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"Kill That Snake": Anti-ERA Women and the Battle Over the Equal Rights Amendment in Louisiana, 1972-1982

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“KILL THAT SNAKE”:
ANTI-ERA WOMEN AND THE BATTLE OVER THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT
IN LOUISIANA, 1972-1982

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

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*In memory of my twin sister, Yvette
1956-2004*

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) ratification battle in Louisiana and the women who helped defeat it. The study emphasizes the role of anti-ERA women in the amendment's defeat, but the views of pro-ERA women are also featured. Historical evidence shows that ERA advocates underestimated anti-ERA women. They dismissed anti-ERA women as either ignorant of their oppression or as pawns of male interests. This study challenges the idea that female ERA opponents in Louisiana behaved irrationally, worked against their own interests, or acted at the behest of men.

Organized women led in opposition to the ERA in Louisiana. Several factors motivated them, including their religious beliefs. Anti-ERA women had different worldviews than pro-ERA women regarding the meanings of gender and equality. Although they came from different faiths, most ERA opponents believed in a created order based on gender difference. In their view, a law that forced equality by demanding men and women be treated the same would not only fail, it would generate disastrous social consequences, including women being drafted into the military, moral decline, and family breakdown. The desire to preserve their class and social status also motivated them. Most anti-ERA women were wives who depended on their husbands financially. They received economic rewards from their marital status, but also psychological and social rewards. Anti-ERA women believed the ERA would diminish and possibly eliminate their roles as housewives. An emerging conservative movement, which began to take shape in the context of the Cold War and the 1960s social revolution, also influenced and motivated anti-ERA women in Louisiana. A significant number of Louisiana women rejected many of the tenets of this social revolution, including feminism and the ERA.

INTRODUCTION

On June 30, 1982, approximately one-hundred men and women gathered for a luncheon at the Royale Rouge Hotel in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The participants gathered to celebrate the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) at the national and state level. When Congress passed the ERA in 1972, it set a seven year ratification period, which would have ended in 1979. When it became clear the amendment would not be ratified by that date, Congress granted a three-year extension. Even with more time, however, the ERA fell three states short of the thirty-eight needed for ratification. The state of Louisiana refused to ratify, despite a hard fought campaign by the state's small but dedicated cadre of feminists. Gail Cox, head of a group called "A Better Way than the ERA," presided over the June program, which honored Louisiana legislators who fought against the amendment. The mood of the event was one of rejoicing, but there was unmistakable gloating in the air. Participants sang a song called "Down the Ole Drain" to the tune of "Tammy," a hit song from 1957 recorded by popular singer and actress Debbie Reynolds. The last verse went, "Does Ellie Smeal really feel like she could die? My heart beats so joyfully. I think I know why. I wish that she knew what I'm thinking of—ERA, ERA, glug, glug, glug, glug."¹

Former state representative Louise Johnson of Bernice received accolades for her leadership in defeating passage. In her words, she "made national headlines in 1972 when she was the first woman legislator in the country to come out against the amendment." Beatrice Hawthorne Moore was the first woman elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives in 1940, but Johnson made history in 1972 as the first woman elected to the

¹Lynn Dias, "Anti-ERA forces rejoice in amendment's death," *State Times* (Baton Rouge, La.), July 1, 1982, the song "Tammy" can be accessed online at www.last.fm/music/Debbie+Reynolds/_/Tammy.

Louisiana House from a north Louisiana parish, Union Parish. Despite her status as a female political pioneer, Johnson swore to defeat the ERA at the same time she swore her oath of office. Leaving little doubt as to her intent, Johnson stood a homemade sign on her desk in the chamber featuring a slithering reptile and the words, “Kill That Snake.” The fact that a woman presented the ERA as a snake and vowed to kill it presents interesting opportunities for analysis. In the view of anti-ERA women, just as the first snake in the Garden of Eden fooled Eve into abandoning her place in paradise, the second snake, the ERA, promised equality to women, but robbed them of the cherished protections and privileges of womanhood instead.²

This dissertation analyzes the Louisiana ERA ratification battle in the 1970s and the women who helped defeat the amendment. It also presents the views of pro-ERA women in detail. The historical evidence shows that ERA advocates underestimated anti-ERA women in Louisiana. They often dismissed ERA opponents as pawns of male interests or as ignorant and anachronistic. Organized women, however, led in opposition to the ERA in the state. They were motivated by several factors, including their religious beliefs. Most opponents were evangelical Protestants or traditional Catholics, with small numbers of Mormon women also active in the movement. Anti-ERA women had different worldviews than pro-ERA women regarding the origins and definitions of gender and of equality. Not all anti-ERA women and men believed in the same story of man’s origins, but they believed in a created order based on gender difference and specificity of purpose. In their view, a law that forced equality by demanding men and women be treated the same was not only

²Lynn Dias, “Anti-ERA forces rejoice in amendment’s death,” *State Times* (Baton Rouge, La.), July 1, 1982; Joan Kent, “Can ERA friend and foe find happiness,” *New Orleans States Item*, May 2, 1975; and Louise B. Johnson, *Women of the Louisiana Legislature* (Farmerville, LA: Greenbay Publishing, 1986).

doomed to fail, it would generate unintended and even disastrous social consequences. These consequences included the draft for women, changes in marital laws regarding spousal support, child custody, and alimony, moral decline, and family breakdown.

The desire to preserve their class and social status also motivated them. Most anti-ERA women were dependent financially on their husbands, but their economic status allowed them to be part of social networks and volunteer women's organizations. As historian Arlene Kaplan Daniels has pointed out, volunteer women received rewards from their status, which often went beyond money. Anti-ERA women believed passage of the ERA would diminish and possibly eliminate their roles as housewives. An emerging conservative political movement, which began to take shape in the context of the Cold War and the 1960s social revolution, also influenced and motivated anti-ERA women in Louisiana. As part of this post-WWII conservative revival, a significant number of Louisiana women rejected many of the tenets of the 1960s and 70s social revolution, including feminism and the ERA.

The ERA was almost fifty years old by the time it came up for ratification in 1972. Alice Paul, head of the National Woman's Party, first proposed the "Lucretia Mott Amendment" in 1923, in the wake of the passage of female suffrage. The Mott Amendment said, "Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction" and "Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." Due to the efforts of the National Woman's Party, Congress considered the ERA in almost every session for twenty years after 1923. Although the Republican Party endorsed it in 1940 and the Democratic Party in 1944, the ERA did not come to a floor vote in either House until 1946, when the United States Senate voted 39-35

in favor. The vote fell short of the two-thirds majority required in the Senate, however. In the meantime, the Mott Amendment was renamed and reworded in 1944, and has remained unchanged to the present. The “Alice Paul Amendment” said, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.” Article two stated, “The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of the article.” Lastly, the law said, “This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.”³

Despite its simple wording, the ERA provoked controversy from the beginning. Opposition to the ERA did not come as much from traditionalists as it did from within the ranks of the women’s movement. Feminists divided over whether women would be better off under laws created to protect them in the workplace or under laws that did not recognize differences between men and women. Organized labor and feminist luminaries such as Eleanor Roosevelt went on record against the amendment. They fought the ERA because they thought it “would make it possible to wipe out legislation which has been enacted in many states for the special needs of women in industry.” Nevertheless, as women surged into the workforce during and after WWII, perceptions about the amendment began to change. The US Senate passed the ERA by wide margins in 1950 and 1953. Senator Carl Hayden (D-Arizona) helped facilitate its passage by adding a “rider,” which sought to

³Thomas H. Neale, “The Proposed Equal Rights Amendment: Contemporary Ratification Issues,” Congressional Research Services, *Cornell University ILR School*, 2-28-2013, access at www.digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/key_workplace/1038; and text of Equal Rights Amendment can be accessed online at “The Equal Rights Amendment: Unfinished Business for the Constitution,” www.equalrightsamendment.org/overview.htm.

“preserve any rights, benefits, or exceptions conferred by law upon persons of the female sex.”⁴

Paul and her followers, however, did not accept conditions being added to the ERA, because they viewed them as nullifications of the law. Although the amendment had found some success in the Senate, Rep. Emanuel Celler (D-New York), a staunch labor supporter, blocked it in a House Judiciary committee for decades. Despite years of persistent advocacy, the ERA languished. The amendment re-emerged, however, as a top priority of the second wave women’s movement in the late 1960s. Rep. Martha Griffiths (D-Michigan) decided to circumvent Celler in 1969 by obtaining enough signatures to file a discharge petition, which enabled legislation to come to a floor vote without going through committee. Griffiths succeeded and the House approved the ERA in June 1970 by a vote of 334-26. Nevertheless, the amendment bogged down in the Senate, because of the addition of qualifying riders. Congress adjourned in 1970 without passing the ERA.⁵

Undeterred, Griffiths re-introduced the ERA the following year and the House of Representatives passed an unadorned ERA in October 1971, by a vote of 354-24. The amendment encountered an obstacle, however, in Senator Sam Ervin (D-North Carolina). A hero of the Watergate hearings, but a gentleman of the “old-school” regarding women’s roles, Ervin stalled the ERA for months with objections and qualifying amendments. The

⁴Ibid. For background on the women’s movement and the ERA see Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1987), 53-81, Amelia Fry, “Alice Paul and the ERA,” in Joan Hoff Wilson, ed., *Rights of Passage, The Past and Future of the ERA* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 13-16, Gilbert Y. Steiner, *Constitutional Inequality: The Political Fortunes of the Equal Rights Amendment* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1985), 7; and Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Why Were Most Politically Active Women Opposed to the ERA in the 1920s?” in *Rights of Passage*, 7-10.

⁵Neale, “The Proposed Equal Rights Amendment: Contemporary Ratification Issues,” Congressional Research Services, *Cornell University ILR School*, 2-28-2013, access at www.digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/key_workplace/1038.

Senate rejected Ervin's amendments, however, and passed the ERA in March of 1972 by a resounding vote of 84-8. The Louisiana legislature began considering the amendment in May of 1972. The ERA had a surprising amount of momentum going into Louisiana and prospects for its passage seemed good. Nevertheless, Louisiana became the first state in the lower South state to repudiate the amendment.⁶

Scholarly works on the fate of the ERA, especially at the national level, began to appear soon after the ratification effort failed in 1982. Because many people, particularly feminists, were surprised by the amendment's failure, early works explored why and how it happened. Mary Frances Berry, a lawyer and constitutional scholar, published a study in 1986 called *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women's Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution*. Berry began the discussion by acknowledging the inherent conservatism of lawmakers and the general populace when it comes to amending the Constitution. The framers made the process difficult. They intended for Constitutional amendments to be a last resort, after the Congress, state legislatures, and courts failed to remedy problems. As a consequence, amendments to the Constitution have required repeated demonstrations of necessity and consensus on the national and state levels.⁷

Berry organized her book into a history of the amendments that came up for ratification between 1890 and WWI. She drew a parallel between the failed 1924 Child Labor Amendment and the ERA. The Child Labor Amendment, like the ERA, appeared to have broad support. By the 1920s and 30s, however, society had already begun to change its

⁶Ibid.; and for the information on the ERA in Louisiana, see Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 218-219.

⁷Mary Frances Berry, *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women's Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ., 1986), 2-3, 43.

views toward child labor and childhood. Many states enacted laws curtailing or prohibiting the practice of child labor. States also began enacting compulsory school attendance laws. Conflict over the Child Labor Amendment reflected growing tensions between the traditional prerogatives of parents versus the growing power of the state. It was not just factory owners or businessmen who fought the amendment, but also urban Catholics and farm families who opposed it. Proponents failed to demonstrate the necessity of or achieve the consensus they needed to pass a Child Labor Amendment.⁸

Berry offered the successful passage of the female suffrage amendment as a counterpoint to the ERA's failure. Although women's suffrage was mostly unpopular throughout its history, advocates overcame the opposition. They used discriminatory legal decisions as rallying cries for change. They even used dissension within their own ranks to their advantage. According to Berry, the militant tactics of the National Woman's Party helped the mainstream National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) reach its goal. NAWSA positioned itself as moderate and "argued that expanding suffrage to women would fulfill the American tradition of representative government without negative effects, and with the positive influence of validating the existing political system." Berry also wrote, "Reformers pointed to lack of change in the roles of women in the western states in which women could vote...and undermined many of the arguments of opponents." Berry argued ERA advocates failed to take lessons from the past about how to achieve ratification of a controversial amendment. "The factors of time, demonstrating necessity, regional and state

⁸Ibid; and Bill Kauffman, "The Child Labor Amendment Debate of the 1920s," *Essays in Political Economy*, 16 (November 1992), published by Ludwig von Mises Institute, online access at <https://mises.org/etexts/childlabor.pdf>, also published as Bill Kauffman, "Child Labor Amendment Debate of the 1920s; or Catholics and Mugwumps and Farmers," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 10 (Fall 1992) 139-169.

diversity as elements in gaining consensus in the states, the expectation of disinformation spread by the opposition—all proved crucial in defeat of the ERA.”⁹

Jane J. Mansbridge, in *Why We Lost the ERA*, took a different approach in explaining why the amendment went down to defeat. Mansbridge argued that much of the support for the ERA was superficial, because it was based on an endorsement of abstract principles. Enthusiasm evaporated as ERA opponents charged the amendment would make substantive changes in day to day social practices. She also argued that in the 1970s the Supreme Court and state legislatures began to abrogate discriminatory laws pertaining to women. As a consequence, many people thought the amendment unnecessary and feared it would push society into uncharted territory. Mansbridge viewed the abstract nature of the ERA as the problem, although she supported it. She argued that in the short term, the amendment would have few tangible benefits for women. In her opinion, ERA activists over-emphasized the amendment’s immediate effects, which fed into opponents’ fears of radical change.¹⁰

Few historians expanded on the explanations of Berry and Mansbridge regarding the ERA defeat until Donald Mathews and Jane Sherron DeHart published *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and Nation*. They initiated a new generation of ERA historiography with the publication of their work in 1992. Mathews and DeHart presented a narrative of the ratification process in North Carolina, a state that epitomized the drama and disappointment that came to characterize the ERA story. They confirmed Berry’s argument that consensus at the national level is not enough. Each state had to establish consensus as well. Activists in North Carolina had a top down organization and they were ill prepared for the opposition, as

⁹Berry, *Why ERA Failed*, 43, 56, 60.

¹⁰Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (University of Chicago, 1986), 1-87, 131, 169, 197.

well as for the diversity of opinion within their own state. Like activists in other states, including Louisiana, proponents concentrated on gaining the favor of individual legislators, instead of the grassroots voting population. More than once, advocates thought they had the votes in the legislature, only to see a few key legislators change their votes at the last minute. Mathews and DeHart also broke ground by engaging with North Carolina ERA opponents, particularly the women who organized against the amendment.¹¹

Mathews and DeHart listened to anti-ERA women articulate their arguments against the ERA. Instead of viewing their objections as trivial or hysterical, they sought to understand why their arguments resonated. The fact that women fought against equal rights for their own sex is nothing new in United States history. Women organized against women having the right to vote. When the ERA came up for ratification in the 1970s, however, advocates seemed surprised at the level of hostility from members of their sex. They believed that in the context of 1960s social movements, especially civil rights, the women's equality movement should have followed as an extension of an ongoing social evolution toward legal and social equality. In contrast to this hoped-for scenario, anti-ERA women in the 1970s emerged as anomalies, which feminists found hard to fathom. Mathews and DeHart found that a substantial number of women did not view the ERA as liberating, but as a threat to their identities and safety. They considered the ERA a rash social experiment, because they viewed gender and the social patterns affixed to it as functions of human nature. They saw the amendment as a blunt instrument that would expose women, in a world in which they were vulnerable, to possible physical and psychological harm, which could

¹¹Donald G. Mathews and Jane S. DeHart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1990), vii-xv, 3-54.

include rape, injury, or psychic trauma. In light of these deeply held feelings, the sometimes lurid imagery ERA opponents used of women being exploited in foxholes and same-sex bathrooms or maimed on the battlefield began to make more sense.¹²

This study follows in the path of Mathews and DeHart by focusing on the ERA ratification process in the state of Louisiana. Although it is a state level study, it is part of the larger ERA narrative, because it intersects with the national feminist and anti-feminist movements, national transformations in politics and culture, and the national fate of the ERA. Although Louisiana never became a true battleground state like North Carolina, ERA supporters fought hard in Louisiana, because they thought the state could be the first in the lower South to ratify. Historian Janet Allured argued in her work on Louisiana feminists in the 1970s that the state not only had a strong feminist movement, but that Louisiana women exerted significant influence on the feminist movement at the national level. Louisiana anti-feminist women also had ties with the national anti-ERA movement. Therefore, Louisiana provides a microcosm of the political, legal, and social conflicts that occurred at the national and state levels. Until recently, little work has been done on Louisiana women after WWII. Allured's work on the second wave women's movement in 1970s Louisiana opened a door to a critical period in Louisiana history. This work is intended to validate and expand on that period by presenting another side – organized female opposition to feminism and the ERA in Louisiana.¹³

¹²Mathews and DeHart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA*, 160-168, Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign against Woman Suffrage* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997); and Elna C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹³Janet Allured, "Louisiana, the American South, and the Birth of Second-Wave Feminism," *Louisiana History* 54: 4 (Fall 2013): 389-423.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters with an introduction and conclusion. The chapters are topical, but they form a narrative of what happened to the ERA in Louisiana. Chapter one contains historical overviews and comparisons of first and second wave feminism. Chapter two discusses the rise of second wave feminism in Louisiana and how it changed the status of Louisiana women. It mainly focuses on the Baton Rouge chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), providing a limited view of Louisiana feminism. But it offers a look at some of the ways feminism manifested in the state. Chapter three examines the rise of organized anti-ERA and anti-feminist women in Louisiana. Chapter four discusses the intersections of religion, politics, and the ERA in Louisiana. Religious beliefs, particularly regarding gender, influenced and motivated anti-ERA sentiment and activism. The final chapter provides a narrative of the path of the ERA through the Louisiana legislature. It tells the story of how the predominately male Louisiana legislature reacted to female activists on both sides of the issue and ultimately decided the amendment's fate.

CHAPTER 1
FROM WOMAN MOVEMENT TO WOMEN’S LIB:
A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF FIRST AND SECOND WAVE FEMINISM IN THE
NATION AND IN LOUISIANA

The battle over ratifying the ERA in the 1970s occurred within the context of second wave feminism. In order to have a second wave of feminism, however, there must have been a first. The goal of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of first and second wave feminism in the nation and in Louisiana. Another goal is to define feminism. Most people seem to have an idea of what feminism is, but find it difficult to define. Some treatments of feminism have viewed it as a cohesive movement for women’s rights, which had a unifying ideology. This chapter, however, focuses on the different and sometimes contradictory meanings of equality that underwrote competing definitions of feminism. The chapter also focuses on continuities in feminism between its first and second waves. Ironically, the contradictions of feminism, which produced such disparity in the women’s movement, gave feminism continued life in the period between its first and second iterations. The rise of feminism in Louisiana, and its counterpoint, anti-feminism, did not occur spontaneously in the second wave of the 1970s. Feminists and anti-feminists in Louisiana were shaped by prior decades in which Louisiana women wrestled with what it meant to be a woman, a citizen, a wage-earner, and a family and community member.

Most historians maintain the first wave of feminism began in the mid-nineteenth century and culminated when women won the right to vote in 1920. They cite the 1848 Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention as a point of origin for the first women's movement. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Mott's sister, Martha Coffin Wright, organized the Convention. They also wrote and presented a founding manifesto of feminism, a document called the "Declaration of Sentiments." They modeled the document on the Declaration of Independence and based it on the idea that both men and women were endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights. The "Declaration of Sentiments" included a list of grievances against male oppression. The list began with the statement, "The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her." Men's denial of women's "inalienable right to the elective franchise" constituted one of the main grievances. The very idea of female enfranchisement, however, sent shock waves through the convention.¹

The first wave of the women's movement arose in large part from the abolition movement. Lucretia Mott met Elizabeth Cady Stanton at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840. The women met while sitting behind a curtain in a sex segregated enclosure, because women were not allowed to be seen or heard at the convention. The unequal treatment, at a convention that called for race liberation and

¹Martha Rampton, "The Three Waves of Feminism," *Pacific: The Magazine of Pacific University* 41, no. 2 (Fall 2008), online at www.pacificu.edu/magazine_archives/2008/fall/echoes/feminism, "Report of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Seneca Falls, NY, July 19th and 20th, 1848," (Rochester, NY: John Dick, 1848), 8, documents can be accessed online at National Park Service, Women's Rights, National Historical Park, New York, www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/the-first-womens-rights-convention.htm. On the main page, click on Declaration of Sentiments and the Report of the Woman's Rights Convention to view original documents; and Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present* (NY: Random House, 2010).

equality, compelled them to take action for female equality. It was no accident that many abolitionists were also Quakers, including Mott, a Quaker minister. Quakerism was anti-authoritarian, anti-ritualistic, and egalitarian. Quakers de-emphasized man's inner corruption and believed that men and women possessed an "inner light" of godliness. Both men and women had personal access to spiritual revelation; therefore, Quakers considered women legitimate sources of God's truth. Nor did they believe in the world's inevitable corruption. Society could be transformed by seeking justice, just as personal transformation could be attained by seeking one's inner light. The women's movement was part of an era of social reform that swept the nation in the first half of the nineteenth century. Many of these reforms centered on religion and the structure of society. This was the golden era of utopian communities. There was no direct link between utopianism and the women's movement. Almost without exception, however, nineteenth century utopians questioned and attempted to revolutionize marriage, work, the family, sexuality, and women's roles in society.²

Women's rights conventions convened throughout the 1850s, until the onset of the Civil War. In addition to equal suffrage, in the pre-war movement, women called for freedom in many areas. Female dress reform, considered quite radical, gained momentum in the 1850s. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's cousin, Gerrit Smith, along with his daughter, Elizabeth Smith Miller, invented the bloomer outfit, popularized by Amelia Bloomer, in 1851. Stanton, although happily married, advocated the liberalization of divorce laws, which in effect critiqued marriage as an institution that often held women in bondage. From their

²"The First Women's Rights Convention: Quaker Influence," National Park Service, Women's Rights, National Historical Park, New York, access at www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/quaker-influence.htm, Mark Holloway, *Utopian Communities in America, 1680-1880* (Dover, 2011), Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992).

homes in upstate New York, Mott, Stanton, and Matilda Joslyn Gage befriended women from the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) tribe and observed their different gender practices. According to historian Sally Roesch Wagner, Iroquois families were matrilineal and the concept of illegitimacy unknown. Women sat on tribal councils and could initiate divorce. Both rape and domestic abuse were rare, because of strict tribal taboos against violence toward women. Even the design of the bloomer was based on the dress of Iroquois women. Most scholars fell short of calling the Iroquois a matriarchy. However, exposure to different gender practices influenced early feminists. In 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton published *The Woman's Bible*, an interpretation that questioned traditional biblical views of women's subordination. The ideas of the early women's movement were part of a heady mix of social reform in the nineteenth century. These early feminists articulated ideas about gender and society that would prosper in the second wave.³

After the Civil War, however, a rift developed among feminists. The issue of voting rights and citizenship for African-Americans caused a split. The contents of the 14th and 15th amendments, passed in 1868 and 1869, caused division among early feminists. The 14th amendment granted citizenship to former slaves, by guaranteeing citizenship to all "born or naturalized in the United States." The second clause of the amendment, however, specified protecting the voting rights of male citizens only. When the 15th amendment came up, which guaranteed voting rights to all citizens regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude, the omission of women dealt a blow to the hopes of women's rights advocates.

³Gerrit Smith, "Dress Reform is Vital to Women's Equality," in *The Women's Rights Movement: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Brenda Stalcup (San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 1996), 75-83, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Divorce Laws Should Be Liberalized," in *The Women's Rights Movement: Opposing Viewpoints*, 88-98. Sally Roesch Wagner, *Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists* (The Farm, Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Co.), 10-52, Barbara Alice Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (NY: Peter Lang, 2006); and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible: A Classic Feminist Perspective* (NY: Dover, 2002), published in 1895 and 1898 by European Publishing, New York.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony refused to support the 15th amendment. Frederick Douglass, Lucy Stone, and Henry Blackwell believed suffrage for African-American men should come first, and women should wait for a more propitious time. In response, Stanton and Anthony formed the National Woman's Suffrage Association (NWSA), which called for immediate voting rights for women. Lucy Stone and her husband, Henry Blackwell, formed the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). The organizations did not come together until 1890, with the formation of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).⁴

Despite division, Stanton and Anthony remained at the vanguard of a remnant dedicated to immediate suffrage and women's legal and social equality. Anthony was arrested and jailed briefly in 1872 for voting in the presidential election, citing her citizenship status under the 14th amendment. According to historian William O'Neill, feminist scandals, particularly surrounding the notorious Victoria Woodhull, and post Civil War fatigue with radicalism ignited a backlash against the women's movement.⁵

In the last decades of the nineteenth-century, the Progressive movement emerged. Unlike earlier social reform movements, progressives did not advocate walking away from civilization to live on a pond or to engage in democratic communal living. They generally sought to manage and mitigate the effects of urbanization and industrialization by centralizing authority and professionalizing social institutions, like politics, government, and education. Women found a niche as leaders and workers in the armies of social reform.

⁴Jean H. Baker, *Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3-77; and Ellen Carol DuBois, *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights* (NY: NYU Press, 1998).

⁵Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (NY: Harper Perennial, 1999), Amanda Frisken, *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution: Political Theater and the Popular Press in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004); and Johanna Johnston, *Mrs. Satan: The Incredible Saga of Victoria C. Woodhull* (Popular Library, 1967).

They enlisted in a host of causes, including promoting child labor laws, protective laws for women in the industrial workforce, food purity laws, and the rehabilitation of politics, elections, and local government. Female reformers flocked to the temperance cause, because the wives and children of alcoholics often suffered degradation and destitution.⁶

Reforming women also sought to improve women's status through the reform of marriage, property, and inheritance laws, the elimination of the double standard for men and women in the crime of prostitution, and the promotion of education and professions for women. Generally speaking, however, the Progressive movement represented a departure from advocating gender equality based on natural rights. Many of the rights and opportunities women demanded at the time, including suffrage, became linked to the idea that women needed rights to better fulfill their roles as mothers and social reformers. Although the Progressive movement expanded women's roles in society, it also had its limits, because much of its activism reinforced traditional gender roles.⁷

Female social reformers, many of whom were middle class, educated, and white, have received much attention from historians. They formed, however, only a part of the mosaic of women's political and social activism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Working class women picketed and went on strike for higher wages, better

⁶Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1987), 6-7, 16-18; Nancy F. Cott, "What's in a Name? The Limits of 'Social Feminism:' or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 3 (December 1989): 809-929; Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (CT: Twayne, 1995); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1966); Richard W. Leeman, "Do Everything" Reform: The Oratory of Frances E. Willard (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992), xi-xiii, 3-49; and Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007).

⁷Nancy F. Cott, "What's in a Name?" 809-929; and Daniel Scott Smith, "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 3/4 (Winter-Spring, 1973): 40-57.

working conditions, and the right to organize. Socialist women advocated a working class revolution. Historians would later refer to most of these women as feminists. However, it is not clear what role feminism played in their activism. In a study of socialist women in the United States, Mari Jo Buhle found that early socialists, primarily immigrants from Germany, had a romantic view of the family. They saw it as a bulwark against competitive individualism and exploitative capitalistic production. They advocated a living wage for fathers and promoted the role of women in cultivating the worker's family and the working class community. Socialists eventually supported women's equality, but the role of women in the overarching class struggle was complicated. Women in the union movement had similar issues. Trade unions, primarily craft unions, supported a living wage for men and protective laws for women in the workforce. Trade unions continued to support protective laws for women well into the twentieth-century. All of these differences illustrated that class, race, and conflicting priorities often prohibited unity among women, much less a coherent theory of feminism.⁸

Historian Nancy Cott helped clear up some of the confusion in *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. She placed the word "feminism" in historical context. Although feminism has become a universal word for women's equality activism across time, Cott established that it did not come into common use until the 1910s. At the height of the suffrage movement, feminism arose, which signaled a new ethos in the women's movement. Carrie Chapman Catt, the leader of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), defined feminism in 1914 as a "world wide revolt against all artificial barriers

⁸Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 1983), xi-xix, 1-104; and Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (NY: Henry Holt, 2000), 225-273.

which laws and customs interpose between women and human freedom.” Then, as now, not every woman who fought for women’s rights called herself a feminist. Catt’s language indicated that feminism was more radical than women’s rights. In an illustration that little had changed by the 1970s, Louisiana anti-ERA activists often spoke, in the same breath, of their support for women’s rights, but of their disdain for feminism.⁹

Cott delineated a line of departure between what she called the nineteenth-century woman movement” and twentieth-century feminism. According to Cott, the woman movement, with its use of the singular, became archaic by the early part of the twentieth-century. She argued that this earlier movement had characteristics that made it different from feminism. The woman movement encompassed a broad range of activities on behalf of women. Generally speaking, however, it presumed gendered ideas about women, in particular their virtue, morality, and sense of duty to others. That is perhaps why Cott argued that the woman movement, in spite of its diverse goals, had a greater sense of unity than feminism. She noted that men could not be a part of the woman movement, although some men supported female suffrage and women’s rights.¹⁰

According to Cott, the basics of feminism took shape in the first decade of the twentieth-century. Feminism, both then and now, resisted precise definition, but it had some basic premises. Feminism was broader than the woman movement, yet also more divisive. Unlike in the woman movement, men could identify as feminists. Feminism was inclusive. Women from all classes, races, and ethnicities could be feminists, including mothers,

⁹Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 13-16; and Melba McIntosh (Louisiana anti-ERA leader), interview by Yvonne Brown, Nov. 4, 2011, Oak Grove, La.

¹⁰Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 15-20.

housewives, working women, and professional women. All of these disparate women, however, were united in the belief that women as a class were oppressed based on their gender.¹¹

At the same time, feminism adhered to a doctrine of individualism. Every woman had the right to make her own choices regarding marriage, motherhood, education, profession, or job. This created a paradoxical situation. The juxtaposition of gender group identity and individualism made it difficult to form community and set common goals. Women also had competing group identities. In the history of feminism, the formation of an enduring interest group based on gender identity proved difficult. Many African-American women during the social revolution of the 1960s and 70s distrusted the feminist movement, because they did not think the interests of middle-class white women reflected their priorities. Feminists also underestimated the ability of many women to transcend their loyalties and ties to their economic and social class, religious beliefs, communities, and families.¹²

Nevertheless, feminism was not only broad but deep. It went beyond changing laws to transforming relationships between men and women within the home, workplace, and social environment. These changes sprang from another tenet of feminism, the social origin of the concept of gender. Feminism argued that most traits considered feminine or masculine came from history, culture, and expediency, and not immutable laws of nature,

¹¹Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 3-10, Cott, "What's in a Name?" 826, and Joan Cassell, *A Group Called Women: Sisterhood and Symbolism in the Feminist Movement* (NY: David McKay, 1977), ix-xiii, 1-5, 15-55.

¹²Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 5-8, 36-40, Cott, "What's in a Name?" 815-820; and Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-51.

science, or God. Gender, therefore, was a “manmade” concept, rooted in history and culture, which structured power relationships between the sexes.¹³

Although it seemed feminism could be whatever one wished it to be, it had at least three widely agreed upon premises. First, feminism argued that women, as a gender, were oppressed by men. Therefore, women should unify based on gender in order to change their status. Second, the ideas that comprised gender, which gave credence to sex hierarchy, did not come from God or nature, but from society. Third, because gender was of social and historical origin, feminists could challenge and change it. According to historian Linda Gordon, “feminism is a critique of male supremacy, formed and offered in the light of a will to change it, which in turn assumes a conviction that it is changeable.”¹⁴

The principles listed above had been part of the woman movement, but feminism provided an organizing structure. Feminism, however, still retained a vague quality. It was broad and universal, yet left space for individuals to define it for themselves. It was a paradox, therefore, that feminism became perceived as divisive and narrow. There are various reasons why feminism polarized instead of unified. The idea of uniting in a comprehensive campaign to fight gender oppression presumed that women would forego other identities in favor of gender identity and unity. This required a high level of commitment to what some thought an abstract ideology. Some women thought feminism meant rejecting or stepping outside the bonds of family, faith, community, and economic class, which proved daunting. Different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups also had

¹³Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1986) 3-14, 26-28, 36-53, Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969) ix-xiii, 23-58, Glenn Collins, “Patriarchy: Is it Invention or Inevitable?” *New York Times*, April 28, 1986, online access at www.nytimes.com/1986/04/28/style/patriarchy-is-it-invention-or-inevitable.html.

¹⁴Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 4-7; and Cott, “What’s in a Name?” 813-826.

different priorities and different ideas about the role of family. As Patricia Hill Collins argued in *Black Feminist Thought*, unlike white feminists, black women did not view the family as the locus of their oppression, but as the locus of resistance in a racist society.¹⁵

The idea of extreme individuality made feminism more controversial than the woman movement. Feminism disconnected women's rights from their roles as mothers, virtuous women, or societal caretakers. This presumably gave women license to pursue sexual liberation, economic independence, or freedom from marriage and motherhood. These ideas, especially sexual liberation, drew harsh criticism from anti-feminists, but they also caused tension within the women's movement as well. Feminism also highlighted disagreements over the meanings of gender equality. One segment of the feminist movement demanded that laws and social institutions be gender blind, and eliminate distinctions based on sex. Once artificial barriers fell, individual women, and men, could achieve according to their abilities and desires.¹⁶

Another group of feminists rejected the idea of "sameness" equality and chose to emphasize gender difference. This elevation of womanhood differed from the earlier woman movement, which celebrated traditional morality and motherhood. Woman-centered feminism linked sexual power with spiritual and social power, because women could give birth and nurture life. Ellen Key, a Swedish writer and feminist, advocated women's sexual liberation in the early twentieth-century. She advocated women's rights to sexuality and motherhood outside marriage. Key wanted to separate motherhood from traditional

¹⁵Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (NY: Routledge, 1990), 3-67.

¹⁶Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 3-43.

marriage, which she called “sex slavery.” She advocated state support for mothers, not as charity, but as recognition and remuneration for the job of raising children and its value to the state. Not only that, she wanted women to embrace motherhood instead of work outside the home. She did not believe “women’s freedom and happiness could be gained through emulation of or competition with men in the economic or political arena.” Key captured the imaginations of American feminists, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Gilman recognized that feminism had at least two opposing tensions. She called the two schools, the “Human Feminists” (Gilman) and the “Female Feminists” (Key).¹⁷

Most feminists, nevertheless, resisted being confined to a particular ideology and moved freely among ideas. They supported equal opportunity for individuals, but also gender group interests and initiatives. They celebrated what they considered female values, but believed the law should not use sex differences to discriminate against or to restrict women. Feminists who advocated legal equality also promoted female gender consciousness, which fostered identity, self-esteem, and political power for women. After all the discussion of conflict, it seemed that feminism should have collapsed from the weight of its own contradictions. Despite its paradoxical nature, however, feminism showed a remarkable resiliency and an ability to sustain contradiction. According to Nancy Cott, the paradoxes of feminism became the basis of its power. It had a defining structure, but feminism had the ability to appeal to different women on different levels.¹⁸

¹⁷Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 41-50; and Ellen Key, *Love and Marriage*, trans. Arthur G. Chater (NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1911).

¹⁸Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 5-6, 8-10, 19-21.

At the same time that feminism began to emerge in the early twentieth-century, the cause of suffrage emerged as the lynchpin and unifier of the first wave women's movement. As noted earlier, differences among women activists helped the cause of suffrage. Traditional suffrage leaders, such as those of NAWSA, framed suffrage as a tool in the hands of reformers, who needed the vote to improve the lives of women, children, and families. The more radical women's rights activists, who wanted nothing less than full legal and social equality, viewed suffrage as a basic and unconditional right, regardless of the consequences. By the time Carrie Chapman Catt devised her "winning plan" in 1916, suffrage became the pre-eminent goal of nearly all feminists. The winning plan was a strategy to ignite suffrage organizations throughout the country to work for suffrage at the state and federal levels. In 1919, with the endorsement of Woodrow Wilson, Congress passed the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote. Tennessee became the last of the thirty-six states needed to ratify on August 18, 1920, and women's suffrage became the law of the land on August 26, 1920.¹⁹

Louisiana women were involved in both the first and second wave of the women's movement. Carmen Lindig, in *The Path from the Parlor: Louisiana Women, 1879-1920*, provided a comprehensive treatment of Louisiana women's entrance into politics and reform after the Civil War. Her biography of Caroline Merrick revealed the challenges Louisiana women faced as they made the transition from "Southern Lady" to "New Woman." Merrick was born in 1825, the daughter of a plantation owner. Her home was Cottage Hall Plantation in East Feliciana Parish. At age 15, she married Edwin T. Merrick, a 37 year old judge. They settled in Clinton, Louisiana, and Caroline managed a household including several

¹⁹Carrie Chapman Catt, "Do You Know?" and "The Winning Plan, Speech to NAWSA, 1916," documents can be viewed online at *Digital Docs in a Box*, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbnawsa.n835e>.

slaves. The Merricks moved to New Orleans in 1856. She spent the duration of the Civil War on Myrtle Grove Plantation, located on the Atchafalaya River. The war was traumatic for Merrick, but it convinced her of women's capabilities. The Merricks returned to New Orleans after the war and Caroline became active in civic and charity work. An incident in 1879 converted her to the cause of women's rights. Merrick was secretary of the all female board of St. Anna's Asylum, a home for destitute women in New Orleans. One of the home's beneficiaries left a monetary bequest to the board in 1878, and the women witnessed her will. Upon taking the will to probate court, however, Merrick and the board learned that Louisiana law did not recognize women as capable of witnessing a will. According to Louisiana law, other incapables included the "insane, idiots, and felons." The state of Louisiana took the money.²⁰

Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, Merrick's friend and fellow civic activist, suggested they draw up a petition to present to a state constitutional convention in 1879. Their petition cited the classic grievance of taxation without representation, and called for women's right to vote on school and education issues. Although they noted that Wyoming had given full voting rights to women, and the state had benefited, Merrick and company thought requesting unqualified suffrage too radical for Louisiana. They were disappointed in their quest for even modified voting rights, however. Louisiana women only received the right to be appointed to school

²⁰Carmen Lindig, *The Path from the Parlor: Louisiana Women, 1879-1920*, (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1986), 21-31, 36, Pamela Tyler, "Woman Suffrage," in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson, Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 2010- Article Published February 4, 2011, <http://www.knowla.org/entry/538/htm>, "Constitution and Revised Laws of Louisiana," Vol. 11, Article 199, compiled and annotated by Solomon Wolff (New Orleans: F. F. Hansell & Bro. Ltd., 1904), p. 1956-1957; and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan Brownell Anthony, Ida Husted Harper, Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage, 1883-1900*, Vol. 4 (1902).

boards under Article 232 of the new constitution. To Merrick's dismay, many women who said they supported her refused to sign the petition.²¹

Louisiana women had fewer qualms about joining temperance and women's clubs, which proliferated in 1880s Louisiana. Frances Willard, the head of the national Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), recruited Merrick to establish Louisiana branches of the organization in 1882. Merrick admitted she had little interest in temperance, but she wanted to support Willard. Despite her lukewarm feeling toward the cause, Merrick became state president. Her considerable leadership skills made the WCTU a success in Louisiana, but temperance seemed to be a cause that sold itself. The WCTU thrived in some unlikely places, even among Catholics and ethnic German Lutherans, who were not known for temperance fervor. Many women found an outlet in the WCTU, which offered a pathway to challenging activities outside the home. It offered women training in organizing, civic affairs, leadership, and public speaking, and a great sense of purpose.²²

The same is true of women's clubs. The New Orleans Woman's Club began in 1884 and claimed to be the first in the South. Woman's Club members distributed food and clothing to flood victims and placed matrons in police stations. The Woman's Club spawned the creation of study groups in the city. They had names such as the Geographics, the Current Topic Class, and the *Quarante*. They studied ancient history, foreign cultures, Victorian poets, and the latest science in child development. Women's Clubs spread throughout Louisiana. In Shreveport, *Hypatia*, *Pierian*, and a Jewish women's group called

²¹Lindig, *The Path from the Parlor*, 36-45, Tyler, "Woman Suffrage," *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, <http://www.knowla.org/entry/538/htm>.

²²Lindig, *The Path from the Parlor*, 46-48, W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 3-24; and Ruth Bordin, *Woman Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1990* (NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

Fidelio organized. In Ruston, the Cultural Club emerged from an embroidery group. In many cases clubs formed a bridge for Louisiana women to more direct support for women's legal, social, and political rights.²³

It was not until the turn of the century that suffrage became a central focus for Louisiana women activists. In 1892 Caroline Merrick, at the age of 67, organized Louisiana's first suffrage organization, the Portia Club. The women of the Portia Club, however, came to represent a past generation. In 1896 Kate and Jean Gordon, part of a new generation, organized the Era Club, which stood for "Equal Rights for All." The Era Club advocated female suffrage, but it also promoted child labor reform, municipal improvements, and public health initiatives. The Gordon sisters achieved state and national recognition as social reformers.²⁴

Kate and Jean Gordon were born into a wealthy New Orleans family in 1861 and 1867, respectively. They never married and dedicated their lives to civic causes. Jean, the younger sister, led the fight for child labor reform in Louisiana. After joining a charity organization in 1888, allegedly after the tragic death of her fiancé, she took up the cause of local child factory workers. Jean and members of the Era Club formed a committee to investigate the exploitation of women and children and unsafe conditions in Louisiana factories. The committee called for laws to regulate child labor and to appoint women as factory inspectors. After an effective media campaign, the Louisiana legislature passed a Child Labor Act in 1906 and appointed Jean Gordon as the first female factory inspector in

²³Lindig, *The Path from the Parlor*, 49-56, Patricia Brady, "Literary Ladies of New Orleans in the Gilded Age," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 33 no. 2 (Spring 1992): 147-156; and Jane Cunningham Croly, *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America* (H. G. Allen, 1898).

²⁴Lindig, *The Path from the Parlor*, 59-61; and Pamela Tyler, "Woman Suffrage," in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, <http://www.knowla.org/entry/538/htm>.

New Orleans. Jean's triumph was short-lived, however, because authorities did not enforce the law. She also launched a campaign in 1908 to mandate a nine hour workday for women and children, which set off a struggle with factory owners. Even some labor groups refused to support Gordon's initiative. As noted earlier, reformers, union leaders, and workers did not always share the same goals. Gordon relented on the nine hour work day, but the 1908 bill provided for better enforcement of safety regulations and made it illegal to hire anyone under the age of fourteen.²⁵

Jean Gordon's passion, however, became the running of the Milne Home for Destitute Orphan Girls, sometimes called the Milne Home for Feeble-Minded Girls. Governor Newton Blanchard appointed Gordon president of the home's board in 1905. Initially, Jean disapproved of long-term institutionalization and advocated private home placements for orphans. Both Jean and Kate, however, became followers of the theories of Social Darwinism and eugenics. Jean became a believer through her work as a factory inspector when she noted that factory children were lethargic and could not read well. Gordon did not attribute this to environmental conditions, but to the inferior genetic make-up of the children's mothers. Although the Milne home purportedly offered humane treatment, it became a social experiment, intended to protect the "feeble-minded" from harm, but also to protect society from their ability to procreate. The Gordons favored legal birth control and forced segregation of the "unfit." In the 1920s, they lobbied the Louisiana

²⁵Lindig, *Path from the Parlor*, 119-122.

legislature for compulsory sterilization laws. Roman Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants opposed the law and it did not pass.²⁶

Kate Gordon, however, became known as the foremost proponent of women's suffrage in Louisiana. Kate made her mark in suffrage circles during a campaign to get New Orleans taxpayers to fund an adequate sewage and drainage system for the city. Louisiana taxpaying women had gained the right to vote on municipal taxation bills as part of the new Louisiana Constitution in 1898. This fell short of what Louisiana suffragists wanted, but Gordon seemed determined to make the most of the opportunity. When a proposed sewage tax came up for a vote in New Orleans in 1899, Gordon became a one woman voting machine. The women's suffrage law of 1898 allowed voting by proxy, because it was presumed ladies would not want to risk their reputations by going to the polls. Before the election, Gordon collected the signed proxies of approximately three hundred women voters. On the day of the election, she traversed the city to vote all of the proxies. The tax passed and Gordon received accolades from lawmakers and city leaders. She so impressed the officers of NAWSA, they offered her a job on the national staff as correspondence secretary in 1901.²⁷

Gordon held the post for eight years. Although the NAWSA staff admired Gordon for her energy and passion, she was opinionated and unbending. She insisted the best way to

²⁶Kathryn W. Kemp, "Jean and Kate Gordon: New Orleans Social Reformers, 1898-1933," *Louisiana History* 24 no. 4 (Autumn 1983): 389-401.

²⁷Elna C. Green, "The Rest of the Story: Kate Gordon and the Opposition to the Nineteenth Amendment in the South," *Louisiana History* 33 no. 2 (Spring 1992): 171-89, Kenneth R. Johnson, "Kate Gordon and the Woman-Suffrage Movement in the South," *The Journal of Southern History* 38 (August 1972): 365-392, Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question*, xi-xiv, 1-56, 127-150, Barbara Smith Corrales, "Parlors, Politics, and Privilege: Clubwomen and the Failure of Woman Suffrage in Lafayette, Louisiana, 1897-1922," *Louisiana History* 38 no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 453-471; and B. H. Gilley, "Kate Gordon and Louisiana Woman Suffrage," *Louisiana History* 24 no. 3 (Summer 1983): 289-306.

obtain female suffrage was at the state level, especially in the South. NAWSA supported a strategy of trying to win suffrage at the state and national levels; therefore, they supported her states' rights ideology. Gordon, however, could not support anything at the federal level. Her obsession with maintaining white supremacy drove her insistence that states pass their own suffrage laws. If black women received the vote through federal amendment, it opened the door for the federal government to intervene in states, primarily in the South, that had disenfranchised black voters. Gordon was both a racist and a Progressive. She believed in black racial inferiority and thought blacks, like those she deemed feeble-minded, needed protection from the responsibilities of citizenship. As an educated, white, and progressive woman, Gordon felt ideally suited for guardianship. Her support for granting the vote to deserving womanhood, however, did not extend to black women, many of whom were also educated and reform minded. In fact, it only made it worse, because according to Gordon, "while white men would be willing to club negro men away from the polls, they would not use the club upon black women."²⁸

Gordon left NAWSA in 1909. Never one to go quietly, she criticized Catt and Anna Howard Shaw for being autocratic. Gordon formed her own organization in 1913, the Southern States Woman Suffrage Conference (SSWSC). By this time, however, Louisiana suffragists began to find Kate Gordon autocratic. Sake Meehan of New Orleans and Lydia Holmes of Baton Rouge organized the Woman's Suffrage Party of Louisiana (WSP) and re-allied with NAWSA. The internal rivalries did not help the cause of suffrage in Louisiana. A state suffrage law came painfully close to passage in 1918; but failed, in part because of

²⁸Green, "The Rest of the Story: Kate Gordon and the Opposition to the Nineteenth Amendment in the South," 171-181.

disunity among Louisiana suffragists. Martin Berhman, however, the mayor of New Orleans, is often credited for defeating women's suffrage at the state level. Female suffrage passed through the Louisiana legislature and went on to a state referendum. But Berhman reportedly ordered his sizeable voting bloc in New Orleans to vote no, because he detested female reformers. When the 19th amendment came up for ratification in Louisiana, Gordon allied with anti-suffragists to oppose it, because she refused to support a constitutional amendment. But she supported a state suffrage law that was being considered at the same time. The bizarre three way contest, however, confused supporters, impelled the opposition, and led to the defeat of both amendments. The state of Louisiana did not ratify the 19th Amendment until 1970.²⁹

Most historians cite the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 as the end of first wave feminism. In some ways, this view is justified. The Suffrage fight brought a high level of organization and focus to the women's rights movement, which dissipated after women won the right to vote. At the same time, expectations for what women's votes would accomplish, in terms of social change, rose precipitously. It did not take long before critics expressed disappointment, not only in the efficacy of voting as a vehicle of social change, but in women themselves. In many states and locales, women did not initially register to vote in large numbers. When they did vote, it appeared women followed their husbands. Eventually, some historians of women's rights questioned whether suffrage advanced women's equality. Historian William O'Neill became one of the foremost proponents of the idea that suffrage was not a radical reform. Ellen DuBois argued, however, that suffrage

²⁹Green, "The Rest of the Story," 171-189; and Joan Kent, "From Suffrage to ERA," *New Orleans States Item*, March 24, 1972.

could never be anything less than a radical transformation of women's status. It brought women into full citizenship and changed their identity. A general perception developed, nevertheless, that the women's movement stalled and even went backward after 1920.³⁰

Historians also looked to ideological divisions that beset the women's movement after 1920 as a reason for the demise of first wave feminism. After 1920, the women's movement went through a period of re-organization. Suffrage had become the great unifier for disparate women's groups. It is not surprising, therefore, that differences re-emerged after women won the vote. In particular, historians cited the conflicts between the ideologies and methodologies of NAWSA and the National Woman's Party (NWP) as a cause of division within the women's movement. In 1919, on the eve of ratification of the 19th amendment, Carrie Chapman Catt proposed a new organization at the annual NAWSA convention, the League of Women Voters (LWV). The LWV organized the following year as a non-partisan, educational, and training vehicle for newly minted women voters.³¹

Alice Paul, however, had a different vision for the future of women's rights. She led the militant wing of the women's suffrage movement. Paul was born in 1885 in New Jersey to wealthy Quaker parents who were avid supporters of women's rights. After Paul received a biology degree from Swarthmore College in 1905, she went to London to study economics and work in the settlement house movement. In London, Paul met kindred spirit Lucy

³⁰William L. O'Neill, "Suffrage Was Not a Radical Reform," in *The Women's Rights Movement: Opposing Viewpoints*, 210-227, Ellen Carol DuBois, "Suffrage Was a Radical Reform," in *The Women's Rights Movement: Opposing Viewpoints*, 228-238; and Estelle B. Freedman, "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s," in *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940*, eds. Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 22-42.

³¹Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 85-114; and Susan Becker, "International Feminism between the Wars: The National Woman's Party versus the League of Women Voters," in *Decades of Discontent*, 223-242.

