson at Emerson School of Oratory	Gradu-ated in 1909	Mid-1910s: Taught Expression and Physical Culture at Tennessee A & I Institute; Civic leader, pageant director, and journalist in Kansas City, Missouri.	Author of the pageant *Milestones of the Race*, 1920s
Elizabeth Lumpkin [Glen] (1881-1963)	Samuel Silas Curry and Anna Baright Curry at the Curry School of Expression in Boston	Late 1890s	Late 1890s: Professor of Speech at Winthrop Normal and Industrial College (Rock Hill, SC) Leader of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in Asheville, NC	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival Collections

Flanner House Records, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

Gwyneth King Roe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society

Indiana YWCA of the U.S.A Records, Indiana Historical Society

La Follette Family Papers, Library of Congress

Physical Education Records, Hampton University Archives

Seidl Society Records, Brooklyn Historical Society

The MacKaye Family Papers, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth

The Papers of Ada Crogman Franklin, Black Archives of Mid-America

Winifred R. Tilden Papers, RS 10/7/11, Special Collections Department, Iowa State University

Woman's Improvement Club Records, 1909-1965, Indiana Historical Society

YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College

Periodicals

American Physical Education Review

Boston University Year Book

Physical Education (a professional journal of the YMCA)

Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education

Proceedings of the National Association of Elocutionists

Werner's Magazine, also published as: *The Voice*, *Werner's Voice Magazine*

Woman's Journal

Newspapers

This dissertation draws extensively from many local newspapers accessed through databases of Newspapers.com, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, African American Newspapers Readex Database, America's Historical Newspapers, and the Hoosier State Chronicles.

Census Records

U.S. census records accessed through Ancestry.com are the source of biographical details for many of the individuals who appear in this dissertation.

Psycho-Physical Culture Manuals

Bishop, Emily. *Self-Expression and Health: Americanized Delsarte Culture*, 5th edition. Chautauqua, New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1895.

Brown, Hallie Q. *Elocution and Physical Culture: Training for Students Teachers Readers Public Speakers.* Wilberforce, Ohio: Homewood Cottage, c. 1910.

Brown, Hallie Q. *Bits and Odds: A Choice Selection of Recitations for School, Lyceum, and Parlor Entertainments*. Xenia, OH: Chew Press. Print.

Emerson, Charles Wesley. *Physical Culture of the Emerson College of Oratory*. Boston. Boston: Emerson College of Oratory Publishing Department, 1891.

Monroe, Lewis B. *Manual of Physical and Vocal Training.* Philadelphia: Cowperthwait & Co., 1869.

Robertson, Peter. *Robertson's Manual of Elocution and Philosophy of Expressio*n. Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1880.

Stebbins, Genevieve. *Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression*. New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1885.

Stebbins, Genevieve. *Delsarte System of Expression, 6th edition*. New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1902.

Stebbins, Genevieve. *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture*. New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1888.

Stebbins, Genevieve. *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics*. New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1893.

Stebbins, Genevieve. *The Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training.* New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1898.

Thompson, Mary S. *Rhythmical Gymnastics*. New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1892.

Primary Source Publications (Selection)

Astley, Norman. *The New York School of Expression Prospectus.* New York: Edgar Werner, 1893.

Croly, Jane C. *Sorosis: Its Origin and History.* New York: J.J. Little & Co, 1886.

Currier, Mary Adams. "The Past and Future of Elocution," *Proceedings of the Second Annual National Association of Elocutionists* (Chicago: NAE, 1893), 127-142.

MacKaye, Percy. *Epoch: The Life of Steele MacKaye.* New York, Boni & Liveright, 1927.

Majors, M.A., ed. *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities.* Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry Printers, 1893.

Parker, Frances Stuart. *Reminiscences and Letters*. Chicago, Privately Printed, 1907.

Scruggs, L.A. *Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character.* Raleigh, North Carolina: L.A. Scruggs, Publisher, 1893.

Wilber, Elsie M. ed. *Werner's Directory of Elocutionists, Readers, Lecturers, and Other Public Instructors and Entertainers.* New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1878.

Wilbor, Elsie M. "Delsarte Methods: A Glimpse at the Work of Mrs. Genevieve Stebbins Thompson." *Werner's Voice Magazine* 13, no. 2 (February 1891): 29-31.

Secondary Sources

Albanese, Catherine L. *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Allen, Robert C. *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Alter, Joseph. *Yoga in Modern India: The Body Between Science and Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Anderson, James D. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Andrick, John M. "Delsartean Hypnosis for Girls' Bodies and Minds: Annie Payson Call and the Lasell Seminary Nerve Training Controversy." *History of Psychology* 15, no. 2 (2012): 124-144.

Banaji, Paige V. "Womanly Eloquence and Rhetorical Bodies: Regendering the Public Speaker through Physical Culture," In *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education: American Women Learn to Speak*, Edited by David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs, 154-176. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Barke, Megan, Rebecca Fribush and Peter N. Stearns. "Nervous Breakdown in 20th-Century American Culture." *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 3 (Spring, 2000): 565-584.

