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Rhetorical Analysis Draft #3

Through Times of Hardship:

*A Woman's Effort to Change Her Fate*

Battle after battle, loss followed by loss, struggles and continuing struggles. This is the essence of the women's rights movement of the twentieth century. Though now painted as an almost beautiful act by a group of benevolent, compassionate women whose only goal was to be able to serve their country, the process by which gender equality was gained was not so attractive. It was filled with hardship, and required more than a few great leaders to rally the "troops," as they so deserve to be called. Through methods from speeches to marches, women and men alike worked for the freedom women so desired. One passionate example of such a leader is Carrie Chapman Catt, who meticulously convinces her listeners of the imminent success of women's suffrage.

One of Catt's most prominent methods of persuading her audience is her constant emotional calls-to-action. Catt, in the very initiation of her speech, tells her audience that a "failure to answer the call may mean an opportunity lost, a possible victory postponed." By starting her address with a passionate wish to have all who are listening be driven to action, Catt succeeds in capturing her audience from the very first moment. Also, in saying that not answering the call would be what led to failure, she is insinuating that there is otherwise a great chance at success. Catt also addresses the concerns of critics about whether or not it is the correct

time to take action. Through her vivid and dynamic question of “suppose we... grasp our victory while it still hangs a bit too high? Has any harm been done? None!”, Catt effectively proves to the supporters of women’s suffrage that there is hope no matter what. She is saying that, even if the movement is not yet ripe, it will not hurt to try, and therefore they will eventually succeed. At one point during her passionate speech, Catt even asks her audience if the women whose men have been killed in battle will just be content to sit in poverty, since women do not have the right to support their own family. She answers this inquiry herself, saying they will not be resigned to this “without protest!” This becomes an effective way of uniting her audience, because it fills them with energy, and gets them eager to do something about the issue. It shows to the women listening that they are not the only ones who desire freedom, and convinces them that every common woman will stand with them, rallying against the injustice of inequality. Convincing activists that they are in the majority is a priority for Catt, for that is what will initiate the changes she wants to see. The most emotional impact Catt has is to appeal to the suffragists listening as a mother. She inquires as to if they should “leave the hard knocks for [their] daughters, or... throw [them]selves into the fray... and thus bequeath to [their daughters] a politically liberated womanhood.” In calling upon her audience as not only activists and women, but also mothers and role models, Catt impacts them all the more. She is appealing to these women’s maternal instincts, which are extremely strong and can easily create action. This is a brilliant approach to calling out the women who are not quite convinced, and to produce a force that will change history.

After presenting reason after reason for her audience to be moved into action, Catt starts to wrap everything up with one last call-to-action. She passionately tells the women to “Awake, arise, my sisters, let your hearts be filled with joy—the time of victory is here. Onward March.”

Without using any specific facts or examples, Catt manages to stir up an emotional response from within the souls of her listeners. At this point in her speech, Catt has put everything out on the table, and now she just needs everyone to throw themselves behind her goals. This is her one last cry to get the women of her time to stand up for their rights, and she is very successful in this effort. By appealing so emotionally to her audience, Catt makes it everyone's personal business whether women receive their rights or not, therefore promising the most effective and efficient results possible.

Carrie Chapman Catt also relates stories of the success of suffrage in other countries to portray the exceeding probability of winning women's rights in America. She starts with broad generalizations in proof that a multitude of European countries have come to the conclusion that women deserve their rights just as much as men. Using Europe as her prime example is not only impactful because of the success they have had, but also because of the recent ties America had with Europe. Catt points out that many countries within Europe "... agree that the war presages a total change in the status of women." She also shares that these nations believe women to be "... a war power and a peace power." Providing evidence that the majority of the European continent found the equality of women a necessity is a strong way to go about convincing the women of America that they too deserved these rights. It shows that, however grim the prospects may seem, suffrage is not impossible, because it has happened before. She is specifically addressing the advancement of equality in other countries that are or were engaged in battle to emphasize that that is what creates change, and therefore that this change is a real possibility in the United States. Catt even makes the generalization that in "all warring countries, women are postmen, porters, railway conductors, ticket switch and signal men." This stresses the need for women's rights in times of war, which is what America is going through at the point of her speech. By

