A Woman's Nature:
Attitudes and Identities of the Bird Hat Debate at the Turn of the 20th Century

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Introduction:

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, a group of American women engaged in debate and action against the killing of birds for hats, resulting in one of the first widespread environmental movements in this country and the birth of the Audubon Society. This movement is particularly noteworthy for what it tells us about the changing attitudes of Americans towards nature, and for the ways it caused the questioning of women's natural roles and needs. Women were the wearers of bird millinery, but they were also the protesters and activists against this fashion. Whether or not individuals placed the blame for the problem upon women's vanity, the blind hand of Fashion, or other factors, definitions of womanhood and nature lay at the crux of the issue.

In this thesis I intend to examine the role of women within the bird protection campaign, particularly on the front of the use of birds in fashion. Ultimately this is a story about a social class of women that could afford to wear birds on their hats but chose not to, and did so without repudiating their assigned gender roles. In defining nature and determining the most appropriate human interactions with nature, groups and individuals define their own identity. Although the end of the 19th century saw the growth of a number of movements that sought to protect and appreciate the natural environment, it was the bird hat issue that ignited a nationwide mass movement. By choosing to forgo feathered and birded hats, the women who formed and participated in the Audubon Societies created their own definitions of proper female behavior and consumption, but they did so through traditional definitions of womanhood. Women were supposed to appreciate beauty, make decisions based on a natural morality and sentiment, and act politically and socially only in as far as the domestic sphere allowed. In the steps that they took to end the slaughter of birds, and in the arguments they proposed to support these steps women

sought to balance the values of beauty and aesthetics with those of nature and morality. In this issue women exploited the tenets of the domestic sphere in order to create an emotional connection to the natural world and work for environmental protection.

Situated in a society in which they were responsible for the ideals of beauty and morality, both of which were becoming increasingly entwined with Americans' perceptions of nature, the women who tried to stop the use of feathered millinery created modified versions of femininity and carefully navigated the construction of their identity. Upper class Audubon women delicately positioned themselves and shaped their roles vis-à-vis lower class women, upper-class men, the new science and the cult of femininity. Women who wore bird hats and those who campaigned against them were similar in many ways. Both were upper class, white, Christian, beauty loving, and probably nature loving. However, the way in which they experienced their morality set the bird protectionists apart. Many subscribed to the notion that women were naturally the more moral of the sexes, and caring for the broader environment was seen as an extension of their care for the family. With the aid of popular bird literature (much of the most popular being written by women), the protectionists prized the bird, and felt an emotional connection and responsibility for its well being. Unlike the traditionally masculine scientific or economic thought, women writer's sentimental and literary style created mass appeal for environmental thought.

Although both men and women worked together in many aspects of the bird protectionist movement of this period, their definitions of the problem and means to solve it were often quite distinct. Whereas women were seen to be the sentimentalists, the bird-lovers, and the mothers, men were the professionals, the sportsmen and the scientists who used economics and logic to frame their arguments. Although originally unable to create mass appeal, ultimately the male

perspective seems to dominate the tone of the campaign. The significance of men's role in this particular moment grows as time goes by. Male contributions to early bird protection went from membership in the earliest elite organizations, to figureheads in the state Audubon Societies, to key leaders, scientists and professionals in the Audubon's push toward legislative ends. Throughout, men's gender roles clearly divided their perspectives and activities from the women who made up the bulk of the movement. As rational thought and science led to legislative victories, the male perspective that advocated these methods assumed responsibility for bird protection.

Popular media had a substantial effect on shaping and structuring the issues and conflicts presented by a bird on a hat. The women's magazine in particular played an important role in women's self-definitions. *Harper's Bazar*, a popular fashion magazine for the middle-to-upper class woman, claimed to be a forum for both beauty and morality and was ultimately left ambiguous on the topic of plumed millinery. The fashion portion of the magazine printed illustrations of the hats, while the literature sections gave human feelings to bird life, and their articles described the activities of women's clubs, and the bird protection issue in particular. In its ambivalent role as both moral standard-bearer and fashion trendsetter *Harper's Bazar* served as both a creator and disseminator of environmental and social ideas and commodities. The media reflected the popular characterization of women's responsibilities, illustrated the conflicts that arose from a bird on the hat, and when the bird protectionist women themselves did not speak, the media provided voices from outside the movement that help us understand how they were perceived.

On May 22, 1875 *Harper's Bazar* printed an article by Miss Mary Thatcher, the future Mrs. T.W. Higginson, entitled "The Slaughter of the Innocents." In this piece Miss Thatcher

highlighted nearly all of the issues that would come to represent the debate over bird preservation during the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.[1] While her name was not present on this piece, a similar article, written by her husband in 1896 attributed this early work to her.[2]

Miss Thatcher began her discussion with the most visible example of what she felt to be a problematic use of bird life: on the ladies' hats. While she complemented the beauty of the avian form, she lamented the loss of the bird lives. She wrote, "But alas! These brilliant visions have been only ghosts of birds, mute warblers, little captives deprived of life and light and song. The outspread wings have lost their magic power, and the little feet, instead of clasping some swaying bough, have been hopelessly entangled in meshes of velvet and lace." For Thatcher, birds have strong emotions and appreciable beauties, and her recognition of these qualities reflects a writing style echoed in the voices of the later women bird writers. While she understood the beauty of the bird, she could not agree with their use in fashion, wondering if "the groves are no longer the fitting haunts of birds, and that their proper nesting place is a woman's hat?" and contemplating why women choose the most inappropriate adornments to highlight their beauty. Although she noted that other societies wore feathers and placed spiritual values upon these articles, for American woman the issue was different, "But a bird on a woman's hat to-day has but one meaning, and that is vanity." Like so many involved in this issue, Thatcher cited vanity as the cause of women's problem, but placed Fashion (always capitalized) as a powerful force working on by its own rules. "Fashion delights to set all the laws of nature at defiance, but she never showed more plainly her ignorance of the fitness of things than when she took the birds from their native haunts and perched their lifeless bodies upon the heads of our

[1] [Mary Thatcher (Higginson)], "The Slaughter of the Innocents," *Harper's Bazar,* 22 May 1875, 338.
[2] T.W. Higginson, "Vivisection and Egrets' Feathers," *Harper's Bazar,* 4 April 1896, 295.

others and sisters and daughters." Thatcher placed the female "Fashion" in opposition to nature, highlighting the artificial use of the natural form. Ultimately, in regard to the bird hat issue Miss Thatcher believed that once women recognized that they harmed wildlife and were being cruel to birds they would stop wearing feathered hats since "these women have tender hearts and would shrink from inflicting needless pain on any creature had not the love of 'style' blinded their eyes." Therefore, the best way to solve this problem was to educate women on the cruelty of their fashions, Thatcher suggested that the "apostles of dress reform" should pick up this topic, and change fashion through an appeal to women.[3]

However, Mary Thatcher did not limit her discussion to only the millinery uses of birds. After lamenting this particular use, she also discussed other human actions that damaged the strength of bird populations. She included farmers' mass killing of birds that they considered pests, only to realize the important balance between insect pests and birds. Thatcher cited scientific evidence that described the power of birds to prevent insect damage to human crops, and contended that the high cost of food and "increase of distress and want in our large cities" could be ameliorated through bird protection. Not only did Thatcher recognize ecological relationships (although not referred to as such) she also connected the problems and poverty of the city to the destruction of birds. She discussed the scientific collection of birds, writing "With all due reverence for science, it must be conceded that naturalists are not as scrupulous about taking life or inflicting pain as they might be." She questioned why non-scientists must kill and display birds, especially when art and sculpture were available and affordable. Extinction was not left out of Miss Thatcher's analysis either. The grouse, prairie-chicken, passenger-pigeon are each mentioned as examples of extinction and near extinction caused by over-hunting. For Thatcher, the ultimate problem was the American lack of awareness of the genuine worth of

[3][Mary Thatcher (Higginson)], "The Slaughter of the Innocents," 338.

wildlife, especially birds, and that their worth should be greater than our ability to use them. She wrote, "The widespread belief that birds and animals were created only for the use and amusement of man is a doctrine unworthy of Christendom." Ultimately, Miss Thatcher believed that to solve to the problem of the birds people must appreciate them more, use them less, and look towards the cultures of other societies in which wildlife and humans share a more balanced relationship.

In many ways, this article is a good place to begin the discussion of the bird hat issue. Miss Thatcher framed her argument in a way that will be similar to many others to follow. She implored women to act responsibly and morally, and believed that education was the key to changing their minds. Beyond the purely sentimental attachment to birds, she used scientific evidence to add greater credence to her outrage. Each of these avenues for discussion will be crucial to the way bird protectionist women shaped their self-definitions. However, what was most unique about "The Slaughter of the Innocents" was not its argument, but rather it is its date and location. While there must have been some media attention to the hunting of birds for the millinery industry, I found no other clearly articulated pieces of writing that describe the scope of the problem and propose solution that dates before 1875. While it is difficult to determine exactly how much contemporary attention Miss Thatcher's article received, recent scholarly attention seems to have missed it. Robert Welker credits J.A. Allen with the first protest against millinery hunting in an article that appeared in 1876.[4] However, here not only was the piece written by a woman a year earlier, but it appeared in a women's fashion magazine that depicted the very styles that Miss Thatcher found so objectionable. *Harper's Bazar* did not trail behind on this issue; it seems to have introduced it.

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[4] Robert Henry Welker, *Birds and Men: American Birds in Science, Art, Literature and Conservation 1800-1900* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), 200.

In order to understand why *Harper's Bazar* could claim to be the first to introduce the bird hat issue, it is useful to understand the purpose and typical scope of this form of popular media. This magazine in particular presented a microcosm of the most important elements of the bird hat debate. First and foremost *Harper's Bazar* articulated what was fashionable. It was the intent of the anti-bird hat movement to end consumer demand for the feathered hat. The activists responded to what was fashionable, and since we do not have comprehensive data about what each woman in America was wearing, the fashion magazine provides some of the most complete information about what fashions were available and recommended. The frequency of birds on hats featured in the magazine may be indicative of the relative popularity of bird fashions, and useful in the quantification of that popularity. Secondly, *Harper's Bazar* reflected something about popular American attitudes toward both women and nature during this turn of the century period. It is problematic to view such a magazine as a mirror of all society, but it is clear that in order to appeal to its readership the magazine sought to represent their interests, and to reflect what the magazine staff thought people wanted to read. From the articles and features of *Harper's Bazar* we learn how women were supposed to act, and the ways that women's role and sphere were changing. We can also see glimpses of some prevailing American attitudes towards nature, even specifically about bird life. Literature on the study of birds was widely read, and impacted Americans' emotional responses to nature. Finally we can see the way arguments directly related to the bird hat issue were carried out. While illustrating the styles, *Harper's Bazar* simultaneously described the moral and social problem with the style, a position that ultimately put the magazine squarely on the fence. The editors of *Harper's Bazar* made very deliberate efforts to both educate the readership, and to present information that the readers wanted to hear. In choosing what information about feathered fashions and the bird protection to

present, and how to present it, *Harper's Bazar* created its own identity, and shaped the identity of its readership, the same women who both wore and protested bird hats.

An examination of periodical journals of the latter half of the 19th century provides a backdrop for our understanding of *Harper's Bazar*, and is important to an evaluation of this magazine as a historical resource. John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman consider magazines to be an example of living history. Because of their frequent publication and willingness to treat a wide range of subject matter, magazines offer detail beyond most other mediums.[5] Between the years 1865 and 1918 there was a major growth in diversity in the magazine industry. Factors of technological development, such as better presses and engraving processes, allowed cheaper and easier creation of periodical literature. Combined with an increasingly educated general public that chose to spend its leisure time reading, the magazine was better able to affect a large number of Americans.[6] While the economic downturn of the 1890s caused the magazine industry to suffer, this resulted in lower prices, which consequently allowed the magazine to compete with the newspaper[7] and often reached a far greater audience than ever before.[8]

While the magazine helped the reader cope with social change, which was great during this period of rapid industrialization and urbanization, it did not necessarily reflect the way life really was. It may have been that the magazines "influenced people's conception of reality and guided them in the process of constructing attitudes and action,"[9] yet this does not necessarily indicate that periodical literature, especially women's periodical literature represented the lives or attitudes of the general public. Zuckerman writes of women's magazines, "...at times they lead,

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[5] John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America, 1741-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), vi.
[6] Ibid., 57.
[7] Ibid., 66.
[8] Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines,* vol. 4, (New York: Appleton, 1957), 12.
[9] Tebbel and Zuckerman, 106.

at times reflect, at times lag in their presentation of women's lives."[10] One of the most difficult questions in analyzing the messages of this popular literature is to determine how accurately a magazine's portrayal of life in America actually represented cultural realities. Women's magazines in particular have often presented unobtainable worlds to the reader, allowing women to see a glamorous and pleasurable world that may little resemble anything they ever expect to, or even want to have.[11] When examining the bird hat issue in *Harper's Bazar* it is important to realize that the images the magazine offers may not have completely reflected public opinion, but were likely to have been influential in shaping its readers thoughts on the subject. Because its target audience was composed of upper class women, Harper's Bazar embraced the codes of the domestic sphere espoused by this class. Women who acted on behalf of the birds were a portion of this class, and because the magazine and its readers both operated under shared gender assumptions, their navigation of the interests and implications of the bird hat debate were similar.

The early history of *Harper's Bazar* provides us with a great deal of information about the desired intent of the magazine. The first issue of *Harper's Bazar* came out on November 2, 1867.[12] Believing that American women would be eager to learn of styles as soon as European women, the Harper brothers designed their newest magazine based on Berlin's high fashion magazine, *Der Bazar* . Edited by New York City historian, Mary L. Booth, the magazine was subtitled, "A Repository of Fashion, Pleasure and Instruction." At the price of $ 0.10 an issue, and $4.00 for a yearly subscription, the magazine was considered an almost immediate success, reaching a circulation 80,000 by its tenth anniversary.[13] In many ways the magazine was

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[10] Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines in the United States, 1792-1995* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), xv.
[11] Ellen McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines: from Mademoiselle to Ms.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 6.
[12] Mott, *A History of American Magazines,* vol. 3, (New York: Appleton, 1938), 388.
[13] Stella Blum, *Victorian Fashions & Costumes from Harper's Bazar 1867-1898* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1974), v; Mott, 3:388.

modeled on Harper's already popular *Harper's Weekly*.[14] Both contained serialized literature, pictures and illustration, and humor, but *Bazar* 's patterns and fashions replaced the politics and public affairs discussed in *Weekly*.[15] Harper's thusly structured its magazines along established gender roles. While men were free to discuss politics, the women's proscribed interests remained in the home.