Bay, Mia. "The Battle for Womanhood Is the Battle for Race: Black Women and Nineteenth-Century Racial Thought." in *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women*, edited by Mia Bay, Farah J. Griffin, Martha S. Jones, Barbara D. Savage, 75-92. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

Bay, Mia. *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Bender, Courtney. "Review of *Healing Gods: Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Christian American* by Candy Gunther Brown." *Church History* 83, no. 4 (2014): 1097–1100.

Bender, Courtney. *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Berch, Bettina. *The Woman Behind the Lens: The Life and Work of Frances Benjamin Johnson, 1864-1952.* Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2010.

Bindman, David. *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Bittel, Carla. "Testing the Truth of Phrenology: Knowledge Experiments in Antebellum American Culture of Science and Health." *Medical History* (2019): 352-374.

Bittel, Carla. "Woman, Know Thyself: Producing and Using Phrenological Knowledge in 19th-Century America." *Centaurs* 55 (2013): 104-130.

Black, Alex W. "Abolitionism's Resonant Bodies: The Realization of African American Performance." *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2011): 619–39.

Blair, Karen J. *The Torchbearers: Women and their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Blair, Karen. *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914.* Teaneck, New Jersey: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980.

Blanchard, Mary Warner. *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Bordelon, Suzanne. "'Please Cherish My Own Ideals and Dreams about the School of Expression': The Erasure of Anna Baright Curry." In *Remembering Women Differently:*

Refiguring Rhetorical Work, edited by Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Helen Gaillet Bailey, 118–34. University of South Carolina Press, 2019.

Bordelon, Suzanne. "'Private Letter' for Public Audiences: The Complexities of Ethos in Louise Clappe's *The Shirley Letters from the California Mine*s, 1851-1852." *Rhetoric Review* 37, no. 8 (December 2017): 1-13.

Bordelon, Suzanne. "Embodied Ethos and Rhetorical Accretion: Genevieve Stebbins and the Delsarte System of Expression." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2016): 105-130.

Bordelon, Suzanne. "Female Embodiment, Contradiction, and Ethos Negotiations in Genevieve Stebbins' Late Nineteenth-Century Statue posing Arguments. *Rhetoric Review* 38, no. 1 (2019): 23-38.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Branson, Susan. "Phrenology and the Science of Race in Antebellum America." *Early American Studies* (Winter 2017): 164-193.

Braude, Ann. *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989.

Braun, Lundy. *Breathing Race into the Machine: The Surprising Career of the Spirometer from Plantation to Genetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Briggs, Laura. "The Race of Hysteria: 'Overcivilization' and the 'Savage' Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology." *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2000): 246-73.

Brooks, Daphne A. *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 186-1910.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Brooks, Lynn Matluck. "Race, Rank, and Reform in Antebellum Philadelphia Social Dance." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 144, no. 2 (2020): 147–78.

Brown, Candy Gunther. *The Healing Gods: Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Christian America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Brown, Jayna. *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Buell, Lawrence. *Emerson.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2004.

Burns, Judy. "The Culture of Nobility/The Nobility of the Self-Cultivation." In *Moving Words: Re-Writing Dance*," edited by Gay Morris, 203-226. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Burns, Sarah. *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Cahill, Patricia A. "Adrienne Herndon's Homeplaces: Shakespeare and Black Resistance in Atlanta, c.1906." *Journal of American Studies* 54 no.1 (2020): 51-58.

Cain, Mary Cathryn. "The Art and Politics of Looking White: Beauty Practice among White Women in Antebellum America." *Winterthur Portfolio* 42, no. 1 (2008): 27–50.

Campbell, Brad. "The Making of `American': Race and Nation in Neurasthenic Discourse." *History of Psychiatry* 18, no. 2 (June 2007): 157–78.

Campbell, Jack K. "Colonel Parker's New Woman and the New Education." *McGill Journal of Education* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1975): 150-168.

Caplan, Eric. *Mind Games: American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy.* Berkley: The University of California Press, 1998.

Capps, Donald. "Relaxed Bodies, Emancipated Minds, and Dominant Calm." *Journal of Religion and Health* 48 (September 2009): 368.

Cardon, Nathan. *A Dream of the Future: Race, Empire, and Modernity at the Atlanta and Nashville World's Fairs.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Carter, Alexandra and Rachel Fensham, editors. *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.

Carter, Paul A. *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age.* DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971.

Cayleff, Susan E. *Wash and Be Healed: The Water-Cure Movement and Women's Health. Philadelphia.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.

Chapman, Mary. "'Living Pictures': Women and Tableaux Vivants in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture." *Wide Angle* 18, no. 3 (1996): 22-52.

Cmiel, Kenneth. *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight Over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America.* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990.

Cobb, Jasmine Nichole. *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century*. New York: New York University Press, 2015.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Conquergood, Dwight. "Rethinking Elocution: The Trope of the Talking Book and Other Figures of Speech." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2000): 325-341.

Cooke, Flora J. "Colonel Francis W. Parker: His Influence on Education." *Schools: Studies in Education* 2, no. 1 (2005): 157–70.

Cooper, Brittney C. *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017.

Corbould, Claire. *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919-1939.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Cott, Nancy. *Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

Cott, Nancy. *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Cox, Karen L. *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture.* Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003.