Burns, and she observed the Pankhurst sisters in action. The Pankhurst sisters, Christabel and Sylvia, along with their mother, Emmeline, achieved notoriety for defying middle class female political decorum. In the cause of women's suffrage, they broke windows, marched in the streets, and got arrested. When Paul returned to the United States in 1910, she joined NAWSA and became head of its moribund Congressional Committee, which had formed to work for a federal suffrage amendment. Paul recruited Lucy Burns, feminist Crystal Eastman, and historian Mary Ritter Beard to the committee. Taking the Pankhurst motto "Deeds not words," to heart, Paul organized a women's march in front of the White House for Woodrow Wilson's inauguration in 1913. In 1914, she founded the Congressional Union (CU) within NAWSA. Paul left NAWSA in 1916 to head her own National Woman's Party (NWP).³²

The NWP attracted young suffragists and others who became impatient with the slow and staid tactics of NAWSA. Paul devised a strategy that included bringing the suffrage fight to national lawmakers, punishing the party and politicians in power, and civil disobedience. NWP members picketed, orated from soapboxes on street corners, and held signs calling President Wilson, "Kaiser Wilson." Authorities arrested picketers for obstructionism, and some went to the Occoquan workhouse, a notorious women's prison. Suffragists declared themselves political prisoners, refused to work, and went on hunger strikes. Although leaders of NAWSA disapproved of the tactics, the publicity generated at

³²Alice Paul Institute, "Alice Paul: Feminist, Suffragist, and Political Strategist," online access at www.alicepaul.org/who-was-alice-paul/.

the brutal treatment of the women, including forced feeding, brought attention and sympathy to their cause.³³

After suffrage, Paul wanted to continue to fight for legal equality at the national level through the vehicle of a constitutional amendment. She announced the “Lucretia Mott Amendment” in 1923, which became known as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). As noted earlier, however, the ERA did not get support from many former suffragists and feminists. Paul’s charisma drew money and followers, but her autocratic and egocentric leadership style turned many people away. The NWP and the ERA also became known as an elitist party and cause. The NWP attracted large amounts of money from rich women like Alva Belmont. To some, the ERA became the narrow focus of well educated, middle class, and wealthy women, who could afford to level or eliminate gender specific laws. ERA supporters were seen as “politically conservative and sympathetic to business interests.” Those who fought for legislation to improve the working conditions, cut the hours, raise the wages, and protect the children of working-class women, did not support the ERA. Eleanor Roosevelt, the iconic feminist of the post-suffrage generation, opposed the ERA, because she thought it too “conservative.”³⁴

The declaration of death for the women’s movement after 1920, however, was an exaggeration. Mary Anderson became head of the new Women’s Bureau in 1920, which

³³Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 53-81, and “Alice Paul: Feminist, Suffragist and Political Strategist,” www.alicepaul.org/who-was-alice-paul/.

³⁴Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 117-142, Roberta W. Francis, Chair, ERA Task Force, National Council of Women’s Organizations, “The History Behind the Equal Rights Amendment,” online access at www.equalrightsamendment.org/history.htm, John Broesamle and Anthony Arthur, “Men are Not the Enemy,” in *Clashes of Will: Great Confrontations that Have Shaped Modern America* (NY: Pearson Longman, 2005), 240-263; and Becker, “International Feminism between the Wars: The National Woman’s Party versus the League of Women Voters,” in *Decades of Discontent*, 223-242.

became a permanent department of the federal government. The following year Congress passed the Sheppard-Towner Act, or the Maternity and Infancy Act. The federal government promised matching funds to states that provided maternity and infant care to poor women. Shortly after 1920, suffrage leaders formed the Women's Joint Congressional Committee (WJCC) as an umbrella organization for rapidly multiplying women's interest groups. Approximately seventeen groups comprised the WJCC, including the League of Women Voters (LWV), the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teachers Association (PTA), the WCTU, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs, to name a few. The WJCC formed a committee of representative organizations to monitor legislation, assess priorities, and formulate plans of action to promote desired legislation.³⁵

One of the issues that drew women together prior to and in conjunction with winning the franchise was the cause of "world peace." Jane Addams and Carrie Chapman Catt organized a conference in Washington, DC in 1915 to devise ways to end the Great War and to prevent future wars. Three-thousand women gathered. The women endorsed a platform that included "suffrage for women, a conference of neutrals to offer continuous mediation as a way to end war, limitation of armaments and the nationalization of their manufacture, organized opposition to militarism, education of youth in the ideals of peace, the removal of the economic causes of war, and the formation of the Woman's Peace Party (WPP)." Jane Addams became chairman of the WPP. The entry of the United States into WWI in 1917, however, complicated matters for the WPP and NAWSA. Catt, representing NAWSA,

³⁵Joan M. Jensen and Lois Scharf, "Introduction," in *Decades of Discontent*, 3-18; and Jan Doolittle Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism, 1920-30* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

endorsed the war effort, while the WPP remained neutral. At war's end in 1919, the WPP became the United States section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), an international peace organization headed by Jane Addams. In the aftermath of WWI, putting an end to war became an important part of the women's

movement. Nevertheless, peace activism caused division within the women's movement and among American women in general.³⁶

The WILPF adopted measures in 1920 that would seem radical even by later standards. It appealed to the State Department for the "release of political prisoners and conscientious objectors, protested against the deportation of 'reds' and opposed compulsory military training as part of a plan to reorganize the United States Army." It also wanted the "U. S. to recognize the Bolshevik government, and remove the blockade of Russia." Although the WILPF was not part of the WJCC, the WJCC and other mainline women's organizations were soon painted with a broad red brush. The publication of a sensational "spider-web" chart in a Michigan newspaper owned by Henry Ford accused WJCC members of being pacifists, socialists, and traitors. The "spider-web" chart listed women's organizations and their leaders in boxes. A web of crisscrossing lines linked these organizations to suspect groups, where they supposedly received instructions in subversive activities. The chart contained many inaccuracies. Catt launched an investigation and found that Lucia Maxwell, an employee of the Chemical War Bureau and assistant to Brigadier General Amos Fries, compiled the chart. The Secretary of War, John W. Weeks, ordered the charts destroyed, but the damage was done. There was speculation that Weeks, who had been an outspoken women's suffrage opponent, was less than sincere in his apology. Weeks purportedly blamed anti-war women for bringing public pressure against the National

³⁶Susan Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Racial Justice, Peace, and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 1-39, Eleanor Barr, Archivist, "Part I: Woman's Peace Party, 1915-1920," "Historical Introduction," Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Collection (DG043), Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, PA, online access at www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/DG026-050/dg043wilpf/Part I-WPPHistory.htm, Eleanor Barr, "Historical Introduction, 1919-1959," Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Collection (DG043), Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, PA, online access at www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/DG026-050/dg043wilpf/history.htm.

Defense Act of 1920, which he supported. The act proposed to keep and train a large standing peacetime army, which female peace activists and the general public opposed.³⁷

The women's movement did not die after 1920, nor did it disappear between the first and second waves. Women continued and expanded their organizational activities.

However, for the most part, women did not organize or unify in a broad based movement specifically for gender equality. War, economic depression, and political persecution helped marginalize and even demonize the women's movement and feminism, especially when women held non-conformist views, such as pacifism.

Unlike the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, it is difficult to fix a date for the beginning of second wave feminism. Some historians argue that the roots of the second wave go back to the 1950s. Signs of rebellion against gender restrictions rumbled beneath a surface of placid domesticity. Mothers organized against nuclear testing and warfare.

Women in the 1950s also reacted to post WWII materialism and consumerism. In a counter-cultural movement, seven mothers in Franklin Park, Illinois formed the La Leche League in 1956 to promote breastfeeding, natural childbirth, and a more "natural" form of childrearing. Founder Mary White, along with the League's founding mothers, was a devout Catholic with many children. They were not feminists as we have defined them. However,

³⁷Lucia Maxwell, "Spider Web Chart: The Socialist-Pacifist Movement in America Is an Absolutely Fundamental and Integral Part of International Socialism," 1924, copy of Spider Web Chart can be viewed online at <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/wilpf/doc3.htm#spiderweb>, chart was also published in a newspaper article titled "Are Women's Clubs Used by Bolshevists?" *The Dearborn Independent*, XXIV (22 March 1924), 11, See Catt's response to the chart at Carrie Chapman Catt, "Poison Propaganda," *The Woman Citizen* (31 May 1924): 14, 32-33, <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/wilpf/doc4.htm>, to view original documents and commentary see Kathryn Kish Sklar and Helen Baker, "How Did Women Peace Activists Respond to 'Red Scare' Attacks during the 1920s?" access at <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/wilpf/intro.htm>, for historical analysis and context, see Joan M. Jensen, "All Pink Sisters: The War Department and the Feminist Movement in the 1920s," in *Decades of Discontent*; and Kim Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), 73-88.

they advanced a critique against the modern medical profession, which discouraged women's participation in childbirth and breastfeeding, and promoted manufactured foods, rigid scheduling, and reliance on experts. They also critiqued post World War II family culture, which distanced fathers and mothers from their children. As fathers left home to earn, mothers became consumers of goods and the services of experts, which, in the League's view, made mothers feel inadequate. Some of these views would later find a home in feminism, especially within the woman-centered health movement.³⁸

A visible movement for women's equality began to emerge by the early 1960s. John F. Kennedy's first Presidential Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 marked a new beginning in the quest for gender equality. Although Kennedy did not have much interest in women's rights, he convened the commission at the urging of Democratic women who worked in the causes of labor, civil rights, and his election. Esther Peterson, the new head of the Women's Bureau, which had been in existence since 1920, pushed Kennedy to open a formal inquiry into the economic, legal, and social status of the nation's women. Kennedy appointed Eleanor Roosevelt to head the commission. In the opinion of Pauli Murray, an African-American lawyer and civil rights activist, this marked a beginning of the second women's rights movement. In 1963, the presidential commission issued its report, the

³⁸Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, rev. ed. (NY: Basic Books, 2008), Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (NY: Basic Books, 1993), Jule DeJager Ward, *La Leche League: At the Crossroads of Medicine, Feminism, and Religion* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Linda M. Blum, *At the Breast: Ideologies of Breastfeeding and Motherhood* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999), Linda Blum, "Mothers, Babies, and Breastfeeding in Late Capitalist America: The Shifting Context of Feminist Theory," *Feminist Studies* 19 (1993): 291-311, Linda M. Blum and Elizabeth A. Vandewater, "Mother to Mother: A Maternalist Organization in Late Capitalist America," *Social Problems* 40, no. 3 (1993): 285-300; and Linda M. Blum and Elizabeth A. Vandewater, "Mothers Construct Fathers: Destabilized Patriarchy in La Leche League," *Qualitative Sociology* 16 (1993): 3-22.

American Woman. The report showed that many American women, while they constituted a larger part of the workforce than ever, lived under a gender “apartheid,” which resulted in second-class legal and economic status. The Commission, however, failed to endorse or even mention the ERA. The national commission, nevertheless, gave birth to state-level commissions and articulated the problems American women faced.³⁹

President Kennedy also signed the Equal Pay Act (EPA) in June of 1963. Rep. Winifred Stanley (R-NY) first proposed an EPA in 1944 as an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act. Representative Katharine St. George (R-NY) in 1950 and 1959 championed two EPA bills. The second bill featured the concept of “equal pay for comparable work,” but stalled because of the definition of comparable work. The bill that passed in 1963 established the principle of “equal pay for equal work,” a phrase coined by St. George. The wording of the bill prohibited wage discrimination “on the basis of sex for equal work on jobs the performance of which required equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions.”⁴⁰

Congress also passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, which included women under Title VII. The law deemed it “unlawful for an employer to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of the individual’s race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.” The story of how the word sex was added to the Civil Rights Act is complicated. As the story is often told,

³⁹Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (NY: Penguin Books, 2000), xvii-xx, 63-70.

⁴⁰Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 70-71, Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women’s Issues, 1945-1968* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), 89-107, Rosa Cho, “Everything You Need to Know about the Equal Pay Act,” National Council for Research on Women, www.regender.org/EqualPayAct1, “The Equal Pay Act of 1963,” (Pub. L. 88-38), Vol. 29, US Code, Section 206(d), www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/epa.cfm.

Virginia congressman Howard Smith, an ardent segregationist, lobbied to include the word sex in the law, because he thought it would cause his northern colleagues to vote against it. Smith joked about it on the floor of the House and gave the impression he was not serious. The congressman, however, had long supported the ERA. Women from the Virginia NWP and the national branch of the party saw an opportunity to advance gender equality at the federal level, and recruited Smith as sponsor. According to historian Jo Freeman, most southern congressmen left the building by the time the vote was called, considering the civil rights battle lost. Therefore, the inclusion of the word sex in Title VII was not a fluke. An unlikely coalition of Republicans, southern congressman, and feminists forged a victory.⁴¹

Congress also created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to enforce Title VII in 1964. The Commission investigated discrimination complaints, offered reconciliation services, and in the worst instances, transferred the case to the Justice Department. It only took complaints regarding four groups: employers of twenty-five or more persons, labor unions with twenty-five or more members, employment agencies dealing with employers of twenty-five or more persons, and joint labor-management apprenticeship programs of covered employers and unions. Initially the EEOC did not have enforcement power and did not cover state and local government employees or public or private educational institutions.⁴²

⁴¹Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 70-74, Jo Freeman, "How Sex Got into Title VII: Persistent Opportunism as a Maker of Public Policy," *Law and Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 9, no. 2, (March, 1991): 163-184; and AAUW (American Association of University Women), "Overview of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964," www.aauw.org/resource/title-vii-of-the-civil-rights-act-of-1964/.

⁴²Information on the history of the EEOC can be found online at EEOC: 35th Anniversary, "Pre 1965: Events Leading to the Creation of EEOC," www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/35th/pre1965/index.html, "1965-1971: A Toothless Tiger Helps Shape the Law and Educate the Public," www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/35th/1965-71/index.html, and "The 1970s: The Toothless Tiger Gets Its Teeth- A New Era of Enforcement," www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/35th/1970s/index.html.

The 1960s saw advances for women's legal equality, but many believe a cultural revolution ignited the second wave of feminism. Betty Friedan, a writer and housewife in New York City, published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, which became a founding manifesto of second wave feminism. Friedan, a Smith College graduate and former writer for a labor newspaper, wrote the book after a college reunion. According to Friedan, a survey she conducted with her classmates revealed the toll the "feminine mystique" took on women, as her peers recounted their frustration and boredom with being housewives. The feminine mystique was a set of beliefs about the nature and expectations of womanhood. It said that most, if not all, women should find fulfillment in the career of mother and housewife. If women felt depressed that they had not pursued their talents and ambitions outside the home, they suffered from a bad attitude or even mental instability. Critics have debunked some of Friedan's work. Although she identified as a trapped housewife, Friedan worked from home as a freelance writer, had paid household help, and sent her children to school in a taxi. Some wives and mothers who had to work, often at repetitive or demeaning jobs, aspired to become full-time housewives. Black women, who endured racial and gender discrimination, could not relate to life in Friedan's comfortable prison. However, thousands of American women identified with Friedan's articulation of "the problem that has no name." Friedan's book made her famous and she became one of the founders of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. NOW was the first national women's equality organization since suffrage, aside from the NWP.⁴³

⁴³Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 3-37, Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 50th anniversary ed. (W. Norton & Co., 2013); and Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (NY: Basic Books, 2011).

Young women, however, developed a feminism of their own in the mid-1960s. Historians trace the origins of “women’s liberation” to women in the New Left and Civil Rights movements. Mary King and Sandra (Casey) Hayden, formerly Cason, helped articulate the tenets of this new movement, which was not just about legal equality, but about transforming the social system. King and Hadyen were white staff members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the early 1960s. Both women were born in the South and came from religious backgrounds. They entered college in the late 1950s. Progressive campus faith communities, which emphasized making personal sacrifices to serve the poor and to facilitate racial equality, influenced the two women. King and Hayden became staff members with SNCC in 1963. In the civil rights group, both women found a “beloved community,” based on interracial and egalitarian ideals. As emotional highs often produce lows, King and Hayden experienced personal loss when tensions developed within SNCC, especially between white and black women.⁴⁴

At a SNCC retreat in Waveland, Mississippi in 1964, they wrote a paper about the position of women in SNCC. At this retreat, leader Stokeley Carmichael made his infamous remark that “the only position for women in SNCC is prone.” According to King and Hayden, he made the remark as a joke, after a long contentious day, and while “under the influence.” SNCC staff members, including King and Hayden, had gathered on a pier to unwind, and all laughed at the joke. Nevertheless, their complaints went unheeded. They attempted to challenge the treatment of women in the organization. Men in SNCC, without thought, relegated women to support roles, such as cleaning, typing, filing, and taking

⁴⁴Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 94-140; and Janet Allured, “Louisiana, the American South, and the Birth of Second-Wave Feminism,” *Louisiana History* 54, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 398-405.

minutes. This galled the young women, who brought high levels of intellectual capital and commitment to the cause.⁴⁵

Unity between blacks and whites continued to deteriorate in SNCC, however. King and Hayden always maintained they wanted to foster communication between white and black women. But their efforts failed. Trouble could be traced to the most personal of subjects—sex. According to testimony, there was a lot of sex between white women and black men in SNCC. Insiders spoke of many interracial relationships as loving and caring. However, some white women eventually felt exploited. Black women felt rejected, and they did not sympathize with white women’s complaints. Black women often took the initiative in leading dangerous and difficult field projects, and no one sought to protect them. Nor did they receive much help from white women. Black men took their strength for granted, but seemed to prefer the more traditionally feminine white women when it came to love and romance. King and Hayden blamed the problems on ingrained social gender patterns and lack of awareness in both sexes. Black women, however, blamed white women for their selfishness and insensitivity.⁴⁶

SNCC embraced racial separatism in 1965, discharged its white members, and told them to organize poor whites. Casey Hayden went to Chicago to work in a community organizing project for Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Her new movement home did not offer Hayden the community she once had. Male SDS workers and leaders grew impatient with the daily grind of inner city organizing; they even started to mimic the

⁴⁵Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 101-109; and Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (NY: Random House, 1979), 83-103, 233-234.

⁴⁶Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 94-140; and Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us*, 3-18, 23, 49.

misogynist behavior exhibited by some of the poor white men they encountered. Feeling disappointed, King and Hayden wrote an essay titled, “Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo,” which they mailed to forty women in SNCC, SDS, and the Northern Student Movement. The memo called for men and women to question their assumptions about women’s roles in organizations, but also in personal relationships. King and Hayden asked why men assumed women should clean, take care of children, be sexually available, and leave important decisions, public speaking, and intellectual activity to men. They wrote, “In one sense, it is a radicalizing question that can take people beyond legalistic solutions into areas of personal and institutional change.” The memo ignited conviction and passion, primarily among New Left women.⁴⁷

King and Hayden’s articulation of the “personal as political,” although they did not invent the phrase, opened floodgates of pent up emotions and frustrations. Interested women began to form Consciousness Raising (CR) groups. The principle of CR was that sexism was so pervasive, neither men nor women could see it or recognize it. Sexism came to be defined as a system of discrimination against women that was often un-codified and subtle, yet powerful. The personal narrative became the currency of CR. As women remembered past and present humiliations, denied opportunities, sexual exploitation, and even abuse, they went through stages of shock, anger, and rage. In the midst of conversion-like experiences, not a few rejected their families, marriages, and past friendships. CR brought enlightenment, but it also drew criticism, even among some feminists. Dorothy

⁴⁷Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 110-140, Evans, *Personal Politics*, 235-238; and Casey Hayden and Mary King, “Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo from Casey Hayden and Mary King to a number of other women in the Peace and Freedom Movements,” November 18, 1965, online access at “The CWLU Herstory Website Archive, Classic Feminist Writings,” www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/memo.html.

(Dottie) Zellner, a New York born Civil Rights worker and feminist, called CR “navel gazing.” Although southern women ignited this examination of culture and gender, northern women developed CR to the level of theory and art.⁴⁸

King and Hayden sent the “Sex and Caste” memo in an attempt to re-capture the unity of early SNCC. They reported that they heard nothing back from African-American women, but the memo touched nerves among young white women in SDS and the New Left. As in SNCC, New Left women did support work, but they also did most of the grassroots organizing. Despite their hard work and talents, however, many said they felt intimidated by the patronizing attitudes of New Left men. When women tried to communicate their issues, men dismissed and ridiculed them. One event is often cited as an impetus for the new Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM). A coalition of leftists and members of the Black Panther Party met in Chicago in 1967 at the National Conference for New Politics to elect a presidential ticket. Jo Freeman, Shulamith Firestone, and other emerging women’s liberationists, wrote a resolution to be voted on at the main meeting. When their resolution came up for a vote, the chairman read it in a bored monotone, eliciting ridicule from the audience. The resolution passed by voice vote with no discussion. In the confusion of several people trying to reach the microphone, including Shulamith Firestone, a man grabbed the mike and started to talk about the plight of the American Indian. When Firestone charged the microphone in order to have her say, conference chairman William

⁴⁸Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 86-87, 114, 196-217, 220, 238, 264, Evans, *Personal Politics*, 102-125, 212-233; and Kathie Sarachild, “Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon,” in *Feminist Revolution* (NY: Random House, 1978), 144-150, essay can be accessed online at “Documents from the Women’s Liberation Movement: An On-line Archival Collection,” Special Collections Library, Duke University, <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/wlm/fem/sarachild.html>.

Pepper allegedly “patted Shulie (Shulamith) on the head.” He then said, “Cool down, little girl; we have more important things to do here than talk about women’s problems.”⁴⁹

This event, among others, helped drive women from the New Left. Women’s liberation groups formed in cities of the Northeast, the Mid-West, and the West Coast. One of the most influential groups was New York Radical Women (NYRW), started in 1967 by Shulamith Firestone, Pam Allen, Kathie Amatriek Sarachild, Anne Koedt, Robin Morgan, Carol Hanisch, and Peggy Dobbins. In Chicago, a group of women called the Westside group, including Heather Booth, Naomi Weisstein, and Vivian Rothstein, evolved into the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union (CWLU) in 1969. Women’s liberation set itself up as an alternative to other feminist organizations, particularly NOW. Despite their supposed rejection of the New Left, the philosophies and methods of the left permeated the WLM. They did not want to equalize laws or institutions; they wanted to work outside of and transform them.⁵⁰

As one of its first projects, NYRW staged a protest of the Jeannette Rankin Brigade, which was a march against the Vietnam War, held in Washington in January of 1968. The protestors were mothers, widows, and members of women’s peace groups. While they had

⁴⁹Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 112-129; and Jo Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” Freeman’s first person account of the conference can be found online at *CWLU herstory project: A History of the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union*, www.cwluherstory.org/. On the main page, click on historical archive to access the memoirs and bios section or go directly to Freeman’s essay at www.cwluherstory.org/on-the-origins-of-the-womens-liberation-movement-from-a-strictly-personal-perspective.html.

⁵⁰A good source of information on the history of the WLM, including memoirs, can be found online at *CWLU herstory project: A History of the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union*, www.cwluherstory.org/. See Jo Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective” under the historical archive, memoirs and bios section; Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 149-159, 182, 201-202, and Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (NY: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2003).

no problem with protesting the war, the NYRW rejected the way women used motherhood to legitimize protest. Members of the NYRW buried an effigy of traditional womanhood and Kathie Sarachild gave a speech called, “Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood.” In her words, “we had a bier with a dummy of a woman on it, and we buried curlers, garters, and a can of hairspray.” Women’s liberation sent out a signal that it was no longer willing to hide behind motherhood, virtue, or even the cause of peace in pursuit of equality. Despite all of its generational, ideological, and methodological differences, however, a fairly cohesive feminist movement began to emerge by the end of the 1960s. Second wave feminism, in spite of divisions and disagreements, became dedicated to fighting for legal, social, and cultural gender equality.⁵¹

As we conclude the chapter, it is appropriate to return to Louisiana women. At the point in which we left them in 1920, the Louisiana woman suffrage movement was in disarray. The Louisiana legislature had refused to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, in part because of opposition from Kate Gordon and other women. Gordon had fought for female suffrage, but she was so adamant about denying African-Americans the vote, she aligned with opponents of female suffrage against the federal amendment. Although Gordon and her followers supported a state suffrage law, the legislature denied women the right to vote at the state level also. The rancor and confusion cast a pall over the women’s rights movement in Louisiana. In the words of Louisiana historian Pamela Tyler, “local women in the 1920s

⁵¹Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 130, 201-203, Kathie Sarachild, “Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood,” essay can be accessed at *DiscoFeminists: How the Feminists of the 1970s Challenged Traditional Ideas about Gender*, www.law146.wordpress.com; and Larkin Warren, “1968: Interview with Kathie Sarachild,” *AARP The Magazine*, 25 March 2008, www.aarp.org/politics-society/history/info-03-2008/1968_kathie_sarachild_interview.html.

displayed a decidedly tepid attitude toward political involvement, not an unremarkable response in light of the peculiar history of woman suffrage in Louisiana.”⁵²

Tyler is one of the few historians to study Louisiana women and their engagement with politics between the first and second waves of the feminist movement. It is often assumed that Louisiana women went on a straight trajectory from the failure of woman suffrage to opposing second wave feminism in the 1970s. As Tyler revealed in *Silk Stockings and Ballot Boxes*, however, the story of Louisiana women’s involvement in politics is more nuanced. Tyler’s book focused on middle and upper-class New Orleans women, called “silk stockings,” who broke into the male dominated world of Louisiana politics from the 1930s to the 1950s. The populist, but tyrannical governor, Huey Long, became the impetus that propelled one of these women, Hilda Phelps Hammond, into the rough terrain of Louisiana politics. Hammond, a society matron, threw herself into politics after Huey Long destroyed her husband’s legal career. She became a leader in the growing anti-Long movement in Louisiana. Well educated and intelligent, Hammond was part of what was called the Bourbon class, which had ruled New Orleans politically and socially for nearly a century. The Bourbons wielded power because of their economic status, family lineages, insulated social circles, and manners and morals. Many accused Hammond and the anti-Longs of being bitter over losing power. Hammond, nevertheless, did not get into politics on behalf of her husband; she became active as a result of the election of John

⁵²Pamela Tyler, *Silk Stockings and Ballot Boxes: Women and Politics in New Orleans, 1920-1963* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 238-252.

Overton, Long's hand-picked candidate for the U. S. Senate in 1932, which she believed to be corrupt.⁵³

Hammond organized her friends, women of her class, into a "Women's Committee," which embarked on a letter writing and public awareness campaign. The Committee, which at one time included over a thousand women, wrote letters to Senate oversight committees in Washington demanding an investigation into Overton's election. Hammond made trips to Washington to testify, speak to Senators, and to observe hearings. The Women's Committee prompted several major hearings, one of them in New Orleans. It is legitimate to wonder why Louisiana women fixated on the Overton election in particular. Although the sordid nature of Louisiana politics was not a secret, Long's behavior in the U. S. Senate followed by Overton's suspect election, brought a level of national ridicule to their state that offended these women deeply. The members of the Women's Committee wielded their class privileges with ease, but their privilege had been covered by a civilized veneer, which included manners and morals such as honesty and paternalistic kindness toward those less fortunate. Huey Long's penchant for wielding raw power and for flouting conventional morals and mores were anathema to Hammond and her friends.⁵⁴

The U. S. Senate seated Overton and Long's assassination in 1935 removed the *raison d'être* for the Women's Committee. However, friends of Hammond, like Martha Gilmore Robinson, expanded on her political activism. Robinson formed the Woman's Citizen Union (WCU) in 1934, which focused on electoral reform. The WCU eventually evolved into a chapter of the LWV in 1942 with Robinson at the helm. In the 1930s, the

⁵³Tyler, *Silk Stockings and Ballot Boxes*, 1-50.

⁵⁴Ibid.

WCU campaigned for voting machines, for polling places to be located in schools and public buildings, and for poll watchers to be able to work unmolested. Machine politicians in New Orleans had been known to locate polling places in bars, brothels, and private homes, which made voting for women and others an intimidating experience.⁵⁵

By the end of the 1930s, female political reformers and activists in New Orleans became determined to elect a reform candidate, Sam Houston Jones, to the Louisiana governorship in 1940. Unlike the non-partisan LWV, these women sought to endorse and work for candidates who met their criteria. After they helped Jones defeat Earl K. Long in 1940, the group organized formally in 1946 as the Independent Women's Organization (IWO). They proved instrumental in the election of another reform candidate, deLesseps Story (Chep) Morrison, as Mayor of New Orleans in 1946. The IWO gained respect as a tough, but honest political organization. Although it endorsed candidates, the IWO refused to take money for their endorsements or their labor on behalf of their chosen candidates.⁵⁶

Tyler's book revealed that many Louisiana women entered politics as good government reformers, which was a progressive tradition legitimized by women's outsider status. She argued, however, that Louisiana women did not remain political outsiders. Flush with victory over their triumph in the Morrison election, members of the IWO even realized some minor political spoils. Martha Robinson, an original member of the Women's Committee and leader of the LWV, eventually entered a race in 1954 to become the first

⁵⁵Pamela Tyler, "Martha Gilmore Robinson," in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson, Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, online access at <http://www.knowla.org/entry/854/>; and Tyler, *Silk Stockings and Ballot Boxes*, 1-30.

⁵⁶Pamela Tyler, "The Independent Women's Organization, 1946-2005," in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson, Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, online access at <http://www.knowla.org/entry/862/>.

woman elected to a city council seat in New Orleans. Mayor Chep Morrison, under a new city charter, had initiated a mayor and city council form of government. Robinson, who had a long history of public service, lost in a contentious election, in which many members of the IWO failed to support her. Robinson's opponents, including the hand-picked candidate of Chep Morrison, Victor H. Schiro, did not treat her with chivalry. They used her age and social status against her. Schiro won the election and would become mayor of New Orleans from 1961-69. It would seem that Louisiana women, at least in New Orleans, began to come of age politically in the time between the first and second feminist waves.⁵⁷

This chapter has attempted to provide a working definition and brief overview of first and second wave feminism in the nation and in Louisiana. Feminism has always been difficult to define, but in the paraphrased words of Carrie Chapman Catt, it was a "revolt against all the barriers that stood in the way of women and human freedom." In spite of, or perhaps because of, its broad and lofty goals, competing definitions of equality and disagreements over how to achieve it plagued feminism throughout its history. By the 1960s and 1970s, however, feminism evolved into a fairly cohesive movement which fought for gender equality on several levels, including legal, social, and cultural. In the next chapter, we will examine the rise of second wave feminism in Louisiana in the 1970s. Second wave feminism became a force for change in Louisiana. Significant social change, however, seldom goes unchallenged. The feminist movement in Louisiana ignited an anti-feminist

⁵⁷Pamela Tyler, "The Independent Women's Organization," in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson, <http://www.knowla.org/entry/362/>, Glen Jeansonne and David Lührssen, "Chep Morrison," in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson, <http://www.knowla.org/entry/1397/&view=summary> and Edward F. Haas, *DeLesseps S. Morrison and the Image of Reform: New Orleans Politics, 1946-1961* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

movement, centered on opposition to the ERA. These two movements would not only shape the decade for women, it would also shape Louisiana politics and culture for years to come.

CHAPTER 2

SECOND WAVE FEMINISM AND THE CHANGING STATUS OF LOUISIANA WOMEN IN THE 1970s

Louisiana experienced a tremendous amount of political, legal, and social change in the 1970s. The rise of feminism and the status of Louisiana women became impelling factors in instigating many of those changes. Compelled by federal law, sweeping social change, and the work of activists, Louisiana began to address the issue of women's inequality. This chapter focuses on the rise of feminism in Louisiana and on limited aspects of the Louisiana women's movement in the 1970s. It examines two organizations, the Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women (LCSW) and the Baton Rouge chapter of the National Organization for Women (BR NOW). Grassroots activists within these groups helped bring about changes in state laws that discriminated against women – in particular, Louisiana's laws governing marriage. They also helped change cultural norms related to gender, especially regarding women's roles in education and the workforce, and the role of the government in addressing the needs of women.

Some Louisiana traditionalists, many of them women, challenged these changes to women's status. The ratification of the proposed ERA amendment became a battleground in 1970s Louisiana. The ERA failed in Louisiana, in large part due to the efforts of organized female opponents. The ERA defeat, however, helped feminists pursue equality at the state level. Because opponents feared the passage of the ERA, they acceded to legal reforms such as changes in marriage and credit laws. Louisiana feminists, in turn, veered away from controversies like abortion. They lost the ERA, but feminists helped enact reforms that established principles of women's equality within the state's institutions.

Second wave feminism in Louisiana began as a result of seeds planted in the first wave, which grew slowly and unevenly during the period between the first and second waves. According to Janet Allured, second wave feminism began in Louisiana in the 1960s. The South and Louisiana in particular, has the reputation of being resistant to feminism. Allured, however, argued that southern women, including some in Louisiana, not only articulated the theoretical foundations of feminism, they exported it. Her point is well taken. A large part of feminism grew out of the movements for racial, social, and economic justice that originated in progressive southern churches. Southerners Mary King and Casey Hayden were among the first to tie racism and sexism together, portraying them as similar systems of injustice.¹

Louisiana became home to a vibrant, if small, women's movement in the 1960s. It emerged in New Orleans, the state's largest city. Kathryn (Kathy) Barrett, a Baton Rouge native, started one of the first conscious-raising groups in the nation in New Orleans in 1966. Barrett, a veteran of the southern civil rights movement, was at the Waveland retreat when King and Hayden presented their first position paper. Excited, she returned to New Orleans and started a women's discussion group, which included Cathy Cade, Peggy Dobbins, Suzanne Pharr, Kim Gandy, Moira Ambrose, the wife of historian Stephen Ambrose, and Dottie Zellner. Barrett, along with Tulane University graduate students, Cathy Cade and Peggy Dobbins, also developed one of the first courses on the sociology of women in the South as part of a free university, which met off campus in Barrett's house.²

¹Allured, "Louisiana, the American South, and the Birth of Second-Wave Feminism," 389-405.

²Ibid; and Evans, *Personal Politics*, 35-75, 98-208.

Several women from this group became feminist leaders at the national level. Kim Gandy became the national president of NOW. Peggy Dobbins, a New Orleans native, joined New York Radical Women (NYRW) after leaving New Orleans for New York City. As part of that group, she helped plan and execute the Miss America protest in Atlantic City in 1968. A company called Toni home permanent was a major sponsor of the pageant. Home permanent solutions contained strong chemicals that smelled like rotten eggs and burned the skin and hair. To protest the ways women tortured themselves for beauty, and to protest the memory of the perms her mother had given her, Dobbins went down the aisle of the convention center flinging permanent solution onto the floor. She was arrested for “emitting a noxious odor.” Fifty years later, Dobbins said it was still her favorite “offense.” After the New York group fell apart the following year, Dobbins started the Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH) with Robin Morgan. The group specialized in “guerilla street theatre,” and they famously hexed Wall Street on Halloween night in 1968. Morgan noted that stocks took a dive the following day. Cathy Cade left New Orleans for San Francisco in 1970, after receiving a PhD in sociology. She came out as a lesbian and became a photographer specializing in feminist lesbian themes. Kathy Barrett also went to New York and became a part of NYRW.³

Dottie Zellner also made feminist history. Zellner moved to New Orleans in 1966, after she and Bob, her husband, had to leave SNCC. She and Carol Hanisch, who lived in

³Barbara J. Love, ed., *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 120, *Redstockings*, “The Miss America Protest: 1968,” www.redstockings.org, “About Peggy Dobbins,” at www.PeggyDobbins.net, Robin Morgan, “Practical Witches,” Interview at *Makers: The Largest Video Collection of Women’s Stories*, www.makers.com/robin-morgan/moments/practical-witches, for description of W.I.T.C.H. see Jo Freeman, “The Revolution is Happening in Our Minds,” online at www.jofreeman.com/feminism/happening.htm, for essays on the history of the women’s liberation movement go to Jo Freeman webpage, see “Articles,” and click on “The Feminist Movement,” access online at www.jofreeman.com/onlinearticles.htm.

New York, worked for the Southern Conference Education Fund (SCEF), which had been in existence since 1946. While in New York, Hanisch helped form NYRW, the women's liberation group that developed CR theory and practice. Hanisch moved to Gainesville, Florida, in 1969 to organize women. From Gainesville, she wrote and distributed a memo to women in the SCEF defending CR. The memo was a response to a previous memo from Dottie Zellner, who called all the talking and inward searching, "therapy" and questioned whether CR constituted a bona fide political movement. Anne Koedt and Shulamith Firestone later titled Hanisch's essay, "The Personal Is Political," and the phrase became an iconic description of the feminist movement.⁴

Adherents of women's liberation frequently clashed over theories and methods. Hanisch, who had been instrumental in planning the Miss America protest, criticized the way some of the protestors behaved. She thought the protestors attacked the female contestants instead of the patriarchal system, which left women with little choice but to participate in their own exploitation and degradation. These disagreements, however, paled in comparison to the poisonous atmosphere that developed in some WLM groups. Women met in small groups, which were leaderless and structureless by design. Hierarchy, structure, and authority figures were anathema in the WLM, because those qualities were identified with male-dominated organizations and institutions. As Jo Freeman argued, however, some groups paradoxically came under the tyranny of a small minority or clique, which controlled the majority through fear of censure and rejection. Freeman wrote from experience. Women shunned and "trashed" their "sisters" for various offenses like wearing make-up, talking too

⁴"Jewish Women in Civil Rights: Dorothy Miller Zellner," *Jewish Women's Archive*, www.jwa.org/discover/infocus/civilrights/zellner, Carol Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political" and "What Can Be Learned: A Critique of the Miss America Protest," <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/>.

much in CR meetings, marrying, getting too much media attention, or attending graduate school. Freeman was shunned because she enrolled in graduate school at the University of Chicago, behavior which was considered too male-identified. The trashing and shunning caused great damage to some women, resulting in severe depression and even physical illness. There were some WLM groups in Louisiana, particularly in New Orleans. However, Louisiana feminists were few in number, and they seemed disinclined to engage in trashing or shunning. For observers in Louisiana and the rest of the nation, however, the actions of the WLM became linked with their views of feminists as angry, unhappy, and man-hating women.⁵

Although core feminists left New Orleans, other feminist groups sprang up. New Orleans, known in some quarters for its somewhat lax attitudes toward sexual expression, contained the first gay rights group in Louisiana. A lesbian rights organization called, “The Daughters of Bilitis,” and a branch of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) operated briefly. Lesbians in Gay Liberation groups, however, often found them dominated by men. Lesbians gravitated toward feminist organizations in New Orleans. Many politically oriented feminist lesbians affiliated with New Orleans NOW. This created some tension, especially at the beginning. The mostly straight and middle-class women of NOW thought vocal lesbians hurt their cause. As Allured noted, however, “eventually the women of NOW became

⁵Jo Freeman aka Joreen, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” <http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>. Descriptions of trashing and shunning can be found by clicking on the “Historical Archive” heading, the “memoirs and bios” section, and then “text memoirs,” of the *CWLU: A History of the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union*, www.cwluherstory.org/. In particular see Jo Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” or access essay directly at www.cwluherstory.org/on-the-origins-of-the-womens-liberation-movement-from-a-strictly-personal-perspective.html.

sympathetic to lesbian rights. Because the movement in New Orleans was so small, it was in their interest to work together rather than opposing each other.”⁶

New Orleans NOW organized in August 1970. The chapter evolved from a seminar on “the problems of the modern woman,” sponsored by Loyola University’s Institute of Human Relations. Celeste Newbrough, a writer and civil rights activist, became its first president. Newbrough was born in New Orleans in 1939. She graduated from St. Joseph’s Academy, a Catholic girls’ school in Baton Rouge, and went to Louisiana State University (LSU). Newbrough wrote college newspaper articles opposing Goldwater and espousing the feminist ideas of Simone de Beauvoir. She left college to go to New York City, but returned to Louisiana and earned an undergraduate degree from LSU in English literature in 1965. Newbrough started her activist career working in the civil rights movement in Louisiana. She worked to integrate public facilities in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Newbrough met Sylvia Roberts in 1969, a Baton Rouge attorney and NOW Southern Regional Director. She became involved in supporting Roberts’ defense of Lorena Weeks in the landmark gender discrimination case *Lorena Weeks v. Southern Bell* (1969). Newbrough became an active feminist, which led to her seminar on women at Loyola with Sheila Jurnak, Roxanne Dunbar, and Karen van Beyer. New Orleans NOW came from this group. In 1973, Newbrough came out publicly as a lesbian and become an activist for homosexual rights.⁷

⁶Allured, “Louisiana, the American South, and the Birth of Second-Wave Feminism,” 413-417.

⁷Information for New Orleans NOW located in box 3, folder 1, Roberta M. Madden Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, hereafter referred to as Roberta Madden Papers; Celeste Newbrough, “Biographical Notes on Celeste Newbrough,” <http://www.celestenewbrough.net/Biography.html>; and Allured, “Louisiana, the American South, and the Birth of Second-Wave Feminism, 414-416.

Baton Rouge NOW (BR NOW) also organized sometime in 1970, according to one of its founders, Roberta Madden. Unlike New Orleans, there is no evidence that Baton Rouge had any organized feminist presence prior to NOW, much less any radical feminist groups. NOW came to represent the vanguard of feminism in Baton Rouge. Until recently, historians have not expressed much interest in southern feminism, particularly the history of NOW in the South. Historians have focused on the defeat of the ERA and the rise of political and social conservatism. NOW feminism, which worked to change laws and institutional practices at the grassroots level, occurred at a slower pace than women's liberation. According to historian J. Zeitz, however, this grassroots feminism transformed the country, because principles of equality became part of the everyday lives of ordinary Americans. Zeitz's work is part of a historical debate on the meaning of the 1970s. Until recently, some historians viewed the 70s as the decade that signaled the end of what they called a "liberal consensus." Zeitz and other historians, however, came to view the 1970s as the decade in which democratic and egalitarian ideals became implemented at the grassroots level.⁸

⁸Jean Lockwood Kelly, "Metamorphosis," *South Baton Rouge Journal*, November 2001, this biographic article on Roberta Madden located in box 1, folder 3, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University. For an overview of 1970s historiography see Beth Bailey and David Farber, eds., *America in the Seventies*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas) 1-8, Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001) xi-xiii, 1-20, Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York, 1982), Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York, 2006), Andreas Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (New York, 2006), David Frum, *How We Got Here: The 70s—the Decade that Brought You Modern Life—For Better or Worse* (New York, 2000), J. Zeitz, "Rejecting the Center: Radical Grassroots Politics in the 70s—Second Wave Feminism as a Case Study," 673-688, Stephen Tuck, "We Are Taking up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left off: The Proliferation and Power of African American Protest during the 1970s," 637-654; and Simon Hall, "Protest Movements in the 1970s: The Long 1960s," 664, all in "Reconsidering the 1970s: The 1960s to a Disco Beat?" *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Oct., 2008); and Maryann Barakso, *Governing NOW: Grassroots Activism in the National Organization for Women* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1-39.

Two friends and co-workers at the LSU Press, Roberta Madden and Maureen Trobec, founded BR NOW after they moved to Baton Rouge with their husbands in 1968. Madden's husband, David, came as assistant professor and writer-in-residence to the LSU English Department. Trobec's husband was a biology graduate student specializing in biological rhythms. Madden was thirty-two, married for twelve years, and mother to an eight year old son. Trobec was twenty-five and married with no children. Despite their age difference, the women became so close Madden said they "could read each other's minds." Working in the world of books at the LSU Press, their relationship evolved through discussions of works by and about women. Madden had left college to get married at the age of 20, but she never relinquished her lifelong commitment to learning, mainly through reading. She earned a college degree in government from Ohio University just prior to moving to Baton Rouge. According to Madden, Simone de Beauvoir's, *The Second Sex*, "turned a light-bulb on in my head."⁹

Trobec came to feminism through the love of books, ideas, and the religious environment of her childhood. She was born in Zion, Illinois, in 1943. John Alexander Dowie, a self proclaimed healer and prophet, established Zion City in 1901. Dowie bought acreage on Lake Michigan to establish the Christian Catholic Church in Zion, a community in which followers could live in Christian perfection. Zion went bankrupt in 1907, but the communal spirit and religious values that remained a part of Zion's legacy made a deep

⁹Bradley J. Wiles, "Biographical/Historical Note," 4-6, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Judy Pennington, biographic article on Roberta Madden, *State Times* (Baton Rouge, La.) November 30, 1987, Jean Lockwood Kelly, "Metamorphosis," *South Baton Rouge Journal*, November, 2001, telephone interview with Roberta Madden, April 18, 2014, Maureen Trobec Hewitt (former president of BR NOW), interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, October 23, 2013; and Bryony Stoker, "Changing the World is the Only Reason I'm doing this! says activist Roberta Madden," 2008 unpublished interview by LSU Journalism student with Roberta Madden, copy in possession of author.

impression on Trobec. Although her parents divorced when she was a child, Trobec remembered a happy childhood, because her mind was stimulated by religious and social ideas.¹⁰

Sylvia Roberts was also instrumental in founding and recruiting for BR NOW. A native of Texas, Roberts graduated from Tulane Law School in 1956. Because she could not get a job at a law firm, Roberts began her career as a legal secretary. She joined NOW in 1966 and became its Southern Regional Director and one of its chief legal defense counsels. Roberts argued and won one of the first discrimination cases under Title VII, *Lorena Weeks v. Southern Bell* (1969). Georgia native Lorena Weeks, a wife and mother, worked for Georgia Southern Bell as a clerical worker when she applied for a higher paying job as a “switchman” in 1966. A switchman tested and maintained telephone routing equipment that was housed in an indoor facility. Southern Bell denied Weeks the job and awarded it to a man with less seniority. A union lawyer represented Weeks in her first lawsuit, which she lost. The company argued they could deny her because of the job’s physical demands and union work rules, which prohibited women from lifting more than thirty pounds.¹¹

Roberts won on appeal by arguing that female clerical workers picked up and put away their thirty-four pound typewriters several times a day. She also pointed out that

¹⁰Maureen Trobec Hewitt (former president of BR NOW), interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, October 23, 2013.

¹¹Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (NY: Basic Books, 2010), 88-94, online interview and transcript of interview can be viewed at “Trailblazer for Equity in the Workplace, Lorena Weeks, featured in new PBS Series,” *UGA Today*, www.news.uga.edu/releases/article/trailblazer-for-equity-in-the-workplace-lorena-weeks-featured-in-new-p/. Allured, “Louisiana, the American South, and the Birth of Second-Wave Feminism,” 420-421, telephone interview with Roberta Madden, April 18, 2014; and “Biographical/Historical Note,” Roberts (Sylvia) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, hereafter referred to as the Sylvia Roberts Papers.

mothers routinely picked up children who weighed thirty pounds or more. Roberts won their case in 1969, but it took several years before Southern Bell put Weeks to work as a switchman and awarded her back-pay. In the meantime, Roberts received no compensation for her legal work, and Weeks had to endure isolation, persecution, and anxiety related to her job and finances. One AT&T supervisor called a meeting of Weeks' fellow employees and told them "to treat Mrs. Weeks just like any nigger." Years later, Weeks still marveled at Roberts' determination, perseverance, and emotional strength. She felt her attorney never got the credit she deserved and said Roberts "kept her from drowning" during those years. These three women, among others, were instrumental in founding BR NOW. According to most of them, however, Madden provided the "spark" that ignited the group.¹²

Robbie Madden was born Roberta Young in 1936 in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Called "Bobbie" by her family, she was the oldest of four children. Her parents, Charles and Mary, had an unhappy marriage. Her father was an accountant, but he had an unstable job history and did not provide well for the family. To support the family, Roberta's mother worked at a grocery store named "Rushing's." Her parents divorced when Bobbie was fifteen, and she went to work part-time at Rushing's to help the family. After graduating high school in 1953 at the age of 17, she went to Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls on a scholarship.¹³

¹²Ibid.

¹³Bradley J. Wiles, "Biographical/Historical Note," 4-6, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Judy Pennington, biographic article on Roberta Madden, *State Times* (Baton Rouge, La.) November 30, 1987, Jean Lockwood Kelly, "Metamorphosis," *South Baton Rouge Journal*, November, 2001, telephone interview with Roberta Madden, April 18, 2014; and Bryony Stoker, "Changing the World is the Only Reason I'm doing this! says activist Roberta Madden," 2008 unpublished interview by LSU Journalism student with Roberta Madden, copy in possession of author.