The intentions of the magazine were quite clearly spelled out in the editorial of the first issue. Mary Booth wrote, "The publishers have just commenced the issue of *Harper's Bazar*, a Weekly Illustrated Family Journal, devoted to Fashion and Home Literature. Their aim is twofold: to supply the existing need of a weekly fashion Newspaper, and to combine therewith a first-class literary journal, which will be indispensable to every household."[16] It continued to describe the publication of timely fashions, and the nature of the "best specimens of household literature," including serial stories, poetry and articles on the "Topics of the Day (excluding politics)." Although the magazine was purposely designed for a female audience, the editorial used language of the "household" rather than appealing directly to women purely on their sex. It was assumed that the household was the woman's domain, and this magazine laid no claims to evoke womanhood in any other setting.

From its first publication to its buyout by the Hearst corporation in 1913, the editor of *Harper's Bazar* was a woman. Following Mary Booth's death in 1889, Margaret Sangster edited the magazine, until her replacement by Elizabeth Jordan in 1899. In 1895 Sangster wrote a pamphlet entitled, "Editorship as a Profession for Women." She argued that effective female

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[14] Harper's Weekly began publication in 1857, and was advertised as a "family newspaper" that printed pictures, essays, fiction and news, and particularly politics. It was seen to be quite influential and thought provoking during its time (Mott, 2:469-470).
[15] Ibid., 389.
[16] Reprinted in Jane Trahey, ed.,*100 Years of the American Female from Harper's Bazaar* (New York: Random House, 1967), 3.

editors came to their work with a special female viewpoint. While women editors should not have been confined to themes of the home, they ought to have found an area in which to specialize and, "For most women nothing is so attractive as the opportunity to do this in the departments of the periodical press which appeal to motherhood in its thousand interests, and to housekeeping, home-making, and the entertainment and instruction of children."[17] We should not be surprised that *Harper's Bazar* paid a good deal of attention to these various issues, since its editors were female. Sangster also praised fashion and clothing as important and dignified for study since, "Clothing and human progress are almost synonymous terms; and it is beneath no one to chronicle the passing styles..."[18] Ultimately, according to Sangster the woman editor should have focused on the areas that most interested her, but she had to constantly balance her wish to inform the readers with the need to appeal to her readers' interests. As Sangster wrote, "She must both defer to and educate her public."[19]

Unlike many other women's magazines that emerged in the second half of the 19th century, *Harper's Bazar* was not intended to serve the needs of women of all social classes. It was primarily designed for the upper or upper-middle class, white woman.[20] The 1870s saw the growth of a new breed of women's magazine that was more inclusive. Pattern magazines, such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Good Housekeeping* provided a wide range of women with quality short fiction, sewing patterns, and served the purpose of a trade magazine for the homemaker.[21] However, *Harper's Bazar*'s content seemed to assume that all its readers had servants. The fashions were hardly practical for housework, and in many cases the wearer required

[17] Margaret Sangster, "Editorship as a Profession for Women," *The Forum,* December 1895, 450.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 451.
[20] Tebbel and Zuckerman, 103.
[21] Ibid., 93

Figure 1. Some examples of bird hats and accessories from *Harper's Bazar* , 27 October, 1888. Reprinted from Blum,

considerable assistance in putting them on.[22] As we understand the type of woman who read *Harper's Bazar* and responded to the bird hat issue, it is important to recognize that this magazine was not targeted for or read by women of all classes, but primarily the upper class society woman who both wore and worked against the bird hat.

The Fashions:

Throughout the period that I examined the magazine, approximately 1867 through 1912, feathered millinery was a frequent and commonplace feature. Feathered hats seemed to have made their way into the pages of *Harper's Bazar* in 1868. The January 18th issue announced the arrival of new types of bonnets from Europe. The section on "New York Fashions" read, "A few of the feather and fur bonnets, now so fashionable in Europe, have just been imported. The feathers used are those of the grebe and pheasant. The white and pearl gray grebes are bound

[22] Blum, v.

with green, scarlet, or blue velvet, while bonnets of dark peasants' feathers have a fall of brown lace..." In what seems to be an introduction to the feathered hat for an American audience, Harper's defined some possible color combinations, but made no reference to the source of these feathers. We know what type of bird they were from, but little more, and there was certainly no mention of cruelty or death. It seems that there is beginning a genuine fondness for natural looking fashions. The article continued to describe fur hats, now more wearable because of lighter-weight skins like seal and chinchilla, as well as a predominance of flowers and leaves.

Feathered fashions were not something new to western culture, but their prominence and reintroduction into popular fashion in the late 1800s was notable. There was a long history of wearing feathers, but the 19th century recurrence had a lot to do with broader trends in fashion and women's consumption patterns, as well as changes in the way Americans viewed nature, wildlife and birds in particular. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, however to completely identify the reasons for fashion and changing aesthetic values and to determine which parties, the consumer, the producer or the media, control what is fashionable. Kathy Peiss writes, "Ideals of beauty ...are fundamentally shaped by social relations and institutions, by other cultural categories and practices, and by politics and economics. Even so, beauty should not be reduced to any one of these: if not autonomous, the aesthetic is a realm with its own language and logic."[23] While we may not be able to determine the precise causes of the sudden prominence of feathered millinery, broader fashion and cultural changes and phenomena are valid influences and merit discussion. Some have argued that changes in fashion are purely arbitrary, or are only based on the imagination, or lack there of, of designers.[24] While in some instances this may be true, I believe that there are too many links to broader social attitudes and trends to write off the

[23] Kathy Peiss, "On Beauty . . . and the History of Business" in *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*, ed. Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 9.

popularity of bird hats as a socially detached whim. Understanding why women would wear birds on their hats allows us to ponder why they would take them off, and in what ways a woman who wore a bird and who did not saw themselves as distinct.

Historically feathers have held a social and symbolic role in a variety of Native American cultures, and even the Roman god Mercury wore wings in his helmet.[25] In the 15th and 16th centuries European noblemen wore feathers, particularly peacock and ostrich. The feathers were a major status and class symbol, prompting sumptuary laws that prohibited the lower classes from this form of display.[26] More than a century before the Audubon societies, Marie Antoinette can be credited with another burst of feathered millinery. The story goes that in a moment of inspiration she inserted ostrich and peacock feathers into her hair one evening, and having gained the compliments of the king, started a trend throughout the court. The lavish ornamentation came to be quite popular, practically placing a woman's head at the center of her figure, and reputedly causing her to ride in carriages with her head out the window to preserve the height of her hairstyle.[27] Even during this period, the lengths taken by women in the name of style and fashion were often extreme. For the next century there was only sporadic use of feathers on hats. Though French and British military officers wore plumed headgear with little objection throughout the nineteenth century,[28] it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that women's feathered hats became less of a cyclical fashion, and maintained their prominence. Although they had existed before, the motives behind feathered hats for women

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[24] Colin McDowell, *Hats: Status, Style, Glamour* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992).
[25] Mary Thatcher (Higginson), "Massacre of the Innocents."
[26] Robin W. Doughty, "Concern for Fashionable Feathers," *Forest History* 16, no. 2 (July 1972): 4.
[27] Robin W. Doughty, *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation: A Study in Nature Protection* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 1.
[28] Ibid., 12.

was a phenomena particular to the end of the 19th century, and reflects the fashion and consumption requirements of this period's upper class women.

Like other articles of clothing, styles and fashions of hats change according to social standards of beauty, but the hat is particularly susceptible to change. Fiona Clark's *Hats* explores the development and styles of hats from 1750 to 1950, two centuries the author considers the "great age of millinery." Hats, perhaps better than other articles of clothing, often reflect societal and fashion trends, and change their appearance frequently. Because the hat need not be perfectly shaped and fitted to the body its form is more easily changed and altered on a whim, and can therefore more closely reflect contemporary standards of beauty.[29]

The late 19th century sumptuousness in hats was related to the overall styles in dress. In general, at the end of the 1800s dress focused less on fullness of the lower body (seen in bustles and crinoline) and more on the upper body, including the bust, neck and head.[30] Elaborate hats highlighted the face, and added horizontal length to the body, fitting into this more general fashion trend. The May 17, 1879 *Harper's Bazar* wrote, "If dresses are simple, bonnets in revenge appertain more than ever to the domain of the fancy"[31] Particularly from 1875 to 1882 popular fashions showed a strong interest in the "natural form." While Stella Blum attributes more flowing and looser dress that was less constricting to the female form to the attitudes of aesthetic movement in art,[32] the movement also focused on the implementation of symbols of nature and "the beautiful" into the lives of all through everyday objects of domestic life.[33] In this vein, the presence of "natural" beauty, such as birds and flowers, atop the hat was a means of inserting beauty into the every day features of life and dress. In Clark's analysis, from 1883-1890

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[29] Fiona Clark, *Hats* (New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1982), 6.
[30] Doughty "Concern for Fashionable Feathers," 6.
[31] Blum, 77.
[32] Ibid.

the sumptuousness of hats only increased, continuing to feature flowers, ribbons and feathers, as well as what she calls, "a strange taste for real birds as trimmings."[34]In some cases the hats even featured the bodies of small mammals or rodents in their mess of natural trimmings! If the new fashion required as much ornate detail as possible, hats offered more surfaces in which to decorate.[35]

Acceptable consumption patterns for women also determined how elaborate their clothing and particularly their hats would be. Ladies' hats during this period were not designed for utilitarian purposes; they were class and beauty symbols. Knowing just what was fashionable and how to wear it was a symbol of upper class femininity as there were elaborate sets of etiquette and beauty tips used to ensure the right look.[36] Wearing the right hat was a crucial part of a woman's social and class identification and hat wearing is a particularly ostentatious display of wealth and style.

Women's consumption of fashion was linked to their broader need to be beautiful. In general, the woman's domestic sphere required women to be beautiful, and to appreciate beauty more than men. It was the woman's role to look her best, and magazines like *Harper's Bazar* constantly reinforced women's quest for style and beauty. For some, the tasks of beauty were equivalent to women's work. One 1902 letter to the editor of *Harper's Bazar* wrote of the woman who did not work outside the home, "The time she gives to entertaining, to charity, to church, to society, and even her toilette, is of much an occupation as a shop-girl's because it is a woman's duty to make herself look as well as she can."[37] Image was an important part of a woman's identity, both as a wife and a mother within the domestic sphere. Responding to a

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[33] Roger Stein, "The Aesthetic Craze" *ARTnews* 85, no. 10 (December 1986):100.
[34] Blum, 149.
[35] Ibid., vi.
[36] Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 76.

contest to write the 10 Commandments of wives and mothers, the two winning entries for each began with "1) Be healthy 2) Be joyful 3) Be beautiful."[38] *Harper's Bazar* printed countless articles on the most beautiful ways to flatter every type of face and figure with the right look, and the quest for beauty was considered a social norm.

According to *Harper's Bazar*, at the end of the 19th century the "right look" involved large lavishly decorated feathered or other natural type hats. Some illustrations and description of bird hats in *Harper's Bazar* emphasized the unique qualities of birds, making use of the realistic, rare, and "natural" appearance as a selling point. The August 20, 1879 issue of *Harper's Bazar* described the fashionable autumn millinery for the upcoming season in its "New York Fashions" weekly section. "Fancy feathers" were a primary focus of this fall's hats, including everything from the fanciest plumes "plucked" from rare birds, as well as occasional whole birds, or halved birds to serve two hats. In some instances five or six birds were clumped together to resemble a nest, or birds were mounted upside down in order to show their feet. The bonnets were large, in dark jewel colors, and like the previous season continued to employ butterflies and foliage as well as the feathers. [39] The rarer the bird, the more valuable its feathers, and the greater social prestige it lent its wearer, so rare was always fashionable.

Figure 2. Hat appearing in the *Millinery Trade Review*, November 1902. Reprinted from Doughty, "Concern for Fashionable Feathers," 11.

Culminating from two walks through the streets of New York City, the ornithologist Frank Chapman wrote a famous list of the birds he identified atop ladies hats. There were forty

[37] *Harper's Bazar* , March 1902, 296.
[38] *Harper's Bazar* , July 1904, 687.

different types of birds here, ranging from the Robin and the Meadowlark, to the Saw-whet Owl, Mourning Dove, Pileated Woodpecker, and the Common Tern.[40] Milliners advertised for hunters to send them feathers, which they would buy at prices ranging from fifteen cents, for a pair of royal tern wings, to 40 cents for the skin of a herring gull.[41] Hats featured songbirds, owls, game birds and shore birds, and often the tail feathers of egrets (called "aigrettes"), herons, spoonbills and ostrich.[42] Bird hats were everywhere and featured almost any bird the milliner could acquire. The popularity and scope of the birded fashions indicates that there was clearly something about the presence of a bird on a hat that appealed to broader needs for nature, and one had to wonder if the scope of this fashion did not cause series problems for American birds.

Figure 3. The swan doesn't seem to notice the smaller bird perched atop this hat appearing in *Harper's Bazar* April 20, 1889.

These fashions often replicated natural scenes and quite frequently employed details, like the nest grouping or the butterflies and flowers, to further emphasize a realistic form of nature. Although, the bird on a hat was obviously dead and still, its living qualities were still referenced for their beauty. One hat from

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[39] *Harper's Bazar* , 20 August 1879, 551.
[40] Frank M. Chapman, *Autobiography of a Bird-Lover* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1933), 39.
[41] Welker, 197.
[42] Ostrich feathers were often quite popular, but were considered outside the realm of bird protection since, unlike the other bird feathers, ostrich feathers could be gathered from the living bird and the animals were commonly farmed. See Rob Nixon, *Dreambirds: The Strange History of the Ostrich in Fashion, Food and Fortune* (New York: Picador USA, 1999).