Cox, Karen L. *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South was Created in American Popular Culture.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Crocker, Ruth. *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

Cunningham, Patricia A. *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics, Health, and Art.* Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003.

Daly, Ann. *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1995.

Daniher, Colleen Kim. "Looking at Pauline Johnson: Gender, Race, and Delsartism's Legible Body." *Theatre Journal* 72, no. 1 (March 2020): 1-20.

Dawson, Melanie V. *Emotional Reinventions: Realist-Era Representations Beyond Sympathy.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015.

Dawson, Melanie V. *Laboring to Pay: Home Entertainment and the Spectacle of Middle- Class Cultural Life 1850-1920*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005.

De Michelis, Elizabeth. *A History of Modern Yoga: Pantanjali and Western Esotericism*. New York: Continuum, 2004.

Desmond, Jane C. "Dancing Out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's 'Radha' of 1908." *Signs* 17 (1991): 28-49.

Desmond, Jane. "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies of Dance." In *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, edited by Jane Desmond, 29-54. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

Dominus, Susan. “When the Revolution Came for Amy Cuddy.” *The New York Times Magazine*, October 18, 2017.

Donawerth, Jane. *Rhetorical Theory by Women Before 1900: An Anthology*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002.

Donegan, Jane B. *Hydropathic Highway to Health: Women and Water-Cure in Antebellum America.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Douglass, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977.

Dror, Otniel E. “Creating the Emotional Body: Confusion, Possibilities, and Knowledge,” In *An Emotional History of the United States*, edited by Peter Stearns, 173-196. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Dudden, Faye E. *Women in the American Theater: Actresses and Audiences, 1790-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Dyson, Stephen L. *Ancient Marbles to American Shores: Classical Archeology in the United States*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

Eastman, Carolyn. *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public after the Revolution*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Elbert, Monika M. “Striking a Historical Pose: Antebellum Tableaux Vivants, ‘Godey’s Illustrations, and Margaret Fuller’s Heroines.” *The New England Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (June 2002): 235-275.

Enstad, Nan. *Ladies of Labor Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Century.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Erenberg, Lewis. *Steppin’ Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981.

Erkkila, Betsy. *Walt Whitman Among the French: Poet and Myth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Evans, Stephanie Y. *Black Women’s Yoga History: Memoirs of Inner Peace*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021.

Fahey, Joseph Francis. “Americanized Delsarte Culture as Physical and Political Expression: How American Women Shaped François Delsarte’s System of Applied Aesthetics into a Progressive Force for Social Reform, Performance, and Professionalism.” PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2000.

Fahey, Joseph. "Quiet Victory: The Professional Identity American Women Forged Through Delsartism," in *Essays on François Delsarte,* 43-84. Claremont, California: Pomona College Theatre Department for the Claremont Colleges, 2005.

Fahs, Alice. *Out on Assignment: Newspaper Women and the Making of Modern Public Space.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Farmer, Jared. "Americanasana," *Reviews in American History* 40 (2012): 145-158.

Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. New York: Vintage, 2009.

Ferguson, Earline Rae. "A Community Affair: African American Women's Club Work in Indianapolis, 1879-1917." PhD. diss. Indiana University, 1997.

Ferguson, Earline Rae. "African American Clubwomen and the Indianapolis NAACP, 1912-1914," In *Stepping Forward: Black Women in Africa and the Americas*, edited by Catherine Higgs, Barbara A. Moss, Earline Rae Ferguson, 73-84. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002.

Ferguson, Earline Rae. "Lillian Thomas Fox: Indianapolis Journalist and Community Leader." In *Indiana's African American Heritage: Essays from Black History News & Notes*, edited by Wilma L. Gibbs, 139-150. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1993.

Ferguson, Earline Rae. "The Woman's Improvement Club of Indianapolis: Black Women Pioneers in Tuberculosis Work, 1903–1938." *Indiana Magazine of History* 84, no. 3 (September 1988): 237-261.

Finnegan, Thomas J. "Dr. Dudley Sargent's Summer at Chautauqua: Evangelizing the Gospel of Physical Culture." *New York History* 86, no. 1 (2005): 29–49.

Folk, Holly. *The Religion of Chiropractic: Populist Healing from the American Heartland.* Chicago: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

Foreman, Gabrielle P., Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Patterson, eds. *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021.

Foster, Susan Leigh. *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance.* New York: Routledge, 2010.

Foster, Susan Leigh. *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance.* Berkley: University of California Press, 1988.

Foulkes, Julia. *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2014.

Foxen, Anya P. *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonialism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Modern Yoga.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Franks, Hallie M. "As Nature Formed It: Venus Sculptures and the 'Natural' Waistline in Dress Reform Discourse." *Classical Receptions Journal* 13, no. 2 (April 2021) 253–276.

Fuller, Robert C. *Alternative Medicine and American Religious Life.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Gere, Ann. *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984.

Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Givens, Jarvis R. *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2021.

Glassberg, David. *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

Glenn, Susan. *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Gold, David and Catherine L. Hobbs, *Educating the New Southern Woman: Speech, Writing, and Race at the Public Women's Colleges, 1884-1945.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2014.

Goodwin, Daleah H. "A Torch in the Valley": The Life and Work of Miss Hallie Quinn Brown." PhD diss., The University of Georgia, 2014.

