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The Gendering of Nevada politics: The ERA ratification campaign, 1973-1981

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THE GENDERING OF NEVADA POLITICS: THE ERA RATIFICATION
CAMPAIGN, 1973-1981

by

Caryll Batt Dziedziak

Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada Las Vegas
1998

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Doctor of Philosophy in History
Department of History
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ABSTRACT

The Gendering of Nevada Politics: The ERA Ratification Campaign, 1973-1981

by

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This dissertation examines Nevada's Equal Rights Amendment ratification campaign spanning from 1973 through 1981. Using legislative records, newspapers, archival records, oral histories and interviews; this work traces the creation of two distinct political cultures that arose in Nevada during this period. Women from both sides of this debate sought to make themselves heard in the political deliberations over this proposed amendment; thus finding new agency with which to express their political views. As ERA activists led a grassroots campaign for equality under the law, conservative women mobilized existing church networks to effect a massive counter attack. In the end, while ratification failed, both sides ultimately broadened the space for women's political voice.

By studying two distinct women's political cultures in Nevada during the 1970s, my research relied on creating sources as well as pouring over volumes of oftentimes untouched archival materials. This methodology underscores the importance of oral histories and archival records in shaping the histories of the recent past. While the ratification campaign both nationally and in Nevada witnessed the morphing of the drive for legal equality into an ideological battle over the authority to dictate gender relations, it nonetheless politicized women as

never before. These energized communities of women expanded the sphere of politics well beyond that of public office; thereby changing the composition of our elected offices, altering legislation, opening the legislative chambers, and expanding the scope of political discourse. In shaking women's gendered beliefs and core values, the Equal Rights Amendment ratification campaign invigorated women's political voice and created new political spaces. The story of Nevada's ERA ratification campaign is not one of failure, rather it is one of women united in common beliefs and convictions, becoming energized and engaged in new political communities to expand the body politic and shape political discourse.

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This dissertation represents the efforts of many people. My chair, Joanne Goodwin, who along with Jean Ford, had the prescience to search out women's records and place them with permanence in the Nevada Women's Archives (NWA). As an undergraduate student, I could not fully appreciate Dr. Goodwin's reference to the NWA as a "treasure trove" for graduate research. However, years later as I poured over the collections of so many women, I silently thanked them for meticulously saving the newspaper articles, notes, minutes, and correspondence; the pieces of history now available to those of us who wish to tell their story.

My thanks to the faculty of the History Department at the University of Nevada Las Vegas for encouraging stimulating research and classroom discussions over my many years as a student. Elspeth Whitney is foremost in welcoming me into that realm of intellectual discourse and to whom I will be forever grateful. Thanks also to the staff of Special Collections both at the University of Nevada Las Vegas and University of Nevada Reno for the welcoming and accommodating space for my research. Much gratitude is owed to my committee: Marcia Gallo, Elizabeth Nelson, and Michelle Tusan, who along with Joanne Goodwin patiently waited for me to write while offering steady encouragement. My appreciation also extends to my graduate representative, Ralph Buechler, who readily agreed to sit on my committee despite the distance of my work from that of his own field.

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I have had the wonderful opportunity to interview women who participated in the ERA ratification campaign and other activism here in Nevada. My thanks and admiration to Myram Borders, Renee Diamond, Dorothy Eisenberg, Vivian Freeman, Martha Gould, Mylan Hawkins, Naomi Millisor, Renee Rampton, Harriet Trudell, and former Lieutenant Governor Sue Wagner. Your lives and determination have truly inspired me.

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Last, but not least, to my family who matter most of all: my parents and in-laws, siblings too numerous to name here, my husband and complement in life Bryan, Matt and Maureen, Dan and Stephanie, and Zach. I love you. And to my grandchildren Geoffrey and Aria Sophia: My love for you is beyond words. Thank you for being the most joyful distraction in life!

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INTRODUCTION

While first campaigning as a Republican candidate for the Nevada State Assembly in 1974, Sue Wagner would joke with constituents that the ERA stood for “Earned Run Average”; a baseball term. At the time, Sue knew a lot about baseball, but very little about the Equal Rights Amendment. That would soon change. When the 1975 Nevada Legislature convened for Sue’s first term as State Assemblywoman, the ERA had become *the* issue, the most acrimoniously debated topic of the legislative session. As one of the few female legislators, Sue found her opinion constantly solicited by the media. She quickly educated herself on the issue and decided that this was something that she *would* support.¹ She thus joined the ranks of Nevadans seeking to place this basic principle of equality into the U.S. Constitution and commenced the first steps of the bitter battle ahead.

Although debated in the state’s biennial legislature from 1973 through 1981, the ERA was never ratified in Nevada. Nonetheless, this period proved instrumental for women in terms of raising awareness of their current status quo, organizing, entering public life, and enacting legislation to rectify many of the existing inequities present in the law. Women’s organizations, such as the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the Soroptimist International of the Americas, the League of Women Voters (LWV), and local chapters of the National Organization for Women (NOW) set out to educate themselves and the general public about the amendment. A statewide Nevadans

¹ Sue Wagner with Victoria Ford, *Through the Glass Ceiling: A Life in Nevada Politics* (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 2005), 136.

for ERA also formed with active northern and southern divisions. Many organizations also joined forces with representatives from the ACLU, Common Cause, and Unitarian congregations to create the Equal Rights Coalition with the hope of more effectively coordinating Pro-ERA strategies.

Taking notice of the ERA ratification history bears an instructive lesson on the cultural underpinnings not only of the 1970s, but still present today. What values and beliefs politicize individuals at a particular historical moment? On the national front, the Equal Rights Amendment proved to be one of the most contentiously debated amendments ever proposed to the American public. Despite the fact that most Americans agreed on the theoretical principle of equality, the amendment languished in the halls of Congress for nearly fifty years before being sent to the states for ratification. Why? In studying the polemics of the Equal Rights Amendment ratification campaign, scholars have shown new appreciation for the complexities and nuances inherent in the process of transforming a theoretical principle into public policy. While the abstract notion of equality had been generally embraced, the application of “Equal Rights” as a matter of public policy meant radically different things to most people. According to Jane Sherron De Hart, early supporters insisted that that the Equal Rights Amendment would be “simple justice.” However, in the decades transpiring since the ERA ratification campaign, Americans have increasingly come to affirm equality in principle, while they have also increasingly come to disagree on the policies required to realize equality on the basis of sex in practice.²

² Jane Sherron De Hart, “Equality Challenged: Equal Rights and Sexual Difference,” *Journal of Policy History* 6.1 (1994): 41-46, 64.

The ERA campaign of the 1970s not only illustrates an important chapter in women's history, but also serves as a means by which to understand Nevada politics. As one of the non-ratified states, Nevada's campaign reflects more than a quest for equality under the law; it reveals the polarization existing over the understanding of women's rights and roles. Nevada was also home to diverse and oftentimes oppositional entities. To understand this complicated political and cultural climate, one only has to juxtapose the presence of conservative northern ranching communities and a prominent statewide Mormon presence against a growing gaming industry, legalized prostitution, and an undeniable Mafia presence. Despite Nevada's unique demographics, the 1970s produced a decade of unprecedented political involvement for women, including: women entering the legislature, the Equal Rights Amendment ratification campaign, the first statewide women's conference, legislation addressing sexual discrimination and domestic violence, and such grassroots efforts as the Community Action Against Rape and the Las Vegas welfare mothers' Operation Life.

This dissertation analyzes Nevada's ERA ratification campaign spanning the legislative sessions from 1973 through 1981. During this campaign, Nevada women became politically involved in unprecedented numbers. However, there were two competing factions that became politicized; women for the ERA *and* those opposed. From a national perspective, Nevada women's Pro-ERA activism may have appeared merely as a "ripple" in the second wave feminist movement. However, I contend that many in Nevada viewed it as a "force unleashed," thereby politicizing another group of women, who engaged in a

massive counter attack to outmaneuver the more grassroots-type feminist activity across the state.

I argue that the Equal Rights Amendment ratification campaign in Nevada quickly metamorphosed from that of a single issue political campaign into an ideological battle; whereby contesting images of gender relations rattled the moorings of the existing paradigmatic structure. I also argue that the heightened anxieties displayed during this campaign underscore its cultural significance; as they reveal the precarious certitude of the dominant gender ideology. Not only questioning long-held beliefs about women's roles and representation, this campaign likewise carried the potential to destabilize long-standing practices and social institutions. Therefore, while the ERA ratification ultimately failed in Nevada, it nonetheless infused and energized a women's political culture that expanded the spirit and scope of future political discourse.

By tracing the ratification campaign of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution affiliated very closely with the second wave feminist movement, my research logically falls within the rubric of social and political history. However, my dissertation does not limit its focus to formal politics. While my research does indeed examine the legislative records of both the U.S. Congress and the Nevada legislature, detailing the national and state debates, my primary focus is to examine women's politicization at this historical moment. During this ratification campaign, women across the nation became politically active; many for the first time. In Nevada, as elsewhere, two dissident factions worked with equal fervor for their cause; whether to promote the Equal Rights Amendment's

ratification or assure its demise. This suggests a political history that is reliant not only upon public record, but with an understanding of the cultural context as well. Rather than merely tracing the course of the ratification campaign as a loss for Nevadans, my dissertation examines the “political culture” as suggested by Ellen Dubois. According to Dubois, political culture understands politics as more than a voting record. Rather, it is an understanding of the underlying values that frame people’s perspectives of politics that is absolutely core to a conceptualization of any particular political moment.³ By studying this ratification campaign through the lens of Nevada women’s political culture, I reveal the core values and beliefs that engaged women during this period.

In considering the underlying values and beliefs framing women’s political outlook in Nevada during the ERA ratification campaign, my work draws upon the methodological tools utilized in cultural history. As described by Peter Burke, cultural history reflects the shift “from an assumption of unchanging rationality, to an increasing interest in the values held by particular groups in particular places and particular periods.” Cultural historians concern themselves with symbolism and representation to search for meaning in a given historical moment.⁴ By exploring how individuals described what the ERA ratification campaign meant to them, how it was debated in the chambers of the Nevada legislature, and

³ Nancy Cott, Gerda Lerner, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Ellen DuBois, and Nancy Hewitt, “Considering the State of Women’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15.1 (Spring): 151-52; see also Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics, Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *The American Historical Review* 89.3 (June 1984): 620-647.

⁴ Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 2.

portrayed in the local media; my dissertation examines the foundational ideals embraced both by those for and against its ratification.

Central to this analysis is the concept of gender, for the ERA ratification campaign quickly became the litmus test for voicing one's values regarding gender relations. As such, I have been heavily influenced by the work of Joan Wallach Scott, who has been pivotal with her analysis of gender as a mode of producing cultural meanings and ascribing distributions of power. By suggesting gender as an analytical tool to replace the ubiquitous male/female binarisms, Scott reveals that sexual differences are not the essentialist constructs of society, but merely another form of organization that is culturally created and given meaning through gender.⁵ To this end, my work looks at the ways the media coverage, personal correspondence, public testimonies, and legislative debates disseminated gendered imagery and representations that expressed their perceptions of acceptable gender mores.

The degree of emotion still expressed over thirty years later by individuals involved in this campaign is striking. My research has not uncovered the same degree of emotion from any other single issue campaign of this period. Why the extreme intensity of emotion? By considering the cultural context present during this campaign, I have come to understand this ratification process as much more than a single issue to be won or lost. Scholars have referred to the Equal Rights Amendment as a "lightning rod for political discussions of women's changing

⁵ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

roles in society.”⁶ Stated differently, one could assert that the ERA ratification campaign created a site of vitriolic ideological contestation, where opposing sides of the issue wrestled for public authority over the designation of women’s roles in American society. Mary Poovey has provided an insightful look into the formation of ideology that she describes as fissured, self-contradictory, contested, and developing unevenly. She relates two perspectives of ideology: first, that of the interdependent images making ideology accessible to people, and second, that of understanding representations of gender as one of the sites where ideology is simultaneously constructed, deployed, and contested.⁷ Poovey’s work illustrates the conflicts and contestations often masked within a seemingly dominant ideology. Pointing to those issues that are deemed “problematic” in any given historical moment, Poovey asserts that they, in fact, are indicators of the limits of ideological certainty.

My work extends this analysis to Nevada’s ratification campaign. I argue that the ERA ratification campaign in Nevada represented more than an issue to be won or lost. This historical period had witnessed rapid social and cultural changes; with the promise or threat of more to come. With the resurgence of women’s movement sweeping the country during this moment, gender became a mutable variable in the broader rubric of power relations. While activists promised constitutional redress of legal equality, opponents transformed this campaign into a threat of apocalyptic doom. Core to this threat laid the potential

⁶ Erin M. Kempker, “Women at the Crossroads: Feminists, Conservatives, and Gender Politics in Indiana, 1950-1980” (Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 2008), 111.

⁷ See Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

of destabilizing gender relations. By studying the rhetoric and representation employed by both sides of this campaign, I illustrate the ideological struggles taking place over the authority to dictate gender relations.⁸

One cannot fully appreciate the ratification campaign of the ERA without understanding the social movement that resurrected this long-neglected amendment and brought it to the forefront of national attention. This resurgence is directly attributable to the second wave feminist movement that made its initial appearance amidst the social unrest of the sixties and by the seventies, simply exploded. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is often cited as having created the impetus for the second wave feminist movement. Published in 1963, *The Feminine Mystique* contained Friedan's journalistic exposé of the disjuncture between the personal potential versus cultural expectations of 1950s housewives. Using women's magazines, Friedan illustrated the media's idealization of domesticity that, nonetheless, left women with feelings of deep discontent. Recent scholars have challenged Friedan's depiction of the postwar dominant ideology as a monolithic conservative promotion of domesticity.⁹

⁸ For more information on the cultural conditions leading to the rise of the New Right, see Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Carol Felsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority: The Biography of Phyllis Schlafly* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1981); William C. Berman, *America's Turn Right: From Nixon to Clinton*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁹ See Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," *Journal of American History* 79.4 (March 1993): 1456, where Meyerowitz argues that the postwar dominant ideology was not a monolithic repressive force, but replete with ambivalences, inconsistencies, and competing voices.

Regardless, when first published, Friedan's work resonated with so many women that it became an instant best-seller. In addressing this "problem that has no name" Friedan sparked the initial conversations that ultimately led to the resurgent feminist movement.

The seventies opened with the three ardent publications that catapulted the nascent feminist conversations into mainstream public discourse: Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*.¹⁰ Immensely popular and often quoted, these works soon became classics as women theorized over the notion of oppression, sexual identity, the meaning of difference, and the role of women in society. As this decade unfolded, the feminist activity riveted the nation's attention as women organized to address societal inequities while entering the workforce and political arena in unprecedented numbers. Rape, domestic violence, sexual discrimination, reproductive freedom, childcare, comparable worth, lesbian rights, and the feminization of poverty became topics scrutinized by legislators, women's organizations, and communities alike.

Despite its growing national presence, the feminist movement did not reflect a singular or cohesive perspective. The more mainstream liberal feminists of the National Organization for Women reflected a membership of largely white middle-class women; many of whom had professional careers. Accepting the current institutional structures, liberal feminists argued for equity in the workplace

¹⁰ Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Random House, 1970); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970); and Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Press, 1970).

and public sphere, seeking to integrate women more thoroughly into current power structures and granting them access to positions formerly held only by men. With “equity” as their platform, liberal feminists espoused a feminist agenda that could be embraced by a majority of their members.

By the mid-seventies, two new feminist factions had emerged from the earlier liberation groups and were now fully engaged. The first new sect, cultural feminism, was highly influenced by the “hippie” counterculture and focused on a woman-centered culture as seen with art, music, literature, and a variety of venues creating new public spaces. Driven by separatist, essentialist, and aesthetic impulses, cultural feminism sought to affirm “the female,” as opposed to accepting any negative cultural stereotyping with regards to being a woman.¹¹ However, this faction of feminism experienced its share of criticism, coming especially from those who had been active in the women’s liberation movement. A prominent critic of cultural feminism, Alice Echols argued that this sect of feminism led activists away from focusing on politics to that of “life-style.” According to Echols, “radical feminism was a political movement dedicated to eliminating the sex-class system, whereas cultural feminism was a countercultural movement aimed at reversing the cultural valuation of the male and the devaluation of the female.”¹²

¹¹ Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (NY: The Free Press, 2003), 143-144.

¹² Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp, “Women’s Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism,” *Signs* 19.1 (Autumn 1993), 32-33, as quoted from Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 6.

The second feminist faction emerging in the mid-seventies was socialist feminism. Like the earlier New Left movement, socialist feminists were critical of capitalism, imperialism, and racism. They therefore sought to create a feminism that was more multicultural and cognizant of the need for economic equality. However, rather than advocate for larger governmental bureaucracies, socialist feminists sought to create democratic alternatives to capitalism, such as workers' cooperatives.¹³ Two of the first socialist feminist groups, Bread and Roses in Boston and the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU), distinguished themselves from the liberal feminists by arguing that equality for all women could not be realized within the current stratified social system. Calling for collective solutions to build collective confidence, these groups enacted projects concerning a vast array of issues, such as: rape, domestic violence, day care, health, workplace organizing, and women in prison.¹⁴ Perhaps, the most lasting effect of socialist feminism has been its impact on academia. The founding of such journals as *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* and *Feminist Studies* encouraged continued theorizing over the distinctions and commonalities between the various strands of feminism, while addressing issues facing women in society. Feminist scholars soon sought recognition as a discrete field of study by creating Women's Studies programs at colleges and universities sprinkled across the states. In 1977, the formation of the National Women's Studies Association

¹³ Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 142-43, 158-59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 158-62.

NWSA) established a national organization by which to promote feminist scholarship.

Much scholarly attention has focused on the women's liberation and second wave feminist movements. Some of the earliest publications were written by scholars who had been activist themselves. Historian and journalist, Ruth Rosen, formerly an activist in California, chronicles the second wave feminist movement in *The World Split Open: How a Modern Women's Movement Changed America*. Rosen details the two main divisions of the movement as that of the older, professional women involved with the National Organization for Women; and the younger, more radical women, who sought women's liberation outside the existing societal frameworks and mainstream politics. Susan Brownmiller, who had been involved in women's liberation groups in New York, recorded her experiences in her powerful memoir, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*, giving the reader a first hand account of the trials and tribulations facing the activists as they sought to transform society. Similarly, Sara Evans' *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* draws attention to the transformative impact that the feminist movement created within the American culture. Evans places herself within the narrative; first, as a member of Chicago's West Siders, then as a feminist organizer at the University of North Carolina. Her account depicts the internal struggles of the movement as well as the legislative policymaking that resulted from the feminist lobbying. As one of the more expansive histories of the second wave feminist movement, Flora Davis' *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960*

details the events leading to the emergence of the second wave feminism and depicts the impact of this movement on many issues affecting women; such as abortion, equal pay, access to credit, and the Equal Rights Amendment. Davis' work provides an excellent accounting of the gains achieved for a younger generation of women who did not experience the struggles of this transformative era.¹⁵

Unlike most of the earlier scholarship tracing the development of the second wave feminist movement, Barbara Ryan's *Feminism and the Women's Movement: Dynamics of Change in Social Movement Ideology and Activism* examines later developments occurring in the 1980s and 1990s. With her theoretical interest focused on the dynamics of social movements, Ryan emphasizes the internecine ideological conflicts rather than the external opposition challenging the feminist movement. According to Ryan, while the ERA served to unify the feminist movement, its defeat left the feminist movement factionalized, in disarray, and once again in need of a new unifying issue with which to consolidate and reorganize.¹⁶

Over the past decade, scholarship has extended to critique generational differences in feminism, with the "third wave" of younger women joining the feminist ranks that espouses contradiction and pluralism. There is also much

¹⁵ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2002); Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1999); Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003); and Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991).

¹⁶ Barbara Ryan, *Feminism and the Women's Movement: Dynamics of Change in Social Movement Ideology and Activism* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

reformulation on the relationship between third wave and second wave feminism. Oftentimes grounded in a Marxist-feminist perspective, these scholars look to social and historical conditions that evince a materialistic analysis of the emergence of the third wave.¹⁷ Scholars continue to destabilize prior constructs in feminism, in efforts to give more awareness to the centrality of women of color in the history of the women's movement.¹⁸

Most recently, scholars are questioning the use of the "wave" metaphor in describing the various variants within the women's movement. Too often, historians have leapt from the passage of women's suffrage in 1920 to the activities of NOW and the resurgence of feminist organizing in the 1960s. This trend overlooks important activities transpiring during the decades between. During the first half of the twentieth-century, working class women and women of color built coalitions of a shared political vision across lines of race, ethnicity, and religion; building a lasting presence in national politics from the first decades of the twentieth-century through the resurgence of the women's movement in the 1960s. These women, who Dorothy Cobble refers to as "labor feminists," successfully linked their class concerns to the greater Civil Rights struggle. Questioning the still common perspective of the white heterosexual middle-class origins of feminism, scholars are also investigating how women used collective

¹⁷ Amber E. Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism," *NWSA Journal* 16.3 (Autumn 2004): 124-153; Susan Archer Mann and Douglas J. Huffman, "The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave," *Marxist-Feminist Thought Today* 69.1 (January 2005): 56-91; Jo Reger, ed., *Differing Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁸ Becky Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 28.2 (Summer 2002): 336-360.

action, whether during conservative or liberal establishments, to enable marginalized or oppressed groups political voice. By discarding the waves metaphors, historians better illustrate how working class women, lesbian activists, and women of color have influenced the contemporary definitions of feminism.¹⁹

My research on the Equal Rights Amendment ratification campaign in Nevada complements an existing body of scholarly work already examining this topic. One of the first efforts of scholars to analyze the Equal Rights Amendment campaign resulted in *Rites of Passage: The Past and Future of the ERA* edited by Joan Hoff-Wilson.²⁰ The essays on this work discuss the origins and early debates over the ERA, reasons for the defeat of the ERA, and the significance of the ERA's defeat. Another insightful study of the ERA is Jane Sherron De Hart and Donald Mathews' *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation*.²¹ Their work explores the ratification process as it unfolded in North Carolina. While a single-state study, this work grounds the national ratification

¹⁹ Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., "Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor," *Feminist Formations* 22.1 (Spring 2010): 76-135; Dennis A. Deslippe, *"Rights, Not Roses": Unions and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Debra Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Susan M. Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998); Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Cooperative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (London: University College London Press, 1998); Kathleen A. Laughlin and Jacqueline L. Castledine, eds., *Breaking the Wave: Women, Their Organizations, and Feminism, 1945-1985* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

²⁰ Joan Hoff-Wilson, ed., *Rites of Passage: The Past and Future of the ERA* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

²¹ Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York: Oxford, 1990).

narrative, as North Carolina was home to the leading Anti-ERA Congressional leader, Senator Samuel Ervin. Hart and Mathews illustrate how Senator Ervin's early accord with Phyllis Schlafly led to an immediate and effective national Anti-ERA campaign. This work is also instructive regarding the national ratification process, as campaign strategies employed in North Carolina would be replicated by both ERA activists and opponents in other non-ratified states.