1894 had several birds on it whose wings "are pointed as in flight!"[43] Bird hats demonstrated great variety in the type of birds and feathers that were used. *Harper's Bazar* shows examples of every type of aigrette, as well as entire parrots, hummingbirds, and other "changeable" birds that grace the headgear. While most fashions illustrated were for grown women, in one print from 1889 there were a variety of women and children's fashions. The setting was outdoors, and one small girl whose hat featured a small bird, is shown feeding a swan [Figure 3].[44] Whether or not intended, the incongruous issues of love of birds as wildlife and as decoration were presented in the same image.

While it may seem odd to equate a dead avian decoration with a live bird, both uses appreciated the aesthetic value of natural forms. American attitudes towards nature underwent a dramatic shift at the end of the 19th century, and this changing perspective affected the terms of acceptable use of environmental resources, including wildlife and birds. As the lives of typical Americans were further removed from daily interaction and struggle with wilderness, their appreciation of nature increased. This appreciation manifested itself in a variety of ways, including some conflicting notions of appropriate use. The beauty of nature caused Americans to make it a commodity, and to protect it, to put a dead bird on a hat, and to watch living birds from the window. Americans had a variety of ways in which to construct their identity in relation to nature, and many changed their perspective during this socially turbulent time.

In their initial encounters with the North American continent, wilderness was the greatest threat to the survival of European settlers. The landscape was unlike anything with which they were familiar and the obstacles it presented seemed insurmountable.[45]Even once Europeans had acclimated to American surroundings, wilderness remained a force to be subdued in the name of

[43] Reprinted in Blum, 269.
[44] Ibid., 215.

human progress. Those on the frontier continued to "fight" their way across the continent, aiming to force the wilderness to submit to civilization[46]. Yet as Americans expanded their territory across the continent, they slowly became cognizant of the environmentally detrimental effects of their actions.

While individual voices began to lament environmental changes caused by human disruptions in the years following the Civil War[47], it wasn't until Americans occupied patches of territory dispersed throughout the continent that most Americans came to believe that the wilderness had played a crucial role in the development their unique identity and that it needed protection. The census of 1890 officially signified the end of the American frontier. No longer was there an edge to the American society; Americans were living from one side of the continent to the other. While this statistical milestone may have had little practical consequence, it seems to have had strong intellectual reverberations. Historians, such as Frederick Jackson Turner, were partially responsible for the thesis that wilderness was crucial to the development of an American nationalism.[48] Whether or not this was the reason for American's rugged temperament or democratic traditions, for many of those living at the turn of the 20th century, it was valued as such. Historian William Cronon writes, "Thus in the myth of the vanishing frontier lay the seeds of wilderness preservation in the Unites States, for if wild land had been so crucial in the making of the nation, then surely one must save its last remnants as monuments to the American past- and as an insurance policy to protect its future."[49] Wilderness was used as a model of a balanced

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[45] Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 26.
[46] Ibid., 24.
[47] Most notable was Vermonter, George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1864).
[48] Frederick Jackson Turner, "Frederick Jackson Turner on the Significance of the Frontier in American History, 1893," in *Major Problems in American Environmental History* , ed. Carolyn Merchant (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1993), 345-347.
[49] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), 76.

and healthy environment, an economic resource, and a source of aesthetic beauty and spiritual uplift.

The greatest human plights were now found in the cities, and rural nature could serve as a counter force against these industrial dangers. An entire "Back to Nature" movement emerged, in which Americans reinvented the importance of nature in the lives of all, including city-dwellers. Although people may not have wanted to move back to the country, they associated nature with their rural past and a superior morality, and sought to reintegrate parts of that lifestyle into their urban lives. Originally just the domain of the wealthy in the 19th century, by the end of the century the middle class also wanted to take country vacations, and to spend time outside with the beauty of nature.[50] Government increasingly sponsored public spaces devoted to nature, resulting in the beginnings of the national park movement (a specifically American phenomena) with Yellowstone in 1872 as well as open spaces within cities, such as New York City's Central Park.[51]

Once most Americans lived in the city, facing the dangers and irritations of urban life, and were not confronted with the difficulties of wilderness, they began to crave contact with rural nature and view time outside as necessary for good health. In the later decades of the 1800s, outdoor sports also gained popularity among women and popular media reflected this change. A discussion of women and sport was a weekly feature in *Harper's Bazar* beginning in 1894 in a column called "The Outdoor Woman." This feature focused on sports most appropriate to women, and on the benefits to their health. In the illustration surrounding the title of this column, were tiny pictures of a golf club, tennis racket, bike wheel, and hunting rifle. These were, in fact, the most discussed activities. Here, along with some information on real women athletes,

[50] Peter Schmitt, *Back to Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

were arguments on the purpose and utility of outdoor activity for women. Beyond amusement, and appreciation of the outdoor air, outdoor sport was praised for its health effects. According to the magazine it was appropriate for women to engage in a limited type of outdoor activity (namely the sports associated with the illustrations around the title) because they have been integrated into what was considered "ladylike" and were useful for women's health. During this period, doctors often proscribed nature as a health remedy especially for women. Even the bird writer, Florence Merriam Bailey was often sent to the western states in order to relax, and improve her delicate health.[52]

The presence of birds on millinery was necessarily related to the changing ways Americans identified themselves and identified with nature. With growing appreciation of the beauty of nature, and the established prominence of beauty within the woman's sphere, beauty of both woman and birds was similar and transmittable from one to the other. Referring to some of the feathered hats of the 18th century, one anonymous author wrote, "Now since to ornament the frolic fair, There's not one pretty bird whose rump's not bare; Do not the ladies more or less appear, Just like the birds who various plumes they wear?"[53] This author proposed that in wearing its feathers, the ladies came to resemble the bird's beauty, while leaving it with a bare rump. In popular sayings we can still recognize ways in which women's beauty and bird's beauty are comparable. Beautiful women are compared to a swan's elegance, a woman's pleasant laugh or beautiful singing voice is like a bird's, and eating like a bird is ladylike and refined. It may be that women wore birds on their hats in order to make themselves as beautiful as the once living bird, and take advantage of its features and qualities. Robin Doughty wonders if, "Perhaps the

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[51] Anne Whiston Spirm, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmstead," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), 91.
[52] Harriet Kofalk, *No Woman Tenderfoot* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1989).
[53] Doughty, *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation*, 2.

Victorian lady sought to impute to herself the fragile beauty of the bird of paradise she wore on her hat."

Americans also began to derive pleasure and enjoyment from viewing the beauty of nature. However, a love of nature's beauty did not necessarily manifest itself in what we would today consider environmentally friendly ways. Taxidermy was a frequent and prized art in the 19th century, and was crucial to the ability to use whole birds in fashion. While stemming from the popularity of natural history collections[54] that required the stuffing of formerly living specimens in order to preserve them, the artistry and means of display of the stuffed animals implied other social and aesthetic meanings in taxidermy. Kitty Hauser contends that prior to the dominance of photography as a means of portraying reality, taxidermy was the next best thing. She writes, "Taxidermy is a dream of arresting time, an attempted duplication of the animal world in order to re-display it in static theatrical tableaux. This is a grisly art of keeping up appearances, where the dead must masquerade as the living; a romance of fur, feather, claw and beak, a very Western kind of fetish."[55] Taxidermic specimens could be collected and owned, and remained potent symbols of nature that could be controlled and brought into the safety of the home and museum.

While women were not usually the most prominent taxidermists, one Colorado woman became quite famous for her works. Mrs. Martha Maxwell was an extremely avid taxidermist in the middle of the19th century who built an extensive collection of the fauna of Colorado, and had a large exhibition at the Centennial Exhibition in 1976. She created the collection by herself by shooting, poisoning, trapping, buying or soliciting specimens, and stuffing them into what

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[54] Mark V. Barrow, *A Passion for Birds: American Ornithology after Audubon,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 9.
[55] Kitty Hauser, "Coming Apart at the Seems: Taxidermy and Contemporary Photography," *Make: The Magazine of Women's Art* no. 82 (December 1998-January 1999): 8-11.

were considered extremely life-like poses. While obviously she would be willing to kill an animal in order to preserve it, she too recognized that some of these animals were in trouble. Her response was to preserve our knowledge by converting them to a permanent form, much like many of the male collectors and scientists. What does seem to be unique about her work was its artistic quality. As her biographer, Mary Dartt wrote, "She simply has a passion, not unknown in the history of science, for all living creatures- an irresistible desire to study their habits and relations, together with a taste for the expression of beauty in form, that would have made her a sculptor had she been placed in circumstances to have cultivated it.[56] While the women conservationists, and modern nature lovers may not have found Mrs. Maxwell's methods of studying wildlife the most appropriate, in this period it was not uncommon or unacceptable.[57] Mrs. Maxwell's artistic skill and appreciation for beauty fits with the way women were perceived to view nature, even if her techniques were untraditional. If wilderness was a formative influence and inspiration for American art, it also served as Mrs. Maxwell's raw material, and was available to her in a way that formal sculpting was not.

In these instances when Americans wanted to view wildlife, they chose to do so in a far more contained and controlled setting. [58] The development of zoos and zoological parks can be seen in a similar fashion: it was important to preserve a record of threatened wildlife, and it was an enjoyable experience to watch the wildlife in action. [59] Philadelphia opened the first American zoo in 1874, inaugurating a wave of openings that would continue through the

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[56] Mary Dartt, *On the Plains and Among the Peaks* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1879), 16.
[57] Even *Harper's Bazar* educated its readers on the principles of taxidermy, giving detailed descriptions for women's at home projects on birds. *Harper's Bazar* 10 September 1878, 517.
[58] Chris J. Magoc, *Yellowstone: The Creation and Selling of an American Landscape, 1870-1903* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 145.
[59] Jeffrey Stott, "The Historical Origins of the Zoological Park in American Thought," *Environmental Review* 5, no. 2: 54-55.

following decades.[60] Both caged and stuffed animals served as evidence of American cultural heritage, but they lacked the danger of wilds, and were most accessible to those in urban rather than rural communities. "Whether exhibited as exotic of nationalistic relics of diminished habitat, whether encased behind glass for the cultured American or performing for gawking multitudes, the containment of individual creatures diminished their Otherness. The enclosed theatrical mis-en-scene rendered wildlife comfortable and artificially natural."[61] Americans were in search of nature, but were really most interested in a form of nature that they could pacify and control. In the same way that they wanted to appreciate landscape at Yellowstone, and visit a museum of stuffed wildlife specimens, a stuffed bird on a hat was another way of incorporating nature into the lives of the average person.

While a love of nature may have inspired in part the fashion of the bird hats, this same growing appreciation for nature sparked women to question their fashions and the environmental repercussions of their styles. Even the coverage of fashion in *Harper's Bazar* took on hints of bird protectionism. In most cases the hat descriptions had little editorial comment. They may have added descriptions of the prettiest and most stylish fashions are, but in most cases these were described without emotional or moral agendas. However, following the formation of the state Audubon Societies, the fashion columns of *Harper's Bazar* exhibited some editorializing in their portrayal of the fashions. An October 1897 description of the upcoming winter millinery, described birds with long tail feathers as the new favorite trimming, as well as the appeal of a pair of "wide stiff wings" behind the head of an owl. However, "This using of birds' heads is one of the season's fads, and the poor owl has been chosen as the victim of this winter's cruelty. Pigeons and doves are also greatly admired for hat trimmings but fortunately in their case, the

[60] Ibid., 54.
[61] Magoc, 149.

supply is equal to the demand, and there need not be the same wholesale slaughter as with the owls. Combing an owl's head with peasants' tail feathers in another new style- not a pretty one"[62] Although the beauty of the natural forms remained intact, their use in fashion became ugly due to the cruel slaughter necessary for their production. At the annual New York State Audubon Society meeting in 1900, Frank Chapman showed a stereopticon image of a "woman's hat trimmed with a whole bird with a startling red eye, its feet in the air, and looking like a piece of game in a poultry shop" to which he asked the women, "Is it fair to deprive a beautiful bird of its life to make a hat like that?"[63] For some, this new perspective imparted something special to birds that should not be so wantonly consumed. *Harper's Bazar* and others have equated animal cruelty with bad fashion. Robin Doughty writes in 1975, "Man has worn the plumage of birds for a very long time. What is novel about feather fashions at the beginning of this century is the prolonged and considerable comment the harvesting of birds evoked. Never before had opposition against feather wearing been so organized, vehement, or widespread."[64] At the end of the century a dead bird on a hat no longer seemed "natural" and acceptable.

No matter how the problem was framed, the millinery industry really did have disastrous effects upon native bird populations, not to mention the impact on birds from other countries that were imported to the U.S. The American Ornithologists Union estimated in 1886 that five million North American birds were killed each year for millinery purposes, [65] while other bird preservationists claimed that at the beginning of the 1900s the number was actually over 200 million per year.[66] Although songbirds were often able to avoid the worst population damages,

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[62] *Harper's Bazar* , (2 October 1897), 815.
[63] "Pleading for the Birds," *New York Times*, 3 June 1900, p. 12, col. 3.
[64] Doughty, *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation*, 13.
[65] Frank Graham, *The Audubon Ark: A History of the National Audubon Society* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 25.
[66] Doughty, *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation*, 53.

shore and swamp birds in the southern U.S. states really felt the effects of hunting for millinery feathers.[67] Obviously, hunting for the millinery industry was not the only threat to the bird population, but it was a more visible target.