Gosling, F.G. *Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American Medical Community, 1870-1910.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "Notes Towards a Corporeal Feminism." *Australian Feminist Studies,* 2 (Summer, 1987): 1-16.

Hairston, Eric Ashley. *The Ebony Column: Classics, Civilization, and the African American Reclamation of the Wes*t. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2013.

Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South*, 1890-1940. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998.

Hale, Nathan G. *Freud and the Americas: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the United States, 1876-1917.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Haller, John S. *Swedenborg, Mesmer, and the Mind/Body Connection: The Roots of Complementary Medicine.* West Chester, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2010.

Haller, John S. *The History of New Thought: From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel.* West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Press, 2012.

Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

Harrington, Anne. *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals.* New York: W.W. Norton, 2020.

Henderson, Alexa Benson. "The Work and Legacy of Adrienne Elizabeth McNeil Herndon at Atlanta University, 1895–1910." *Phylon* 53, no. 1 (2016): 80-101.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hine, Darlene Clark. *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Hirshbein, Laura D. *American Melancholy: Constructions of Depression in the Twentieth Century.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009.

Hoberman, John. *Black and Blue: The Origins and Consequences of Medical Racism.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Hoganson, Kristin. *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Hohl, Elizabeth Anne. "To Uplift Ourselves and Our Race: The New Negro Woman of the 1890s." PhD diss., Union Institute & University, Cincinnati, Ohio. 2009.

Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. *Wild Unrest: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Making of "The Yellow Wall-Paper."* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Hull, Akasha (Gloria). "Introduction," In *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer*, by Alice Moore-Dunbar Nelson. New York: Prentice Hall, 1996.

Hunter, Tera. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Iverson, Laura Williams. "Conscious Home Exercise for Women: Cultivating a New Mind/Body Practice in the Late Nineteenth Century." MA thesis, Florida State University, 2007.

Jackson, Mark. *The Age of Stress: Science and the Search for Stability.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Johnson, Joan Marie. "'Drill into Us ... the Rebel Tradition': The Contest over Southern Identity in Black and White Women's Clubs, South Carolina, 1898-1930." *The Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 3 (2000): 525–562.

Johnson, Nan. *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life: 1866-1910.* Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois UP, 2002.

Johnston, Robert D., ed. *The Politics of Healing: Histories of Alternative Medicine in Twentieth-Century North America*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Jones, Martha S. *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Jones, Martha S. *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All.* New York: Basic Books, 2020.

Kant, Marion. "German Gymnastics, Modern German Dance, and Nazi Aesthetics." *Dance Research Journal* 48, no. 2 (2016): 4–25.

Karpf, Juanita. "'As with Words of Fire': Art Music and Nineteenth Century African-American Feminist Discourse," *Signs* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 603-632.

Karpf, Juanita. "An Opportunity to Rise: Reinterpreting Esther, The Beautiful Queen." *Black Music Research Journal* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 241-272.

Karpf, Juanita. *Performing Racial Uplift: E. Azalia Hackley and African American Activism in the Postbellum to Pre-Harlem Era*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022.

Kasson, John F. *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1990.

Kasson, Joy. *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth Century American Sculpture.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Kates, Susan. "The Embodied Rhetoric of Hallie Quinn Brown." *College English* 59, no. 1 (1997): 59-71.

Kates, Susan. *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education, 1885-1937*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001.

Kelly, Mary. *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education and Public Life in America's Republic.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Kesselman, Amy. "The 'Freedom Suit': Feminism and Dress Reform in the United States, 1848-1875." *Gender and Society* 5, no. 4 (1991): 495–510.

Kimber, Marian Wilson. *The Elocutionists: Women, Music and the Spoken Word.* Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2017.

Kippola, Karl M. *Acts of Manhood: The Performance of Masculinity on the American Stage, 1828-1865.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012

Klassen, Pamela E. "The Robes of Womanhood: Dress and Authenticity among African American Methodist Women in the Nineteenth Century." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 14, no. 1 (2004): 39-82.

Klassen, Pamela E. *Spirits of Protestantism: Medicine, Healing, and Liberal Christianity.* Berkley: University of California Press, 2011.

Klein, Rachel N. *Art Wars: The Politics of Taste in Nineteenth-Century New York.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.

Klein, Rachel, "Art and Authority in Nineteenth Century New York City: The Rise and Fall of the American Art-Union." *Journal of American History* 81, no. 4 (March 1995): 1534-61.

Knighton, Andrew Lyndon. *Idle Threats: Men and the Limits of Productivity in Nineteenth Century America*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Kraler, Magdalena and Kelly Mullan. "Review of *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonalism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Modern Yoga* by Anya P. Foxen." *Correspondences* 9, no. 1 (2021): 141-147.

Kraler, Magdalena. "Yoga Breath: The Reinvention of Prana and Pranayama in Early Modern Yoga." PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2022.

Krasner, David. *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kremer, Gary R. *Race and Meaning: The African American Experience in Missouri*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2014.

Kroker, Kenton. "The Progress of Introspection in America, 1896-1938." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 34 (2003): 77-108.

Kuriyama, Shigehisa. *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine.* New York: Zone Books, 1999.