Debating the addition of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution is not the usual undertaking for state legislatures. However, given the task facing state legislatures during this period, an understanding the amendment-making process from a national viewpoint proves instructive. In *Constitutional Inequality: The Political Fortunes of the Equal Rights Amendment*, Gilbert Y. Steiner studies the ERA campaign from the perspective of amending the U.S. Constitution, contending that the window of opportunity for ratification quickly closed by 1973. Steiner argues that three developments solidified opposition to the amendment: first, the linkage of the ERA to abortion with the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973; second, an increased pre-occupation with the military draft with the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and President Carter's suggestion for women's inclusion in the draft; and lastly, the national popularity of the ERA's leading congressional opponent and Chair of the Senate Watergate hearings, Senator Sam Ervin.²² Likewise, in "The Equal Rights Amendment, Public Opinion & American Constitutionalism," Louis Bolce, Gerald De Maio and Douglas Muzzio examine the *Federalist Papers* to explore the Founding Fathers' intentions regarding

²² Gilbert Y. Steiner, *Constitutional Inequality: The Political Fortunes of the Equal Rights Amendment* (Washington: Brookings, 1985).

constitutional amendment-making.²³ According to the authors, the Founders thought public opinion prone to rashness. Thereby, they instilled a series of constitutional checks in amendment-making to thwart the will of popular majorities. The authors, therefore, point to the ineffectiveness of popular polling during the ERA campaign, showing that despite the national popular support of the ERA, the purposeful deliberations of the constitutional amendment-making process successfully halted this popular effort.

Similarly, in *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women's Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution*, Mary Frances Berry also studies the amendment-making process in an effort to understand ERA's defeat. Like the previous scholars, Berry asserts that activists relied too heavily on polls indicating a majority of support from the general population.²⁴ According to Berry, successful amending of the U.S. Constitution is not dependent upon the majority support of the general public. Instead, she argues persuasively that the critical criteria for amending the U.S. Constitution must include a pre-existing consensus at the state level and a sense of national necessity. Berry contends that both of these consensus majorities could be, and in fact were, blocked by simple minority oppositional forces that successfully inhibited the amendment's ratification.

Some scholars argue that viewing the ERA ratification campaign as a dichotomous process – of winning or losing – presents too simplistic an analysis

²³ Louis Bolce, Gerald De Maio, and Douglas Muzzio, "The Equal Rights Amendment, Public Opinion & American Constitutionalism," *Polity* 19.4 (Summer 1987): 551-569.

²⁴ Mary Frances Berry, *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women's Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

of this struggle. In “The Stages of the Policy Process and the Equal Rights Amendment, 1972-1982,” Sarah A. Soule and Brayden Young King assert that each stage of the policy process contains both more stringent rules than the preceding stage and increasingly consequential legislative actions.²⁵ The authors assert that increased attention should be given to the various nuanced stages of any policymaking, since social movements have greater capacity to affect policy changes at specific critical moments during this process. While the ERA has already been defeated, the authors argue that an awareness of these strategic campaign opportunities could garner more favorable policy implementations in the future.

Likewise, in *The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment: Conflict and the Decision Process*, Janet K. Boles looks to factors beyond the simplistic approval or disapproval of the ERA. In examining state legislatures of non-ratified states, Boles notes the contentiousness of their ratification debates. Given the vitriol of the debates and length of the ratification campaign, Boles argues that, in the end, the legislators voted against the *conflict* of the ERA ratification process, rather than against the *content* of the amendment itself.²⁶

Navigating between ideological purity and political pragmatism is a struggle for any social movement. In *Why We Lost the ERA*, Jane J. Mansbridge argues that passage of the ERA would have meant little actual changes in

²⁵ Sarah A. Soule and Brayden G. King, “The Stages of the Policy Process and the Equal Rights Amendment, 1972-1982,” *American Journal of Sociology* 11.6 (May 2006): 1876.

²⁶ Janet K. Boles, *The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment: Conflict and the Decision Process* (New York: Longman, 1979).

existing gender relations. However, she asserts that the defeat of the ERA was directly related to more expansive changes in the public's attitude, namely, an increasing skepticism of the Supreme Court's authority alongside a solidification of the Conservative Right.²⁷ Mansbridge's work illustrates how both sides of the ERA campaign exaggerated the purported effects of the amendment as debates shifted from discussion of theoretical rights to that of practical implications.

The scope of politics extends well beyond the realm of public office. In Michael Quinn's "The LDS Church's Campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment" and O. Kendall White, Jr.'s "Mormonism and the Equal Rights Amendment," the authors write pointedly about the strategic positioning of religious institutions between religious ideology and political action. Quinn and White denote the Mormon Church as one of the most politically active religious institutions in the ERA campaign. The authors argue that despite publicly disavowing any stance on the Equal Rights Amendment, the Mormon Church nonetheless enacted a powerful counterattack on the ERA fueled by the religiosity of their members. Like Mansbridge's work, these authors reveal that the rhetoric utilized by Mormon leaders exaggerated the expected outcomes of the Equal Rights Amendment, thereby instilling fears and reifying the current status quo.²⁸

²⁷ Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 4.

²⁸ Michael Quinn, "The LDS Church's Campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment," *Journal of Mormon History* 20.2 (1994): 85-155; see also O. Kendall White, Jr. "Mormonism and the Equal Rights Amendment." *Journal of Church & State* 31 (1989): 249-267.

While my examination of Nevada's ERA ratification campaign touches on the formal politics of the state legislative process, my core focus centers on Nevada women's inchoate political culture taking root during this period. Jean Ford, who led single-issue public campaigns, held public office, and took leadership positions in women's organizations; had the prescience to found the Nevada Women's Archives. Housed in the Special Collections departments of the University of Nevada Las Vegas and the University of Nevada Reno, both repositories house the papers of many women leaders of this time as well as the collections of women's organizations, single-issue campaigns, legislators, and various civically-engaged women. Several legislators, who actively supported the passage of the ERA, donated their political papers that chronicled legislative activity as well as correspondence received from concerned citizens. These collections also contain minutes from organizational meetings, correspondence between activists, media coverage, articles from local and national media sources, and an abundance of errant memos. Examined as a whole, these sources provide the first conversations of women forming a community linked by political interests.

The recognition of this nascent political culture is evident in the databases of Nevada newspapers that contain scores of articles covering the ERA. Newspapers such as the *Las Vegas Sun*, *Las Vegas Review Journal*, *Reno Gazette*, and *Valley Times* proved instructive when analyzing this time period. Where in the newspapers are the articles placed? Front page? In the Women's/Living section? Did the newspapers view the ERA as newsworthy or

simply a women's issue? Editors and publishers used their newspapers to voice their viewpoints on the campaign. Interestingly, two simultaneous and parallel themes emerged from the Nevada media: first, that this ratification campaign had been organized by unruly and uninformed women whose work was therefore insignificant, while secondly, that strident feminists championed that ERA fight; determined to win at whatever cost to the state. Again, one sees the rhetorical extremes of an ideologically-driven campaign.

The newspapers along with the archival collections provide a rich sense of the inchoate women's political culture that began with the formation of several women's organizations, expanded during several single-issue campaigns, and exploded during the years of the Equal Rights Amendment ratification campaign. One can trace the evolution of women's political identities from their early identification through spouses, with the organizational minutes listing members as "Mrs. 'Husband's First and Last Name.'" As these women began to educate themselves on important issues and gain confidence, they also began granting interviews and public appearances in their own right. These women, both for and against the ERA ratification, had come to recognize their own sense of political autonomy and political voice.

The state legislative records provide the voting outcomes and details of the contentious debates spanning 1973 through the 1981 legislative sessions. In examining testimonies from such constitutional experts as Yale Law Professor Thomas Emerson, legislators both for and against the ERA, activists, and concerned citizens, one quickly recognizes a ideological clash in the making with

an increasing hyperbolic rhetoric employed by the Antis of this campaign.

Furthermore, the interviews of women activists and leaders in the state reveal the emotion of this campaign still viscerally present more than thirty years later.

Adding their memories and emotion to the abundance of existing primary sources contextualizes the ideological contestation and historical narrative of Nevada's ERA ratification campaign.

On a national perspective, the primary reports available from the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, including: *To Form a More Perfect Union: Justice for American Women*, and *The Spirit of Houston: The First National Women's Conference* inform the details of planning and implementing the historic women's conferences. This provides a national template with which to compare Nevada's activities. Additionally, the numerous national and local newsletters reflecting both sides of the ERA campaign, such as the *Phyllis Schlafly Report*, the *Eagle Forum*, *STOP-ERA Nevada*, *ERAmerica*, and *Nevadans for ERA* document the local and statewide activities undertaken by both sides, couched within the national perspective of this campaign. All of these sources contextualize the direction, emotion, and reaction of Nevadans during this period.

The organization of my research is both chronological and thematic. Chapter one examines the history of the Equal Rights Amendment from its introduction in the U.S. Congress in 1923 through the course of congressional debates leading to its passage in March 1972. This chapter looks to the rationale of former suffragist, Alice Paul, as she penned the initial verbiage for the Equal

Rights Amendment. I analyze the early disagreements between the National Woman's Party and women's organizations that espoused protectionist legislation. I not only place the amendment in its historical context, but also explore key issues raised during the congressional debates, such as: classification by sex, the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment, and key Supreme Court decisions.

The creation of President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women played a critical role in the resurgence of the Equal Rights Amendment. Ostensibly formed to promote women's equality in society, I reveal how Director Esther Peterson used this commission to quell discussions of the Equal Rights Amendment and circumvent the plea for President Kennedy's endorsement. Lastly, I trace how the Commission on the Status of Women led to the creation of the National Organization for Women in 1966 that, in turn, then lobbied the U.S. Congress for the passage of the ERA. This intense lobbying effort, along with Congresswoman Martha Griffiths' discharge petition, culminated in the Congressional passage in 1972.

In Nevada, much social change had occurred during the years before the ERA debates ever entered the Nevada legislature. Chapter two opens with an examination of the cultural context of Nevada after World War II through the late sixties and early seventies. Las Vegas responded to the federal government's call for munitions in WWII, thereby creating an influx of workers, jobs, and housing. Nevada's gaming industry soon experienced a paradigmatic shift as ownerships transformed from Mafia influence to corporations. Las Vegas

experienced the turmoil of court-imposed school desegregation that culminated in bitter community divisions. In the early seventies, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) targeted Nevada to highlight the need for welfare rights reform. As Nevada felt the surging pulse of the social unrest crossing the nation, state leaders scrambling to reaffirm control. This was the cultural context welcoming the ERA debates to the Nevada State Legislature in February 1973.

This chapter also focuses on activists' organizing; both nationally and in Nevada. I consider how organizations such as the League of Women Voters became a springboard for women's activism. During this period, members of the League, many of whom had never before been active, learned to research issues and present their case before legislative bodies. In the late sixties, the League of Women Voters called public attention to the environmental infractions by local dumpsites, lent their support for the desegregation of the Clark County School System in Southern Nevada, and carefully studied legislative policies and decisions. Thus, the League provided the necessary milieu for women to transition from being social homemakers into effective activists.

Lastly, I examine the Nevada's legislative debates over the ERA, covering the 1973, 1975, and 1977 legislative sessions. Here I introduce key legislators who fought for the ratification of the ERA, such as Assemblywomen Jean Ford and Sue Wagner. I also analyze Nevada legislative leadership, voting records, public testimony, parliamentary procedures and obstructionist tactics present during these sessions. Also noted are the methods used by anti-ERA legislators to postpone legislative discussion of the ERA. Oftentimes, the ERA never made

it out of committee. How did the legislative leadership manage to keep the ERA from full legislative discussion? In the Nevada legislature, this issue did not run down party lines. What differentiated the legislative vote? What differences were evident between the various regions of the state or legislative districts?

ERA activists in Nevada also underestimated the political acumen of various counter forces at work during this time of consciousness-raising. Chapter three opens with the analysis of the Mormon Church in the Anti-ERA campaign. Nevada Senate Majority Leader, Jim I. Gibson, arguably the most powerful legislator in the state, was also a leading figure in Nevada's Mormon Church. The Church leadership directed him to stop the ERA ratification and throughout his tenure, Senator Gibson led the legislative fight for its defeat.²⁹ The Church undertook several tactics to undermine Nevada's ERA campaign. Organizing the "Citizen's Quest for Quality Government," the Church called on its members to serve on this committee, which then undermined Pro-ERA political candidates; misconstruing their political stances and portraying them in the most detrimental manner.

The LDS women's auxiliary groups, known as Relief Societies, called upon Church women to organize Anti-ERA campaigns. Relief Society leaders instructed the religious faithful to write letters to politicians and newspaper editors, lobby, and canvas neighborhood passing out Anti-ERA literature. These

²⁹ Sue Wagner with Victoria Ford, *Through the Glass Ceiling: A Life in Nevada Politics* (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 2005), 190.

activities undertaken by this bloc of newly-politicized women enacted a powerful counter attack against the grassroots organizing of the ERA activists..³⁰

While the Mormon Church successfully politicized its membership, the national Anti-ERA message was inspired by the rhetorical flourish of an Illinois housewife, Phyllis Schlafly. This chapter follows Schlafly's rise to national prominence; analyzing the rhetoric of her *Eagle Forum* newsletter and her STOP ERA efforts. Extraordinarily well organized, Schlafly's influence reverberated across the states. In Nevada, I examine the activities of STOP ERA, which organized in northern and southern divisions that disseminated Schlafly's Anti-ERA message across the state. I also consider the frequent testimony of northern STOP ERA co-chair, Janine Hansen, who effectively debated the ERA ratification utilizing language that stirred fear of federal intrusion and upheaval of traditional mores.

1977 proved to be a defining year for the Equal Rights Amendment both nationally and in Nevada. In response to the United Nation's proclamation of 1975 as International Women's Year (IWY) and 1975-1985 as the Decade of Women, the United States formed its National Commission on International Women's Year. Charged with promoting the national observation of International Women's Year, the Commission proceeded to coordinate state and territorial women's conferences during 1977, culminating in a national women's conference to be held later that same year. Ironically, this historic moment provided both the promise of unprecedented advances in a national feminist agenda, while

³⁰ Renee Rampton, interview by author, digital recording, Las Vegas, Nevada, 27 August 2006.

simultaneously solidifying opposition in greater numbers than ever before seen. How did this happen?

Chapter four returns to the International Women's Year to expose the events that literally propelled women, both feminists and conservatives, from the margins into the political mainstream. During this decade, women within Nevada organized for the first Statewide Women's Conference held in June 1977. This chapter follows the successes and struggles of Nevada women as they planned and implemented the conference. Former Assemblywoman Jean Ford and attorney Frankie Sue Del Papa led Nevada's Coordinating Committee that was appointed by the International Women's Year Commission in Washington, DC. I depict the challenges facing the Coordinating Committee as they attempted to solicit interest around the state, reaching out to the rural enclaves of northern Nevada, and seeking to include women who voiced their disapproval of the IWY's Plan of Action agenda. I then follow the events of the conference weekend in Las Vegas June 19-21, 1977. Examining the choice of workshops and speakers, I reveal the topics most salient to Nevada women during that time.

June's statewide women's conference elected twelve Nevada delegates to attend the first National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas later that same year. With more than 20,000 individuals in attendance, the Houston conference became a national newsworthy event. The conference's twenty-six plank National Plan of Action granted high priority to the needs of minority women and displaced homemakers, reproductive freedom and sexual preference, and

support for the ERA.³¹ This chapter also studies the rhetoric and representation used to describe the activities of the conference; illustrating how this imagery either signified the importance of this event or trivialized its impact. Lastly, I examine the effects of the conferences on the outcome of the ERA ratification, as paradoxically, these conferences provided the critical venues needed for ERA opponents to organize a very effective counter attack.

The ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in Nevada failed for many reasons, all of which successfully moved the debates from an issue of equality before the law to that of gender relations. However, despite its failure, this campaign served to politicize women; either in support or opposition, as no proposed constitutional amendment had done before. Whether to affirm women's traditional roles or establish lasting legal equality, this campaign led to the development of political culture for women that tested the boundaries of political discourse and broadened the boundaries of the existing body politic.

³¹ National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, *Spirit of Houston: An Official Report to the President, the Congress, and the People of the United States*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978).

CHAPTER ONE

THE U.S. HISTORY OF THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

- Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.
- Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.
- Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

COMPLETE TEXT OF THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

The Suffrage Movement

The story of the Equal Rights Amendment begins with the suffrage movement. In 1840, while attending a World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott were shocked to learn that they would not be allowed to sit in the gallery with their husbands. Incensed at the male abolitionists' hypocrisy, Stanton wrote later that it demonstrated to her the impossibility for men to understand what liberty truly meant to women. Stanton and Mott vowed to hold a meeting once back in America, but eight years would transpire before they announced the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention.³²

On July 14th, the *Seneca County Courier* printed a brief announcement regarding a meeting to take place July 19th and 20th. The stated purpose of the meeting was to discuss the social, civil, and religious rights of women. With an overwhelming response, over three hundred men and women arrived at the

³² Doris Weatherford, *American Women's History: An A to Z of People, Organizations, Issues, and Events* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1994), 311-12.

Wesleyan Chapel eager to listen to the featured speakers, and in turn, to discuss their own concerns.

Given that she had eight years with which to ponder her response to the World Anti-Slavery Convention, Stanton's thoughts flowed freely into the *Declaration of Rights of Women*. Styled after the *Declaration of Independence*, the document opened by listing the detailed injustices endured by women, then summarily stated:

“Now, in view of this entire disenfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation – in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.”³³

As merely one of the resolutions of the Seneca Falls Convention, the notion of women's enfranchisement nonetheless proved to be highly controversial. Nevertheless, it passed by a slim majority and the efforts of procuring full enfranchisement now began. Those present at the Seneca Falls Convention made a bold claim for full citizenship, including suffrage, based on their individual merit; not merely as mothers rearing good citizens. This

³³ Alice S. Rossi, “Selection from the History of Woman Suffrage,” in *Feminist Papers* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1973), 413-14, 418.

represented the radicalism of their claim, for they demanded a *direct* relationship to the state; unmediated by husbands or children.³⁴

The call for women's suffrage represented a lofty and somewhat theoretical goal for this period, given that universal male enfranchisement was but a recent phenomenon in the United States. However, the women's rights movement also addressed such pragmatic issues as divorce, guardianship, and married women's property rights. Formed in 1866, the American Equal Rights Association merged the Anti-Slavery Society and the Women's Rights Society as a vanguard for the legal protection of both black males and women. It would not be until black males were granted full enfranchisement after the Civil War that the issue of women's suffrage would reach paramount importance.

As evident in most social movements, the suffrage movement endured several internecine battles; factionalizing the movement into various organizations. The enfranchisement of black males after the Civil War triggered the first splintering of the American Equal Rights Association. Many of the suffragists, including Susan B. Anthony, rejected advancing voting rights for male ex-slaves, while educated white women remained barred from the voting polity. Therefore, Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton formed the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) in 1869. Meanwhile, Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe regrouped the remaining members of the Equal Rights Association, forming the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). The AWSA remained closer to the abolitionist goals shared by both groups, while the NWSA

³⁴ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 95.

prioritized women's enfranchisement above all else. By 1890, the leadership of both organizations had ameliorated their differences and united their efforts under a new name, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).³⁵

The suffrage movement became global with the inception of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1904. Throughout the next decade American suffragists would learn invaluable tactics from their sisters abroad. However, the turn of the century also evidenced a now aging NWSA leadership. The movement desperately needed an infusion of new energy and direction to reinvigorate its membership and garner the attention of disinterested Congressional Committees. New energy would soon arrive with Alice Paul, who would brazenly demand national attention for the lagging movement.

As a young suffragist, Alice Paul energized the suffrage movement with a fearless determination that both enthralled and exasperated those around her. Born into a New Jersey Quaker family, Paul earned her B.A. from Swarthmore College and worked the following year in New York City's Lower East Side; training in social work. During that time she worked to persuade labor unions to admit women and successfully formed a milliner's union.³⁶ She later received her M.A. and Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania. Her doctoral research focused on the legal position of women in Pennsylvania; an interest that would find resurgence in her later work on the Equal Rights Amendment. Paul continued her studies, ultimately earning a Bachelor of Laws

³⁵ Weatherford, *American Women's History*, 331-33.

³⁶ Amelia R. Fry, "Alice Paul and the ERA," *Social Education* 55.5 (Sept. 1995): 286.

from Washington College of Law and a Masters and Doctor of Civil laws from American University.³⁷

For a period of time as a graduate student, Paul attended the London School of Economics, while living and working amongst the poor in London's East Side. This experience would change Paul's life. She became heavily influenced by the militant Pankhurst sisters and engaged in radical activities for the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union in England and Scotland. She learned the political strategies of marching, demonstrating, and even inflicting property damage upon politicians opposed to women's rights. During this period, she underwent a series of imprisonments, hunger strikes, and forced feedings. This experience crystallized her life's passion for women's rights.³⁸ With a brilliant mind and unwavering tenacity, she proved to be an unmitigated force with which to be reckoned.

Returning to the United States, Paul joined the Congressional Committee of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). By 1913, Paul and other suffragists formed the Congressional Union; the more militant branch of NAWSA. While never incorporating the extreme militancy utilized by the Pankhursts in England, Paul nonetheless, favored very public displays, such as parades and picketing. As chair of the NAWSA's Congressional Committee, Paul organized a Washington, D.C. parade to greet Woodrow Wilson the day before his inauguration. More than eight thousand women participated in the

³⁷ Susan D. Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars* (Westport, CONN.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 29.

³⁸ Fry, "Alice Paul and the ERA": 286.

event that devolved into a chaotic frenzy as angry onlookers jeered and attacked the marchers, while police failed to ensure the women's safety.³⁹

The leaders of NAWSA had never been comfortable with Paul's militant tactics and Paul herself became increasingly disillusioned with NAWSA's more conventional strategies. By 1916, Paul broke with NAWSA and formed the National Woman's Party (NWP). In January 1917, Paul and NWP suffragists picketed the White House as "Silent Sentinels," with banners asking, "Mr. President, What Will You Do for Woman Suffrage?" and "How Long Must Women Wait for Liberty?" For six months they picketed before largely sympathetic crowds until the wartime concerns made the protestors look unpatriotic. Lashing out at the President as "Kaiser Wilson" and questioning the foundations of our government during wartime created an increasingly incendiary situation. In June 1917, police began arresting hundreds of suffragists for "obstructing traffic"; jailing them for sentences ranging from a few days to several months. On October 29, 1917, Paul led a delegation to the White House, fully aware of her impending arrest. During her seven month imprisonment, Paul endured a self-imposed fast until officials finally force-fed her. Resolute to the end, Paul viewed herself as a political martyr, enduring jail and forced-feedings to secure "a more fundamental freedom."⁴⁰

The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), led by Carrie Chapman Catt, objected to the more radical tactics employed by the

³⁹ Weatherford, *American Women's History*, 265-66.

⁴⁰ Amy E. Butler, *Two Paths to Equality: Alice Paul and Ethel M. Smith in the ERA Debate, 1921-1929* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 51-52.

National Woman's Party suffragists. They viewed suffrage as sullied by such strategies, fearing alienation of the suffrage movement by the partisan powers that be. Catt and the NAWSA leaders favored persuasion over the Woman's Party's choice of more militant coercion. This differing of political strategies would remain a point of contention between Catt and Paul throughout the suffrage campaign.

With the passage of the nineteenth amendment in 1920, Catt dissolved the NAWSA and created the League of Women Voters in states with partial or total suffrage. The League sought to redress existing discrimination against women with "specific bills for specific ills."⁴¹ With education as its driving force, the League of Women Votes began its mission of transforming the newly-franchised women into an educated and informed citizenry.

