The Battle of the Battle Hymn:
Examining the Rhetorical Significance of Suffrage Music

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This project will examine the rhetorical significance of syndicated sheet music in the woman suffrage movement. By analyzing the combined forms of textual, visual and aural argumentation in published sheet music I will explore how this popular form allowed a controversial pro-suffrage message to be presented, but minimized the radical appearance of such messages. As a whole, this project will illustrate the how historical music and appeals to memories of traditional songs were used to support new forms of political and cultural identities.

Over the past nine months, I have researched music gathered in Danny O. Crew’s catalogue, Suffragist Sheet Music, and will use the LARC grant to further my investigation into primary sources available in local archives such as the Oregon Historical Society as well as other primary sources recovered by Professor Richards. After gathering relevant sources, I will analyze suffragist songs alongside traditional battle hymns and religious songs, to better understand the context in which suffrage music was created and circulated. This analysis will bring to light the persuasive character of suffragist songs, and the manner in which they gave seemingly pious appeals to “cult of true womanhood” ideals expediency of wartime or holy levity in their juxtaposition to Christian/Military melodies.

I anticipate my involvement with the LARC grant to consist of 8-10 weeks of research, beginning in May. The first 4-5 weeks of my LARC work will be spent compiling, analyzing, and cross-examining my sources with research conducted within the fields of rhetoric and music history, and constructing a solid hypothesis and argument. The last 3-5 weeks of my LARC work will focus on completing my final product, a 15-20 page research paper. If time allows, I will also produce a mixed-media presentation, emphasizing the manner in which suffrage sheet music utilized aural and visual means of persuasion.

My coursework in rhetorical criticism, argumentation, and visual rhetoric has prepared me to conduct research and analysis. Moreover, my IB studies of history and completion of Professor Wallace’s History of Religion in America course provided me with context for examination of suffrage song appeals. Completion of Professor Wen’s Chinese Gender/Media Studies course gave me an international understanding of women’s rhetorical roles. In Professor Richards’ course, I studied the rhetoric of the suffrage movement, which has been the main influence in my research. I derive my credibility as a musical scholar from involvement in prestigious music ensembles in high school and at Willamette, as well as private study with Professor Pascale.

This project combines my interests in music, activism, history, and rhetoric. It will allow me to conduct advanced research and develop better skills in accessing archives, and provide opportunities to improve my ability to interpret sources. Working in a LARC collaborative will enable my research on a multimedia, interdisciplinary subject to flourish, through the insight of my colleagues and advisors. Professionally, I am motivated to conduct this research project, in hopes that it will provide an excellent foundation for graduate study and research.