Lake, Taylor S. “American Delsartism and the Bodily Discourse of Respectable Womanliness.” PhD diss., The University of Iowa, 2002.

Lake, Taylor S. “The Delsarte Attitude on the Legitimate Stage: Mary Anderson’s Galatea and the Trope of the Classical Body,” *Mime Journal* 23, no. 14 (2005): 113-135.

Lampert, Sara E. “The Perfect Delight of Dramatic Reading: Gertrude Kellogg and the Post-Civil War Lyceum,” In *Thinking Together: Lecturing, Learning, and Difference in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Edited by Angela G. Ray, and Paul Stob, 130-149. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2018.

Lange, Allison K. *Picturing Political Power: Images in the Women’s Suffrage Movement.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020.

Lanier, Doris. “The Early Chautauqua in Georgia,” *Journal of American Culture* 11 no. 3 (Fall 1988): 9-18.

Lasser, Carol. “Conscience and Contradiction: The Moral Ambiguities of Antebellum Reformers Marcus and Rebecca Buffum Spring.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 38, no. 1 (2018): 1-35.

Lears, T.J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Anti-modernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Lee, Mabel. “Physical Education of the Latter Nineteenth Century (1865-1900).” In *A History of Physical Education and Sports in the U.S.A,* 49-130. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1983.

Lee, Mabel. *Memories of a Bloomer Girl*. Washington, D.C.: American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation. 1977.

Lee, Maureen D. *Sissieretta Jones: “The Greatest Singer of Her Race,”1868-1933.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012.

Leloudis, James L. *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Lerner, Gerda. “Early Community Work of Black Club Women.” *The Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (April 1974): 159-60.

Levine, Lawrence. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Lewis, David Levering and Deborah Willis. *A Small Nation of People: W.E.B. Du Bois & African American Portraits of Progress.* New York: Harper Collins, 2003.

Logan, Shirley W. *We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999.

Logan, Shirley Wilson. *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008.

Lorini, Alessandra. *Rituals of Race: American Public Culture and the Search for Racial Democracy*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999.

Lynch, Kelly Jean. "Aesthetic Dance as Woman's Culture in America at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Genevieve Stebbins and the New York School of Expression." *Feminist Modernist Studies* 5, no. 3 (2022): 247-260.

Malamud, Margaret. *African Americans and the Classics: Antiquity, Abolition and Activism.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2019.

Mancini, J.M. *Pre-Modernism: Art-World Change and American Culture from the Civil War to the Armory Show.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Manning, Susan. *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Martin, Francis. "To Ignore Is to Deny: E. W. Kemble's Racial Caricature as Popular Art." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40, no. 4 (2007): 655–82.

Martinez, Katharine. *Philadelphia's Cultural Landscape: The Sartain Family Legacy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.

Mas, Catherine. "She Wears the Pants: The Reform Dress as Technology in Nineteenth-Century America." *Technology & Culture* 58, no. 1 (January 2017): 35–66.

Matthiessen, F.O. *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Mattingly, Carol. *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002.

Mattingly, Carol. *The Temperate Woman: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000.

McArthur, Benjamin. *Actors and American Culture 1880-1920.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.

McCarthy, Kathleen*.* *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

McCray, Lucinda. *Health Culture in the Heartland, 1880-1980: An Oral History.* Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

Mccullough, Jack W. *Living Pictures on the New York Stage.* Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981.

McFarlin, Annjennette Sophie. “Hallie Quinn Brown: Black Woman Elocutionist, 1845-1949.” PhD diss., Washington State University, 1975.

McHenry, Elizabeth. *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African-American Literary Societies.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

Meckel, Richard A. “Henrietta Russell: Delsartean Prophet to the Gilded Age.” *Journal of American Culture* 12 (Spring 1989): 65-78.

Meindl, Maria. “Reading Elsa Gindler: Tracing the Legacy of a Somatics Pioneer.” PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2022.

Melder, Keith E. “Woman's High Calling: The Teaching Profession in America, 1830-1860.” *American Studies* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1972): 19-32.

Merritt, Carole. *The Herndons: An Atlanta Family.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002.

Merritt, Francine. “Werner’s Magazine: Pioneer Speech Journal.” PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1954.

Meyerowitz, Joanne J. *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Moore, Jacqueline M. *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation’s Capital, 1880-1920.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999.

Moore, R. Laurence. “Religion, Secularization and the Shaping of the Culture Industry in Antebellum America.” *American Quarterly* 41 no. 2 (June 1989): 216-242.

Morantz-Sanchez, Regina. “Feminist Theory and Historical Practice: Rereading Elizabeth Blackwell.” *History and Theory* 31, no. 4 (Dec., 1992): 51-59.

Morantz-Sanchez, Regina. *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians and American Medicine*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

Morantz, Regina Markell. “Making Women Modern: Middle Class Women and Health Reform in Nineteenth Century American.” *Journal of Social History* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1977): 490-507.

Mott, Wesley T. “‘America’s Intellectual Morning’: or, How the Transcendentalists Founded Boston University.” *Resources for American Literary Study* 35 (2010): 95-138.

Mullan, Kelly Jean. “European Antecedents to Somatic Movement,” In *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action,* edited by Martha Eddy, 63-82. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2016.