Bobbie met her husband, David, at the college radio station. Madden was an aspiring poet, playwright, and actor. He had gone to Iowa for a year following a brief and unhappy stint in the U. S. Army. Within that year, the pair fell in love. Madden had progressive social views, and unlike shy Bobbie, he loved performing and public speaking. Mary Young had reservations about the match, because she thought writing poetry equated to poverty, but she accompanied her daughter to Knoxville in 1956 to marry Madden. It was her husband who gave Roberta the nickname “Robbie.” Madden was shy, but serious minded, intellectual, and dedicated to social justice. Her convictions came from her life experiences. Decades later, Madden recalled feeling humiliated because she was poor. This ignited a commitment to fight for those on the lower social and economic rungs of society, which included women. Her feminism came from witnessing her mother’s difficult life. She remembered the day her mother returned home from work, devastated, because she did not get a promotion to store manager. According to Robbie, a man who was little more than a bag-boy got the job, simply because he was male. Although Madden left college to get married in the 1950s, she had a drive to become educated, find a career, and develop the capacity to be financially independent, which was an important motivation for her feminism.¹⁴

There is no exact date for the founding of BR NOW. The first newsletter, called the *NOWLETTER*, came out in March 1971, but it indicated the group had organized already. The first officers elected at the March meeting were Maureen Trobec, President, Roberta Madden, Vice-President, Patt Foster Roberson, Secretary, and Dorothy Kemp, Treasurer. In a story both women enjoyed telling, Madden had to “twist the arm” of Trobec to become the

¹⁴Ibid.

first president. According to Trobec, Madden did not “feel qualified” to lead the group, despite being the force behind it. By June 1971, Treasurer Dorothy Kemp wrote excitedly to Madden that BR NOW had twenty-three registered members. Members had to pay ten dollars to the national organization and three dollars to BR NOW, in order to become an official member. NOW was strict about its requirement that no one could be a member who had not paid national dues, because the major part of its operating costs came from local chapters. They had received eighteen dollars in local dues, fifty dollars in national dues, and sixty-eight dollars in support, for a treasury total of ninety-seven dollars and eighty cents. Trobec remembered several hundred people being involved with BR NOW, but the official membership total probably hovered around fifty people. Although the membership may have been small, BR NOW encompassed a core group of women—and men—who became instrumental in the Louisiana women’s movement.¹⁵

BR NOW members came largely but not entirely from the faculty, staff, and student body of LSU. Trobec remembered “people from all walks of life, and housewives,” joined NOW. Mary Jordan listed herself on the membership application as a “restless housewife.” Colleen Collier was an office building manager, and Bill Junkin worked at the Louisiana State Department of Education. Two Catholic nuns, Sisters Mary (Maria) Theodosia and Joelle Mauer joined, and also two Baton Rouge artists, Shirley Reznikoff and Carol Herschman. Pinkie Gordon Lane, a published poet and professor at Southern University in

¹⁵Copies of the BR NOW newsletter, the *NOWLETTER*, can be found in the Francis A. De Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, hereafter referred to as the Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers; Information on early membership provided in National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. 1 No. 1, March 1971, p. 1, box 8, folder 37; Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Interview with Maureen Trobec Hewitt, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, October 23, 2013; and box 3, folder 2, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Baton Rouge, was a member. Pat Evans was a television producer at WBRZ-TV, and future head of the Louisiana Women's Bureau.¹⁶

LSU students formed a vital part of the membership and they sometimes had unique reasons for joining. Janet Marie Reed, an English Education major, read a *Vogue* article entitled, "Is Television Messing with Your Mind," which made her angry. She was "tired of being coerced into being a professional consumer by t. v. ads, and demanded the right to define womanliness for herself." She wanted NOW to "fight the travesty t. v. ads make of femininity." Helen Taylor, a young woman from England studying at LSU, said she became interested in the woman question when she won a national British debate competition at the age of eighteen defending equal pay for equal work. Taylor was also known as the young radical of BR NOW. On February 6, 1971, Taylor led a dozen feminists in a protest of two downtown Baton Rouge "art" theatres, the Caprice and the Imperial, which showed pornographic films and refused to admit women.¹⁷

Madden, editor of the newsletter, did a write-up of the protest in the March *NOWLETTER*. Her summary indicated the women protested the male only admissions policy rather than the pornography. According to Madden, "The policy grossly discriminates against the women who are degraded—as are men—in the sex films." By protesting the theatre's...right to exclude women from entering public accommodations, the pickets sought to make a symbolic gesture." In looking back, however, Madden admitted

¹⁶Maureen Trobec Hewitt, (former president of BR NOW), interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, October 23, 2013, National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1971, box 8, folder 37, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and box 3, folder 2, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

¹⁷National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1971, p. 1, 4, box 8, folder 37, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and box 3, folder 2, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

she did not support the theater picket. She said in a telephone interview that the protest “trivialized” the movement. She also indicated Sylvia Roberts had been very concerned about the protest. They printed a disclaimer in the newsletter that BR NOW was not associated with the protest in any way.¹⁸

The pornography issue may not have been paramount to Madden at the time, but it was important to the feminist movement. Differing views on pornography presented a dilemma for feminists. On one side, there was a belief that women should control what they did with their bodies. On the other side, the pornography industry existed and thrived on the exploitation and degradation of women. By the mid-1970s, sex-workers began to advocate for dignity and rights and they began to resent the idea of feminists patronizing them. When the sexual revolution met women’s liberation, a tension developed between opposing ideas. For some, if feminists preached against prostitution or pornography, in order to defend women from exploitation or abuse, it smacked of old-fashioned morality and the double standard. Feminists like Betty Friedan, and even Madden, however, were not comfortable with the seeming hedonism of younger feminists. In a revealing moment, Fran Bussie, the Louisiana AFL-CIO Community Services Officer and a friend of NOW, seemed embarrassed forty years later when she recalled receiving a donation from C.O.Y.O.T.E. to help with the Louisiana ERA fight. The acronym stood for “Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics.” COYOTE organized in 1973 to lobby for the repeal of prostitution laws and to

¹⁸National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1971, p. 4, box 8, folder 37, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and telephone interview with Roberta Madden, April 18, 2014.

promote an end to the shame attached to what they called sex work. COYOTE wanted labor laws regulating working conditions, instead of punitive laws.¹⁹

Leaders of BR NOW did not agree with the theatre protest, but they were also sensitive to the local press' eagerness to cover anything sensational about feminism. Madden called the local coverage of the protest "snickering and sensationalist." Feminists in Louisiana had legitimate concerns about not being taken seriously. Although the press balanced their coverage of the ERA debate between pro and con, reporters often took the opportunity to make light of not only feminism, but also women's disagreements over it. One of their favorite ways of characterizing debates between women was to call the conflict a "catfight." In a small blurb in the *Morning Advocate*, Gus Weill, a popular political commentator known as "Grassroots Gus," had this to say about the coming International Women's Year (IWY) Conference in Houston:

The fur is going to fly over in Houston next month at the International Women's Year Conference. When the radical feminists and the radical antifeminists meet head on, there'll be more hair-pulling than at a sheep-shearers' contest. Most catfights cause an increase in the cat population. Doubt if this one will.

Louisiana feminists in the 1970s, however, seemed more concerned that they not appear to be "cat-fighting," than sexism on the part of the press. At a state organizational meeting for

¹⁹National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1971, p. 4, box 8, folder 37, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, telephone interview with Roberta Madden, April 18, 2014, for information on and discussion of COYOTE and pornography, prostitution, and feminism, see Larry Kelp, "Album Covers Unkind to Women," *Times* (Shreveport, La.), January 23, 1980, Margo St. James, "Hookers and Housewives Come Together: Violence, Abortion, Welfare Become Common Issues at 1977 International Women's Year Conference," *Coyote Howls*, Vol.4, no. 2 (Autumn 1977), copy of COYOTE newspaper in the possession of Fran Bussie, Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (NY: Free Press, 2006); and Valerie Jenness, "From Sex as Sin to Sex as Work: COYOTE and the Reorganization of Prostitution as a Social Problem," *Social Problems* 37 (3) (August 1990): 403-420.

IWY in early 1977, Louisiana coordinating committee members debated whether to protest or censure the neighboring state of Mississippi, which had elected an all white delegation to the national convention. They decided against any action, however, in part because they wanted to be sure to “get good press,” and “avoid catfights.”²⁰

In addition to faculty, staff, and students of LSU, as well as community people, BR NOW had a small number of African-American women as members. As noted, many black women did not embrace feminism because they prioritized the civil rights movement over the movement for gender equality. The rise of Black Nationalism and racial separatism caused further division. According to historian Winifred Breines, however, interactions between black and white women within the civil rights movement and the early second wave women’s movement helped fuel resentments. Black feminists thought white feminists were oblivious to their own racism, which presumed white privilege and manifested itself in white control of conferences, agendas, and goals. Dorothy Pitman, a nationally known black community organizer and a supporter of feminism, said in an interview:

I can’t really say I’m a sister to white women, unless they recognize how they also were oppressive in a capitalistic situation. I hope women are not talking only about changing roles with men: to be the president of a bank or a chemical corporation and not change that whole situation—to have them remain murdering corporations. That’s the only reason I go around speaking on Women’s Liberation; they have to understand it’s a political movement to change the system.

²⁰National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1971, p. 4; box 8, folder 37, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, telephone interview with Roberta Madden, April 18, 2014, Gus Weill, “Grass Roots Gus,” *Morning Advocate* (Baton Rouge, La.) October 4, 1977, copy of article located in box 2, folder 16, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Candace Lee, “Statistics Show Women’s ‘Place’ and It’s No Joke,” *Sunday Advocate*, (Baton Rouge, La.) 6 August 1972; and Susan Finch, “Catfight Erupts at Conference,” *New Orleans State-Item*, 4 June 1976.

Pitman was an avowed Socialist, but she spoke to an issue that resonated with many black women and men. Equality was not just about individual advancement or about pitting women against men, but about changing the system and uplifting the entire race.²¹

African-Americans in Louisiana expressed broad support for the ERA and women's equality, but their support tended to be general and sometimes ambivalent. On a couple of occasions, this ambivalence became public. Roberta Madden wrote a letter in June 1971 in response to Baton Rouge Councilman Joseph A. Delpit, who seemed to discourag black women from becoming feminists in a speech at Southern University "on the political power of black women." Delpit had been elected in 1967 as the first African-American city councilman in Baton Rouge, and white feminists, like Celeste Newbrough, the president of New Orleans NOW, helped him get elected. Delpit encouraged young black women to "get on the inside and bring about meaningful change." In the next breath, however, he urged black women to "avoid a game of rhetoric of women's liberation because black men are not even liberated and too many black women have the role of supporting families as breadwinners to play the liberation game."²²

A younger generation of black women seemed no less ambivalent in 1977. At the Louisiana (IWY) conference in 1977, a young woman made a point to express black women's views of feminism and the ERA. Conference organizers recruited Masharika

²¹Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement*, 13-16, 49, Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76-129; and Mary Cantwell, "I Can't Call You My Sister Yet: A Black Woman Looks at Women's Lib," *Mademoiselle*, May 1971, Copy of article in box 8, folder 41, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

²²Roberta Madden to Mr. Joseph A. Delpit, 5 June 1971, box 8, folder 41, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Kurudisha, a member of the National Black Political Assembly, to participate in a panel on the proposed amendment. Kurudisha opted out at the last minute, saying she was unprepared to speak on the ERA, but she wanted to make a formal statement. She said:

The ERA is a means of presenting grievances, not a means of liberation. ERA will be just another law; it will not give us the human dignity we have been so long striving for. Black women are not marching in the streets supporting ERA, because ERA will not change realities. But, for all that, we support ERA.

Although Kurudisha did not speak for all black women, many African-Americans shared her sentiments. In polls taken on the attitudes of African-Americans toward the ERA in Louisiana, most expressed support for women's equality. However, polling subjects expressed little knowledge of the ERA or desire to be active for its passage.²³

Despite mixed feelings about feminism, many African-Americans in Louisiana supported the goals of women's equality, and a number fought for women's rights in the political and social arena. Pinkie Gordon Lane was one of the founding members of BR NOW. A native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Lane moved to Louisiana in the 1950s to teach English after graduating from Spelman College in Atlanta. After teaching at Leland, a historically black college in Baker, Louisiana, she moved in 1959 to Southern University in Baton Rouge. Lane became the first African-American to receive a doctorate from LSU in 1967. Initially a short story writer, she decided to concentrate on writing poetry later in life. She became the first African-American Poet Laureate of Louisiana from 1989-1992. Sybil Taylor Holt became the first black woman to achieve high office in the Louisiana AFL-CIO. Throughout the 1970s, she was the assistant to the president of the Louisiana AFL-CIO,

²³"Executive Committee Proofing of Conference Report," p. 34, box 2, folder 15, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Victor Bussie. Holt led in the fight for ERA passage and the rights of union and working women. Most black women feminists in Louisiana came from the Civil Rights and labor movements. Their feminism was an extension of their work for racial equality and their personal struggles to realize their human potential. They believed in individual hard work and education. But unlike Masharika Kurudisha, they believed that changing legal and

social institutions was essential to providing equality for men and women, regardless of race.²⁴

It is evident that BR NOW included people from different races, genders, occupations, and economic classes. Nevertheless, membership consisted mostly of white, educated, and professional transplants to Louisiana. This provided fodder to opponents of feminism and the ERA who accused NOW members of being outsiders and opportunists. At the 1976 First Governor's Conference on Women, protesters carried signs that read, "Scalawag governor promotes carpetbag women." The epithet "scalawag" was in reference to Governor Edwin Edwards, who had presumably sold out the women of Louisiana to feminist outsiders. The women and men of NOW were not elitists or opportunists in terms of money or social connections, however. Most NOW members, particularly the leaders, came from humble beginnings. Nevertheless, Frank Simoneaux, the state representative for the area surrounding LSU, said that his constituents represented a small progressive enclave in Louisiana. Whether it was true or not, anti-feminists in Louisiana viewed the feminists in BR NOW as a group of outsiders, who sought to push their own political and cultural agenda, especially regarding gender roles.²⁵

Despite their small numbers, the first years of BR NOW were active and exhilarating, and included bonding and establishing a presence in the community.

²⁴Janet Allured, "Louisiana, the American South, and the Birth of Second-Wave Feminism," 391-396, 405, Rose Tarbell, "Biographical/Historical Note," Pinkie Gordon Lane Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, hereafter referred to as Pinkie Gordon Lane Papers; and box 2, folders 1, 10, 13, and 16, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

²⁵Susan Finch, "ERA catfight erupts at conference," *New Orleans States Item*, 4 June 1976; and Frank Simoneaux (former Louisiana state representative), interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 13 June 2013.

According to Trobec, they often met in Roberta Madden's large Victorian house on Park Boulevard, a tree lined street close to LSU. Madden had managed to procure a mimeograph machine, and working on the newsletter turned into informal meetings and "rap" sessions. Early recruiting efforts also included consciousness-raising. BR NOW engaged in CR that was educational and geared toward women who knew little about feminism. Madden remembered a young woman, newly married to a man with political ambitions, who expressed interest in NOW, but did not understand why feminists were so "angry." The young woman came back later and said she finally understood, because she had put all of her faith in her marriage and husband, and both had betrayed her. BR NOW scheduled a series of rap sessions in 1971 on "Consciousness-Raising," "What Men Have to Gain from the Liberation of Women" and "Female Sexuality."²⁶

BR NOW president, Maureen Trobec, described an intense and transformative CR session in the March *NOWLETTER*. In February 1971, almost twenty women from BR NOW gathered in a hotel room for a weekend of bonding and internal exploration. Trobec wrote:

In the space of a motel's executive suite living room and a span of 27 hours that seemed incredibly timeless, 16 women and 1 male psychiatrist explored what it means to be a woman. Hours were spent in a profound agony—shared by all—as Dr. Curtis Steele used psychological role-playing and simple mechanical exercises that dramatized feelings and released the pent-up energy of years of unrealized guilt or resentment.

²⁶National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1971, p. 4, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 1; box 8, folder 37, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and Roberta Madden, telephone conversation with author, 18 April 2014.

According to Trobec, the most surprising thing that came out of the workshop was that women could feel “trust, sympathy, and intense empathy” with each other. She called it a “delightful discovery that the stereotypes of petty, conniving, ‘catty’ women can melt away so completely in the real sharing of human experience.”²⁷

CR occupied an important role for BR NOW, but the members were primarily doers. One of the first year’s highlights was a fund-raiser. In August 1971, the national NOW announced a drive to raise 100,000 dollars to start a Women’s Lobby in Washington, DC. Local chapters could keep twenty-five percent of the proceeds, and BR NOW decided to go full tilt and make it a “celebrity event,” which featured an auction of the works of southern artists and writers. In addition to the auction of donated books, original paintings, and sculptures, they planned dramatic readings, dancing, cocktails, a short jazz concert, and an address by the “most prominent feminist” at the gathering. Invited guests included T. Harry Williams, Joanne Woodward, Harper Lee, Robert Penn Warren, Ann-Margaret, Gloria Steinem, Rex Reed, George McGovern, Shirley MacLaine, Truman Capote, Bella Abzug, and Norman Mailer.²⁸

The invitation to Norman Mailer revealed a bit of humor on the part of BR NOW. Mailer became infamous after publishing an essay called “Prisoner of Sex” in *Harper’s Magazine* in March 1971. Mailer’s essay and book of the same title was a response to feminist Kate Millett, who, in her book, *Sexual Politics*, had criticized Mailer’s portrayals of

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸See National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Baton Rouge, La., “The Women are Coming! The Women are Coming!” Vol. I, No. 5, August 1971, “Star-Studded Fund-Raising Party Rescheduled for October 21,” Vol. I, No. 6, September 1971; and “You are Cordially Invited to a Great Big Party,” Vol. I, No. 7, October 1971, all in box 8, folder 37, Francis A. deCaro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and box 6, folder 26, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

women. Mailer responded to the invitation by sending a signed copy of *Prisoner of Sex*, in which he wrote a note congratulating the “ladies” of BR NOW. Historian T. Harry Williams donated a copy of his Pulitzer Prize winning *Huey Long*, and Ernest Gaines a copy of his novel, *Of Love and Dust*. The event was held at the Camelot Club, located at the top of the twenty-one story Louisiana National Bank Building on Florida Boulevard, which featured stunning views of the Mississippi River and downtown Baton Rouge. The national president of NOW, Wilma Scott Heide, came as honored guest and gave the address. BR NOW raised more than twelve hundred dollars that night. The national NOW reported that the overall results had been disappointing, however. The country-wide fundraising effort had only netted 2, 280 dollars for the Women’s Lobby, of which BR NOW contributed an astounding five hundred dollars. BR NOW expressed great pride that “one of the youngest, smallest, and southernmost outposts of feminism led the nation in its contribution.”²⁹

In the midst of organizing and fundraising, members of BR NOW focused on activism. Much of their activism consisted of researching discriminatory laws and practices and challenging prevailing institutions to reform. Mary S. Metz, a French teacher at LSU, emerged as a leader in BR NOW. Metz and her husband Eugene, a professor of architecture, came to LSU in the mid-1960s. The couple helped found NOW in Baton Rouge and Mary served as its second president. Both were born in South Carolina. Metz credited her interest in women’s rights and women’s education to her parents. Her mother was the only female school principal within many miles, and her father included her in daily political and

²⁹Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (NY: Doubleday, 1970), 314-335, Norman Mailer, *Prisoner of Sex* (NY: Little Brown, 1971), Maureen Trobec Hewitt (former president of BR NOW), interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, La., October 23, 2013; and National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. 1, No. 10, January 1972, box 8, folder 38, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

intellectual discussions. After she and Eugene married in the 1950s, the couple made a pact. They agreed that both their careers would carry equal weight in the marriage. They vowed not to move anywhere without consideration to the career of each partner. Mary earned her doctorate in French at LSU and became an award winning teacher. She became known for precipitating a shift in the culture of LSU regarding women faculty, staff, and professionals.³⁰

Metz exposed a longtime pattern of discrimination against women at LSU. She became involved at a Faculty Council meeting in the spring of 1971. A representative from the Council on Campus Minorities, a group working to end discrimination at LSU, rose to give a status report at the meeting. When he made no mention of bias against women, Metz felt compelled to speak. She urged the committee to include equal rights for female faculty members as part of their mission. LSU administrators appointed Metz to research the situation and make recommendations for improvement.³¹

Metz wrote an eye-opening report, which she published in the BR NOW newsletter in the 1971 May-June issue. She also published it for distribution on campus. The report demonstrated the second class status of women faculty at LSU. Male faculty outnumbered female faculty overall five to one. Out of 1100 tenured faculty, only forty-five were women. Metz also found that LSU paid women faculty less than men, even at the same rank. Differences in pay between men and women in rank were substantial. There was a \$1918 difference at the top rank of Professor, \$1234 at Associate Professor, \$773 at Assistant

³⁰National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. 1, No. 3, May-June 1971, 1-2; box 8, folder 37, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and Eloise Lee Leiterman, "Behind this College President: Encouraging parents, flexible husband," *Christian Science Monitor*, Nov. 14, 1983, online www.csmonitor.com/1983/1114/111462.html.

³¹National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. I, No. 3, May-June 1971, 1-2, box 8, folder 37, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Professor, and \$468 at Instructor. She found women clustered at the lower ranks, especially at the rank of Instructor, which usually meant higher teaching loads and no tenure. The heavy teaching loads prevented women faculty from doing the research and publishing necessary to qualify for tenure or a tenure rank position. Metz recommended immediate “salary adjustments, promotions where justified, reduced teaching loads to allow for writing and publishing, administrative appointments, and key committee appointments” for women. Metz mailed her report to every female faculty member, with a call to form an all female faculty oversight committee.³²

The university created a permanent committee to address gender discrimination on campus, but for some female faculty members, the committee proved too little too late. Carol Parr, a BR NOW member, became one of the first women at LSU and in Louisiana to file a sex discrimination lawsuit against an institute of higher learning. Changes in Title VII enabled Parr to challenge LSU. Congress amended Title VII in 1972 by passing the *Equal Employment Opportunity Act*. The act gave the EEOC the litigation power it formerly lacked and covered employees of educational institutions, including universities. Parr, a Colorado native, came to LSU in the late 1960s to pursue a doctorate in linguistics, within the Department of English. After she graduated in August 1972, Thomas Kirby, the Department Head, hired Parr for the fall semester of 1972 as a “special lecturer.”³³

³²Ibid.

³³Gena Corea, “Carol Parr Upsets Her Boss,” published in *Frankly Feminist, New Republic*, No. 26, October 26, 1973, copy in box 8, folder 7; see “Testimony by Dr. Carol C. Parr before the Joint Legislative Subcommittee on Discriminatory Practices and Fair Labor Standards,” Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 4 March, 1975; and Joan Kent, “Sex Bias Probe at LSU: Women Claim Title Used to Discriminate,” *New Orleans States-Item*, 30 January 1974, both found in box 8, folder 11, all in Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Special Lecturers were the pink collar workers of the academic world. Women made up the majority of these employees, who served from semester to semester, according to the pleasure of the department head. Seventy-one percent of special lecturers on campus were women. In the English Department alone, fourteen out of fifteen were women. Although they usually taught three or more classes per semester, which was considered a full time teaching load, they had part time status. They earned a flat fee per course or semester, received no benefits, and had no designated status within departments. For many female special lecturers, their status was more problematic than their pay. Most departments chose to hire men when assistant professor positions came open, even if the man had less experience or qualifications. After a successful semester, Kirby offered Parr another semester as special lecturer. According to Parr, pay was not the issue. She and Kirby agreed on a salary, but Parr said Kirby altered her status to 7/8 special lecturer at the last minute, which carried an extra course. She also requested status as Visiting Professor, which offered more pay, status, and benefits. Unable to agree on terms, Parr filed a formal complaint with the EEOC, the Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) Office for Civil Rights, and the U. S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division in January 1973. She alleged LSU violated both Title VII and the Equal Pay Act.³⁴

Initially, Parr's case seemed to go well. Early in 1974, the EEOC regional manager in New Orleans, Darlene Graham, brokered a conciliation agreement that both LSU and Parr agreed to. One provision reinstated Parr with back pay. However, due to bureaucratic

³⁴Gena Corea, "Carol Parr Upsets Her Boss," published in *Frankly Feminist, New Republic*, No. 26, October 26, 1973, copy in box 8, folder 7; see "Testimony by Dr. Carol C. Parr before the Joint Legislative Subcommittee on Discriminatory Practices and Fair Labor Standards," Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 4 March, 1975; and Joan Kent, "Sex Bias Probe at LSU: Women Claim Title Used to Discriminate," *New Orleans States-Item*, 30 January 1974, both found in box 8, folder 11, all in Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

territorialism, Glenn Clasen, EEOC District Director, refused to approve the agreement, because he said it empowered the Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division. In the meantime, Chancellor Cecil Taylor denied that LSU violated any laws. In December of 1974, the Department of Labor sued LSU on behalf of Parr and dozens of faculty and employees. Paul Murrill, the incoming chancellor, however, asked for time to review the case. The University eventually agreed in early 1975 to pay 113,000 dollars in back pay to seventy people, including a few men. One of those not included in the settlement, however, was Carol Parr, the original complainant.³⁵

Metz and members of BR NOW also created inroads for feminism on campus by interacting a great deal with students. Metz mentored a chapter of NOW on the LSU campus. The students in NOW organized speakers, workshops, and seminars, in order to educate their fellow students in feminism and women's issues. On one occasion, however, they took direct action. In March 1973, thirty members of the Coalition to Promote Equality and Democracy (CPED) conducted a "sit-in" at Chancellor Cecil G. Taylor's office. At the same time, approximately one-hundred supporters also roamed the halls of David F. Boyd Hall, the top administrative building. Members of the Black Action Movement and Campus NOW composed the CPED. Impatient with the pace of change at LSU, the students presented a list of 19 demands.³⁶

The demands included immediate affirmative action hiring of women and black faculty, the implementation of women's and black's studies programs, the liberalization of

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Jeff Cowart and Jack Glover, "CPED Attempt To See Taylor Not Successful," *Daily Reveille*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, La., 23 March 1973 and "Coalition Fails in Try to Meet Taylor," *Morning Advocate* (Baton Rouge, La.), 23 March 1973.

housing regulations, particularly the elimination of curfews for women only, and more representation for students on campus committees. The protesters were peaceful, but when Taylor refused to come out of a meeting to talk to them, they began to chant “Taylor, Taylor, get your ass out.” Tensions escalated when the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, James W. Reddoch, ordered his assistant, Ralph E. Gossard, to take pictures of protesters. Gossard grabbed student I. D.’s and singled out black students for identification. When asked why he was identifying and photographing students, Gossard replied that he and Reddoch “were collaborating on a book.” Reddoch retorted the book would be titled, “The Sex Life of a Turtle, It Can be Done.” Bowing under some pressure, however, the chancellor met with the students the following week, and eventually the students presented their case to the Board of Supervisors.³⁷

BR NOW’s activism also went beyond the bounds of LSU. A primary focus of the organization became challenging the antiquated laws that helped maintain the second class status of women in Louisiana. To many people, newcomer and native alike, the law that governed jury selection in the state often came as a shock. In the early 1970s, women were not automatically called to jury duty in Louisiana. If a woman wanted to serve, she had to make a request in writing to her parish clerk of court. Few women volunteered and fewer still were chosen. Therefore, most juries in Louisiana were all male. The law assumed women should be shielded from jury duty, because of their “emotional” nature. At the

³⁷Jeff Cowart and Jack Glover, “CPED Attempt to See Taylor Not Successful,” *Daily Reveille*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 23 March 1973, Jeff Cowart, “CPED Members to Meet with Chancellor Taylor,” *Daily Reveille*, Louisiana State University, 27 March 1973, Jack Glover and Jeff Cowart, “CPED Members Confront Chancellor, Dean of Women,” *Daily Reveille*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 29 March 1973, “CPED Presents Statement to Board of Supervisors,” *Daily Reveille*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 10 April 1973, and “Coalition Fails in Try to Meet Taylor,” *Morning Advocate* (Baton Rouge, La.), 23 March 1973.

March 1971 BR NOW meeting, officers encouraged members to send written requests to their clerk of court and provided a template. Trobec also appointed Patt Foster Roberson and Dorothy Kemp to do research on their home parish of East Baton Rouge. The women discovered that in the prior six years, twenty-three women in the parish volunteered and sixteen were ruled eligible. The eligible women told Roberson and Kemp, however, that the clerk of court told them they “would probably never be called to serve.” It would take a landmark court case to overturn Louisiana’s jury law. In 1972, a St. Tammany Parish grand jury indicted Billy J. Taylor for aggravated kidnapping. Taylor’s lawyers appealed the indictment, because Taylor had been indicted by an all male jury in a parish with fifty-three percent female eligibility. They argued violation of his Sixth and Fourteenth Amendment rights, because he was not tried in front of a cross-section of his peers. The Louisiana Supreme Court denied the motion, but the United States Supreme Court declared Louisiana’s law unconstitutional in January 1975.³⁸

Louisiana’s jury law fell because of federal intervention, but other state laws proved more resistant to change. BR NOW undertook one of its first “action projects” in early 1971. Members wrote, published, and disseminated an informational pamphlet entitled *Women of Louisiana: Rights You Do Not Have*. Sylvia Roberts provided the legal expertise, Helen Taylor, the student from England, wrote the copy, Roberta Madden edited the

³⁸National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1971 and Vol. 1, No. 2, April 1971, box 8, folder 37, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Legal Information Institute (LII), *Taylor v. Louisiana* (1975), Cornell University Law School, www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/419/522, Holly J. McCammon, *The U. S. Women’s Jury Movements and Strategic Adaption: A More Just Verdict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Cynthia Harrison, “Shoehorning American Women onto American Juries,” A Review of Holly J. McCammon’s *The U. S. Women’s Movements*, H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online, H-Law, November 2013, online access www.postandcourier.com/tilldeath/assets/d3-5.pdf; and Jo Freeman, “The Revolution for Women in Law and Public Policy,” in *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, ed., Jo Freeman (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1995), 365-404, access online at <http://www.jofreeman.com/lawandpolicy/revlaw1.htm>.

manuscript, and Barney McKee, production manager of LSU Press, designed the pamphlet and supervised the production. Shelby Taylor collected eighty-five dollars from members to cover the cost of printing and mailed pamphlets from her office. The small foldout constituted an opening salvo in what would become a ten year struggle to change archaic laws in Louisiana, primarily the state's marriage laws.³⁹

The pamphlet was written in a conversational question and answer format, which was accessible to the layperson. BR NOW hoped to educate people about state laws relating to women and compel them to action. The pamphlet focused on Louisiana's marriage laws, which were based on the Community Property (CP) system. Community property marriage laws tended to be present in states with French or Spanish heritage, and Louisiana was one of only eight CP states in the union, including California, Idaho, Texas, Washington, Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico. Louisiana's CP laws became part of the Civil Code of Louisiana in 1808. In essence, the law said that material gains accumulated during a marriage were communal property. Upon dissolution of the marriage, either through death or divorce, property had to be divided fifty-fifty between the husband and the wife, regardless of whether the wife had ever worked outside the home.⁴⁰

³⁹Copy of *Women of Louisiana: Rights You Do Not Have*, box 8, folder 42, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1971, 1-2; and *NOWLETTER*, Vol. 1 No. 2, April 1971, box 8, folder 37, newsletters in Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

⁴⁰Sylvia Roberts, *Women of Louisiana: Rights You Do Not Have* (1970), box 8, folder 42, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Jo Freeman, "The Revolution For Women in Law and Public Policy," <http://www.jofreeman.com/lawandpolicy/revlaw1.htm>; Harriet Spiller Daggett, *The Community Property System of Louisiana, Reprinted with Addenda* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, first ed. 1935) reprint 1945, 1-10, 18-21; and Katherine Shaw Spaht and John Randall Trahan, *Family Law in Louisiana* (Lake Mary, Florida: Vandeplas Publishing, 2009), 136-140.

According to Harriet Spiller Daggett, the first female full professor of law at LSU, the CP system had evolved from “rude Germanic tribes,” who allowed women to strip corpses after battle and keep the plunder. Daggett wrote a book on Louisiana family law in 1935 that became the first publication of the LSU press and the standard for students of Louisiana family law for decades. Daggett and others believed that CP laws had historically been an advantage for women. They compared it to the English “common law” tradition, in which “a woman lost her legal identity upon marriage, because it merged into that of her husband.” In 1966, Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black referred to marriage in the English common law as the “old common-law fiction that the husband and wife are one, and that one is the husband.”⁴¹

By 1970, however, it became clear that parts of Louisiana’s marriage law were more suited to the past than the present. The bane of Louisiana’s CP law became the “head and master” clause. Despite the fact of mutually owned property, the head and master clause gave the husband the sole right to manage and control all of the community property, including the wife’s half and all of her earnings if she worked. The husband had the right to sell the family home, take out a mortgage, and apply for loans, all without the wife’s knowledge or consent. A wife could sign a legal document exempting the family home from sale, but few women knew about this provision. Wives had the right to keep and to control separate property they brought into the marriage, or gifts they received within the marriage,

⁴¹Harriet Spiller Daggett, *The Community Property System of Louisiana, Reprinted with Addenda* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, first ed.1931) reprint 1945, 1-10, 18-21, notes from “The Louisiana Governors Conference, Panel on ‘Women and the Law,’” moderated by Janet Mary Riley, with speakers Jim Gelpi, Kay Jeter, and Olive Pierson, box 2, folder 11, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Jo Freeman, “The Revolution For Women in Law and Public Policy,” <http://www.jofreeman.com/lawandpolicy/revlaw1.htm>; and Katharine Connell-Thouez, “The New Community of Acquets and Gains in Louisiana” *McGill Law Journal* 26 (1980-81), 320-348, online access at www.mcgill.ca/userfiles/other/3539270-connell_thouez.pdf.

such as a dowry or an inheritance. Nevertheless, if the wife did not file an act of notary in order to separate and control that property, the husband had the right to administer his wife's separate property as well. In reality it was difficult to maintain the separateness of marital property. Unless there was a death or divorce, a wife never truly realized her half of the community, because she had no control over it.⁴²

The law did have provisions intended to protect the wife. A husband owed his wife the necessities and even the "comforts and conveniences" of life, but the wife had no such obligation. The husband assumed responsibility for all debts, including the wife's debts. Nevertheless, debts were pledged against the community, which included the wife's half. A wife could renounce a debt-ridden community upon marital dissolution, but she renounced her half of the communal as well. Material gains from the separate property belonging to the husband became part of the community in contrast to the wife's ability to keep the gains from her separate property. Wives were also entitled to alimony. These protections, however, often fell short. It was up to the husband to decide what constituted necessities, comforts, and conveniences. All debts were pledged against and satisfied from the community, which meant the wife's half also. This essentially made the wife responsible even if she had no knowledge of her husband's transactions. As for alimony, it was determined on need, the husband's ability to pay, and was hard to collect.⁴³

The law often had unforeseen consequences for women, especially married women. Single women often found it difficult to get credit in their names, but married women found it nearly impossible. Because the husband controlled the community and was the person

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

legally responsible for debts, it made sense that lenders or creditors wanted a husband's signature. Emily Hubbard, a feminist and eventual state director of ERA United, experienced the effects of the law first hand. Hubbard worked as an executive secretary to the Provost and Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs at LSU. Despite her position and the fact that she earned more money than her husband, the Campus Federal Credit Union refused to give her a personal loan without her husband's signature in 1973.⁴⁴

The credit union did not require a wife's signature for a husband or a co-signer for a single woman to get a loan. Percy H. Miller, a Campus Credit Union board member, said "the action was necessary because of the state's community property laws." Attorney Charles Moore added, "Any debt a husband undertakes is a community debt while the family unit is not responsible for a wife's debts. If a wife defaulted on a loan, a creditor could not force her husband to pay." Hubbard relented and got her husband's signature, but she got elected to the credit union board and convinced them to change the rule. She also experienced another shock when she could not get a parish library card in her own name. The application form stated "if married, give husband's name." When Hubbard demanded to know why she could not get a card in her name, they said it was "necessary because of the need to get in touch with the wife if she has an overdue book." The library's rule may have been more annoying than pernicious, but it reflected a social culture that viewed the husband as the head and the responsible party of the family unit. For a woman like Hubbard,

⁴⁴Mary R. Heffron, "Sex Discrimination Cited In Campus Credit Union," *Daily Reveille*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 13 February 1973, Emily Hubbard, Interview by Alecia P. Long, Baton Rouge, La., August 11, 2011, transcript in possession of author.

who was educated and accomplished, as well as the prime family wage earner at the time, it was also a deep and abiding humiliation.⁴⁵

Although the law was becoming archaic in a changing culture and economy, head and master had its defenders. The idea was ingrained in popular culture that wives enjoyed privileged status within marriage and had the advantage in a divorce, particularly in regards to alimony and child custody. On a local PBS radio program in 1972, Donald Meyer and Gordon Wilson debated the status of women under Louisiana law. Wilson took the side that the law favored women in Louisiana. He said, “Under Louisiana law women could be seen as being in a superior position.” He further elaborated, “The woman may compel her husband to work and support her during the marriage or after the marriage has been dissolved, whereas the man cannot demand the same.” Wilson doubtless spoke for a substantial segment of the male population when he said, “A married woman enjoys protective status under which a husband is obliged to support her and manage her affairs. Anyone who has experienced a divorce knows how privileged women are in this State.”⁴⁶

There were also legal experts who defended Louisiana’s marriage laws. One of the foremost defenders of head and master was Robert A. Pascal, Professor of Law at the LSU School of Law in Baton Rouge. Pascal, an expert in French and Spanish law, also opposed the ERA. The defense of head and master and opposition to the ERA usually went hand in hand. Pascal based his argument on the idea of marriage and family as a community, or

⁴⁵Ibid; and Emily Hubbard, “To Action Please,” National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, March 5, 1975, box 8, folder 40, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

⁴⁶See “Two Men Debate Status of Women Under Louisiana Law on PBS-TV,” *Louisiana Women: A Newsletter*, Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Department of Labor, Women’s Division, Baton Rouge, La., Vol. 1, Number 3, April, 1972, box 8, folder 35, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

corporate entity. In his view, the community could only function through mutual cooperation, and that cooperation rested on differentiated gender roles. Pascal also believed that without a head, the community would disintegrate amidst chaos, extreme individuality, and competitiveness. He argued that the laws of nature and history deemed the logical head to be the husband. With two heads, marriage would become a union of two separate individuals devoted to their own self-interests rather than the preservation of the community. Pascal was not alone in his opinion, even among legal experts and legislators who wanted to reform the law. It would take nearly a decade of debate and perseverance to reform Louisiana's CP system and eliminate the head and master provision.⁴⁷

In the meantime, members of NOW, led by Roberta Madden, made periodic visits to Baton Rouge banks, department stores, and lending institutions to test their lending and credit policies and treatment of female customers. They publicized the results in the newspapers and in their newsletter. The results were mixed. Banks and stores took the law under consideration, but bad publicity was bad for business. More businesses began to re-evaluate their practices and recruit women as customers and consumers of credit. The Louisiana legislature eventually passed the Louisiana Equal Credit Opportunity Act in 1975. Louisiana's law made it illegal to deny someone credit based on sex or marital status, but legislators had to amend a major provision of community property law in order to make the law work. Creditors denied married women previously because they could not sue the husband or the community for a wife's unpaid debt. Under the new law, a "married

⁴⁷Robert Pascal (retired LSU Family Law Professor), Interview by Yvonne Brown, LSU Law School, Baton Rouge, La., March 28, 2012, Robert A. Pascal, "Why I Oppose the ERA," *Southern University Law Review* 4 (Fall 1977); and Mack E. Barham, "A Louisiana Justice Views: Equal Rights for Women versus the Civil Code," *Morning Advocate* (Baton Rouge, La.), 15 June, 1974.

woman's earnings became responsible for debts incurred by her before and during marriage." The credit law illustrated an aspect of legal change that some who championed equality often overlooked, which was the fact that with equal rights came equal

responsibilities. NOW always emphasized, however, that equality came with responsibility.⁴⁸

In addition to state laws, the ERA became a central focus of Louisiana feminists and BR NOW. For Louisiana feminists, the laws that affected marriage provided a perfect example of the need for a federal equality amendment. As we have seen, the ERA had a long and controversial history within the women's movement. For a substantial part of its history, even many feminists have not supported it. The question was whether women benefitted more from gender neutral laws or laws that recognized gender difference, such as those affecting welfare, workplace conditions, or reproductive rights. By the 1960s, however, distinctions began to blur between feminists over this issue. The changing fortunes of the ERA reflected the changing economy and nature of work, which had moved toward technology, information, professionalism, and consumerism, rather than manufacturing. Traditional protections for women in the industrial workplace, such as those imposed on Loreena Weeks, came to be viewed as discriminatory. Despite lingering objections from some working class women, the status of the amendment changed during the period of second wave feminism. The ERA, with its promise of equality under the law, came to be

⁴⁸“How is Your Credit?, National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, January 1975, Baton Rouge, La; and “Money Matters,” National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, March 5, 1975, both in box 8, folder 40, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Lawrence E. Gill, “Community Property—Equal Credit Opportunity in Louisiana,” *Tulane Law Review* January 1976; and Katharine Connell-Thouez, “The New Community of Acquets and Gains in Louisiana” *McGill Law Journal* 26:2 (1980-81), 320-348, access to journal at www.lawjournal.mcgill.ca/en/issue/1302, or go to article pdf at www.lawjournal.mcgill.ca/userfiles/other/3539270-connell_thouez.pdf.

viewed by feminists as matter of basic civil rights, rather than a contested view of equality.⁴⁹

The ERA did not come up as an issue within BR NOW until early 1972. In late 1971, BR NOW posted articles in the newsletter following the progress of the amendment at the national level. The *NOWLETTER* of March 1972 featured the triumphant headline “SUCCESS==FAVORABLE TERMINATION OF A VENTURE!!!! says Webster, Women’s Equal Rights Proposal Is Approved.” The article reported the Senate passage of the ERA with a “lopsided 84-8” vote over the objections and filibuster of Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina. Realizing defeat at the conclusion of the vote, Ervin had uttered the prayer, “Forgive them, Father, they know not what they do.” The aging senator fought the ERA by proposing what ERA advocates called “crippling amendments,” exempting women from the draft and adding qualifiers that allowed states to keep laws allowing for gender differences. To feminists, these “riders” nullified the law. The article also noted that only four constitutional amendments had failed in the nation’s history. The article hinted that proponents thought the ERA would have a smooth and easy path to ratification.⁵⁰

In early 1972, BR NOW, along with feminists across the state, began to gear up for state ratification. They encouraged members to write to legislators and held meetings to

⁴⁹Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1992), 10-12, 1-15, 149-192, Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1-10, 50-120, Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (NY: The New Press, 2010), 65-73, Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); and Nancy McLean, “Post-War Women’s History: The ‘Second Wave’ or the End of the Family Wage?” in eds. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig, *A Companion to Post-1945 America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell), 235-260.

⁵⁰National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. I, No. 13, April 1972, box 8, folder 38, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library.

inform the public about the ERA. Sylvia Roberts and Maureen Trobec were guests on WJBO's "Topic" program, hosted by John Camp, on March 22, 1972. The two women gave stirring, but somewhat abstract answers regarding the need for a federal equality amendment. In answer to Camp's question about the "intent behind the Equal Rights Amendment," Roberts responded, "The ERA would provide for equal justice under the law, which we always thought was the cornerstone of our society in the first place." Trobec answered, "One of the reasons the ERA is necessary is because women have not been considered persons under the 14th Amendment."⁵¹

Signs of trouble soon arose in Louisiana, nevertheless. In the May newsletter, Linda Martin, a Louisiana NOW member, wrote an article summarizing an interview conducted by Phil Oakley on WJBO's "Topic" program. Oakley interviewed Louisiana State Representative Louise Johnson, newly elected from Union Parish in District 11, on May 8, 1972, regarding her opinion of the ERA. This was apparently an effort to get the other side of the ERA debate, following the earlier program featuring Roberts and Trobec. Johnson was the first female representative from a north Louisiana parish, and one of only two female representatives in the Louisiana House. Even more significant, Johnson had vowed to lead the "floor fight against ratification in the Louisiana legislature."⁵²

According to Martin, Oakley, normally a "penetrating" interviewer, let Johnson talk for forty-five minutes without much interruption, which caused Martin a great deal of

⁵¹See "Timely Topics 'On the Air': Women's Rights Presented on Louisiana Radio and TV," and "Ratification of the ERA: Will the Louisiana Legislature Keep Step with Social Change and Social Progress?" both in Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Department of Labor, Women's Division, Baton Rouge, La., *Louisiana Women: A Newsletter*, Vol. 1, Number 3, April, 1972, box 8, folder 35, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

⁵²National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. I, No. 14, May 1972, box 8, folder 38, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

frustration. Johnson listed objections she found “ignorant and irresponsible.” Johnson asserted, “The wife has the advantage under the present Louisiana community property laws,” but she failed to mention the head and master clause. She also claimed that in the event of divorce, the wife has the “first right” to the children. Although in practice, wives usually received custody of minor children, neither spouse had an automatic right to permanent custody in Louisiana. Johnson also presented what would become a familiar argument against the ERA—that it would lead to unisex bathrooms. According to Johnson, it was “one of her main concerns that ‘Men’ and ‘Women’ signs would be removed, just as ‘White’ and ‘Colored’ signs have been removed.” She also thought rape laws could be repealed because they applied to men only. In what would become her signature style and language, Johnson declared the ERA would only benefit “bachelor” women. She had “always been liberated,” and “felt sorry” for women who wanted the ERA. In her view, they are “not a large part of my constituency; I don’t know many unhappy women in my area.” Despite the fact Martin found most of the objections ludicrous, Johnson’s arguments would resonate with many Louisianians.⁵³

Although abortion became one of second wave feminism’s most salient issues, it did not become a major part of BR NOW’s activism in the 1970s. It remained in the background because some BR NOW members felt ambivalent about the procedure or disagreed about the morality of abortion generally. Madden, one of the most committed feminists in BR NOW, initially objected to abortion on ethical grounds. In her words, she “thought it was a real crime to have an abortion.” However, she also said her position evolved. Trobec, an advocate of legal abortion, convinced Madden that a woman’s right to abortion was a

⁵³Ibid.

feminist issue. Although she never became comfortable with it, Madden eventually supported the idea that access to legal abortion was a fundamental right of women. On a personal level, Madden said when she “met women who had abortions, she realized they were not bad people.” But others in BR NOW also had doubts. Two of the founding members, Sisters Joelle Mauer and Maria Theodosia, did not support abortion because of their religious convictions. The group discussed the issue at one of their meetings in early 1971. According to the newsletter, “it was found that several areas of disagreement exist among the members, with a substantial minority voicing strong reservations about making abortion law reform or repeal a top-priority item here. The chapter supports the national NOW policy, but in view of these internal differences, abortion has not been emphasized in our local program.” It seemed BR NOW decided the best way to handle the situation was to make abortion a matter of individual conscience.⁵⁴

Before the Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, abortion was regulated by the states. Prior to the late nineteenth-century, most states did little to regulate abortions and they took place before the fetus “quickened” or the mother felt the child move. After the Civil War, states began to enact strict laws, and many prohibited abortion except to save the life of the mother. From 1965-1973, however, an abortion law reform movement took hold. The movement fell along two lines, abortion law reform or abortion law repeal. The reform movement permitted abortions for three reasons: to save the life of the mother, severe mental or physical deformity of the child, and pregnancy as a result of rape or incest. By

⁵⁴National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. I, No. 9, December, 1971, box 8, folder 37; and Vol. I, No. 14, May 1972, box 8, folder 38, both in Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Roberta Madden, phone interview with author, 18 April 2014, Maureen Trobec, (former president of BR NOW), interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, La., 23 October, 2013; and Sr. Joelle Mauer, telephone interview with author, August 20, 2014.

1972, thirteen states had reformed their laws, including Georgia. The repeal movement, however, wanted no restrictions on abortions prior to “fetal viability,” which included the first trimester and sometimes the second. New York, Hawaii, Alaska, and Washington repealed their abortion laws prior to 1973. Louisiana, however, had one of the strictest abortion laws in the country.⁵⁵

According to the Civil Code of Louisiana, a physician could perform a legal abortion for only two reasons. A doctor could “terminate the pregnancy to preserve the life or health of the unborn child or to remove a stillborn child.” The physician could terminate a pregnancy for the “express purpose of saving the life, preventing the permanent impairment of a life sustaining organ or organs, or to prevent a substantial risk of death of the mother.” A physician who performed an illegal abortion faced steep penalties, including imprisonment at hard labor for up to ten years and a fine that ranged from ten thousand to one hundred thousand dollars. The law stated, however, that this penalty did not “apply to the female who has an abortion.”⁵⁶

By 1973 BR NOW almost doubled its official membership roster and new women began to assume leadership roles. Maureen Trobec, the first president, had moved back to Illinois after her husband earned his degree, but she earned a masters’ degree in English at LSU also. Roberta Madden remained active in BR NOW, but she left the LSU Press in 1972 to head up a new Consumer Protection Center for Baton Rouge. The organization grew so

⁵⁵Rosemary Nossiff, *Before Roe: Abortion Policy in the States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 1-20; and Linda Greenhouse and Reva B. Siegel (Yale Law School), *Before Roe v. Wade: Voices that Shaped the Abortion Debate before the Supreme Court’s Ruling* (NY: Kaplan Publishing, 2010).

⁵⁶Justia, U S Law, U S Codes and Statutes, Louisiana Laws, Title 14, Criminal Law, RS 14:87, Abortion, online at www.law.justia.com/codes/louisiana/2011/rs/title14/rs14-87, *Rosen v. Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners*, CIV. A. NO. 70-1304, 380 F. Supp. 875 (1974), United States District Court, E. D. Louisiana, July 11, 1974, online at www.leagle.com/decision/19741255380FSupp875_11145.xml/ROSENV.Louisiana.

much BR NOW formed an executive board in addition to the officers, to oversee the local chapter. In March 1973, the group elected six board members, many of whom founded BR NOW, including Pinkie Gordon Lane, Mary Metz, Jane Chandler, Pat Evans, Carol Parr, and Mary Erickson. As the organization grew, so did the level of activism. Roberta Madden and Mary Metz became more involved with state ERA ratification, which began to take considerable time and energy. BR NOW created task forces for the year 1973-74, which formed to study and make recommendations on “day care, religion, poverty, legislation, employment, and abortion.”⁵⁷

Despite growth, the difficulties of retaining members and raising the money needed to keep the chapter running began to take a toll. BR NOW newsletters indicated it became harder to raise money and engage members’ time and energy by fall 1974. In May of that year, the president, Nora Duncan, announced that officers found a potential home-base for BR NOW, which was a former gift-shop located at 449 Hearthstone Drive. Rent for the facility was \$165 per month plus utilities. The leadership calculated if they could get two hundred dollars per month in pledges from members they would rent the building, but if the center was not self-supporting after six months, they would close it down. By September, BR NOW had to close the center for lack of financial support.⁵⁸

There was also indication by 1975 that personal conflicts developed within the group. Ginny Ellis, an active member, stunned the membership by resigning from BR NOW in March 1975. She chose to resign through a personal message in the newsletter. One of the

⁵⁷National Organization for Women, *NOWLETTER*, Vol. II, Number 1, January 1973, Number 2, February 1973, Number 3, March 1973; and number 4, April 1973, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in box 8, folder 39, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

⁵⁸“NOW Center” Baton Rouge National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. III, May 1974, “Now Center Closes,” *NOWLETTER*, Vol. III, Number 5, September 1974, box 8, folder 40, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

reasons Ellis cited for leaving was her involvement with a “Stop Rape Task Force” being developed in Baton Rouge. She emphasized that the women on the task force were “goal oriented.” She said, “Though we have experienced internal rifts, these have been worked through, because what we are working for is more important than our personal egos and conflicts.” She went on to indict BR NOW because of the “disunity, back-biting bitchiness, passivity, egocentricity, intolerance, and ineffectiveness of this chapter.” In an interview with Roberta Madden, she failed to remember serious infighting in BR NOW, although she said there were strong differences of opinion. BR NOW may have fallen victim to its own success. It had formed to help new feminists support each other’s growth in feminist activism. By 1975, many of these women were stretched thin, with full-time jobs, careers, families, in addition to their feminist project priorities. Publication of the newsletter ceased after 1975 and membership declined in BR NOW, although NOW remained active at the state level.⁵⁹

The Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women (LCSW) had things in common with NOW, including several members, but its mission was different. The Commission was a state entity charged with accumulating data on, promoting awareness of, and making recommendations to answer the needs of Louisiana women. It was created to be a non-partisan fact finding and advisory council to the state government. State commissions on the status of women became popular after President Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women in 1961. Commissions were popular with local politicians, but they developed a reputation for being ineffectual and a vehicle for political posturing. The Louisiana

⁵⁹Ginny Ellis, “Open Letter to the Members,” *NOWLETTER*, March 5, 1975, in box 8, folder 40, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Commission, however, did valuable research on the circumstances of Louisiana women, particularly their educational and economic circumstances. The data showed that Louisiana women were being short-changed educationally and economically. The Commission's primary focus evolved into finding ways to improve the economic circumstances of Louisiana women.⁶⁰

Governor John McKeithen issued an executive order establishing a Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women (LCSW) in 1964. The Commission did not begin to organize, however, until the Louisiana legislature passed Act 43 in 1968. The bill created a Women's Division within the State Department of Labor and a permanent LCSW. It was not until 1971, however, that the commission started to receive consistent funding and meet on a regular basis. In 1972, the Louisiana Commission consisted of twenty people appointed by the governor. Several members of BR NOW served on the LCSW, including Sylvia Roberts, Susan Chapin Holton, and Pat Evans. Other commissioners included Corinne Maybuce, the principal of Choctaw Elementary in Baton Rouge, and Edmund M. Reggie, a city judge from Crowley, a powerful state Democrat, and friend of the late John F. Kennedy. Susan Holton served as the administrator starting in January 1972, and she proved to be a productive researcher and writer.⁶¹

Holton, a sociologist, researched and wrote the foundational material used by the Commission. She published reports on Louisiana's female prison inmates, the shortfalls of vocational education for Louisiana women, the composition of the female workforce in

⁶⁰Information on the beginnings of the LCSW found in box 1, folder 1, Sylvia Roberts Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

⁶¹Box 1, folders 1, 2, 6, 8, 10, and 12; and box 2, folders 24, 25, 27, in Sylvia Roberts Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Louisiana, and Louisiana women and poverty. Her findings revealed a stark economic picture for Louisiana women. Women earned approximately half of what men earned, despite a slight edge in education. Of female heads of families, 51 percent fell below the poverty line. Women were clustered in service and support occupations, which employers deemed less valuable in terms of monetary compensation. The economic circumstances were worse for black women in Louisiana. Many black women workers remained hidden because they worked as household workers in the homes and businesses of white people. Approximately sixty percent of black women in 1970 worked as “Service Workers,” including “Private Household,” compared to sixteen percent of white women. There were also more black female heads of household below the poverty line.⁶²

Louisiana women also had fewer opportunities for education and job training than Louisiana men. Job training and vocational education for women suffered from lack of resources and ingrained attitudes regarding gender among educators and policy makers. Holton did a survey of attitudes among the mostly male guidance counselors at Louisiana vocational schools, and discovered a mindset more suited to the 1950s than the 1970s. The position of one guidance counselor reflected popular thinking. This counselor wrote, “Interest, aptitudes, physical strength, endurance, and dexterity are all trait differences between the sexes. These, I think, are valid reasons why there is one sex in a particular occupation.” Another counselor argued, “They (women) are just not interested in that kind

⁶²Susan Holton, “Administrator of Commission Releases Findings of Most Recent Study;” and “EBR Legislators Listen to Women Express Views—Vocational Needs of Women in Prison and a Request for Support of the ERA are Presented,” both in *Louisiana Women: A Newsletter*,” Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Vol. 1, No. 4, May 1972, copies of newsletter and reports found in box 8, folder 35, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Susan C. Holton, *The Status of Women Workers in Louisiana, 1970* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, State Dept. of Labor, 1972); and Holton, *Women and Poverty: The Status of Female-headed Families in La., 1970* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Dept. of Labor, 1972).

of work.” One of Holton’s reports addressed the plight of one of Louisiana’s most vulnerable female populations, incarcerated women. Female inmates in Louisiana were increasingly black, under-educated, young, single, and mothers. They endured crowded conditions and an almost total lack of job training, counseling, and access to social support networks. The prison offered training in laundry and sewing, but very few found employment doing those jobs on the outside.⁶³

The LCSW sought tangible ways to improve the economic status of Louisiana women. The Commission focused on encouraging women to train for jobs traditionally held by men. These jobs included carpentry, machine repair, electrical work, and work in the industrial, chemical, and refining plants of Louisiana. In order to facilitate their efforts, the LCSW joined forces with the AFL-CIO of Louisiana. Victor Bussie, the President of the Louisiana AFL-CIO, and his wife, Fran Bussie, the AFL-CIO Community Services Officer, supported legal and economic equality for women. Although the national AFL-CIO endorsed the ERA in 1973, the state organization took up the cause of women’s rights in Louisiana several years earlier.⁶⁴

Not all union members, however, grasped the union’s change in direction regarding the ERA and protective laws for women in the workplace. At the first official meeting of the

⁶³Susan C. Holton, *Louisiana Women and Girls in Public Vocational-Technical Education Programs: A Study of Sex Discrimination* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, State Dept. of Labor, 1972); and Holton, *Work Training Programs and Job Finding Assistance for Female Offenders at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Dept. of Labor, February, 1972). Holton, “EBR Legislators Listen to Women Express Views—Vocational Needs of Women in Prison and a Request for Support of the ERA are Presented,” in *Louisiana Women: A Newsletter*, Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Vol. 1, Number 4, May, 1972, box 8, folder 35, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

⁶⁴See notes and brochure from the “Women and Employment Conference,” held on September 15, 1976, box 2, folder 10, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and “Carpenter Nails down 4-Year Apprenticeship,” from Baton Rouge, La. (AP) appeared in *The Daily Journal* (Fergus Falls, Minnesota), Monday, October 7, 1974.

