



Progressive Politics and the Training of America's Persuaders

By Katherine Adams

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At the beginning of the 20th century, Progressive reformers set up curricula in journalism, public relations, and creative writing to fulfill their own purposes: well-trained rhetors could convince the United States citizenry to accept Progressive thinking on monopolies and unions and to elect reform candidates. Although Progressive politicians and educators envisioned these courses and majors as forwarding their own goals, they could not control the intentions of the graduates thus trained or the employers who hired them. The period's vast panorama of rhetoric, including Theodore Roosevelt's publicity stunts, muckraker exposés, ad campaigns for patent medicines, and the selling of World War I, revealed the new national power of propaganda and the media, especially when wielded by college-trained experts imbued with the Progressive tradition of serving a cause and ensuring social betterment.

In this unique volume, Adams' chronicles the creation of this advanced curriculum in speaking and writing during the Progressive era and examines the impact of that curriculum on public discourse. Unlike other studies of writing instruction, which have concentrated on freshman curriculum or on a specific genre, this book provides a historical and cultural analysis of the advanced composition curriculum and of its impact on public persuasion. Adams surveys American instruction at state and private schools across the country, with special attention given to the influential Progressive universities of the Midwest. She draws on a wide variety of primary data sources including college catalogs, course assignments, departmental minutes, speeches, and journals, and includes an extensive bibliography of research sources concerning advanced composition instruction and American rhetoric before World War II. As a resource offering remarkable historical insights on the history of writing instruction in America, this volume is of great interest to scholars and students in rhetoric, communication, and technical writing.

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