While Catt and the NAWSA suffragists now viewed their work as complete; Alice Paul did not. She felt that enfranchisement for women represented only the beginning of women's equality. Paul therefore fought vehemently for the Equal Rights Amendment as the means to assure women's lasting legal equity. The National Woman's Party (NWP) now viewed itself as the vanguard for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment; urging its members to leave other single-issue work to the progressive reformers. While the NWP did not overtly oppose labor legislation enacted for the protection of women; it did, however, oppose laws that segregated women as a separate class. Although the NWP recognized the intrinsic differences between men and women, they,

⁴¹ Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment*, 16.

nonetheless believed that these differences were irrelevant to citizens' equality in a democracy.⁴² As the leader of the NWP, Paul cautioned that allowing women to be classified as a special class for special legislation could allow for future restrictions at the caprice of the legislatures.⁴³ Paul resolutely argued that the protective legislation ostensibly enacted to protect women, in fact, limited their opportunities and relegated them to remain in the menial jobs.

The National Woman's Party's official objective remained committed to achieving complete equality between men and women; both under the law and within relationships. In 1922, the NWP adopted twenty-nine goals to remove all remaining discrimination against women. Modeled after the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments, the Party asked for a single moral standard, equal opportunities in education and work, and recognition of the mutual contributions to marriage and home.⁴⁴ Paul believed that the women's economic transformation required nothing less than the protection of a constitutional amendment. Thus, at the request of the National Woman's Party, Senator Charles Curtis (R-KS) introduced the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to Congress in 1923; commencing what would become an arduous forty-nine year congressional battle.

⁴² Joan Hoff-Wilson, ed., *Rights of Passage: The Past and Future of the ERA* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 12, 17, 33.

⁴³ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 124-125.

⁴⁴ Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment*, 52-53.

Florence Kelley and the National Consumers' League

Women across the country did not immediately coalesce around this cause. Many former members of the suffrage movement and the social justice branch of the Progressive movement strongly opposed the Equal Rights Amendment. Only decades earlier, massive immigration, rapid industrialization, and urbanization had created the possibility for pervasive social disarray. Many middle-class organizations emerged during this era to address the nation's problems; among them, the National Consumers' League (NCL). As general secretary of the NCL, Florence Kelley would stand as the vanguard for protectionist legislation for women and children throughout the first decades of the twentieth century.

Born into an affluent Philadelphian family, Kelley attended Cornell and wrote her thesis on legislation affecting women and children. Denied admission to the University of Pennsylvania Law School due to her sex, Kelley continued her studies at the University of Zurich, where her association with Marxists only emboldened her enthusiasm for economic and social justice. Returning to the United States in 1886, Kelley joined Jane Addams at Chicago's Hull House which provided medical services, child care, numerous classes, legal aid, and cultural activities to immigrants and people of the working class.⁴⁵

Appointed general secretary of the National Consumer League in 1899, Kelley issued annual reports urging new forms of knowledge based on gender distinctions. Kelley promoted women's role as "purchaser" and stressed the

⁴⁵ Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Women's America*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 295; Weatherford, 5-6.

need for women to be informed consumers. Under Kelley's leadership, the National Consumer League organized middle-class women against unregulated capitalism; garnering increased scrutiny on factory conditions, state regulations, factory inspectors, and women's and children's labor. Accentuating gender differences, the NCL mobilized thousands of middle-class women as moral arbiters for working women and children; using their consumer knowledge to expand governmental responsibility for safe consumer products and protected working conditions. Between 1900 and 1920, the NCL worked assiduously for gender-specific legislation to benefit working women.⁴⁶

In 1921, Kelley met with members of the League of Women Voters, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union; all of whom voiced their objections to the Equal Rights Amendment proposal of the National Woman's Party.⁴⁷ While the National Woman's Party rejected Kelley's use of "classification by sex" to enact protective legislative measures, these women's organizations embraced the classification; using it to fight discriminatory practices by addressing specific issues and championing the passage of the Sheppard-Towner Maternity Act; child labor laws; women's right to jury service; and married women's rights of name, citizenship, domicile, contract, and inheritance.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander, eds. *Major Problems in Women's History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 263-68.

⁴⁷ Kerber and De Hart, *Women's America*, 4th ed., 357-58.

⁴⁸ Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment*, 7-8.

Although many of these same women had previously worked with the National Woman's Party for suffrage, the disagreement over protective legislation for women created an uneasy tension amongst activists that remained unresolved during the decades ahead. As seen in the contrasting views of women leaders and social organizations, these early debates over the Equal Rights Amendment illustrate the complex interplay between social visions of protection for women's difference and unmitigated equality under the law.

The end of World War I heralded changes in American women's dress and lifestyle that informed a new image of women in the Western world. Known as "flappers," this generation of young women bobbed their hair and shed the restrictive garments that had modestly covered women's arms and legs. With a new freedom in dress style, flappers also transgressed the boundaries of the male dominated public domain, adapting many of the masculine habits, such as smoking cigarettes, imbibing in alcohol, driving cars, and even enjoying the suggestive dances that grew out of the new jazz music. This marked a decade of unprecedented disruption in women's traditional gender norms.⁴⁹

After a decade of unparalleled prosperity, few Americans anticipated the stock market crash of 1929 that sent the US economy spiraling. By 1932, the median income had plummeted to half of what it had been in 1929. By 1932, four million Americans had lost their jobs. The economic collapse placed incredible strains on the once familiar roles for men and women. Former businessmen felt the shame of standing in relief lines day after day. In Chicago,

⁴⁹ Weatherford, 132-33.

children fought with men and women over garbage dumped by municipal trucks. Many women took on extra work doing laundry, taking in boarders, and providing additional outside domestic work. Thousands of families faced evictions and foreclosures; forcing many to move in with relatives, rely of the charity others, or live off the streets. Hopelessness and despair permeated the nation, leaving congressional leaders scrambling for solutions. This was not a time when Congress would entertain notions of legal equality for women.⁵⁰

Roosevelt's New Deal policies would dominate the political terrain of the 1930s and 40s. Women leaders of this period, such as Frances Perkins, Molly Dewson, and Mary Anderson had worked for decades to enact laws protecting working women and children. They viewed such protective legislation as their crowning lifetime achievements. As such, they vehemently opposed the Equal Rights Amendment and any other attempts to nullify the protective measures of which they had worked so diligently to set in place.⁵¹

During Franklin Delano Roosevelt's tenure in the White House, no other female inspired the nation's women more than Eleanor Roosevelt. As First Lady, she reached beyond the constraints of the White House to impact women in ways never before contemplated by her predecessors. She wrote a syndicated newspaper column called, "My Day," hosted a radio show, and became a union member joining the American Newspaper Guild. Roosevelt used these outlets to urge women to become civically involved and run for political office. Indeed,

⁵⁰ Gary B. Nash et al., eds. *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 816-19.

⁵¹ Weatherford, 277-78.

Roosevelt garnered an unprecedented influence over women and women's issues. As such, the Equal Rights Amendment campaign received a significant blow when she agreed that protective legislation trumped the need for equal rights. Only in Roosevelt's later years would she would rethink her position on the ERA.⁵²

Congressional Consideration of the ERA

By the early nineteen-forties, the exigencies of World War II proved that women's labor could drive the wartime economy. Both married and unmarried women flooded the work force to fulfill wartime labor shortages. Women proved their mettle during these trying years with most enjoying their expanded role and wishing to remain within the paid labor force after the war's end. During this period, most protectionist legislation had been suspended to allow for women's wartime work, thus providing the opportunity for serious consideration of the ERA in congressional committees. In July 1945, the House Judiciary Committee voted in favor of the ERA fifteen to seven. In January 1946, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted in support of the ERA eleven to four. The proposed constitutional amendment now awaited a vote in both houses of Congress. Intense lobbying followed. Letters flowed in to Congress from both sides, including an oppositional letter signed by noted women leaders; including Eleanor Roosevelt, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Frances Perkins. When the Senate roll was called on July 19, 1946, the amendment received a favorable majority of thirty-eight to thirty-five; however, still falling short of the two-thirds

⁵² Ibid., 296-97.

majority necessary to claim victory. This failure marked Congress' unwillingness to ensure women's lasting legal equality during the postwar moment that craved a return to the "normalcy" of home and family.⁵³

While introduced into nearly every session of Congress from 1923 until the end of World War II, oppositional forces prevented the Equal Rights Amendment from ever moving out of committee to the floor for a general vote. Two Congressional leaders stand out as the foremost opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment during this period of Congressional inactivity: Congressman Emmanuel Celler (D-NY) and Senator Samuel James Ervin, Jr. (D-NC). Representing the garment district in New York City, Congressman Celler adamantly opposed striking down existing laws that protected the workers of his district; many of whom were women. As Chair of the powerful House Judiciary Committee, Celler refused to hold hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment, thereby preventing the amendment from leaving the Judiciary Committee for consideration on the floor during his entire Chairmanship that lasted from 1951 through 1965.⁵⁴

However, the most vocal Congressional opponent of the Equal Rights Amendment proved to be Senator Samuel J. Ervin, Jr. of North Carolina. A veteran of World War I, Senator Samuel Ervin, Jr. had experienced firsthand the vicissitudes of wartime and believed firmly in protecting women from the harshness of that reality. As a wartime combat veteran, he could not

⁵³ Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women's Issues, 1945-1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 21-23.

⁵⁴ Joan Hoff-Wilson, *Rights of Passage*, 82; see also Amelia R. Fry, "Alice Paul and the ERA": 287.

comprehend why women would insist upon an equality that might demand military combat duty. As a longtime advocate for a restricted constitution and federal government, Ervin also warned that the Equal Rights Amendment would do more to centralize federal government than anything passed since the fourteenth amendment.

A Southerner and fervent supporter of states rights, Ervin wholeheartedly believed that the ERA would invite federal encroachment into state matters. However, the real point of contention for Senator Ervin had to do with gender. He argued that there are natural differences between men and women based upon “physiological and functional differences.” According to Senator Ervin’s logic: since women had the physiological capacity to bear children, men therefore, had the moral responsibility to protect women and shoulder the more arduous and hazardous activities. Ervin pointed to the Supreme Court decision of *Muller v. Oregon*, in which female workers were classified by their sex and therefore, “protected” with restricted working hours. To Senator Ervin, it was inconceivable that a country would overlook these natural differences when advocating for a constitutional change.⁵⁵

During the 1940s and 1950s, the general consensus of those opposed to the ERA pointed to the conservative Supreme Court. They argued that the Court did not have a reputation for interpreting law to benefit those whose rights had been violated. They therefore concluded that the ERA may, in fact, jeopardize rights if left to the Court to decide. The League of Women Voters agreed that

⁵⁵ Mathews and De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA*, 35-36.

this presented to great a risk. Prominent legal scholars testified on the impact of such an amendment. In 1953, distinguished Harvard constitutional scholar, Paul Freund, believed that the principle of equality was too vague a concept to redress women's existing problems. Arguing that the ERA could call every legal issue relating to women into constitutional question, Freund and other scholars objected to the ERA's mandate of "absolute legal equality" between men and women.⁵⁶

On September 9, 1970 the Senate renewed hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment. While opposition often framed their testimony within the framework of legal objections, they continued to appeal to conventional notions of gender. Legal scholars continued to worry about the absolute application of equality for the sexes. Freund maintained that the concept was too vague, calling into question traditional roles ascribed to women by custom or law. Following Senator Ervin's hearings, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted fifteen to one in favor of the amendment. Before sending the amendment to the full Senate for further debate, Judiciary Chair Senator Ervin reproached the "militant" women who wanted to take rights away from their sisters; passing laws to make men and women exactly alike.⁵⁷

In April 1971, scholars at Yale Law School produced a lengthy article discussing the possible ramifications of the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Authored by Yale Law Professor Thomas Emerson, with Barbara

⁵⁶ Ibid., 28-29, 37.

⁵⁷ Mathews and De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA*, 37-39.

A. Brown, Gail Falk, and Ann E. Freedman, the article soon became the authoritative piece cited by both the advocates and opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment. According to the authors, “This basic principle of the Equal Rights Amendment derives from two fundamental judgments inherent in the decision to eliminate discrimination against women in our legal system. First, the Amendment embodies the moral judgment that women as a group may no longer be relegated to an inferior position in our society....This moral decision implies a further practical judgment-that such an equal status can be achieved only by merging the rights of men and women into a ‘single system of equality’...Classification by sex, apart from the single situation where a physical characteristic unique to one sex is involved...is always an over classification...Such a result is in direct conflict with the basic concern of our society with the individual, and the rights of each individual to develop to his or her own potentiality. It negates all our values of individual self-fulfillment.”⁵⁸

The Daunting Opposition of the Women’s Bureau

However, oppositional forces to the Equal Rights Amendment had already begun to organize. One of the greatest opponents of the ERA during these years proved to be the Women’s Bureau. First created in 1920 within the Department of Labor, the Women’s Bureau’s purported function was to collect information about women workers.⁵⁹ However, its first director, Mary Anderson, staunchly

⁵⁸ See also Emerson, Thomas, B. Brow, G. Falk, and A. Freedman, “The Equal Rights Amendment: A Constitutional Basis for Equal Rights for Women,” *Yale Law Journal* 80.5 (April 1971): 871-985.

⁵⁹ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, 8.

opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment and made the amendment's defeat her priority. At her urging, the solicitor of the Department of Labor drew up a legal treatise on the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, which became the department's position paper on the subject. It warned of extensive litigation that would create unwanted changes to Social Security, women's induction into the military, diminish the legal responsibility of husbands to provide for their families, loss of protective legislation, and deplorable legal and social consequences.⁶⁰

The Bureau then formed a coalition of organizations steadfastly supporting protective legislation for women, including: The National Women's Trade Union League, The Consumers League, The Young Women's Christian Association, The National Council of Jewish Women, The National Council of Catholic Women, The National Council of Negro Women, and The League of Women Voters. This coalition and the Women's Bureau proved to be formidable foes to Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party. However, in 1937, the National Woman's Party received the endorsement of the ERA by the National Business and Professional Women's Clubs; who had made the ERA their legislative priority. With a burgeoning membership of sixty-five thousand, this backing proved instrumental in finally moving the ERA from committee to the Senate floor.⁶¹

Alarmed over the growing success of the Equal Rights Amendment, the Women's Bureau coalition called for the formation of a national directing

⁶⁰ Ibid., 17-18.

⁶¹ Ibid., 15-16.

committee to oppose the ERA. Formed in 1945, the coalition named itself the “National Committee to Defeat the UnEqual Rights Amendment” (NCDURA). NCDURA worked against the passage of the ERA in Congress while setting up local chapters to eliminate discriminatory legislation in the states. Within the first year, NCDURA’s membership roster included over forty-three national organizations; including the American Civil Liberties Union.⁶²

The Women’s Bureau staunchly contended that the ERA would do little if nothing for women. Instead, they charged that discrimination could be eliminated with “specific bills for specific ills.” Realizing that it is strategically much better to be campaigning “for” an issue rather than “against” one, the Bureau decided to introduce an Equal Pay bill to assuage attention about the ERA, while at the same time advancing a positive cause for women. In 1945, NCDURA drafted an Equal Pay bill to be introduced by Senators Wayne Morse (R-OR) and Claude Pepper (D-FL). The bill, in fact, only protected women. If a male employee earned less than his female counterpart at a particular job, he had no recourse. This oversight in drafting the bill gave opponents a powerful “equal treatment” argument against its passage. However, proponents of the bill felt that it could, at the very least, placate ERA supporters, and at the very best, shelve the ERA for good. By 1947, the powerful American Federation of Labor (AFL) argued against the bill’s passage, contending that collective bargaining provided better means for equal pay for women. Additionally, the wartime labor urgency had

⁶² Ibid., 19-20.

now begun to fade and Congress felt no compunction to pass such a bill.⁶³ As Americans recovered from the brutalities of World War II, society's focus turned to home and hearth; leaving Equal Pay and the ERA in fading memory.

In 1947, the Women's Bureau decided to follow Eleanor Roosevelt's suggestion of proposing an alternative piece of legislation addressing legal discrimination without the all-encompassing effects suggested by the ERA. With astute acumen, it changed the name of the "National Committee to Defeat the UnEqual Rights Amendment" to the more innocuous "National Committee on the Status of Women" and proposed the "Status Bill" or the "Taft-Wadsworth Bill" into Congress. With its innocent title, the Status Bill found easy endorsement by Eleanor Roosevelt, the Women's Bureau, the League of Women Voters, and all seven female members of Congress. The Status Bill paradoxically sought both to verify women's independence while affirming their connectivity to the family. Additionally, it proposed the creation of a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women to make a comprehensive study of the civil, social, economic, and political status of women.⁶⁴ In the end, the paradoxical wording of the Status Bill became its downfall, as it rendered sufficient Congressional controversy to have further consideration postponed.

This proved only to be a short term defeat for the Women's Bureau. In the 1950 Congressional Session, at the Bureau's request, Senator Carl Hayden (D-AZ) introduced a rider to the Equal Rights Amendment, which stipulated that

⁶³ Ibid., 41-45.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 26-30.

nothing in the amendment “be construed to impair any rights, benefits, or exemptions now or hereafter conferred by law upon persons of the female sex.”⁶⁵ Members of Congress could now vote both for legal equality and the “special rights, benefits, or exemptions” for women. As such, the Hayden Amendment essentially removed any valid legal redress with the inclusion of women’s special status. Once again, the dilemma of protectionism versus equality brought a stalemate to the Congressional debates.

Campaigning for the U.S. Presidency during 1960, Senator John Kennedy promised to move the vision for America forward. He publicly endorsed the Equal Rights Amendment and vowed to expand the roles for women in American society. In fact, when President-Elect John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, influential women of the Democratic National Committee pressed him to name more women to important posts and worthwhile public positions. In the end, however, President Kennedy named merely ten Senate-confirmed appointments for women to policy-making executive and judicial positions.⁶⁶

The Leadership of Esther Peterson

One Kennedy appointee would, however, prove critical to the course of the President’s policymaking on women’s issues; including its positioning toward the demise of the Equal Rights Amendment. Born into a Danish Mormon family, Esther Eggertsen spent her childhood in the Mormon community of Provo, Utah. After earning her bachelor’s degree from Brigham Young University, she set her

⁶⁵ Mathews and De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA*, 31.

⁶⁶ Cynthia E. Harrison, “A ‘New Frontier’ for Women: The Public Policy of the Kennedy Administration,” *The Journal of American History* 67.3 (Dec. 1980): 635.

sights on New York City. There she received her master's degree from Columbia University Teacher's College. During her time in New York City, Esther met and eventually married Oliver Peterson. Oliver was a Depression farm boy, who had seen firsthand, moneylenders' exploitation of poor farmers. As one immersed in radical populist politics, he shared with Esther the horrors of many workplace conditions; all the while stressing the importance of unions. All of these concepts had been so foreign to Esther, who had grown up in the protected and restrictive environment of Utah.⁶⁷

After their marriage, the Petersons moved to Boston where Oliver attended Harvard, and Esther, now Esther Peterson, taught at Winsor School for Girls; an affluent girls' college-prep school. Also at this time, much to the dismay of the local Mormon Relief Society, Esther began volunteering at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Here she taught current events to the students who were working girls. During this time, Esther felt the sharp contrast between her day job at the affluent girls' school and the evening volunteerism with the girls of the working class.⁶⁸

Peterson's attitude about labor would alter dramatically when she found her YWCA girls out striking for better wages. The girls worked at a South Boston factory making cotton housedresses, known as Hoover dresses. The owner changed the design of the dress from one with a square pocket to one with a heart-shaped pocket. Understandably, the workers asked for a pay raise, but the

⁶⁷ Esther Peterson with Winifred Conkling, *Restless: Memoirs of Labor and Consumer Activist Esther Peterson* (Washington, DC: Caring Publishing, 1995), 3, 12, 17-20.

⁶⁸ Esther Peterson with Winifred Conkling, *Restless*, 22, 25, 30.

owner refused. The workers went on strike; which became known as The Heartbreaker Strike. Peterson understood the harsh conditions the workers faced, not only at the factory, but also in their homes. This prompted her to join her students on the picket line the next day. She then organized board members of the YWCA and members of the Women's Trade Union League to form the Citizen's Committee of Concerned Women, which joined the strikers. By the strike's end, the workers had formed a local branch of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWA), returned to work, and received their raise. Peterson viewed this connection between collective bargaining and women's empowerment as remarkable. As individuals they lacked any power. As a group, they represented strength in numbers. Peterson would now spend her life working to protect the needs of working-class women; a conviction that would lead to later conflict.⁶⁹

Years later, Peterson, now a Kennedy supporter and legislative representative for the Industrial Union Division of the AFL-CIO, directed the alliance that worked to keep the Democratic Convention from adopting a Pro-ERA endorsement in its 1960 party platform.⁷⁰ During Kennedy's presidential campaign, Peterson had skillfully garnered labor support for him and helped swing her conservative home state of Utah in Kennedy's favor. Shortly after his election, Kennedy named Peterson director of the Women's Bureau. Within the first year, Kennedy also named her assistant secretary of labor; a position she

⁶⁹ Ibid., 34-36.

⁷⁰ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, 116.

held concurrently with her post as director of the Women's Bureau. As the highest-ranking woman in Kennedy's administration, Peterson became the final voice in decisions regarding women's labor, safety, and health protections. Peterson's dual positions afforded her substantial voice not only in directing Kennedy's policy-making for women's issues, but also in influencing his administration's stance on the ERA.⁷¹

President's Commission on the Status of Women

In the early 1960s, President Kennedy's administration created a new trajectory in the course of public policy affecting women by implementing a series of aggressive initiatives intended to broaden opportunities for women.⁷² The Equal Pay Act of 1963 guaranteed equal pay for "equal" rather than "comparable" work; setting that precedent for the federal government to standardize women's employment on par with men. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act promised to become the critical legal weapon in the fight for women's economic equality. It called for the formation of an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and made it responsible for enforcing compliance while investigating complaints of infraction.⁷³

Nevertheless, no element of President Kennedy's administration would effect the status of the Equal Rights Amendment more forcefully than the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW). Shortly after

⁷¹ Peterson with Conkling, 94-97, 114-115.

⁷² Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, xii.

⁷³ Kathleen C. Berkeley, *The Women's Liberation Movement in America* (Westport: Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), 20.

President Kennedy's election, Peterson began working toward the establishment of the commission; envisioning it as a method to measure conditions for working women and create proposals for change. Peterson also hoped that such a commission would deflect attention from the increasingly popular push for the Equal Rights Amendment. The twenty-six member commission of the PCSW was responsible for oversight in six areas: employment policies and practices of the federal government, employment policies and practices of federal contractors; social insurance and tax laws; labor legislation; political, civil, and property rights; and new and expanded services necessary for women as wives, mothers, and workers.⁷⁴

As a labor advocate, Peterson opposed the ERA for its potential to harm working women. In her experiences, Peterson felt that many of the feminists advocating for the ERA were elite professionals and businesswomen that had no idea of the problems facing the female working class. In touring the country as Director of the Women's Bureau and Assistant Secretary of Labor, this issue became increasingly evident to Peterson. During a roundtable discussion in Los Angeles, women raised many concerns, such as equal pay, job advancement, and lack of tenured female professors. Peterson turned to an agricultural worker present and asked, "What's your greatest need?" She replied, "Toilets." As an awkward silence filled the room, Peterson intoned, "Things start from the bottom up."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, 114.

⁷⁵ Esther Peterson with Conkling, 102-105.