The Actions and Reactions:

In 1875, *Harper's Bazar* was among few voices condemning cruelty to birds. By 1897, however, several waves of organizations had formed to work for bird protection. Groups of scientists and cadres of sportsmen were interested in the protection of birds, and each formed committees and organizations towards this end. Discussion of bird protection was not entirely new, during J.J. Audubon's heyday there was limited discussion of the need to protect birds from excessive hunting and for scientific purposes. However, the millinery issue was far more visible, and in its charge against women, an easier target. Hunting, especially the upper class hunting for sport, was associated with the traditional rugged American man as well as the aristocratic and leisured European hunter. The pursuit of beauty fit into women's established sphere, but the killing of other animals, especially other mothers, was an act that was not acceptable to a new, more nature loving morality.

One of the earliest organizations to recognize the human threat to bird-life, the American Ornithologists Union (AOU) was founded in 1883 by professional male ornithologists. While their concerns were primarily scientific in nature, they came to realize the dangers of over-hunting, egg collecting and the disruption of migratory patterns in particular bird populations.[68] The second annual meeting of the AOU resulted in the creation of a committee to work for the protection of American birds led by William Brewster. Working on its own, this portion of the AOU had difficulty in producing change; its efforts to reach the public were a financial burden,

[67] Welker, 259.

and the poor health of Brewster contributed to their inability to enact major change.[69] However, in 1886 they produced a "Model Law" published as a supplement to *Science* that provided an outline for bird protection legislation, as well as documents describing bird destruction, with appeals to women to stop the slaughter for fashion.[70] While the AOU would come to work closely with the Audubon societies, especially in their combined effects for bird protection legislation, their reputations would remain distinct. The AOU was not inclusive in its membership, and failed to create mass appeal for its campaigns. Even when sharing members, the AOU argued that birds were necessary for scientific purposes, while the women of Audubon societies were perceived to focus on the sentimental and emotional appeals for protection. The select membership and professional elitism of the AOU did not create the mass movement so crucial to social and environmental reform.

Continuing to comment upon the bird protection issue, *Harper's Bazar* announced the founding of the first Audubon Society on April 3, 1886. In the "Personal" section of the magazine appeared this notice: " A society taking its name after the great naturalist J.J. Audubon has been established for the purpose of fostering an interest for the protection of wild birds from destruction for millinery and other commercial purposes . . .It invites the cooperation of persons in every part of the country."[71] *Harper's Bazar* did not editorialize on the goals of this new society; instead simply disseminating information about its existence. There is the assumption, however, that bird protection and millinery would both be of interest to the reader.

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[68]Carl W. Bucheister and Frank Graham Jr., "From the Swamps and Back: A Concise and Candid History of the Audubon Movement." *Audubon* 75 (January 1973): 7.
[69] Theodore Whaley Cart, "The Struggle for Wildlife Preservation in the United States, 1870-1900: Attitudes and Events Leading to the Lacey Act" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1971), 62.
[70] Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 123.
[71] *Harper's Bazar* , 3 April 1886, 219.

The Audubon Society referred to by *Harper's Bazar* was founded by George Bird Grinnell, owner and editor of *Forest and Stream,* and avid outdoorsman, in 1886. This, the second organization founded expressly for the protection of bird life, primarily represented sportsmen and their concerns. Yet like the AOU and its elite scientists, without mobilization from the ground up, their results were limited and short-lived. The first Audubon Society's initial efforts looked promising. Through *Forest and Stream* , Grinnell created a society devoted to the protection of wild birds, and rapidly received an enormous response from his readers. By the end of the Audubon Society's first year 16,000 had enrolled in this society, and by August 1887 the numbers had reached 38,000. Unfortunately this organization had little effect on real bird protection. Its primary vehicle remained the magazine (it began its own publication, *Audubon Magazine*, in 1887), and while it was able to lobby the AOU Model Law to New York and Pennsylvania, an absence of strong grass roots support made the organization to large and unwieldy for greater reforms. By 1895 the original Audubon Society had faded away, and the wearing of bird hats was as rampant as ever.[72]

While Grinnell's means of organization did not result in the bird protection effects he sought, his vision of the problem was crucial in shaping future arguments. In the February 11, 1886 editorial in which he announced the formation of his Audubon Society, he wrote that Americans were coming to realize that wearing birds for fashion was an outrageous and dangerous phenomena, and that through further education and the growth of sentiment for bird life, these destructive and wanton trends could be reversed. He wrote, "Legislation of itself can do little against this barbarous practice, but if public sentiment can be aroused against it, it will die a speedy death…The reform in America, as elsewhere, must be inaugurated by women, and

[72] Welker, 205.

if the subject is properly called to their notice, their tender hearts will be quick to respond."[73] Although it was not women's impetus to start this first Audubon Society, as it would be in the next wave, the numbers indicate that many did respond to Grinnell's pleas.

Although Grinnell's Audubon Society and its public support had all but faded away by 1895, this lull was not to last for long, and it was the next wave of Audubon Societies that turned bird protection into a broadly based environmental protection movement. The Massachusetts Audubon society was founded by Mrs. Harriet Hemenway, a well-known Boston socialite and philanthropist who was quite involved in public service. Having just read an article describing the horrific murder of birds in Florida for hat plumage, Mrs. Hemenway decided to take some steps of her own to end this trade. The now legendary story goes that she called her cousin, Miss Minna B. Hall to tea, and the two of them took down the social register, the *Boston Blue Book*, and proceeded to contact the most fashionable ladies of Boston in order to create a mass boycott of feathered millinery.[74] They invited these wealthy, and fashionable women to Mrs. Hemenway's home, and over afternoon tea parties planned and organized their next steps. Minna Hall recalled later of their initial meetings, "We marked the ladies of fashion who would be likely to wear aigrettes on their hats or in their bar…We then set out circulars asking the women to join a society for the protection of birds, especially the egret. Some women joined and some who preferred to wear the feathers would not join."[75] Their organization took its name from Grinnell's failed Audubon Society of a decade before, since that group, although having collapsed from its overly successful membership drive, was based on similar principals.

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[73] George Bird Grinnell, "The Audubon Society," *Forest and Stream: A Weekly Journal of the Rod and Gun,* 11 February 1886, 41.
[74] Price, 63.
[75] Graham, 15.

By 1897 the Massachusetts Audubon Society had a membership of 1,284[76] and similar organizations had emerged in other states. The Pennsylvania Audubon Society was founded later in 1896, and was closely followed by societies in New York, New Hampshire, Illinois, Maine, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Washington D.C. Geographically, while the focus of the bird preservation stemmed from the eastern, more industrialized states, the movement rapidly spread westward, and by 1898 there were Audubon Societies in Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee, Minnesota, Texas and California.[77] In 1901 leaders from each individual society met together in New York City and formed a federation of the societies, the National Committee of Audubon Societies of America, and elected William Dutcher as their chairman.[78] The federation remained loose, and while serving as a forum for communication and national lobbying it allowed the state societies to carry on their own campaigns.

The founders quite clearly spelled out the purpose of the society from their earliest meetings. They wrote, "The purpose of the Society is to discourage buying and wearing for ornamental purposes the feathers of any wild birds and to otherwise further the protection of our native birds." [79] Hats were the primary focus of this organization, with greater emphasis on the consumption rather than the production of such millinery. Therefore, the people that needed to be reached with the bird protection message were the wearers of plumed hats: upper class women. In this forum, upper class women were inherently implicated in the issue since they were the wearers of the troubling, wanton and wasteful millinery. At its origins this organization was not especially focused on changing government or legislation. It perceived the cruelty and

[76] Bucheister, "From the Swamps and Back," 10.
[77] Graham, 18.
[78] Ibid., 41.
[79] Joseph Kastner, "Long Before Furs, It Was Feathers That Stirred Reformist Ire," *Smithsonian* 25, no. 4 (July 1994): 99.

massacre of birds for consumption to be outrageous and sought to end the outrage by making women want to abandon this fashion.

The first meeting of the Massachusetts Audubon Society occurred on February 10, 1896, and although founded by socially powerful women, some men were also included. The female founders recognized that having scientists and professional men in their camp would arouse the necessary mainstream attention for their cause. Just a week after the first February meeting, William Brewster, a founder of the AOU and prominent field ornithologist, was invited and elected president of the Massachusetts Audubon Society. His scientific credentials allowed the Audubon Society far greater access to established and respected national organizations and added creditability to their work. The women of the Audubon society recognized the importance of the male scientific voice, even going as far to believe that this figure was required in order to keep the organization on task and effective. When Brewster threatened to resign from the organization, Minna Hall appeased him by claiming, "If you leave us, we shall become narrow minded and unscientific."[80] While the female founders of the Massachusetts Audubon Society intended to educate and change fashion based on the moral conscience of its wearers, they believed their women members lacked the scientific and professional perspective necessary to attract public attention and maintain their organization. While women remained the bulk of the membership and the driving force behind its activities, male leaders such as Brewster were considered important to the prestige and focus of the organization.[81]

Although the Audubon Society had a variety of scientific and civil male leaders, in most of the new state Audubon societies, a prominent woman was the founding and prime organizer of

[80] Ibid., 101.
[81] Graham, 16.

the new clubs.[82] In Connecticut, Mabel Osgood Wright was elected president, vice-presidents in Boston included Sarah Orne Jewett, and Mrs. Louis Agassiz, president of Radcliffe College, as well as Mrs. Julia J. Irving, president of Wellesley College.[83] While some women did hold important posts in the Audubon leadership, men had a disproportionate claim on the top positions. Throughout the country, men made up half of the leadership while women were 80% of the membership. Each local society had a secretary who reported its activities to other societies and these were almost exclusively women. [84] While men did hold positions of power, and make up some of the societies membership, media attention to the Audubon societies continued to place their work in a category similar to other women's clubs, and to emphasize the activities of women.[85]

From the start, women of the Audubon Societies believed that the way to stop the massacre of the birds was to stop the wearing of the birds and their feathers. Historically, much thought, including the recent ecofeminists movement, has argued that there is a particularly vital connection between women and nature. Essential to understanding women's involvement in the bird hat issue is their perception of the environment and their role in it. In engaging in environmentalist campaigns and activities, women used the socially proscribed strengths of their gender to rally supporters to their cause. Much like the women involved in other aspects of the women's club movement, women who worked for environmental causes like bird conservation maintained their status as ladies, while extending their domain to a broader sphere. However, there was wide variation as to how much blame the Audubon women placed on other women. The environmental reform women were often critical of the bird-wearing woman, because

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[82] Ibid., 18.
[83] Carolyn Merchant, "Women of the Progressive Conservation Movement, 1900-1916," *Environmental Review* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 70.
[84] Price, 64.

harming an animal solely for fashion, especially when the animal was a human-like mother, seemed to be morally lacking and in violation the proscribed female gender role. In many ways there were few distinctions between the woman who would wear a hat, and one who wouldn't. Both were of the same gender, class, and race, and both were supposed to be interested in their own beauty, and believed that a bird and its feathers were, at least in some form, lovely. What the women who refused birded millinery felt that they had over other women was superior morality and sentiment.

Audubon leaders typically spelled out the need for women's activity in the Audubon movement very clearly. At a New York City Audubon Society meeting in 1897, Morris K. Jesup, president of the society, spoke. "There is no one who respects and admires woman more than I do, and it pains me when I am forced to say that her vanity and the contingent eagerness of man to supply her with birds' plumage reaches one of the greatest calamities of our age. The remedy rests solely with the intelligence, the humanity of women; let her refuse to decorate her hat with feathered plumage and the slaughter of the birds will cease."[86] This statement in many ways captures the most common sentiments expressed over women's involvement with bird hats. First, women were blamed the presence of plumed millinery. It was silly "vanity" that caused a woman to wear a bird on her hat, and unfortunately some men "calamity." It was the "humanity" of women that ought to have been their guide in this matter.

Figure 4. Reprinted from *Harper's Bazar* 29, no. 14, 232.

[85] Ibid.
[86] "Urgent Plea for Birds," *The New York Times,* 3 December 1897, 12, col. 1.

Once she has realized the moral error of her ways, Jesup contended that the killing would subside.

While Jesup spoke from a man's point of view, his audience was primarily women, and women's writing followed similar logic. In her widely distributed pamphlet, entitled "Women's Heartlessness" Celia Thaxter strongly criticized those who continued to wear birds on their hats. She wrote, "When the Audubon Society was first organized, it seemed a comparatively simple thing to awaken in the minds of all bird-wearing women a sense of what their "decoration' involved. We flattered ourselves that the tender and compassionate heart of woman would at once respond to the appeal for mercy."[87] Here too, the assumption was made that it was solely the woman's responsibility to refuse "Fashion" and to act upon the naturally occurring compassion that she was supposedly born with. Ultimately, Thaxter concluded that there was hope that women would follow their consciences, so that we "see the day when women, one and all, will look upon the wearing of birds in its proper light, - namely, as a sign of heartlessness and a mark of ignominy and reproach."[88]

As the second, woman led, wave of Audubon Societies took hold in America, *Harper's Bazar* reflected some of the attitudes of the anti-bird hat campaign. While the pages of *Harper's Bazar* were frequently filled with illustrations of feathered hats and the magazine frequently mentioned these feathers in their fashion descriptions, other sections of the magazine were better able to present the voices and opinions of the anti-feather portion of the population. Each issue of *Harper's Bazar* contained a page devoted to satire and humor, and featured jokes, short poems and cartoons. In the satirical form of the cartoons, the magazine used pointed humor to portray the silliness of fashion as well as other issues associated with the use of nature in fashion.

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[87] Celia Thaxter, *Women's Heartlessness* (Boston: December 1886; reprint, New Jersey: Audubon Society of the State of New Jersey, 1899), 3.

In some cases the cartoons addressed the hat issue very clearly, and show the women who wore bird-hats in a very silly and unflattering light. One cartoon from 1886 illustrated a woman with an exceptionally elaborate hat [Figure 4].[89] While the woman was shown glancing downward with a demure and reserved expression, there was nothing reserved about her headgear. In this hat, a small cap was topped with an entire ostrich neck and head. The bird's body was missing, but one foot extended over the woman's forehead and a variety of plumes, some striped, and others like a peacock, grew out the back. The caption read, "The Slaughter of the Innocent Birds. Fashion demands the sacrifice from the ostrich to the humming-bird." It is very clear that this cartoonist found the demands of fashion to be utterly ridiculous. While the wearer of the hat was a woman, and no other figure was present, here Fashion's demands were the problem, and the woman's expression makes it look as if she too was oppressed by her hat. We are left with an exaggeration of the types of hats worn, and a clear connection to the lives of birds, but there was little blame placed on the women consumers, or any human producers. The similarity of the caption to Miss Thatcher's 1875 article "The Slaughter of the Innocents" makes it seem likely that the illustrator was aware of this earlier piece, and his cartoon contributes to its efforts.