LCSW in November 1970, the commission hosted a speaker from the Louisiana AFL-CIO, a man named L. G. Morgan. Morgan appeared on behalf of Victor Bussie, who was engaged at a hearing of the “Organized Crime Commission.” Morgan tried to rise to the task. He told the commission, “We will support your programs. Fifty years ago women were fighting for political recognition and now it is the economic struggle.” He then “noted the parallel conditions between the problems of women and the problems of the blacks.” Morgan went on to say, “It must be a real struggle to be black and a woman.” Morgan changed direction, however, and said, “On the subject of protective laws, the goal of the AFL-CIO was to have men get the same protective laws as women and that there was still a very real need for protective legislation for women.” Presumably “some people would assign women twelve hours a day, seven days a week;” therefore, “it would be a mistake to repeal the labour [sic] law.” Morgan then took a question from the floor. A “Mrs. Shannon” asked if there were any women in executive positions with the Louisiana AFL-CIO. Morgan answered “no,” but offered the reason that the labour [sic] movement is elected primarily by men, and women aren’t in the position to work nights and devote enough time to unit leadership duties.”⁶⁵

In spite of Morgan’s lapse into extolling the virtues of the past, the AFL-CIO, as led by Fran Bussie and Sibal Taylor Holt, became supporters of equal opportunity for women workers. They also became strong supporters of the ERA. In another historical turnabout, the LCSW came out in favor of state ratification of the amendment. President Kennedy’s first national Commission had failed to endorse the ERA. But in the LCSW “Minutes of the Executive Committee” from February 1972, Administrator Susan Holton announced, “A

⁶⁵Sylvia Roberts, “Minutes, First Official Meeting, Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women,” box 1, folder 13, Sylvia Roberts Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

majority of Commission members voted in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment. The outcome was 14 for, 1 opposed, and 5 no answers.” Although they voted in favor, some commissioners showed caution over taking a public stand. Sylvia Roberts, the Secretary of the Commission, reported that “Dean Moore, Mrs. Maybuce (Corinne), and Commission Chairman, Dr. Tucker (Clara), voiced the opinion that the Commission should announce its support of the ERA as it is being considered on the Federal level, but...should not take chances this year in recommending a state legislative stand on the ERA.”⁶⁶

In 1973 the LCSW went through a period of transition. Under Governor Edwin Edwards, it transferred from the Department of Labor to the Division of Human Services in the new Department of Health and Social and Rehabilitation Services. Although the LCSW continued to exist in an advisory capacity, Edwards established the Louisiana Bureau on the Status of Women. Pat Evans, one of BR NOW’s founders, became its first director. Evans administered programs using funds from the federal government and lobbied for state level programs. The federal Continuing Education and Training Act (CETA) funded a program called “Jobs Unlimited.” The program placed “economically disadvantaged” women into non-traditional jobs and trades. The Women’s Bureau recruited employers to train and to mentor the women. The Women’s Bureau did its best to facilitate economic opportunities for women and to change cultural attitudes toward the nature of male and female work, but lack of money and resources hampered them. The Women’s Bureau, headed by Evans, also

⁶⁶Sylvia Roberts, “Minutes of the Executive Committee,” February 11, 1972, box 2, folder 27, Sylvia Roberts Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

decided to endorse the ERA. The LCSW and the Women's Bureau became convinced the passage of the ERA was crucial to creating economic parity for Louisiana women.⁶⁷

Evans also lobbied the legislature to pass a bill on behalf of displaced housewives. The problem of displaced homemakers emerged in the 1970s on a national scale because of increasing rates of divorce, widowhood, and the rising cost of living. Older women, who had been housewives their whole lives, found themselves single with no marketable skills. Even Louise Johnson agreed with Pat Evans on the need for services, although she considered Evans a political enemy. The Louisiana legislature passed the "Displaced Homemaker's Act," in 1979, which provided resources for education and job training and a center for displaced homemakers.⁶⁸

The Louisiana Women's Bureau sponsored one of the most memorable events of the 1970s, the first Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women. The conference was held June 4-5, 1976, at the Chateau Capitol hotel in downtown Baton Rouge. Although conferences are not thought of as vehicles for radical change, they became a way for women to exchange ideas and to gain governmental and institutional recognition and legitimacy. As a testimony to its significance, the Women's Conference garnered great controversy. It was at this event that protesters held up signs proclaiming Governor Edwin Edwards a "scalawag," who

⁶⁷Susan Holton, "The Commission on the Status of Women in a Period of Transition," *Louisiana Women: A Newsletter*, Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Vol. 1, Number 6, October 1971, in box 8, folder 35, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, copies of LCSW newsletters can also be found in box 2, folder 38, Sylvia Roberts Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; box 2, folders 5 and 10, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

⁶⁸Box 1, folder 3, box 2, folder 10; and box 4, folder 5, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and Lisa Levenstein, "'Don't Agonize, Organize!': The Displaced Homemakers Campaign and the Contested Goals of Postwar Feminism," *The Journal of American History* 100, no. 4 (March 2014): 1114.

promoted “carpetbag” women. Babs Minhinnette, a local ERA adversary, led the protest. Minhinnette was the leader of an anti-ERA group called FOES – Females Opposed to Equality. It incensed the members of this group that the Women’s Bureau endorsed the ERA. They thought the Bureau and the conference failed to represent all Louisiana women and misused taxpayer funds.⁶⁹

In spite of protests, the conference proved a success. One of its most popular workshops was a panel on “Women and the Law.” The Friday June 5th panel included lawyer Janet Mary Riley as Moderator, lawyers Kay Jeter, Olive Pierson, and Jim Gelpi as panelists, and Robbie Madden as recorder. The panelists, not surprisingly, focused on Louisiana’s marriage laws. Kay Jeter presented the familiar story that the CP system had once been a source of what she called “great blessings” to married women. Nevertheless, she called the head and master language the “catch” in the partnership. In her words, CP had offered “certain safeguards to protect women, which (were) now seen as discrimination.” Louisiana feminists had been focusing on the law since the early 1970s. Momentum against head and master began to increase by 1976, however. The ERA had been voted down by the legislature four times and public pressure to change discriminatory laws at the state level began to grow. The legislature had passed a credit law in 1975, but according to Janet Mary Riley, “the Law Institute had been working on CP for years trying to maintain the status quo.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹Box 2, folder 11, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and Susan Finch, “ERA Catfight Erupts at Conference, *New Orleans States Item*, June 4, 1976.

⁷⁰Notes from panel on “Women and the Law,” box 2, folder 11; and “Minutes of the January 16-17, 1976 Meeting of the Council of the Louisiana State Law Institute,” box 8, folder 13, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, ; and Janet Allured, “Janet Mary Riley: An Angel with Teeth,” in *Louisiana Women: Their Lives and Times, Vol. 2*, eds. Shannon Frystack and Mary Farmer-Kaiser (Athens: University of Georgia, 2013).

The LSU Board of Supervisors created the Louisiana Law Institute in 1938. They designed the Institute to “consider and propose needed improvements in both adjective and substantive law” in Louisiana. The Institute was composed of federal and state judges, the Louisiana Attorney General, as well as faculty members from the state’s four law schools. Riley, a professor at Loyola University Law School, was one of only a handful of female members of the Institute in 1976. Under pressure from feminists, the threat of lawsuits, and the growing awareness of the public, the Louisiana legislature had charged the Law Institute with researching gender discriminatory laws and finding ways to change them.⁷¹

Riley was not only outnumbered by gender, she held a minority view on how to replace the head and master provision. This quiet female law professor from Loyola University, New Orleans, seemed an unlikely candidate for leading a reform movement of head and master. Born in 1915 in New Orleans, Riley was the third and youngest daughter of a devout Catholic family. After a stint as a schoolteacher, she obtained a library science degree and became law librarian at Loyola in 1945. She took law classes at night and passed the bar in 1953. Riley remained single, but she supported her mother and a divorced sister with children. She first achieved the spotlight when she came out against the ERA in the early 1970s. Like several of her male colleagues and fellow family law experts, she thought the ERA would eliminate legal protections for women within marriage. In 1976, however,

⁷¹William E. Crawford, “Forum Domesticum: The Louisiana Law Institute-History and Progress,” *Louisiana Law Review* 45 No. 5 (May 1985); and box 2, folder 11, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Riley stunned many people because she changed her mind about the ERA. It seemed her experiences as sole support of her family made her a supporter of the amendment.⁷²

A majority of the Law Institute members favored a scheme in which each spouse managed only “the part of the community he or she earned.” The difficulties of this stood out to Riley, however. She questioned what would happen if “one spouse stayed home or earned no money.” Riley and a minority favored “joint and several control” or “equal management,” a method in which each spouse had equal say in the disposition and management of community property. By 1976, it seemed almost a given that head and master had to go, but many institute members, male and female, still hesitated at changing it. Only a few, like Robert Pascal, were completely hostile to changing the statute, but others seemed genuinely perplexed over how it would work to have two people in charge of community property. Some made comments such as “an extravagant spouse could cause trouble.” The gender of the “extravagant spouse” was not specified, but the husband already had the right to be extravagant with community property. The biggest concern, however, seemed to be the idea that equal management would cause “disharmony in marriage.” In 1979, the Louisiana legislature finally passed a new law that included the long awaited reform of head and master. Under the section called “management of the community,” it said, “Each spouse acting alone may manage, control, or dispose of community property

⁷²Janet Allured, “Janet Mary Riley: An Angel with Teeth,” in *Louisiana Women: Their Lives and Times* Vol. 2. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013).

unless otherwise provided by law.” It seemed that both man and wife would now have equal management rights over community property in Louisiana.⁷³

The 1976 governor’s conference proved a milestone for Louisiana women, but the celebration of International Women’s Year (IWY) in 1977 became one of the culminating events for women in Louisiana and the nation. After the United Nations proclaimed an International Year for Women in 1975, the U. S. Congress formed the National Commission on Observance of IWY in 1976, chaired by Congresswoman Bella Abzug. The commission received five million dollars to fund fifty-six state meetings to be held by the summer of 1977. The purpose of the state meetings was to pass resolutions and to elect delegates to a historic national women’s conference scheduled for November 18-21, 1977, in Houston, Texas.⁷⁴

Congress awarded grants to states based on population and Louisiana received 54,909 dollars. The state was also assigned a quota of twenty-six delegates, who would be elected to go on an all expenses paid trip to Houston for the national conference. Co-chairs Shirley Marvin and Clarence Marie Collier headed up a thirty-two member coordinating committee for Louisiana. The Coordinating Committee contained some familiar names, including Pat Evans and Roberta Madden, who became the corresponding secretary. Each coordinating committee member had to submit five names, from which a nominating

⁷³Janet Mary Riley, Recorder, “Minutes of the January 16-17, 1976 Meeting of the Council of the Louisiana State Law Institute,” box 8, folder 13; and box 2, folder 11, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; for explanation of changes in matrimonial law see Katherine Connell-Thouez, “The New Community of Acquets and Gains in Louisiana,” *McGill Law Journal*; and Katherine S. Spaht and Cynthia Samuel, *Equal Management Revisited: 1979 Legislative Modifications of the 1978 Matrimonial Regimes Law* 40 La. L. Rev. (1979), available at <http://digitalcommons.law.lsu.edu/lalrev/vol40/iss1/7>.

⁷⁴Box 2, folders 8, 12; and 13, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

committee would pick twenty-six delegates and five alternates to present as a slate to the state IWY conference, scheduled for June 17-18 in Baton Rouge. The committee worked to prepare a balanced slate. They asked for “representatives of local, state, regional, and national institutions, organizations, and unions, which work to advance the rights of women, with special emphasis on low income women and members of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious groups, and all ages.” A quota system, however, was prohibited.⁷⁵

The delegate slate, however, became a point of contention at the state meeting. Although nominations could be taken from the floor the day of the conference, the committee’s prepared slate had an advantage, because the list contained the names of well-known women’s rights and community activists. And in fact, the committee’s slate was overwhelmingly elected at the June meeting. This led to complaints at the state conference regarding the nominating procedures. Several people pointed out that thirteen of the thirty-three nominees chosen were from Baton Rouge. They also noted that almost every member of the nominating committee appeared on the slate, because they nominated each other. The mini-protest, however, did not go anywhere. Unlike the all-white delegation from the neighboring state of Mississippi, the Louisiana delegates took pride in the fact that African-American women composed almost one third of their delegation. Committee member and IWY delegate Felicia Kahn said at one of their meetings, “We are lucky not having grand

⁷⁵Dick Wright, “Conference Eyes Second-Class Treatment of Louisiana Women,” *Morning* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, June 18, 1977, Shirley Benton, “Louisiana Women Are on the Move to IWY Meeting, *Sunday* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, October 30, 1977, for names of members of coordinating and nominating committees, see box 2, folders 13, 15; and 17, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

dragon of KKK here. We are a good delegation. We...show that Louisiana women, black and white, stand together.”⁷⁶

Louisiana women would indeed stand together in Houston, but the state IWY conference had its share of disunity. The Louisiana conference was held at the Chateau Capitol in downtown Baton Rouge on June 17-18, 1977. Eight hundred and fifty people registered for the conference and a thousand people were expected to attend. The Honorable Mary Ann Krupsak, lieutenant governor of New York, opened the meeting and gave the keynote address. In addition to electing delegates, the state conferences convened to pass resolutions, which would be formulated into a national plan of action at the Houston IWY conference. Bella Abzug, national IWY chairman, made it clear, however, she wanted each state to pass a uniform set of sixteen resolutions, which had been written by the national IWY committee. Many of the prepared resolutions did not incite controversy, but others exposed deep divides that had formed among the nation’s women. Resolution number six called for the immediate ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, which had been contested by Louisiana women for five years. The resolution titled “Teenage Pregnancy,” said it “supported the Supreme Court decisions guaranteeing reproductive freedom of women.” In addition, it “condemned any interference, open or subtle, with a woman’s right to control her reproduction, and called the “means of controlling reproduction a basic

⁷⁶“Women Pick Wide Range of Delegates for Meeting,” *Sunday* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, June 19, 1977, for information on nominating procedures see box 2, folders 13, 15, 16; and 17, for details of conference proceedings see Roberta Madden, “Louisiana Women’s Conference Minutes,” located in box 2, folder 16, all in Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

human right.” Abortion opponents thought the resolution was deceptively titled and clearly endorsed abortion.⁷⁷

The ERA and reproductive rights resolutions caused a small rebellion at the Louisiana conference. At one thirty in the afternoon on the last day of the conference, convention delegate Sheila Feigley began to read the first of the sixteen resolutions. As a vote was called for on that resolution, delegate Sibal Taylor moved to adopt the entire agenda without discussion. Charlotte Felt and Carmelite Salassi, members of the Women’s Auxiliary of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce, objected and made motions to take each resolution separately. Nevertheless, they were quelled by multiple motions to adopt the whole agenda without debate. As the five o’clock deadline for the end of the conference approached, the sixteen resolutions were adopted without being read or discussed. It must be noted that Felt and Salassi, as members of the Chamber of Commerce Women’s Auxiliary, had been leading the state fight against ratifying the ERA. Nevertheless, Ralph Dreger, president of the Council on Human Relations, felt that his friends, including Roberta Madden, had used parliamentary procedures to “railroad” the resolutions through the conference.⁷⁸

⁷⁷Cynthia Woody, “Plea for Individuality, Dignity Given by Conference Keynote Speaker;” and “Over 1,000 Expected to Attend Louisiana Women’s Conference,” *State* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Times*, June 17, 1977, National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year, “Recommendations Urged for Consideration by State IWY Meetings;” and Bella Abzug, letter to state coordinating committee, both in box 2, folder 13; and Roberta Madden, “Louisiana Women’s Conference Minutes of Plenary Session One, Minutes of Plenary Session Two, Minutes of Plenary Session Three; and Minutes of Plenary Session Four,” box 2, folder 16, all in Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

⁷⁸“Resolutions Package Adopted as State Women Close Meeting,” *Sunday* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, June 19, 1977, Roberta Madden, “Louisiana Women’s Conference, Minutes of Plenary Session Four,” box 2, folder 16; and Dr. Ralph Mason Dreger, “Reflections on the Louisiana Women’s Conference,” *Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations*, Vol. 13, No. 1, June 1977, box 2, folder 17, all found in Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Despite controversy at home, Louisiana delegates went to the national conference in Houston determined to be unified and to represent their state well. Francine Merritt served as one of only five official conference parliamentarians. Lorna Bourg, a delegate from Jeanerette, took the podium to help pass an amendment for national policies to meet the needs of rural women. Representing the “Southern Mutual Help Association,” a group of sugar cane workers, Bourg made a plea for the “80,000 people living ‘behind the cane curtain’ on sugar plantations in 15 parishes in Louisiana.” She told reporters, “It is not uncommon for farm workers to receive a pay envelope after harvest season with no money in it—only a slip showing the balance due at the plantation store.” The rural women’s amendment passed easily, but the Louisiana delegates wrestled with the most divisive issue of the conference, an amendment endorsing lesbian rights. Betty Friedan, however, turned the tide when she professed her conversion on the issue. She said, “I am known to be violently opposed to the lesbian issue in the women’s movement; it has been used to divide us.” Nevertheless, she said, “I believe we must give lesbians the protection in their own rights. Join me in voting for this.” Roberta Madden remembered Friedan’s speech as awkward and uncomfortable to listen to. But the Louisiana delegation united and voted yes.

In a dramatic moment, Madden said the Mississippi delegation stood up and turned their backs to their Louisiana sisters.⁷⁹

Second wave feminism became a powerful force for change in 1970s Louisiana. Feminists in BR NOW and other organizations fought at the grassroots level to achieve gender equality for Louisiana women. They succeeded in bringing about changes in state law and within institutions, particularly at the higher education level, which fostered equality. These changes did not go unchallenged, however. In the next chapter, we will look at women in Louisiana who organized to fight feminism, and in particular the ERA. Feminists would be surprised, at least initially, that other Louisiana women would become their biggest adversaries.

⁷⁹Mary Lu Abbott, "Support of Lesbian Rights Overwhelmingly Approved," *Houston Chronicle*, November, 21, 1977, "Delegates Considering Resolutions on 26 Issues of Concern to Women," *Houston Chronicle*, November 20, 1977, Cynthia Woody, "At Women's Conference: Objectives Outlined at Press Conference," *State (Baton Rouge, La.) Times*, November 18, 1977, Claudia Feldman, "Times Have Changed, says gay activist after Parley Vote," *Houston Chronicle*, November 21, 1977, Jane Ely, "Women Cheer Symbolic Flaming Torch," *The Houston Post*, November 19, 1977, Cynthia Woody, "Lorna Bourg Speaks for La. Cane Workers," *State (Baton Rouge, La.) Times*, November 23, 1977; and Cynthia Woody, "Conference Delegates from La. Tell What NWC Has Meant to Them," *State (Baton Rouge, La.) Times*, November 22, 1977.

CHAPTER 3

THE RISE OF ORGANIZED ANTI-ERA WOMEN IN LOUISIANA: CLASHES OVER GENDER, CULTURE, AND POLITICS IN THE 1970s

The 1970s in Louisiana was a time of social transformation. Ideas about gender, equality, and individual rights shifted. In general, the emphasis went from preserving social institutions, many of them built on gender hierarchy, to promoting individual rights and equality. As we saw in the previous chapter, the legal and social status of Louisiana women began to evolve in the direction of individual equality under the law. Many Louisiana traditionalists thought the quest for individual rights had gone too far. In their minds, the demand for unlimited individual rights, particularly regarding gender, threatened to create social chaos, especially within the institutions of marriage and the family. For Louisiana traditionalists, many of them women, the ERA came to epitomize this social chaos.¹

This chapter focuses primarily on two organizations that opposed the ERA: the Women's Committee of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation and the Women's Auxiliary of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce. It examines their motivations, arguments, and political strategies. Louisiana ERA advocates seemed stunned initially at the swift mobilization and success of organized anti-ERA women. Many ERA proponents believed that male dominated business interests were behind the anti-ERA movement. Without a frame of reference to understand their opponents, feminists seemed to argue that anti-ERA women were in the thrall of a backward culture and not responsible for their actions. Feminists, however, underestimated the inner motivation and political independence of anti-ERA women. The idea that the ERA diminished women's status motivated female opponents. In their view, the amendment would

¹Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

eliminate gender distinctions and force women to be like men. In general, most anti-ERA women leaders were married and dependent financially on their husbands. As a consequence, the ERA threatened to infringe upon their perceived legal and social prerogatives and status. Although these women were part of the auxiliary units of established organizations, they assumed leadership in anti-ERA efforts. By focusing on issues such as the draft for women, alimony for men, the destruction of traditional marriage, and threats of federal intervention in personal and family matters, Farm Bureau and Chamber of Commerce women were instrumental in the defeat of the ERA in Louisiana.

Aside from trying to protect what they felt to be their interests, anti-ERA women thought the amendment was destructive to the family and society. They disagreed with feminists' views of gender and the nature of equality. Anti-ERA women did not believe concepts of gender came from history, society, or an over-arching system of patriarchy. Most thought gender differences were part of a created natural order and could be observed empirically. ERA opponents said they believed women to be equal to men. In their world view, however, the natural order, which was based on difference, made the idea of absolute equality an absurdity. Nevertheless, Louisiana anti-ERA women said they supported the rights of women to "be whatever they wanted to be and do whatever they wanted to do." These statements did not mean they contradicted themselves. Anti-ERA women believed women could do whatever they wanted, as long as their jobs and ambitions were bounded by their responsibilities to husband, home, and family. Historian Mary Brennan described conservative female political activists as "women acting as political agents

for a conservative agenda that included the belief that a woman's first responsibility was to her family."²

In recent years, scholarship on conservative women in the United States has evolved. Women's history as a distinct subfield did not exist until the 1960s. As a result, historians often conflated women's history with women's progress toward equal rights. In many cases, scholars tended to either ignore conservative women or portray them as anachronisms. Historians generally, and feminist historians in particular, have not always found it easy to characterize women who opposed equal rights for their own sex. Susan Marshall, a historian of female suffrage opponents, noted this attitude among suffragists in the early twentieth century. According to Marshall, suffragists "dismissed women opponents as throwbacks to another century, clinging futilely to antiquated gender norms." Marshall argued this attitude also shaped analysis of anti-feminist women for decades. She maintained that "this traditional label has profoundly influenced society's views of anti-feminism to the present day, tilting analyses away from politics and locating the conflict in the realm of female culture, where it is reduced to a simple lifestyle struggle between homemakers and careerists." Marshall helped transform perceptions of anti-feminist women because she viewed them as political actors in their own right.³

²Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade against Communism* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2008), 1-55, 153, "Second Wave Feminism(s) and the South: The Difference that Differences Make," In *Women of the American South*, ed. By Christie Farnham (NY: NYU Press, 1997), 276-301, "Equality Challenged: Equal Rights and Sexual Difference," In *Civil Rights in the United States*, ed. By Hugh Davis Graham (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 40-72; and "Gender on the Right: Meanings Behind the Existential Scream," *Gender and History* 3 (Autumn 1991), 246-67.

³Susan E. Marshall, *Gender and Class in the Campaign against Woman Suffrage* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 6, 8-9; and Kim Nielsen, "Doing the 'Right' Right," *Journal of Women's History* 16 (August 2004): 169.

Historians of anti-suffrage women, such as Susan Marshall and Jane Jerome Camhi, presented parallels between anti-suffrage and anti-ERA women. They also provided methodological frameworks for analyzing anti-feminist women. Marshall discovered that women in the northeast, especially Massachusetts, drove the organized anti-suffrage movement. Using the rubric of class and self-interest, Marshall argued that anti-suffrage women were married or related to economically and socially elite men. Because of their relationships, these women had social standing and influence. They were also active in voluntary associations for reform. Middle to upper class women thought they would lose status when universal female suffrage debuted. They believed a new generation of professional women would make laywomen reformers outdated and irrelevant.⁴

Jane Jerome Camhi made a similar argument in *Women against Women*. She maintained anti-suffrage women believed women would lose political clout with the vote. In their view, legislators would be more inclined to listen to women who had no formal political power, because they assumed women to be disinterested in personal or political gain. In the minds of anti-suffrage women, the equation of one woman to one vote reduced the collective and individual power of women. Even some historians saw merit in this idea. William Chafe and Anne Firor Scott argued that women lost some political leverage, at least initially, when they lost their status as disinterested outsiders. Both Marshall and Camhi argued that scholars cannot assume they know what constitutes personal, social, or political power for all women. They showed that self-interest often goes beyond money, political power, or even legal rights, especially for women in a gender stratified society. Self-interests for anti-suffrage women included preserving their identities, social standing,

⁴Marshall, *Gender and Class in the Campaign against Woman Suffrage*, 1-10.

spheres of influence, and economic status. Historian Arlene Kaplan Daniels called these rewards “psychic income.” Psychic income included “prestige, experience, a sense of virtue, feelings of efficacy, public recognition, mental and emotional stimulation, and the rewards that come from working with others toward a desired goal.”⁵

The work of anti-suffrage historians provided an analytical framework for historians of anti-ERA women. Anti-ERA women, however, cannot be understood outside of the context of a broader conservative movement, which arose after WWII. As noted previously, words and concepts such as feminism and conservatism are hard to define, because their meanings change over time. In the context of this chapter, however, Louisiana men and women who opposed the ERA were beginning to align with a conservative movement called the “New Right,” which began to coalesce after WWII. In 1970s Louisiana, however, the words conservative, and its opposite, liberal, were not often used to describe opposing ERA forces. Likewise the term “New Right” did not appear until the end of the decade. Even if they did not call themselves the New Right, however, anti-ERA women and men in Louisiana began to embrace its tenets.⁶

⁵Arlene Kaplan Daniels, *Invisible Careers: Women Civic Leaders from the Volunteer World*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, ix; Pamela Tyler, *Silk Stockings and Ballot Boxes: Women and Politics in New Orleans, 1920-1963*, Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1996, 7. Jane Jerome Camhi, *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1994), 1-15, 27-28, Thomas J. Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1994); and Elna Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁶Irving Kristol, *Neo Conservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 1999), Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Chicago: Regnery, 7th ed. 2001), John P. East, *The American Conservative Movement: The Philosophical Founders* (Chicago, Regnery, 1986), Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984; and Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2010).

It is difficult to find a beginning for the rise of the New Right. It became a recognizable entity after WWII, but according to some historians, roots of the modern conservative movement go back to the 1930s. Historian Gregory Schneider cited the southern agrarians and their critique of the modern industrial economy as a turning point. The southern agrarians started as a group of twelve men, most of whom were professors at Nashville's Vanderbilt University. Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Donaldson, and Frank L. Owsley were prominent members. Calling themselves "Twelve Southerners," in 1930 they published a book of essays called *I'll Take my Stand*. The southern agrarians presented a critique of the industrial economy, its effects on the social order, and its effects on the human spirit. In particular, they cited the corrupting effects the industrial economy had on labor and community life. One of the main goals of the industrial economy had been to create tools and machines to make life easier. The authors argued this idea not only demeaned labor itself, it constituted a lie. Instead of job satisfaction or security, industrial laborers endured escalating physical and mental stress and economic insecurity, not to mention the soul withering effects of displacement and consumerism. The agrarian economic critique was not so much a political argument but an ethical one, which would re-emerge after WWII.⁷

Gregory Schneider considered the agrarians a part of what is called the "Old Right," which lingered, or perhaps malingered, through the 1930s and 40s. There was no coherency

⁷Gregory L. Schneider, "The Old Right," 5-8, "Southern Agrarianism and the Defense of Region," 9-15, in *Conservatism in America Since 1930*, ed. Gregory L. Schneider (NY: New York University Press, 2003), the "Southern Agrarianism and the Defense of Region essay taken from Twelve Southerners, "Introduction: A Statement of Principles," in *I'll Take my Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (NY: Harper, 1930), Walter Kirk Wood, "Before Republicanism: Frank Lawrence Owsley and the Search for Southern Identity, 1865-1965" *Southern Studies* Vol. 6 (4), 65-77; and Wood, "The Misinterpretation of Frank L. Owsley: Thomas J. Pressly and the Myth of a Neo-confederate Revival, 1930-1962" *Southern Studies* 10 (3-4), 39-67.

to the Old Right. It was a mix of odd-fellows, including southern agrarians, isolationists, Jeffersonian republicans, opponents of the New Deal, and even some who thought monarchy might be a solution to the problems of the modern industrial state. They had a few things in common, which included favoring limited government and localism. A significant portion of the Old Right favored isolationism in international affairs. World War II and the popularity of the New Deal, however, crushed the Old Right, which seemed reactionary and antiquarian.⁸

After WWII, however, conservatism reemerged in a new form. In a play on words, the progenitors of the new movement did not call themselves conservatives, but “classical liberals.” Classical liberals believed the tenets of liberalism had been transformed and even perverted in the twentieth-century. They wanted to recapture the historical roots of liberalism. According to Frank Meyer, an ex-Communist and one of the founders of the movement, historical liberalism had rested on the “primacy of the individual, the division of power, the limitation of government, and the freedom of the economy.” The definition of liberalism, however, began to change in the 1930s, especially in light of the New Deal. Liberalism became increasingly associated with the idea that the government, especially at the national level, should be involved in ameliorating or solving social ills. It became the responsibility of the state to help the aged, the poor, and those who lacked social and political power.⁹

⁸Gregory Schneider, “The Old Right,” 5-8, Seward Collins, “Monarch as Alternative,” 16-28, Albert Jay Nock, “Radical Individualism: The State as Enemy,” 29-48, in ed. Gregory L. Schneider, *Conservatism in America Since 1930*.

⁹ Gregory Schneider, “Classical Liberalism,” 49-52, and Frank S. Meyer, “A Rebel in Search of Tradition,” 122-134, in ed. Gregory L. Schneider, *Conservatism in American Since 1930*.

The earliest advocates of a return to classic liberalism, however, were not political philosophers, but economists. Two of the founders of modern conservatism were the classical liberal economists Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. Hayek was born in Austria in 1899. He earned doctorates in law and political science from the University of Vienna in 1921 and 1923. Hayek said his experiences in WWI and its aftermath turned him to the study of economics and its effects on people's lives. As a professor at the London School of Economics during WWII, Hayek published his most famous work, *The Road to Serfdom* in 1944. Hayek thought the economic and social policies he saw developing in Britain resembled those of pre-WWII Germany. As Britain nationalized industries such as steel, coal, and railroads, Hayek recalled the programs of Nazi Germany, which nationalized industries and initiated massive public works and benefits programs. He challenged the commonly held idea that fascism was a capitalistic reaction to socialism. He saw little difference in the end results of socialism and fascism. According to Hayek, both resulted in enormous state power, which diminished individual liberty. Hayek formed the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947, a group of liberal economists and scholars who met in Switzerland.¹⁰

Milton Friedman, an economics professor at the University of Chicago, was a member of the Mont Pelerin Society. Friedman, along with George Stigler and Gary Becker, formed the "Chicago school" of economics. Friedman, the most well known, challenged the predominant economic theories that took hold during the Great Depression and WWII, which were based on the theories of British economist John Maynard Keynes. In simplified form, Keynesian economics worked on the demand side of the economy. During economic downturns, people stop spending, which produced deleterious effects on the economy.

¹⁰F. A. Hayek, "Resurrecting the Abandoned Road," 53-65 and F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994 ed.), 3-9, 13-14, 15-25.

According to Keynes, the government should increase demand for goods and services by increasing the money supply, spending money, and lowering taxes. Friedman, however, was an apostle of the “free market.” The free market was based on supply and demand with as little government intervention as possible. Friedman’s free market philosophy was not just an economic theory, but also a political and social theory. In Friedman’s view, “there were only two ways of coordinating the economic activity of millions. One was central direction involving the use of coercion—the technique of the modern totalitarian state. The other was voluntary cooperation of individuals—the technique of the market place.” In the 1960s, Friedman’s book *Capitalism and Freedom* made him a celebrity and a hero of the newly emerging Right. Inspired young people formed conservative clubs on college campuses.¹¹

Like all social movements, post WWII conservatism had opposing factions and contained inherent contradictions. The primary challenge to the free market economists came from the traditionalists. Traditionalists detested the ideas of free market capitalists. In their minds, free market capitalism promoted too much competition, individualism, materialism, and greed. Its constant demands of economic destruction and renewal destroyed community and stability, which made free market capitalism inherently anti-conservative. The values of the new traditionalists were the values of the “village,” which endured through generational ties, the parish church, with its graveyard and baptismal font, and a sense of place. Traditionalists were also concerned with the great moral dilemmas brought about by the modern age. The horrors of technological warfare, particularly the

¹¹Milton Friedman, “Defining Principles: Capitalism and Freedom,” 68-90 and Gregory L. Schneider, “Classical Liberalism,” 51, in *Conservatism in America Since 1930*, Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

atomic bomb, appalled traditionalists, who wondered how the age of progress could yield such savagery.¹²

Russell Kirk, a college professor from Michigan, emerged as a towering figure among traditionalists. Kirk, who earned a doctorate from the University of Scotland, endured a short stint as a professor at Michigan State University. Calling it “behemoth” university, he rejected a supermarket approach to the curriculum and the idea that college should be a job training academy. He retreated to a family home in rural Mecosta, Michigan, called “Piety Hill.” Kirk spent the rest of his life thinking and writing. In his most influential work, *The Conservative Mind*, published in 1953, Kirk formulated six “canons of conservative thought.” Kirk’s conservative canons did not address politics but centered on the nature of man and the order of society. For traditionalists, the place of man in the cosmos, so to speak, was more humble than for utopians and progressives. In the conservative worldview, man had an important role, but he was not the measure. Man made ideologies or utopias could not perfect man or society, and the results of their implementation were almost always disastrous.¹³

Not all traditionalists were religious, although most were to some degree. They did not tend to be evangelistic, however. Traditionalists embraced Kirk’s first canon, which was “belief in a transcendent order, or body of natural law, which rules society as well as conscience” and that “political problems, at bottom, are religious and moral problems.”

¹²Gregory L. Schneider, “Traditionalism,” 91-94, Richard M. Weaver, “The Quest for Order,” 95-106, Russell Kirk, “The Conservative Mind,” in *Conservatism in America Since 1930*, Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 1-17, Charles W. Dunn and J. David Woodward, *The Conservative Tradition in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 45-63; and Robert Nisbet, *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002), 1-84.

¹³Gregory L. Schneider, “Traditionalism,” 91-94, in *Conservatism in America Since 1930*; and Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 7th ed., 2001), ii-xx, 3-11.

According to Kirk, traditionalists also had a “conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes, as against the notion of a ‘classless society.’” In his words, “if natural distinctions are effaced (erased) among men, oligarchs fill the vacuum. Equality before courts of law are recognized by conservatives; but equality of condition, they think, means equality in servitude and boredom.” Conservatives did not think established traditions should be cast away lightly. They believed “change and reform are not identical, and that innovation is a devouring conflagration more often than it is a torch of progress.” One of Kirk’s conservative canons also said that a free society rested on private property rights. In his words, “freedom and property are closely linked: separate property from private possession, and Leviathan becomes master of all.” Nevertheless, traditionalists were mostly apolitical and had no particular party loyalty.¹⁴

Both liberal economists and traditionalists had great influence on the emerging conservative movement. A third branch of the movement, however, would bring the two together. Ex-communists, almost religious in their fervor, became the basis for a fusion of the disparate elements of the new conservatism. Among them were Frank S. Meyer, Whittaker Chambers, and Max Eastman. Meyer, more than any of them, saw the potential of a unified conservative political movement. Meyer was born in New Jersey in 1909. He attended Oxford University and the London School of Economics, but was deported from England in 1933 for Communist proselytizing. Meyer testified that while serving in WWII he read Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom*, which caused him to reject Communism. He co-founded the conservative journal *National Review* with William F. Buckley, Jr. Unlike several *National Review* founders, Buckley had never embraced Communism. He was, as some

¹⁴Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 7th ed., 2001), 3-11.

described, a cradle conservative, who wrote a best selling critique of his alma mater, *God and Man at Yale* (1951) when he was only twenty-five years old. Buckley was a traditionalist, but he was also anti-Communist and supported free market principles. Meyer, who was at first a critic of the traditionalists, came to believe traditionalists and classical liberals could capitalize on what they had in common, in order to become a political force. In Meyer's words, the "challenge to resurgent conservatism in America was to simultaneously create a new intellectual and spiritual leadership...to move forward to the defeat of collectivist liberalism in the political sphere."¹⁵

Meyer's vision of a political movement based on conservative principles proved prescient. The presidential candidacy of Republican Barry Goldwater in 1964, however, stunned the political establishment of both parties. Goldwater appeared to embody Meyer's concept of "fusionism." He was anti-Communist and supported a strong national defense. Nevertheless, Goldwater incorporated other elements into his popular conservatism. He brought in forgotten elements of the Old Right into the emerging New Right. He supported limiting the power and reducing the size of the federal government, primarily by reducing or dismantling welfare and social programs. He argued for the old specter of state's rights, which he based on a strict interpretation of the Constitution. He also supported Jeffersonian individualism and republicanism. Goldwater's localism was different than the communitarian localism of traditionalists like Russell Kirk, however. Kirk's localism was based on hierarchy and tradition. Goldwater advocated a transfer of political power from the

¹⁵Frank S. Meyer, "A Rebel in Search of Tradition," 122-134, Meyer, "A Rebel Finds His Tradition," 171-179, Gregory L. Schneider, "Anticommunism," 131-134, Schneider, "Fusion," 169-170, Whittaker Chambers, "A Witness," 135-148, Gerhart Niemeyer, "The Communist Mind," 149-160, William F. Buckley, Jr., "Krushchev at the UN: The Damage We Have Done to Ourselves," 161-170, Buckley, "National Review: Statement of Intentions," 195-200, Buckley, "National Review: Credenda and Statement of Principles," all in *Conservatism in America Since 1930*, William F. Buckley, Jr., *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of 'Academic Freedom'* (Lanham, MD: Regnery, 50th anniversary ed., 2002).

national to the state and local level. Conservatives, particularly Goldwater, resurrected the states' rights argument in the early 1960s. Goldwater was aware that the issue of states' rights was associated with the South's resistance to civil rights and integration. He tied it, however, to a loss of individual liberty and local autonomy that could apply to anyone in any state. He also tied it to the idea of an increasingly domineering national government, which forced compliance to laws that went against the will of a majority of the people. Many elite conservative intellectuals seemed uncomfortable with Goldwater's rise to the top of popular conservative politics. The people who formed the base of Goldwater's support were not from the halls of academia and their names did not appear on the editorial lines of conservative journals. Goldwater got his nomination with the support of political outsiders and neophytes, including college students and housewives.¹⁶

The founders of modern conservatism were mostly men, with notable exceptions. They were also intellectual elites. They were overwhelmingly writers and purveyors of ideas. Although most wanted change and some even sought political power, few had any desire to engage directly in politics. The Goldwater candidacy, however, revealed that a conservative political movement had been taking shape. A large number of the people who translated conservative ideals into political activism, however, were not elite men, but

¹⁶Gregory L. Schneider, "The Plunge into Politics," 207-210, Barry M. Goldwater, "The Conscience of a Conservative," 211-225, Goldwater, "Extremism in the Defense of Liberty: The Republican National Convention Acceptance Address," 238-246, William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Young Americans for Freedom," 226-230 all in *Conservatism in American Since 1930*, Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1990); and John A. Andrew III, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1997), 1-32, 75-100, 187-205.

average women, who lived in rural areas, mid-America, and the suburbs of large towns and cities.¹⁷

Historians are beginning to analyze the role grassroots women played in the formation of the New Right. Michelle Nickerson, author of *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, argued that female conservative activists can trace their lineage to 1950s suburban housewives, who waged anti-Communist campaigns from their living rooms and kitchen tables. She based her study on housewife activists in Los Angeles and suburban Orange County. These housewives absorbed the tenets of post WWII conservatism, including anti-Communism, the economic and moral superiority of capitalism, and the logic of free markets. But they also transformed the nature of post-WWII conservatism. One of the biggest differences between elite conservatives and grassroots conservatives was their level of interest in social and moral issues. Conservative activism went beyond the realm of the abstract and into grassroots activism at the local level. Housewives in California ousted teachers and school board members they deemed too liberal and tried to influence the content of public school curricula and public library holdings. Nickerson coined the term “housewife populism” to explain their activism. The idea of popular revolt permeated the psyches of grassroots conservative women, as well as others in the emerging New Right. Historically, populists of all persuasions believed

¹⁷Jean Hardisty, “Kitchen Table Backlash: The Anti-feminist Women’s Movement,” in Amy E. Ansell, ed., *Unraveling the Right: The New Conservatism in American Thought and Politics*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 105-125, Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Stacy Braukman, *Communists and Perverts under the Palms: The Johns Committee in Florida, 1956-1965* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2013).

themselves to be a beleaguered majority pitted against a powerful minority. Many on the New Right would embrace outsider status, even as they won political victories.¹⁸

The Women's Committee of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation (LFBF) constituted one of the most active anti-ERA groups in 1970s Louisiana. The LFBF came out early as an opponent of the ERA. In some ways, it is difficult to understand why the Farm Bureau, an agricultural organization with early twentieth century roots, took such an avid interest in defeating the ERA. Answers lay within the history of the Farm Bureau and its intersection with economic, political, and social history, especially in the agrarian South. The American Farm Bureau Federation organized in 1920 as a private non-profit agency dedicated to helping farmers and farm communities. John Barron, a graduate of Cornell University, established the first Farm Bureau in 1911 in Broome County in upstate New York. It originated as a small bureau of the local Chamber of Commerce. The USDA, the Binghamton Chamber of Commerce, and the Lackawanna Railroad funded the bureau.¹⁹

The organization had a philosophy similar to that of the agricultural extension movement, which operated out of land grant colleges. Extension took knowledge from universities and brought it to farmers, especially regarding scientific farming techniques and sound business principles. They even advocated scientific principles in housekeeping and social organization. The philosophy of agricultural extension was a mixture of government help, community cooperation, and principles of self-reliance. The Farm Bureau had a

¹⁸Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012) xiii-32, Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade against Communism* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2008), 1-55.

¹⁹Most histories of the Farm Bureau are at the state level. Information on the national Farm Bureau history can be found on their website from the online publication, "Farm Bureau: Historical Highlights, 1919-1994," *The Voice of Agriculture: American Farm Bureau Federation*, www.fb.org.

similar self-help and mutual cooperation model, but it also had ties to private business. In several states it formed cooperatives to provide life insurance and insurance against crop losses at a time when almost no one insured farmers. The Farm Bureau also became a political lobbying organization to state and national legislatures on behalf of farmers.²⁰

In the history of agricultural movements and organizations, the Farm Bureau, like agricultural extension, could be considered politically and socially conservative. Both programs took hold after the failure of the populist agrarian revolts of the late nineteenth century. Agrarian populists had viewed the intransigent problems of farmers as structural. They cited the government's handling of the money supply, business, railroad, and agricultural monopolies, and political corruption as causes of their economic oppression. Populists wanted to re-distribute economic and political power away from business, corporate, and political monopolies. The Farm Bureau, however, did not seek to overturn established social, economic, or political orders.²¹

The Farm Bureau focused its efforts on the preservation of the private family farm. Members provided support and knowledge in order to make farmers more efficient, productive, and profitable. But saving the family farm went beyond economic preservation. At the turn of the twentieth century, the family farm became a cultural icon of what came to

²⁰Wayne Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-Five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989); and Frederick W. Williamson, *Origin and Growth of Agricultural Extension in Louisiana-1860-1948* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1951).

²¹Donna A. Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement 1881-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), William Ivy Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Movement: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1978), Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2009); and Robert W. Shugg, *Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers during Slavery and After, 1840-1875* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969 2nd ed., 1st ed. 1939).

be regarded as unique American values, like economic and political independence, individualism, and democracy. Saving the family farm also meant saving the farm family, which was seen as a primary institution responsible for creating and preserving these American values. Farm women played crucial roles in rural family and community life, both economically and socially. Almost every farm program had an “arm” that addressed the needs of farm women. In rural movements like the Grange and agrarian populism, some women emerged as political leaders. Within the Farm Bureau, however, the identities of women and children were subsumed under the corporate identity of the family, which was headed by a male. This view of the family was based on gender hierarchy, differentiated roles, and the often romanticized but mostly uncompensated labor of women and children. It is not surprising, therefore, that Farm Bureau women, and men, felt threatened by the ERA, especially as they were in the economic class that owned, or aspired to own, their farms.²²

By the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s, however, farmers became willing to ask the government for help. According to its official history, the Farm Bureau took a major role in writing the agricultural adjustment acts (AAA). As part of the New Deal, the AAA set the precedent for farm policy for decades to come. It also initiated ongoing controversy. The most controversial policies were the government subsidies given to farmers to stop producing commodities, keep products off the market, and in some cases, to destroy crops or livestock. Legislators and policy makers enacted these policies to solve the persistent problem of overproduction and low prices. Most farmers liked the subsidies but

²²Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” *The Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, Chicago, 1893, William L. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1974), David B. Danborn, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1979); and Dennis Roth, “The Country Life Movement,” www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/rural_development_chap1, p. 3.

they disliked the policies. Farmers thought the subsidies were inadequate and they disliked price controls and production quotas. Leaders of the Farm Bureau and others believed subsidies drove land prices and equipment costs upward, causing inflation. According to agricultural historian, Luther Tweeten, the Farm Bureau began to change its attitude toward government in the 1950s and 60s as the nation returned to economic prosperity. It began to espouse free market principles and the laws of the marketplace. These attitudes toward government would later influence the Farm Bureau's stance on the ERA.²³

The Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation (LFBF) started in 1922. According to Daniel Robertson's history of the LFBF, the Louisiana organization mirrored the national organization's turn to the right in the 1950s and 60s. The LFBF State President, L. L. Lovell, took a firm stance in 1959 on the role of government. In a presidential address on January 23rd of that year, he said, "The role of government in agriculture must be to ensure competition in all phases of agribusiness and to stop erosion of the dollar's purchasing power." He also thought inflation was "the greatest danger facing farmers today, and the real root of our over-production problem." President Lovell also took a moral stance against "the welfare state of give-away programs for those able to work and prosper." He thought government spending on social welfare programs helped cause inflation and high interest rates. Perhaps more importantly, according to Lovell, government "give-aways" contributed to the deterioration of values, morals, and the work ethic.²⁴

²³Luther G. Tweeten, *Terrorism, Radicalism, and Populism in Agriculture* (New Jersey: Wiley and Sons, 2008) 166-168, Daniel Ray Robertson, "History of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation," doctoral thesis, Special Collections, University Archives, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 92-93, 214, Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1989) 147-189; and "Farm Bureau: Historical Highlights, 1919-1994," *The Voice of Agriculture* (American Farm Bureau Federation), accessed online at www.fb.org/about.history.