Peterson decided that the PCSW would, as opposed to past commissions, not take a public stance on the ERA. At the commission's commencement ceremony, Peterson paid tribute to Congressman Emanuel Celler, who had proposed such a commission in 1947. Celler's bill explicitly included the policy statement that the commission would endorse statutes distinguishing women from men if the laws were based on reasonable differences in physical, biological, or social function. Although she personally opposed the ERA, Peterson's main objective in leading the PCSW was not to obstruct the ERA; but rather to create an overarching program to improve the status of women. However, Peterson viewed the ongoing ERA debate as the main obstruction to effecting any progressive policy for women. Therefore, Peterson carefully crafted every public statement to avoid any mention of the ERA itself.⁷⁶

When President Kennedy issued his executive order to establish the President's Commission on the Status of Women, he made no mention of any pre-existing policy positions; including his administration's position on the ERA. Lacking any explicit policy statements, the PCSW received welcoming support from the Business and Professional Women's organization as well as many other Pro-ERA groups. In selecting the twenty-six commissioners to serve on the PCSW, Peterson allowed for the appointment of only one ERA supporter. Marguerite Rawalt, a past president of BPW and a member of the National

⁷⁶ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, 121.

Woman's Party, became the sole voice advocating for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment – a lonely battle indeed.⁷⁷

One member of the PCSW's subcommittee on Civil and Political Rights advocated a different approach to redressing discrimination and equality. Pauli Murray, a black attorney who had a long history of involvement in civil rights volunteered to write a memorandum on state discriminatory laws. Murray hoped that this memorandum would procure a court ruling on the states' violation of the fourteenth amendment. While a supporter of the ERA, Murray was sensitive to its divisive presence before the commission and the possibility of the amendment depriving many poor women of needed labor protections. Murray proposed a reassessment of the fourteenth amendment as applied to state laws and practices; oftentimes capriciously discriminating on account of sex. Her plan to procure a court decision offered the commission an alternative solution to taking sides on the ERA. Murray argued that new differentiation must be made between laws that offer special protections for family and maternal functions and those that discriminate unjustly against women. She acknowledged that she agreed with specific instances for states to ascribe classification by sex in their codes for sex-specific needs. However, she argued that with the Supreme Court's 1908 decision in *Muller v. Oregon*, sex-specific codification had been expanded and institutionalized for women as a broad class. Therefore, Murray

⁷⁷ Ibid., 122-123.

argued for a reexamination of the specific applications of these sex-specific laws.⁷⁸

When President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women issued its final report in 1963, it revealed that tensions still existed amongst the commissioners over the adherence to traditional assumptions about women's roles. It also affirmed that the commission had reservations about linking race and sex as equal targets of discrimination and refused to evince any support for the ERA:

“Since the Commission is convinced that the U.S. Constitution now embodies equality of rights for men and women, we conclude that a constitutional amendment need not now be sought in order to establish this principle. But judicial clarification is imperative in order that remaining ambiguities with respect to the protection of women's rights be eliminated.”⁷⁹

While the President's Commission on the Status of Women successfully circumvented any frank debates over the Equal Rights Amendment, it did impact women's rights. The Commission was ordered to establish state-based commissions on the status of women to create a continuum of dialogues on status and concerns of women across the states. These state councils then convened for annual meetings on the Status of Women. In fact, one such

⁷⁸ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, 125-127; see also Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 229-234.

⁷⁹ Mary Beth Norton, *Major Problems in American Women's History* (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1989), 394-395; see also Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 232-233.

meeting would prove instrumental in the second wave feminist movement and the Congressional vote on the ERA.

An unforeseen consequence of the President's Commission on the Status of Women was the creation of a network of communication that women used for more than reporting to the Commission. Women were becoming organized. When delegates met in June 1966 for the Annual Status of Women Meeting in Washington, DC, they received the copies of recent remarks made by Congresswoman Martha Griffiths to the Congressional floor earlier that same month. Griffiths had taken the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to task for its lack of enforcement of Title VII; bitterly denouncing the EEOC for "its arbitrary arrogance, disregard of the law and hostility to the human rights of women."⁸⁰

The timing of Griffiths' rebuke proved fortuitous. Outraged over the government's lack of attention to issues critical to female workers, the delegates planned a course of action. Before the conference's end, Betty Friedan and twenty-seven other attendees formed the National Organization for Women (NOW), with the purpose "to take the actions needed to bring women into the mainstream of American society, now, full equality for women, in fully equal partnership with men."⁸¹

The inception of NOW consequently marked the shift in control of the national women's agenda from a largely ineffectual federal governmental entity to

⁸⁰ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, 20.

⁸¹ Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement* (New York: Random House, 1976), 83.

an independent political action organization that heightened the ongoing debates over discrimination and equality. Not only did they establish NOW, but additionally, in 1971, Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, Betty Friedan, and Liz Carpenter formed the National Women's Political Caucus in Washington, D.C., as a bipartisan organization whose purpose was to lobby Congress for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.⁸² Women had become reinvigorated and ready to demand attention from the members of Congress.

Despite the intensive Pro-ERA lobbying of Congress by the National Organization for Women and the National Women's Political Caucus the Equal Rights Amendment remained hostage to Congressman Emanuel Celler's House Judiciary Committee. Many vocal opponents of the ERA argued that it was an unnecessary proposition, since women already had equality of rights under the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment. This may have been theoretically persuasive, but advocates of the ERA knew that the courts were not consistent in their interpretation of the equal protection clause; making it too unreliable to be used as the vanguard for equal rights.

Congresswoman Martha Griffiths of Michigan consistently rebuked those citing the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment as sufficient safeguard of rights. An attorney by profession, Griffiths had practiced law, served in her state legislature, and presided as a judge in Michigan before being elected to Congress. Her knowledge of case law provided her with plenty of material with which to counter ERA opponents. Citing numerous examples of

⁸² Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 89.

recent case law, such as *Hoyt v. Florida*,⁸³ Griffiths argued that women could not collectively depend on the courts to extend the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment to women.⁸⁴ Also disillusioned with the Supreme Court's opinions on several sexual discrimination cases, Griffiths believed that only a constitutional amendment could redress existing disparities before the law. Contending that forty-seven years in Committee was time enough for the Equal Rights Amendment to be heard by the full Congress, Griffiths filed a discharge petition in 1970 and successfully moved the proposed amendment out of Congressman Celler's Judiciary Committee for debate on the full House floor. Subsequently, on August 10, 1970, the House passed the proposed ERA and sent it to the Senate.⁸⁵

After a series of contentious debates, the Senate passed the proposed Equal Rights Amendment on March 22, 1972 and sent it out to the states for ratification.⁸⁶ However, this was only after co-sponsors Congresswoman Martha Griffiths and Senator Birch Bayh agreed to include a seven-year ratification time limit insisted upon by its leading senatorial opponent, Senator Samuel Ervin. An unnecessary provision for a proposed amendment, Griffiths and Bayh nonetheless believed it to be an innocuous compromise with the amendment's

⁸³ The Supreme Court decision in *Hoyt v. Florida* was decided on March 12, 1961 (9-0). Gwendolyn Hoyt killed her husband with a baseball bat during a marital dispute over his adultery. She had offered to forgive him and but his obduracy provoked the dispute. She pleaded to temporary insanity before an all male jury that proceeded to convict her of second-degree murder.

⁸⁴ Mathews and De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA*, 39.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

most vocal opponent.⁸⁷ Only the most prescient of strategists could have ever envisioned the fateful effect this would invoke in the years ahead.

With congressional approval, the fate of the Equal Rights Amendment now lay before state legislatures for the ratification's super majority approval. The forty-nine year Congressional battle would soon pale in comparison to the vitriolic ratification debates taking place across the states in the years ahead. In a country torn by an unpopular war, obtrusive Supreme Court rulings, a rising feminist movement, civil unrest, and political scandals; the resurgence of the Equal Rights Amendment became a flashpoint for the meaning and implementation of "equality versus difference."⁸⁸ The contentious debates of the congressional halls now echoed across the country's landscape; triggering a maelstrom of emotion in communities nationwide.

⁸⁷ David E. Kyvig, "Historical Misunderstanding and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment," *Public Historian* 18.1 (1996): 56.

⁸⁸ Hoff-Wilson, *Rights of Passage*, xi.

CHAPTER TWO

BORN FOR BATTLE IN THE BATTLE BORN STATE

The U.S. Congress sent the proposed Equal Rights Amendment out to the states for ratification on March 22, 1972. A flurry of state ratifications followed. By 1973, thirty states had ratified the Equal Rights Amendment and victory appeared at hand. However, in the end, this historical moment proved to be most disadvantageous for the amendment's ratification. American society was at unrest. The civil rights movement of the 1960s had created a model for new groups to publicly voice disapproval of the current status quo. Subsequently, the 1970s witnessed dissent and dissatisfaction in communities across the national landscape, including: the anti-war movement, the environmental movement, the gay rights movement, and the invigorated feminist movement. The brutalities of the Vietnam War played out nightly on the evening news as a weary nation watched in horror. The nation's leadership fractured as the unfolding of the Watergate scandal and rising inflation piqued the general public's distrust of government. At the same time, a slight reorganization in politics occurred, as regional burgeoning populations and booming economies shifted the national power to the South and Southwest. This subtle shift of political influence would lead to a rise in conservatism and serve a deadly blow to the ERA's ratification campaign.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 255; for more background on the rise of the Conservative Right, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008); Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right*

Maya Miller and Jean Ford: Leading the Way

During this decade in Nevada, two women would prove to be daunting forces in organizing women: Jean Ford and Maya Miller. While they worked on many of the same issues, Ford and Miller represented two very different versions of the politicized woman. Born in Oklahoma and spending most of her childhood in Missouri, Jean Ford attended Southern Methodist University and received her degree in sociology. After college, she joined the Red Cross, spending the next years working in Kansas, Colorado, and lastly, Hawaii; where she met her future husband.⁹⁰ Coming to Las Vegas in the early sixties, Ford felt very comfortable in the role of the traditional housewife. Now married to a dermatologist and mother of two young girls, Ford contentedly put her college degree on hold, focusing instead on the needs of her family. That is, until she found there were no library services for the unincorporated neighborhood where they lived.

Shortly thereafter, Ford became embroiled in the campaign to establish a new district library. At the same time, an acquaintance suggested that she join the newly formed League of Women Voters; since they planned to study the state parks. As an outdoor enthusiast, this suggestion piqued Ford's interest. She joined the Las Vegas Valley League of Women Voters; becoming president in her second year. Her League training in researching issues, studying the

Made Political History (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008); Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁹⁰ Jean Ford with Vikki Ford, *Jean Ford: A Nevada Woman Leads the Way* (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program), 34-44.

community, and attending legislative committees proved invaluable as she now fought for the establishment of Red Rock state park in the Las Vegas Valley.⁹¹ For the woman who fought a stutter and feared speaking into a microphone; the League now provided the necessary milieu; building her self-confidence for a later bid for elected office. This training, alongside Ford's ability to attract other women to volunteerism, would prove instrumental in the contentious years of the ERA ratification campaign.

When Jean Ford first joined the Vegas Valley branch of the League of Women Voters, Maya Miller had already been an active member in the northern Reno/Carson City branch. Their paths would cross often over the next decades, as they both encouraged women from their perspective cities not only to join the League, but also to engage in the issues affecting their communities. Unlike Jean Ford, Maya Miller never minded stepping outside the formal political process. Born into an affluent Californian family, she received her education at Cornell and did doctoral work at Stanford, before relocating to Washoe Valley in northern Nevada with her husband and young children in the late 1950s. Soon afterward, the Millers purchased the 20 acre Washoe Pines Camp; a former divorce ranch. Here they established Foresta Institute as a nonprofit center for the study of ecology and social issues. The Millers envisioned turning the former divorce ranch into a summer ecology camp for students. This dream became a reality as they successfully ran the summer camp for a number of years.⁹²

⁹¹ Jean Ford with Vikki Ford, *Jean Ford: A Nevada Woman Leads the Way*, 82-93.

⁹² Kit Miller interviewing Maya Miller, unedited transcription. In the possession of Dr. Joanne Goodwin, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Maya's connectivity to points of power, not only in Nevada, but across the states, provided momentum for activists and life-altering opportunities for welfare mothers seeking improvements in the existing social structures. Living within the beautiful respite of Lake Tahoe, Maya fought to preserve its beauty for all Nevadans, while quietly bankrolling quests for social justice across the state. Using her personal affluence, she became a vocal advocate for those with far lesser means. Maya's activism, not only brought attention to the inadequacy of the state's policies, but served to swell the ranks of activists across the state.⁹³

Miller had first become involved with the League when they had decided to study the issue of poverty. By 1968, Maya had become president of Nevada's League of Women Voters and director of poverty and race issues for the National League. Disgusted by Nevada's draconian welfare policies, Maya battled regularly with the 'Old Boys' of the Nevada legislature. Explaining her involvement in the welfare rights issue, Miller stated, "I live in northern Nevada, surrounded by rich white people, so being involved with the struggle of black women over welfare rights helped me to understand and connect with the civil rights movement." She would later chair the board of Operation Life, a social services outreach program for those on welfare; created in Las Vegas by these same welfare mothers.⁹⁴ Over the years, Miller donated millions of dollars to both state and national groups. While Ford was never comfortable with political

⁹³ Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Women Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Street Press, 2005), 89-92.

⁹⁴ "Maya Miller Receives Community Activism Award," *Feminist Majority Newsletter* (Fall 1998) http://www.feminist.org/research/report/102_ten.htm accessed 2/1/2006.

agitation outside the formal process, Miller's outspoken activism earned her a spot on President Nixon's "Enemies List" during the Vietnam War Era.⁹⁵ Despite adherence to vastly different political styles, Ford and Miller both became instrumental leaders in women's political activism across Nevada.

Race, Rights, and Reform: Setting the Stage for the ERA

During this same period in Nevada, advocates for civil rights began organizing. As repeatedly evident in history, the issues of race and gender oftentimes intersect; this era proved no different. In 1968, when Nevada enacted severe welfare cuts; poor blacks organized. Many of the same individuals fighting for better treatment of black citizens later became involved in the campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment. The legislative resistance to addressing civil rights and welfare reform had provoked activists to take their politics to the streets; ERA activists would later do the same.

As the 1960s commenced, Dr. Charles West and Dr. James McMillan, two well-respected black professional men, sought to reverse the growing "Jim Crow" attitude of Las Vegas. In 1960, Dr. McMillan, threatened a national boycott with passive resistance and demonstrations on the Las Vegas Strip if businesses did not end their discriminatory practices. Local government officials and business executives did not want to damage the image of Las Vegas as the glamorous

⁹⁵ "Senate Candidate: Maya Miller enjoys 'motherly type' label," *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 3 March 1974; "U.S. Senate Race: Candidate places wealth at roughly '2-3 million'" *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 18 April 1974; "Honored Advocate: Maya Miller," *Progressive Leadership Alliance Newsletter* (Winter 2001) <http://www.planevada.org/feb2001.htm> accessed 11 June 2005; "Maya Miller Receives Community Activism Award," *Feminist Majority Newsletter* (Fall 1998) http://www.feminist.org/research/report/102_ten.htm accessed 2/1/2006; "Women's Rights Leader Maya Miller Dies at 90: Activist Recalled as Philanthropist with "A Very Hard, Fighting Side," *Las Vegas Review Journal* 2 June 2008; Kit Miller interviewing Maya Miller, unedited transcription in the possession of Dr. Joanne Goodwin, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

and carefree resort city. Therefore, they carefully brokered an agreement between all parties, which came to be known as the Moulin Rouge Agreement. McMillan reported that approximately ninety percent of the hotels had already integrated their employees. As part of the settlement, local officials created the Southern Nevada Human Relations Committee, allowing members of the black community to discuss mutual concerns with governmental officials, businessmen, and police.⁹⁶ In 1966, a federally mandated reapportionment of Nevada's legislature resulted in the election of its first black member, Assemblyman Woodrow Wilson; a long awaited voice for the black community of Las Vegas.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, the short term promises translated into negligible gains for the black community. In 1968, the State League of Women Voters (LWV) issued a report on the progress made since Nevada's Civil Rights Act was enacted three years prior. The League's report indicated rampant discrimination still evident in employment and housing. The League, therefore, called for open housing and the integration of schools.⁹⁸ Their suggestion, unfortunately, was not embraced by local officials, and tensions continued to mount throughout both black and white communities. In January 1969, violence erupted across Las Vegas high schools and in October 1969 gang-related assaults in the city's Westside black community sent twenty-three people to the hospital as two hundred police

⁹⁶ Eugene P. Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930-1970* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1995), 184-186.

⁹⁷ Michael S. Green, "Brown, Integration, and Nevada," in Brian Daugherty and Charles Bolton, eds., *With All Deliberate Speed: Implementing Brown v. Board of Education* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008), 235.

⁹⁸ Green, "Brown, Integration, and Nevada," in *With All Deliberate Speed*, 241-242.

officers struggled to restore order. In May 1970, over three hundred students at Rancho High School went on a pipe swinging rampage; sending nine students to the hospital. The Rancho riot is still remembered as the worst single-day school insurgence to occur in the city during the entire civil rights movement.⁹⁹

A busing boycott and a series of riots and public altercations ensued, triggering enough alarm for Governor Paul Laxalt to place the Nevada National Guard on high alert. In 1970, local NAACP leaders filed a lawsuit against the Clark County School District. The League of Women Voters, who had written a report stating the need for school integration, joined the lawsuit and issued an amicus curie as a friend of the court.¹⁰⁰ In 1972, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in *Kelly v. Guinn* that the Clark County School District's policies did reveal a pattern of segregation. The ruling thereby ordered the Clark County School District to implement a plan within its school policy for immediate integration. School officials subsequently drew up a new policy for school integration, but it would take time to quell the animus of a bitterly divided community.¹⁰¹

When the 1971 Nevada legislature convened, welfare rights had become the topic on everybody's mind. As the only black legislator in the Nevada

⁹⁹ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 191-194.

¹⁰⁰ Dorothy Eisenberg with Caryll Batt Dzedziak, *An Interview with Dorothy Eisenberg* (Las Vegas: Women's Research Institute of Nevada, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2008), 58; see also, Matthew Ronan, "A History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case: *Kelly et al v. The Clark County School District*," (Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada Las Vegas, 1998); Michael S. Green, "Brown, Integration, and Nevada."

¹⁰¹ James W. Hulse, *The Silver State: Nevada's Heritage Reinterpreted*, 3rd ed., (Reno: University of Reno Press, 2004), 284.

legislature, Assemblyman Woodrow Wilson of Las Vegas introduced Assembly Bill 232, which would allow the Governor to appoint two welfare recipients to the Welfare Board. After hours of debate, the bill died in the Assembly Health and Welfare Committee. Assemblyman Wilson cautioned that this defeat would only fuel the state's welfare problems, which could explode at any time.¹⁰²

Like an obdurate child, Nevada also refused to accept federal welfare funding for twenty years after the passage of the Social Security Act. In 1955, Nevada became the last state in the union to accept Aid to Dependent Children. George Miller, Director of Nevada Welfare, prided himself on running a lean welfare division intent on uncovering welfare fraud. In January 1971, Miller announced that largest cut in Welfare stipends in the state's history. Reformulating the state welfare benefits, Miller reduced Nevada's monthly base to \$144 for a mother and three children – far below the official poverty level. To those already battling daily poverty, this dealt a deadly blow. Despite this affront, caseworkers continued to raid welfare recipients' homes at all hours, looking for telltale signs of a man's presence; justification enough to drop them from public assistance. To the impoverished black families of Las Vegas' Westside community, the walls of racism appeared impenetrable.¹⁰³

With hostility rising at the state capital, Maya Miller held strategy sessions for the activists at her ranch nearby. Here she invited welfare rights

¹⁰² Roy Vanett, "Welfare Change Bill Voted Down," *Las Vegas Review Journal* [n.d.] League of Women Voters Papers, box 4, folder 6, Lied Library, Department of Special Collections, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

¹⁰³ Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*, 137-38.

representatives from Washington, DC; Black Panther women from Oakland, CA; League of Women Voters members; and welfare mothers from Las Vegas and Reno.¹⁰⁴ Miller's ranch not only provided a venue for these discussions, but also lodging close to the legislature. Welfare mothers could stay at Miller ranch and drive the short distance to Carson City to testify before the legislature or sit in committee hearings. Miller's outreach to those with lesser means gave them accessibility to the political machinations of the State Capitol. In March 1971, an overflowing crowd of welfare recipients filled the Senate Finance Committee hearing on Assembly Bill 319. This bill stipulated that welfare stipends should be determined by the Welfare Department within the dollar limitations set by the Nevada Legislature. Attorney General Robert List received rancorous boeing by the crowd when he described this bill as one that, "[P]uts the taxpayer back in the driver's seat."¹⁰⁵

Only days later, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) would partner with local activists to organize a Welfare Rights March on the Las Vegas Strip. Over one thousand marchers headed down the Las Vegas Strip in protest of the welfare cuts in Nevada. The Westside welfare mothers were joined by local supporters, black civil rights leaders, anti-war activists, civil rights activist Reverend Ralph Abernathy, Caesar Chavez of the United Farm Workers, actors

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 144-145.

¹⁰⁵ "List Boosed for Welfare Limit Stand," *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 2 March 1971.

Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland, and even famed pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock.¹⁰⁶

As State President of the League of Women Voters, Jean Ford believed one should work within the existing political system. The public protests and marches made her uneasy. She believed the League's policy of research and education created sufficient means to address all social ills. Therefore, as League President, she issued a statement disavowing the League's support or involvement in the March, stating, "[W]e feel this issue should be settled in the court and have chosen to participate through that process. We also hope to provide 'light' instead of 'heat' to the situation by providing members of the legislature pertinent facts and information to help them in making objective and meaningful decisions regarding a truly effective welfare system in Nevada."¹⁰⁷

However, some members of the League of Women Voters felt that this issue superseded any organizational bylaws. League members: Harriet Trudell, Naomi Millisor, and Dorothy Eisenberg; all white middle-class mothers with young children, proudly marched with the protestors. Dorothy brought along two of her daughters. Harriet marched alongside her terrified twelve year old son. As angry onlookers yelled at the protestors, the local police force maintained a wall of protection for the marchers and their children. While the threat of violence

¹⁰⁶ Orleck, 155.

¹⁰⁷ "Women Voters Not Supporting Welfare March," League of Women Voters Papers, box 16, folder 4, Lied Library, Department of Special Collections, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

remained palpable, no violence ensued.¹⁰⁸ Subsequent news coverage ran across the country. It was a good day for the women of the Westside.

A week later, the protesters returned to the Las Vegas Strip; this time marching to the Sands Hotel Casino. Here the demonstrators found the hotel's doors barricaded and patrolled by scores of security guards. NWRO organizer, George Wiley directed the protesters back to the street, where they sat down and blocked infuriated motorists. As expected, eighty-six marchers were arrested, mostly Westside mothers and children. Authorities sought to damage the reputation of the welfare rights activists by claiming "outsiders" had been brought in to create havoc in the community. However, this historic moment belonged to the welfare mothers, who forcefully demanded and received a place in the body politic. Heralding "motherhood's moral authority," they pushed the boundaries of political inclusivity to claim a better life for their children.¹⁰⁹

Over the course of the recent events when Nevada politics took to the streets affluent, middle-class, and poor women banded together to make their voices heard. There would be repercussions at the legislative chambers, as longtime legislators felt the unease of women's presence; with their once private and jocular discussions now before inquisitive listeners. Across communities, North and South, women gathered to discuss the status of Nevada politics; making themselves agents of change.