An illustration with a similar message appeared in the February 1909 issue. Here we see a chicken shedding tears as it looked at a very similar bird perched atop a large brimmed hat [Figure 5].[90] The wings of the bird on the hat were slightly outstretched, and its tail feathers extend up and out, and were delicately curled at the ends. The caption read, "Alas! My poor brother!" While the hat was simpler and more realistic in this second illustration, this illustration made a more emotional appeal for the birds. Like the anthropomorphism of birds in popular

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[88] Ibid., 7.
[89] *Harper's Bazar* 29, no. 14 (1886), 232.

Figure 5. Birds have feelings too! Cartoon from *Harper's Bazar* February 1909, 200.

literature of the period, the bird here was a living creature with very real feelings, and human-like emotional responses. The living bird recognized the dead one as a brother, and reminded the reader that their millinery ornaments came from a living source, and their lives were important to others. Once again, the blame from this cruelty was left vague and up to the reader. Killing a bird for a hat was most certainly cruel, but reason for this millinery was left up to the imagination of the reader. Although 23 years have passed between the "The Slaughter of Innocent Birds" and this illustration, not much seemed to have changed. Like women's responses in general, these cartoons and articles featured in the magazine were designed to raise consciousness of the moral and emotional implications of a bird on a hat. They do not make lengthy explanations of why we need birds, rather they hit the reader with a quick, jarring and sentimental image.

In addition to its satire pages, *Harper's Bazar* also documented the activities and successes of the hat reformers as part of their column, "Club Women and Club Work." In June of 1897 the column reported on the success of some member clubs of the Massachusetts Federation of Clubs, working to stop the use of birds in millinery. Olive Thorne Miller was quoted in the piece as quite optimistic about the success of women in the struggle, based on the recent success of some of her "talks" on birds. The reform sentiment from children was deemed to be especially effective, and Miller shares two anecdotes: "One little boy announced a visitor the other day to his mother thus: 'Mamma, there's a woman with a dead body on her hat who wants to see you'; and another told his mother 'he could not bear Mrs. B--- because she had a

[90] *Harper's Bazar* February 1909, 200.

poor little dead bird on her bonnet.' When the children are roused, something will be done, and protest like that of the Massachusetts Federation means home enlightenment through the great army of club-women mothers."

In fact, *Harper's Bazar* was not far off-base when it lumped the bird-protection women's clubs with other women's clubs of the period. As middle class married women, not needing to work for a wage, became increasingly confined to the home they assumed the role of society's moral guardians. They formed clubs for a large variety of purposes, many in forms of social reform.[91] For the most part *Harper's Bazar* was a strong proponent of women's clubs, and devoted considerable space to the growth and activities of a variety of clubs. In 1890, the magazine stated, "Nearly every community of any size has its woman scientist, its woman philologist or its woman archaeologist."[92] Women's participation in club activities was an acceptable and normal activity. Yet while supporting women's activities outside of the home, the magazine was sure to remind its readers that these sorts of activities did not change the nature of the woman's sphere or her duties to her home and family. An 1885 article entitled "Ladies' Clubs" discussed the propriety of women's club activities, but included this proviso: "We do not undertake to undervalue the privileges of a home. No happy wife and mother, no fortunate possessor of a home, will ever be in danger of caring too much for a club."[93] Women's clubs could have been seen to threaten to the status quo of women's rights, but *Harper's* wanted to minimize this point of contention. Thusly, it argued that the club was not a threat to the home, just an extension of women's care that would always be secondary to the care of her family.

Environmental concerns were a prime candidate of clubwomen's attention. Karen Blair writes, "God- said clergymen, medical men, and popular writers- created woman with natural or

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[91] Price, 65.
[92] *Harper's Bazar* , 25 October 1890, 826.

biologically moral superiority over man. Her ability to create a happy and wholesome environment for her family grew from her instinctive sanctity and sweetness."[94] Women's morality was granted to her through God and her biology. On one hand she was especially tied to nature, simply because nature and her biology were crucial to her world outlook and decision making strategies. On the other hand, her moral superiority and sweetness would then allow her to take better care of nature when she realized its inherent natural worth and beauty. Environmental issues perceived as affecting the home, health and family, were topics that fell well within the domestic sphere. Much like the women involved in other aspects of the women's club movement, women who worked for environmental causes like bird conservation maintained their status as ladies, while extending their domain to a broader sphere. According to Blair's argument that women's clubs of the period were maintaining traditional definitions of womanhood while adding a public dimension to the women's sphere, environmental concerns were a particularly pertinent subject.[95] Many of the environmental campaigns in which women were involved, came from the broader women's club movement, and there are multiple examples of women who were involved in both the Audubon Societies and a variety of other groups for education, social reform, and amusement.[96]

During the end of the 19th century, women's groups were hardly the only players involved in environmental protection. It was during this period that we see the development of the major types of environmental thought that led to the environmentalism of today. While a growing appreciation for the aesthetics of nature may have contributed to birds on hats for some, it caused others to recognize that their uniquely American natural resources would not always be in great

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[93] *Harper's Bazar,* 17 October 1885, 666.
[94] Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Homes & Meier Publishers, 1980), 2.
[95] Ibid., 1.

abundance and required protection. The growing realization that natural resources were expendable and at risk (based on public knowledge of events like the extinction of the passenger pigeon, and approaching extinction of the native bison), prompted conservation and protective responses. In appreciating nature more, wilderness enthusiasts came to place a higher premium on the life of animals, and the need to protect them.

There were two primary types of thought and methods for environmental protection at the turn of the century: conservation and preservation. In the time period before World War I, the preservation and conservation camps can be seen quite separately. According to Thomas Dunlap, "In the period before World War I and the collapse of the Progressive movement, the rational resource users (the Gifford Pinchot school) can be labeled the 'conservationists.' Call the advocates of wilderness and nature 'preservationists.'"[97] Led by forester Gifford Pinchot, conservationists believed that nature needed to be used wisely so to protect future use. In contrast, the preservationists, epitomized by John Muir, believed that nature should be preserved for its own sake, based on its beauty and capacity to inspire. The two camps acted in a fairly complementary attitude up until the turn of the century and the conflict over the use or preservation of the Hetch Hetchy valley.[98] Within the bird hat protest lie elements of both of these broader ideologies towards nature. A sentimental love for bird life reflected preservation's romantic affection for the beauty of nature, while those who wished to ensure the maintenance of bird populations for human use and emphasized the importance of professional and scientific stewardship, fit more closely with the conservationists. Scholarship on the bird hat campaign, often interchanges the terms of preservation and conservation, but in this paper, I have chosen

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[96] Price, 68.
[97] Thomas R. Dunlap, "Conservationists and Environmentalists: An Attempt at Definition," *Environmental Review* 4, no. 1 (spring 1980): 30.
[98] Coates, 25-26.

simply to use the term "protection" as to avoid associating the bird hat movement completely with either of the broader camps.

Certain aspects of women's responsibilities and duties of the home made them superior conservators and moral educators, and put them in an advantageous position to protect the environment. While her focus is on the period after the founding of the state Audubon Societies, Carolyn Merchant's concept of the "Conservation Trilogy" is useful in understanding women's motives behind environmental conservation. Through their conservation efforts, women, and the men who supported them, sought to maintain tradition assumptions of women's societal role. The "Conservation Trilogy" involved efforts to protect "True Womanhood," the home, and the child, and was espoused by the women of the Conservation Congress of 1909. The first part of the trilogy argued that womanhood itself could provide the "atmosphere" for conservation ideas, and that women were practiced conservationists since many of their actions in the home were based on "making do" with available supplies (for example, cooking with leftovers) or the strict budgeting of household resources.[99] In the second part of the trilogy, conservation of the home, women sought to protect the health and happiness of their families and their immediate environments, because the home was the environment of true womanhood. Mrs. Orville Bright, representing the National Congress of Mothers, spoke on the need to conserve for the benefit of people, rather than other organisms, because if there were "no men, women, and children to use and enjoy them" they were of little value. Resources must be best conserved for "the use, comfort, and benefit of the homes of the people."[100] In the final part of the trilogy, women ought to be concerned with conservation for the benefit of the child and for future generations. As woman was the "transmitter of life," it was her role to protect her children as well as the unborn

[99] Carolyn Merchant, "Women of the Progressive Conservation Movement, 1900-1916," *Environmental Review* 8, no. 1, (spring 1984): 74.

generations. Children must be protected from the dangers of urban life, and permitted to, in the words of Mrs. John Walker, "enjoy the freedom of the bird and the butterfly…and all that the sweet breast of Nature offers so freely."[101] For Mrs. Walker, nature was important for its aesthetic beauty, and for the attitudes it could foster in future generations. Care for the health and well being of the natural world was simply a natural extension of the domestic sphere, and women could care for the environment without modifying the core principles of the domestic sphere.

Women's traditional exclusion from the spheres of business and economics allowed them to use different kinds of logic and justification for environmental preservation. In a sense, they were outsiders, whom society permitted to have a more moral or sentimental outlook on a problem that would usually only be seen in an economic or scientific light.[102] As Mrs. Lydia Adams-Williams wrote in her article, "Conservation- Women's Work" in 1908, "man has been too busy building railroads, constructing ships, engineering great projects, and exploiting vast commercial enterprises" to protect the environment. Women, with their household budgeting experience, were better able to "educate public sentiment to save from rapacious waste and complete exhaustion the resources upon which depend the welfare of the home, the children, and the children's children."[103]

Although the bird hat issue was linked to the broader conservation and preservation movements, in its reliance upon emotional and sentimental arguments and belief of the sentience of birds, it was probably most closely aligned with the contemporary animal rights movement. The emergence of the animal rights movement in the decades following the Civil War stemmed

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[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., 75.
[102] Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Association in American History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 3-4.

from a variety of sources. Scientific works made the link between animals and humans stronger. Darwin's *Origin of the Species,* published in 1859, sparked huge controversy and produced widespread public conversation, challenging conventional notions of the relationship between humans and other animal species. [104] Darwin's work put nature in charge of human "destiny", and forced the questioning of humans' role and connections to the environment.[105] Converging with this scientific-based thought were social factors based on the increasing industrialization of the nation. Discussion of workers rights and conditions prompted investigation and compassion for both humans and animals. Here too popular literature affected popular opinion. Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* was extremely influential in rallying support for the humane treatment of animals.[106] Upper-class Americans were becoming more aware of the plights of others, and in part because animals provided an emotional link to the American agrarian past, in some cases this compassion extended to their treatment as well.[107] 1866 saw the creation of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, followed by the Massachusetts SPCA in 1868, the District of Columbia SPCA in 1870, and the American Humane Association in 1877. For the rest of the century, a new animal-welfare organization popped up every couple of years.[108]

A substantial portion of the participants in the bird protection movement agreed with the ideals of the humane and animal rights movement. Many individuals active in the bird hat protests were also actively anti-vivisection, and organizations like the British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds enacted both humane and anti-feather campaigns.[109] The sentimental and

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[103] Lydia Adams-Williams, "Conservation- Women's Work," *Forestry and Irrigation* , June 1908, 350.
[104] Lawrence and Susan Finsen, *The Animal Rights Movement in America: From Compassion to Respect* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 27.
[105] Barbara Gates, *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1.
[106] Harold D. Guither, *Animal Rights* (Carbondale : Southern Illinois University Press, 1998).
[107] Finsen, 27.
[108]Guither, 99.
[109] Gates, 115.

moral arguments of the bird hat issue (espoused most frequently by women) can be seen to stem from the same sources that spawned the humane movement. Those who believed that animals had feelings and rights would naturally be opposed to their millinery use.

Crucial to the determination that animals were creatures that should be protected and cared for, was the development of sentiment on their behalf. One way in which turn of the century animal lovers convinced others to love animals was through popular literature. This technique is particularly apparent in the awakening of interest in bird life. In his descriptions of the turn of the century female bird writers, Paul Brooks writes, "Though their names may not be familiar to today's readers, our women writers deserve much of the credit for making birds and bird study a part of daily life. No less important is the emotional drive they brought to bear in persuading 'women of fashion' to cease crowning their hears with plumes and 'withered corpses.'"[110] The women nature writers did much to affect public opinion on nature and wildlife, and they attempted to rally the support from women deemed so necessary. At the same time as the Audubon Societies were in full effect, women were writing prolifically on birds and their habits, and were widely read. As part of the bird hat campaign, the female bird enthusiast fought with both "pen and lectern."[111] Olive Thorne Miller, Mabel Osgood Wright, and Florence Merriam Bailey were three of the most popular bird writers of the period, and each was involved in the conservation of bird life, especially in the millinery issue.

Bird writers' descriptions of birds as anthropomorphic and "feathered friends" were often highly gendered. A short blurb in the "Sayings and Doings" section of the June 19, 1869 issue of *Harper's Bazar* reported, "A writer on Birds Nests in *Atlantic Monthly* remarks that there seems to be a system of Women's Rights prevailing among the birds contemplated from the standpoint

[110] Paul Brooks, "Birds and Women," *Audubon* 82, no. 5 (September 1980): 89.

of the male is quite admirable." [112] In this piece, the female bird was praised for her ability to choose the location of the nest, and maintain a healthy family, features that could be seen in human mothers' care for the home and health of her family. In other instances, the actions of the fathers were considered as well, but in some cases with far less affection. Olive Thorne Miller described watching a pair of birds teach their little one how to fly. However, something went wrong in the lesson, and the father-bird, with an angry look in his eye, pushed his offspring off a precarious position to its death. The father then left the mother, and Mrs. Miller saw him with a new mate. Hardly a glowing report of bird masculinity, Miller wrote, "It had taken that disreputable sparrow less than thirty-six hours to kill his baby, divorce his wife, and woo and bring home a bride!"[113] While one must hope that Mrs. Miller did not consider these tendencies to be normal in bird or human societies, she very clearly phrased the birds' activity with reference to human family structures and social interactions. Most frequently, victims of murder for fashion were described as female. The poor little hatchlings died with when hunters killed their mothers for her maternal feathers. While male birds also died for their feathers, the connection between human mothers and bird mothers is not just hinted at, it is expressed clearly[114] and with the purpose of awakening women's maternal response to work for the protection of birds.