Mullan, Kelly Jean. “Harmonic Gymnastics and Somatics: A Genealogy of Ideas.” *Currents: Journal of the Body-Mind Centering Association* (2016): 16-28.

Mullan, Kelly Jean. “Somatics Herstories: Tracing the Educational Antecedents of Elsa Gindler, Hade Kallmeyer, and Genevieve Stebbins.” *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices* 9, no. 2 (September 2017): 159-178.

Mullan, Kelly Jean. “Somatics: Investigating the Common Ground of Western Body-Mind Disciplines.” *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy: An International Journal for Theory, Research and Practice* 9, no. 4 (2014): 253-265.

Mullan, Kelly Jean. “Forgotten ‘New’ Dancer of New York City’s Gilded Age: Genevieve Lee Stebbins and the Dance as Yet Undreamed.” *Dance Research Journal* 52, no. 3 (2020): 97-117.

Murphy, Jacqueline Shea. *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Nelson, Julie R. “A Subtle Revolution: The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle in Rural Midwestern Towns, 1878-1900.” *Agricultural History* 70, no. 4 (1996): 653-71.

Nheem, Johann N. *Democracy’s Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

Nur Amin, Takiyah. “African American Dance Revisited: Undoing Master Narratives in the Studying and Teaching of Dance History.” In *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies,* edited by Geraldine Morris and Larraine Nicholas, 44-55. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Odom, Selma Landen. “Delsartean Traces in Dalcroze Eurythmics,” *Mime Journal* 23, no. 14 (2005) 136-151.

Ogren, Christine A. “Revitalising Teachers' Bodies: Prescriptions for Rest and Teachers' Summer Activities in the United States, 1880s-1930s.” *Paedagogica Historica* 54, no. 1-2 (2018):154-168.

Ogren, Christine A. “A Large Measure Of Self-Control and Personal Power”: Women Students at State Normal Schools During the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries.” *Women's Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 3/4 (2000): 211-32.

Ogren, Christine A. “Enthusiasm and Mutual Confidence”: Campus Life at State Normal Schools, 1870s-1900s,” In *Rethinking Campus Life: New Perspective in the History of College Students in the United States,* edited by Christine A. Ogren and Marc A. Vanoverbeke, 91-114. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Ogren, Christine A. *The American State Normal School: “An Instrument of Great Good.”* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Oyallon-Koloski, Jenny. “American Delsartism, Gestural Meaning, and Crafting Physical Performance in Early Biograph Films,” paper presented and recorded for Domitor 2020,

accessed March 8, 2023, https://domitor2020.org/en-ca/american-delsartism-gestural-meaning-and-crafting-physical-performance-in-early-biograph-films/

Ottosson, Anders. “One History or Many Herstories? Gender Politics and the History of Physiotherapy's Origins in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries.” *Women’s History Review* (2015): 1-24.

Ottosson, Anders. “The First Historical Movements of Kinesiology: Scientification in the Borderline between Physical Culture and Medicine around 1850.” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 11 (August 2010): 1892-1919.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *The History of White People*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.

Park, Roberta J. “Physiologists, Physicians, and Physical Educators: Nineteenth Century Biology and Exercise, Hygienic and Educative.” *Journal of Sport History* 14, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 28-60.

Park, Roberta J. “Physiology and Anatomy Are Destiny!?: Brains, Bodies and Exercise in Nineteenth Century American Thought.” *Journal of Sport History* 18, no. 1 (1991): 31–63.

Parker, Alison M. “Frances Watkins Harper and the Search for Women’s Interracial Alliances.” In *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, edited by Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth, 145-171. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012.

Patterson, Martha H. *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005.

Peiss, Kathy. “Going Public: Women in Nineteenth-Century Cultural History.” *American Literary History* 3, no. 4 (1991): 817–28.

Peiss, Kathy. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-Century New York.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

Peña, Carolyn Thomas de la. *The Body Electric: How Strange Machines Built the Modern American.* New York: New York University Press, 2003.

Perpener, John O. *African-American Concert Dance: The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

Perry, Imani. *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Pfister, Gertrud. *Gymnastics: A Transatlantic Movement from Europe to America*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Plant, Rebecca Jo. "Preventing the Inevitable: John W. Appel and the Problem of Psychiatric Casualties in the U.S. Army during World War II." In *Science and Emotions after 1945: A Transatlantic Perspective*, edited by Frank Biess and Daniel M. Gross, 209-238. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Pollack, Deborah C. "Atlanta: New South Brilliance Ascending from Embers of Civil War." In *Visual Art and the Urban Evolution of the New South*, 11–62. University of South Carolina Press, 2015.

Polos, Nicholas C. "A Yankee Patriot: John Swett, the Horace Mann of the Pacific." *History of Education Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1964): 17-32.

Preston, Carrie J. *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Putney, Clifford. *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Rabinovitch-Fox, Einav. "[Re]Fashioning the New Woman: Women's Dress, the Oriental Style, and the Construction of American Feminist Imagery in the 1910s." *Journal of Women's History* 27, no. 2 (2015): 14-36.

Ray, Angela G. *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States.* Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2005.