¹⁰⁸ Dorothy Eisenberg with Caryll Batt Dziedziak, *An Interview with Dorothy Eisenberg*, 53-57; see also Harriet Trudell with Caryll Batt Dziedziak, *An Interview with Harriet Trudell* (Las Vegas: Women's Research Institute of Nevada, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2008), 55-56.

¹⁰⁹ Orleck, 159-161.

League of Women Voters

Under the able leadership of Maya Miller in the North and Jean Ford in the South, Nevada's League of Women Voters became a springboard for women's activism. The League created the necessary milieu for women to transition from being social homemakers to effective activists. League meetings held in members' homes, provided accessibility for many young mothers who initially just enjoyed the social outlet. However, they soon learned to research issues, become confident in public speaking, and organize issue-oriented campaigns. League members researched and educated themselves on various topics, sat through legislative committee hearings, and published their studies; making their presence felt by policymakers. Senate Finance Committee Chair, Senator Floyd Lamb, in particular, did not appreciate the presence of League members in committee hearings, stating, "These people are infringing on us. They are too promiscuous – I don't know if that is the word – but whatever it is I don't want a lot of interfering from the art gallery."¹¹⁰ League members had permeated the boundaries of the body politic; now expanding political discourse beyond the realm of a privileged few.

Many members experienced life-altering events through their affiliation with the League. As the Las Vegas Valley League President during the school desegregation turmoil, Dorothy Eisenberg became a focal point for the local media. A private person by nature, she nonetheless, braced herself for this affront. As the school integration mayhem intensified, privacy vanished. With an

¹¹⁰ "Kibbitzers' Irk Senator," [n.d.], Florence McClure Papers, box 9, folder 2, Lied Library, Department of Special Collections, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

extremely divided community, where emotions ran high; Dorothy experienced the estrangement of acquaintances, friends, and even members of her own synagogue. Growing up in a Jewish community within the multi-ethnic tapestry of South Philadelphia, she recognized the need to reach across the bitter racial divide. While the League's espousal of school integration proved incendiary, Dorothy continued to lead the way. Public outrage escalated to the point of phoning a bomb threat to the Eisenberg's home. Shaken and disappointed in the community's hatred, Dorothy nonetheless, never wavered in believing the cause worth fighting for.¹¹¹

A neighbor of Jean Ford's, Naomi Millisor had been apolitical her whole life. As the wife of a Republican real estate executive and mother of three sons, Millisor's daily activities centered on maintaining their middle-class household and being a supportive wife. She even remembers attending a local forum for women on how to be the perfect wife. That aspiration soon changed. Millisor had always been what she calls a "professional volunteer." She joined the Easter Seals Guild and volunteered as a swimming instructor. She also volunteered for Jean Ford's campaign to get the Clark County Library started. Soon afterward, Ford encouraged her to join the League. Before long, Millisor found herself studying local environmental infractions, writing up a booklet on how to recycle, and eventually in the midst of the fight to integrate the Clark County schools. Years earlier Naomi and her husband had started a Republican's Club. However, now studying various issues with the League, she

¹¹¹ Eisenberg with Dziedziak, 59-64.

thought to herself, “Oops! Wrong party.” Soon fellow League member, Harriet Trudell, registered Naomi as a Democrat; an affiliation she proudly maintained throughout her life.¹¹²

Harriet Trudell arrived in Las Vegas with her husband and two children in the summer heat of 1962. An electrician by trade, Harriet’s husband had found lucrative work with the Titan Missile at the Nevada Testing Grounds. Las Vegas was much different than the communities with which Harriet was familiar. As a young woman, Harriet had been a union organizer for the state AFL-CIO in Florida and always engaged in politics. Now in Nevada, she began volunteering at the Democratic Headquarters. It did not take her long to notice the racial divide of the city. As another new League member, Harriet joined a team studying school integration and soon became embroiled in the Clark County school integration imbroglio.

While League members Jean Ford, Lavonne Lewis, and Jackie Stormson meticulously researched the issue, Harriet had more of a “take to the streets” type of personality. Therefore, Harriet and her good friend, Naomi Millisor, decided to set an example for those in the white community resisting school integration. The two friends enrolled their sons in the first integrated sixth grade center. Visceral hatred emanated from those opposed to integration, but the women remained undeterred. Naomi’s sons received regular pummeling by the black students during the first few weeks, but soon afterward; these same students routinely joined the Millisor family for a filling meal. Years later, Harriet’s

¹¹² Naomi Millisor, interview by author, digital recording, Las Vegas, Nevada, 15 March 2006.

son would work with an integrated staff on the Strip; many of his black coworkers were longtime friends from his earlier years attending the desegregated middle school.¹¹³

Nevada Legislative Debates

As Nevada legislators convened for the 1973 session, they still faced unresolved decisions concerning the state welfare system and the ongoing effects of discrimination. With emotions still charged over welfare rights and racial tensions, the legislators hardly wished for another combative legislative session. However, the difficulty of those decisions would soon pale as a new “women’s issue” appeared before them; the Equal Rights Amendment.

The Nevada Legislature is housed in Carson City, a small community just outside of Reno, Nevada. Political clout, therefore, emanated from the North with a parochial mindset of taking care of one’s own. Just a decade earlier, a movement called the Sagebrush Rebellion swept across the western states; especially in Nevada, where the federal Bureau of Land Management controlled eighty-seven percent of the land. Those partaking in the Sagebrush Rebellion movement felt that many federal policies affecting the West had been enacted in ignorance of issues specific to this region and without regard for western problems.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Millisor, interview; see also Trudell with Dziedziak, 20, 25, 29, 38-41, 43-45.

¹¹⁴ See Sagebrush Rebellion Papers, Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, Department of Special Collections, University of Nevada Reno. In an attempt to regain state control of these lands, Nevada made numerous requests for additional land grants from the Federal Land Law Review Commission during the 1970s. The Commission denied these requests, and instead recommended retaining these lands in Federal ownership to be used and enjoyed by all Americans. To counter-act that decision, the 1977 Nevada Legislature created the Select Committee on Public Lands with the goal of changing public land policies and building a coalition

That western independent mindset was alive and well during the entire ERA ratification debates in the Nevada legislature lasting from 1973 through 1981, where conservative Democrats controlled both the Senate and Assembly. Yet the very structure of the Nevada legislature would impact the outcome of any debates over the ERA. As a citizen legislature, the Nevada legislature is comprised of sixty-three members who meet biennially in regular sessions of 120 calendar days. This very fact played a critical role in delaying any passage of ratification before the 1982 time limit expiration.

Four women served in the 1973 state assembly during the first legislative debates over the Equal Rights Amendment: Eileen Brookman, Margie Foote, Jean Ford, and Mary Gojack. Assemblywoman Eileen Brookman had served in the Assembly since 1965 and would continue to serve for sixteen years in the legislature. Small in stature, Brookman dressed in orange daily to be sure that her presence would be recognized; this color became her signature. An ardent supporter of the ERA, Brookman also consistently supported legislation to assist senior citizen programs, disability programs, and juvenile justice services.¹¹⁵

Voted into office on the tide of the women's movement, freshmen Assemblywomen Mary Gojack and Jean Ford joined the 1973 legislative debates. Inexperienced in the legislative process and unfamiliar with the Equal Rights Amendment, both assemblywomen gathered research and voiced their

of like-minded western states. This led to the creation of the Western Coalition on Public Lands. Assembly Bill 413, titled, "Sagebrush Rebellion" bill was passed by the Nevada Legislature in 1979 to create a board of review, providing state control of specific lands within the state.

¹¹⁵ Women's Research Institute of Nevada website, http://wrin.unlv.edu/biographies/eileen_brookman.html, accessed 7 September 2010.

support of the amendment's ratification. In the subsequent legislative sessions, they would emerge as vocal leaders in the battle for the ratification of the ERA.

Not all female legislators supported the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. State Assemblywoman Margie Foote made up her mind immediately that it was not necessary. Born and raised in the northern town of Sparks, Nevada just outside Reno, Foote had earned a college degree, taught school for a few years, then ran a children's apparel shop with her mother. Interviewed by a national TV reporter Foote remarked, "Women are already superior. Why would they want to go backwards?" Foote believed that the ERA would cause most issues dealing with women to end up in the courts; something she felt was a waste of time. According to Foote, people were not dissatisfied with the way things currently were – status quo was just fine.¹¹⁶ Freely voicing her opposition during the legislative sessions, Foote often spoke before public forums and joined the northern STOP-ERA contingency. For her vocal opposition to the ERA spanning 1973 through 1977, activists targeted her 1978 bid for re-election and voted her out of office.¹¹⁷

As the first elected female senator, Helen Herr fought for equity in the workplace by sponsoring the 1973 legislation guaranteeing equal pay for equal work for men and women. However, she strongly opposed the Equal Rights Amendment and as the sole female senator, she requested that her remarks be

¹¹⁶ Senator Margie Foote, interview by author, digital recording, Sparks, Nevada, 4 October 2007.

¹¹⁷ Foote, interview; Assemblywoman Vivian Freeman, interview by author, Reno, Nevada, 4 October 2007.

entered into the legislative record. Senator Herr stated, “This act would deliberately undermine the family which is the cornerstone of our society. God made us different for an important purpose and function. We may be superior in some ways, weaker in others. The laws that protect us from burdens we were not built for must not be denied us.”¹¹⁸ She would soon emerge as a leader in the fight against the ERA. Herr would remain in the Senate until her defeat in the 1978 primary election; a defeat that she blamed on her opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment.¹¹⁹

Although Nevada’s Democratic Governor, Mike O’Callaghan publicly supported the ratification of the ERA, Democrat Senate Majority Leader B. Mahlon Brown and the Democratic majority did little to effect its passage. Much attention had been given to welfare reform in the prior legislative session and no legislator had looked forward to another contentious session. Senators Bryan and Wilson introduced Senate Joint Resolution 1 (SJR 1), calling for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. SJR 1 quickly moved to the Senate Judiciary Committee, where Chair Mel Close announced that the committee would hold public hearings on the Resolution.

During the public hearings held in February 1973, over one hundred individuals testified; with both sides of the issue fairly evenly divided. Senator Close carefully directed the hearings, ensuring that all individuals giving testimony received courteous attention by all in attendance. After hearing the

¹¹⁸ Nevada Legislature, *Nevada Legislative Record*, (Carson City, 1973), 243.

¹¹⁹ Women’s Research Institute of Nevada website, http://wrin.unlv.edu/biographies/helen_herr.html, accessed 7 September 2010.

testimony, both for and against the ERA, Senator Close adjourned with the following remarks for the legislative record, “My main concern revolves around the possible Supreme Court interpretation of the amendment. Many people have been somewhat surprised at various interpretations of constitutional provisions the Supreme Court has rendered in the past few years...I feel there are many discriminatory laws with regards to women; some favoring them and some detrimental to them...[w]e have had a study by the Legislative Counsel Bureau showing where possible areas of discrimination occur by statute. Where they are unjust or unreasonable, they should be amended...[i]f the amendment is not adopted until 1979, or if it is never adopted, the alleged discrimination would continue to exist, unless action is taken in Nevada today. The committee is prepared to take that action.”¹²⁰

The Senate debated the Resolution over the course of the next few weeks and finally voted it down 16-4. In the Assembly, Jean Ford introduced Assembly Joint Resolution 8 (AJR 8), calling for the ratification of the Equal Rights amendment. The Joint Resolution never made it out of the Assembly Judiciary Committee. There would be no further legislative discussion of the Equal Rights Amendment for another two years.¹²¹ Yet, Senator Close proved true to his word. For while the ERA had been voted down during the 1973 session, the Senate Judiciary Committee continued the arduous and time-consuming task of

¹²⁰ Nevada Legislature, *Nevada Legislative Record*, Senate Judiciary Committee, 27 February 1973, (Carson City 1973).

¹²¹ Nevada Legislature, *Nevada Legislative Record*, (Carson City, 1973), <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/1973/SJR01,1973.pdf>, accessed 20 April 2010.

pouring over Nevada's Revised Statutes to purge discriminating language. Once found, they drafted bills to ensure equality in Nevada law. By the end of the 1973 legislative session, Pro-ERA legislators realized that they had much to learn about this amendment. While they supported the theoretical principle of equality under the law, too many people already argued that the amendment would thrust society into disarray. Already, there was talk of unisex restrooms, women forced into the workplace, alimony for men, governmental child care, and federal imposition on family matters. Much research had to be done before the next legislative session. Meanwhile, oppositional forces set forth the initial to steps toward an effective counter-movement.¹²²

After B. Mahlon Brown retired following the 1973 session, James I. Gibson ruled the legislature. As Senate Majority Leader from 1975 until his retirement in 1988, Senator Gibson, a conservative Mormon Democrat, led the Mormon-controlled legislature as an unwavering opponent of the Equal Rights Amendment.¹²³ Senator Floyd Lamb, a cantankerous Mormon Democrat, consistently supported Senator Gibson's opinions; including his opposition to the ERA. As Chair of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, Senator Lamb was in a privileged position to both introduce and kill many bills. During several of the legislative sessions undertaking consideration of the ERA, Senator Lamb introduced a Senate Joint Resolution calling for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Having introduced the Resolution, Lamb moved

¹²² Jean Ford with Vikki Ford, *Jean Ford: A Nevada Woman Leads the Way*, 183.

¹²³ Senator Joe Neal, interview by author, digital recording, Las Vegas, Nevada, 6 August 2007; Foote, interview; Freeman, interview; Trudell with Dziedziak, 62.

immediately for “Indefinite Postponement.” This procedural maneuver would end any further debate of the ERA; thereby killing the bill for the rest of the legislative session. While this technical slight-of-hand incensed proponents of the ERA; it nevertheless represented a legitimate parliamentary motion. As evident with Lamb’s procedural manipulations, leaders of the Nevada legislature oftentimes chose obstructionist tactics over meaningful debate during the legislative sessions.¹²⁴

There were, however, other politicians who became unexpected leaders in the fight for ERA’s ratification. One such legislator proved to be freshman senator, Joe Neal. Neal’s unique background would prove instrumental in championing the cause for the Equal Rights Amendment. Neal worked as a compliance officer at the Ramsey Electrical Engineering Company, one of the companies contracted at the Nevada Test Site. His duties there were to enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964; which included race, religion, national origin, and sex. A Democrat, Senator Neal entered the Nevada legislature by defeating the Republican state senator Woodrow Wilson; the only other black male to have served in the legislature. As a progressive black male, Neal knew that he was outnumbered at the legislature. He recognized that the Mormon leadership controlled the legislature. He also knew that Mormon doctrine viewed black males as unfit for the priesthood; the normative qualifier for men in the Mormon

¹²⁴ Neal, interview; Nevada Legislature, *Journal of the Senate*, 16 January 1979, (Carson City 1979), <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Library/LegHis/LHS/1979/SJR01,1979.pdf>, accessed 23 October 2010; Nevada Legislature, *Journal of the Senate*, 22 January 1981, (Carson City 1981), <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Library/LegHis/LHS/1981/SJR07,1981.pdf>, accessed 23 October 2010.

Church. Yet, as a freshman senator, Neal would prove his mettle; decisively standing his ground against the powerful Mormon leadership of the legislature.¹²⁵

A Louisiana native, Neal had attended Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and graduated with a degree in political science and history. During his time at Southern University, the college offered a unique program allowing undergraduate students to take freshman law courses during their senior year of undergraduate studies. By participating in this program, Neal felt that by the time he graduated, his ability to understand law and research law was equivalent to many of the lawyers who had graduated from top law schools. Neal's oratorical skills and knowledge of parliamentary procedure created a notable presence in the impending legislative debates.

Entering the Nevada legislature, Neal knew that he had monumental challenges ahead, yet he was determined to have his voice heard. During his early weeks in the Nevada Senate, the Senate Secretary, Leola Armstrong, called Neal down to her office and gave him a book called the *Mason's Manual*. She told him, "Read it, because you're going to need it." Neal immediately recognized that it contained the rules of the legislature – parliamentary law.¹²⁶ And read it he did, soon becoming recognized as an expert of parliamentary procedure at the Nevada legislature. This would prove critical in the forthcoming ERA debates.

¹²⁵ Neal, interview.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

On February 28, 1973, just weeks after taking office, freshman Senator Neal stood resolutely before the Senate and said, “Mr. President, as a black man, my appreciation for equal rights for any citizen is equal or greater than any Senator present here today...For the past weeks in the Senate, I have watched with great concern how each morning at the convening of the Senate we pay homage to God and extol the virtues of this ‘free society.’ I have seen the President of this Senate each morning turn and say proudly ‘will you follow me in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.’ I always flinch with amazement when we come to the portion of the Pledge of Allegiance that says ‘one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.’ With liberty and justice for whom? Certainly not for women, certainly not for blacks and certainly not for Indians. It is liberty and justice for the white Caucasian male, who by his pride is willing, by his vote against Equal Rights for Women, to make the Senate Chamber a den of inequity instead of a place for liberty and justice for all. It is not only power that you exercise here this morning by voting against this amendment, it is power buttressed by fear. What I am saying is simply this: if you do not allow women to become an equal part of our social, economic, political, and religious institutions, you will be shouting your insecurity to the world. Whatever the American women have and will become, will be a reflection of your action here today.”¹²⁷ The Nevada ERA activists had found a new and vocal friend.

¹²⁷ Nevada Legislature, *Journal of the Senate*, (Carson City, 1973), 28 February 1973, <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Library/LegHis/LHS/1973/SJR01,1973.pdf>, accessed 23 October 2010.

Women Organizing for the ERA

With the legislative debates stalled for another two years after the end of the 1973 legislative session, Jean Ford and other Pro-ERA advocates realized that there was no time to lose; evidence abounded that Anti-ERA forces were quickly organizing across the states. In, January 1974, Jean called a meeting at her home to establish the ERA Coalition with the purpose of coordinating efforts for ERA's passage. At the meeting, Jean asked each individual to state what their organization was doing to eliminate discriminatory laws and/or obtain passage of the ERA. Kate Butler, representing the League of Women Voters, related that the League had received a grant to produce an informational film about the ERA. The League planned to show the pro-con film across the state, including the more rural areas. A number of individuals shared details of upcoming educational seminars and courses pertaining to women's rights. Several organizations belonging to the ERA Coalition contributed money to lease an office in Reno for the upcoming year. Ford ended the meeting with a request for bills to change discriminatory laws in Nevada. All in attendance realized that much work had to be done before the 1975 legislative session.¹²⁸

Also formed after the 1973 legislative session, the Nevadans for ERA (NERA) represented a statewide organization working toward the ratification of the ERA. The campaign ran across the state, with Kate Butler as the state coordinator. Mylan Roloff served as northern coordinator, while Renee Diamond and Cynthia Cunningham chaired the South. NERA published a statewide

¹²⁸ "ERA 'Coalition' Meeting," Jean Ford Papers, box 28, folder 7, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

newsletter to educate the public about legislative activity concerning the ERA and promote general public awareness of the amendment. As public vitriol over the proposed amendment heightened, members of the Nevada for ERA became scapegoats for the opposition's rage. The doors of offices in Las Vegas and Carson City were smeared with ugly and threatening words. Volunteers discovered that one of their Las Vegas offices was even wiretapped; only later to be burglarized. As State Coordinator, Kate Butler summarized that these activities were probably meant to scare the ERA activists; which they did.¹²⁹ This campaign no longer reflected a single-issue; an ideological war had begun.

Undeterred, volunteers fought back Anti-ERA sentiment with their own publications, radio commercials, and public forums. Local leaders connected with national organizations supportive of the ERA, such as NOW, Women's Political Caucus, AFL/CIO, Labor Women United, and American Association of University Women. National NOW sent an advisor to Nevada to assist the local activists with their strategy. California NOW brought women into Nevada on weekends to assist with field operations. Weekend after weekend twenty to fifty women would arrive from California to lend their support. The volunteers would canvas neighborhoods leaving Pro-ERA pamphlets. Oftentimes, at the end of those long days, the women would gather at Renee Diamond's home for a backyard picnic. Creating Nevadans for Better Government as their ERA Political Action Committee, Nevadans for ERA began raising money to cover that campaign expenses. Some national organizations, such as NOW and

¹²⁹ Author's email exchange with Kate Butler, 16 October 2007; "Blame Legislators, Not Us, for Boycott," *Las Vegas Sun*, 28 February 1978.

ERAmerica donated money toward the ratification campaign in Nevada, but Nevadans for ERA relied mostly on their own fundraising abilities. Most members had no formal political background and instead, relied on their experiences with PTA, church, and community activities. Therefore, their grassroots efforts in fundraising remained as local and family-oriented activities, such as spaghetti/lasagna dinners and yard sales.¹³⁰

Local groups lent non-monetary support as well. The Clark County Teachers' Association (CCTA) allowed the volunteers to use their offices at night for phone banking. Volunteers would phone-poll to get ideas about the general opinions seen in various neighborhoods. This information helped them choose what neighborhoods to canvas next. The also women started a pledge group called the 21/11 Club¹³¹ with little pledge books containing the monthly coupons to mail in with their pledge. Donors would pledge five dollars per month until March 1979 – the deadline for ratification - to assist in defraying costs incurred by the Nevadans for ERA. Bob Coffin sent in the first pledge. Coffin later became a Nevada state assemblyman and senator; serving in the legislature for twenty-eight years.¹³²

¹³⁰ Renee Diamond with Caryll Batt Dziedziak, *An Interview with Renee Diamond* (Las Vegas: Women's Research Institute of Nevada, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2002), 23-30, 48.

¹³¹ 21/11 Club stood for 21 votes needed in the Assembly and 11 votes needed in the Senate for the ratification of the ERA; "NERA Newsletter," (November 1977), in Nevadans for ERA Papers, Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, Department of Special Collections, University of Nevada Reno.

¹³² Renee Diamond with Caryll Batt Dziedziak, *An Interview with Renee Diamond*, 27.

Resuming the Legislative Debates

By the time the Nevada legislature reconvened in February 1975, a new face had joined the Pro-ERA legislative caucus. Sue Wagner, a young mother from Reno, ran as a Republican for the Nevada Assembly on an “Open Government” campaign in response to the invidious Watergate scandal. While campaigning, Sue was unaware of the contentious ERA battle brewing across the states. Her future constituents proved far more concerned about who would be caring for her young children while she was in office. By the time the 1975 Nevada Legislature convened, however, the ERA had become a heated topic. Sue realized that she had to make up her mind quickly on this issue, or become buried with mail from constituents trying to persuade her one way or the other. She decided to lend her support to the cause by joining the Nevadans for ERA and working with other Pro-ERA legislators during the legislative session. Believing the ERA represented a fundamental principle of equality; Wagner braced for the battle ahead.¹³³

During this session, pro-ERA legislators tried a new tactic for the amendment’s passage. Instead of introducing the resolution by a female assemblywoman, as it had been done in the 1973 session, they instead chose a male colleague. Reno Assemblyman Bob Barengo agreed to be the lead sponsor and introduce the Assembly Joint Resolution (AJR 1). The Assembly voted overwhelmingly “Do Pass” with 27 for and 13 against. The new strategy appeared to be working. However, opposition rose amongst the Senators.

¹³³ Wagner with Ford, 136, 165, 172-73.