A tradition of human interactions with birds added significance both to their millinery use and the efforts to protect them, and affected the ways bird writers considered their subjects. From prehistoric times birds have been food for people, but also artistic inspiration, even in cave paintings. Perhaps because they are one of the only animals to sing, because we are inspired by

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[111] Deborah Strom, *Birdwatching with American Women: A Selection of Nature Writings* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986): xii.
[112] *Harper's Bazar*, 19 June 1869, 391
[113] Olive Thorne Miller, *Bird-Ways* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1885), 158.

their flight, and because they are relatively harmless to human lives, they claim a unique position in our imagination.[115] However, their utility as food remained important as well. During the settlement of the North American continent birds were characterized as either food or pests, either way fit to be hunted.[116] However, by the end of the 19th century, views on birds were considerably different. Artists like J.J. Audubon found beauty in nature, and elevated the image of the bird to high artistry. Combined with the writings of Thoreau, Emerson, Burroughs and others, the bird was fully entrenched in the popular imagination as well. [117] At the end of the 19th century, birds were a potent symbol of nature and beauty, "a living creature whose grace of motion, musical powers, and intelligence" could give the viewer "the purest pleasure,"[118] and one whose use or protection would be emotionally charged.

Women's writing was exceptionally influential in creating sentiment towards birds. Three authors in particular, Olive Thorne Miller, Mabel Osgood Wright, and Florence Merriam Bailey popularized the genre and their writings provide insight into particularly feminine attitudes towards bird life, and the types of sentimental arguments used to convince other women not to wear birds. Although intended as pleasurable literature, works by Mabel Osgood Wright were always didactic in their anthropomorphism of birds, and in the messages portrayed about the worth of bird life. In her story, "Overture by the Birds" Mrs. Wright featured a group of birds discussing a human conservation they overheard. The human children were discussing bird shooting, and one tried to convince the other that all birds are special. Mrs. Wright wrote,

> " Why you silly dear!' cried the big girl, laughing a sweet little laugh like the Bobolink's song, 'that only proves how little you know about wild birds. Plenty of them are more brightly colored than your Canary, and some of those that wear the plainest feathers sing

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[114] Price, 90-91.
[115] Welker, 158.
[116] Paul Brooks, "Birds and Men," *Audubon* 82, no. 4 (July 1980): 44
[117] Welker, 90.
[118] Frank M. Chapman, "The Audubon Society Again," *New York Times,* 19 November 1897, 6.

> more beautifully than all the Canaries and cage birds in the world. This summer, when you have made friends with these wild birds, and they have let you see their homes and learn their secrets, you will make up your mind that there are no common birds; for every one of them has something very uncommon about it." [119]

In this passage Wright encouraged the study of wild birds, and described how all birds were beautiful in a variety of ways. While in most bird literature birds were imbued with human characteristics, here the girl was said to laugh like a bird song. Although this story is cute and entertaining, Wright was clear and deliberate in her pro-bird message to all her readers. How could anyone possibly put a dead bird on a hat after they read this pleasant story and learned how to watch the even more beautiful living bird?

While Mabel Osgood Wright's novel, *Birdcraft* , also frequently described birds in anthropomorphic language, this book was intended as a field guide for the amateur ornithologist, and contained a combination of scientific and identification information. While women could access the scientific discourse on birds, they continued to use this language to engage others in sentimental appeals. Mrs. Wright was the first president of the Audubon Society of the State of Connecticut, and the editor of the Audubon section of *Bird-Lore,* the official periodical of the Audubon Society.[120] She would strongly disagree with Mrs. Maxwell's methods of studying nature, since Mrs. Wright was a firm believer in the examination of only living birds, and if any were to be killed it should have been by scientists only.[121] In her criticism of man's hunting of birds for any reason, Mrs. Wright argued that although birds had natural enemies, for some reason they trusted man to an extra degree. She wrote, "Poor little birds! They do not realize that man with his higher intelligence is really the most relentless of all. The other enemies kill

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[119] Strom, 151.
[120] Carolyn Merchant, "Women and Conservation," in *Major Problems in American Environmental History* , ed. Carolyn Merchant (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1993), 377.
[121] Mabel Osgood Wright, *Birdcraft: A Field Book of Two Hundred Song, Game and Water Birds* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), xv.

for food only, man kills for food casually, for decorative feathers wantonly, and for scientific research plausibly, with the apology that the end and aim is knowledge."[122] Teaching Americans to watch birds would also teach them to treasure their living worth.

Olive Thorne Miller was a prominent bird writer who was also active in the Audubon societies. Her writing in particular focused on the attitudes and actions of birds themselves and the ways people could introduce birds into their lives. In her book, *Bird-Ways*, Miller wrote about birds in order to convince her readers that birds have feelings and families much like humans, and they should not be so wantonly destroyed. She wrote of the millinery use of birds, "It seems even more strange that a gentle woman can endure the beautiful plumage of a delicate winged creature, whose sweet life of song and joy was rudely cut short by brutal men that the poor dead body might shine among her laces."[123] Once again, the focus was on the beauty of the birds, as well as the romanticization of their lives. In addition, Mrs. Miller questioned the "gentle" nature of any women that would wear a hat with a dead bird atop it. Mrs. Miller joyfully described her bird observations throughout the rest of the book, many of which take place from the window of her house with an opera glass. Evidenced in her descriptions of women, and her physical proximity to her house and yard, Mrs. Miller did not challenge the boundaries of the women's sphere. But through her easily accessible style she brought birds into the homes of thousands of her female readers.

A series by Olive Thorne Miller, entitled "Bird-Lore" (also the title of the Audubon Society's periodical that she edited) appeared in five issues of *Harper's Bazar* in 1892 and gave the reader the tools necessary to bring the joys living birds into their lives. This series touched on a variety of ways that people could interact with and enjoy birds. The fourth section, "To

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[122] Ibid., 11.
[123] Miller, 204.

Tame a Bird" educated the reader on how to become closer and even to make friends with the neighborhood birds. According to Miller there were four stages necessary for establishing a relationship with a bird: in step one the human must overcome the bird's fears, in the second the bird was happy, in the third he was tame, and in the fourth and final step he was humanized.[124] These stories had a twofold purpose. They were genuinely entertaining as literature, and therefore served the literary aims of *Harper's Bazar*. However, they were also didactic, teaching the reader to enjoy birds and to recognize, if not their "humanity," at least their sentience.

Florence Merriam Bailey was another example of the early bird watchers and writers. The popularity of her literary style particularly exemplified the impact of emotional on the reader and the way literature could be used to impact their attitudes to the environment. As a student at Smith College, the future Mrs. Bailey was an avid birder, and a follower of John Burroughs. She co-founded the Smith College Audubon Society in March of 1886, just months after the founding of George Bird Grinnell's first society.[125] Whereas many of the other woman writers came into nature writing in their later lives, Florence's family was always involved in the study of nature (her brother, C. Hart Merriam was a prominent naturalist and head of the US Biological Survey). Florence Merriam Bailey's style was very deliberately more literary than scientific. Mrs. Bailey realized that this more accessible writing style would attract a larger and more diverse audience, and would encourage the study of living wildlife.[126] While trying to protect birds from their millinery uses, Mrs. Bailey was very careful in the way she approached her fellow students on the subject. In what was to be an oft quoted anecdote, she wrote of the organization of the Smith club, "'The birds must be protected; we must persuade the girls not to wear feathers on their hats. We won't say much about hats, though,' these plotters went on.

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[124] *Harper's Bazar*, 19 March 1892, 226.
[125] Kofalk, 34.

'We'll take the girls afield, and let them get acquainted with the birds. Then, of inborn necessity, they will wear feathers never more.'"[127] While Mrs. Bailey had much popular success with her lighthearted bird stories, when she changed her style to a more scientific one and wrote for the scientific bird journals, the public's attention dwindled.[128] It seems that the women bird writers were correct to assume that a more literary style would gain them popularity and public concern for their subjects. In their attempts to change public attitudes, bird protection advocates needed to appeal to a broad audience. Overall, the women bird writers did much to affect popular attitudes towards bird life and its preservation. Paul Brooks concludes his discussion of "Birds and Women," "Their writing, addressed to readers of all ages, obviously had a great deal to do with the success of the early Audubon societies and the whole movement for bird protection"[129]

While the bird writers tried to create public interest in birds that would cross class divisions, they themselves represented the same kind of upper-class women that had started the Audubon Societies. Upper-class women laid claim to a superior morality, that here was based on the ability to empathize and appreciate the beauty of nature, since only they had the time to join societies and watch birds for hours. Modern historian Jennifer Price writes, "In theory, every woman, rich or poor, was born with natural moral gifts. In practice, the separate-sphere definitions of Woman as morally superior favored wealthier women over working-class women, who had to work outside the home in men's business."[130] The class status of the women founders and members of the state societies was crucial. Particularly in Boston the founding members of the Audubon Society came from exceptionally well to do and traditionally activist families. Their

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[126] Ibid., 59.
[127]Florence Merriam Bailey, "Florence Merriam Bailey on the Early Audubon Women, 1900," in *Major Problems in American Environmental History* , ed. Carolyn Merchant (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1993), 389.
[128] Marcia Myers Bonta, *Women in the Field: America's Pioneering Women Naturalists* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1991), 182.
[129] Brooks, "Birds and Women," 97.
[130] Price, 77.

last names may have been well known for their success in business, but they were also, in the words of John Mitchell, "the same families that brought down the British Empire in the Americas. This was the same group that forced Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, and it was these families that were about to create the American tradition of environmental activism."[131] Whether or not Mitchell is correct in the importance of these wealthy families on environmental activism, it was people of considerable economic means that had the time and the money to spend on these public service projects, and their actions reflected positively on their social status.

Class played an important role in the framing of the bird hat debate. Upper class women prided themselves on their ladylike virtues of compassion and morality, while they considered lower class women less respectable, less moral and less feminine.[132] As some upper class Audubon women began to abandon their feather millinery, they shifted the blame for the continued sales of birds on hats to the poor. They made fun of the servant girl who put a chicken feather in her bonnet, or characterized the hat wearer as a real "loidy" who did very unladylike things like spitting and drinking beer.[133] Upon the discovery that lower-class Italian immigrants were shooting city songbirds for dinner, the Audubon Society targeted the immigrant communities with a poster campaign. While the Society acknowledged that cultural differences produced this practice, their posters announced that in this country, songbirds should be enjoyed, not eaten.[134]While in most cases the women of the Audubon Society directed their criticisms to other women of similar class and social status, they sometimes characterized the wearers of bird millinery as of lower social worth or they targeted the activities of other ethnic groups.

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[131] John H. Mitchell, "The Mothers of Conservation," *Sanctuary* (January-February 1996): 5.
[132] Price, 78.
[133] Ibid., 79.
[134] Kastner, "Long Before Furs,"101.

Voices from outside the Audubon Society point to the prevalent classism that is evident in the attitudes of many within the bird protection movement. Maggie Fitzpatrick, a forewoman in charge of feathers in a millinery establishment argued against the bird protectionists' criticisms of her industry and its workers. Arguing that the millinery industry was an important source of women's employment, Fitzpatrick believed that it was unfair to admonish hard-working women, especially when they used feathers from food or game birds, not song birds. Fitzpatrick wrote, "Furthermore, is it right to kill thousands of seals yearly to supply fine garments for the rich? Why should it be wrong for a poor girl to make a living by working at the feather trade?"[135]

Miss Fitzpatrick brings up some valid points. In her examination of women's role in the millinery trades in *The Female Economy*, historian Wendy Gamber concludes that the fashion industry gave women autonomy in many of the same ways as the club movement. [136] While some women found notions of "fashion" confining and oppressive, for others the fields of dressmaking and millinery offered new opportunities. Custom work provided good jobs for women. The work was safe, portable, and allowed women to be their own boss.[137] It required skill and artistry and offered good pay and the possibility for ownership, which was rare in female work. In couching their debate, those of the bird preservation societies characterized the milliner as a man driven purely by economic needs. However, in taking this view upper-class women denied the importance of women in the trade, and overlooked the autonomy the working women gained from their trade.

Obviously, not all Americans believed in the message and the actions of the Audubon Society. Frequently, critical voices focused on what they perceived as inconsistencies in the

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[135] Maggie Fitzpatrick, "Song Birds and Millinery," *New York Times* , 11 April 1900, 3.
[136] Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

Audubon message, especially in its emphasis on "beautiful" birds without consideration for other animals and issues. For the most part these criticisms came from men. If the domestic sphere required women's attention to beauty and morality, the forces of logic, economics and science could be seen to control men. Many men simply refused to honor sentimentality as a valid decision-making tool. Some did not buy the argument that the birds killed for their feathers were as special as the Audubon Society made them out to be. During the 1913 debate in congress, Congressman James A. Reed asked, "Why there should be any sympathy about a long-legged, long-beaked, long-necked bird that lives in swamp and eats tadpoles?...Let humanity utilize this bird for the only purpose that the Lord made it for...so we could get aigrettes for the bonnet of our beautiful ladies."[138] Reed argued that the beauty of women was more valuable than the beauty of these swamp birds, and that birds should be "rationally" used for their ornamentation.

Others were not convinced that wearing bird plumage was truly different than other ways that people use animal resources. "Do the Audubonites think it hurts a skylark more to be killed for adornment than it does a chicken for eating?" asked J.H.H. in a letter to the New York Times, "And how about the fur-bearing animals, the seals, minks and all the other- doesn't it hurt them to be killed for adornment?"[139] While a reader responded to this letter two days later arguing that it was the cruelty, "the slow death by starvation of young herons and the lingering torture of nesting seagulls"[140] that set the millinery killings apart from those for food, some Americans doubted that one type of killings was really so much worse than another.