²⁴Robertson, "History of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation," 93.

The national Farm Bureau initiated a program for women members in the late 1940s, called the “Women’s Committee.” The LFBF started its Women’s Committee at this time. The Committee had state executive officers and district and parish level leaders. Individual members were simply called Women’s Committee members. The state Chairman of the LFBF Women’s Committee was elected at the state convention every year. She automatically assumed a seat on the LFBF Executive Board and had voting privileges. As we have noted, Farm Bureau membership was a family affair. The LFBF enrolled families and not individuals, but families were enrolled under the name of the male head. Therefore, the organization did not keep records of how many women belonged at any given time or their individual names. The purposes of the Women’s Committee were social and educational. Most of their educational efforts went to the community, especially to local schools. Women Farm Bureau members, particularly the parish and district leaders, spoke to schoolchildren about Louisiana farm products, the importance of agriculture as a way of life, and the superiority of the American economic, political, and social systems. Despite the fact that these women became ambassadors for Louisiana agriculture, male LFBF leaders did not always understand their contributions. James Graugnard, LFBF State Chairman during the 1970s, once referred to the Women’s Committee as a “cooking group.”²⁵

Women’s Committee leaders, however, were political in their activities, according to a broad definition of political activity. In the culture war between tradition and social change that emerged in the 1960s, Farm Bureau women advocated traditional values through promotion of agriculture and rural life. Helen Nelson Mobley, born in 1901, became

²⁵Melba McIntosh, interview by Yvonne Brown, digital recording, Oak Grove, La., 4 November 2011; and Mike Danna (Louisiana Farm Bureau), telephone interview with author, July 23, 2013.

head of the LFBF Women's Committee from 1960 to 1970. Mobley, a strong minded and energetic woman, was devoted to politics, religion, youth education, and the promotion of rural life. According to Henry Bernard, a long time LFBF staff member, people referred to Mobley as "Carrie Nation," presumably for her determination and moral rectitude. She was born in Pendleton, Oregon, into a family of pioneer farmers and ranchers in Oregon and Montana. She earned a B.A. in Business Administration at the University of Oregon in 1922. An avid outdoorswoman, Mobley swam, golfed, and played college basketball. She met her husband in Texas after she became the Texas director of Camp Fire Girls. They ran a farm and cattle ranch in Lettsworth, outside of the small town of New Roads in Point Coupee Parish.²⁶

Mobley served as chairman of the Point Coupee Parish Farm Bureau Women's Committee from 1954 to 1959. She was elected state chairman in 1960. In one of her first acts as statewide leader, she introduced a document at the 1960 state convention that would, in her words, "reveal the increasing infiltration of leftwing philosophies into the schools and churches." In 1965 she initiated a program called the "Freedom Bookshelf," in order to fight this "leftwing infiltration." Women's Committee members placed books in school libraries about the "American free enterprise system, the dangers of communism, and the heritage of our nation." Efforts like the Freedom Bookshelf eventually yielded to a "Mass Media Monitoring Committee," formed in 1977. Mrs. A. C. Ray from Tallulah, Louisiana, the seat of Madison Parish, headed the committee. According to the Farm Bureau News, this

²⁶Helen Nelson Mobley obituary, Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, Baton Rouge, La., July 23, 1993, Helen N. Mobley Certificate of Death, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Henry Bernard, telephone conversation with author.

committee followed along the lines of the “book monitoring committee in the public school systems.”²⁷

Melba McIntosh succeeded Helen Mobley as State Chairman of the Women’s Committee in 1971 and led it during the pivotal years of the ERA ratification battle. She was born and raised in the small town of Oak Grove, Louisiana, located in the northwest corner of the state. McIntosh described her childhood as a happy one. Her mother worked throughout her childhood as a bookkeeper in a general store in Oak Grove. Melba’s mother had an African-American maid who provided childcare and housekeeping. McIntosh told of her attachment to this surrogate mother and of her heartbreak when she came home one day to find the woman gone. She often went to her mother’s job after school to “help out.” McIntosh would later testify that Farm Bureau women opposed the ERA because it would force women out of the home to work; nevertheless, McIntosh expressed pride in her mother’s job.²⁸

McIntosh graduated from college and became an elementary school teacher. She taught briefly, but moved to nearby Darnell when she married John McIntosh, a farmer with large landholdings in West Carroll Parish. In an interview, McIntosh said she could not describe herself as a working farm wife during her marriage. Her work on the farm mostly consisted of going into town to pick up machine parts or to get them repaired. She admitted she often did not know what parts to ask for or how to describe what had broken down. With the help of her African-American housekeeper, Melba managed her household and

²⁷ Robertson, “History of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, 101, 132, 135-136, 189, *Louisiana Farm Bureau News*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, Sept. 1961, p. 1 and June 1977, p. 1; telephone interview with Jim Monroe, Farm Bureau legislative liaison, April 24, 2013.

²⁸Melba McIntosh, interview by Yvonne Brown, Oak Grove, La., November 4, 2011.

occupied herself with church and community activities, including the Farm Bureau Women's Committee.²⁹

McIntosh proved an able successor to Helen Mobley. McIntosh considered the older woman a friend and mentor. Mutual dedication to their Christian faith served as a bond between them. They shared concern over what they considered the liberal teaching of some Christian denominations that advocated new tolerance of homosexuality and sexual permissiveness. McIntosh also remembered participating in the Farm Bureau Women's Committee patriotic programs for schoolchildren, which promoted the "free enterprise system." In her words, they did these activities in the 1960s because, "we were afraid of war," presumably meaning either with Communists or with their economic system.³⁰

Throughout the 1960s, McIntosh revealed a growing interest in conservative thinking and causes, according to handwritten notes she kept among a small amount of ERA memorabilia. She developed an interest in listening to and taking notes from tapes and lectures that appeared to be coming from conservatives such as ex-Communists, former politicians, Soviet defectors, ex-CIA operatives, and even her church pastor. The bulk of her notes pertained to the insidious nature of Communism and its infiltration into the United States via anti-war activists, rioters, radical civil rights activists, and liberal media. She wrote down maxims such as "all Communist movements are the same," and "negotiating with Communists is like looking for food in a tiger's mouth." Conservatives of the 1960s believed all Communist movements were essentially the same. The idea of the universal nature of Communism meant it had to be detected and rooted out wherever it appeared. This

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

thinking justified fighting in Vietnam, overthrowing Fidel Castro in Cuba, and confronting creeping socialism at home.³¹

McIntosh also attributed the disturbing breakdown of law and order and riots in the United States in the 1960s to Communists. McIntosh wrote in her notebook about rioters, “As the police resist them, according to Communist propaganda, the police become guilty.” According to her notes, the repudiation of God constituted one of Communism’s most pernicious beliefs. In Communism there was “no God—no beginning—no ending, matter only.” Most Americans suffered from a “lack of ability to understand the Communist approach to destiny.” Traditionalists like Melba McIntosh did not think they misunderstood the Communist approach to destiny. To them, relativism emerged from a belief in atheistic materialism, a chaotic state in which morality, history, and the nature of truth changed. If the world consisted of “matter only,” and had no beginning and no ending, then traditional social institutions, like the family, could not be defended as unchanging and based on timeless truths.³²

As a Farm Bureau women’s leader, McIntosh had experience in political activity, even if that activity was promoting the free enterprise system to schoolchildren at the local level. She entered one of the biggest political battles in Louisiana, however, at the beginning of her tenure as Chairman of the Women’s Committee in 1971. She led large and small contingents of Farm Bureau women to the state capitol in Baton Rouge for most of the duration of the ERA ratification struggle, which spanned the years 1972-82. For the most

³¹Melba McIntosh, interview by Yvonne Brown, Oak Grove, La., November 4, 2011, McIntosh’s handwritten notes are located in her personal papers, copies of which are in possession of author.

³²Ibid.

part, she went to Baton Rouge accompanied by four to seven women, who helped her do “footwork” in the halls of the capitol. While the other women came and went, she stayed for weeks at a time, during the spring and summer legislative season. The LFBF paid the women mileage to get to Baton Rouge as well as for McIntosh’s hotel lodging. She and her contingent walked the halls of the legislature, canvassing and talking to legislators about the ERA and persuading them to vote against it.³³

She carried a typewritten list of names of legislators from the November 1975 elections, which she used during the 1976 legislative season. A look at her list offers insights into how hard she worked to defeat the ERA, but also shows the uncertainty of the outcome. The list included the names, addresses, and political affiliations of 39 senators and 105 representatives in the Louisiana legislature. Before each name McIntosh made a check mark, an “X,” or a question mark. The members of the Louisiana House were of particular importance that year. The Louisiana Senate had refused to re-consider the ERA after passing it with a wide margin in 1972. McIntosh noted the number “59” at the end of the list. It appeared that this was the number of Louisiana House members she had on her side. The fate of the ERA rested with the members of the newly formed Committee on Civil Law and Procedure. Out of approximately fifteen committee members, McIntosh indicated only 6 had committed to voting no. The 1976 committee hearing and vote would eventually become a scene of high drama, when two members changed their votes to “no” at the last minute.³⁴

³³Melba McIntosh, interview by Yvonne Brown, Oak Grove, La., Nov. 4, 2011; and Jim Monroe (Louisiana Farm Bureau), telephone interview with author, April 25, 2013.

³⁴Melba McIntosh, interview by Yvonne Brown, Oak Grove, La., November 4, 2011, personal papers of Melba McIntosh, copies in possession of author, Jack Wardlaw, “Things looking up for La. ERA forces,” *New Orleans States Item*, 12 May, 1976, Jim Monroe, telephone interview with author, April 25, 2013; and Daniel Richey, interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, La., May 10, 2013.

Although she worked mostly with legislators, McIntosh remembered an encounter with Governor Edwin Edwards in the hallway before a crucial committee hearing. According to her memory, Edwards took a crumpled and handwritten list of names out of her hand and told McIntosh, “she could go home; she had all the votes she needed.” Although it is impossible to read anything of particular significance into the encounter, it hinted that his support for the ERA might not have been as great as he professed. Edwin Edwards was elected for the first time as Louisiana governor in 1972. In the beginning, he said he supported the ERA and claimed co-authorship of the amendment during his term in the U.S. House of Representatives. However, the governor began to moderate his support as controversy over the amendment grew. By 1974, he pleaded neutrality, but his neutrality amounted to non-support among disappointed ERA proponents. Edwards’ unwillingness to put pressure on legislators to pass the amendment drew the ire and frustration of some ERA advocates. This did not seem to bother him, and he became increasingly cavalier about the ERA as the 1970s progressed. At the First Governor’s Conference on Women in 1976, when asked about the ERA, Edwards quipped, “I have many friends for and against...and I stand by my friends.”³⁵

Legislative sessions and legislators came and went over the lifetime of the ERA in Louisiana, but the Farm Bureau’s leadership and membership kept up a constant level of activity and legislative pressure against ratifying the amendment. Seventy-five Farm Bureau women went to Baton Rouge in July 1974 as a show of force against the ERA. Phyllis

³⁵Interview with Melba McIntosh, Nov. 4, 2011, Bill Lynch, “Pressure from Edwards needed to dislodge ERA,” *New Orleans States-Item*, 21 May 1974, Deidre Cruse, “ERA Apparently Loses Out Again,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 20 June 1974, Donald C. Brown Jr., “ERA Leader Says Edwards Insincere,” *Baton Rouge Sunday Advocate*, 23 June 1974, Deidre Cruse, “ERA Vote Leads To Strong Words From 2 in House,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 25 June 1974.

Schlafly even came to Louisiana to conduct a workshop for Farm Bureau women at their annual Women's Committee Workshop on July 12, 1976. The workshop was part of the organization's 54th annual convention held in Shreveport, Louisiana. Schlafly discussed issues related to the ERA and held a question and answer session for three hundred women. The workshop encouraged the women and gave them the tools they needed to write letters and cards to their representatives. Jean Hardisty has argued conservative women were good followers and liked to take direction from charismatic conservative leaders, like Schlafly. There is, however, a more subtle aspect to their behavior. Women in traditional volunteer organizations generally looked up to their leaders and accepted their authority. The women who attained leadership in these organizations, however, were usually women who had worked hard within the group at the grassroots level and were adept at getting along with others. In reference to Jo Freeman's analysis in the "Tyranny of Structurelessness," traditional women's organizations worked efficiently because they had organizational structure, lines of authority, and well established, understood, and accepted pathways to leadership.³⁶

McIntosh became the face of Farm Bureau opposition. She testified before the legislature and newspapers often quoted her. McIntosh argued consistently over the years. She seldom veered from her "talking points," either in front of the legislature, or in an interview many years later. The Farm Bureau Women's Committee stated they supported equality for women, but objected to the second part of the amendment, which mandated federal enforcement. They wanted rights for women implemented at the state level, not by

³⁶"Phyllis Schlafly Discusses ERA," Louisiana *Farm Bureau News: Convention Edition*, August 1976, p. 18; and; and Jean Hardisty, "Kitchen Table Backlash: The Anti-Feminist Women's Movement," 110-111, 123-124, in *Unraveling the Right: The New Conservatism in American Thought and Politics*, ed. Amy E. Ansell.

the federal government. Reflecting this view, Louisiana Farm Bureau women argued the amendment would compel the federal government to interfere in personal matters of home and family. According to them, women would be drafted on an equal basis with men, responsible for paying alimony, and in the event of divorce, placed in competition with their higher earning spouse, for custody of their children. They thought the ERA would deny women a choice in whether they wanted to enter the paid workforce. In a Louisiana House ERA hearing in 1975, McIntosh testified that “husbands would have to pay double Social Security in order for housewives to collect their Social Security when they die.” This would “force women out to work who don’t want to work.”³⁷

The states’ rights argument, however, had a long history tainted by slavery, war, and racism. It also became identified with southern regionalism. By the 1970s, however, the issue of states’ rights acquired a wider audience, as people across the nation fought, sometimes violently, over busing and grumbled over affirmative action. Farm Bureau Women did not refer to race in their public opposition to the ERA, however. Nevertheless, some legislators and activists, both black and white, made a connection between ERA opposition and race, especially in light of the civil rights movement. Dorothy Mae Taylor, an ERA supporter and the first black woman to serve in the Louisiana legislature, spoke about the double burden of racism and sexism. Steven Dupuis, a white representative from Opelousas, tried to allay fears over giving women legal equality by likening it to misplaced

³⁷Deidre Cruse, “House Committee Kills ERA Despite Arguments,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 12 June 1975, Smiley Anders, “Anti-ERA Groups Gather,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 18 February 1976, Shirley Benton, “Louisiana Women Face ERA Battle,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 5 April 1979, “Equal Rights Amendment defeated in La. Legislature,” *Louisiana Farm Bureau News*, Vol. LII, No. 7, p. 1, 2, Baton Rouge, La., July 1974, Melba McIntosh, “Chairman’s Report,” from the “Woman’s Viewpoint,” *Louisiana Farm Bureau News*, Baton Rouge, La., March 1977, p. 4, Interview with Melba McIntosh, Oak Grove, La., 4 November 2011; and Barry M. Goldwater, “The Conscience of a Conservative,” in *Conservatism in America Since 1930*, 221-225.

fears over civil rights. In a speech, he “noted fears of early legislatures about blacks in state government, but the eight blacks in the present legislature are most responsible legislators.” Cynthia Ware, chair of ERA United, commented on race and the ERA at the end of the battle in 1982. In referring to the fate of the amendment, she said, “The ERA sailed through until the end of 1972. What was left (meaning the opposition) was the old Confederacy, which was locked in bitter struggles over integration and other issues involving the rights of blacks.” But Ware did not blame the old Confederacy for the ERA defeat. She thought “people felt guilty about discrimination against minorities;” therefore, “that’s where they concentrated their energies. The ERA received less attention from civil rights groups.”³⁸

Corinne Maybuce had a different view of the way race intersected with the ERA. Maybuce was a founding member of the LCSW and one of the first female and African-American school principals in Baton Rouge. She was also a veteran of the civil rights movement. Reporter Candace Lee did a series of articles in 1972 on the women’s movement in Louisiana. When Lee questioned Maybuce about opposition to the ERA, Maybuce said, “Race entered the picture when (ERA) opponents alleged passage of the amendment would lead to both sexes using the same restrooms.” Maybuce referred to opponents’ insistence the federal government would outlaw same sex bathrooms and dressing rooms under the ERA. Although ERA supporters thought the unisex bathroom argument trivial, Maybuce alluded to the origins of opponents’ fears. When Donald Mathews and Jane DeHart interviewed

³⁸Bill McMahon, “Rights Ratification Rejected in House,” Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 30 June 1972, James H. Gillis, “La. House Kills Measure on Women’s Equal Rights,” New Orleans *Times Picayune*, 30 June 1972, John LaPlante, “New ERA resolution marks renewed effort,” Baton Rouge *State Times*, Baton Rouge, La., 1 July 1982, John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: the Southernization of America* (NY: Harper’s Magazine Press, 1974), Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (NY: Times Books, 1996); and Dennis Deslippe, *Protesting Affirmative Action: The Struggle over Equality after the Civil Rights Revolution* (MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

ERA opponents for their book on ratification in North Carolina, the level of emotion over the bathroom issue surprised them. Women expressed a sense of violation at the thought strange men could enter their intimate space at a time when they felt vulnerable. Maybuce implied that fears multiplied at the idea that it could be black men who transgressed the bathroom barrier. Despite evidence that race was a part of the debate, those against and even those for the ERA seemed inclined to separate issues of race and gender.³⁹

ERA advocates did their best to counter the gender-based arguments against the ERA. Although they thought many of the objections came from emotion, ERA proponents made arguments against each objection. In the case of unisex bathrooms, they said the law recognized the right to privacy as paramount. ERA advocates also assured women that judges would not award custody based solely on income. The draft was a problematic issue, however. ERA supporters admitted women would be subject to the draft. They tried to turn the issue around by portraying it as a positive thing for women. ERA advocates said women would gain access to education, training, and low cost loans, like the G.I. bill for men. A workshop at the New Orleans Public Library in May 1972, however, turned into a debate over how the ERA would impact women, particularly regarding the draft. Attorney Sylvia Roberts and Mary Metz, LSU Professor and president of BR NOW, answered questions about the ERA before the first hearing in the Louisiana legislature.⁴⁰

³⁹Candace Lee, "Women Urged to Cooperate to Heal Country's Wounds," *Baton Rouge Sunday Advocate*, 6 August 1972, Sylvia Roberts Papers, Box 1, folder 8, Donald G. Mathews and Jane S. DeHart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation*, 1-50; and Jennifer Powell Gonzalez, "Searching for Sisterhood: Black Women, Race and the Georgia ERA," 9-13, Masters Thesis, Georgia State University, Dept. of History, 2006, online access at http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/history_theses.

⁴⁰Joan Kent, "ERA Passage: What Have Women to Lose?" *New Orleans States-Item*, 17 May 1972, Linda Lightfoot, "Horrible Results Feared in Women's Rights Proposal," *Baton Rouge State-Times*, 13 May, 1972; and Maury Landry, "National, State Figures Promote ERA in Louisiana," *Baton Rouge State-Times* 20 April 1977.

Roberts did not equivocate about the draft. She told the crowd of one hundred people, “We’ve had the specter of women being impaled on bayonets, dragged into battle, leaving their screaming children behind. But let’s look at the facts. There is no legal assurance now women will not be drafted. The drafting of nurses was seriously considered in World War II.” Roberts went on further, “And suppose we are drafted? Most women are not going to be placed on the front lines. There are some good things about the military. Many women who have made it got their training in WWII...the veteran’s benefits are something to consider too.” According to the reporter, someone in the audience piped up and said, “But, women don’t want to serve in the military.” Roberts responded firmly, “Many men do not want to serve in the military either. If women want equal rights, they are going to have to take equal responsibility.” Although Roberts was being honest in her response, her “equality demands responsibility” approach did not appeal to those women who did not want to lose the privilege of being exempt from the draft. In a similar fashion, ERA opponents seemed to gain the high ground in gender sameness versus gender difference debates. ERA opponents put ERA advocates on the defensive, when they focused on the things women would lose when they gained equality.⁴¹

The Women’s Auxiliary of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce constituted a sister organization to the Farm Bureau in the Louisiana anti-ERA struggle. At first glance, it would seem they had little in common, because of their rural and urban dichotomy. Nevertheless, they had similar social and political roots. The national Chamber of Commerce organized at the behest of President William Howard Taft in 1912, at almost the same time as the Farm Bureau. Like other groups in this organizational era, the Chamber

⁴¹Joan Kent, “ERA Passage: What Have Women to Lose?” *New Orleans States-Item*, 17 May 1972.

was dedicated to mutual cooperation among private businesses for the good of all. National, state, and local Chambers lobbied all levels of government on behalf of large and small businesses. The organization became known for its opposition to high taxes, government regulations on businesses, and unions. Although the Chamber operated on the national level, it became known as an advocate for local communities, small businesses, local industries, and “mom and pop” operations. The Chamber of Commerce of the New Orleans Area organized in 1913.⁴²

The Women’s Auxiliary of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce was organized in 1960. W. F. (Bill) Riggs, Executive Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce of the New Orleans Area, sent a letter to Mrs. Rodney (Jewel) Toups, a leading civic and social leader, soliciting her help in starting a women’s auxiliary in April 1960. In soliciting the expertise of Toups, Riggs went to one of the most successful volunteer organizers in the city. Toups was one of the “the “grand dames” of New Orleans society, in the words of one of her admirers. Upon her death in 1990 at the age of eighty-two, her obituary provided a partial list of her activities. Toups had presided over local chapters of the March of Dimes, the American Red Cross, and the Goodwill Volunteer Auxiliary. She was also past president of the Orleans Club, the Women’s Guild of the New Orleans Opera Association, and a board member of Le Petit Theatre Du Vieux Carre, the New Orleans Repertory Theater, and the New Orleans Symphony. Five hundred women came to the first organizational meeting,

⁴²Chamber of Commerce of the New Orleans Area Collection, MSS 066, Louisiana and Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana, Conor Dougherty, “Don’t Yawn: Chambers of Commerce are Really Quite a Kick: They Helped Send Lindbergh to the Skies and Capone to the Slammer,” *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 16, 2012, www.wsj.com, Chris Mead, “The Other Chambers of Commerce,” Nov. 18, 2012, *newgeography*, www.newgeography.com; and Joel Kotkin, *The New Class Conflict* (NY: Telos Press, 2014).

held at 3:30 p. m. on April 19th in the grand ballroom of the Roosevelt Hotel. Membership stood at seven hundred and eighty-eight women by the end of Toups' presidency, which lasted eighteen months.⁴³

Toups and members of her social and civic circle sent letters to working, professional, and volunteer women asking them to be charter members of the Auxiliary. Nevertheless, a few women with jobs pointed out the afternoon meeting time prohibited working women from joining. Two women, Mrs. M. A. Bradburn and Mrs. A. W. Habeeb, were suggested as excellent candidates for the new "Executive Board." Bradburn was a trained horticulturist, a nationally accredited flower judge, and president of the Jefferson Council of Garden Clubs. Habib was president of the Women's Auxiliary of the Medical Society. Overall, the Women's Auxiliary attracted married women who did not have to work and who had the time, energy, and resources to engage in multiple volunteer activities. Prospective members had to be recommended, although criteria for joining did not seem to be strict. One response, however, showed that some women found membership beyond them because of circumstances they could not control. A prospective member named Annette Bigler wrote on her application card that although she wanted to join, she was "on a very tight budget and found herself unable to join your group." She listed herself as a widow who worked as a "Mary Kay Beauty Consultant" and "entrepreneur." On the back of the card she wrote, "Do you ever do anything to help find jobs for overqualified, over 40 women? Do

⁴³W. F. Riggs, Jr., ltr to Mrs. Rodney Toups, April 7, 1960, found in box 1, folder titled "Correspondence Jan. 29, 1960-Jul. 1, 1960," Women's Council/The Chamber/New Orleans and the River Region Collection, MSS 188, Louisiana and Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana. Hereafter referred to as the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce Women's Auxiliary Papers. The women's auxiliary was officially titled the Women's Auxiliary of the Greater New Orleans and River Region Chamber of Commerce. In the body of the paper, I refer to them simply as Chamber Auxiliary women or Chamber women; and Jewel Freie Toups, obituary, *Times (New Orleans) Picayune*, January, 23, 1990.

you work at all with the Center for Displaced Homemakers?” As historian Arlene Kaplan Daniels pointed out, invisible careers in the volunteer world conveyed significant rewards. Communities benefitted from the unpaid labor of talented women. Volunteer women received rewards in friendship, peer support, satisfaction in accomplishments, and enjoyment of life. But as Bigler’s note suggested, a death or divorce could change a woman’s circumstances overnight, making the volunteer world a precarious place to inhabit.⁴⁴

The Chamber Auxiliary organized by forming committees, each of which had a particular emphasis. In a report of the Auxiliary’s first year, Toups cited the accomplishments of the Beautification Committee, which initiated a program for landscaping the Pontchartrain Expressway. Nevertheless, like the Farm Bureau Women’s Committee, the Chamber Auxiliary engaged in political activity, broadly defined. The Educational Committee conducted courses titled “Practical Politics,” which forty-five members completed. This committee also submitted a proposal to the Louisiana Board of Education to start a study of the Constitution in all Louisiana high schools, using materials written by a “Mr. Robert Weaver.” According to Toups, they had reviewed Weaver’s materials and found them “historically accurate.” The “Patriotic Emphasis Committee” procured films from the U. S. Navy on how to display the American flag, which they also tried to promote in the local schools. The Women’s Auxiliary “National Security Committee” headed up one of the organization’s biggest projects. They pledged the entire

⁴⁴Membership information and application card of Annette Bigler, box 12-14, folder titled “Membership,” New Orleans Chamber of Commerce Women’s Auxiliary Papers, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, “Invisible Careers: Women Civic Leaders from the Volunteer World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Pamela Tyler, *Silk Stockings and Ballot Boxes: Women and Politics in New Orleans, 1920-1963* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

Auxiliary membership to attending and working at one of Dr. Fred Schwarz's Schools of Anti-Communism, held in New Orleans from October 23-27, 1961.⁴⁵

By 1970, the Auxiliary had the names of almost one thousand women on its membership roll. The organization continued its civic and educational activities, but fighting state ratification of the ERA became a defining issue in the 1970s, especially for the leadership. Few were more committed than Charlotte Felt, the Chairman of the National Legislation Committee for the Auxiliary. Felt was born in Arkansas in 1918 and earned a degree in music. She taught music to schoolchildren briefly, but moved to Louisiana after her marriage to journalist Arthur F. Felt, Jr. Her husband became an executive editor for the New Orleans *Times Picayune*. Felt's daughter recalled that because of her father's position, her parents did not discuss politics at home, and her father did not take positions on controversial political issues. It would seem that when it came to politics, the Felts lived separate lives. His wife Charlotte became the family's chief political activist and made defeating the ERA a defining mission in her life.⁴⁶

Felt not only served as the National Legislation Chairman of the Women's Auxiliary, she became a historian of the state ratification struggle. Her account of the ratification battle credited the Women's Auxiliary for the ERA defeat in Louisiana. She credited herself with initiating an anti-ERA movement in the Women's Auxiliary. In her account, Felt said she heard about the danger of the ERA in April 1972 at the national conference in Washington,

⁴⁵Jewel Toups (president of Chamber of Commerce Women's Auxiliary), "Annual Report of Women's Auxiliary," box 1, Collection 188, New Orleans Chamber of Commerce Women's Auxiliary Papers, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

⁴⁶Charlotte Felt, interview by Yvonne Brown, July 24, 2012, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, copies of Charlotte Felt's personal papers in author's possession, "C of C Women Oppose Lib Bill," New Orleans *Times Picayune*, 24 May 1972, "Chamber Auxiliary Reiterates Opposition to Rights Proposal," New Orleans *Times Picayune*, 30 May 1972; and Arthur F. Felt, Jr., ed. "Lib Amendment—or Volstead Anew," 27 March 1972.

D.C. of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Felt served on the National Resolutions Committee of the DAR for the first time that year. The DAR made the “Dangers of the Equal Rights Amendment” the centerpiece of their resolutions. In Paul Revere-like fashion, Felt said she took the information to Louisiana, and in her capacity as National Legislative Chairman, mobilized the Women’s Auxiliary for political action. She also believed Louisiana began the momentum that led to other states refusing to ratify the amendment, particularly in the South. Felt went to the neighboring states of Arkansas and Mississippi to help organize opposition and lobby legislators when the ERA came up for ratification in those states. She went to her home state of Arkansas after the Louisiana campaign in July 1972. She and Louise Johnson went together and met with Arkansas legislators W. D. Moore, Bobby Newman, and Joe K. Mahoney II. Arkansas never ratified the ERA. Felt led three Women’s Auxiliary members in January 1973 to the Mississippi state capitol in Jackson to educate their legislators on the amendment’s dangers. It is unclear how much influence Felt had, but neither the Arkansas nor the Mississippi legislatures ever took a vote on the ERA.⁴⁷

Some historians have overlooked the role of the DAR in the anti-ERA movement. Phyllis Schlafly was a longtime DAR member and served as their National Chairman of National Defense. In a memo addressed to her supporters, Schlafly said the DAR came out against the ERA “even before I got into battle.” The organization claimed the ERA would “nullify hard-won protective state labor legislation for women workers; remove primary responsibility for support of their families and children from husbands and fathers;

⁴⁷Recorded Interview with Charlotte Felt by author, July 24, 2012, Baton Rouge, Louisiana and copies of Charlotte Felt’s personal papers in author’s possession.

adversely affect women's dower and property rights; and subject women to compulsory military service including combat duty." According to historian Kim Nielsen, the DAR, founded in 1890, had been a progressive women's organization until the 1920s. In the first "Red Scare," the DAR made a turn to the right. Under the leadership of Presidents Lora Walker and Grace Brousseau, the DAR created the National Defense Committee and took stands against the Child Labor Amendment, the Children's Bureau, and the Sheppard-Towner Act. DAR leaders were concerned about the growing "centralized bureaucratic despotism over American women and children." Their main concerns, however, were their perceptions of the growing power of female peace activists, a decline in military preparedness, and the feminization of the nation after World War I. Brousseau explained these feelings when she said, "Normal human mothers and wives do not believe in war, but mothers need to promote the instincts of courage and self-preservation in male children." If not, "the net results would be lack of virility, initiative, and productivity."⁴⁸

The Women's Auxiliary sprang into action after Felt's return from the DAR convention with warnings about the ERA. In addition to getting articles into the *Times Picayune*, members mailed position papers to all Louisiana legislators on May 19, 1972. Peggy Koerner, the president of the Auxiliary, participated in radio call in programs and televised interviews. She also testified before the Louisiana legislature in 1972. In her testimony, Koerner argued that married women would lose their legal protections and benefits, but she talked about working women losing protections as well. She said, "Two

⁴⁸Information obtained from personal collection of Charlotte Felt, including typewritten memo from Phyllis Schlafly, copy of DAR Resolutions, and Mrs. Felt's narratives of the events surrounding the ERA in Louisiana. Felt created and maintained an organized, sequential, and indexed scrapbook of her activities and the activities of the Women's Auxiliary regarding the ERA. Copies of all scrapbook material are in possession of author. I hereafter refer to her materials as Charlotte Felt Personal Papers.

points of mischief in this ERA proposal were: the ‘absolute’ lack of need for the amendment and the ambiguity of its major term ‘equality.’” She went on to say, “Some just discriminations that could be destroyed are laws fixing benefits such as minimum wages, maximum hours, and safety standards for women.” According to Koerner, “In one fell swoop all protective legislation that protects women from exploitative employers could be invalidated. For many American women, particularly those in the lower income or minority groups, this is a heavy price to pay for a theory of equality.” Koerner also expressed concern about what the ERA would do to “deserted women struggling to support themselves and their children through whatever work they can get.”⁴⁹

What is notable about her comments is that historically business interests had opposed union based protective legislation for women. As we have noted, the status of the ERA changed in second wave feminism, but Koerner’s actions illustrated that Chamber Auxiliary women had attained a level of political independence. The men of the Chamber seemed to disappear when it came to the ERA, at least publicly. It also revealed that ERA advocates, such as Victor Bussie of the AFL-CIO, underestimated the political independence of the Women’s Auxiliary. He and his wife, Fran Bussie, the AFL-CIO Community Services Officer, commented at the end of the struggle that they thought the “the insurance industry” killed the ERA. They did not seem to accept that the Chamber Women’s Auxiliary and its individual members had their own reasons and rationale for opposing the amendment. When pressed for details, however, Fran Bussie expressed vague allegations. The idea that the insurance industry was funding an organized anti-ERA campaign seems to have started at the national level. Oddly enough, Roberta Madden

⁴⁹Quotes from Peggy Koerner in Charlotte Felt Personal Papers, copies in possession of author.

became a licensed insurance agent and went into business with a woman partner in 1978. Although she only worked as an agent for a few years, she tried to recruit other women into selling insurance. According to Madden, the life insurance business had dated ideas about the family bread winner, historically the man, being the focus of their marketing. But the industry seemed anxious, at least in Louisiana, to refurbish its image and practices in the 1970s. It is plausible that with more women working and earning higher salaries, the insurance industry may have started to equate women's equality with a new market for their products.⁵⁰

The rank and file of the Women's Auxiliary also did their part. Busloads of Chamber women went to the State Capitol for ERA hearings nearly every year during the legislative session. Approximately one hundred and fifty Auxiliary women went to the State Capitol on May 24, 1972 on the first day of ERA hearings. The Auxiliary recruited women by making the trip convenient and as pleasant as possible. A flier noted if they made a reservation, they could "make the trip in air conditioned Greyhound busses" for a round trip bus fare of only four dollars each. They could find ample parking and board the buses at two different locations, the First Baptist Church on St. Charles Avenue and the original Schwegmann's grocery store on Airline Highway and Labarre Road. Form letters were made available, which guided women in what to say if they testified or someone wanted their opinion. They could read "I am here in the Capitol today to oppose the ERA because it will take from women more than it will give to women, and because it will weaken the basic family

⁵⁰For quotes from Victor and Fran Bussie see Bill McMahon, "Polls Show Majority in State Support ERA Ratification: Fran Bussie," Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 31 October 1978, John LaPlante, "New ERA resolution marks renewed effort," Baton Rouge *State Times*, 1 July 1982, Fran Bussie, interview by Yvonne Brown, July 27, 2013, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and box 1, folder 3, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

structure. The ERA would place in legal jeopardy state laws based upon sound consideration of the physiological and functional differences between the sexes.”⁵¹

The Women’s Auxiliary employed simple but effective strategies against the ERA. Hundreds of women made their way to the State Capitol at minimal expense. Because the Chamber of Commerce, like the Farm Bureau, was an established organization, their women’s auxiliary had access to resources like mimeograph machines, postage, and an organizational structure that facilitated communication, one of the main ingredients of their success. In looking back, some pro-ERA groups believed ERA opponents won because they had access to and spent more money. It is true that ERA opponents had resources at their disposal, especially at the beginning of the ratification struggle. Nevertheless, it is not clear that large amounts of money were involved. Anti-ERA organizations had crucial help in winning, however. Their organizations had been established for decades and they had access to resources from the “father” organization as well.

Marilyn Thayer, leader of an anti-ERA organization called, “Louisiana Women Opposed to the ERA,” told of another strategy employed by anti-ERA groups. Anti-ERA groups decided not to combine into one large anti-ERA organization. It is not known where they got this advice, but Thayer said they were told they would be more effective if they remained as separate groups. This gave the appearance not only of volume but of diversity of dissent. Thayer also said civic groups did not want to merge with religious groups.

⁵¹Charlotte Felt Personal Papers; and New Orleans Chamber of Commerce Women’s Auxiliary Papers, Box 10, folders 1 and 2.

Although she was a devout Southern Baptist, Thayer said each group wanted to have a voice. She also indicated they did not want ERA opposition to be viewed as only religious.⁵²

Thayer was born Marilyn Rossbach in New Orleans in 1929. Her father died at the age of 38 when Marilyn was a high school freshman. Marilyn's mother went to work as a switchboard operator for Southern Bell to support her three daughters. Thayer went to business school after graduation instead of college. She went to work for Lykes Brothers Steamship Co. in New Orleans, where she met her husband, a ship designer and Boston, Massachusetts native. Stuart Thayer served for a short time in the Pacific at the end of WWII, repatriating the islands. He entered MIT on the V-12 program and earned a degree in naval architecture. He graduated in 1948 and made his way to New Orleans where he met his future wife. Marilyn and Stuart married in 1950 when she was twenty-one years old. A few months after their marriage, Stuart was called to service in the Korean War and sent to the Naval Shipyard in Boston to refurbish naval destroyers. Marilyn, who had never lived outside New Orleans, attracted a lot of attention because of her home city and state, but she said she grew tired of questions about and allusions to the corruption and depravity of Louisiana politics. She did something unusual about it, however. Thayer said she did not want to have a "D" for Democrat behind her name anymore, so she registered as a Republican. She claimed, however, she did not become involved with politics until the ERA.⁵³

Thayer's volunteer work with the Volunteers of America (VOA) drew her into ERA politics. Religious and social reformers, Ballington and Maud Booth, started the VOA in

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Telephone Interviews with Marilyn Thayer, Lawrenceville, GA, 18 February 2012, 3 July 2013, 18 March 2014, 10 May 2014; and 3 July 2014.

New York City in 1896. Ballington's parents were Salvation Army founders William and Catherine Booth. Like the Salvation Army, the VOA established itself in poor urban communities, in order to help people rejected by society, including ex-prison inmates and "indigent women and children." The VOA started in New Orleans in the 1890s. A benefactor donated a large home on Magazine Street in 1915 to house destitute women and children. The Magazine Street location became a maternity home in 1942. The organization also became a licensed adoption agency in 1948. Thayer had a seat on the local VOA board and was president of its volunteer auxiliary organization throughout the 1970s. She also had two adopted children, a son and a daughter. She did not adopt them through the VOA, but from the Protestant Home for Babies in New Orleans. Thayer, in her early forties at the time, remembered bringing her toddler daughter with her to the Baton Rouge capitol in a stroller to protest against the ERA.⁵⁴

Thayer's opposition to the ERA was linked to her status as an adoptive mother. She said she became sensitive to the issue of abortion, which became tied to the ERA after *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Phyllis Schlafly propagated the idea that passage of the federal amendment would prevent states from making any laws against abortion. Opponents also believed the amendment was part of a larger picture of moral breakdown in society. Thayer remembered being distressed over babies born of drug-addicted mothers at the VOA in the 1970s because they were not "adoptable." She did not think drug addicted mothers should abort their babies, but she, along with other anti-ERA women, wanted a traditional moral order restored. Thayer joined the Chamber Auxiliary to join their effort to stop ERA ratification in

⁵⁴Ibid.; and Background on VOA can be found at "Volunteers of America Greater New Orleans," online at www.voagno.org/Services/Children-Youth-Family/Adoption-Services.

Louisiana. She also helped organize and lead a New Orleans chapter of an ad hoc anti-ERA group called “Louisiana Women Opposed to the ERA.” This group, however, seemed to do most things in conjunction with the Chamber Women’s Auxiliary.⁵⁵

The Chamber Auxiliary’s fight against the ERA drew other women besides Thayer, including Romelia (Mel) Boyer Schiro. Born in 1939, Schiro grew up on 6th street, in the Irish Channel neighborhood of New Orleans. Opinions vary on its exact boundaries, but it has been described as bounded by Magazine Street to the north, First Street to the east and Toledano Street to the west. The Irish Channel became home to Irish immigrants in the early to mid nineteenth-century. Although known as a working class enclave, Schiro’s father worked for Hunt-Wesson Foods, which gave him the ability to offer his family a solid middle-class life. She remembered her father took his family to New Orleans’ best restaurants, including Antoinettes and Galatoires, as part of his job.⁵⁶

After graduation from Redemptorist High School, Schiro attended classes at University of New Orleans and Loyola University of New Orleans. She did not graduate from college, but went to work for the Boeing Corporation. The Boeing Corporation was responsible for building the Saturn V booster rocket, which launched the first landing on the moon in 1967. Schiro recalled exciting years in which she worked with almost one hundred men and had her own government security clearance. She enjoyed an active social life as well. A self professed 1960s version of a “party girl,” Mel loved going out, dressing stylishly, and “playing the field” romantically. Nevertheless, she had a strict Catholic

⁵⁵information from copies of materials from Charlotte Felt’s scrapbook, including articles in El Dorado *Arkansas Daily News*, 20 October 1972 and Nancy Stevens, “Women Educate Solons On Bill: Louisiana Group Tells Men ERA is Dangerous Proposal,” *Jackson Daily News*, 18 January 1973.

⁵⁶Mel Schiro, interview by Yvonne Brown, July 16, 2014, New Orleans, La., Mel Schiro, telephone interviews with author, July 2; and August 27, 2014.

upbringing and expected to marry and settle down. She stayed single, however, until she was almost thirty years old. Despite enjoying her life as a single career girl, Schiro said she realized in her late 20s she “had to get off the merry-go-round, because she would not be young and pretty forever.” She had been engaged several times, reportedly breaking off the engagements just weeks shy of the wedding ceremony.⁵⁷

Mel seemed to meet her match in Gasper Schiro, however. She said they met at Philips Pizza in the Irish Channel. Mel, accustomed to receiving a lot of attention, noted that when Gasper walked through the door, people flocked to him. After an initial bit of pique, she realized he was handsome, popular, and a “practicing Catholic,” which was very important to her. They married in July 1969, and Gasper’s cousin, Victor H. Schiro, the mayor of New Orleans, attended the reception in the newly renovated historic Gallier Hall. Gasper, an attorney, would be elected the city’s “Register of Conveyances” in 1978, and would become New Orleans’ longest running registrar, holding the position until 2008. Schiro also became the leader of the Regular Democratic Organization (RDO), which had been in existence since 1877. This political organization had once dominated Louisiana politics, particularly at the beginning of the twentieth-century. Although the RDO did not have the same level of political clout by the 1970s, it was still an influential organization. Mel put her energy into becoming a social and political asset to her husband.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Mel Schiro, interview by Yvonne Brown, July 16, 2014, New Orleans, La., Mel Schiro, telephone interviews with author, July 2; and August 27, 2014.

⁵⁸Ibid; and John Kelly, “1969: Schiros Meet at Gallier Hall,” *Times Picayune* online magazine NOLA.com, July 11, 2010, access www.nola.com/living/index.ssf/2010/07/1969_schiros_meet_at_gallier_h.html, for New Orleans political history see Edward F. Haas, *Mayor Victor H. Schiro: New Orleans in Transition, 1961-1970* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014).

In her words, a chance encounter at the state capitol in Baton Rouge changed her life forever. Schiro, who said she could get ready to go anywhere at a moment's notice, dressed and coifed impeccably, remembered the day her husband told her they would be leaving for Baton Rouge momentarily for the beginning of the legislative session in 1972. Mel, who loved stylish clothes, recalled she wore a "beautiful baby blue dress" that day to see their friends, in particular, Frank Marullo, who had just been elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives. As she and Gasper talked to Marullo, she said her attention fixed on a group of women entering the building. Schiro expressed shock at their appearance. She said they looked like "gollywogs," because they had unkempt hair and wore masculine looking slacks. Gollywogs were black ragdoll figures depicted in a children's book from the late nineteenth-century. According to Schiro, she had "never seen women like that—that's why we didn't have a name for it."⁵⁹

As she turned to Marullo, Schiro asked, "Who are those women; what do they want?" Marullo replied, "Something called the ERA for women." When she asked further, "What is it," Marullo replied, "I don't know; nobody knows." Schiro described this experience as a mental awakening. She said she could foresee the ERA leading to abortion and homosexual marriage. Accordingly, she and Gasper rushed onto the floor of the legislature and started advising their friends to vote against it. In 1972, the full Louisiana Senate and a House committee had just passed the ERA. The Louisiana House defeated the ERA, and it seemed Schiro found a political mission. A short time later, she received a phone call from Jewel Toups, the founder of the Chamber of Commerce Women's Auxiliary. Toups, in her 60s, issued a personal invitation to the younger Schiro to join the

⁵⁹Ibid.

board of the Auxiliary. When Schiro attended her first meeting, she was surprised and gratified to hear Charlotte Felt and Carmelite Salassi lay out plans to defeat the ERA.⁶⁰

In an interview years later, Schiro reflected on the reasons they prevailed and the nature of political power during that time period. She, as well as many of her Auxiliary friends, was a political and social insider. Schiro married into a political family, but she grew up in the same neighborhood and went to school with members of the Louisiana legislature, including state senators Nat Kiefer and Michael O'Keefe. Her connections were not necessarily based on wealth, but on shared history and values. According to Schiro, the real politics did not happen in public or even in front of the legislature, but after hours, during dinner, drinks, and dancing with political friends of longstanding. Feminists in Louisiana, many of whom were relative newcomers to the state, could not easily or perhaps ever acquire these types of connections.⁶¹

The Farm Bureau Women's Committee and the Chamber of Commerce Women's Auxiliary constituted two of the most influential groups to oppose the ERA in Louisiana. Opposition to the ERA, however, compelled some women to form their own groups. Barbour (Babs) Wilson Minhinnette organized Females Opposed to Equality (FOES) sometime in 1972. Little is known of FOES's organizational structure or how many members it had. The main spokesperson for FOES was Minhinnette. She was born in 1939 in Mobile, Alabama, and died in Denham Springs, La. in 1998 at the age of sixty. Little is known of her educational or personal background, but she was married to Virgil Eldridge Minhinnette and had one son named Thomas. A Louisiana newspaper listed her occupations

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

as housewife and interior decorator. What is known is that Minhinnette was an avowed anti-feminist and a perennial political activist in Louisiana. Minhinnette loved attention and was willing to go to great lengths to attract it. She and her followers picketed the Louisiana Governor's Conference in 1976, and caused an uproar by holding signs calling Edwards a "scalawag," and feminists "carpetbaggers and lesbians."⁶²

Perhaps it was the name of her group or her disdain for feminism that caused news outlets all over the nation to take note of and print her views. A Pennsylvania newspaper quoted Minhinnette, "God created men and women differently. Man will have decreed by law that God made a mistake and in fact men and women are the same." She went on further to say, the ERA would "deprive women of deferential and preferential treatment. The gals would not be babied as much as some gallant employers have allowed—such as special rest or meal periods, special comfort facilities for women, restrictions on weightlifting, and shorter workdays." The *Iowa City Press-Citizen* printed a quote from Minhinnette which read, this "amendment seeks to repeal nature."⁶³

The Louisiana media also solicited Minhinnette for interviews and sought her participation in public debates. In a debate against Roberta Madden in front of the False River Rotary Club, Minhinnette ran through a laundry list of objections to ERA, which ranged from women in the military sharing foxholes and showers with men to fears of Communism and government mandated day care centers. She said, "In all of the Communist societies there is equality between the sexes; women in Communist countries do the work of

⁶²Barbour (Babs) Wilson Minhinnette obituary, Mobile County, Ala., 1998.

⁶³*The Daily Courier*, Connellsville, Pa., 12 April, 1972, Lyle Denniston, *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, Iowa City, Iowa, 20 April, 1972.

men while their children are in government-run day care centers where they are indoctrinated into Communist ways.” As for foxholes, Minhinette quoted her 17 year-old son who did not want women in the fox-hole with him, “messing things up.” When asked about the husband as head of the family, Minhinette responded, “What’s wrong with that: Someone’s got to be the head or you end up with a two-headed monster. Anyway, she winked slyly, if a woman works it right she can be the boss.”⁶⁴

However, as time went on, Minhinette’s darker side emerged. In 1977, she became affiliated with a group called the Christian Defense League (CDL), an anti-Semitic, white supremacist, and anti-federal government group. James K. Warner, a disciple of the Christian Identity movement, established the CDL in Metairie, Louisiana, in 1976. Christian Identity was an ideology predicated on the idea that white North Americans were the true descendants of the tribes of Israel. Its adherents believed conspiratorial theories that the Jews wanted to establish one world government. They also believed African-Americans were an inferior race and opposed equal rights for homosexuals. Many were also holocaust deniers. Warner came to Louisiana from California, at the behest of his friend, Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, to establish a “New Christian Crusade Church.” His church, however, was not a church in a traditional sense, but a front for recruitment to the CDL and for the “Sons of Liberty,” a mail order business that specialized in racist and anti-Semitic

⁶⁴Joe Loupe, “Proposed Equal Rights Amendment Is Debated,” *Point Coupee Banner*, 3 April 1975.

literature.⁶⁵

By the late 1970s, Minhinette was heavily involved with the CDL. Newspapers as far away as *The Daily News* of Huntingdon, Pa., reported a protest by Minhinette and ten members of the CDL in 1978. They gathered at an NBC affiliate station in Baton Rouge to protest the airing of a miniseries on the Holocaust. The protestors waved Confederate flags and Minhinette told a reporter, “We call it ‘Hoaxacost.’ Six million Jews being gassed is pure fiction. There weren’t even 6 million Jews over there at the time. The Jews are doing everything they can to extinguish Christianity. They have unmitigated gall.” Minhinette also continued to protest faithfully against feminism and the ERA at every opportunity. She and members of the CDL protested at the IWY conference in Houston in November of 1977.⁶⁶

Newspapers reported that twenty “extremists” under the leadership of Babs Minhinette, “flaunted signs reading, ‘who needs Jews, Dikes, Abortion, and Communism.’” When conference participants asked them to leave, a fight broke out and several people were struck in the face and fell to the ground. Minhinette demanded police protection and told police “we stayed completely silent and were assaulted and attacked by Commies and queers.” Minhinette’s incendiary rhetoric and confrontational tactics always garnered

⁶⁵Steven E. Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History* (ABC-CLIO, 2011), 139-149, Arthur E. Geringer, *Terrorism: From One Millennium to the Next* (Lincoln, NE: Writers Club Press, an affiliate of iUniverse, Inc., 2002), 422-423, Michael Barkun, “Essay: The Christian Identity Movement,” published online by Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), accessed online at www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/ideology/christian-identity/the-christian-identity-movement; and Karen Turni Bazile, “Neighbors Surprised at Racist Operation: Storefront’s Activities Low-Key Until Wreck,” *Times* (New Orleans, La.) *Picayune*, August 1, 2003, found online at www.religionnewsblog.com/3885/neighbors-surprised-at-racist-operation.