Moving up from the assembly, Mary Gojack fought to turn the tide in favor of the amendment in the Senate. However, Jack Schofield and Margie Foote, who had also moved up from the Assembly, joined with the majority and voted the amendment down 12-8. The following month, Senator Carl Dodge introduced Senate Joint Resolution (SJR 1) before the Senate Judiciary Committee. The resolution's language stated, "Ratifies proposed constitutional amendment relative to equal rights for men and women." Senator Margie Foote moved a "do kill" that was seconded by Senator Dodge. The ERA received no further legislative debate during the 1975 session.¹³⁴

Pro-ERA activists had busily spent the past year educating the public, lobbying the legislators, and checking for any discrimination in existing laws. During this time, national policy trends also looked to eliminate sex discrimination in the law with the U.S. Congress passing legislation on equal credit, displaced homemakers, flexible work hours, rape, pregnancy disability, and educational opportunities.¹³⁵ Title IX of the 1972 Higher Education Act prohibited sex discrimination in any educational program receiving federal funding. In 1974, The Women's Educational Equity Act Program provided federal monies to public schools that countered sex role stereotypes and promoted equality of women's educational opportunities. Inspired by the challenges of feminists, many states revised rape statutes that had long made the prosecution of the attackers nearly

¹³⁴ Ford with Ford, 183; Nevada Legislature, *Nevada Legislative Record*, (Carson City, 1975), *Senate Judiciary Committee Minutes*, 20 February 1975, <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Library/LegHis/LHS/1975/SJR01,1975.pdf>, accessed 23 October 2010.

¹³⁵ Hoff-Wilson, ed., 56.

impossible. New laws barred the cross-examination of victims about their own sexual history.¹³⁶ Legislators in Nevada followed this national trend as state legislators both for and against the ERA, began introducing bills to rectify existing sexual discrimination in the Nevada Revised Statutes. One of the earliest bills passed during this decade addressing sexual discrimination was the Equal Pay for Equal Work, sponsored by ERA opponent, Senator Helen Herr.

By the end of the 1975 legislative session, Nevada legislators, both for and against the ERA, had passed a flurry of bills rectifying discriminatory laws, including: the repeal of the sole trader laws, prohibiting discrimination against credit applicants on the basis of sex or marital status, revising and generally equalizing Nevada's community property laws, transferring responsibility for sex discrimination from the Labor Commission to the Equal Rights Commission, repealing the discriminatory language in the Nevada Constitution relating to women's rights to hold certain public offices, Equalized age for marriage, equal responsibility of parents in marriages of minor children, providing opportunity for support pending divorce equally to men and women, prohibiting discrimination against women in the militia, and lastly, providing for a study of Nevada laws that may discriminate on the basis of sex.¹³⁷ Despite suffering through a second ERA defeat this session, Pro-ERA legislators felt the satisfaction of knowing that the session proved propitious in rectifying outdated and discriminatory laws. The

¹³⁶ Schulman, 167.

¹³⁷ Nevada Legislature, *Nevada Legislative Record*, (Carson City, 1975), <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/1975/SJR01,1975.pdf>, accessed 22 April 2010.

battle had not been won, but this victory represented a gratifying step toward equality.

In February 1977, the Nevada legislature convened for its 59th Session. Most legislators who had vocally advocated either for or against the Equal Rights Amendment in 1975 now returned to resume the debate. Senator Mary Gojack, Assemblywomen Sue Wagner and Eileen Brookman all returned to take up the ERA fight. Newcomer Assemblywoman Nancy Gomes from Washoe County also joined the Pro-ERA ranks. However, there was a noticeable absence from the Pro-ERA legislative coalition as Assemblywoman Jean Ford had lost her bid for State Senate in the 1976 election. Despite her defeat, Ford managed to return to Carson City for the legislative session, serving as a lobbyist for the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce.¹³⁸ Vocal ERA foe, Senator Helen Herr also lost her re-election bid to serve in the 1977 session, ending her twenty year tenure in the legislature. Herr blamed her loss on her opposition to the ERA. Senator Margie Foote did return for her final session; once again voicing her opposition to ERA's passage. This proved to be Foote's last term, as she too fell victim to a drive against her bid for re-election.¹³⁹ Assemblywoman Karen Hayes returned to serve in her second legislative session to not only continue her opposition to the ERA in the legislature, but soon embarking on an Anti-ERA community speaking tour.

¹³⁸ Ford with Ford, 184-189.

¹³⁹ Freeman, interview.

The legislative leadership remained under the control of Mormon ERA opposition: Senate Majority Leader Jim Gibson, Senator Mel Close, and Senator Floyd Lamb. During the legislative interim, Nevadans for ERA had been busy soliciting pledged support from many Assemblymen, and therefore, felt hopeful for a win in the Assembly. However, a backroom deal had been negotiated between the Assembly and Senate leadership whereupon it was agreed that the ERA would be killed before ever coming to the Assembly. Therefore, these new Assembly “supporters” freely pledged their support to the ERA and accepted contributions, albeit in minuscule amounts, from the Nevadans for ERA knowing that they would never be called upon to vote.¹⁴⁰

Given that the ERA had passed overwhelmingly in the 1975 Assembly by 27-13, supporters decided to introduce the ERA resolution initially in the Senate to secure the more difficult victory first. Senator Joe Neal later felt that this decision sealed the fate of the ERA. Neal believed that the Assembly would have, once again, passed the resolution, believing that Senate leadership would definitely vote it down. However, few would have ever imagined the parliamentary maneuvers that would come into play during the Senate vote, blocking the Anti-ERA control – but Joe Neal did. He had carefully read the *Mason’s Manual* of parliamentary law and now had a plan.¹⁴¹

Early in the session, Senate Majority leader Jim Gibson pressed a rules change through the Democratic Caucus to change the Senate Standing Rules;

¹⁴⁰ Diamond with Dziedziak, 18, 31.

¹⁴¹ Neal, interview.

thereby prohibiting the Lieutenant Governor from casting any tie-breaking vote in the Senate.¹⁴² On February 8, 1977, Senator Gibson called for a special evening session whereupon the Senate would cast its vote regarding SJR 5 – the Equal Rights Amendment resolution. Earlier, Pro-ERA Senator Joe Neal overheard ERA opponent, Senator Blakemore state that there would never be a tie in the Senate; as he and another Senator would simply abstain from the vote. Neal recognized this as a strategy to keep Lieutenant Governor Bob Rose, an ERA supporter, from casting a potential tie-breaking vote. A master of parliamentary procedure, Neal immediately thought of the little known Senate Rule 30, which when invoked mandates that all present must vote either “aye” or “nay.” In other words, no abstentions allowed! Checking with the Legislative Counsel Bureau for legal verification, Neal then tracked down Lieutenant Governor Bob Rose and told him of the plan to invoke Senate Rule 30 at the evening session.¹⁴³

As the evening session’s discussion of the Equal Rights Amendment convened, Senator Joe Neal rose and stated, “If I am in order at this particular time, Mr. President, I would like to invoke Rule No. 30 when this question comes up for vote and if I could be sustained by Senator Faiss and Senator Hernstadt on this issue, then we can move on. And thank you very much.” Mass confusion ensued as most legislators were not familiar with Senate Rule 30. Pulling out their *Mason’s Manuals*, legislators rose citing various parliamentary objections. After more than an hour of heated debate, the vote was called on the ratification

¹⁴² “Joe Neal Upset: State Senate charged with ERA setback” *Las Vegas Review Journal* 14 December 1976; Neal, interview.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

of the Equal Rights Amendment resolution. All resolutions needed a majority of the Senate to pass; not merely a majority of the vote. With the Senate vote of 10 “ayes,” 8 “nays,” and 2 “abstentions,” opponents felt a victory at hand, as 11 “aye” votes were needed to reflect a majority of the Senate.

At this point, however, Lieutenant Bob Rose stated that under Rule 30 the “abstentions” would count as “nays”; making the final count 10-10. As President of the Senate, he then cast the tie-breaking vote in favor of the ERA; making the final Senate vote 11-10 in favor of ERA’s ratification. Those opposed to the ERA had been outmaneuvered by members of the Senate well-versed in parliamentary procedure. However, this victory proved short-lived. Within hours, Senate leadership had aligned its forces in the Assembly. Once the Assembly convened, several legislators rose to speak on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment. While no one in opposition rose to debate the resolution, the final vote nonetheless totaled 15 “ayes” 24 “nays” and 1 “absent.” The 24 Assemblymen who voted against the resolution included 8 Assemblymen who had taken contributions from Nevadans for ERA with the promise of voting in favor of the resolution.¹⁴⁴ ERA proponents were shocked and angry at the broken promises, but to no avail. Once again the Equal Rights Amendment would go down in defeat.

Member of the Judiciary Committee, Assemblywoman Sue Wagner literally collapsed at her desk when the final vote arrived. She recalled her feelings of disbelief, stating “It was my feeling that this issue was not taken very

¹⁴⁴ Nevada Legislature, *Journal of the Senate*, 8 February 1977, (Carson City, 1977); Neal, interview.

seriously by a very many people [legislators] and it was something that could be traded off for something else. It boggled my mind because we're talking about a basic fundamental philosophical principle of equality. It was like a slap in the face to women that we were just not important enough or equal."¹⁴⁵

Before the legislative session adjourned, Assemblyman Bob Mello from Sparks, Nevada introduced Assembly Bill 301; calling for a citizens' advisory referendum on the Equal Rights Amendment's proposed ratification. This would become known as Question 5 on the 1978 election ballot. ERA advocates opposed the referendum, stating that it merely provided an excuse for legislators who didn't want to assume the responsibility for their votes. ERA advocates quickly filed suit, challenging the constitutionality of the referendum. Ultimately, this lawsuit would be struck down by the Nevada Supreme Court, leaving the fate of the referendum in the hands of an already overworked group of volunteers. ERA activists immediately formed the Equality NOW campaign and canvassed neighborhoods to support ERA politicians while at the same time encouraging voters to vote for the referendum. However, their efforts paled in comparison to an efficient Mormon-run telephone tree, whereby upwards of 9,000 individuals were contacted the day before the referendum vote. When Nevada citizens voted on November 7, 1978, only 61,768 voted in favor of Question 5, while a resounding 123,952 voted against the measure. The people had spoken, voting down the referendum by a 2:1 margin. This dealt the final blow to the ratification

¹⁴⁵ "Making a Difference: Women in Nevada Politics, 1965-1982," *The Nevada Experience* #608, [Produced by] KNPB, Sylvia Ontaneda-Bernales, producer. Reno, Nevada, 2009. Lied Library, Media Resources, [Video # HQ1236.5U6M33], University of Nevada Las Vegas.

campaign. For while the referendum was merely advisory and not binding; all Anti-ERA legislators would refer to its defeat in the subsequent legislative sessions as “the voice of the people.” While introduced again in the 1979 and 1981 legislative sessions, the ERA resolutions simply died in committee.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Secretary of State William D. Swakhamer, “Constitutional Amendments to be Voted Upon in State of Nevada at General Election, November 7, 1978,” Legislative Counsel Research Library, (Carson City); Nevadans for ERA Papers, Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, Department of Special Collections, University of Nevada Reno; Hawkins, interview; D. Michael Quinn, “The LDS Church’s Campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment,” *Journal of Mormon History* 20.2 (1990): 125.

CHAPTER THREE

EMERGENT CULTURES IN CONFLICT

The Equal Rights Amendment ratification campaign not only politicized women fighting for its ratification; it also mobilized masses of women adamantly opposed to its passage. These women, many of whom had not been politically active before, voiced their anxiety about the perceived attack on their identity and values. Both groups of women addressed this issue with equal fervor; each side believing that it represented essential values and truths. ERA activists believed in transforming the theoretical principle of equality into action. They therefore welcomed the impending social and legal changes to be wrought by the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Opponents reacted much differently. Indeed, they perceived the Equal Rights Amendment and feminism as interchangeable dangers; ready to dismantle the very foundation of their identity. As this chapter illustrates, the importance of studying the Equal Rights Amendment ratification campaign lay not in its ultimate passage or defeat, but rather in understanding its role in politicizing women of all political persuasions throughout Nevada.

Across the nation, the “Anti” forces coalesced; oftentimes under the guidance of religious entities. While most memberships of religious affiliations nationwide revealed a mixed response to the Equal Rights Amendment, there were exceptions. Studies revealed that Jews and Mormons represented the only religious groups whose viewpoints on the ERA were overwhelmingly one-sided. A national study indicated that 85.7 percent of Jewish women and 89.4 percent of Jewish men supported the ERA, whereas 75 percent of Mormon women and

87.5 percent of Mormon men opposed its passage. No other religious affiliations had such unified responses.¹⁴⁷

Many social commentators have noted the involvement of the Catholic Church in the political arena. The church's conservative theology parallels many conservative political positions on such controversial issues as abortion. However, over the decades, church representatives have been equally vocal on such social justice issues as civil rights and liberation theology.¹⁴⁸ When the Equal Rights Amendment's ratification campaign took to the states, the national Catholic perspective remained bifurcated. With the amendment's strong link to abortion, church leaders voiced their opposition. However, groups did form that remained loyal to church doctrine while advocating for the passage of the ERA. One such group, "Catholics Act for ERA," consisted of a national membership of Catholic nuns and laypersons who lent support to states battling the ERA ratification.

Visiting Nevada during the bitter 1978 campaign, "Catholics Act for ERA" received a verbal lashing by Nevada's Bishop Norman McFarland for their "dishonesty and deceit." As the highest ranking Catholic official in the state, Bishop McFarland adamantly opposed the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and wasted no time publicly expressing his views. Sending a letter

¹⁴⁷ Val Burris, "Who Opposed the ERA?: An Analysis of the Social Bases of Antifeminism," *Social Science Quarterly* 64 (June 1983): 308-10; Kent L. Tedlin, "Religious Preferences and Pro/Anti Activism on the Equal Rights Amendment Issue," *Pacific Sociological Review* 21 (January 1978): 55-61; Quinn, "The LDS Church's Campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment": 144-145.

¹⁴⁸ James T. Richardson, "The 'Old Right' in Action: Mormon and Catholic Involvement in the Equal Rights Amendment Referendum," in *New Christian Politics*, David G. Bromley and Anson Shupe, eds., (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984): 214.

stating his strong reservations about the ERA to all priests in Nevada, he encouraged them to quote him, if desired, in their discussions of the amendment. This very letter was later read into the Legislative Record by none other than Senate Majority Leader, Jim I. Gibson. While Bishop McFarland made his position quite clear, individual parishes could chose whether or not to take up the Anti-ERA crusade.¹⁴⁹ The church's opposition stemmed more from the ERA's linkage to abortion than anything else. Catholics who espoused the church's teachings on the right to life, were therefore less inclined to support the ERA. While the most recognizable opponent of the ERA nationally, Phyllis Schlafly, was a devout Catholic, in the end, there was no mobilization of Catholic membership en masse to fight the ERA either nationwide or in Nevada.

The Mormon Church

No church in Nevada was more organized in activating its membership against the ERA than the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, known more commonly as the Mormon Church. Under the leadership of the First Presidency, church membership dutifully responded to his official directives and revelations. The political influence of the LDS Church's First Presidency had increased dramatically since the 1950s. Then First President David O. McKay proved to be a charismatic, handsome, and extremely popular leader of the church. His office used the media extensively to increase his effect upon church members, who began referring to him as "Prophet"; a term previously reserved only for Mormon founder Joseph Smith. According to D. Michael Quinn, former full professor of

¹⁴⁹ Richardson, "The 'Old Right' in Action," 220-221.

history at Brigham Young University, this reverence for the First President of the LDS Church created a political unity unseen since the years of the Church's nineteenth-century persecution. According to Quinn, the increased adoration of the First Presidency made it increasingly difficult for church members to dissent from his political views.¹⁵⁰

Women's role within the Mormon Church has changed over the course of the church's history. In the early days of the church, Mormon women enjoyed public roles alongside Mormon men. With the establishment of Utah's settlement in 1847, Mormon women held rights that exceeded those of most other women in the United States, such as : the right to own property, conduct business, and file for divorce on the grounds of incompatibility. In 1870, Utah granted women the right to vote; the first state to do so. During this period of church persecution, all members were expected to contribute to the community's well-being; including women. As the church began to experience greater political and economic stability in the twentieth-century, Mormon women's public prominence and autonomy began to diminish. During the 1920s the church began emphasizing women's domesticity while minimizing their history of autonomy. By the 1970s, of during the height the resurging feminist movement, church leaders reminded Mormon women to reject the lures of careers, self-fulfillment, and independence in favor of the eternal fulfillment won through marriage, motherhood, and submission. During this period, the First Presidency revoked the autonomous

¹⁵⁰ Quinn, 97-98.

status of the church's Relief Society; the women's auxiliary organization.

Herein, the Relief Society would be monitored by the church's male leadership.

This new structuring resembled the both the model of Mormon marriage and their notion of salvation. Unlike mainstream Christianity, Mormon doctrine regards hell as the eternal resting place for a very few individuals. Conversely, their concept of heaven is expanded into tiers. The highest tier, the celestial kingdom, can only be attained through exaltation and exaltation cannot be reached alone. According to Mormon doctrine, when couples are temple-married, they are bound not only for their lifetime on earth, but for eternity. The only way for Mormon women to achieve exaltation in the celestial kingdom, therefore, is by submitting themselves by temple-marriage to a priesthood Mormon male. Sexual difference and female dependency remained core to official Mormon dogma.¹⁵¹

While the ERA directly challenged Mormon convictions about women's roles here on earth and thereafter, the LDS Church leadership kept its official position of non-interference in political matters during the early ratification debates. Church leaders maintained that LDS chapels and meetinghouses should never be used for overtly political activities; including speech-making, distribution of literature, or political discussions. While infractions involving thousands of Anti-ERA Mormons were reported in several states including Nevada, the church leadership simply stated that such activities were without

¹⁵¹ Neil J. Young, "The ERA Is a Moral Issue': The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment," *American Quarterly* 59.3 (2007): 7.

central direction. Whatever surreptitious activity did occur at the local Stakes and Wards, the official policy remained that of noninterference.¹⁵²

While the Mormon Church refused to make a public stance on the ERA until late 1976, nevertheless, church leaders' sentiments regarding women's changing roles in society proved nothing short of apocryphal.¹⁵³ In October 1973, LDS President N. Eldon Tanner, (First Counselor in the First Presidency), presented his views on womanhood in his address titled, "No Greater Honor: The Woman's Role":

"It is of great concern to all who understand this glorious concept that Satan and his cohorts are using scientific arguments and nefarious propaganda to lure women away from their primary responsibilities as wives, mothers, and homemakers. We hear so much about emancipation, independence, sexual liberation, birth control, abortion, and other insidious propaganda belittling the role of motherhood, all of which is Satan's way of destroying woman, the home, and the family – the basic unit of society."¹⁵⁴

Given the close affiliation of the feminist movement with the Equal Rights Amendment, one could justifiably assume that long before its public opposition, the church was already organizing against the ERA ratification. Pro-ERA Mormons later confirmed that to be true.¹⁵⁵

As state ratification battles ensued, the church increased its public commentary on the amendment. On January 11, 1975 the LDS Church-owned

¹⁵² Quinn, 144-45.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 107.

¹⁵⁴ President N. Eldon Tanner, "No Greater Honor: The Woman's Role," address delivered on 7 October 1973, *The Ensign* (January 1974), Jean Ford Papers, box 28, folder 9, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

¹⁵⁵ Renee Rampton, interview by author, Las Vegas, Nevada, 27 August 2006; Quinn, 106.

newspaper, *Church News*, published an editorial denouncing the Equal Rights Amendment as unnecessary, uncertain, and undesirable; condemning it as a unisex law that did not acknowledge the Divinely-created differences between men and women.¹⁵⁶ In May 1976, the ruling body of the Mormon Church issued a public statement concerning political activity and community involvement by Church members throughout the United States. It invoked Church membership with the following, “We urge Latter-Day Saints everywhere to become actively engaged in worthy causes to improve our communities, to make them more wholesome places in which to live and raise a family...in all such activities, Latter-Day Saints must understand that they function as citizens of the nation and not as representatives of the Church.”¹⁵⁷ Finally, on October 22, 1976, the LDS Church released its first formal Anti-ERA statement actually signed by the Mormon President Spencer Kimball. While coyly intimating its position against the ERA for several years, the church now cast its official declaration against the amendment. Numerous speeches by church leaders, admonitions from the Twelve Apostles, and literature distributed by church organizations quickly followed; all encouraging the church members to take up the Anti-ERA cause. The call for mass mobilization was underway.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ *Church News*, 11 January 1975, as cited in O. Kendall White, Jr., “Mormonism and the Equal Rights Amendment,” *Journal of Church and State* 31 (1989): 251-52.

¹⁵⁷ *The Bee Hive* (May 1976), Jean Ford Papers, box 28, folder 9, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

¹⁵⁸ White, Jr., “Mormonism and the Equal Rights Amendment”: 251-52.

The effectiveness of the national Mormon Anti-ERA campaign can be traced directly to the structure of the Mormon Church. Members are obliged to follow the authority of the Presidency who is said to speak with divine inspiration. In a characteristic Mormon family, the husband belongs to the church's lay priesthood; which excludes women, and until 1978, also excluded black men. The wife attends Relief Society, while children attend Mormon Sunday schools, Mormon-run Scout troops, and athletic activities. Home teachers visit the family once a month to discuss religious or personal issues. Additionally, each family tithes ten percent of its pre-tax income, making the Mormon Church one of the most affluent religious institutions in the United States. Simply put, the church authority makes its presence known in every aspect of a Mormon family's life.¹⁵⁹

While oftentimes suggesting that Anti-ERA activity reflected merely local action, the very hierarchical organization of the church made possible an immediate and massive mobilization for Anti-ERA action. As scholar Jo Freeman has observed, "Enormous resources are required to reach, let alone mobilize aggrieved groups that are atomized and scattered throughout the population. Those that are concentrated can be mobilized fairly easily..."¹⁶⁰ This proved instrumental in effecting the Mormon's aggressive Anti-ERA counter-attack.

The structure of the LDS Church with wards, stakes, and relief societies already in place; provided an immediate venue and audience for disseminating

¹⁵⁹ Lisa Cronin Wohl, "Mormon Connection?: The Defeat of the ERA in Nevada," *MS*. (July 1977): 80, Jean Ford Papers, box 28, folder 9, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

¹⁶⁰ Jo Freeman, "Resource Mobilization and Strategy: A Model for Analyzing Social Movement Organizations Actions," in *The Dynamics of Social Movements*, Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy, eds., (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, 1979): 176.

campaign information. Social networks using Fireside Chats brought campaign pressure into the personal space of one's home. Additionally, LDS members created political action committees, such as Families Are Concerned Today (FACT) in Florida, Virginia's LDS Citizens Coalition (VLDSCC), and Nevada's Citizens' Quest for Quality Government (QUEST). These committees effectively used telephone trees, letter writing campaigns, and "home" and "visiting teacher networks" to lobby legislators and discourage members from voting for candidates who supported the ERA.¹⁶¹

Citizens' Quest for Quality Government

The Mormon Church in Nevada not only overtly opposed the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, but covertly organized to remove Pro-ERA political candidates from office. In Las Vegas, each Bishop had been directed by the Stake President and Regional Representative to select at least one person from each Ward to serve on the Citizens' Quest for Quality Government (QUEST). Ostensibly a citizens' group formed to be a watchdog for quality government, it was in fact, a Mormon-run organization whose goal was to ensure that elected officials were those that adhered to the conservative Mormon platform.¹⁶²

As a member of the Las Vegas 40th Ward, Renee Rampton was a devoted member of the LDS Church. A skilled musician and mother of four, she spent many volunteer hours as the church organist while coordinating quality music

¹⁶¹ White, Jr., 255, 257; Rampton, interview.