It must have been clear to the American public, that sentimentality was a primary cause for the outrage against feathers in the millinery industry. When appealing to women hat-wearers

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[137] Mary Van Kleeck, *A Seasonal Industry: A Study Of The Millinery Trade In New York* (New York : Russell Sage Foundation, 1917), 29.
[138] Kastner, "Long Before Furs," 5.
[139] *New York Times,* 24 April 1910, 12.

it may have been appropriate, but when creating law and regulation some believed that sentimentality had no place. Women were traditionally denied access to business and economic decisions, which in part allowed their reliance on emotional decision-making to be socially acceptable, but some were angered when this sentimentality was used to argue against particular business practices. One letter to the editor of the New York times criticized those working for legislation on the millinery use of birds: "It does not appear to be generally understood by those who permit their judgement to be warped by sentimentality in this matter that there are hundreds of species of birds on the face of the earth that are as pestiferous and obnoxious to mankind as numerous species of insects and vermin. As to the plumage of such birds, would it not also be a great economic waster to prohibit the use of it…?"[141] Here, the author reversed the economic argument for bird protection, and argued that since Americans kill so many pest birds we should simply use their feathers, and that sentimentality should have no place in these decisions.

Despite the scattering of negative responses the bird protectionists continued in their efforts. The women of the Audubon Societies met. And they discussed birds. And they held lectures, and slideshows, and spoke to children, and wrote pamphlets. They supported the founding of "Bird Day" in schools, and an annual Christmas Day bird count. They even designed a series of hats that featured the latest styles, but were completely bird-free, naming them "Audubonnets."[142] Depending on the desired goals the success of these efforts varied. Some noticed that more people were putting out bird food, and certainly more were watching and taking note of the birds of their backyard. Some even developed so much affection for bird life that they were willing to sacrifice other animals. One Audubon volunteer wrote, "I have also entertained birds who come about by house by placing food and water and bird houses for them.

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[140] *New York Times,* 26 April 1910, 10.
[141] *New York Times,* 29 May 1913, 12.

And last, but not least, I killed our handsome cat because she killed more birds than two or three ladies could wear on their hats."[143] While the Audubon Societies may have introduced the bird hat issue to a few enlightened upper-class women, the problem was important to many others.

Yet, while the Audubon Societies and their campaigns gained popular attention, women still wore birds and feathers on their hats. The intent and the methods of the first years of the Audubon Societies did not seem to be paying off, and while the needs and priorities of the Audubon women remained the same, voices from within and outside the Audubon Society began to reinterpret the problem, and to search for new causes and solutions.

While *Harper's Bazar* printed criticisms of the use of birds and feathers on hats due to the cruelty and destruction of bird populations, it also wanted to find a way to balance the claims of the conservationists with the continuing feather fashions. Because the fashions had not changed, *Harper's Bazar* was eager to believe that there was no conflict between its portrayal of the fashions, beauty, and its responsibility to educate and inform its readers' morality. On November 18, 1899, the magazine published a brief piece that refuted the claims of cruelty and argued that the feathers used on hats were safely and humanely gathered from farmed birds:

> "The tender-hearted women who have refused to wear egrets on their hats and bonnets, on account of the poor mother birds, will be glad to learn that they are not killed for the purpose of obtaining these lovely ornaments. As a matter of fact, the hunters, without powder or shot, go around (in South America or India) during the right season to the breeding or roosting grounds and collect the plumes which are cast by the male birds every year.
> "In Venezuela the natives are beginning to farm the birds, as they are easily domesticated; and as the egrets grow again each year this enterprise should be very profitable.
> "It has long been considered a very cruel thing to wear an egret, as it was supposed that a mother-bird was killed to obtain it. We have heard harrowing descriptions of nests of young birds left unprotected while the mother-birds lay mangled on the ground- all for

[142] Graham, 39.
[143] Graham, 18.

> the adornment of heathen womankind. But now the most tenderhearted lady (provided she can afford the luxury) may wear this beautiful ornament with a clear conscience."[144]

In some aspects this article was more cruel to the wearers of feathered fashions than any preceding it. It described how women who wore the feathers of a killed bird were thought to be "heathen," and that all "tender-hearted" women would abstain from such vanities. *Harper's* acknowledged that killing birds (especially mother birds) made a cruel and "harrowing" story, but one that new "evidence" proved to be false. In purchasing feathered millinery women of means did not cause the death of mother birds. Rather, they helped farmers and hunters in distant and exotic countries earn a living. In a magazine that tended to assume that all its readers were from a well-to-do class, mentioning that some may not be able to "afford the luxury" was a rare admission. In this moment, under the assumption that there was no need for further concern, the magazine tried to unite two contradictory ideas into the profile of the woman who had refused to wear feathers, but who might, without guilt, now wear them. This woman was "tender-hearted" and was particularly worried about the lives of other mothers, even when those mothers were birds. However, she was also interested in fashion and beauty. Without the moral and sentimental concerns for the birds, she would be likely to begin wearing the fashions again, because they were beautiful and she wanted to incorporate their beauty with her own.

However, the information provided above simply wasn't true. Without citing their source, Harper's issued a correction in the March 10, 1900 issue. "Many letters having come to the BAZAR protesting against this statement, we willingly admit that the paragraph was incorrect and should not have been published."[145] While they may have wanted to believe that their fashions did not go against their attitudes towards women's morality, *Harper's Bazar's*

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[144] *Harper's Bazar* 18 November 1899, 974.
[145] *Harper's Bazar* , 10 March 1900, 219.

moral obligation to the truth forced the magazine to admit that the facts simply did not support the claim that feathers could be gathered without harming birds.

Bird protectionists continued the search for a change in how to break into the nature-vs.-beauty debate. Perhaps the problem was that women refused to stop wearing feathers because they were simply slaves to fashion, and fashion refused to change. It was a commonly believed that there was truly no way to change fashion, and that it operated solely on its own volition. In her investigation of women in the millinery industry in 1914, Mary Van Kleek wrote, "Everybody in the business must accept its whimsical irregularities as part of the established order, and only theorists or reformers would dream of suggesting the possibility of control of a situation created by admittedly uncontrollable conditions."[146] Popular in economic thought, such an "invisible hand" of irrepressible historical forces was often invoked to explain fashion. In *Harper's Bazar* it seemed as though popular fashions changed with an apparent lack of human intervention.

Even from the subtitle of the magazine, we can see that it viewed itself as a "repository" for fashions, rather than a shaper of styles. Modern historian Jennifer Price writes that the fashion magazines of the 1890s "report on each new season's hat styles not as if men had created and marketed them but as if they had just arrived by

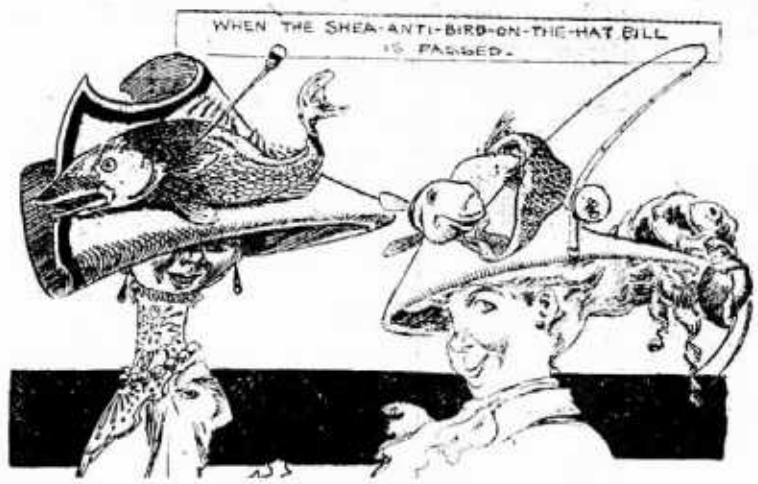

Figure 6. Just what would women do if there were no birds for their hats? Why turn to the fish of course! This far-fetched cartoon from the *New York Times* (10 April 1910, pt. 5, p. 16) refers to the Shea-White plumage bill in New York State that restricted the feather industry.

[146] Van Kleeck, 25.

courier from another planet."[147] This lack of human responsibility for popular fashion was crucial to the targeting and blaming of the female consumer for the killing of birds. Men looked to the styles of fashion and saw no **meaning or purpose, and seeing no good reason for wearing birds, men placed the blame on** women, rather than on the (male) hunter or milliner.[148] If fashion were impossible to change, than the efforts of women to change what other women wore would naturally be doomed for failure. For those who believed in the irrepressible forces of fashion, women's search for beauty would always win out over the sense of right and wrong, even when issues of motherhood and femininity were at stake.

But perhaps there was more than simply vanity involved in women's slavery to fashion. Some suggested that it was the need to find a mate, or the socially proscribed consumption patterns that ruled over women's behavior. In some instances, the women's need for beauty and fashion was more clearly linked to their relations with men. Writing to the New York Times, G.P. argued that "If all men would simply withdraw social attentions from women who wear plumage, the plumage would be discarded within a week."[149] Modern writer on hats, Colin McDowell, would appear to agree with G.P.s assessment and goes as far to claim that there is something particularly erotic about feathers on a woman's hat. "They quiver orgasmically with the slightest movement of puff of wind and it has long been assumed that men find the whole thing so arousing that they go weak at the knees."[150] Here, fashion was not an arbitrary god, but one who was designed to please the opposite sex. Still, the focus remains on the consumption rather than the production of birded millinery. While women may have been able to defy fashion's whims, they were unable to determine what men found attractive, and it should

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[147] Price, 95.
[148] Ibid., 94.
[149] "Bonnets and Ballots," *New York Times* 8 May 1910, 12.
[150] McDowell, 114.

therefore have been men who took stock of the moral and economic factors present in the killing of birds, and make a decision to solve the problem.

While Fashion may have been blamed for its ability to manipulate consumption patterns, within the fashion magazines some were fed up with those who blamed their media for immoral fashion. Helen Berkeley-Loyd, editor of *The Delineator* , another popular fashion magazine, felt the need to justify her magazine and its response to the issue:

> The prevalence of grebe trimming and the demand for gulls, aigrettes and birds of paradise indicate that the thousands of women who for years ceased to wear the pretty things, hoping thus to stop the cruelty that secured them, now feel they might just as well take advantage of their beauty and becoming effects as to let others do so. Nothing can ever stop the cruelty except severe punishment meted out by law to the evil-doers. Until then, the average woman reasons, she may as well wear the lovely things, just as she wears broadtail and sealskin, knowing that these also represent mothers and offspring cruelly separated and slain. Pardon the digression; but I do not like to see *The Delineator* unjustly blamed for recommending the use of these particular feathers, when it is merely recording their vogue." [151]

If the problem was more than just women's vanity, perhaps it lay in their consumption responsibilities. Examining the issue from a modern perspective, Barbara Gates writes, "For them, if women were the victims of a culture that demanded conspicuous consumption and display, they were nonetheless also people who might be exhorted and persuaded to alter their ways through intelligent and passionate address."[152] Women were expected to dress appropriately to their class, and if the fashions called for birds, it victimized women, placing them in an exceptionally tight spot between their sense of morality, their sense of beauty and their class expectations.

Consumption and the use of nature as a commodity were seen as particularly problematic in the millinery use of birds. While sometimes noting the problems of sport hunting or

[151] Helen Berkeley-Loyd, "Fashions in New York," *The Delineator,* January 1906, 11.

collecting, most bird protectionists focused on hunting for profit, especially when the sale was made for the production of feathered millinery. The societies called market hunters a "harmful class of selfish people" and men of "barbarous stupidity."[153] For their part in the commercialization of nature, merchants could also be blamed for the feathered hats. One letter to the editor of the *New York Times* described an announcement by Boston and Chicago merchants who would no longer sell birded millinery. Wishing that New York would do the same, the letter's author wrote, "What a noble step! If the New York houses would do the same, what progress would be made! Women who now wear birds from thoughtlessness would no longer have the chance to purchase them."[154] Women could not be entirely responsible for the existence of bird hats because women did not traditionally carry out key steps of the production of the hat. "Every bird that is worn on a woman's hat was killed by a man. Not one woman in a hundred would wear plumage if she had to kill and skin the birds herself. All the actual slaughter and infliction of suffering is done by men for the sake of money."[155] By criticizing those who killed for money and the commercialization of nature, upper class Americans preserved their lofty class status, and perceived their graceful consumption as less problematic than the money-soiled business.

The connection between the environment, consumerism, and the collateral debate about whether men or women were most responsible for the problem became more complicated as Americans struggled with the effects of urbanization and its accompanying social changes. The creation of an American nationalism, based in part upon the vast natural resources and a special relationship with the wilderness, allowed the construction of "nature" that could be commodified

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[152] Barbara T. Gates, *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998),118.
[153] Price, 93.
[154] A.C.C., "A Plea for the Birds," *New York Times* 16 November 1897, 6.

and marketed. In his *Yellowstone: The Creation and Selling of An American Landscape* Chris Magoc contends that the founding and use of the national park had just as much to do with nature's worth as a purely American commodity. He writes, "Popular myth has obscured the fact that, even as American attitudes toward nature were shifting in 1872, the establishment of Yellowstone Park was driven ultimately by the hinged forces of nationalism and good old-fashioned capitalism."[156] Attracting tourists, both domestic and international, was a crucial factor in the creation of the national park, and was based in part on the uniquely American wilderness and its marketability. Like birds on hats, the beauty of nature, in this case primarily landscape, could be sold to Americans who felt the lack of nature in their daily lives. And yet it was the concept of turning the inspirations into a commodity that was such a problem for some. It was the same divide apparent in the conflict between conservation and preservation. For the most part conservationists did not struggle with the commodification of nature, since they believed in the capitalistic use of natural resources. Preservationists, on the other hand, continued to be outraged by the insistence upon rational, rather than emotional and spiritual, use of natural resources.