Ray, Angela G., and Stob, Paul, eds. *Thinking Together: Lecturing, Learning, and Difference in the Long Nineteenth Century*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2018.

Reynolds, David S. *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*. New York: Random House, 1996.

Richardson, Robert D. *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism.* New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Rieser, Andrew Chamberlin. *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism, 1874-1920*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Robertson, Nancy. *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA 1906-1946.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010.

Rooks, Noliwe M. *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture That Made Them*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

Rose, Ann C. *Psychology and Selfhood in the Segregated South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

Rosenberg, Charles E. "Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century Medicine: Some Clinical Origins of the Neurosis Construct." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 63 (1989): 185-197.

Rosenberg, Charles E. “The Place of George M. Beard in Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 36, no. 3 (1962): 245-259.

Rosenberg, Charles E. “The Therapeutic Revolution: Medicine, Meaning, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America.” In *The Therapeutic Revolution: Essays in the Social History of American Medicine*, edited by Morris J. Vogel and Charles E. Rosenberg, 3-26. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979.

Rosenberg, Charles E. *Our Present Complaint: American Medicine, Then and Now.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2007.

Rosenberg, Rosalind. *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Ross, Dorothy. *G. Stanley Hall: The Psychologist as Prophet*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

Ross, Janice. *Moving Lessons: Margaret H’Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000.

Rothman, Sheila M. *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in America.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Royster, Jacqueline Jones. *Traces of A Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000.

Rusert, Britt. *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture.* New York: New York University Press, 2017.

Ruyter, Nancy Lee Chalfa. “The Intellectual World of Genevieve Stebbins.” *Dance Chronicle* 11 no. 3 (1988): 381-97.

Ruyter, Nancy Lee Chalfa. *Reformers and Visionaries: The Americanization of the Art of Dance.* New York: Dance Horizons, 1979.

Ruyter, Nancy Lee Chalfa. *The Cultivation of Mind and Body in American Delsartism.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999.

Rydall, Robert. *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism.* New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Salem, Dorothy. *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920.* Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc. 1990

Sappol, Michael. *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Sasson, Diane. *Yearning for the New Age: Laura Holloway-Langford and the Late Victorian Spirituality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.

Satter, Beryl. *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Saumaa, Hiie. "Annie Payson Call's Training in Release and Somatic Imagination." *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 1 (2017): 70–86.

Schaffner, Anna K. *Exhaustion: A History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

Schmeisser, Iris. "Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch Forth Her Hands": Ethiopianism, Egyptomania, and the Arts of the Harlem Renaissance." In *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination*, edited by Geneviève Fabre and Klaus Benesch, 263-286. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004.

Schmidt, Leigh Eric. *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Schoepflin, Rennie B. *Christian Science on Trial: Religious Healing in America.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Schrank, Sarah. "American Yoga: The Shaping of Modern Body Culture in the United States," *American Studies* 53, no. 1 (2014): 169-181.

Schuller, Kyla. *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

Schuster, David G. *Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011.

Shaver, Claude L. "Steele MacKaye and the Delsartean Tradition." In *History of Speech Education in America*, edited by Karl R. Wallace, 202-218. New York: Appleton.

Shaw, Stephanie. *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Shelton, Suzanne. *Divine Dancer: A Biography of Ruth St. Denis*. New York: Doubleday, 1981.

Sicherman, Barbara. "The Uses of a Diagnosis: Doctors, Patients, and Neurasthenia." *Journal of the History of Medicine* (January 1977): 33-54.

Simonson, Mary. *Body Knowledge: Performance, Intermediality, and American Entertainment at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Singleton, Mark. "Salvation through Relaxation: Proprioceptive Therapy and its Relationship to Yoga." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20, no. 3 (2005): 289-304.

Singleton, Mark. *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Sklar, Kathryn Klish. *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America." *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 3 (Sept., 1973): 332-356.

Smith, Mary Jane, "The Fight to Protect Race and Regional Identity within the General Federation of Women's Clubs, 1895-1902." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (2010): 479-513.

Smith, Shawn Michelle. *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Smith, Susan L. *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and tired: Black Women's Health Activism in America, 1890-1950*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.

Smith, Zaide. "What Do We Want History to Do to Us?" in *Kara Walker: Fons Americanus* edited by Clara Kim, 32-53. London: Tate Publishing, 2020.

Sokalaski, J.A. *Pictorial Illusionism: The Theatre of Steele MacKaye.* Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

Starr, Paul. *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. New York: Basic Books, 1982.

Stepan, Nancy Leys and Sander L. Gilman. "Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism." in *The 'Racial' Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future,* edited by Sandra Harding, 170-200. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Streeter, Carrie. "Breathing Power and Poise: Black Women's Movements for Self-Expression and Health, 1880s–1900s." *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 39 no. 1 (2020): 5–46.

Streeter, Carrie. "Exhibiting Scientific Grace: American Delsartism, Black Citizenship, and the Staging of the New South." In *The Articulate Body: Science and Dance in the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Lynn Matluck Brooks and Sariel Golomb. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, forthcoming.