¹⁶² Rampton, interview; Renee M. Rampton, "The Role of the Mormon Church in the 1978 Nevada Election," Jean Ford Papers, box 4, folder 38, Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, Department of Special Collections, University of Nevada Reno; Bromley and Shupe, eds., *New Christian Politics*, 219-20.

programs for the Mormon children of Las Vegas. While serving as Homemaking Counselor in the 24th Ward Relief Society, her Bishop, Mahlon Edwards, requested that she serve on the QUEST Committee. Rampton refused citing her concern over the separation of church and state. Troubled by this request, Rampton contacted Mormon State Assemblywoman Karen Hayes, who she had known for years and for whom she held much respect. Rampton shared her concerns about the integrity of the QUEST Committee. Assemblywoman Hayes assured her that it was okay, since it had come from the Prophet. Despite additional phone calls by church members urging her to join QUEST to help defeat the Equal Rights Amendment, Rampton refused.¹⁶³

While never joining the QUEST Committee, Rampton nonetheless remained distraught over the degree of political involvement of her church. On November 23, 1976 she wrote a letter to LDS President Kimball expressing her distress, stating:

“I have agonized for several weeks about writing you again about the political actions of the Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints in Las Vegas, Nevada. I appreciate your reply to me a few months ago in stating that the actions were those of local leaders, not of the church. However, I don’t believe a personal statement to me is enough. Not in view of the flagrant disregard of your statement concerning separation of church and state as practiced by local leaders...A great deal of damage has been done by to the church by involvement in politics here. Since I appeared before the Democratic Party Unfair Campaign Practices Committee and testified about my experiences with the “Quest” group, a number of people have expressed to me their disenchantment with the church because of these practices...I can’t believe, President Kimball, that you are aware of the extent of politicking that is going on by our local church leaders.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Renee Rampton, “My ERA Dilemma,” Renee Rampton Papers, box 1, folder 2, Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, Department of Special Collections, University of Nevada Reno.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

As a Mormon-controlled organization, the QUEST Committee interviewed primary election candidates about their stance on certain issues, including the following five emotional items: abortion, marijuana, pornography, capital punishment, and the Equal Rights Amendment. The committee oftentimes misrepresented the political candidates by editing their answers and then sending Aaronic Priesthood boys to distribute the literature containing false statements. The QUEST Committee then circulated the final poll summaries at LDS Ward meetings.

Cynthia Cunningham, active in Nevadans for ERA and an Assembly candidate for District 8, received the polling results two days before the primary. Reporting to the Unfair Campaign Practices Committee, Cunningham stated, “Whoever QUEST really represents and whatever their motive, their tactics are typical of dirty politics at its worst. The sheet delivered to my home wasn’t identified to source...and seriously misrepresented my response to questions to make me look as bad as possible based on moral values.” Unsurprisingly, Cunningham lost in the primary to her Mormon rival.¹⁶⁵

LDS Relief Societies

Another organization actively working against the ERA’s ratification had long been in place before Congress passed the ERA out to the states. The women’s auxiliary groups, known as relief societies, are the official women’s

¹⁶⁵ Myram Borders, “‘QUEST’ Rigged Pre-Election Poll,” *Las Vegas Sun*, Vol. 27 No. 8 [n.d.] and Myram Borders, “Mormon Group’s ERA Stand Probed,” Mary Gojack Papers, box 1, folder “ERA 1975-1976,” Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, Department of Special Collections, University of Nevada Reno; Renee Rampton, “My ERA Dilemma,” Renee Rampton Papers, box 1, folder 2, University of Nevada Reno.

organization of the LDS Church. First organized by Joseph Smith in 1842, the organization's purpose is to provide opportunities for leadership, service, and education through weekly and monthly activities and lessons in service, home management, and homemaking arts. Additionally, the visiting teachers make regular visits to church women in their homes. The organization functions at general, ward, and stake levels with a worldwide membership of over 2 million.¹⁶⁶

On December 13, 1974 before the LDS Church made any public statement against the ERA, Barbara B. Smith, General President of the Relief Society addressed the LDS Institute of Religion at the University of Utah, stating "It is my considered judgment that the Equal Rights Amendment is not the way....Once it is passed, the enforcement will demand an undeviating approach which will create endless problems for an already troubled society."¹⁶⁷

As the ERA ratification campaign unfolded across the nation, relief societies called upon church women to organize Anti-ERA counter attacks. Many women, like Arda Harman of Las Vegas, had not even heard of the ERA until asked by the church to fight against it. However, by engaging in this political battle, Mormon women proved to their church and themselves that they embraced Mormonism's most core beliefs. Mormon women's overt politicization against the ERA confirmed their internal acceptance of Church doctrine

¹⁶⁶ Janath Russell Cannon and Jill Mulvay-Derr, "Relief Society," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, (New York: MacMillan, 1992): 1199-1206.

¹⁶⁷ Quinn, 106.

regarding proper gender roles, male-female relations, and the submission of women.¹⁶⁸

In Nevada, leaders of the relief societies successfully politicized the religious faithful to write letters to politicians and newspaper editors, lobby, and canvas neighborhoods passing out Anti-ERA literature.¹⁶⁹ Instructional sheets provided membership with succinct directives. One such flyer stated:

“If you are opposed to the so-called Equal Rights Amendment...And if you feel that the E.R.A. is a direct attack upon the family structure which is the cornerstone of this great Republic. Please write to your representatives in the State Legislature and express your opposition. Your letters need not be long and detailed. Make them short and direct: ‘Please stop E.R.A.’ and one or two reasons why is enough. No need for postage either. Just bring them to Relief Society or your R.S. teachers will pick them up if you just give them a call.”¹⁷⁰

Disturbed by the continuing political involvement of Church members, Rampton wrote a letter of concern to the national leader of the LDS Relief Society, Barbara Smith, and copied the LDS Presidency, David O. McKay. While Barbara Smith never replied, President McKay’s secretary responded, denying church involvement and stating that this was merely a local issue. Nonetheless, the Relief Societies proved critical in disseminating materials and information. In the Las Vegas 40th Ward, Las Vegas South Stake, the Education Counselor of the Relief Society spoke with unabashed opposition to the ERA, citing National Relief Society President Barbara Smith’s open letter against the ERA. Materials

¹⁶⁸ Neil J. Young, “The ERA is a Moral Issue: The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment,” *American Quarterly* 59.3 (2007): 3.

¹⁶⁹ Rampton, interview.

¹⁷⁰ Renee Rampton Papers, box 4, University of Nevada Reno.

continued to be circulated at Sunday prayer meetings, with encouragement to attend informational meetings opposing the ERA.¹⁷¹

The regular meetings of Relief Societies provided an opportunistic venue and captive audience for disseminating anti-ERA propaganda. As I discuss in my next chapter, many Mormon women attended the National Women's Conference held in November 1977. Mormon Assemblywoman Karen Hayes attended the national conference as an alternate delegate from Nevada. Upon her return, Hayes spoke at many LDS Stakes, sharing what she had experienced at the conference. Throughout her talks, Hayes made no mention of the conference's numerous planks drafted to improve women's lives. Instead, she focused on the "deviancy" she witnessed at the conference, such as blatant discussions of lesbianism and exhibitions of sexual gratification devices. Many Mormons in attendance reacted with shock and outrage at what they viewed as perverted and pornographic evidence.¹⁷²

Mormon Women Fight Back

Incensed by what they heard at their Stake, Rampton and her good friend, Verlene Choidini, realized that Assemblywoman Hayes was grossly distorting the intention and outcome of the conference to an audience already largely opposed to feminism and the ERA. Feeling compelled take this beyond the walls of the Church, they invited non-Mormon ERA activists Cynthia Cunningham, Jean Ford,

¹⁷¹ Rampton, interview.

¹⁷² Ford with Ford, 250; Diamond with Dzedziak, 58-59; Rampton, interview; Renee Diamond, interview by author, Las Vegas, Nevada, 5 March 2007.

and Renee Diamond to come to their Stake to listen to the distortions for themselves. Upon hearing Hayes' version of the Women's Houston Conference, Cunningham, Ford and Diamond realized, much to their dismay, that they had severely underestimated the political acumen of the Mormon Church.¹⁷³ Indeed, as State Senator Joe Neal pointedly stated, "Those were not prayer meetings that the Mormons were having at Church. Those were *precinct* meetings."¹⁷⁴

As another Mormon woman who supported the Equal Rights Amendment, Dorothy Frehner attended a talk given by Assemblywoman Jean Ford about the ERA. She was so impressed that she sent Assemblywoman Ford the following note, "Dear Mrs. Ford, I enjoyed your talk. I hope you are re-elected so you can work for the ERA. My time is limited between school, helping my husband's business and four children at home. But if there is some way I could help in your next election, please let me know."¹⁷⁵

Soon Frehner joined Renee Rampton and Verlene Choidini organizing for the ERA. Before long, Frehner's car would sport a bumper sticker that read "Another Mormon for the ERA." Despite their ERA activism, Rampton and Choidini remained loyal members of the LDS Church. Dorothy Frehner would not. As Dorothy's work for the ERA intensified, so did her disillusionment with the Mormon Church. Soon the former Relief Society President would request that her name be removed from church records, as she could no longer support

¹⁷³ Diamond with Dzedziak, 58-59; Rampton, interview.

¹⁷⁴ Neal, interview.

¹⁷⁵ Jean Ford Papers, box 28, folder 9, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Church directives. Shortly thereafter, the Church excommunicated Frehner on the grounds of apostasy.¹⁷⁶

In northern Nevada, Vivian Freeman, who had been raised in the Mormon Church, now worked as a nurse in Reno. Married to a Mormon, but presently not active in the Church herself, since the treatment of women she had witnessed throughout her childhood disgusted her. Now Vivian decided to become educated on women's issues and politics. She subsequently enrolled in courses at the University of Nevada Reno. Soon Freeman and her neighbor, UNR librarian Martha Gould, began organizing for Nevadans for ERA. Vivian's work in the ERA ratification campaign truly politicized her. She worked tirelessly with the northern Nevadans for ERA to successfully campaign against Anti-ERA Assemblywoman Margie Foote's re-election; removing her from public office. Vivian later ran for Nevada Assembly, serving in the Nevada Legislature from 1987-2001.¹⁷⁷

Whatever trepidation Mormon women in Nevada felt in organizing for the ERA ratification, they all took comfort in the fearlessness of the Mormon woman who took the ERA fight to the national level. A resident of Virginia and the national leader of the Mormons for ERA (MERA), Sonia Johnson gained national prominence by publicly criticizing the Mormon Church's Anti-ERA campaign. Johnson's style was that of public confrontation. She oftentimes targeted the sites of large Mormon conferences and gatherings whereupon the Mormons for

¹⁷⁶ Linda Cooper, "Vegas Mormons Dare to Support the ERA," *The Valley Times*, 29 January 1978.

¹⁷⁷ Freeman, interview.

ERA would fly banners saying “Mother in Heaven loves Mormons for ERA” or “Mormons for ERA are everywhere!”¹⁷⁸ On August 4, 1978 Johnson testified before the U.S. Senate Constitutional Rights Subcommittee. During this hearing, Johnson received a bitter verbal lashing from Utah’s Mormon Senator Orrin Hatch. As Hatch questioned Johnson, he became increasingly agitated by her cool demeanor. Finally, he exploded saying, “It’s implied by your testimony that you’re more intelligent than other Mormon women, and that if they were all as intelligent as you, they would all support the Equal Rights Amendment.” Slamming his fist on the table before him, Hatch shouted, “Now that’s an insult to my wife!”¹⁷⁹ To those present during the hearing this outburst was shocking. Hatch’s eruption is an example of the intensity of Mormon opposition to what they perceived as ERA’s frontal attack on women’s traditional roles and mores.

Undeterred, Johnson continued to publicly denounce the Mormon Church for its covert mobilization against the Equal Rights Amendment. Ultimately, the Mormon Church would excommunicate her on December 1, 1979. During her church trial all witnesses were forbidden from mentioning the Equal Rights Amendment. While all knew that Johnson’s excommunication stemmed directly from her public criticism of the Church’s covert anti-ERA campaign, LDS leaders instead explained that “she was charged not only with hampering the church’s worldwide missionary effort, but with damaging other church programs, including

¹⁷⁸ Sonia Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic: Sonia Johnson* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1981), 156-158.

¹⁷⁹ Linda Sillitoe, “Church Politics and Sonia Johnson: The Central Conundrum,” *Sunstone Magazine*, Issue 19, (Jan.-Feb. 1980): 35-42; Sonia Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic*, 134-135.

temple work, the welfare program, family home evening, genealogy, and family preparedness.”¹⁸⁰

While very active in Virginia, Johnson lent her support to ERA activists in Nevada. She visited Nevada in the fall of 1977 with the hopes of attaining another state ratification for the ERA. Staying at Renee Rampton’s home, she joined local activists in leafleting churches around the city. Johnson’s determination inspired Rampton’s later activism. In October, Rampton and a group of around twenty ERA supporters, including local Democratic activist Harriet Trudell, headed up to Salt Lake City, Utah to attend the semi-annual LDS Church General Membership Conference. There they picketed and disrupted the conference; garnering local media attention. Police soon arrived to escort the group. A newcomer to activism, Rampton thought the police “were really after us!” Seasoned political activist, Harriet Trudell, turned to Rampton and said, “They’re here to *protect* us!”¹⁸¹ Rampton and the handful of Pro-ERA Mormon women had much to learn about politics, but found themselves in good company. Now women gathered, whether political neophytes or experienced strategists, to coalesce around a singular cause – the Equal Rights Amendment.

By spring of 1978, many religious leaders in Clark County, long resenting the cohesive voting blocs of the Mormons, threatened to take action. According to local religion columnist George Franklin, “The resentment, maybe even envy, started with church influence on the ERA issue.” According to Franklin, unless

¹⁸⁰ Johnson, 323-326.

¹⁸¹ Rampton, interview.

the leaders of the Mormon Church halt the concentrated political activities, other churches threaten to enter the political arena too. Franklin ended with the following plea, “Keep the pulpit out of politics and politics out of the pulpit!”¹⁸² That did not happen in 1978.

While Mormons only comprised approximately ten percent of the population in Nevada, their influence was felt with disproportionate significance. The effectiveness of telephone trees, Stake meetings, and directives from the Prophet, created a voting bloc where upwards of ninety-five percent of eligible Mormon voters turned out to vote on Election Day.¹⁸³ Nevada Senate Majority Leader Jim I. Gibson, arguably the most powerful legislator in the state, remained a leading figure in Nevada’s Mormon Church. A Mormon convert, Gibson was also a regional representative of the Mormon Apostles. The Church leadership directed him to stop the ERA campaign and throughout his tenure, Senator Gibson led the legislative fight for its defeat.¹⁸⁴ Additionally, in the Nevada legislature, Mormon legislators held top leadership positions; including Senator Jim Gibson as Senate Majority Leader and chair of the Government Affairs Committee, Senator Mel Close as chair of the Judiciary; Senator Floyd Lamb as chair of Finance, and Senator Lee Walker as chair of Health and Welfare. As Senate Majority Leader, Senator Jim Gibson named all committee chairs, who then voted in unison behind Gibson’s lead. Given that Mormons chaired all the

¹⁸² George Franklin, “By George!” *Las Vegas Sun*, 4 April 1978.

¹⁸³ White, Jr., “Mormonism and the Equal Rights Amendment,” 253-254.

¹⁸⁴ Wagner with Ford, 190; White, Jr., 252.

powerful legislative committees, State Senator Joe Neal realized very quickly during his freshman term that, indeed, the Mormons controlled the Nevada legislature.¹⁸⁵

The referendum on the Equal Rights Amendment passed by the Nevada legislature in spring of 1977 would go before the citizens on November 7, 1978. While Pro-ERA activists launched the Equity NOW Campaign, organizing both across northern and southern communities, Mormon politicking quietly ensued. As election days neared, telephone trees activated and literature drops increased. Two days before the election, a leaflet containing the following message was hand delivered to homes of Las Vegas and Boulder City LDS members not attending Church services that week:

“THE HOUR IS HERE

PRESIDENT KIMBALL HAS STRONGLY COUNSELED US TO VOTE AGAINST THE E.R.A. THE QUESTION IS NO. 5. IT IS CRITICAL THAT EACH OF US:

1. VOTE
2. VOTE ‘NO’ ON QUESTION NO. 5”¹⁸⁶

As election day neared, a rumor circulated that a recent poll showed the ERA slightly ahead. The Las Vegas Mormon Church quickly mobilized for its final attempts to derail the ERA. Church leaders called a meeting, where approximately 2,000 attended. Here organizers made an emotional plea to do whatever was needed to defeat the ERA referendum. Attendees returned to their

¹⁸⁵ Neal, interview.

¹⁸⁶ Renee Rampton Papers, box 4, University of Nevada Reno.

individual Wards and mobilized masses of loyal church members to make phone calls, distribute literature, get people to the polls, and do poll watching the day of the election. In the days just prior to the election, approximately 9,000 Mormons engaged in these efforts to quell the ERA referendum. Their efforts were not in vain. When the referendum went out to the citizens for their vote on November 7, 1978 the result was a resounding 2:1 vote defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment.¹⁸⁷

Phyllis Schlafly and STOP-ERA

While the Mormon Church effected an impressive political machine during the ERA ratification years, more often than not, their actions remained covert; lacking any recognizable national public leader. However, the Anti-ERA campaign would soon find its vocal leader in a housewife from Alton, Illinois. The personal background of Phyllis Schlafly reveals that of an intelligent and ambitious young woman who faced difficult challenges with an unwavering determination. While she would espouse a return to women's traditional roles, her own life reflected a women who was anything but traditional. This peculiarity would frustrate her feminist opponents, who frequently found themselves bewildered by Schlafly's poised demeanor and cool rhetoric. The combination of Phyllis Schlafly's charismatic leadership, directing an army of ideologically-driven women, would prove lethal to the ERA ratification campaign.

As the national spokesperson for STOP-ERA, Phyllis Schlafly's impact reverberated across the states. A skilled orator and master of rhetorical flourish,

¹⁸⁷ Richardson, 222-223.

her message triggered the anxieties of the traditional American middle class who had a growing concern over the country's changing social and cultural mores.¹⁸⁸ Schlafly's singular ability to dislodge the Equal Rights Amendment's ratification process stunned ERA proponents. While she constantly harkened for a return to women's traditional roles and gender mores, her own life revealed that of an independent woman who took full advantage of opportunity whenever presented. As the metonymic symbol for all the "Antis" of the ERA campaign; her life, therefore, merits closer scrutiny.

Raised in St. Louis during the Great Depression, Phyllis Stewart and her younger sister Odile grew up under the doting attention of their Catholic Republican parents. Their family enjoyed the lifestyle afforded by their middle class status, however, that changed dramatically when Phyllis reached the fourth grade. A victim of the economic times, her fifty-one year old father, Bruce Stewart, lost his job as a sales engineer for Westinghouse. To support the family, Phyllis' mother, Dadie Stewart, went to work; first in retail, then as a teacher, and finally as the Librarian of the St. Louis Art Museum, where she worked until her retirement. Despite his family's financial hardships, Bruce Stewart refused to go on welfare; believing that his grandchildren would be burdened with paying for Roosevelt's welfare state. During these difficult times,

¹⁸⁸ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 4.

the Stewarts nonetheless, remained loyal Republicans who vehemently detested Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal.¹⁸⁹

Determined to provide her daughters with the finest education, Dadie Stewart brokered a deal with the Mother Superior of the Academy of the Sacred Heart, whereupon she would catalogue and maintain the school's library in exchange for free tuition for her daughters. With this additional obligation, Dadie Stewart worked seven days a week during the years her daughters attended the Academy. Phyllis proved to be an ambitious student who graduated valedictorian of her class with honors in classical languages and French. She received a four year scholarship to Maryville College; a local Catholic school. However, after only one year at Maryville, Phyllis transferred to Washington University in search of a more rigorous education. Now without the benefit of her scholarship, Phyllis needed employment to pay for her education. She found full-time work at the St. Louis Ordinance Plant testing ammunition by firing rifles and machine guns. Phyllis usually worked the night shift, which allowed her to take morning classes at Washington University. She graduated in three years and received a fellowship to attend graduate school at Radcliffe College.

After earning her graduate degree in Political Science from Radcliffe, Phyllis found work in Washington, DC at the American Enterprise Association (AEA); a conservative think tank. During her educational years, Phyllis had not been particularly interested in politics. However, she now found herself inundated with resources with which to educate herself on the prewar ideological

¹⁸⁹ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 19-21.

opposition to the New Deal and modern conservatism. After one year working as a researcher at AEA, Phyllis now embraced a well-informed conservative ideology, devoted to free enterprise and American liberty.¹⁹⁰

Returning to St. Louis, Phyllis worked for the next three years at the St. Louis Trust Company and First National Bank. Here she organized the bank's first library; creating a filing system for the ninety periodicals subscribed to by the bank. She also assisted the bank's conservative Vice President, Towner Phelan, who produced a monthly newsletter for the bank's clientele. As an ardent conservative, Phelan espoused the virtues of free enterprise while warning of the encroaching welfare state. Phyllis supplied Phelan with ideas and drafts for articles, wrote speeches for both the bank's president and vice president, and initiated an educational program for women on financial matters. Shortly thereafter, she became a popular speaker for women's organizations throughout the city; advising on trusts, estate planning, marital taxes, and financial planning.¹⁹¹

In 1949, Phyllis Stewart married J. Fred Schlafly, Jr., a prominent attorney from a distinguished St. Louis family, who was fifteen years her senior. Together, the Schlafly's enjoyed an intellectual bonding, grounded in a conservative ideology and steeped in devout Catholicism. As counsel for the conservative foundation called, Wake Up America, Fred Schlafly became a

¹⁹⁰ Critchlow, 22-26.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 29-30.

frequent public speaker on the evils of communism.¹⁹² Phyllis shared her husband's fear and disdain over the perils of communism. No longer working outside the home, she immersed herself in all sources available, soon becoming an authoritative voice on the dangers of communism.

Phyllis returned to writing and produced a popular pamphlet entitled, *A Reading List for Americans*; a guide to important anticommunist books. Phyllis' contribution to the conservative movement lay in the fact that she could skillfully translate the ideas of intellectual and anticommunist authors into verbiage for the general layperson; thereby creating a needed conduit from intellectual circles to the growing grassroots conservatives.¹⁹³ This ability would later prove to be a critical skill in Schlafly's ability to lay foundational arguments against the Equal Rights Amendment that appealed to masses of conservative women. Over the next decade, the Schlafly's remained active in conservative politics while raising their family. In 1964, while president of the Illinois Federation of Republican Women, Phyllis gave birth to their sixth and final child and published *A Choice, Not an Echo*; a bestselling tribute to Barry Goldwater's conservatism.¹⁹⁴

The success of her book propelled the reputation of Schlafly's political acumen in ways that elected office could not. The book impressed retired Rear Admiral Chester Ward; a pre-eminent nuclear strategist. Ward suggested that they collaborate on a book about America's survival in the midst of the Soviet's

¹⁹² "Homefront," VII.2 (February 1973), National Organization for Women Papers, box 1, Lied Library, Department of Special Collections, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

¹⁹³ Critchlow, 31, 37, 39, 41.