⁶⁶“Nightmare of Nazi Death Camps: Holocaust Not Planned to Entertain Viewers,” *The Daily News*, Huntingdon, Pa., 17 April 1978.

media attention, but it is difficult to know how much influence she had on the ERA defeat in Louisiana. Leaders of the mainstream women's groups did not seem to have anything to do with her, and she placed herself apart from them. In reference to anti-ERA and anti-feminist women, Minhinette told a Louisiana reporter she was sad that other protesters in Houston "did not have the guts to go to the convention center and face the enemy. What if our forefathers had tried to win the American revolutionary war away from the battle?"⁶⁷

ERA proponents seemed unprepared for the organized opposition of Louisiana women. Some attributed the ERA opposition to moneyed business interests, emotionalism, and women's ignorance of their second class status. Louisiana anti-ERA women, especially from the Farm Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce Auxiliary, were motivated by their own reasons to oppose the ERA. They believed women would lose perceived privileges, like exemption from the draft, protections within marriage, and the option of being housewives. Because of the efforts of organized anti-ERA women, members of the Louisiana legislature came to believe the ERA would bring about a radical transformation in society, particularly within marriage, the family, and the state's social institutions. This caused many legislators to exercise caution and to reject passage of the ERA. In the following chapter, we will look at religious opposition to the amendment, which was also critical to the ERA defeat. ERA opponents expressed religious objections to the amendment from the beginning. But after the 1973 Supreme Court decision to legalize abortion in all fifty states, the abortion issue occupied a central role in the ERA battle.

⁶⁷"The National Women's Conference: The Historic Meeting in Houston with the \$5 million price tag that you paid for—Was it worth it? Three Women...Three Views," *Gris Gris*, Vol. 5, No. 21, November 30-December 6, 1977; and "Conflict at Conclave," *Houston Chronicle*, November 20, 1977.

CHAPTER 4 WOMEN, RELIGION, AND THE ERA IN LOUISIANA

Opponents of the ERA advanced several types of arguments in opposition to the amendment, including constitutional, legal, and social. Religion, however, became almost inextricably interwoven with opposition to the ERA. This happened on the national level, but was amplified in Louisiana, because of its strong traditions of fundamentalist Protestantism in the north and Catholicism in the southern part of the state. ERA advocates portrayed the amendment as a simple statement of women's legal status under the law, but it became a religious and moral issue for ERA opponents in Louisiana.

This chapter examines the various ways women used their religious beliefs to politicize and organize against the ERA, and the role religion played in its defeat. It also investigates the changing perceptions of gender roles in both the Protestant and Catholic traditions and how these perceptions shaped ERA opposition. It is important to note that there was no monolithic view on the ERA within the state's two largest religious traditions—Protestantism and Catholicism. A few Protestant denominations supported the amendment, but many did not. Catholics, as well, occupied both sides of the debate. Protestant opposition to the ERA consisted mostly of fundamentalists and evangelicals. Traditional Catholics, often led by laywomen, formed the locus of Catholic opposition. Evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants used the Bible as a basis for their opposition to the amendment. They interpreted the ERA as antithetical to biblical teachings on appropriate roles for women, not only in marriage, but within society as well.

Catholic women, however, were divided over the amendment. A Catholic laywoman's organization, the Catholic Daughters of the Americas (CDA) opposed the

amendment, but Catholic nuns supported the ERA. Catholic laywomen objected to the ERA for many of the same reasons as Protestant opponents. They thought the ERA would harm the family and hurt women's status as wives and mothers. The support of nuns for the ERA reflected their growing concern for and participation in social justice movements, which accelerated in the 1970s. Many Catholic laywomen and men, however, focused their objections to the ERA on the issue of abortion. Phyllis Schlafly argued the ERA would result in more abortions and enshrine the right to abortion in the Constitution. In addition to the aforementioned purposes, this chapter explores the link between abortion and opposition to the ERA in Louisiana. Religious opposition to the ERA in Louisiana in the 1970s was not an organized political movement of the Religious Right. However, opposition to feminism, the ERA, and abortion brought together a coalition of evangelical Protestants, traditional Catholics, and even Mormons who overlooked their theological and historical differences to defeat the ERA.

One of the greatest difficulties in discussing religion within the context of the politics and culture of the 1970s is defining the use of terms. Words such as fundamentalist, evangelical, and religious right are used interchangeably with little regard for distinctions or historical context. Historian George Marsden provided an essential tool for understanding these terms in his book *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. Although fundamentalists and evangelicals have much in common, and one person can be both, they are not always the same. They are products of different time periods and historical contexts, and they have different emphases.¹

¹George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3-37.

According to Marsden, fundamentalism is a subset of evangelicalism. In his words, “it as a distinct version of evangelical Christianity uniquely shaped by the circumstances of America in the early twentieth century.” In some ways, fundamentalism was more a historical than a theological movement. Fundamentalism arose in the early twentieth-century in reaction to the theory of evolution, a new way of interpreting the Bible called “higher criticism,” increasing secularism, and a loosening of moral standards. Like fundamentalism, evangelicalism is both a theological and social movement. Historians and theologians disagree on the precise definition of what constitutes an evangelical. Generally speaking, however, a common core of beliefs has come to define an evangelical in both a historical and theological perspective. Most evangelicals believe in the truth and divine inspiration of Scripture. They believe faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, through his death, burial, and resurrection, results in salvation. They also believe in a personal conversion experience that results not only in eternal salvation, but a transformed life.²

An evangelical feels compelled to tell others the “good news” of his or her salvation and to influence the society for good. In the minds of evangelicals, Christianity embodied the highest virtues, especially in a republic, because of its emphasis on individual morality and autonomy. Evangelicals were a driving force behind abolition, one of the nineteenth century’s great reform movements.

As historian Grant Wacker pointed out, however, evangelicals were not theocrats. Wacker argued that evangelicals were heirs of two opposing American traditions. One he

²Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 3, George Marsden, “The Evangelical Denomination,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden, vii-x (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984). In his essay, Marsden defines evangelicals as Christians who typically emphasize 1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture; 2) the real, historical character of God’s saving work recorded in Scripture; 3) eternal salvation only through personal trust in Christ; 4) the importance of evangelism and missions; and 5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life.

called the “custodial ideal.” The custodial ideal assumed that “society is organic and that civil authorities have a custodial responsibility for the spiritual as well as the physical well being of the organism.” Wacker called the other tradition the “plural ideal.” It assumed a distinction between public interests and private interests, and deemed religion a private concern. Evangelicals negotiate the tension between two opposing but compelling ideals—the idea that transformation of self happens individually and voluntarily, and the duty of the transformed to redeem the culture using Christian morality and principles.³

In spite of or perhaps because of its dual purposes, evangelicalism gave rise to two great social movements—abolition and women’s rights—prior to the Civil War. Yet several culture shocks rattled the foundations of evangelicalism after the war. One shockwave was Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, which changed the epistemology upon which knowledge of the truth about man and God had been based. Prior to this shift in the scientific method and the basis of knowledge, evangelicals held fast to the scientific method of Francis Bacon, a seventeenth century lawyer and philosopher of science. The Baconian method included observation of phenomena and the accumulation and classification of facts, which led to scientific laws of nature and humanity. Evangelicals believed that rational men, through careful observation, could discern truths and laws about God, man, and nature. The Baconian method did not conflict with evangelicals’ supernatural beliefs or their belief in

³Joel A. Carpenter, “From Fundamentalism to the New Evangelical Coalition,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden, 3-5; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 11-14; and Grant Wacker, “Uneasy in Zion: Evangelicals in Postmodern Society,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden, 22-25.

God as creator. Prior to Darwin, evangelicals saw themselves as men of science as well as believers in the supernatural.⁴

Most evangelicals viewed Darwinian evolution with unease, and some viewed it with horror. Man could not be God's special creation if he evolved from simple matter and lower forms of animal life. According to evolutionary theory, life forms progressed to higher levels of complexity. In this view, there was no "fall of man" in the Garden of Eden, nor was there any need of redemption. Nevertheless, to evangelicals, it was evolution that was theoretical, idealistic, and irrational. It seemed rational that man was a distinct and superior creature, far above animals. Also it seemed obvious that man was corrupt and in need of redemption. Evangelicals believed in social progress and improvement, but for them it was connected to spiritual awakening. These critical differences in views regarding science, the natural world, and the structure of society lingered well into the 20th century. Evangelical opponents of the ERA in the 1970s believed it was obvious that men and women were created differently. In their minds, the ERA would eliminate laws based on gender distinctions. To them, it seemed idealistic to the point of irrationality for the law to recognize no difference between the sexes.⁵

Other theories besides evolution challenged biblical orthodoxy in the late nineteenth century. A view of biblical interpretation called "higher biblical criticism" came from Europe, primarily from Germany. German biblical critics stripped the Bible of its supernatural origins and denied the miraculous nature of its content. They believed it was of

⁴Mark A. Knoll, "The Evangelical Mind," in *The Evangelical Landscape: Essays on the American Evangelical Tradition*, ed. Garth Rosell, 20-23 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996); and Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 7-8, 13-17, 55-56, 110-115.

⁵Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 19-20, 120-123.

human origin, a product of culture and history. According to Canon Dyson Hague, an essayist in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, the new criticism viewed the “religion of Israel as a naturalistic evolution from heathendom.” The stories of the Bible were not literally true, but produced by men to explain natural phenomena or to reflect cultural needs. These views were not widely held among the general populace in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, evolution and biblical criticism undermined belief in the literal truth of the Bible and its authority as a blueprint for structuring society, especially in the universities and among intellectuals.⁶

Fundamentalism as a movement came into being in the first two decades of the 20th century. Marsden defined a fundamentalist as “an evangelical who is angry about something.” He explained further, “A fundamentalist is an evangelical who is militant in opposition to liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores, such as those associated with ‘secular humanism.’” Fundamentalists no longer felt at home in a society that denied the truth of Scripture, the judgment of God, or the pride and excesses of fallen men. WWI provided justification for fundamentalists’ critique of evolution, biblical criticism, and cultural modernism. According to fundamentalists, death and destruction on a horrifying scale were the logical outcome of modern nihilism and Darwinian materialism.

⁶George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 14-15, 32-34; and Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 61, 105, 120-121, 148-150; information on “higher criticism” from *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, eds. A. C. Dixon and Reuben A. Torrey, first published as a series of essays from 1910-1915 by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, re-issued in 4 volumes in 1917, Canon Dyson Hague, MA, Rector of the Memorial Church, London, Ontario, Lecturer in Liturgics and Ecclesiology, Wycliffe College, Toronto, Canada, “The History of the Higher Criticism,” Vol. 1 Ch. 1, p. 5.

Fundamentalists, feeling powerless to stop the ravages of unbelief, theological liberalism, and social licentiousness, took a combative stance toward the culture.⁷

Despite the fight to remain culturally relevant, fundamentalism became marginalized in the 1920s. After the Scopes “monkey trial” in 1925, fundamentalism seemed dead, at least outside the South and in parts of rural America. The well-known populist William Jennings Bryan attempted to defend the literal truth of biblical stories like the creation of Adam and Eve and Noah and the flood, but Clarence Darrow made him an object of derision. Fundamentalism became associated with being anti-intellectual, unsophisticated, uneducated, and economically disadvantaged. But as history would show, reports of the death of fundamentalism and evangelicalism turned out to be premature.⁸

Evangelicalism made a comeback during and after WWII. According to Marsden and other religious historians, fundamentalism did not disappear; it adapted. Evangelicals and fundamentalists showed the ability not only to refocus their message, but also to use cultural and technological innovations. Evangelicals shifted their focus to the West, the South, the middle United States, and the suburbs. Because the name “fundamentalist” lay in disrepute, “evangelical” became the preferred term. Even so, the new evangelicals adopted a more optimistic message, with an emphasis on saving souls and avoiding controversy. Using

⁷Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 1-6, Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, Second edition, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 118-123, 146-164, Grant Wacker, “Uneasy in Zion: Evangelicals in Postmodern Society,” in *Evangelicals and Modern America*, ed. By George Marsden, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 17-28; and Martin E. Marty, “Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon,” in *Evangelicals and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden, 56-68. The concept and development of fundamentalism is associated with the publication of a massive volume devoted to defending the faith called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, edited by A. C. Dixon and Reuben A. Torrey. The *Fundamentals* was a compilation of essays by theologians and preachers, first published in twelve paper bound volumes from 1910-1915. Two California based oil millionaire brothers, Lyman and Milton Stewart, financed the project. The word fundamentalist was coined in 1920.

⁸Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 184-195; and Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 59-61.

media innovations like radio and, by the 1950s, television, evangelicals reached a mass audience that responded in the midst of economic depression and war. In the 1940s, Charles Fuller’s “Old Time Revival Hour,” had the largest radio audience in the nation. Evangelists started holding mass youth rallies in the 1940s in big cities like New York and Chicago. The Youth for Christ movement began in 1945, and Billy Graham, a graduate of Wheaton College, became its first full-time evangelist.⁹

Graham epitomized a new evangelical for a new age. He appealed to middle-America, was politically non-partisan, and though a Southern Baptist, he deemphasized denominational ties. Ironically, the new evangelicalism benefitted from fundamentalists’ marginalization. Fundamentalists had begun establishing their own colleges, seminaries, and independent ministries in the late nineteenth-century. The early fundamentalists viewed themselves as outsiders to the prevailing culture. In many ways, their new institutions, which were created to uphold traditional Christian beliefs and values, were counter-cultural and anti-institutional. Their message promoted an emotional experience of conversion and sanctification. Evangelicals had always believed that ordinary people could know the Bible, but as never before, the average person believed in their own ability to interpret Scripture. The traits of fundamentalists, that they were anti-institutional, willing to follow iconic ministers and ministries, and individualistic, helped pave the way for ministers like Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority.¹⁰

⁹Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 68-82.

¹⁰Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 76-82; John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), Preston Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007); and Alex R. Schafer, *CounterCultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

Opinions differ on the reasons for the rise of the religious right. In general, many historians think white, suburban, middle-class Protestants lashed out at their perceived losses in political, social, and economic status. Just as evolution and biblical criticism had done a century earlier, the social revolution of the 1960s challenged traditional religious beliefs and institutions. As individuals searched for meaning, fulfillment, and new ways of living ethical lives, Christianity came to be considered repressive and oppressive. Some viewed historic Christianity as a tool of social, legal, and political inequality, which further tainted its legitimacy. Perceived attacks from the outside were accompanied by perceived attacks from within. In Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church, sacred rituals, liturgy, and structures of authority were democratized in order to become culturally relevant. According to this view, an organized religious right formed the vanguard in the 1970s in opposition to secularization, the decline of Christian influence on the law, morality, and culture, and theological liberalism.¹¹

Despite the perceived war on religion, an astonishing variety of spiritual movements arose in the 1970s. Spirituality in the 1970s, however, looked different than it did in previous generations. Interest in yoga, Native American mysticism, and Eastern religions rose in nearly all sectors of society. These “alternative” religions achieved unheard of levels of legitimacy in the 1970s among average people. A corresponding spiritual revival within the evangelical world also began to take place. The candidacy of Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter captured the national imagination, as he introduced the language of being “born again” to people all over the country. A mustached and Hawaiian shirt wearing campus

¹¹Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), Martin Durham, *The Christian Right, the far right and the boundaries of American Conservatism* (NY: Manchester University Press, 2000), xi-xiii, 1-42, 84-125.

minister named Hal Lindsey stunned the world in 1970 with a book of biblical prophecy called *The Late Great Planet Earth*. The book introduced Armageddon, the Rapture, and the Anti-Christ to the popular culture. Even in the midst of this religious explosion, however, another way of divining truth began to supersede traditional religion.¹²

Sociologist and philosopher, Philip Rieff, called it *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, in a book published in 1966. According to Rieff and others, therapy became a type of secular religion for the age. People from all walks of life, including working class men and women, went into therapy, which might range from psychoanalysis to simple talking, either with professionals or in peer groups. On the one hand, the ascendance of the therapeutic culture de-mystified mental illness and democratized access to treatment. On the other hand, a growing contingent of critics became worried that people were turning inward too much, becoming selfish, and abdicating their responsibilities to families, communities, and even their country.¹³

A number of social critics and even historians began to think there was something pathological about the 1970s. If the 1980s became the decade of greed, the 1970s became the decade of narcissism. Journalist and author Tom Wolfe wrote an article called “The ‘Me’ Decade and the Third Great Awakening” in 1976, and gave the iconic name to the decade. Wolfe began his essay by describing an Erhard Seminars Training (EST) seminar. Werner Erhard, an encyclopedia salesman originally named Jack Rosenberg, created EST.

¹²Paul Boyer, “America’s Doom Industry,” *Frontline Magazine*, online www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/explanation/doomindustry.html; and Hal Lindsey and Carla C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 1-24.

¹³ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006, 40th Anniversary edition, original publish 1966), Philip Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 1995).

Erhard changed his name when he abandoned his wife and children for another woman in the early 1960s. After moving to California, Erhard had an epiphany while driving on the California freeway. Erhard suddenly “got it,” after years of spiritual searching. He summarized what he got with the phrase, “What is, is. What ain’t, ain’t.”¹⁴

Erhard parlayed his revelation into a successful business by creating weekend training seminars, so others could experience their own spiritual epiphanies. Mostly white and middle class people paid \$250 to spend sixty hours over two weekends locked in a hotel ballroom with hundreds of strangers. Highlights of the seminar included public confession of long-held secrets and sins. Wolfe referred to this new quest for spiritual fulfillment as a third great awakening. This great awakening, however, bore little resemblance to previous religious revivals. People sought not to remake society, but to remake themselves and find a meaning and purpose for their lives.¹⁵

Historian Christopher Lasch also wrote an unlikely best-seller that became a defining work on the 1970s, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979). He linked historical cultural trends to the evolution of a distinct late twentieth-century personality type, which came to be known as the narcissist. In the midst of the 1970s, Lasch and others noticed a profound change in personality development and in people’s ability to form relationships. According to Lasch,

¹⁴Tom Wolfe, “The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” *New York Magazine*, August 23, 1976. Essay also appears in Tom Wolfe, *The Purple Decades: A Reader* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), 265-296. John Johns, “Interview with Werner Erhard,” *The California Magazine PSA*, May 1976. Interview can be acquired for fee at scrib.com. Online access to the history of EST and the Werner Erhard interview can be obtained at www.erhardseminarstraining.com under the title “Tribute to EST.”

¹⁵Wolfe, “The Me Decade;” and Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*, 40th anniversary edition (Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI), 2006). Tom Wolfe, “The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” *New York Magazine*, August 23, 1976. Essay also appears in Tom Wolfe, *The Purple Decades: A Reader* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), 265-296. John Johns, “Interview with Werner Erhard,” *The California Magazine PSA*, May 1976. Interview can be acquired for fee at scrib.com. Online access to the history of EST and the Werner Erhard interview can be obtained at www.erhardseminarstraining.com under the title “Tribute to EST.”

in the early twentieth-century, mental patients tended to suffer from extreme guilt and phobias. In the late twentieth-century, however, they complained of feelings of emptiness, meaninglessness, and diffuse and unspecific depression and anxiety. The most telling characteristics of the new narcissist were shallowness, the inability to make lasting relationships, the desire to repudiate the past, and the lack of investment in the future.¹⁶

Lasch's methodology was controversial. Using the language of psychoanalysis, he analyzed the nature of the subconscious bond between infant and parents, primarily the mother. He argued in part that late modern capitalistic society created absent fathers, leaving the primary responsibility of raising children to the mother. Mothers, however, were cut off from traditional support and subjected to a barrage of professional advice and consumer advertising. The mental state of many mothers became one of anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy, which expressed itself in emotional detachment from the child. Children turned their rage inward, because they could not reconcile their anger at the mother who would not or could not meet their emotional needs, yet gave them solicitous but superficial attention. The narcissist became a person who feared intimacy, could not trust, and manipulated others.¹⁷

Lasch's book received a great deal of criticism. His Freudian language of id, ego, and superego, seemed outdated in an age of popular psychology and slogans. Lasch's book angered feminists in particular, because he appeared to blame feminism for the decline in harmonious family relationships and the escalating war between the sexes. Nevertheless,

¹⁶Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 1-50, 71-90.

¹⁷Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 71-90, 101-115.

critics have taken Lasch's arguments out of context. He placed overall blame for the development of the narcissistic personality on the moral and social decline caused by late stage capitalism.¹⁸

This analysis of the culture of narcissism may seem to have little to do with the ERA. Feminism, unlike other social movements such as Civil Rights, became linked with this presumed culture of narcissism in subtle yet definitive ways. The idea that feminists were in a minority of unhappy, angry, and dissatisfied women was common. Louisiana's own Louise Johnson placed ERA supporters into a special group of "unhappy women." Some male Louisiana legislators seemed to view the ERA almost like Sigmund Freud, when the psychiatrist asked his "What do women want?" question. In a newspaper article introducing the ERA to the Louisiana public, reporter Joan Kent interviewed legislators about their thoughts on the proposed amendment. Senator Charles G. Smithers said, "If this is what women want (though I can't imagine why) they ought to have it." Leaders and theorists of the second wave feminist movement like the women's liberationists had linked the personal with the political. In the opinions of some feminists like Dottie Zellner, however, too much emphasis on the personal made feminism seem more like therapy than a political equality movement. It also opened a door for opponents of feminism to view the demands of feminists as individual needs and wants, many of which they deemed selfish.¹⁹

¹⁸Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 319-349, 17-26, 28-50.

¹⁹"Ratification of the ERA: Will the Louisiana Legislature Keep Step With Social Change and Social Progress?" in *Louisiana Women: A Newsletter*, Volume 1, No. 3, April, 1972, Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Department of Labor, Women's Division, P O Box 44063, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, copies of this newsletter can be found in Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Collection, Box 8, folder 35; and Quote from Sigmund Freud in Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work* (NY: Basic Books, 1981, first ed. 1953).

ERA opponents in Louisiana began to raise religious and moral objections to the amendment early in the state's ratification campaign. Religious beliefs motivated people for and against the ERA, but those who opposed the ERA for religious reasons seemed to be the most vocal. In 1972, at the first hearing in the Louisiana House of Representatives, several male representatives brought God into the debate. Representative Julius Blount of Walker, a Southern Baptist, chose to read from chapter three of the book of Genesis. In this chapter, God judged Adam and Eve after he discovered they had listened to the serpent and eaten the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Blount quoted from verse sixteen of chapter three, which reads, "To the woman He said: I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you." Blount quoted the "he shall rule over thee" verse with emphasis, and ended his speech with "This God said." It was not only men who used the biblical creation story to oppose the ERA, however. At the 1974 Louisiana House ERA committee hearing, Mrs. Foster Judlin of New Orleans told the gathering, "Today the man is and should be the lord and master of the household, as surely God intended because God created Adam first."²⁰

Many fundamentalists justified the subordinate role of women in marriage and society because Eve believed the serpent's lie and persuaded her husband to follow her. According to the Bible, Adam knew what the serpent was doing, but he went along with his wife. Fundamentalists linked this passage to the apostle Paul's New Testament teaching in I

²⁰Bill McMahon, "Rights Ratification Rejected in House," Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 30 June 1972; Deidre Cruse, "ERA Apparently Loses Out Again," Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 20 June 1974; bible passages taken from "The Woman's Study Bible," published in 1995 and 2006 by Thomas Nelson, Nashville, Tn., ed. Dorothy Kelley Patterson; translation is New King James Version, published by Thomas Nelson, Nashville, Tn., copyright 1982.

Timothy: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” Louise Johnson, a devout Baptist, placed a sign on her desk in the Louisiana House of Representatives, which featured a reptile and the words “Kill that Snake.” Johnson did not explain the meaning of her sign, but it implied that the ERA represented the serpent’s attempt to once again trick women into believing a lie.²¹

Nevertheless, many Southern Baptists and evangelicals drew a distinction between the religious and secular worlds, and had no problem with women in the workplace. Many evangelicals also either ignored or modified Paul’s mandates. According to historian Margaret Bendroth, for most evangelicals in the twentieth-century, their approach to questions regarding women’s roles was ad-hoc. However, within the crucible of cultural change in the 1970s, particularly women’s liberation, they were forced to confront the “woman question.” Bendroth argued that this forced a delineation of women’s role among evangelicals.²²

Bendroth also maintained the biblical basis for women’s subordination shifted after WWII, arguing that evangelicals began to cite the order of creation, rather than Eve’s falling prey to temptation, as justification for womanly submission. In the creation order, God made Eve from Adam’s rib. Eve was not only made from Adam, she was made for him. This gave impetus to what is known as a complementarian view, in which God created woman to complement and to complete man. In 1973, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) passed a

²¹Biblical passage from I Timothy, Chapter 2, Verse 12, *New King James Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006).

²²Margaret Bendroth, “The Search for ‘Women’s Role’ in American Evangelicalism, 1930-1980,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden, 122-134.

“Resolution on the Place of Women in Christian Service.” It asserted that “most women’s liberation movements had attacked the scriptural precepts of women’s place in society.” The SBC, therefore, resolved to “reaffirm God’s explicit Word that 1) man was not made for the woman, but the woman for the man; 2) the woman is the glory of man; 3) woman would not have existed without man, neither would man have existed without the woman; they are dependent one upon the other—to the glory of God.”²³

This complementarian view was not new. Nineteenth and twentieth century women reformers, many of them evangelicals, used gender differences to justify their unique roles in social reform. However, by the 1970s, goals shifted from looking outward to reforming society, to looking inward at reforming marriage, motherhood, and family life. According to religious historian Elizabeth Flowers, what became known as “women’s ministry,” became popular in evangelical churches. Flowers argued the women’s ministry offered a “submissive model of womanhood” to combat the growing threat of feminism. These ministries included classes for women that taught Bible study, how to communicate with husbands, how to manage children, and even “Christian” dieting. In accommodation to a culture that began to uplift self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and emotional well-being, ministries to women represented efforts to make the roles of wife and mother emotionally, psychologically, and even sexually fulfilling.²⁴

²³Bendroth, “The Search for Women’s Role in American Evangelicalism, 1930-1980,” 122-134; and Southern Baptist Convention, SBC Resolutions, “Resolution on the Place of Women in Christian Service,” June 1973, Portland, Oregon; accessed at <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp>.

²⁴Elizabeth Hill Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power since World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Charity R. Carney, Review of *Into the Pulpit*, by Elizabeth Hill Flowers, published on H-Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences, H-South, January, 2013.

Despite strong biblical rhetoric, Southern Baptists did not take an official denominational stand against the ERA in the 1970s. The SBC did not make a formal resolution against the ERA until 1980. By then, they had backed down from the strong “order of creation” language of the 1973 resolution. The SBC acknowledged “women today are answering God’s call for service within the home, the church, and the work-a-day world.” They even urged “employers to seek fairness for women in compensation, advancement, and opportunities for improvement.” Nevertheless, the SBC resolved “that this Convention, reaffirming the biblical role which stresses the equal worth but not always the sameness of function of women, does not endorse the Equal Rights Amendment.” This stance of affirming a traditional biblical view of women, yet calling for advancement and equality for women in the workplace, seemed contradictory. The SBC, however, began to articulate a separation of the spiritual roles of women from their secular roles. Women could occupy two different roles and still comply with biblical standards. She could be a CEO, but not pastor her church. This created a duality between the church’s hardening political positions regarding women’s roles and their “hands off” attitude regarding women’s private and work lives, which were more fluid than is generally acknowledged.²⁵

The life and career of Louise Johnson illustrated this dichotomy. She had defeated a powerful male incumbent to become the first woman representative from Lincoln and Union Parishes. She was also a successful businesswoman. A Southern Baptist minister in her town criticized and repudiated her, because he thought “a woman had no business getting

²⁵Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution on Women,” June 1980, St. Louis, Missouri; and “Resolution on the Role of Women, June 1981, Los Angeles, California, accessed at <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp>; and Elizabeth Hill Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power since World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

involved in that ‘pit of sin’ down in Baton Rouge.” Johnson, however, rejected his argument. She thought she was perfectly suited as a woman to be in politics as well as business. Nevertheless, Johnson expressed biblical objections to the women’s equality amendment from the beginning. At the first Louisiana House ERA hearing in 1972, Johnson told her fellow legislators, “How many of you are going to be Samsons and have your hair clipped?” Johnson responded in writing to a request from a member of the American Association of University Women in 1973 to support the ERA by making her most famous remark about her position. Johnson responded, “I am a Baptist who believes in the Bible and an orderly fashion of living. I am very disappointed the thinking of your group is so narrow and thoughtless. There are only three groups that stand to profit by the passage of this amendment—the Prostitutes, the Homosexuals, and the Lesbians.” Johnson told a reporter in 1977, “ERA is anti-Christian. I’ve documented it and it goes against my Church’s teachings.” She also said, “If you are a Baptist and you believe the Bible, you can’t pick the scriptures you want to believe. You’ve got to believe it all or none.” The reporter commented that talking about the Bible represented a “new tack” for Johnson.²⁶

Using religious arguments was not a new tack for ERA opponents. As the decade progressed, however, they increasingly focused on moral and religious issues in their opposition to the amendment. The idea the ERA promoted homosexuality and would lead to homosexual marriage became recurrent themes in the Louisiana ERA struggle. Phyllis

²⁶Bill McMahon, “Rights Ratification Rejected in House,” *Morning* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, June 30, 1972, Guy Coates, “Women’s Rights Legislation Again Facing La. Lawmakers,” *Baton Rouge State Times*, 13 April 1977, Louise Johnson, unpublished personal memoir titled “The Great Upset of 1971: A Woman Wins a Seat in the Legislature,” box 3, folder 1, Louise Johnson Papers, Prescott Memorial Library, Louisiana Tech University, “As Job Remarks in the Old Testament—Oh That Mine Adversary Has Written a Book,” Baton Rouge Chapter of National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. II, No. 4, April 1973, box 8, folder 39, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Schlafly, a constitutional lawyer, propagated arguments linking the ERA to a moral “Pandora’s box.” She argued that if the amendment became part of the Constitution, states would lose the right to make laws concerning abortion, marriage, and rape.²⁷

Nevertheless, the abortion issue did not seem to be at the forefront for evangelical Protestants through most of the 1970s. Protestants seemed more concerned that the ERA would promote homosexuality and lead to state sanctioned homosexual marriage. Evangelical anti-ERA activists in Louisiana approved of a campaign by Anita Bryant, a singer and Florida citrus growers’ spokeswoman, to deny rights to homosexuals in Florida in 1977. Bryant, a former beauty queen from Oklahoma, became famous in the 1960s for her wholesome beauty, powerful singing voice, patriotism, and all-American image. After winning second runner up in the Miss America pageant of 1959 as Miss Oklahoma, Bryant recorded hits like “Paper Roses,” toured with Bob Hope in Vietnam, and sang the National Anthem at the Super Bowl. She became the official spokeswoman for the Florida Citrus Commission in 1969 and filmed commercials with the famous line, “A day without Florida orange juice is like a day without sunshine.” Bryant, a devout evangelical, embarked in on a local and national campaign against homosexual rights in 1977. Her home county, Dade, had enacted an ordinance prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals. Bryant, using her fame, led a successful effort to repeal the ordinance by portraying it as a threat to children.

²⁷Bill McMahon, “Rights Ratification Rejected in House,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 30 June 1972, Millie Hall, “Defeat of ERA Is Not Feared,” *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 24 May 1974.

Bryant went national with a campaign called “Save our Children,” in which she said homosexuals would recruit children, because they could not reproduce.²⁸

Louisiana ERA opponents were aware of Bryant’s campaign, and used the issue of homosexual rights in their opposition to the ERA. Marilyn Thayer, who was a member of the New Orleans Chamber Women’s Auxiliary, referred to Bryant in 1977 at an ERA hearing. Thayer, a Southern Baptist, praised the “referendum now being held in Miami, Florida, attempting to repeal equal rights for homosexuals” to a newspaper reporter. “If ERA is passed, voters would not be able to make that decision,” she said. “The only ones to benefit from this (ERA) would be homosexuals.” Homosexuality and lesbianism in particular formed an undercurrent to the debate that elicited fear among traditionalists, especially over changes in gender role identity. In an interview, Thayer remembered “screaming lesbians” who accosted her as she entered the Louisiana State Capitol in Baton Rouge for an ERA hearing. According to Thayer, as she pushed a stroller carrying her adopted baby, they yelled at her, “If you haven’t tried it, don’t knock it.” Thayer did not explain why she brought her toddler to the capitol. It may have been a matter of necessity; nevertheless, women pushing strollers presented a visual tableau. For opponents, the ERA presented a choice between screaming lesbians or motherhood and the traditional family.²⁹

The argument that ERA would de-criminalize rape became part of the moral mix of objections to the amendment. ERA antagonists viewed rape as a crime of lust, not power. They argued states would no longer be able to prosecute men for rape, especially in cases of

²⁸Robert Medley, “Anita Bryant: Sunny Side of Life,” *NewsOK: Oklahoma News, Sports, Weather*, Patrick McCreery, “Miami Vice: Anita Bryant, Gay Rights, and Child Protectionism,” Phd. Dissertation, NYU, 2009.

²⁹Bill McMahon, “ERA Resolution Debated by Panel,” *Baton Rouge State Times*, 7 June 1977, Telephone Interviews with Marilyn Thayer, to her home in Atlanta, Georgia, 18 February 2012 and 3 July 2013; and interview with Charlotte Felt, Baton Rouge, La.

seduction or sex with minors. In a public debate, Babs Minhinnette, president of FOES (Females Opposed to Equality), said she feared “the ERA will wipe out seduction and rape laws as they now exist.”

The issue of unisex bathrooms was also related to fears regarding sex and promiscuity. The idea of male and female mixing in an intimate environment elicited an almost hysterical reaction from at least one Louisiana legislator. For Rep. Thomas Rice of Jefferson Parish, it connoted fears of rape and the inability of men to protect their wives and daughters. On the Louisiana House floor, he said he was “frightened to death” of the potential scenario of “women going into a dressing room with a man, or of a man going into a woman’s dressing room.” He vowed to take it all the way to the Supreme Court “if denied,” presumably meaning if the amendment passed the Louisiana House.³⁰

Individuals from denominations like the Southern Baptist and the Church of Christ often testified before the legislature against the ERA. The United Pentecostals of Louisiana, however, represented one of the largest denominations to oppose the ERA. In some ways, this was unusual. Pentecostals, although fundamentalist in their biblical views, had little to do historically with evangelicals. Pentecostals were exclusivists, because they believed in the necessity of a second “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” as evidence of salvation, along with demonstrable spiritual gifts like “speaking in tongues.” They also believed in separatism from what they considered worldly and sinful habits, like drinking, dancing, and gambling.

³⁰Quote from Rep. Thomas Rice in Bill McMahon, “Rights Ratification Rejected in House,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 30 June 1972, Deidre Cruse, “ERA Apparently Loses Out Again,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 20 June 1974, Susan Finch, “ERA Catfight Erupts at Conference,” *New Orleans States-Item*, 4 June, 1976, Deidre Cruse, “House Committee Kills ERA Despite Arguments,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 12 June 1975; and “Meet with Iberia Solon: Group Pushes for Passage of Equal Rights Amendment,” *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, 15 May 1975; and Quote from Babs Minhinnette in Joe Loupe, “Proposed Equal Rights Amendment Is Debated,” *Point Coupe Banner*, 3 April 1975.

United Pentecostals had strict rules for the conduct of women, prohibiting them from cutting their hair, wearing make-up, wearing pants, and swimming with members of the opposite sex.

However, their conservative views existed in tension with historically-based egalitarian practices regarding women. Pentecostalism was an experiential, populist, and individualistic religion. Its adherents, including women, were expected to manifest specific spiritual gifts such as healing, teaching, preaching, and prophecy. Pentecostals emphasized the egalitarianism of the Holy Spirit, who gave gifts to, and even favored, the poor, the uneducated, and the disenfranchised. Within this culture, women rose to prominence becoming national and world renowned evangelists, preachers, healers, and prophets. Aimee Semple McPherson, who established her own denomination, the Church of the Foursquare Gospel, was a Pentecostal.³¹

According to some Pentecostal historians, however, as Pentecostals became more middle-class after WWII, women's roles began to look more like those adopted by their evangelical counterparts. By the 1970s, Pentecostals found common cause with other evangelicals over issues like women's liberation, abortion, and perceived national moral decline. In Louisiana, representatives of the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI) were politically active in opposing the ERA. Thetus Tenney, the wife of UPCI pastor and minister, T. F. Tenney, led Pentecostals against the ERA. Tenney and her husband returned to their home state of Louisiana in 1976 to pastor his home church in DeRidder. Pastor

³¹Lisa Stephenson, *Dismantling the Dualisms for American Pentecostal Women in Ministry: A Feminist-Pneumatological Approach* (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2011); and Glenda Bridges Mitchell, "Spirit-Filled Women: Louisiana's United Pentecostal Church International and Modern American Culture," Phd. Dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens, Ga., 2003.

Tenney became the District Superintendent for Louisiana in 1978, with oversight over hundreds of ministers. They located at UPCI headquarters in Alexandria, Louisiana. From this post, Thetus Tenney began to build her own ministry to women. She also became involved in the political fight to defeat the ERA.³²

Thetus Tenney came late to the ERA battle in Louisiana, but according to Representative Daniel Richey, she influenced her district representative, John Wyeth (Jock) Scott. Scott, a devout Catholic from Alexandria, was first elected in 1972 with the freshman House class that included Louise Johnson. Scott found common ground with the United Pentecostals on general religious and moral grounds regarding the ERA. His district in Alexandria, however, was also a United Pentecostal stronghold, and the UPCI was the largest Pentecostal denomination in the state.³³

As she remembered her political involvement years later, Tenney admitted she did not remember the specifics of why she had opposed the ERA. She said, “It was the law, the way it was written.” She talked mostly about the differences between the sexes, particularly the “anatomy of a woman.” However, she acknowledged her own ambivalence and that of the Pentecostal Church regarding women’s roles. Tenney said she came from a family that claimed three generations of female preachers—her mother, herself, and her daughter. She remembered her most important work at the time was her mission to women. Tenney inaugurated large women’s conferences at the UPCI owned Tioga Campground outside of Alexandria. It was within this venue that she preached one of her signature messages, called

³²Telephone Interview with Thetus Tenney, to her home in Alexandria, La., 10 July 2013.

³³Oral Interview with Daniel Richey, Baton Rouge, La., 10 May 2013; Obituary of John Wyeth (Jock) Scott, *Alexander Town Talk*, 27 April, 2009.

“The Feminine Side of God.” In this sermon, Tenney portrayed God as neither male nor female, but as having a dual nature with both feminine and masculine traits. In fact, she emphasized the deity’s nurturing and feminine traits. Tenney wanted to reinforce the equality and value of women within Christianity. However, these were complementarian views. As Elizabeth Flowers argued, complementarianism reinforced submissive roles for women by promoting a separate but equal mentality. Nevertheless, Tenney sought to offer an alternative vision for women in order to combat feminism.³⁴

Evangelical Protestants formed the locus of Protestant opposition to the ERA in Louisiana. Their objections to the amendment came in large part from their interpretations of the Bible regarding creation, the roles of men and women, and marriage. Nevertheless there was no organized Protestant opposition. Protestants did not speak or act with one voice. They tended to voice their religious objections as individuals or as emissaries from their local churches.

Catholics also played a pivotal role in the ERA ratification struggle in Louisiana, and were critical factors in the ERA’s defeat. The role of Catholicism and of Catholics, however, is sometimes overlooked in critical analyses of religious opposition to the amendment. In general, scholars have not focused on Catholic opposition to the ERA because the focus has been on the role of Protestant evangelicals in the formation of the religious right. Catholics, nevertheless, were at the forefront of the post WWII conservative revival, particularly as cold warriors. Both Phyllis Schlafly and William F. Buckley were devout Catholics. The connections between their faith and their conservatism, however, did not initially center on moral social issues. They focused on Communism as a corrupt

³⁴Telephone Interview with Thetus Tenney, to her home in Alexandria, La., 10 July 2013.

political, social, and economic system. But Catholic cold warriors also connected Communist atheism to its persecution of dissenting peoples, especially Catholics behind the Iron Curtain. Issues like feminism, the ERA, and abortion became central to Catholics, however, in the 1970s. Among Catholics in Louisiana, these issues caused a divide between laywomen and women religious. In response to women's changing status in the church and in the greater society, a number of women religious, or nuns, embraced feminism and the ERA. Catholic laywomen affirmed traditional church teachings on the role of women and fought against ratification of the ERA in Louisiana.³⁵

In spite of the vigor of the debate, the Catholic Church as a whole did not take an official stand for or against the ERA. The governance of the Catholic Church is hierarchical and it speaks as one voice on matters of faith and practice; therefore, it comes as a bit of a surprise the church took no stand. The diocesan bishops of Louisiana, including the Archbishop of New Orleans, Philip Matthew Hannan (1965-1988), did not make formal statements. In the newspaper of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, *The Clarion Herald*, news about the ERA appeared in scattered articles throughout the 1970s. Most of the articles, however, were general in nature and picked up from national wire services. They printed news such as the ERA time extension passed by Congress in 1979. It also made the paper

³⁵Kenneth L. Grasso, Gerard V. Bradley, and Robert P. Hunt, eds. *Catholicism, Liberalism, and Communitarianism: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the Moral Foundations of Democracy* (Lanham, MD: Bowman & Littlefield, 1995), James Terence Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933-1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), Mark Massa, *The American Catholic Revolution: How the Sixties Changed the Church Forever (USA)* (Oxford University Press, 2010); and Alexandra Elizabeth Michaelides, "Redefining Sisterhood: The New Nuns, Laywomen and Catholic Feminist Activism, 1953-1992," p. 95-100, 2012, *Dissertations*, Paper 311, Loyola University Chicago, <http://ecommons.luc.edu/diss/311>, Frank L. Cocozzelli, "The Politics of Schism in the Catholic Church," *The Public Eye* 24 no. 3 (Fall 2009), www.publiceye.org/magazine/v24n3/politics-schism-catholic-hurch.html, John Hicks, "The Political Subsistence of the Religious Right: Why the Christian Right Survives and Does Not Thrive," *The American Religious Experience*, www.are.as.wvu.edu/jhicks.htm.

when Catholic groups supported the ERA, such as the Canon Law Society of America's (CLSA) endorsement of the ERA in 1979. The endorsement came after two years of debate, but it barely passed. The head of the task force, Father Richard A. Hill, recommended remaining neutral on the ERA. It passed when civil and canon lawyer, Father James Coriden, an ERA supporter, made amendments to the resolution that noted objections to the ERA. The resolution cited objections such as "its effect on abortion laws, the right to privacy, and homosexual marriage." One *Clarion Herald* article reported a national survey that showed a majority of Catholics supported "both the Equal Rights Amendment and a constitutional amendment to 'outlaw' abortion." The substance of these few articles helps answer the question of why Catholic bishops seemed reluctant to take a stand. The ERA stood at the center of a conflict over women's roles in the Catholic Church and society. The biggest problem for the ERA amongst Catholic hierarchy, however, became its perceived link to abortion.³⁶

A transformation for women in the Catholic Church, particularly in the lives of women religious, came from the Catholic ecclesiastical revolution known as Vatican II. Pope John XXIII conceived the idea for the Vatican II Council in 1959. He proposed a council of the "Universal Church," which had two goals, "the adaptation of the Church and of the apostolate to a world undergoing great transformation and a return to unity among

³⁶ "More ERA time backed," 10 November 1977, "Equal Rights Bill Opposed by NCCW," 28 May 1970, "ERA Conference Set for April," 7 April 1974, "ERA, Abortion said Unrelated," 24 June 1976, "Survey Shows Catholics Support ERA," 1977, "Canon Law Group Backs ERA Fight," 8 November 1979, "ERA, Abortion Link Denied," 19 June 1980, "Ruling May Well Seal ERA Doom," 19 April 1984, "Court Ruling Reaction: Pro-Life Leaders Dismayed," 18 January 1979, "Pro-lifers Flex New Muscles in Capitol March," 25 January 1979; Articles are from *The Clarion Herald*: Official Newspaper of the Archdiocese of New Orleans; the archives of the weekly newspapers from the 1970s are held as hard copies at the headquarters of the Archdiocese, which is located at 1000 Howard Ave, Suite 400, New Orleans, La. 70113; current issues of *The Clarion Herald* can be accessed online at <http://www.clarionherald.org>; and Interview with Barbara Bovard, 19 January 2012, Baton Rouge, La.

Christians.” The council opened in Vatican City on October 11, 1962 and ended on December 8, 1965. Pope John XXIII died in office in 1963 and was succeeded by Pope Paul VI. The Council produced thousands of pages of documents, which were divided into three main categories, Constitutions, Declarations, and Decrees. The writings that compelled changes in the lives of women religious came from the Decree called “*Perfectae Caritatis*: Decree on the Adaption and Renewal of Religious Life.”³⁷

The *Perfectae Caritatis* is relatively brief compared to other documents of Vatican II. There seemed to be three main ideas in the document that affected women religious. The first was that religious orders and “institutes,” needed to change with the times. In order to “adapt and renew religious life,” religious orders needed to “return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes,” but also “adapt to the changed conditions of our time.” The decree acknowledged that “institutes had their own characteristics and work” and that the “founders spirit and special aims, as well as sound traditions, should be faithfully held in honor.” Nevertheless, religious orders needed to turn from the insular traditions of the past. The decree mandated:

Institutes should promote among their members an adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times they live in and of the needs of the Church. In such a way, judging current events wisely in the light of faith and burning with apostolic zeal, they may be able to assist men more effectively.

The prescription for fulfilling this mission stated that “the manner of living, praying, and working should be adapted everywhere...to the modern physical and psychological

³⁷Creighton University, *Vatican II*, See “Historical Background of Vatican II,” Opening Speech to the Council,” and under “Documents of Vatican II,” click on Decrees and *Perfectae Caritatis*, all online at www.creighton.edu/vaticanii/documentsofvaticanii/.

circumstances of the members and to the demands of culture, and social and economic circumstances.”³⁸

According to *Perfectae Caritatis*, fulfilling the demands of this new calling necessitated a change in how institutes governed themselves. This led to a second emphasis of the decree, which was a mandate to change the practices of religious orders. “Therefore let constitutions, directories, custom books, books of prayers and ceremonies and such, be suitably re-edited and obsolete laws being suppressed, and be adapted to the decrees of this sacred synod.” Without a doubt, however, the most visible change in religious life came from the decree to adapt the nun’s “habit” to contemporary society. A traditional nun’s habit consisted of layers of voluminous cloth that covered her from head to toe. Only the faces and the hands of most nuns remained exposed. Paragraph seventeen of *Perfectae Caritatis*, however, opened the door to change when it said:

The religious habit, an outward mark of consecration to God, should be simple and modest, poor and at the same (time) becoming. In addition, it must meet the requirements of health and be suited to the circumstances of time and place and to the needs of the ministry involved.

Although the decree was vague, the last line of the order made it clear this change of habit was not voluntary. It said, “The habits of both men and women religious which do not conform to these norms must be changed.”³⁹

Lastly, *Perfectae Caritatis* contained a call for religious orders to become more autonomous in their

³⁸Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, October 28, 1965, *Perfectae Caritatis: Decree on the Adaption and Renewal of Religious Life*, paragraphs 2 and 3, online access at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/councils/v2relig.htm>.

³⁹ *Perfectae Caritatis*, paragraphs 3 and 17, online at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/councils/v2relig.htm>.

decision making and to democratize within their orders. Paragraph four stated: “To establish...adaptation and renewal, to embody it in legislation as well as to make allowances for adequate...experimentation, belongs only to the competent authorities, especially to general chapters. The appropriation of the Holy See or of the local Ordinary must be obtained where necessary according to law. But superiors should take counsel...and hear the members of the order in those things which concern the future well being of the whole institute.

In some ways, the ideas contained in Vatican II’s decrees on religious life hardly seem extraordinary. But they propelled a transformation in the personal and institutional lives of women religious.⁴⁰

In the opinions of some historians, however, the call for women religious to adapt to the modern world began before Vatican II. Roots can be traced back to the “Sister Formation Movement,” which began in the early 1950s. The movement began as a result of a call from the church for nuns to adapt their mission to a changing culture even before the 1960s. Demographic changes brought about by the post WWII boom in the Catholic population prompted the call. Young novitiates, with little formal training, were being sent out as teachers and workers without the necessary spiritual maturity or professional training. Women leaders in religious orders were aware of the pressure on nuns. They demanded and received concessions from the Church, such as the time, the financial resources, and the opportunities for nuns to earn college degrees, not only in education, but in theology, psychology, and social work. According to Sr. Annette Walters, the idea of “Sister Formation” articulated the problem of how to redefine the meaning of the

⁴⁰*Perfectae Caritatis*, paragraph 4.

sisterhood and the sister, in light of a declining way of life, which was the insulated life of the cloister.⁴¹

The foundations for reform may have been laid in the 1950s; nevertheless, Vatican II unleashed the “apostolic zeal” of many women religious in Louisiana and elsewhere. Nuns began to take part in the Civil Rights and anti-poverty movements. Religious orders of nuns had nursed the sick and fed, clothed, and taught the poor for generations. In the 1960s, however, they became attuned to the philosophy of social justice, which was the idea that poverty had root causes in systematic racism and patterns of economic inequality.⁴²

As they began to view poverty through a lens of social inequality, nuns in Louisiana were drawn to the cause of women’s rights. Two Holy Cross Sisters, from the order formally known as Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross, Joelle Mauer and Maria Theodosia, were founding members of BR NOW. The stories of Sisters Mauer and Theodosia go back to the founding of the Holy Cross Sisters in the United States. Father Theodosius Florentini and Mary Theresa Scherer founded the order in Switzerland in 1856. Bishop Vincent Wehrle of Bismarck, North Dakota, hearing of their work, recruited Holy Cross sisters to come to Dickinson, North Dakota, in 1912. According to their

⁴¹Mary Lea Schneider, “American Sisters and the Roots of Change: The 1950s,” *U. S. Catholic Historian* 7 no. 1, special edition, “Transitions in Catholic Culture: The Fifties” (Winter 1988): 55-72, Angelyn Dries, “Living in Ambiguity: A Paradigm Shift Experienced by the Sister Formation Movement,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 79, no. 3 (July 1993): 478-487; and Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *Out of the Cloister: A Study of Organizational Dilemmas* (Austin: University of Texas, 2014).