Unfortunately for the women of the Audubon Society, no matter what their efforts were, and how sensible and appropriate their response, women continued to wear feathered millinery. Bird populations suffered up until the First World War, when finally legislation and economics affected fashion. Some contemporary commentators assumed that while proper ladies should have been able to resist the feathered fashions, their lack of response to sentimental, scientific, and logical arguments reflected badly upon the female gender as a whole.

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[155] Alice Stone Blackwell, "Ballots and Millinery," *New York Times* 3 May 1910, 12.
[156] Magoc, 4.

The bird hat debate offered an arena for political theories as well as for economic, social and literary discussions. One letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in 1909, questioned the lack of women's response to the real and deadly source of their ornamentation, and wondered if this neglect was a symbol of their inability to attend to civic duties, and if it constituted a reason not to grant them the vote. The author wrote,

> Can the suffragettes who talk about the reforms they would institute if they had the ballot give us a little object lesson by reforming an abuse in which their own sex is the offender, and which they can put an end to as well without the ballot as with it? For years past the public has been kept well informed in regard to the economic loss as well as the cruelty and useless destruction of bird life, which the practice of wearing the plumage of wild birds for hat decorations has occasioned and is still occasioning.[157]

This author had obvious dissatisfaction with women's response to the bird hat issue, and in some respects his or her objections were valid. Women had seen information about the abuses associated with their fashion choices in multiple popular and less popular media forms for decades. Not only were women in particular blamed for the continuation of the use of birds in the millinery industry, but this allowance caused the author to doubt women's ability to enact civil reform. The bird hat issue, this *New York Times* reader argued, must then serve as a test of women's resolve, and carried political implications as well as environmental weight.

For some, the bird hat issue irrevocably damaged their perception of women's character strengths. Edward Bok, editor of the *Ladies Home Journal* lived most of his life as a great believer in the "feminine instinct" and the superior moral capacities of women. However, two experiences in his professional career caused him to question these strengths that he attributed to women. First, he was unable to convince fashionable American women to forsake French fashions in favor of what he felt to be superior American designs. While his campaign on behalf of the American fashions was greeted with a positive response in letters, he found few changes in

what American women purchased. In his dismay, he asked his intelligent women friends why there was no result, to which they answered, "When it comes to the question of her personal adornment, a woman employs no reason; she knows no logic. She knows that the adornment of her body is all that she has to match the other women and out do her, and to attract the male, and nothing that you can say will influence her a particle. I know this all seems incomprehensible to you as a man, but that is the feminine nature."[158] This incident seems to have greatly scarred Bok. Not only is this need for adornment the true "feminine nature," but it is completely impervious to all logic and reason.

The second incident that reaffirmed Bok's new vision of women's need for adornment came from bird hats themselves. According to Bok, he himself had "unearthed the origin of the fashionable aigrette"[159] and learning of the "cruel torture" of the mother heron who only produced the aigrette during her "period of maternity" was outraged enough to publish an account of the horrors of the starving orphaned babies left to die in the nest. Bok was "certain that the mere publication of the frightfully convincing photographs would be enough to arouse the mother-instinct in every woman and stop the wearing of the so-highly prized feather," [160] but once again he was proven wrong. After four months, Bok recollected, demand in feathered millinery actually increased and women told him that his article only reinforced the notion that the aigrette feathers were special indeed and ought to be prized. Once again, Bok asked his intelligent female friends why the commonality with the mother bird and the mothering instinct do not prevail, to which she answered, "When it comes to her possession of an ornament of beauty, as beautiful as the aigrette, it [the mothering instinct] weighs with her, but it doesn't tip

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[157] "What Suffragettes Might Now Do, " *New York Times* 20 January 1909, 8.
[158] Edward Bok, *The Americanization of Edward Bok: The Autobiography of a Dutch Boy Fifty Years After* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 331.
[159] Ibid., 332.

the scale against her possession of it…A woman will regret that the mother bird must be tortured and her babies starve, but she *will* have the aigrette…"[161] Bok, being the crusader he claimed to be, did not give up, and decided to draw up his own plume legislation and lobby it at the state level. Ultimately he won his legal battle, but there is no joy in it for "His ideal of womanhood had received a severe jolt. Women had revealed their worst side to him, and he didn't like the picture."[162]

In many ways, Bok's recollections are distant from historical evidence. To the best of my knowledge, the first time critical information about the plumage trade appeared in *Ladies' Home Journal* was November 1909, thirty-four years after *Harper's Bazar* printed Mary Thatcher's "Massacre of the Innocents."[163] Bok can hardly be the trailblazer that he claims to be. His generalizations about the attitudes of women can also be treated with a very large grain of salt. He completely ignored the legions of women who did make the decision not to wear plumage due to their ethical concerns, some based on logic, others on sentiment. However, what is most significant about Bok's account is his reliance on the mother-instinct and moral superiority as the female means for decision making. He believes that attracting male attention was the primary goal of female adornment, and women would do anything to be beautiful. Therefore, appealing to women's judgement was wasted energy. He was convinced that appealing to men and the law was the way to achieve real results. In many ways the transition undergone by Bok may be representative of the attitudes of the bird protection agencies. While their initial efforts were based primarily on education and social pressure to induce women to end their consumption of bird hats, after years of this work and little result, we see that their attention turns more to

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[160] Ibid., 333.
[161] Ibid., 335.
[162] Ibid., 336.
[163] A reference to this issue of *Ladies' Home Journal* appears in *New York Times* 15 January 1909.

legislation and its enforcement. Did all male members of the bird-protection societies give up on women as the agents of change? It seems doubtful, but we do see evidence that some men bestowed less importance to women's actions on the bird protection issue.

Even modern scholarship on the bird hat issue varies on the importance and significance it attaches to women's actions. It seems that there were two periods that we see scholarship on the bird hat issue: in the early 1970s and once again in the 1990s. In the chapter she devotes to the bird hat issue in her 1999 book, Jennifer Price argues a strong case for women's unique involvement in this environmental campaign, and their creation of identity through this issue. Carolyn Merchant's brief analysis of the Audubon Society in her 1995*Earthcare* also points to the importance of women's involvement, and Theodore Whaley Cart's 1971 dissertation describes feminine voices as a crucial influence in the creation of legislation. However, other sources focusing on bird protection and the Audubon Society at the turn of the century, give only perfunctory significance to women's involvement. Both Doughty and Welker describe women's concerns and actions but frame them as the precursors a more significant, and masculine, campaign for legislation. Graham's history of the Audubon Society (published in part by the Society) includes stories of Mrs. Hemenway, but as soon as the Audubon Society is established focuses almost exclusively on men's responsibility for legislation, and its enforcement. Today still, while the female authors look to the women of the movement (especially since their works were published in the 1990s when strong efforts were made to reinsert women into environmental history) the male historians of thirty years ago instead focused on the progressive reformers and their laws and regulations. For decades it seems that the methods of the women protectionists were deemed less important, and the scholarship reflected the takeover of the issues by the progressive men.

In 1898 Senator George Hoar of Massachusetts had introduced a bill to Congress that sought to prevent the sale, importation and shipment of millinery feathers within the United States. While the Audubon Societies lobbied for this bill and passed along Hoar's petition and plea for the birds, it did not pass. However, in 1900 Congress did pass legislation on the millinery use of birds. The Lacey Act, working within the "commerce" clause of the constitution, effectively banned the interstate transport of birds killed for their feathers from states which banned this type of killing. [164] The passage of this bill sent a message described by Theodore Whaley Cart as a "Monroe Doctrine for endangered species: that wildlife was henceforth not the be considered a subject for commercial exploitation."[165] A 1913 Federal Tariff Act further controlled the trade in feathers, causing some to consider that year the highpoint in the bird protection movement, since congressional debate attracted a great deal of national attention. Although there were loopholes in the bill, generally it prevented the importation and selling of birds feathers, even if it did still allow feathers to be worn.[166]

WOMEN AND MEN
IN THE CONNECTICUT AUDUBON SOCIETY, 1923

Figure 7. By 1923 had women been relegated to the nest? This photo seems to represent the increased public presence of men within the Audubon Societies. The women are still there, but are clumped in the background. From Price, 100.

What did the passage of legislation do to the role of

[164] Graham, 22.
[165] Cart, 5.
[166] Doughty, *Feather Fashions*, 150. I found some references to a New Jersey law that prohibited the wearing of feathers, but I found no mentions of its results or if it was actually implemented.

women within the Audubon Society? In general, lobbying for legislation allowed fewer opportunities for the traditional types of activities, such as education and popular appeals that the women of the club movement found so appropriate to their skills. Women could not vote, and while they could influence the votes of their husbands and sons and write letters to their legislators, they could not make their own decisions regarding legislation. Jennifer Price writes, "The exigency of the club's volunteer reform work subsided, too, as the Progressive-era government, as a response in part to the clubs' lobbying efforts, translated many of the women's social and environmental campaigns into legislation." The rise of the professional, which so characterized the Progressive Movement of the early 20th century, [167] can be seen too in the Audubon Society. Writing in the middle of the 20th century, in his *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, Samuel P. Hays mused, "It is from the vantage point of applied science, rather that of democratic protest, that one must understand the historic role of the conservation movement."[168] Without emphasis on women's sentiments and fashions, the bird protection movement took on tones more similar to the rational use of the broader conservation movement, and there was less need for women's protests. It was now the job of the scientists and the educated men to press for the reform of millinery and commercial trades, and women's involvement in bird protection took on a secondary role.

Some still credited women with the passage of laws as a result of their widespread lobbying activities, but the responsibility of law was on the shoulders of men. In a 1913 letter to the New York Times, William Hornaday writes, "It is the noble-minded, God-fearing women of America who to-day are voicing the great demand for the housecleaning of the United States in the matter of bird slaughter for millinery…I have been told by members of Congress that from

[167] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 154.

every corner of the Unites States letters are pouring into the capital from the wives and mothers of America, urging, and even demanding, that the odious millinery traffic in the feathers of slaughtered birds be prohibited. If this movement wins out, the victory must be credited to the women who have asked for it."[169]

By the 1920s women's hats no longer predominantly featured birds and plumage. While laws and changing attitudes toward nature may have had some effect, it also may have just been a decline in opulence of fashion and American life in general associated with World War I. With the beginnings of World War I, women's fashion was greatly simplified, and the decadence of heavy-feathered millinery carried less allure. While legislation or public awareness may have influenced some women's fashion decisions, perhaps these actions were more important in the precedent they set for future environmental legislation, rather than their direct effects on the feather wearing habits of well-to-do women.[170] In its views on fashions and morals, Harper's Bazar seems to never relinquish its ambivalence. Rather, as the feathered fashions faded, Harper's discussion of bird mother-massacres faded with them.

Women were so deeply embroiled in the bird hat movement because both wearing and protesting against the wearing of these hats forced a difficult navigation of women's duties to both morality and beauty. The relationship between aesthetic and ethical environmental values is a common one in environmental thought and organization. Philosophers Arnold Berleant and Allen Carlson describe the variety of ways to relate the two. First of all, in some instance aesthetics and ethics are in conflict. In an instance like the damming of Hetch Hetchy, debate focused on either the preservation of the scenic and aesthetic worth of the valley or the

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[168] Samuel Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 2.
[169] *New York Times,* 31 May 1913, 10.
[170] Doughty, *Feather Fashions*, 210.

accommodation of the human need for water. However, in other instances the concepts support one another. Aesthetic interests can achieve moral ends. Aesthetic appreciation of the environment can bring the viewer pleasure, and increase quality of life for a community that is made of happier individuals, certainly an ethical end. Similarly, there are occasions where the combination of use and beauty go hand in hand; for example pastoral farm lands, or perhaps a the trees and greens of a golf course. Those seeking to encourage the union of environmental aesthetic and ethical concerns must determine which feature predominates. Aesthetics can be treated as just one aspect of the environment making it worth preserving, or as a crucial and foundational element for the creation of an environmental ethic.[171]

The Audubon Society continues to view itself as a strong moral force, and recognizes this quality as stemming from the bird hat question. Serving as president of the National Society in 1990, Peter A.A. Berle writes of the founders of his society, "They saw their embryonic organization as a moral force that could sway public opinion and push government toward what they believed ought to be a national goal- to make a secure place for the wild birds and other animals hat their ancestors had taken for granted."[172] Regardless of if this was really the full intent of the members of the society at its conception, the current society remembers it in this way. While the Audubon society recognizes the moral intentions of its founding females, it implies that the most crucial actions carried out were legislative, governmental, and the work of men.

While preservation of morality remains crucial to the Audubon Society today, the preservation of beauty, however, seems to have been more thoroughly lost from the initial Audubon Society. American environmentalism has come to rely more upon science to explain

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[171] Arnold Berleant and Allen Carlson ,"Introduction," *Journal for Aestheticism and Art Criticism* 56, no. 2 (spring 1998): 99.

why nature is important, and while nature as inspiration or beauty is still appreciated, this logic is not called upon in order to make environmental decisions as it is seen as overly sentimental and too personal. However, if those in the environmental camps wish to make humans realize the connection they have to the rest of the environment and create a new "wilderness ethic" as proposed by John Muir and Aldo Leopold, they may benefit from an examination of the particularly female means of looking at the environment at the beginning of the 20th century.

The nature of a bird on a hat at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th called into question the identity of women. Women were supposed to be moral, and beautiful, but this identity became complicated when nature became beautiful and moral as well. The women of the Audubon Societies acted according to the rules of the domestic sphere, and in defining themselves, carefully navigated their opinions of animals, other women, and fashion, and the ways they envisioned their role in wildlife protection. The same debate between beauty and morality can also be seen in the content of *Harper's Bazar*. Like women in general, the magazine was forced to include both beauty, nature and in fashion, as well as issue of moral and ethical substance. Within the bird protection movement women used the skills at their disposal, but with the perceived need for legislation and the growing professionalization of their movement, women's involvement fell to a secondary position. As time went by women were called on less for their sentiment, and the masculine rules of conservation and legislation took greater hold.

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[172] Graham, vii.

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