saying that results have been constant in all countries in situations just like the one this country was in at the time, Catt effectively relates the impending possibility of success right there in their own country. Besides referring to Europe as a whole, Catt also references Great Britain specifically. She makes her audience aware that, not only are women able to work in Britain, but they are even “employed as police... and women detectives have recently been taken on the government staff.” Through her communication of the high level of the positions women hold in Great Britain, Catt creates in her listeners a sense of longing—almost to the point of jealousy—for that same amount of freedom. Now, not only have women gained a few rights, they have achieved them almost to a level equal to men. This fills Catt’s audience with hope for the future, their future, and encourages them to go out and take control of their own fate. As one of her last allusions to the triumph of suffrage in other countries, Catt lets all activists present know that Great Britain has an “enthusiastic appreciation of women’s patriotism practical service.” Serving to conjure a sense of confidence and passion, this statement makes people aware of the amount of support that the women’s rights movement has from around the world, and insures them that there is almost no way they could be unsuccessful in America. Every one of the instances of suffrage in other countries that Catt refers to supports her claim that there is no possibility of failure when it comes to gaining rights for women.

Throughout her speech, Catt also refers to and quotes men in order to give her claims credibility to those critics who are listening. She talks about the views of men, and how even the highest up are in full support of women gaining their rights. One such prominent male was “Lord Sydenham... [who] said, ‘...Wherever intelligence, care and close attention have been needed, women have distinguished themselves.’” Here he is saying that women deserve credit for the amazing things that they are capable of accomplishing, and so consequentially, their rights. By

way of Lord Sydenham's quote, Catt proves to skeptics that even notable gentlemen are in support of gender equality; therefore they have no reason to deny its sensibility. Catt also quotes a London Times writer, who says "But, for women... the country would have perished of inanition and disorganization." By showing that this credible writer believes the existence of the nation is thanks to women, Catt gives another example of a country depending on women. Her point here is that if men say the livelihood of millions of citizens is thanks to the actions of women, why would women not deserve their rights. She uses these men's quotes as a way of backing up her point of view on the success of women's suffrage and giving her ideas credibility. Not all who are listening to her will be unbiased enough to take her thoughts, or even her facts, as truth because she is a woman. By pulling men's arguments that are for her cause into her own case, Catt appeals to a much wider range of audience members.

Another major strength in Catt's argument for the success of women's suffrage is her response to the resistance. There are many dissenters to equality, and many present legitimate divergent opinions. However, Catt stops them before they can object by providing a multitude of instances where serious oppositionists have changed their positions. She starts out on a broad scale, saying that "... hundreds of bitter, active opponents have confessed their conversion." Right away, she is clueing her listeners in to the inherent flaws in the anti-suffrage philosophy. Catt is proving that if many of those against women's rights were easily convinced to alter their view points, there is surely a forthcoming victory for the suffrage movement. Catt then goes on to talk specifically about those whose opinions have been swayed. One of her major cases for persuasion of the contrary side is through the case of "Mr. Asquith, [who was] world renown for his immovable opposition to the Parliamentary suffrage for British women...". Catt informs her audience that this harsh, anti-equality man eventually "pledge[d] to include women in the next

election bill.” This seemingly miraculous turnaround lends itself to the support of the coming achievement of the women’s rights movement in America. Catt uses this example to prove to listeners that there is in fact, hope for the nation, and for the women who call it home. If someone as stubborn and set in his ways as Mr. Asquith can become a supporter then anyone in the United States, Catt seems to say, can as well. Not only does Catt show the faults of the opposition, but she also proves to them that the American government will ultimately stand against them. Catt believes, as do the majority of Americans, that the government has so much “National pride that they will [not] allow the Republic to lag long behind the [British] Empire...”. Here, Catt is telling anti-suffragists that, because equality for women has been gained elsewhere, it is only a short matter of time until the United States government races to catch up. The fact that America will not stand for being behind the country that it extracted itself from works in activists favor, creating lasting action and change. Catt carefully and calmly addresses the arguments against the women’s rights movement, and uses rebuttals to convince all sides of the undeniable positive outcome for suffragists throughout America.

Time and time again Americans have struggled to gain what they felt they deserved. From African American citizenship to prohibition, many battles for rights have been waged. One of the most well known of these efforts was the women’s rights movement. The fight for equality was one of adversity and misfortune. However, with the assistance of many a great leader, women are now able to be in control of their own fate. One of the lesser known, yet most impactful, of these greats was Carrie Chapman Catt. Catt was a skilled orator who could effectively unite people emotionally for her cause. She was the catalyst for great change, with the ability to convince those who observed her speaking of the certain success of the women’s rights movement.

Work Cited

Catt, Carrie Chapman. "The Crisis." *American Rhetoric: Top Women Orators*. Michael E.

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