⁴² Mary Christine Morkovsky, *Living in God’s Providence: History of the Congregation of Divine Providence* (USA: XLibris Corp., 2009), 215-217, Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); and Elizabeth Carroll, “Reaping the Fruits of Redemption,” in *Midwives of the Future: American Sisters Tell Their Story*, ed. Ann PatrickWare, 53-68 (Kansas City: Leaven Press, 1985).

institutional history, local residents greeted the sisters with much fanfare. A ten year old girl named Susanna Laufer was among the townspeople. Laufer would later take vows and become Sister Maria Theodosia, one of the first American Holy Cross Sisters. Maria Theodosia, who became a school principal, made a deep impression on one of her own students, Joelle Mauer. In 1950, Mauer took vows with the Holy Cross Sisters and the two women, thirty years apart in age, formed a ministry partnership that lasted almost twenty-five years.⁴³

Sisters Mauer and Theodosia left the mid-West for the mission field of south Louisiana in 1950. The two nuns went alone to rural Louisiana to begin a mission called the Apostolate of Our Lady of Peace. Their mission area consisted of the miles along the river road, which stretched from New Orleans to Baton Rouge, and encompassed the parishes of St. James, St. Charles, and John the Baptist. A large part of this region had been settled by German immigrants in the early eighteenth-century and is referred to as the “German Coast.” Although the region was heavily Catholic, there were no Catholic schools in the area. Sister Mauer remembered they taught religion classes in the public schools in the middle of the school-day. By her account, they drove two hundred miles per day up and down the River Road to reach approximately two thousand students. Mauer remembered she had to “run” just to keep up with the much older Sr. Theodosia.⁴⁴

⁴³Mary Mangold, archivist, “Glimpses From the Past: From the Plains of North Dakota to the Fields of Louisiana,” and “60 Years of Ministry,” in *Holy Cross Happenings*, Summer 2011, access at www.holycrosssisters.org/177352_low.pdf, “Holy Cross Sisters to Begin Ministry in Calvert City, KY,” in *The Western Kentucky Catholic* Vol. 35, No. 7, September 2008, p. 8, access online www.rcdok.org/documents/wkc_online/2008/2008_9_September.pdf; and Telephone Interview with Sister Joelle Mauer, 20 August 2014, to Owensboro, Kentucky.

⁴⁴Telephone Interview with Sister Joelle Mauer, 20 August 2014, call to Owensboro, Kentucky.

Mauer also recalled that women in the rural parishes had difficult lives. Most of them did not know how to drive and she said, “They were like prisoners in their houses.” The sight of two nuns driving alone all over the parishes elicited some shock, according to Mauer. She said that she and Sr. Theodosia taught many women to drive, but their husbands felt threatened. Many of the local men worked in the shipyards and they did not like the idea of their wives not being at home, even when the men were at work. Much of their ministry involved teaching both religion and music in African-American schools. Both sisters were accomplished musicians. Mauer said she made many people angry when she recruited young African-American men to be altar servers. She said many white altar servers quit. Nevertheless, one young African-American man under her tutelage from Vacherie, Louisiana, Terry Steib, became a priest and eventually Bishop of the Memphis Diocese. Mauer recalled that it was she who drove him to the seminary in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.⁴⁵

In 1968, Bishop Robert Tracy, the first bishop of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, called Mauer and Theodosia to Baton Rouge to head a new “Office of Liturgy” for the diocese. From this post, both nuns joined BR NOW. Mauer said her interest in NOW and women’s rights came from her experiences working with the rural poor, primarily women and children. It did not appear that Vatican II reforms had much impact on her views of women’s roles. Mauer said her parents and her mentor, Maria Theodosia, shaped her attitudes about women’s equality. Her parents had “shared authority equally” in the

⁴⁵Telephone Interview with Sister Joelle Mauer, 20 August 2014, The Catholic Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee, “Bishop Steib Celebrates 20 Years as the Leader of the Memphis Diocese,” online at www.cdom.org/CatholicDiocese.php?op=Bishop_Steib.

marriage and the home, but it was Sr. Theodosia, “a brilliant woman,” according to Mauer, who inspired and challenged her.⁴⁶

Nuns from other religious orders in Louisiana also supported the ERA and worked for its passage. One of the main spokeswomen for nuns in Louisiana was Sr. Theresa Drago of the Carmelite Order, located in Lafayette, Louisiana. Sr. Drago was a teacher, but she was also the leader of the Southeast Region of the National Assembly of Women Religious. She testified in 1974 before the Louisiana House on behalf of ERA passage. When an ERA opponent referred to earlier in this chapter, Mrs. Foster Judlin, began quoting the Bible regarding Eve’s secondary status in creation, Drago countered with her own scriptural knowledge. She quoted from the book of Genesis “God created Man in his image: in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.” Drago used the same story of creation, but she interpreted it differently. If God created both male and female in his image, women could not be considered inferior to men. Furthermore, the verse seemed to say that God, being neither male nor female, contained attributes of both male and female within His nature. This resembled Thetus Tenney’s teachings on the “Feminine Side of God,,” although Tenney had used her teaching on God’s “feminine side” to bolster a case for women’s separate but equal status. Drago argued, however, that because God created women and men equally in His image, the law should treat them equally as well.⁴⁷

Sister Drago spoke again on behalf of the ERA as part of a New Iberia delegation, which met with their Representative, Elias Ackal, Jr., in May 1975. She said that the support

⁴⁶Telephone Interview with Sister Joelle Mauer, 20 August 2014, The Catholic Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee, “Bishop Steib Celebrates 20 Years as the Leader of the Memphis Diocese,” online at www.cdom.org/CatholicDiocese.php?op=Bishop_Steib.

⁴⁷Deidre Cruse, “ERA Apparently Loses Out Again,” Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 20 June 1974; Interview with Thetus Tenney, 10 July 2013.

of her organization, the National Assembly of Women Religious, for the ERA was based on the Vatican II Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. According to Sr. Drago, the constitution said, “Every kind of discrimination ‘whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion’ is contrary to God’s intent and should be eradicated.” She went on to link discrimination to social ills and suffering, especially on the part of women. The newspaper quoted Sr. Drago, “She spoke of the suffering caused to poor families by job discrimination and low pay for mothers who support themselves and children.”⁴⁸

A segment of Catholic laywomen, however, did not share the views of nuns about women’s equality or the ERA. Groups of Catholic laywomen in the nation and in Louisiana came out against ratification of the ERA. The National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) came out in opposition to the ERA in May of 1970. At this point, the amendment had not passed at the national level. The objections of the NCCW seemed in line with the general objections of various religious and civic groups. In a letter to Indiana senator, Birch Bayh, the NCCW President, Mrs. Norman Folda, said the ERA was “a threat to the nature of woman which individuates her from man in God’s plan for His creation.” The letter also stated, “The amendment would in reality wipe out many legal safeguards which protect woman’s position in the family.” Members of the NCCW appeared before the Louisiana legislature in opposition to the ERA. In a 1975 Louisiana House Committee hearing on the ERA, the newspaper reported that a Mrs. James Harvey of the NCCW testified. Mrs. Harvey

⁴⁸ “Meet with Iberia Solon: Group Pushes for Passage of Equal Rights Amendment,” *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, 15 May 1975; Creighton University, *Vatican II*, “Documents of Vatican II, Constitutions,” *Gaudium et Spes*, “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on December, 1965, online access at www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

made an impression when she said, “God did give men the edge.” The newspaper reported ERA proponents in the room reacted with audible “ooohs” to her statement.⁴⁹

The opposition of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas (CDA) in Louisiana had an effect on the ERA ratification campaign. In April 1975 the CDA in Louisiana came out against the ERA. This action followed a resolution from the National CDA opposing the amendment. The organization was formed in Utica, NY in 1903 by members of the Knights of Columbus. Originally called the “Daughters of Isabella,” it underwent a name change and incorporation in 1925. The CDA organized “courts” across the nation and the world. The organization became known for their funding of Catholic missions, international and domestic charity work, and their support of elderly priests and nuns. They also had a history of involvement in social and political issues. According to their history, the CDA fought the Cummins-Valle Birth Control Bill in 1923, which sought to repeal the Comstock Act, and promoted the National Legion of Decency, which originated in 1934. The Legion of Decency was a movement to persuade Catholics, especially those with children, to take an oath to boycott movies the Church deemed morally suspect. The Legion allegedly became so powerful Hollywood producers feared its consequences until after WWII.⁵⁰

CDA women did not quote the Bible, or the story of Adam and Eve, in order to support women’s submission to men. They emphasized the sanctity of the family, maintaining and reinforcing the family unit, and the protection of children. They also

⁴⁹“Equal Rights Bill Opposed by NCCW,” *The Clarion Herald: Official Newspaper of the Archdiocese of New Orleans*, 28 May 1970; and Deidre Cruse, “House Committee Kills ERA Despite Arguments,” in *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 12 June 1975.

⁵⁰Catholic Daughters of the Americas, “The History of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas,” online at www.catholicdaughters.org/history.shtml, Morton Keller, *Regulating a New Society: Public Policy and Social Change in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 32-34; and James M. Skinner, *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933-1970* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1993).

supported Catholic education and living, in order to protect the family and to preserve the faith for the next generation. The organization, however, was vague when it spoke publicly about the ERA. Barbara W. Songy, the Louisiana state CDA “regent,” said the ERA “poses a threat, not a support to women’s rights. Specific problems in women’s rights should be dealt with by specific laws to meet these problems.” On another occasion, she also said the ERA was “a direct threat to the family.” In 1976, Mrs. John D. Parker from New Orleans, representing the National Council of Catholic Women and also the CDA, explained the orientation of Catholic anti-ERA women. In her words, “Encouraging women to work took them out of the home and contributed to the breakup of families, the lack of discipline with children, and the rising crime rate.” Although it is unsubstantiated, political activists claimed CDA opposition influenced some Louisiana politicians to oppose the ERA. Mel Schiro, anti-ERA activist with the Chamber of Commerce Auxiliary, said Governor Edwin Edwards’ mother was a CDA member, and had “spoken to him” about his support for the ERA.⁵¹

There is no easy answer as to why Catholic nuns and laywomen differed so much on their views of feminism and the ERA, since they shared the same faith. Although the difference is subtle, Catholics and Protestants had different views of womanhood and motherhood. Catholicism infused motherhood with a mystical quality, epitomized by the concept of the “Eternal Woman.” According to historian Alexandra Michaelides, the “Eternal Woman” of Catholic theology was based on an ideal of womanhood that was

⁵¹J. C. Hatcher, “Acadiana Women Plan ERA Passage Strategy,” Baton Rouge *Sunday Advocate*, 5 January 1975, “Women’s Group Opposes ERA Ratification,” Baton Rouge *State-Times*, 28 April 1975, Deidre Cruse, “House Committee Kills ERA Despite Arguments,” Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 12 June 1975, Smiley Anders, “Anti-ERA Groups Gather,” Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 18 February 1976; and Oral Interview with Fran Bussie, Baton Rouge, La., 27 July 2013.

connected to a woman's reproductive status and identity. A German theologian, Gertrude von Le Fort, wrote in *The Eternal Woman*, "Three timelessly valid aspects of woman's life—virgin, bride, mother—denote the fulfillment of woman's life in its entirety, but each within its own proper scope." Unlike in Protestant theology, which said women occupied a secondary role in the church and family because of Eve's failure, some Catholic theologians argued that women had natural gifts for obedience, sacrifice, and suffering. They offered an exalted version of submissive womanhood.⁵²

Theology was important to the formation of Catholic womanhood, but the views of some conservative Catholic women cannot be separated from the conservative movement that rose after WWII. As we have noted, Catholics had a pivotal role in the formation of post WWII conservatism and dominated its intellectual circles. William F. Buckley, Jr. influenced some of conservatism's leading lights to convert to Catholicism, including his college roommate and future brother-in-law, L. Brent Bozell. Although he denied his persuasiveness, Buckley influenced Frank Meyer and Russell Kirk, and his Yale political science professor, Willmoore Kendall, to become Catholic. The Catholic fight against global Communism shaped modern conservatism in unique ways. Catholic conservatives envisioned the battle as a global struggle of the "Christian West" against the godless Communist "East." This gave modern conservatism an unparalleled moral imperative and dimension. Frank Meyer, the former Communist, put it this way, "Communism, in actual and objective fact, does represent an absolute black, and the West, as a civilization is in its

⁵²Alexandra Elizabeth Michaelides, "Redefining Sisterhood: The New Nuns, Laywomen and Catholic Feminist Activism, 1953-1992," p. 40-42, 2012, *Dissertations*, Paper 311, Loyola University Chicago, <http://ecommons.luc.diss/311>; and Gertrude von Le Fort, *The Eternal Woman*, Translated from the German by Placid Jordan, (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee Bruce Publications, 1962), 31.

essence, as close to an absolute white as is possible in the subdued light which illuminates this imperfect world.”⁵³

For many Catholics of the 1950s and 60s, the story of Hungarian Cardinal, Jozsef Mindszenty, epitomized this story of good versus evil. Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty was born in Hungary in 1892. He suffered imprisonment by the Nazis from 1944-45. Pope Pius the XII made him Primate of Hungary in 1945 and a Cardinal in 1946. Hungarian Communists, however, tortured, tried, and convicted Mindszenty of treason and sentenced him to life imprisonment in 1949. According to his memoirs, his captors beat him with rubber truncheons, gave him drugs, and brainwashed him into confessing to a large number of crimes, including theft of the Hungarian crown jewels. He remained imprisoned for eight years. Hungarian rebels freed Mindszenty in the 1956 uprising, but when the Soviets invaded Hungary to re-establish Communist regency, he took refuge in the U. S. embassy in Budapest, which became his home for fifteen years. The case of Jozsef Mindszenty fired the imaginations of people all over the world, especially Catholics in the United States. He not only became a hero and warrior of the Christian faith, he became a political symbol of freedom versus tyranny.⁵⁴

⁵³Patrick Allitt, “American Catholics and the New Conservatism of the 1950s,” *U. S. Catholic Historian*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Transitions in Catholic Culture: The Fifties (Winter, 1988), 19-23, Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America’s Most Powerful Church* (NY: Times Books, Random, 1998).

⁵⁴ Patrick Allitt, “American Catholics and the New Conservatism of the 1950s,” 15-37, Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty, *Memoirs*, (NY: Macmillan, 1974), “Cardinal Mindszenty of Hungary Sentenced,” *This Day in History*, the History Channel, access at www.history.com/this-day-history/cardinal-mindszenty-of-hungary-sentenced; Alex Last, “Fifteen Years Holed Up in an Embassy,” 5 September 2012, *BBC News Magazine*, www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19470470.

Cardinal Mindszenty grew in stature and fame as Communists held him captive at the American embassy. The Catholic Church referred to Mindszenty as a “dry martyr.” A dry martyr sacrificed his or her life for the faith, but was denied an actual death. Fred and Phyllis Schlafly, along with Father Stephen Dunker and Fred Schlafly’s sister, Eleanor Schlafly, formed the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation (CMF) in 1958. Eleanor Schlafly became the first president of the CMF and still presides over it today. The foundation was primarily educational and political in purpose. Although Eleanor Schlafly headed the CMF, Phyllis Schlafly wrote study courses geared to teaching average people the philosophies and methodologies of Communism. Her courses became popular in Catholic schools, and students enrolled in Cardinal Mindszenty clubs.⁵⁵

Mindszenty’s status as an anti-Communist icon, however, began to fade by the early 1970s. As relations between the Soviets and the U. S. and the Vatican and the Soviets entered a new era, the presence of this symbol of a more savage time became an embarrassment. The Communists released Mindszenty from the embassy in 1971 to a hero’s welcome, especially among U.S. Catholics. The Vatican, however, removed Mindszenty as Bishop of Hungary, in favor of a more accommodating churchman. Mindszenty refused to step down. Feeling betrayed by his church, he went to live in Vienna, where he died in 1975. The betrayal of Mindszenty, along with the perceived softening of the Catholic Church toward Communism, fed into some conservatives’ perceptions that many forces were arrayed against them. In 1976, a local reporter interviewed several Catholic women at

⁵⁵ William A. Borst, PhD, “The Dry Martyrdom of Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty,” CatholicCulture.org, accessed at www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recum=10004, Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade*, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 80-88, Kristi Lowenthal, “Conservative Thought and the Equal Rights Amendment in Kansas, Phd. Dissertation, Kansas State University, 2008, p. 149-162, pdf at <https://krex.k-state.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2097/907/kristiLo?sequence=1>.

an ERA ratification hearing at the capitol in Baton Rouge. The reporter did a special piece designed to gauge the backgrounds and affiliations of women on both sides of the ERA. Mrs. Lawrence Derbes, a New Orleans native, educated in Catholic schools, and with a medical technology degree from Loyola, told reporter Shirley Benton she was an oil painter and mother of seven. She opposed the ERA. She was also a member of the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, Morality in Media, and the Metairie and Chateau Country Clubs. Derbes did not elaborate on why she opposed the ERA, but her sister, Mrs. John B. (Lorraine) Stahl, was more forthcoming. She told the reporter she was a member of the Mindszenty Foundation, the John Birch society, and the Orthodox Roman Catholic Movement (ORCM). When asked if she had any memberships in social groups, Stahl said she “belonged to no social groups,” because she had “finished playing while Rome’s burning.” She connected the ERA to the social and cultural destruction that seemed to be occurring before everyone’s eyes, yet people refused to see it.⁵⁶

Mrs. Don F. Carlos, the wife of a Covington psychiatrist, a registered medical technician, and mother of six children, told the reporter she belonged to the John Birch Society, Mindszenty, and ORCM also. Father Francis E. Fenton started the ORCM in 1973. Father Fenton and his followers rejected the reforms of Vatican II. They also remained loyal to the Tridentine Mass, which was the Latin Mass established in 1570. In a brief telephone interview with the elderly Mrs. Stahl, she said that “Vatican II was a farce” and she still believed in the legitimacy of the Latin mass. She also said she believed in the idea of “government takeover.” Mrs. Stahl and her friends occupied the outer limits of Catholic

⁵⁶Shirley Benton, “Louisiana Women Voice Opinions of ERA,” Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 17 June 1976.

conservatism. Nevertheless, Mel Schiro, a Chamber Auxiliary member who was politically and socially well-connected, also expressed how much the story of Cardinal Mindszenty affected her as a Catholic schoolgirl. She and her sister, Beth Klein, remain members of the CMF today. In an interview, Schiro also mentioned her distrust of the “trilateral commission,” an organization formed in 1973 by John D. Rockefeller. Some conservatives thought the trilateral commission was plotting to form a “one world” financial and governmental system.⁵⁷

The views of these very conservative Catholic women reflected their idea that feminism and the ERA were connected to something bigger. Although their suspicions about a government takeover were vague, some religious women who opposed the ERA viewed it as part of a spiritual struggle between good and evil. Because they believed in the supernatural, they viewed feminism as an attempt to undermine and destroy the family, which they thought God established as the foundation of society and the primary vehicle to facilitate salvation, especially of the next generation.⁵⁸

The abortion issue did not intersect with the ERA in the first years of the 1970s. As noted earlier, BR NOW began discussing abortion as part of the national abortion law reform and repeal movement at the end of 1971, but they chose to not take a stand.

⁵⁷Shirley Benton, “Louisiana Women Voice Opinions of ERA,” *Morning Advocate*, 17 June 1976, Telephone interview with Lorraine Stahl, 25 July 2013; and Oral Interview with Mel Schiro and her sister, Beth Klein, New Orleans, Louisiana, 16 July 2014.

⁵⁸Shirley Benton, “Louisiana Women Voice Opinions of ERA,” *Morning Advocate*, 17 June 1976, Telephone interview with Lorraine Stahl, 25 July 2013; and Oral Interview with Mel Schiro and her sister, Beth Klein, New Orleans, Louisiana, 16 July 2014; telephone interview with Mel Schiro to New Orleans, 2 July 2014 and 7 August 2014; and Pope Pius XI, “Divini Redemptoris: On Atheistic Communism,” Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Atheistic Communism, March 19, 1937, www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19031937_divini-redemptoris_en.html.

Protestants, even those who gave religious reasons for opposing the ERA, did not talk about abortion in these early years. Two Supreme Court cases decided in 1973, *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, made abortion one of the leading social and political divides in the country, however. It is not certain when abortion became tied to the ERA, but in late 1974, Phyllis Schlafly issued an alert to her constituency in her *Phyllis Schlafly Report*. The report was entitled, “E.R.A. Means Abortion and Population Shrinkage.” In this report, Schlafly laid out arguments that would be used to link the ERA with abortion. She credited Clarence Manion, a constitutional lawyer and former dean of the Notre Dame Law School, for providing the theoretical basis of linking the ERA with abortion. Manion, born in 1896, was Schlafly’s friend and one of the fathers of the post WWII conservative movement. Their argument said, “If the Equal Rights Amendment is ratified, E.R.A. will repeal all and every kind of anti-abortion laws we now have, and prevent the enactment of any anti-abortion law in the future.”⁵⁹

By the latter part of the 1970s, the idea that ERA would cement abortion into the constitution became one of the major themes of anti-ERA activists. Over the decade, some of the early anti-ERA arguments diminished in relevancy. Perceived legal protections for married women, the status of housewives, and the status of the husband as head of the household became somewhat archaic as national and state laws changed and women achieved access to many occupations and professions. The issue of the draft for women also

⁵⁹Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (NY: Hill and Wang, 2001), the first chapter of *Before the Storm*, called the “The Manionites,” gives a biography of Clarence Manion and can be accessed at <https://www.nytimes.com/books/first/p/perlstein-storm.html>, *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, Vol. 8, No. 5, Section 2, December, 1974; to read the texts of these legal decisions see *Doe v. Bolton*, 410 U. S. 179, (1973), Cornell University Law School, Legal Information Institute (LII), Supreme Court, www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/410/179; and *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U. S. 113 (1973), U. S. Supreme Court, FindLaw, <http://laws.findlaw.com/us/410/113.html>.

receded. President Richard Nixon ended the draft in 1973 and men no longer had to register by 1975. The controversy of women being drafted, however, came roaring back after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. President Jimmy Carter proposed a re-activation of universal male draft registration in the wake of Soviet aggression. He proposed that women be required to register also.⁶⁰

Congress approved male registration, but refused to approve female registration. Carter's action, however, launched a renewed national debate on the draft and the ERA. Dozens of newspaper articles appeared in Louisiana newspapers. Ironically, more men began to make the argument that women should be registered and subjected to the draft as an equality issue. Several men filed a lawsuit in *Rostker v. Goldberg* (1981), which alleged the registration law discriminated against men based on gender. They won in district court, but ultimately lost at the Supreme Court. Anti-ERA women had made the argument the ERA would benefit men more than women. Men would be entitled to receive alimony, spousal support within the marriage, and custody of children. It is unlikely the 1980 draft debate had

⁶⁰"Women and the Draft in America," <https://www.sss.gov/wmbkgr.htm>; Bernard D. Rostker, *I Want You!: The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* (Rand, 2006), view pdf @ www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG265.pdf; and Frank Thompson, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Jimmy Carter, 1979, Book 2: June 23 to Dec. 31, 1979* (Government Printing Office).

a significant impact on the ERA's chances of passage in Louisiana at that point, but it brought renewed attention to a controversial consequence of legal equality.⁶¹

It appeared unlikely the ERA would pass in Louisiana by the end of the 1970s, but activism on both sides continued. A new local organization, "A Better Way (Than ERA)," appeared in early 1979 to engage in a renewed effort to deny state ERA ratification. In their words, they organized to "keep Louisiana free from further Federal control and fresh in its approach to solve problems dealing with sexual discrimination." A small group of people who belonged to the Latter Day Saints (LDS) formed the organization in February of 1979 at a meeting at the LDS building on LSU's campus. Twenty-eight Mormons from LDS congregations across Louisiana, including Denham Springs, Slaughter, Lafayette, and Lake Charles, composed the initial membership. The next meeting drew fifty people and was held at the LDS chapel on Winbourne Avenue in Baton Rouge. A "State Advisory Committee"

⁶¹ Here is a sampling of the many articles and letters to the editor that appeared in Louisiana newspapers about women, men, the draft, and the ERA. Wanda Horn and Chris Russo, "Local Reaction to Draft Plan: 'Good and Bad,'" Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 9 February 1980, Don Ruiz, "Equal Rights and Responsibilities," *Daily Sentry News*, 8 February 1980, "Legal Fight May Give Answer to Registration," Hammond, La. *Daily Star*, 11 February 1980, "Groups Ambivalent on Decision," Monroe, La. *Morning World*, 9 February 1980, "Drafting Girls Wrong," Ferriday, La. *Concordia Sentinel*, 11 February 1980, "Congress Opposed to Registration of Women," Monroe, La. *Morning World*, 9 February 1980, "Anti-Draft Demonstrators Stage March," Alexandria, La. *Town Talk*, 10 February 1980, Don Lewis, "Few Students Favor Renewal of Draft," New Orleans *Times Picayune*, 24 January 1980, Marc Leepson, "Will Women Really Be Drafted," New Iberia, La. *Daily Iberian*, 8 February 1980, Gary J. Hebert, ed. "Draft Registration and the ERA," White Castle, La. *Times*, 25 January 1980, "An Unhappy Prospect of Draft Registration," Baton Rouge, La. *State Times*, 25 January 1980, Cynthia Woody, "Baton Rougeans Respond: Question of Drafting Women Brings Strong Opinions For and Against," Baton Rouge, La. *State Times*, 25 January 1980, "Draft Plan Opponents Promise All-Out Protest," New Orleans, La. *Times Picayune*, 25 January 1980, "Draft Specter Stirs ERA Debate," New Orleans, La. *States-Item*, 31 January 1980, Rose Kahn, "Feminists Give Views on the Draft," New Orleans, La. *States-Item*, 1 February 1980, Joan Beck, "Draft Women? Wait Until ERA Passes," New Orleans, La. *States-Item*, 30 January 1980, "Female Draft Opponents to Petition Carter," New Orleans, La. *States-Item*, 1 February 1980, Margaret Love, Letter to the editor, "Draft ERAers," New Orleans, La. *Times Picayune*, 1 February 1980, Art Buchwald, "Should We Draft Girls?" Lake Charles, La. *American Press*, 7 February 1980, Mrs. Robert Gill, letter to the editor, "How ERA Affects Draft Registration," Morgan City, La. *Daily Review*, 6 February 1980, Diane Loupe, *Loopholes*, "Draft Must Include Women," Slidell, La. *Daily Sentry News*, 6 February 1980; and *Rostker v. Goldberg*, 453 U. S. 57 (1981), Cornell University Law School, Legal Information Institute (LII), www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/453/57.

formed the top leadership of “A Better Way,” and it included three people, Steve Cutler, Coordinator, and Paul Anders and Gail Cox, Assistant Coordinators. A few years later Gail Cox would lead the celebration of the death of the ERA, which opened this study. Although Mormons composed the initial membership of “A Better Way,” the group launched into a busy schedule of workshops in March and April that included outreach to people from other faiths. A few Catholics, in particular, seemed to be drawn to “A Better Way.”⁶²

One interview subject, who asked that her name be withheld, and who was a devout Catholic, became one of the early members of the organization. Born in the late 1940s, the subject, whom we will refer to as “Mrs. B,” represented a younger generation of anti-ERA activists. She was born and raised in a lower middle and working class area of Baton Rouge and her father repaired televisions. Her mother worked as a cocktail waitress in downtown Baton Rouge in a bar close to the State Capitol, which lawyers and legislators frequented. Mrs. B’s father stayed home at night and took care of the children. As she recalled, her mother grew to dislike politics and politicians. Mrs. B’s parents sent their children to the Catholic schools attached to their parish, St. Gerard Majella. St. Gerard’s parish formed in 1944 and was staffed by priests from the Redemptorist order. St. Gerard’s was one of the first parishes established in a then suburb of Baton Rouge to meet the needs of the post-war baby boom. At its height in the 1950s and 60s, the parish had over five thousand

⁶²“A Better Way,” *Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No. 1, April, 1979 and Letter of introduction to Senator Barham from Libby Hollett, President of Baton Rouge chapter of “A Better Way,” dated April 27, 1979; these materials from small private collection of Barbara Bovard, copies in possession of author; and Oral Interview with Barbara Bovard, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

parishioners and fifteen hundred students in its elementary, junior high, and high schools. Mrs. B became a working mother herself, and adopted a son in 1977.⁶³

She remembered she had little interest in the ERA prior to joining “A Better Way.” Mrs. B said legalized abortion caused her to join the group. Like many people who remembered where they were when they first heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Kennedy assassination, or 9/11, she remembered, “where she was and what she was doing the day she heard about *Roe v. Wade*.” When asked in an interview why she had opposed the ERA, she admitted the ERA came second to her primary purpose of fighting legalized abortion. Mrs. B and her husband were anti-abortion activists; they picketed abortion clinics, attended anti-abortion rallies, and were members of “Right to Life.” She said she had never met a Mormon before joining the group, but she thought they believed they would “have families in heaven.” Her belief that the country was in a moral crisis caused Mrs. B to cross a great ecumenical divide in order to fight what she perceived as anti-family laws and legislation. The ERA, at least for her, was ancillary to that cause.⁶⁴

The arguments linking the ERA with abortion seemed abstract. By the late 1970s, however, its perceived connection with abortion became one of the leading reasons to oppose the ERA in Louisiana. Political reporter, Rafael Bermudez, acknowledged this in 1979. He said, “People are fearful of issues ERA opponents have linked to the proposed amendment, namely abortion and gay rights.” He also noted, “even though some of the forces behind the national women’s movement strongly favor the right of a woman to have a

⁶³“Mrs. B,” Oral Interview by Yvonne Brown, 19 January, 2012, Baton Rouge, La; and telephone interview to her home in Baton Rouge, 16 December, 2011.

⁶⁴Ibid.

legal abortion, Louisiana ERA supporters have attempted to disassociate ERA from the abortion issue.” They had limited success in separating the two issues, however. After helping to defeat the ERA in a Louisiana House Committee in 1977, Rep. John Hainkel (D-New Orleans) said he was against it because “ERA has been pushed by NOW, which seeks national day care centers, promotes abortion, and would deny tax exemptions to churches which oppose abortion.” He expressed disgust that the ACLU in New Orleans had auctioned an abortion from the local Delta Women’s Clinic for thirty dollars at a fundraiser. Marlene Roeder, director of the Louisiana ACLU, acknowledged it was true, but said in an interview “she was surprised at the reaction.” She said, “After all abortions are legal and it’s as legitimate for a woman to get an abortion as it is to get a divorce.” The ACLU had also auctioned a divorce for nineteen dollars. The fate of the ERA may have been sealed by the late 1970s, but opposition to abortion dealt one of the final blows to ratifying the amendment in Louisiana.⁶⁵

People who opposed the ERA expressed religious objections from the beginning. Among Protestants, evangelicals and fundamentalists based their objections on their biblical interpretation of women’s roles going back to the story of creation. Later on, evangelicals connected the ERA to moral breakdown in society, particularly to an increase in the acceptance of homosexuality. The Catholic Church did not take a stand on the ERA, but the issue divided nuns and laywomen. Some groups of Catholic laywomen rejected the ERA because they thought it harmed the family, which was central to the foundation of a good society and the propagation of the faith. As the 1970s progressed, the ERA became part of a

⁶⁵Bill McMahon, “ERA Fails 5th Time in La. Legislature,” 8 June 1977, “ACLU Auctions abortion for \$30, stirs fuss,” Des Moines, Iowa, *Des Moines Register*, 25 June 1977; and Rafael Bermudez, “ERA Wins Favor But Not Votes,” Baton Rouge La. *Sunday Advocate*, 10 June 1979.

nascent political movement, which began to unite Protestants, Catholics, and Mormons in a fight against general moral breakdown, particularly regarding abortion. In the next and final chapter, we will look at what happened to the ERA in the Louisiana legislature.

CHAPTER 5 THE LOUISIANA LEGISLATURE, LOUISE JOHNSON, AND LOSING THE ERA

In hindsight, many people considered the defeat of the ERA in Louisiana as inevitable, considering the conservative social history of the state. The defeat of the ERA, however, did not seem inevitable in the 1970s. ERA proponents fought hard throughout the ten year ratification period, from 1972-1982, because they believed they could win. They based their initial optimism on support from significant sources. Governor Edwards expressed public support for the measure throughout the ratification process. Louisiana was one of the few southern states that had politically powerful unions, and the Louisiana AFL-CIO worked aggressively for ERA passage. The social tide also began to turn in the 1970s regarding women's rights. In public opinion polls taken during the ratification period, a majority of Louisiana citizens expressed approval of the ERA and legal equality for women.¹

This chapter focuses on the legislative history of the ERA ratification struggle and provides the evidence for how and why the ERA failed. The ERA came under attack from legislators like Louise Johnson, newly elected in 1972. Among the amendment's legislative supporters, few matched the passion and determination of Johnson. Likewise, anti-ERA citizen groups outmatched pro-ERA groups in organization and focus. Although polls showed the Louisiana public generally supported women's equality, that support did not translate into votes for the ERA in the state legislature. Roberta Madden, who estimated she

¹Merikaye Presley, "ERA Support Underrated," *Times* (New Orleans, La.) *Picayune*, May 6, 1975, "Louisiana Poll: ERA has Positive Impact, 65 Percent Say," *Times* (New Orleans, La.) *Picayune*, November 27, 1977, Nora Norris, "Almost Half Respondents Oppose ERA in Instapol," *State* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Times*, April 3, 1978, Bill McMahon, "Polls Show Majority in State Support ERA Ratification: Fran Bussie," *Morning* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, October 31, 1978, Bill McMahon, "Majority of La. Voters Favors ERA Adoption," *State* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Times*, January 6, 1979; and Bill McMahon, "Most Louisiana Voters Favor Equal Rights Amendment," *Sunday* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, January 7, 1979.

spent “thousands of hours” working toward the amendment’s passage, summed it up for a reporter in 1982. “Support was a mile wide and an inch deep. People are for the ERA, but not enough to write a letter or make a phone call.” In the end, Louisiana legislators chose not to ratify the ERA, because of the public’s seeming indifference, the activism of the opposition, and their own doubts about the amendment.²

It appeared as if the ERA had a good chance of passing in Louisiana at the beginning. The amendment came up for ratification in the Louisiana Senate in May 1972 shortly after Congress ratified the ERA in March. The Louisiana Senate considered and passed the ERA with little fanfare and in almost record time. Senator J. D. DeBlieux of Baton Rouge introduced Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 3 on May 8, 1972. A partial wording of the resolution read, “For ratification by the Legislature of the state of Louisiana of the amendment to the Constitution of the United States relative to equal rights for men and women.” The second paragraph continued, “Whereas, the Ninety-Second Congress of the United States of America...in both Houses, by a Constitutional majority of two-thirds thereof, adopted a proposition to amend the Constitution...to prohibit denial or abridgment of the equality of rights on account of sex...the Louisiana Legislature hereby wishes to record its ratification of said amendment.” By May 10, the resolution was referred to the Committee on Judiciary “A,” headed by J. D. DeBlieux. Surprisingly, the committee hearing received little public notice.³

²Ruth Laney, “ERA—R. I. P.” Baton Rouge, La. *Sunday Advocate*, 14 February 1982.

³Legislative Calendar: Senate Concurrent Resolutions; Thirty-Fifth Regular Session, 1972, Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 3, *1972 Legislative Calendar of the State of Louisiana: Thirty-Fifth Regular Session of the Legislature under the Constitution of 1921*, State of Louisiana. Hill Memorial Library, Special Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Copies of the “Calendars and Journals” of the State of Louisiana, which provide a brief history of legislation in Louisiana are also housed at the Legislative Law Library of Louisiana, Royal St., New Orleans, La.

According to the Minutes of the Louisiana Senate, Senate Judiciary Committee A met on May 18 in the Old Senate Lounge of the State Capitol Building. The committee consisted of nine members, all male. Chairman J. D. DeBlieux and Vice Chairman Jackson B. Davis headed the committee. All nine members were present. Only ERA proponents testified at the Senate hearing. They included Mary S. Metz, representing the Baton Rouge Chapter of NOW, attorney Sylvia Roberts, representing the American Bar Association, and attorney John Moore, who also spoke in favor. Representative Dorothy Mae Taylor of the Louisiana House rounded out the hearing. Five members voted yes, with Chairman DeBlieux abstaining. One other committee member, Samuel B. Nunez, Jr., also abstained. The two “no” votes were cast by Cecil Kay (C. K) Carter and Jesse M. Knowles. Although it is not necessarily connected to the ERA, Senator Carter would be defeated in 1975 by Virginia K. Shehee, the second woman elected to the Louisiana senate in forty years and an ERA supporter. The resolution passed through the committee on a 5-2 vote and went before the full Senate on June 7. The Louisiana Senate approved the resolution to ratify the ERA by a vote of 25-13.⁴

Considering the trouble the ERA would soon encounter in the Louisiana House, it begs the question of why there was such disparity between the two chambers. The Louisiana Senate was considered the more deliberative body of the state legislature and according to Rep. Daniel Richey (D-Ferriday), it was more liberal than the House of Representatives. Rep. Frank P. Simoneaux, an ERA supporter, said state senators represented larger districts

⁴Ibid., “Regular Session, 1972, Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 3, A Concurrent Resolution,” 1-2, “Minutes of Meeting, Senate Judiciary Committee ‘A,’ Senate Judiciary Committee ‘A’ Roll Call,” Hill Memorial Library, Special Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Copies of pages from the “Calendars and Journals” can be obtained for a fee from the Senate Docket, Legislative Document Services, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

than state representatives, and were more removed from their constituency. Presumably, this gave senators leeway to vote their consciences and what they judged to be the best interests of their constituents, without as much regard for their political fortunes. As the following years would reveal, however, Louisiana senators were indeed concerned about their political fortunes. After 1972, the Louisiana Senate refused to allow the ERA to be voted on again by the entire body.⁵

The Louisiana Senate's ERA passage in 1972 marked the high point for the amendment in the state. For most of the ratification years, the Senate refused to act on the amendment until the Louisiana House acted first. After the critical House defeat of 1972, the legislature did not reconsider the ERA the following year. A Baton Rouge newspaper reported, "Women's rights groups did not try to introduce the ERA in the 1973 fiscal session because a three-fourths vote was needed for any non-fiscal matter." This did not mean women's groups sat by. In a rather unusual effort to raise money for the cause, some BR NOW members expressed their willingness to sell blood in order to "help finance NOW's campaign for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment." Nevertheless, after sitting out the 1973 legislative session because of a perceived lack of support, ERA proponents looked forward to 1974. They waged a renewed organizational campaign to persuade both houses to consider and pass the ERA.⁶

⁵Oral Interview with Daniel Richey by author, 10 May 2013, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Telephone interview to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with Frank P. Simoneaux by author, 23 May 2013; "Women's Rights' Law Defended," Baton Rouge *State Times*, 15 May 1972; and Bill McMahon, "Rights Ratification Rejected in House," Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 30 June 1972.

⁶Information about the lack of action in 1973 can be found in Deidre Cruse, "ERA Proposal Expected to Win," Baton Rouge *Sunday Advocate*, 12 May 1974; and "Blood for the ERA," Baton Rouge National Organization for Women *NOWLETTER*, Vol. II, Number 3, March 1973, box 8, folder 39, Francis A. de Caro and Rosan A. Jordan Papers.

The Louisiana Senate would prove to be a disappointment to ERA advocates, however. Its action, or lack thereof, in the 1974 legislative session set the course for the future of the ERA in the Louisiana Senate. The Senate took up the amendment again in May 1974. Once again, Senate Judiciary Committee A took up the measure at a public hearing on May 28. There was more public participation and diversity of testimony in 1974 than in 1972. According to reporter Jerry Estill, “Scores of women—old ones and young ones, fat ones and skinny ones—packed into the room and spilled into the hallway outside. About half wore lapel signs declaring that “ERA Is Not the Way,” and the other half wore signs saying: “Yes ERA.” The Senate, however, lobbed the ERA “hot potato” into the House of Representatives to “let the lower chamber take the heat.” One Louisiana state senator, who remained nameless, but claimed to be “personally sympathetic to passage of the proposal,” explained to reporter Estill: “Why would we expose ourselves again this year only to let them kill it in the House? Let’s let them get out front and take the heat.” Senate Judiciary Committee A voted 4-3 to defer action and to wait for the Louisiana House to act. Chairman Deblieux explained the logic of this strategy to reporter Deidre Cruse. In his words, “until we get some assurance from the House that it will pass there, there is no reason to bring it up in the Senate because we know it will pass here.” Senator Edgar Mouton, one of the committee votes in favor of ERA passage, tried to calm fears and rally support for the amendment. He argued that opponents were “reading too much into it. It is a simple principle based on equality under the law...to make women equal, not in restrooms, not in the military draft, but under the law.”⁷

⁷Jerry Estill, “Senate Body Tosses ERA Issue to House,” *Baton Rouge State Times*, 29 May 1974; and Deidre Cruse, “ERA Apparently Loses Out Again,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 20 June 1974.

In the following years, a few Louisiana senators made public pronouncements of their ERA support and assured supporters they would get it to the Senate floor for a vote. In a special legislative session that began in January of 1975, Edgar Mouton (D-Lafayette) introduced a resolution to ratify the ERA. At first, the senators appeared to be trying to talk themselves out of considering the amendment. Senator B. B. Rayburn of Bogalusa questioned whether the resolution was legal, considering it was not “included among the items listed in Gov. Edwards’ call for the 15-day special session.” The senate secretary, C. W. Roberts, explained that “concurrent resolutions which do not have the effect of law could be considered during special sessions.” This piece of information, however, caused some senators to question whether they should bother to deal with it, if it would not have the effect of law. Senator Carl Bauer of Franklin worried about just the opposite—that it would have the effect of law. He said, “The resolution might have an effect of law, if Louisiana is the final state needed for ratification.” About a week later, however, when Mouton attempted to bring the resolution to a vote, it became a case of “all hell-breaking loose,” according to some.⁸

Mouton tried to lay his groundwork carefully. He asked ERA supporters not to lobby individual legislators at the special session. According to Mouton, he knew many legislators had to run for re-election in the fall. He implied in his advice that voting for the ERA in the January session rather than the regular session would help their re-election chances, because “pressures will be more intense then.” Senator Nat Kiefer, however, made a surprise move that shocked Mouton as well as the senators on the floor. Kiefer, a member of Judiciary A committee, had helped pass the ERA resolution on a 4-2 committee vote. Kiefer, however,

⁸ Capitol News Bureau, “Third Legislature ERA Tiff Looming,” *State* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Times*, January 15, 1975.

offered an amendment to Mouton's resolution at the last minute. The amendment said that ratification could not take effect until after a public referendum. Senator Fritz Windhorst of Gretna, an ERA supporter, jumped in and said the U. S. Supreme Court had already ruled against conditioning ratification on the outcome of a referendum. Senator Claude Duval, an ERA opponent, however, spoke in favor of the Kiefer amendment, "if it would kill the bill." Senator J. D. DeBlieux called Kiefer out on his actions, and said, "This amendment is just an attempt to dodge the issue." The vote was 21-16 in favor of the Kiefer amendment. Mouton was forced to return the ERA to the Senate calendar, "for the proper last rites." By the time of the regular session, Mouton did not re-introduce the amendment for consideration. Senator J. D. DeBlieux, a perennial ERA supporter, gave up on passing the amendment in 1975 also, noting that "the measure has an excellent chance of passing this year," but he had "no plans to introduce it himself."⁹

Mel Schiro, a veteran anti-ERA activist from the Chamber of Commerce Auxiliary, gave a more colorful account of the Kiefer incident in an interview. Schiro, whose memory has faded regarding the exact date, nonetheless recalled a special session convened by the Louisiana Senate to pass the ERA. In her recounting, she took a telephone call on a cold morning, telling her the Louisiana Senate had just passed the ERA through a committee vote early that day. To her horror, the full Senate was about to vote on and probably pass the ERA. Schiro said she dressed quickly, threw on a sable mink coat, and travelled to Baton Rouge. She accompanied Charlotte Felt, the anti-ERA leader for the Chamber Auxiliary.

⁹J. C. Hatcher, "Acadiana Women Plan ERA Passage Strategy," *Sunday* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, January 5, 1975, Rafael Bermudez, "Rep. Johnson Predicts Fourth Defeat for ERA," *State* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Times*, April 16, 1975; and Gerald Moses, "La. Senate Blocks ERA Ratification," *Morning* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, January 23, 1975.

Once she arrived, Schiro cornered Nat Kiefer, a friend from her high school days. Schiro recalled that she believed Kiefer to be a “left-leaning liberal,” but she used her friendship with him to let him know what she thought of what he had done. She held him responsible for the early morning stealth committee hearing. Sleepy and agitated, Schiro called Kiefer a “dirty rotten bastard.” Her worst epithet, however, seemed to come when she called him a “politician.” According to Schiro, Kiefer began patting her on the back, saying, “Don’t worry baby; I’m going to take care of you.” Schiro claimed that Kiefer started arguments on the Senate floor, and legislators almost came to blows. She also said that at six o’clock in the evening, another childhood friend, Michael O’Keefe, the president of the Louisiana Senate, promptly banged his gavel, officially ending the special session. According to her story, both of these men, whom she knew from childhood, basically concocted a diversion to de-rail the ERA. It is not certain that Schiro’s story is the same event reported in the newspaper for the special session of 1975. However, in both versions, Nat Kiefer appeared to support the ERA, but also took action to avoid a direct vote. This would be consistent with the behavior of some members of the Louisiana Senate throughout the 1970s.¹⁰

The ERA gained a new champion in freshman senator Tony Guarisco (D-Morgan City) in 1976. Guarisco proposed Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 1, a resolution to ratify the ERA, to the 1976 Senate session. The resolution was referred to a new committee, Senate Judiciary Committee “B,” in hopes of easier passage. Nat G. Kiefer (D-New Orleans), who once again declared his support of the ERA, chaired the committee. Members of the new committee who supported the ERA included Edgar Mouton (D-Lafayette) and

¹⁰Mel Schiro, interview by Yvonne Brown, New Orleans, La., July 16, 2014, Mel Schiro, in telephone interviews with author, July 2, 2014 and August 27, 2014.

Virginia Shehee (D-Shreveport). The Senate, however, refused to take any action on the ERA for 1976 and the next few years.¹¹

After several years of taking a back seat, in 1979 the Louisiana Senate once again became a factor in the ERA's fate. The Senate effort generated more noise than results, however. Louisiana ERA supporters rallied in 1979 after Congress extended the ratification deadline for three more years. After losing an 11-5 vote in a Louisiana House committee, ERA backers placed their faith in the Louisiana Senate. They determined to go forward with a bill filed by Anthony Guarisco, which would be heard by Judiciary Committee B on June 11. Unknown to ERA advocates, however, Guarisco brokered a deal with fellow senators to kill his own bill. Guarisco admitted he had "promised to take no action on his ERA bill in return for help from fellow senators on a lobbying bill he wanted to pass." Guarisco told a reporter for the Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* he was "approached by three or four senators who offered to support him on one of his other measures if he wouldn't move with his ERA bill." They told Guarisco, "house members were considering running for their Senate seats and they preferred not to be put on a political spot with an ERA vote." According to the *Morning Advocate*, Guarisco said he agreed to defer his bill because he knew "there were other ERA bills around which could be brought up." Fran Bussie, director of ERA United and an AFL-CIO representative, called him a "Benedict Arnold to the women—and the men—of this state." She said of Guarisco, "I have to wonder about the

¹¹ Deidre Cruse, "Women's Caucus Stresses Passage of ERA in 1976," Baton Rouge *Sunday Advocate*, 1 February 1976, "Alan Alda Supporting ERA in La.," *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, Lafayette, La., 16 March 1976; and Jack Wardlaw, "Things Looking up for La. ERA forces," *New Orleans States-Item*, 12 May 1976.

sincerity of someone who is willing to trade off the rights of 51.3 percent of the population of the country and make a game out of it.”¹²

Edgar Mouton, a committee member, became angry when Guarisco tried to defer committee action on the ERA bill. In Mouton’s words, “He used this ERA bill as a sacrificial lamb, which is not right.” Mouton in turn made Guarisco angry when he got himself designated co-sponsor of Guarisco’s bill and guided it to a favorable committee vote. Guarisco got the Senate to remove Mouton as co-sponsor of his bill by a vote of 23-13. With Mouton removed from the bill, Guarisco put the ERA back on the Senate calendar, where he intended to keep it until the legislative season ended.¹³

Mouton, however, offered another ERA bill. When Mouton’s bill got to the Senate floor, E. Edwards Barham (R-Oak Ridge), the only Republican in the Senate, made a motion to return the ERA resolution to the calendar, which would kill it. This Senate-wide vote was intended to test whether the amendment had a chance of passing. Thomas Hudson (D-Baton Rouge), an ERA advocate, arrived at the chamber on a stretcher to cast his vote against sending the ERA back to the calendar. Hudson had injured his back playing tennis the prior weekend. Hudson’s legislative aide, Lee Mikell, had to press the “no” button for him. Despite the Senate sideshow, Barham’s motion to send the ERA back to the calendar passed by a 25-14 vote, and the ERA died for another year. As far as the Louisiana Senate was

¹²Rafael Bermudez, “Six Gubernatorial Candidates Endorse Equal Rights Amendment,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 29 January 1979, John LaPlante, “ERA’s Chances in La. Legislature Remain in Doubt,” 2 April 1979, Rafael Bermudez, “House Committee Rejects ERA Bill,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 12 June 1979, Don Buchanan, “Third ERA Bill Alive After Second Killed,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 13 June 1979.

¹³Don Buchanan, “Third ERA Bill Alive After Second Killed,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 13 June 1979, Don Buchanan, “ERA Dealt Death Blow,” *Baton Rouge, La. Morning Advocate*, 27 June 1979, Joan I. Duffy, “ERA Dead for This Year in La., Alexandria, La. *Daily Town Talk*, 27 June 1979; and Jack Wardlaw, “25 La. Senators Write the Obituary for ERA in 1979, New Orleans, La. *States-Item*, 27 June 1979.

concerned, 1979 represented the end for ratifying the ERA. Hudson's dramatic stretcher entrance made the local newspapers, but Roberta Madden, founder of BR NOW, did not seem impressed. She remembered Hudson as having a "fair" record of support for women's equality, but by this time Madden could not help feeling jaded.¹⁴

She described some Louisiana politicians' actions with a bit of wry humor. Madden said she and fellow ERA advocates described them as "toilet bowl" feminists. In her words, when the time came for a vote, they "disappeared into the men's room, sat on a toilet, and put their feet up, so the sergeant-at-arms could not find them." Although she did not express particular animosity toward Hudson, Madden decided to run against him for the District 15 senate seat in 1979. It appeared she thought she could do a better job than Hudson in meeting the needs of the constituents. Using the campaign slogan, "the system works if the senator works," Madden threw herself into campaigning by summer 1979. Her biggest problem, however, was raising money. Madden calculated she needed 35,000 dollars in order to compete. Ollie T. Osborne, head of the Acadiana ERA Coalition and Madden's friend, sent a five dollar donation, but also questioned Madden by saying, "I'm somewhat puzzled as to why you're running against Hudson as I thought he was one of our best." Other friends sent in small donations, but a few like Tom Baird, could not contribute anything; in his case, he "could not help her financially due to his divorce." Hudson prevailed against Madden, but she garnered a respectable thirty-two percent of the vote, despite being a political neophyte.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid.; and Roberta Madden, telephone interview with author, April 18, 2014.

¹⁵Box 1, folders 8, 10, 11, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; and Roberta Madden, telephone interview with author, April 18, 2014.