Summers, Martin. "Diagnosing the Ailments of Black Citizenship: African American Physicians and the Politics of Mental Illness, 1895-1940." In *Precarious Prescriptions: Contested Histories of Race and Health in North America*, edited by Laurie B. Green, John McKiernan-González, Martin Summers, 91-114. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Sun-Young Park. *Ideals of the Body: Architecture, Urbanism, and Hygiene in Postrevolutionary Paris*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018.

Suter, Lisa Kay. "The American Delsarte Movement and the New Elocution." PhD diss., Miami University, 2009.

Suter, Lisa Kay. "The Arguments They Wore: The Role of the Neoclassical Toga in American Delsartism." In *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education: American Women Learn to Speak*, edited by David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs, 134-153. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Syman, Stefanie. *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn. *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.

Thomas, Helen. "Physical Culture, Bodily Practices, and Dance in Late Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-century America." *Dance Research* 22, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 185-204.

Thornbrough, Emma Lou. *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 2000.

Todd, Jan. *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful.* Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999.

Tomko, Linda. "Considering Causation and Conditions of Possibility: Practitioners and Patrons on New Dance in Progressive-era America." In *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies,* edited by Geraldine Morris and Larraine Nicholas, 2nd. ed., 148–159. Bloomington: Taylor & Francis, 2017.

Tomko, Linda. *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Unger, Nancy C. *Belle La Follette: Progressive Era Reformer*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Van Osdol, Paige M. "The Women's Elocution Movement in America, 1870-1915." PhD. diss., The Ohio State University, 2012.

Veder, Robin. *Living Line: Modern Art and the Economy of Energy*. Providence: Dartmouth College Press, 2015.

Venet, Wendy Hamand. *A Strong-Minded Woman: The Life of Mary A. Livermore.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005.

Verbrugge, Martha H. *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Verbrugge, Martha. “Knowledge and Power: Health and Physical Education for Women in America,” In *Women, Health and Medicine in America: A Historical Handbook*, edited by Rima D. Apple, 361-382. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990.

Verbrugge, Martha. *Active Bodies: A History of Women’s Physical Education in Twentieth Century America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Vertinsky, Patricia. “From Physical Educators to Mothers of the Dance: Margaret H’Doubler and Martha Hill.” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 7 (May, 2010): 1113-1132.

Vertinsky, Patricia. “Isadora Goes to Europe as the ‘Muse of Modernism’: Modern Dance, Gender and the Active Female Body.” *Journal of Sport History* 37, no. 1 (Spring, 2010): 19-39.

Vertinsky, Patricia. “Transatlantic Traffic in Expressive Movement: From Delsarte to Dalcroze to Margaret H’Doubler and Rudolf Laban.” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 13 (October, 2009): 2031-2051.

Vertinsky, Patricia. “Yoga Comes to American Physical Education: Josephine Rathbone and Corrective Physical Education,” *Journal of Sport History* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 287-311.

Vertinsky, Patricia. *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Exercise, and Doctors in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Vogel, Todd*.* *Rewriting White: Race, Class and Cultural Capital in Nineteenth-Century America.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

Wailoo, Keith. *Pain: A Political History.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

Walker, Rachel. "Facing Race: Popular Science and Black Intellectual Thought in Antebellum America." *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 19, no. 3 (2021): 601-640.

Walker, Rachel. *Beauty and the Brain: The Science of Human Nature in Early America.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023.

Walsh, Peter J. “Sound Minds and Unsound Bodies: Massachusetts Schools and Mandatory Physical Training.” *The New England Quarterly* 55, no.1 (March 1982): 39-60.

Walsh, Shannon L. *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance in the Progressive Era: Watch Whiteness Workout*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Walters, Ronald G. *American Reformers, 1815-1860.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.

Warner, John Harley. *The Therapeutic Perspective: Medical Practice, Knowledge, and Identity in America, 1820-1885.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Weber, Jody. *The Evolution of Aesthetic and Expressive Dance in Boston.* Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2009.

Welter, Barbara. “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860.” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 151-174;

Weisberger, Bernard A. *The La Follettes of Wisconsin: Love and Politics in Progressive America.* Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994.

White, Christopher G. *Unsettled Minds: Psychology and the American Search for Spiritual Assurance, 1830-1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

White, Deborah Gray. *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.

Whorton, James. *Crusaders of Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Whorton, James. *Nature Cures: The History of Alternative Medicine in America.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Wiebe, Robert H. *The Search for Order: 1877-1920*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.

Winterer, Caroline. *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750-1900*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007.

Wirzbicki, Peter. "Black Transcendentalism: William Cooper Nell, the Adelphic Union, and the Black Abolitionist Intellectual Tradition." *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 2 (2018): 269-290.

Wood, Anne Douglas. “The Fashionable Diseases’: Women’s Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no.1 (Summer, 1973): 25-52.

Zackodnik, Teresa C. *Press, Platform, Pulpit: Black Feminist Publics in the Era of Reform.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011.

Zimmerman, Kenneth. “William Torrey Harris: Forgotten Man in American Education.” *Journal of Thought* 20, no. 2 (1985): 76–89.

Zschoche, Sue. “Dr. Clarke Revisited: Science, True Womanhood, and Female Collegiate Education.” *History of Education Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 545-569.

Zuber, Devin O. *A Language of Things: Emanuel Swedenborg and the American Environmental Imagination*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019.