The story of the Louisiana Senate and the ERA appeared to be one of self-serving cynicism. After voting in large majority to pass the ERA in 1972, most state senators worked hard to avoid having to vote on the ERA again. According to Jack Wardlaw, a veteran Louisiana political reporter, the state senators acted out of fear and caution. They perceived the ERA as a divisive issue, with strong feelings on both sides. They also thought Louisiana voters were almost equally divided on the amendment. Their response to political polarization was political paralysis. Wardlaw wrote in his political commentary that “the Legislature’s usual response, when faced with pleas by competing groups, is to do nothing, if at all possible.” Many senators thought the risks of backing the ERA outweighed the benefits.¹⁶

The Louisiana Senate had its share of drama regarding the ERA, but the real battle took place in the Louisiana House of Representatives. The long and slow death of the ERA in Louisiana began with the House defeat in 1972. Records of the legislature show that after the Senate approved the ERA on June 7, 1972, they sent the bill to the Louisiana House on June 9, where House Judiciary Committee “B” received the bill. The committee reported the resolution favorably, which meant they passed the bill through committee to the full House. On June 29, the ERA was called from the calendar, voted on, and rejected by a vote of “32 Yeas and 65 Nays.” This was the only time the full House voted on the ERA.¹⁷

There are no audio or written records that chronicle the debates in the Louisiana House from that time period. Newspaper reporters, however, provided many details of the

¹⁶Jack Wardlaw, “Why ERA failed in La.,” *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 30 June 1982; and Rafael Bermudez, “ERA Wins Favor But Not Votes, Baton Rouge, La. *Sunday Advocate*, 10 June 1979.

¹⁷Joan Kent, “ERA Passage: What Have Women to Lose?” *New Orleans States-Item*, 17 May 1972, Joan Kent, “Women Answer Critics of Bill,” *New Orleans States-Item*, 26 May 1972, and Bill McMahon, “Rights Ratification Rejected in House, Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 30 June 1972.

1972 debate. Four hours of debate on the House floor preceded the vote. As the speeches wore on, Speaker of the House, E. L. Henry, suggested it “might be time to start down the row of Capitol correspondents, since every representative had already been heard from.” Concerns of those opposed to the ERA ran the gamut from concerns about same sex bathrooms and dressing rooms to boys and girls marching together like they did in Russia and Yugoslavia. Some representatives went back and forth and changed their minds within the same speech. Mike Thompson of Lafayette, after saying he was not against women having “equal footing,” proceeded to criticize the ERA. He finally stopped with the observation that, “we are being asked to do something when we really don’t know what we are doing.” Thompson changed his mind several times about the ERA. He voted against it in 1972, but sponsored the ERA in 1974. During a crucial committee hearing in 1976 in which the ERA was expected to pass, Thompson cast one of the critical “no” votes.¹⁸

There was almost a carnival-like atmosphere when Rep. Bill Strain (D-Abita Springs), a thirty year old “heavyweight member,” paraded up and down the aisles carrying Louise Johnson’s “Kill That Snake” sign. One House member finally asked the Sergeant at Arms, Richard Barrios, to take the sign away from Strain. The “heavyweight” Strain, however, refused to give up the sign. Barrios tagged along behind the big man as he weaved around the room. This was also, in probability, the year Mel Schiro first heard of the ERA while on a trip to the Capitol with her husband. As she told the story, she went onto the floor of the legislature to warn her friends not to vote for it, because no one “knew what it was or what it would do.” Schiro confirmed the free-wheeling and chaotic atmosphere that

¹⁸Bill McMahon, “Rights Ratification Rejected in House,” Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 30 June 1972.

reigned on the floor of the Louisiana legislature. Anyone could walk around the floor and talk to legislators. Schiro said legislators would ask friends to sit at their desks and register their votes when they had to be away from their seats. In 1973, the Louisiana House passed a resolution changing the rules of order. Under rules for “Decorum and Debate,” the only people allowed on the floor during sessions would be house members, their staff and employees, and officers of the legislature. Even the media would be confined to their own space.¹⁹

Several representatives spoke out in favor of the ERA during the long debate in 1972. Representative Alphonse Jackson (D-New Orleans), one of the few African-American legislators, begged his fellow representatives “to sublimate our masculine egos.” Rep. Kevin Reilly (D-East Baton Rouge) said, “There is the rankest discrimination in every sector of employment against women. This amendment is a reaffirmation that everyone is equal under the law.” Frank Simoneaux of Baton Rouge talked about the opposition to civil rights in the past. He said, “Legislators once heard: Do you want your daughter to marry a black? Do you want them in your home? But, he concluded, “Is there one of you who can say I don’t (now) want someone else to have the rights that I do?” Despite some passionate ERA support, opposition overwhelmed those voices.²⁰

The Louisiana legislature was a male domain in 1972. Out of 105 legislators, only two were women. It is notable, therefore, that a large part of the credit for the ERA defeat in 1972 went to Louise Johnson. With no legislative experience, newcomer Johnson allegedly

¹⁹Mel Schiro, interview by Yvonne Brown, July 16, 2014, Mel Schiro, telephone interviews with author, July 2 and August 27, 2014; and “Rules of Order of the House of Representatives of the State of Louisiana, Chapter 5. Decorum and Debate, *Official Journal of the Louisiana State Legislature*, 20-22, 68-71.

²⁰Bill McMahon, ““Rights Ratification Rejected in House,” Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 30 June 1972.

persuaded dozens of male representatives to vote against the ERA. The “Kill That Snake” sign that Rep. Strain carried around the chamber came from her desk. Johnson’s forceful personality and convictions about the evils of the ERA attracted followers in the Louisiana House. She also captured the imaginations of the media and the public. The only other female member of the House was Dorothy Mae Taylor, the first African-American woman elected to the legislature in the state’s history. Although both were female legislative pioneers, they were political opposites, particularly regarding the ERA. Journalists liked to say the two women cancelled each other out politically. Nevertheless, the media and the public could not seem to get enough of Johnson. They seemed fascinated by the phenomenon of a strong and assertive woman who was against the ERA.²¹

Before her election to the Louisiana legislature in 1971, Johnson had already broken through gender barriers. She started her own independent insurance agency in the early 1960s. Johnson was a married 47-year-old woman with one grown son when she decided to run for the Louisiana House of Representatives. By her own admission, Johnson had great ambition. She also acknowledged she had not followed the path of traditional womanhood. Johnson knew many of the obstacles that faced ambitious women, but that did not prevent her from becoming an enemy of the ERA. Like other anti-ERA women, Johnson had distinct ideas about gender roles, the nature and meaning of equality, individualism, and the role of government.²²

²¹Jack Wardlaw, “Why ERA failed in La., *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 30 June 1982.

²²Louise B. Johnson Papers, Special Collections, Manuscripts, and Archives, Prescott Memorial Library, Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, Louisiana, hereafter referred to as Louise B. Johnson Papers; from personal memoir entitled “The Great Upset of 1971: A Woman Wins a Seat in the Legislature,” box 3, Folder 1, 1-2, Stephen Webre, “Louise Brazzel Johnson,” In KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana, ed. By David Johnson, Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 2010-Article published February 24, 2011, <http://www.knowla.org/entry.php>.

Johnson was born in 1924 in the small town of Dubach in Lincoln Parish. There is little known of her childhood, but, according to her unpublished memoir, she developed an avid interest in politics as a Hico Elementary School student. Her favorite teacher was Mr. W. L. (Buster) Caldwell. According to Johnson, he taught his young students that “every person had a right to his opinion and opportunity no matter who you were, and if you believe in something, go after it and don’t back down. Nothing is impossible if you prepare. He believed in the individual.” In the fifth grade, Johnson went with her class to Baton Rouge to visit the state legislature. The grandeur of the State Capitol stunned the young schoolgirl. She said, “That visit was like stepping into a dream world for a little country girl. It was like an Alice in Wonderland dream. I was swept up and could picture myself someday in that action.” The words of Johnson’s teacher were not unusual for adult mentors who wanted to inspire young people. However, Johnson internalized these beliefs in individualism, in ignoring limitations, and in her own ability to work hard and achieve her goals. They drove her to become a successful businesswoman and the first woman to serve in the Louisiana legislature from northern Louisiana. These principles also helped drive her opposition to the ERA.²³

Johnson met her husband, Sam, in Dubach, but the family moved to Bernice in Union Parish in the 1940s. Louise had one son, Samuel Wayne Johnson, born in 1942, when she was 17 years old. With only a small family to care for, Johnson poured her considerable energy into community work and a business career. She started an independent insurance agency in 1964. In Johnson’s personal papers, she noted that in “three short years, her

²³Louise B. Johnson Papers, Box 3, folder 1, 1-2; Stephen Webre, “Louise Brazzel Johnson,” KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana; and Louise B. Johnson Obituary, *Ruston Daily Leader*, 8 January 2002, 3.

premium volume grew from 0 to \$100,000.” Her business became her life, but she confessed she loved her work so much it did not seem like work to her. Throughout her careers in business and politics, Johnson’s husband Sam remained in the background. He worked as a “truck superintendent for the local Salley Grocery Co.” When asked about his wife’s political ambitions, he replied, “Whatever she wants to do is all right with me.”²⁴

Johnson developed the skills and stamina of a politician long before she ran for political office. She said, “My office was a gathering place. People felt free to fill their coffee cups and unload their burdens. I helped with their weddings, funerals, showers, graduations, homecomings, and headed financial drives and civic projects.” She also “typed papers and filled out forms, all for free.” Johnson admitted she “competed in a man’s world,” and worked “sixteen to twenty hour days, seven days a week.” She did not seem to resent having to work so hard, although a man in the same business might have succeeded working less. She viewed traditional gender norms as an advantage, and combined taking care of people with business.²⁵

In 1971, Johnson decided to pursue her lifelong dream of running for political office. She determined the timing was right. John J. McKeithen’s second term was winding down and people seemed ready for change. Johnson positioned herself as an outsider and a reformer. She claimed local people were angry at the “McKeithen boys” down in Baton Rouge who were raising taxes while giving themselves raises. She initially ran in a dual

²⁴Louise B. Johnson Papers, Box 2, folder 6; and Box 3, folder 1, Stephen Webre, “Louise Brazzel Johnson, KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana; and Louise B. Johnson Obituary, *Ruston Daily Leader*, 8 January 2002, 3.

²⁵Box 1, newspaper clippings, box 2, folder 6; and Louise Johnson, “The Great Upset of 1971: A Woman Wins A Seat in the Legislature,” box 3, folder 1, p. 1-5, all in Louise B. Johnson Papers, Prescott Memorial Library, Louisiana Tech University.

member district that included Union, Morehouse, and West Carroll Parishes. In the middle of the campaign a judge ruled dual member districts illegal. Johnson ran for a single seat in the newly created District 11, which included Union and Claiborne Parishes.²⁶

In her memoir, Johnson exclaimed that the new District 11 was now the “home of three incumbents, with a combined total of 52 years experience!” One of the incumbents was no less than John Sidney Garrett, the Speaker of the Louisiana House. Johnson, however, would not be intimidated. At a pie and cake auction in rural Claiborne Parish, Garrett showed up in a suit that looked like “5th Avenue.” She remembered, “He told those people what an honor he had brought to Claiborne Parish.” Garrett said, “Do you realize that I’m the Speaker of the House and that’s the most powerful position in Louisiana except the Governor?” According to Johnson, Garrett seemed oblivious to the fact that people in the audience began to “snicker” at him. In response, Johnson, wearing a modest “pin-check cotton dress,” rose to speak and “looking up toward the sky and all around above his head,” she said, “Excuse me, I was looking for the king or the halo.” She said her comments “drew a round of applause and she could feel the crowd moving to her camp.”²⁷

Johnson thrived on challenges but expressed hurt when some of those closest to home failed to support her. In Johnson’s words, “I was no libber, but there were a few shockers I was not prepared for, one was from one of my best friends.” Her friend told her, “You won’t get 50 votes and...mine won’t be in the bunch. You need to stay right where

²⁶Louise B. Johnson, “The Great Upset of 1971: A Woman Wins A Seat in the Legislature,” box 3, folder 1, p. 10-13, Louise B. Johnson Papers, Prescott Memorial Library, Louisiana Tech University. 10-13, Stephen Webre, “Louise Brazzel Johnson,” KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana, Anne Ogburn, “John J. McKeithen,” In KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana, ed. By David Johnson, Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 2010- Article published March 1, 2013, <http://www.knowla.org/entry.php>.

²⁷Louise B. Johnson, “The Great Upset of 1971: A Woman Wins A Seat in the Legislature,” 10-13, box 3, folder 1, Louise B. Johnson Papers, Prescott Memorial Library, Louisiana Tech University.

you are. Your place is in Bernice.” Even more shocking to her, a local Baptist minister she admired told Johnson a woman had no business in politics and that “it’s too dirty a profession for a Christian to venture into.” But she surprised everyone and beat John Sidney Garrett and made Louisiana history. One article referred to Johnson as a “110 pound giant killer” for defeating the powerful House Speaker.²⁸

By the 1970s, however, a woman like Johnson would become an enigma to feminists. Because Johnson made herself such an outspoken opponent of the ERA, feminists in Louisiana sometimes made her a target of their frustration. Johnson was called “an ignorant Southern belle, a fool, and a disgrace to women.” Johnson’s views on gender, equality, and the nature of individual rights were opposed to those advocated by second wave feminists. Johnson did not deny that women encountered obstacles because of their sex, but she believed it was up to the individual woman to overcome obstacles just as she had done. She often said she had “owned two businesses and had never been discriminated against.” In an interview she gave after she left office, Johnson said, “The major barrier to women today are women themselves. Men try to accept people as they project themselves. I have always projected myself as a business woman and therefore have been accepted as such.”²⁹

To Johnson, the idea of giving rights to a collective group regardless of individual merit was basically immoral. Only the morally bankrupt demanded unearned rights or privileges. In a response to a woman asking her to support the ERA, Johnson wrote, “There are only three groups that stand to profit by passage of this amendment—the Prostitutes, the

²⁸Louise B. Johnson, “The Great Upset of 1971: A Woman Wins A Seat in the Legislature,” 1-5, box 3, folder 1, Louise B. Johnson Papers, Prescott Memorial Library, Louisiana Tech University.

²⁹Louise B. Johnson Papers, Box 3, Folder 7; and Stephen Webre, “Louise Brazzel Johnson,” KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana, <http://www.knowla.org/entry.php>.

Homosexuals, and the Lesbians.” Johnson thought that both success and failure could be attributed to individual character and merit. Historian Nancy Baker called this way of thinking a form of “exceptionalism.” Roberta Madden, who knew Johnson, also thought she had a desire to stand out. She said Johnson liked being “the only filly in the stall,” which was a reference to Johnson’s status as one of only two women in the Louisiana House in the early 1970s. Johnson did not believe an overarching system of patriarchy or endemic sexism played the major roles in holding women back.³⁰

Johnson’s strong stances against feminism and the ERA contributed to ending her political career. Her candor on those issues made her a divisive figure—popular to some but notorious to others. Johnson alluded to receiving death threats, although there was no record in her personal papers of any threats made to her or her family. She resigned her house seat in 1975 in order to run for the Louisiana Senate. She lost in a close race to Charles Barham, a fellow Democrat and lawyer from Ruston. According to historian Stephen Webre, organized labor and African-Americans targeted Johnson for defeat. Johnson believed the time she spent fighting the ERA in Louisiana and in other states caused her defeat. In the

³⁰Millie Ball, “Defeat of ERA Is Not Feared: Rep. Louise Johnson Not Particularly Powerful,” New Orleans *Times Picayune*, 24 May 1974, Bill McMahon, “Rights Ratification Rejected in House,” *Morning Advocate*, June 30, 1972, John LaPlace, “No ERA Again in Round 4,” New Orleans *Times Picayune*, 12 June 1975, “Second Wave Feminism(s) and the South: The Difference that Differences Make,” In *Women of the American South*, ed. By Christie Farnham (NY: NYU Press, 1997), 276-301, “Equality Challenged: Equal Rights and Sexual Difference,” In *Civil Rights in the United States*, ed. By Hugh Davis Graham (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 40-72, “Gender on the Right: Meanings Behind the Existential Scream,” *Gender and History* 3 (Autumn 1991), 246-67, Nancy E. Baker, “Texas Conservative Women in the 1970s,” in *Texas Right: The Radical Roots of Lone Star Conservatism*, ed. David Cullen and Kyle Wilkinson (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2014).

middle of her campaign for the senate, Johnson went to the neighboring state of Texas to testify at a hearing to rescind that state's ratification of the ERA.³¹

Texas had ratified the ERA in 1972, but a Texas representative named Bill Hilliard introduced a bill to rescind the ratification in 1975. Johnson attended the hearing and testified as an expert witness, due to her status as a Louisiana legislator and a self-proclaimed student of the Constitution. Johnson told the committee she “firmly believed an inequality of women does not arise out of constitutional defects, but out of...judicial and legislative default and neglect.” She also said the ERA was “not needed to accomplish the status desired by most women.” The effort to rescind failed in Texas. Johnson also failed to win a Louisiana Senate seat. She tried to regain her old House seat in 1978 and lost yet again. The little girl who was swept away by the glamour of the state capitol had a short political career. There is some irony in Johnson's fate. In an earlier time period, Johnson may have been viewed as she viewed herself—as a pioneer for women in the political arena.³²

After the 1972 House debacle, ERA forces renewed their resolve to win ratification of the amendment. They placed the ERA on hiatus in 1973, due to lack of support. They placed their hopes in the Louisiana House of Representatives in 1974. As we remember, the Louisiana Senate deferred action on the ERA in 1974, because they wanted to lob the “hot

³¹Stephen Webre, “Louise Brazzel Johnson,” KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana, <http://www.knowla.org/entry.php>, Lynn Dias, “Anti-ERA Forces Rejoice in Amendment's Death,” Baton Rouge, La. *State Times*, 1 July 1982; and Louise B. Johnson Papers, Box 3, folder 1, “The Great Upset of 1971: A Woman Wins A Seat in the Legislature,” 1-3.

³²Robert Wuthnow, *Rough Country: How Texas Became America's Most Powerful Bible-Belt State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 350-355, “Rescinding Ratification of the Texas Equal Rights Amendment,” Hilliard, et. al, “1975 Texas ERA Hearings, 64th Legislature, Regular Session, HCR 57, 1975, audiotape on file at Legislative Library located in Austin, Texas.

potato” (ERA) to the Louisiana House. In the intervening year, pro-ERA forces placed their emphasis on grassroots organizing. In early 1974 ERA proponents formed a coalition called ERA United of Louisiana. Karline Tierney, a New Orleans women’s rights activist and “housewife,” headed the group. Mary Metz, the president of Baton Rouge NOW, became head of ERA United’s legislative task force. According to Tierney, a coalition of 14 state-wide women’s groups comprised ERA United. In March 1974, Metz reported that the group was composed of 30 groups and approximately 20,000 women.³³

Tierney recruited workers at a meeting of Women in Politics (WIP) in February. Twenty-five women signed up to telephone, type, and do public speaking. They passed the hat to help finance the planned \$3,400 budget. WIP pledged \$200 from their treasury, “if they could spare it.” Both Tierney and Metz had high hopes for ERA United. Tierney said they had been unprepared in 1972. They changed their strategy and planned to lobby on the ground in legislators’ home districts this time. Tierney believed they had relied too much on floor lobbying in 1972. She expressed enthusiasm for the future of the new organization. In addition to the ERA, she thought the group should begin working for “better day care centers, the constitutional convention, and for women candidates.”³⁴

Pro-ERA forces were also bolstered by the entrance of an important ally, the Louisiana AFL-CIO. The state AFL-CIO began supporting the ERA officially in 1974. At the 19th Annual Convention, the Executive Board of the Louisiana AFL-CIO endorsed the ERA. Historically, organized labor’s ERA support represented a major philosophical shift

³³Deidre Cruse, “Louisiana Women Gearing Up For Campaign to Pass ERA,” Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 8 February 1974, “State Acceptance of ERA Argued,” Baton Rouge *Sunday Advocate*, 10 March 1974; and Deidre Cruse, “ERA Proposal Expected to Win,” Baton Rouge *Sunday Advocate*, 12 May 1974.

³⁴Ibid; Interview with Emily Hubbard by author, interview conducted by Alecia Long, 11 August, 2011, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Roberta Madden Papers, Box 4, folder 21.

regarding the status of women in unions and in the workforce. Progressives had fought for protective legislation for women workers. Traditionally, many women union workers felt ambivalent about the consequences of “sameness” equality. Protective legislation protected women from physical exploitation and created a reserved class of women’s jobs. Some women thought the ERA would enable men to take women’s jobs and force women to compete for men’s jobs on an uneven playing field, because women had a physical disadvantage in industrial work. Many union men also felt less than enthusiastic about the ERA in a time of increasing competition for jobs. Nevertheless, the state and national AFL-CIO recognized that women were becoming a permanent part of the workforce and an essential source of numbers and support to unions.³⁵

In addition to their grassroots efforts and the AFL-CIO support, ERA advocates thought they had gained more support in the legislature in 1974. It appeared, however, legislative and executive branch support had actually eroded. Governor Edwin Edwards retreated from his public endorsement of the ERA. Representative Mike Thompson (D-Lafayette), who had voted “no” to the ERA in 1972, but agreed to sponsor it in 1974, called on the governor for help in late May of 1974. The amendment had stalled in House Judiciary Committee “B,” headed by Chairman Dick Guidry of Galliano, whose position on the ERA was not yet clear. The governor had suggested sending it to that particular committee, because he claimed he could influence the committee members. Edwards had also promised labor and women’s groups he would intervene. To their astonishment, the governor went public with an announcement several weeks before the vote that he “thought

³⁵Deidre Cruse, “ERA Proposal Expected to Win,” *Baton Rouge Sunday Advocate*, 12 May 1974, Louisiana AFL-CIO Executive Board, “Resolution No. 3, Equal Rights Amendment,” published in *19th Annual Convention* (Baton Rouge, La.: Ortlieb Press, 1974); and

the proposal was in trouble” and “it was not important enough for him to work actively for its passage.” He even went before House Committee “B” on another matter.³⁶

Mary Metz of ERA United did not take Edwards’ statement well. Metz met with Edwards and he reassured her he would help with the committee. Up until the committee vote, Metz believed Edwards would use his influence as he promised. A disappointed Metz told the *Sunday Advocate* that Edwards had only been playing a “political game.” He said he wanted Louisiana to ratify the ERA, but he claimed helplessness before the legislature. Edwards would declare in 1975, “I would vote for its ratification. However, that is a legislative matter and as governor, I have made and will make no effort to influence the legislature.” In addition to Metz, there were others who did not accept Edwards’ excuses that he had no influence over the legislature or that he acted out of respect for the autonomy and independence of the legislative branch. Rep. Frank P. Simoneaux, a friend of Edwards and a loyal ERA supporter, said of the governor many years later, “He was publicly for it, and privately against it.”³⁷

Edwards’ biographer, Leo Honeycutt, addressed the ERA in his authorized work on the former governor’s life and political career. Honeycutt placed Edwards in a favorable light regarding the governor’s desire to be progressive on the rights of women and minorities. Although he did not say so explicitly, Honeycutt implied that as Edwards dealt with difficult issues such as balancing the budget, raising severance taxes on businesses, and

³⁶Bill Lynch, “Pressure from Edwards needed to dislodge ERA,” *New Orleans States Item*, 21 May 1974.

³⁷Deidre Cruse, “ERA Apparently Loses Out Again,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 20 June 1974, Donald C. Brown, Jr., “ERA Leader Says Edwards Insincere,” 23 June 1974, Tom Aswell, “Legislators: Stances Voiced on Amendment,” *Baton Rouge State Times*, 1 March 1975, Rafael Bermudez, “Rep. Johnson Predicts Fourth Defeat for ERA,” *Baton Rouge State Times*, 16 April 1975; and Telephone Interview with Frank P. Simoneaux by author, 23 May 2013.

the looming oil crisis, he found it increasingly difficult to deal with a recalcitrant legislature and a hostile press.³⁸

Honeycutt also maintained that Edwards invested much of his hope for progress regarding equality for women in the new Louisiana Constitution of 1974. Edwards made the re-working of the 1921 Constitution a priority at the beginning of his first administration. According to Honeycutt, the 1921 Constitution was so complex, “law clerks went blind peeling back layers of amendments and still could not be sure what was legal and what wasn’t.” Edwards purportedly did not want only legislators and the usual power brokers to write the Constitution. The governor made twenty-seven appointments to the convention from industry, labor, law enforcement, racial minorities, education, and civil service, among other sectors of Louisiana society. One hundred and thirty-two delegates convened on January 5, 1973, at the LSU Assembly Center to embark on what Edwards’ described as a momentous opportunity.³⁹

The new constitution would soon intersect with the ERA. A Louisiana “Bill of Rights,” modeled on the national Constitution became the focus of Louisiana citizens interested in equal rights for women. Article I of the 1974 Constitution became the “Declaration of Rights” and it confirmed the rights to property, to freedom of religion, to bear arms, and to privacy. Nevertheless, Section 12 of Article I, called the “Freedom from Discrimination” clause, garnered a great deal of time and attention from the delegates and the public. Louisiana advocates for both sides of the national ERA ratification issue testified

³⁸Leo Honeycutt, *Edwin Edwards: Governor of Louisiana*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Lisburn Press, 2009), 145-155.

³⁹Honeycutt, *Edwin Edwards: Governor of Louisiana*, 129-143.

before the “Declaration of Rights” committee. The committee members were Rep. Alphonse Jackson, Chairman, Judy Dunlap, Vice-Chairman, Rep. Shady Wall, Rep. Louis (Woody) Jenkins, Chris J. Roy, Mrs. Novyse E. Soniat, Ford E. Stinson, Kendall Vick, Anthony J. Guarisco, Jr., and Dr. Gerald N. Weiss.⁴⁰

The committee began to hear testimony on what would come to be called a state ERA. Karline Tierney, of Women in Politics (WIP) submitted a request to the committee asking for inclusion of an amendment which was almost identical to the national ERA. It said, “Equality of Rights under the law shall not be denied or because of race, color, creed, sex, or national origin.” However, ERA opponents, such as Charlotte Felt and Robert Pascal, testified they objected to the idea because it was a “uni-sex” clause. Opponents to the national amendment advocated for qualifying language, which would ensure that some distinctions could be made between men and women under state law. The eventual wording of Section 12 of Article I read:

In access to public areas, accommodations, and facilities, every person shall be free from discrimination based on race, religion, or national ancestry and from arbitrary, capricious, or unreasonable discrimination based on age, sex, or physical condition.

The state ERA did not seem to make much of a difference, however, in terms of the local debate over the national ERA. Because of its qualifying language, ERA proponents did not consider the state amendment strong enough to relinquish their commitment to ratifying the

⁴⁰ Lee Hargrave, “The Declaration of Rights of the Louisiana Constitution of 1974,” *Louisiana Law Review* Vol. 35 No. 1 (Fall 1974), “Louisiana Constitution of 1974, Article I, Declaration of Rights,” *The Louisiana Digital Library*, www.louisdl.louislibraries.org/cdm/ref/collection/p267101coll4/id/11985; and Louisiana Constitutional Convention Records Commission, “Records of the Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1973: Committee Documents, Volume Ten,” www.archive.org/stream/recordsoflouisia10lourich/recordsoflouisia10lourich_djvu.txt.

constitutional amendment. ERA foes, however, often turned to the state ERA in the following years as one more reason a national constitutional amendment was not necessary.⁴¹

The ERA ratification battle erupted again in the summer House session of 1974. House Judiciary Committee B, headed by Dick Guidry of Galliano, voted 10-7 against passage of the ERA on June 20, 1974. Mike Thompson, the ERA sponsor, said a couple of committee members had changed their minds and voted “no” at the last minute. Mary Metz went public with the names of two committee members who reneged on their support. She said, “Rep. Shady Wall of Monroe,” who was a member of the state constitutional “Bill of Rights” committee, “voted no after telling ERA supporters he would back the resolution.” ERA supporters also thought Rep. Leonard Chabert of Houma would vote for the bill, because Edwards promised them he would talk to the Houma representative. Chabert told the *Sunday Advocate* that Edwards “never talked to him one way or another on the ERA.” Despite what must have been a keen disappointment, Metz took the defeat in stride and vowed they would “definitely try again.”⁴²

Some ERA supporters, however, did not appear to feel as sanguine about the legislative duplicity. The following Monday after the committee vote, vandals desecrated the homes of two committee members who voted “no.” Representatives Frank Marullo of New Orleans and Kenneth Leithman of Gretna reported vandals smeared the word “pig” in

⁴¹Text of amendment from Louisiana State Senate, “Louisiana Constitution of 1974”, Article I, Section 12, access at www.senate.legis.state.la.us/documents/constitution/constitution.pdf, Deidre Cruse, “House Committee Kills ERA Despite Arguments, *Morning* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, June 12, 1975; and John LaPlace, “No ERA Again in Round 4,” *Times* (New Orleans, La.) *Picayune*, June 12, 1975.

⁴²Deidre Cruse, “ERA Apparently Loses Out Again,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 20 June 1974; and Donald C. Brown, Jr., “ERA Leader Says Edwards Insincere,” *Baton Rouge Sunday Advocate*, 23 June 1974.

red paint on their houses in the early hours of Monday morning. Leithman said someone also threw a rock wrapped with a threatening letter through the window of his house while his wife and children slept. The *Times Picayune* also reported Leithman's car was painted with the word "pig."⁴³

The victims blamed pro-ERA women, but the vandals were never caught. Committee chairman, Dick Guidry, thought ERA opponents might have done it to smear pro-ERA women. In any case, Leithman used the incidents to vent his anger before the Louisiana House. Taking personal privilege, Leithman shouted,

To those poor, sick people responsible—it was me—J. Kenneth Leithman—who cast the committee vote against...not my wife, not my little boy and not my daughter. So, come see me! Eyeball me! Your irresponsible actions really convinced me that the committee's action was 100 per cent correct.

Rep. Shady Wall took the incidents as license to launch an unprecedented personal attack on Mary Metz and on ERA proponents. Claiming personal privilege, he referred to proponents as "those pigs that came down here trying to pass ERA." He also said, "Mary Metz told a reporter I lied to her when I told her I would vote for it. She is the liar. Mary Metz is the liar." Other representatives moved quickly to silence Shady and to defend Metz. Edward Booker of New Orleans, an ERA supporter, noted the irony of a politician calling someone a liar. Booker said, "Shady, you don't have the most consistent record in the world."⁴⁴

⁴³Deidre Cruse, "ERA Apparently Loses Out Again," *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 20 June 1974, Deidre Cruse, "ERA Vote Leads To Strong Words From 2 in House," *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 25 June 1974; and "Homes of 2 Who Voted Down ERA Vandalized: Notes Left Threatening Families," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 25 June 1974.

⁴⁴Deidre Cruse, "ERA Vote Leads To Strong Words From 2 in House," *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 25 June 1974; and "Homes of 2 Who Voted Down ERA Vandalized: Notes Left Threatening Families," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 25 June 1974.

The ERA ratification struggle in the Louisiana House proceeded along similar lines in 1975 and 1976, minus any vandalism or inflammatory outbursts from representatives. Supporters continued to be optimistic and work hard for ratification, but their hopes ended in disappointment both years. The year 1975 proved to be particularly painful. For the first time since 1972, it looked as if the ERA would make it out of a House committee with a favorable vote. According to the *Times Picayune*, a large and colorful crowd had gathered in the House Chamber to watch the hearing and the vote. Proponents wore orange and black, and “Annabelle Walker of New Orleans wore a wedding gown with a parasol and sign that advocated “Equal partners in Marriage.” The vote tied 7-7 in House Judiciary Committee B, chaired once again by Dick Guidry. The chairman broke the tie by voting “no.” Thus the ERA failed by an extremely close vote of 8-7. This proved to be a stinging defeat for the ERA at the mid-point of the decade.⁴⁵

Both sides of the ERA divide geared up to fight the same battle in 1976, although with a new sense of urgency. The clock was ticking down to the ratification deadline of 1979. After several bad experiences, the pro-ERA side found reasons to hope in 1976. New committees had been formed in the Louisiana House of Representatives. The now infamous, at least to ERA supporters, House Judiciary Committee B would no longer be the place where the ERA went to die. The new Committee on Civil Law and Procedure, chaired by Sam LeBlanc of Algiers, who had voted for the ERA in 1975, now had charge of the ERA. Other past ERA supporters on the committee included Mike Thompson and Frank

⁴⁵John LaPlace, “No ERA Again in Round 4,” *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 12 June 1975, “Third Legislative ERA Tiff Looming,” *Baton Rouge State Times*, 15 January, 1975; and Deidre Cruse, “House Committee Kills ERA Despite Arguments,” *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, 12 June 1975.

Simoneaux. ERA backers were heartened by two newly elected representatives who had supported the ERA in their campaigns—Diana E. Bajoie and William H. Byrnes. Diana Bajoie was the second African-American women elected to the La. House of Representatives, after Dorothy Mae Taylor.⁴⁶

The anti-ERA side, however, did not rest in 1976. Louise Johnson had left the Louisiana House and lost a campaign for the Louisiana Senate. Her departure, however, did not result in a loss of personnel or motivation to defeat the amendment. Nineteen seventy-six was an election year in Louisiana. Along with the elections of more African-Americans and women, who supported the ERA, a new type of politician entered the Louisiana political landscape. Young activists, some in their twenties, began winning state offices in the early 1970s. What made them unique is that they were Democrats who described themselves as limited government, low tax, and social conservatives. It was not unique for southern Democrats to be for limited federal government, low taxes, or maintaining traditional social institutions. Nevertheless, these young conservatives began to feel at odds with the political party of their “fathers.” To these young conservatives, the Democrat party was becoming the home of big government and special interest minority groups.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Deidre Cruse, “Women’s Caucus Stresses Passage of ERA in 1976,” Baton Rouge *Sunday Advocate*, 1 February 1976, Smiley Anders, “Anti-ERA Groups Gather,” Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, 18 February 1976, Jack Wardlaw, “Things looking up for La. ERA forces,” *New Orleans States-Item*, 12 May 1976, “Alan Alda Supporting ERA in La.,” *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, 16 March 1976, Deidre Cruse, “House Group Debating Equal Rights Measure,” Baton Rouge *State Times*, 16 June 1976, and John LaPlace, “ERA Measure Dies in House Committee,” New Orleans *Times Picayune*, 17 June 1976.

⁴⁷Daniel Richey, interview by author, Baton Rouge, La., May 10, 2013, Andrew, John A. III, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), Brennan, Mary, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), Crespino, Joseph, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Theodoulou, Stella Z. “Minority Status to Serious Partisan Alternative? The Case of the Louisiana Republican Party, 1948-1983,” Phd. Dissertation, Tulane University, New Orleans, La., 1984.

In 1976, one such young man, Daniel W. Richey, won election to the Louisiana House at the age of 26. Richey was born in Ferriday, La., in 1948. In an interview many years later, he described his childhood upbringing and town as “idyllic.” He excelled in athletics, academics, and extracurricular activities in high school. Richey was active in Key Club, a high school service and leadership organization. Through Key Club, he met another young man with political ambitions, Louis (Woody) Jenkins. Jenkins, a political and social conservative, would later mentor Richey before and after he entered the Louisiana House of Representatives. Richey went to McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana, on a basketball scholarship, and attended Loyola Law School in New Orleans.⁴⁸

Richey began his political conversion to conservatism in law school. He read the works of Ayn Rand and Henry Hazlitt, both considered founders of modern day libertarianism. Conservatives and libertarians diverge on essential points and even contradict each other. However, the ideas of the classical liberal economists unified conservatives and libertarians. They both espoused the superiority of laissez faire capitalism, the logic of free markets, individualism, and severe limits on the role of government. Religious conservatives like Richey, who was a devout Catholic, did not condone Rand’s atheism, but they liked her portrayals of the virtues of unfettered capitalism and of the exploits of men liberated from oppressive and misguided government.⁴⁹

Upon questioning, Richey said he did not connect the ERA to solving the problems of women and discrimination. Like many other anti-ERA people, he believed women

⁴⁸Daniel Richey, interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, La., May 10, 2013; and Louis “Woody” Jenkins, interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, La., September 5, 2014.

⁴⁹Daniel Richey, interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, La., May 10, 2013, Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

already had adequate legal protections and equal rights. Therefore, Richey proceeded to make fighting the ERA a priority in 1976. According to Richey, the Speaker of the House, E. L. (Bubba) Henry, decided that 1976 would be the ERA's year to pass and he stacked the Civil Law and Procedure Committee with ERA supporters. Eleanor Shirley of ERA United also knew much was at stake in 1976. According to her recollection, ERA lobbyists went to work on committee members Lane Carson, Walter Bigby, James Dimos, Hunt Downer, L. G. LePlante, Manuel Fernandez, and A. J. McNamara, who had pledged support, but was reportedly "wavering." ERA supporters thought they had eight yes votes on the committee. The committee included sixteen members and Chairman Sam LeBlanc, for a total of seventeen. Shirley expected the vote to tie at eight for and eight against, and that LeBlanc would break the tie with a yes vote. In the meantime, however, Richey said he worked surreptitiously to persuade committee members to say "no" to the ERA. Both Lane Carson and Mike Thompson reportedly changed their minds and voted negatively. The committee vote of 10-6 against passage of the amendment proved devastating to ERA supporters. Richey, however, still sounded gleeful many years later as he recounted the apparent committee coup. In his opinion, 1976 marked the death of the ERA in Louisiana.⁵⁰

Even after a string of disappointments, ERA proponents did not give up. They were encouraged that Thomas I. Emerson, a Yale law professor and expert on the ERA, would be coming to Louisiana to testify on behalf of the amendment in 1977. Emily Hubbard, chairperson of ERA United, remembered Emerson paid his own way to get to Louisiana. In

⁵⁰Daniel Richey, Interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, La., May 10, 2013, box 9, folder 1, Roberta Madden Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, John LaPlace, "ERA Measure Dies in House Committee, *Times (New Orleans) Picayune*, June 17, 1976; *Official Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Louisiana*, May 21, 1976, p. 291-292, "Reports of the Committees, House Concurrent Resolution No. 58, June 16, 1976, 922; and "Minutes of the House Committee—Civil Law and Procedure, June 16, 1976, State Capitol, House Chamber, Senate Docket, Baton Rouge, La.

his remarks, Emerson contended that “in a country which prides itself upon securing for its citizens justice and equality, the present status of women is a national scandal.” Despite some significant support, the committee voted down the resolution 11-5.⁵¹

In 1978, nothing happened regarding the ERA at the state level, because Louisiana supporters rallied to the cause of extending the ratification deadline. Congress set the original deadline for ratifying the ERA at seven years, which ended in March 1979. By the end of 1977, in spite of the enthusiasm generated by the national IWY conference, national feminist leaders judged the amendment to be in trouble. New York Senator Elizabeth Holtzman proposed a resolution to extend the deadline by seven more years on October 26, 1977. On July 9, 1978, approximately one hundred women from Louisiana made the trip to Washington DC, to join thousands of women in a historic march on the nation’s capitol. In temperatures above ninety degrees, estimates of fifty-five to one hundred thousand women marched from the Washington monument to the steps of the Capitol Building. Louisiana ERA supporters who marched on Washington included Roberta Madden, Fran Bussie, Ida Martinez, Sibal Taylor Holt, and Ruth Lincecum Hebert.⁵²

The resolution to extend the ERA time period was controversial, however. ERA advocates based their case on the fact the original time period was in the preamble of the

⁵¹Bill McMahon, “ERA Fails 5th Time in Louisiana Legislature,” Baton Rouge, La. *State Times*, 8 June 1977, Sharon McRae, “How Does It Stand in State?: ERA’s Biggest Enemy: Fear,” Baton Rouge, La. *Morning Advocate*, 30 April 1977, “ERA Dead for this Year,” Alexandria, La. *Daily Town Talk*, 10 June 1977, Lucien Salvant, “Capitol Notebook: La. Legislative Action on ERA Discussed,” Alexandria, La. *Daily Town Talk*, 12 June 1977; and Bill McMahon, “ERA Resolution Debated by Panel,” Baton Rouge, La. *State Times*, 7 June 1977.

⁵²James Lardner, “Over 40, 000 ERA Backers March on Hill: Demonstrators Seek Extension of Time for Ratification,” *The Washington Post*, July 10, 1978, “President Backs Extension for ERA,” *State* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Times*, July 13, 1978, Peggy Simpson, “ERA Demonstrators March on Capitol: Seek Extension of Ratification,” *Morning* (Baton Rouge, La.) *Advocate*, July 10, 1978; and Thomas H. Neale, Specialist in American National Government, “The Proposed Equal Rights Amendment: Contemporary Ratification Issues,” Congressional Research Service, access at <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42979.pdf>.

proposed amendment and not the text. They also cited that until the 18th amendment, no proposed constitutional amendment had included a time requirement. Feminist leaders like Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, and Eleanor Smeal, however, chose to compromise in order to ensure passage through house and senate committees. The compromise was called the “three plus three plan,” which extended the deadline not seven years but three years, three months, and seven days. Louisiana feminists lobbied their state senators and congressmen in person and by letter. They appealed in particular to Lindy Boggs, who had expressed doubt about abortion, but support for women’s rights and equality. On August 15, 1978, the US House of Representatives passed an extension with a 235-190 vote. Of the eight Louisiana representatives, only Lindy Boggs and Gillis Long voted yes to the extension. The US Senate passed the extension by a 65-27 vote in October, 1978. Louisiana’s senators, Russell Long and Bennett Johnston, split their votes. Long voted no and Johnston voted yes. Nevertheless, the extension did not make a difference in the outcome. By the end of the second deadline on June 30, 1982, neither the state of Louisiana nor the nation passed the ERA.⁵³

As defeats came one after another, it is difficult to comprehend why supporters invested immeasurable amounts of time, energy, and resources to the ERA in Louisiana. There are several reasons why they persevered. First, they believed in the logic and rightness of their cause. They believed in the basic fairness of the amendment, and thought reason would over-ride emotional objections. Second, they believed the words of Louisiana

⁵³Fran Bussie, interview by Yvonne Brown, Baton Rouge, La., July 27, 2013, Lyle Denniston, “ERA Supporters Were Waiting for that ‘Swing’ Vote, But...” *The Washington Star*, July 19, 1978; and the record of votes on the ERA extension in the national congress can be found online at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/95-1978/h1327>. Six Louisiana congressmen voted no to the ERA extension—Robert Livingston, David Treen, Joseph Waggoner, Thomas Huckaby, William Henson Moore, and John Breaux. To view online record of national Senate vote on ERA extension, access <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/95-1978/s1086>.

legislators who said they supported and would vote to ratify the amendment. Third, because they were influenced by polls, which said most Louisiana citizens approved of the ERA, they thought Louisiana legislators would eventually accede to public pressure and vote in favor of the amendment.

There are several reasons why the amendment went down to defeat. Well organized opponents, most of them women, waged an effective campaign in the legislature to defeat the ERA. Although both sides had a certain amount of money and resources, anti-ERA women, particularly those from the Farm Bureau and Chamber of Commerce, had an early advantage, because they had longstanding organizational structures and the resources of their parent organizations. They also had an undeniable level of historical influence from interests like agriculture and business. Anti-ERA forces also had help from one of the few women in the Louisiana legislature, Louise Johnson. Johnson appeared to sway male legislators, who seemed impressed that an independent businesswoman opposed the amendment. As Roberta Madden noted at the end of the campaign, one of the main reasons they lost was the level of public support they hoped for did not materialize. Although polls said a majority of people in the state favored the ERA, some of the internals tell a different story. Much of the professed support was for abstract ideals of “equality.” Support for the ERA was also broken down along generational lines, with younger people, who sometimes failed to vote, supporting the ERA. Despite the determination of proponents, the battle to ratify the ERA in Louisiana ended in defeat.

CONCLUSION

On July 3, 1982 several hundred people met in New Orleans to conduct a mock funeral march in 94 degree weather to commemorate the same event that opened this dissertation—the death of the ERA. The marchers consisted mostly of a dedicated group of advocates who had battled for ten years to get the ERA passed in Louisiana. Participants lined up on North Rampart Street at 2 p.m., passed through the French Quarter, and ended in Jackson Square where they listened to fourteen speeches in the oppressive heat. The Louisiana Women’s Political Caucus organized the march, and participating groups included the American Civil Liberties Union, the League of Women Voters, the Independent Women’s Organization, the Louisiana Gay Political Committee, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women, represented by women from Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Local 4522 from Chalmette, Louisiana. Marchers wore white sashes in honor of suffragists and carried open umbrellas while jazz musicians dressed in tuxedos led the parade.¹

Though it was a mock funeral, the event took on the air of a celebration. A jazz funeral in New Orleans tradition commemorates a sad event, but it usually turns into a party, which celebrates the hope of new life to come. According to a reporter, “strip-teasers on Bourbon Street showed their enthusiasm by dancing in doorways and onlookers watched from balconies. The marchers threw out yellow doubloons with orange lettering that said: ERA—A New Day! Never Again Silence.” It seemed that despite their disappointment, ERA activists would not give up the fight. One speaker, New Orleans Parish Juvenile Court

¹Lou Chapman, “ERA supporters mark death of amendment with funeral,” *Times Picayune*, July 4, 1982, “Women set jazz funeral for ERA,” *Morning Advocate*, June 22, 1982, and “Women’s Caucus plans jazz funeral for terminal ERA,” *Times Picayune*, June 22, 1982.

Judge Anita H. Ganuchau, said, “and to those of you who thought we were gone, I just want to say, Hi Ronnie—Hi Phyllis. We’re still here and we’ll always be here.”²

Despite Ganuchau’s joking manner and the air of celebration, the march commemorating the death of the ERA reveals the importance of the ERA ratification struggle in Louisiana in the 1970s. Although it has been largely ignored, the ERA stood at the center of a protracted and heated battle over the meanings of gender equality and the roles of women in the homes, workplaces, and institutions of Louisiana. Another part of the story that has not fully been explored is the role anti-ERA women played in the defeat. Pro-ERA forces, then and now, tended to dismiss female opponents as either backward or as pawns of male dominated business interests. Anti-ERA women in Louisiana, however, were pivotal to the defeat of ERA ratification.

Female ERA opponents were motivated by their own beliefs about gender roles, the nature and importance of the family, and the relationships of individuals and families to the state. The views of most of them on gender came from their religious beliefs. They believed God ordained a natural order in which men and women were created differently for different purposes. Although they said they believed in the equality of men and women, they thought the ERA was a gender neutralizing law, which would result in more inequality than equality. In their view, women would be forced to compete with men on an unfair playing field, be denied the choice to be mothers and housewives, and be exploited by men. This conservative view of gender, which anti-ERA women held, was less optimistic than what they believed to be the utopian ideals of liberalism, but in their minds, it was more realistic.

²Lou Chapman, “ERA supporters mark death of amendment with funeral,” *Times Picayune*, July 4, 1982.

Laws such as the ERA could not guarantee equality; they would degrade or destroy important institutions like the military, marriage, and the family, and prove to be a disappointment to both men and women.³

On a practical level, anti-ERA women in Louisiana did not act from high-mindedness alone. The leaders of civic groups in Louisiana that opposed the ERA, such as the Farm Bureau Women's Committee and the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce Women's Auxiliary, were middle-aged housewives who relied on their husbands financially. Many of the women who belonged to these groups shared their circumstances. They wanted to preserve their financial status, but also their social status and identity, which hinged on traditional marriage and prevailing gender norms. The leaders of these organizations did not have to work outside the home. Therefore, they had the time, energy, skills, and peer support to wage an anti-ERA campaign. Anti-ERA women leaders in Louisiana, such as Melba McIntosh, Charlotte Felt, Marilyn Thayer, and Mel Schiro also had considerable political experience prior to the ERA, through their work with the DAR, the Farm Bureau, and the Chamber Auxiliary.

The findings of this study also challenge a common belief about anti-feminist and anti-ERA women. A number of scholars and social critics adhere to the "backlash" theory of conservative women in the 1970s. They argue that conservative women lashed out against feminism in the 1970s because they sought to bring women back to the legal, social, and cultural circumstances of the 1950s or earlier. To some extent there is truth to this. Many of the anti-ERA women considered here believed women belonged at home being wives and

³Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society* (NY: Basic Books, 2009), 1-30, Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1-40."

mothers. Nevertheless, this is not an adequate explanation for why younger women aligned with conservatism and anti-feminism, and continue to do so today. It does not fully explain women who were politicians and business women, but nevertheless rejected feminism. The case should not be overstated, but anti-ERA women in Louisiana said they believed the right of every woman to do and achieve whatever she desired. In their worldview, however, women's ambitions were circumscribed by the realities of gender and the individual's gifts and talents, not to mention their circumstances. Gender dictated that responsibilities to husband, children, and family came first.

The battle over the ERA left a lasting legacy in Louisiana. As stated several times in this study, the 1970s were filled with social, political, and cultural change. Although Louisiana did not ratify the amendment, the ERA indirectly led to changes in legal and social status for Louisiana women. The public demanded and legislators overturned Louisiana's one hundred year old marriage law, which included the provision that the husband was head and master, and had control of all the community property, including the wife's share and earnings. A spotlight was turned on discriminatory practices at the state's institutes of higher learning, which led to more opportunity for education and in hiring. Although it was not included in this study, state and private partnerships developed to establish domestic violence shelters and rape crisis lines. These services came as a result of changing ideas about physical and sexual violence toward women. Although at times they did so reluctantly, especially in the case of Louisiana's marriage law, anti-ERA women lent their support to these measures.

Conservative anti-ERA women left a legacy as well. Marilyn Thayer became involved with Republican Party politics at the national and local level. She became head of

a state committee to elect Ronald Reagan in 1980. Much attention has been given to the rise of the Republican Right in the 1970s. The battle over the ERA in the 1970s in Louisiana did not represent the rise of a Republican Right in Louisiana, at least not yet. With the exceptions of a few, who were Republicans already, like Thayer and Felt, politicians and activists involved on the anti-ERA side remained Democrats. Daniel Ritchey and Woody Jenkins did not become Republicans until the 1990s. But the Louisiana struggle over the ERA helped lay a foundation for a political shift. Louisiana had been known for its iconic politics and politicians, but Louisiana politics began to resemble and align with an emerging national Republican conservative and Democrat liberal divide because of the ERA. These political and cultural shifts came in part as a result of the ERA ratification battle and the part Louisiana women played in the clashes over gender, culture, and politics in the 1970s.⁴

⁴Oral Interview with Daniel Ritchey, 10 May 2013, Baton Rouge, La., Telephone Interview with Louis (Woody) Jenkins, to his home in Baton Rouge, 28 August 2014; and telephone interviews with Marilyn Thayer to her home in Georgia, 18 March 2014, 18 February 2012, 3 July 2013; and 25 May 2014.

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