¹⁹⁴ "Homefront," National Organization for Women Papers, box 1, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

nuclear build up. *Gravediggers* came out later that same year, with two million copies sold in the first two months. Four more books followed, all warning of the Soviet's nuclear build up, while criticizing U.S. officials disengaging from the nuclear arms race. Their fourth work, *Kissinger on the Couch*, unleashed a thorough critique of Kissinger's policies; including the SALT I agreement. Their final book, *Ambush at Vladivostok*, published in 1976, analyzed the preliminary SALT II agreement signed by Gerald Ford. During this time, Schlafly often testified before congressional committees on the ramifications of foreign policies. Many governmental officials and politicians disagreed with Schlafly's analyses, but most were thoroughly impressed by her scope of understanding.¹⁹⁵

Certainly, no one expected a housewife from Alton, Illinois to understand the complexities of the SALT I & II agreements. Yet, this same woman who spoke with ease before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would also testify with equal fervor for the protection of women's traditional roles.

Schlafly's crusade against the ERA came about rather serendipitously. In December 1971, a conservative forum in Connecticut invited Schlafly to participate in a debate. Schlafly intended to address national defense, but the club preferred a debate over the pending Equal Rights Amendment. Knowing little about the ERA, Schlafly requested background material on the issue. Upon reading this material, Schlafly formed an immediate reaction against it. By February 1972, Schlafly launched her crusade against the ERA with the *Phyllis Schlafly Report* titled, "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women?" Here she

¹⁹⁵ Carol Felsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority: The Biography of Phyllis Schlafly*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1981), 215-227.

articulated the oppositional argument that would lead the Anti-ERA movement. Schlafly insisted that the family “is the basic unit of society, which is ingrained in the laws and customs of our Judeo-Christian civilization [and] is the greatest single achievement in the history of women’s rights.”¹⁹⁶

Forming the “Stop Taking Our Privileges” campaign, better known as STOP ERA, Schlafly created a national network with statewide chapters with which to disseminate her monthly *Phyllis Schlafly Report*. In 1975, Schlafly founded the Eagle Forum which she referred to as “the alternate to women’s lib.” She also began also publishing the *Eagle Forum Newsletter*. While the *Phyllis Schlafly Report* was a national-news oriented newsletter that was both scholarly and spirited, appealing to a large readership of both men and women, the *Eagle Forum Newsletter* was a mimeographed folksy newsletter replete with inspiration, instruction, and incitation for the Anti-ERA troops. Schlafly had long since mastered rhetoric that triggered anxieties of conservative American. Now with her monthly newsletters disseminating information and instruction across the nation, scores of conservative women quickly joined Schlafly’s STOP ERA campaign. While their rationale for joining the opposition reflected a myriad of reasons, they nonetheless remained unified politically and represented formidable strength in numbers.¹⁹⁷

Senator Samuel Ervin, Jr. (D-NC) had long fought the congressional passage of the Equal Rights Amendment; having been widely recognized as its

¹⁹⁶ Critchlow, 217-219.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 225.

leading opponent. Shortly before the final congressional vote on the Equal Rights Amendment, Phyllis Schlafly contacted Senator Ervin, wishing him success in blocking its passage. She included a copy of her *Phyllis Schlafly Report* outlining her anti-ERA argument. Already organizing a national Anti-ERA campaign, Schlafly now hoped to target elected officials. She convinced Senator Ervin to extend his congressional franking privileges for mailing his Anti-ERA speeches to state legislators and precinct committees across the country. Schlafly subsequently supplied the mailing lists to Senator Ervin's office, which then sent out the anti-ERA materials. By late 1973, Senator Ervin's anti-ERA materials had been sent to STOP-ERA members in twenty-four states and to members of state legislatures in twenty-five states.¹⁹⁸ Efficient and effective, the Anti-ERA campaign reached across the nation before Pro-ERA activists had even begun to organize.

One may wonder how a single woman effected such a successful campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment. No doubt, Schlafly was an intelligent, perceptive, and organized woman; however, her greatest strength lay in the power of her rhetoric. For the language utilized by Schlafly in her monthly *Phyllis Schlafly Report* represented far more than innocuous flourish. The content and expression of her message definitely played off the worries of her ready audience; igniting fears of an impending and tumultuous social upheaval.

Schlafly's timing in launching her Anti-ERA campaign proved critical, for as noted scholar of Burkean rhetorical theory and criticism, Leland Griffin notes,

¹⁹⁸ Mathews and De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA*, 50-51.

“The inception period of a movement is a time of indecision; of alienation, auscultation, and the innovation of public tensions. It is a time for the identification of destinations and devils, the ‘Mecca’ of the movement, and the ‘evil principles’ it opposes.”¹⁹⁹ Schlafly’s STOP ERA characterized ERA proponents with a three dimensional personification that included: physical characteristics, psychological and social personality parameters, and political philosophy. Schlafly adroitly combined these features to create the caricature of Pro-ERA women as a deviancy and danger to society.

According to Schlafly, the physical characteristics of ERA activists fell under two broad themes: their general unattractiveness and their suspect sexuality. Within the first month following the US Congressional passage of the ERA, Schlafly described remarks by contributors to *MS. Magazine* as “sharp tongued, high-pitched whining complaints by unmarried women.” When describing the Pro-ERA activists, Schlafly routinely grouped the terms, “radical, unkept, and lesbian.” By contrast, she never made a public appearance without careful attention to her own appearance: hair perfectly coiffed, sensible dress, and an unwavering demure temperament. Outwardly calm and poised, Schlafly’s rhetoric nonetheless proved piercing. In 1977, at the height of the ERA battle, Schlafly published *Power of the Positive Woman*, in which she stated, “If man is targeted as the enemy, and the ultimate goal of women’s liberation is

¹⁹⁹ Martha Solomon, “The Rhetoric of STOP ERA: Fatalistic Reaffirmation,” *The Southern Speech Communication Journal* 44 (Fall 1978), 44, as cited from “A Dramatistic Theory of the Rhetoric of Movements,” in *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*, William H. Rueckert, ed., (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1967), 462-463.

independence from men and the avoidance of pregnancy and its consequences, then lesbianism is logically the highest form in the ritual of women's liberation."²⁰⁰

Consistently referring to ERA proponents as "libbers," Schlafly created their psychological and social profile within the rubric of aggression and deception. She hinted that their aggressive demeanor was due in part to their frustration at feeling unfulfilled; a result of abdicating traditional women's roles. She also charged that the feminists were guilty of "hoodwinking" the American public with their sophistic argumentation; again, deceptive to the core. To complete the caricature of the Pro-ERA woman, Schlafly depicted their political stance as radical and espousing governmental control over citizens' private lives. In sum, Schlafly's nimble rhetoric described the feminist "libber" broadly as: harsh, unattractive, loud, sexually suspect, disingenuous, and willing to corrupt traditional values for their misguided goals.

Even the most experienced speaker found it difficult to attack Schlafly's poised message. Her rhetoric so incensed ERA advocates that they routinely lashed out at Schlafly herself. Often credited with spearheading the Second Wave Feminist Movement, Betty Friedan was no stranger to public debate. Yet, when debating Schlafly in Bloomington, Illinois, Friedan became so exasperated that she blurted out, "I'd like to burn you at the stake, as far as that's concerned." Sadly, the power of Schlafly's words oftentimes incited her opponent's frustration

²⁰⁰ Martha Solomon, "The Rhetoric of STOP ERA: Fatalistic Reaffirmation," 45, as cited from *Phyllis Schlafly Report*, 5:7, (February 1972); Phyllis Schlafly, "The Power of the Positive Woman" in Philip E. Devine and Celia Wolf-Devine, *Sex and Gender: A Spectrum of Views*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), 246.

into open hostility. The degree of animus targeting Schlafly's person soon escalated to the degree that her family feared for her safety.²⁰¹

While Schlafly's rhetorical framing of the feminist Pro-ERA standpoint highlighted their antagonism toward the current status quo, STOP ERA members conversely celebrated women's privileged status within the family and society.²⁰² In other words, Schlafly and ERA opponents espoused a positive and reaffirming voice regarding women's current cultural status. With the monthly publication of her *Phyllis Schlafly Report*, Schlafly disseminated her rhetorical depiction of ERA activists across the states. In fact, her newsletter had circulated for an entire year before the Nevada legislature first debated the merits of the ERA in February 1973. Thus, when Nevada activists began organizing for the ERA, they faced this frontal assault before even realizing that they were in battle.

Nevada's STOP-ERA

State Senator Helen Herr proved to one of the most vocal opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment during Nevada's 1973 legislative session. Herr knew that the next legislative session would become even more acrimonious than the last. Therefore, as Assemblywoman Jean Ford and others gathered to organize the Nevadans for ERA, Herr mounted her own Anti-ERA forces. In September 1974, Herr met with over one hundred women at the Paradise Valley Recreation Hall to form Nevada's STOP ERA movement. According to Herr,

²⁰¹ Carol Felsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority*, 301.

²⁰² Martha Solomon, "The Rhetoric of STOP ERA: Fatalistic Reaffirmation," *The Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 44, (Fall 1978), 46-49, as cited from *Phyllis Schlafly Report*, 5:7, (February 1972); 8:10, 2 (May 1975); 11:1, 2 (August 1977); and *Phyllis Schlafly, Power of the Positive Woman*, (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 12.

“The average woman does not understand the meaning of this proposed law. It is too broad and generalized.” To illustrate the “can of worms” that would be opened with the passage of the ERA, Herr read a list of laws pending in Maryland after it had passed the ERA. The list included, male alimony, automatic draft into state militia, the integration of males and females in prison, the right to seize a wife’s property to pay for their husband’s debt, and the integration of boys and girls in state-run training and rehabilitation centers.²⁰³

Several political candidates also attended the organizational meeting. Jack Doyle, candidate of the American Independent Party for U.S. Senate stated, “I do definitely oppose coeducational foxholes.” State Senate candidate Don Hancock stated that he could envision this amendment making rape no more than a misdemeanor offense. Clearly, those opposed to the amendment cleverly targeted conventional fears to elicit reactionary affirmations of traditional mores.

In forming the Nevada branch of STOP ERA, Herr intended to marshal forces against the ERA before the commencement of the 1975 legislative session. Her plans proved effective, as hundreds of women responded immediately to her call. The goals of the newly formed organization were to educate the public on the ramifications of ERA’s passage and persuade state legislators to vote against its ratification. Sylvia Ford and Janine Hansen, both from Sparks, Nevada, agreed to serve as co-chairs for the northern Nevada Committee; coordinating their efforts with Senator Herr’s Committee in southern Nevada.

²⁰³ “Group will fight Equal Rights Bill,” *Las Vegas Review Journal* [n.d.], Jean Ford Papers, box 30, folder 1, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Herr welcomed any opportunity to debate the Equal Rights Amendment before the public. As the legislator who first introduced the Equal Rights Amendment into the Assembly in 1973, Assemblywoman Jean Ford proved to be Herr's ready opponent in numerous public debates. On September 30, 1974, both women spoke before a crowd of around one hundred fifty concerned individuals representing both sides of the campaign. Assemblywoman Ford assured the crowd that ERA's ratification would simply require people to be judged on their merit, not their sex. Senator Herr countered, stating that the amendment would, "Strike down at the very foundation of the society, the family. Women will go out and work. Don't worry about the children. They'll be in day care centers, that's how they do it in Russia." While Ford calmly dispelled such premonitions, emotion proved to be a powerful trump card in Senator Herr's arsenal of ERA "horrors."²⁰⁴

While many members of Nevada's STOP ERA campaign consisted of conservative middle-aged women, northern co-chair, Janine Hansen instead was a young Brigham Young University (BYU) college student with unmatched energy and determination. Hansen came from a Mormon family with a long history of political involvement representing the Independent American Party. Her father, retired Major General Homer K. Hansen served as state director for The Conservative Caucus of Nevada and her brother, Dan, was editor-in-chief for *The Independent Eagle* news publication. Hansen knew that the ERA was coming to the state through her sister in-law, Sharon Hansen, who was already

²⁰⁴ Ann Ehrenburg, "Herr, Ford clash over ERA issue," *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 4 October 1974.

very active with another Anti-ERA organization called the Happiness of Womanhood (HOW). When the ERA ratification debate entered Nevada politics, Hansen had already read materials sent out by Schlafly's STOP ERA and thought Schlafly's argument convincing. As she also came from a family that consistently championed states' rights over federal intervention, Hansen would consistently argue that the ERA would create the transference of power from the state to the federal government.²⁰⁵

Home for Thanksgiving break during November 1974, Hansen organized a rummage sale to raise the initial funding for materials for her Anti-ERA campaign. Exhibiting the determinism that would characterize her for decades later, she then forwarded a copy of the press release announcing the formation of Northern Nevada's STOP-ERA to Assemblywoman Jean Ford, with a handwritten note stating, "Dear Assemblywoman Jean Ford, The Committee felt you would be interested in reading this."²⁰⁶ The battle lines had been drawn!

An excellent student, Hansen had previously been active in her high school's debate team, placing first in the state competition for Forensic Extemporaneous Speaking. This type of training proved invaluable to Hansen, as it required her to debate both sides of any issue, thereby necessitating an ability to quickly analyze key points. Hansen often debated ERA proponents. With her ease in debating both sides of any issue, she oftentimes manipulated the material of her opponents to reveal how it destroyed their own arguments. Hansen served as a citizen lobbyist at the Nevada legislature representing both

²⁰⁵ Janine Hansen, telephone interview by author, digital recording, 19 November 2008.

²⁰⁷ Jean Ford Papers, box 30, folder 2, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

the Nevada Eagle Forum and the Independent American Party. As co-coordinator of northern Nevada's STOP ERA, Hansen recalled that Schlafly skillfully capitalized on the initiative of the local people without much local involvement. According to Hansen, Schlafly testified several times before the Nevada legislature and continued to send her materials out to Nevada, but maintained a "hands off" approach to local organizing that allowed local leaders to manage the state's STOP ERA campaign.

Nevada's STOP ERA campaign focused mainly on grassroots organizing. They coordinated an extensive telephone tree throughout the various counties, enabling them to disseminate information quickly as well as rally their members on short notice. Members provided regular legislative testimony and solicited concerned citizens to testify as well. They also formed a Speakers Bureau that proclaimed, "We have a standing offer to debate any member of the Pro-ERA movement, anytime, anyplace, before any group or organization."²⁰⁷ Hansen and the other STOP ERA leaders also routinely contacted their state representatives, organized frequent public debates, and provided media interviews. When Pro-ERA activists brought in "big name draws" like Maureen Reagan to testify before the legislature, Hansen would quickly point out that STOP ERA didn't need to rely on outsiders, as their organization reflected the true wishes of Nevada's own.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Jean Ford Papers, box 31, folder 1, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁰⁸ Hansen, interview.

Often testifying herself before the legislature, Hansen repeatedly warned against the encroachment of states rights and the invidious presence of federal intervention into local and personal matters, cautioning, “It could very well transfer jurisdiction over marriage, divorce, child custody, sports, schools, inheritance, prison regulations, protective labor laws, insurance rates, and public accommodations out of the hands of the states’ elected officials and into the hands of the federal politicians, bureaucrats, and judges. It must be what the people want, the way that they wish to run their state government. We are all individuals and must have our rights, but not be federal mandate. Our state recognizes and protects the rights of individuals, with only one voice in congress, we would not be heard. We want guarantees, not promises.”²⁰⁹

Nevada’s STOP-ERA campaign directed their efforts to educate the public on the perils of the ERA. On May 8, 1975 the day before Mother’s Day, STOP-ERA organized the “You Can’t Fool Mother Nature – STOP-ERA” Mothers’ March. Here Washoe County “STOPPERS” marched door-to-door in Sparks, Nevada where they distributed over 3,000 pieces of Anti-ERA literature. Mothers’ March Chair, Jolane Spade stated that the march demonstrated their concern as mothers over the potentially harmful effects of the amendment on the family. Elated with the success of their march, organizers pointed to the *Reno*

²⁰⁹ Nevada Legislature, *Nevada Legislative Record*, Senate and Assembly Joint Committee Hearing, 2 February 1977, (Carson City, 1977).

Evening Gazette coverage that included a large photo of Jolane Slade and Janine Hansen sporting STOP-ERA T-Shirts.²¹⁰

One week later on May 15, 1976 over one thousand concerned citizens attended the Las Vegas STOP-ERA Family Rally held at the Las Vegas Convention Center. Numerous politicians, organizational representatives, and church officials attended. Local businessman, Guido Ravelo, provided an emotional account of how Cuba's citizens had lost their freedom and warned of the same consequences in our country. Pat Little presented a letter from the National Council of Catholic Women, whose eleven million members opposed the ERA. In total, the Rally netted nearly one thousand dollars for Nevada's STOP-ERA campaign, while garnering substantial newspaper coverage and airtime on local TV and radio stations.²¹¹

Nevada newspapers covered most events held by either side of the ERA ratification campaign. Most articles provided factual details of the local forums and debates, with articles detailing neutral summaries of the events. Some columnists, however, quickly picked up on the negative rhetorical characterizations and used the newspaper to vent their anger over the Equal Rights Amendment and feminism. A popular local columnist weighed in on the ERA campaign often and his choice of language made his viewpoint shockingly clear. Invoking a tone of mockery, he referred to the ERA proponents as "so-called liberators" and "pseudo-females screeching for their rights." Delineating

²¹⁰ *STOP Equal Rights Amendment Newsletter*, (June 1976), Jean Ford Papers, box 30, folder 2, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

clearly between women who supported the ERA versus those who opposed, he stated, “The real women of Nevada and the United States have been silent in their opposition to this movement that has besmirched the sanctity of marriage, made a mockery of illegitimate childbirth, and generally downgraded womanhood.” He concluded his newspaper column with, “We propose that the former bra burners now try burning what used to be held with those supports. That would be dramatic as Hell!”²¹² His inflammatory rhetoric leaves no question as to how he feels about “normal” women versus the alleged aberrations of womanhood fighting for the ERA.

Berkeley L. Bunker, a Bishop in the LDS Church, also wrote a regular column for the *Valley Times*. With the independence of his journalist’s pen, Bishop Bunker freely shared his disdain for feminists and supporters of the ERA. Again using the excessive rhetorical characterization first espoused by Phyllis Schlafly, he described the extreme differences between Pro and Anti-ERA women, writing, “Due to the aggressive nature of the women libbers, men are losing interest in women. Who knows but what some unsuspecting chap may manifest an interest in courting a girl or even being affectionate with his own wife to the end that if he didn’t perform up to her expectations she would administer a karate chop that would maim him for life.... Surely there are enough women in America who enjoy being women to turn the tide of the militant maidens who seek to remake all women into men... When Divine Providence created woman He could find nothing among all His creations to pattern her after, not even man.

²¹² Dick, Odessky, “A Lift for Libbers When Tourism Sags,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 2 February 1977, Jean Ford Papers, box 30, folder 3, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

So He chose to create her after the mold of the angels in heaven, and so they walk the earth in that pattern...Ballot or no state-wide ballot, down with the ERA – a blight on womanhood. Woman, the gentle soft sweetness of God’s creation. A sweetheart, companion, and wife. God’s greatest gift. An eternal treasure.”²¹³

In another article, Bishop Bunker lashed, “There is one group that crosses party lines which may become very active in the next election. They are the Pro-abortionists, the liberal lassies of ERA., [sic] the homey-honeys of the secret hide-away, the Sweet Susies of the soft skin, the promoters and purveyors of pornography, especially child pornography materials and practices.”²¹⁴ Bishop Bunker could not have drawn a more graphic distinction between the Pro-ERA “karate-chopping purveyors of child pornography” and their “angelic” opponents!

As the Equal Rights Amendment ratification campaign unfolded across the vast expanse of Nevada’s desert to the communities of the North and South, Pro-ERA activists faced an increasingly entrenched opposition. Thousands of politicized members of the LDS Church used the existing church structures to communicate directives at a moment’s notice, distribute information, contact legislators, promote voter turn out, and affect campaign outcomes. The effective combination of Phyllis Schlafly’s national prominence and prolific writings together with the mobilized masses conservative citizens and politicized members of the Mormon Church; produced an ERA counter-attack too powerful

²¹³ Berkeley L. Bunker, “Down with ERA – A Blight on Womanhood,” *Valley Times*, 7 April 1977.

²¹⁴ Berkeley L. Bunker, “Frank Scott Chooses Three Outstanding Men,” *Valley Times*, 22 September 1977.

to stop by the Pro-ERA grassroots organizers. Together, Schlafly, conservative opponents, and the Mormon Church now turned to the events of the International Women's Year to finally seal the fate of the Equal Rights Amendment.

CHAPTER FOUR

IWY: CENTER STAGE FOR IDEOLOGICAL WARFARE

1977 proved to be a defining year for the Equal Rights Amendment both nationally and in Nevada. Paradoxically, this historic moment provided both the promise of momentous feminist victories, while simultaneously solidifying opposition in greater numbers than ever before seen. How did this happen? In order to understand this turning point, one must return to the events of the early seventies that literally propelled women, both feminists and conservatives, from the margins into the political mainstream.

In 1972, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 1975 to be the International Women's Year (IWY) and shortly thereafter issued another proclamation deeming 1975–1985 as the Decade of Women. Subsequently, Richard M. Nixon's Presidential Proclamation No. 4262 of January 30, 1974 requested that Congress, citizens, governmental officials, and educational institutions provide practical and constructive measures for the observance of International Women's Year. On January 9, 1975, Gerald Ford issued Presidential Proclamation No. 11832 calling for the formation of a National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year. Comprised of thirty-five citizens appointed by the President, along with four Congressional members named by the House and Senate, the National Commission set forth to identify recommendations for eliminating barriers currently facing American

women.²¹⁵ President Ford charged the Commission with promoting national observation in the United States of International Women's Year; specifically, encouraging cooperative activity regarding women's rights and responsibilities. The Commission's action agenda included: promoting equality between men and women, ensuring women's full integration in economic, social, and cultural developments, and lastly, recognizing women's ongoing contributions toward friendly international relations that promoted world peace.²¹⁶

The U.S. Congress quickly followed President Ford's lead. New York Congresswoman Bella Abzug, along with a caucus of congresswomen, drew up legislation which became known as Public Law 94-167. This legislation directed the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year to convene a National Women's Conference. In preparation for the National Conference, the Commission would sponsor a women's conference in each state and territory, from which delegates would then be chosen to attend the National Women's Conference later that same year. Public Law 94-167 allocated \$5,000,000 to carry out the provisions of the Bill.²¹⁷ Never before had the U.S. Congress allocated funding to study the status of women across the nation. Invigorated by this progressive legislation, women set high expectations for their full political, cultural, and economic integration into society. An unprecedented

²¹⁵ National Commission on the Observation of International Women's Year, "...To Form a More Perfect Union...": *Justice for American Women*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 117-121.

²¹⁶ National Commission on the Observation of International Women's Year, "...To Form a More Perfect Union...": *Justice for American Women*, " 118.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 370-372; see also Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End*, (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 139-140.

move that nudged the marginalized feminist activities into the mainstream of American political purview, unfortunately, this legislation would also prove critical in mounting a backlash of conservative women.

The IWY Commission convened its initial meeting on April 14-15, 1975 and chose as its top priority, the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. The following resolution passed the Commission with a unanimous vote:

- “The National Commission on the Observation of International Women’s Year, as its first public action and highest priority, urges the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.
- We believe the prompt ratification of the amendment is essential to the realization of full equality for women and to the fulfillment of American democracy.
- We commend the work of the thousands of women and men, in and out of government, whose dedication has brought the amendment so close to ratification.
- As our main commitment to the observance of International Women’s Year, we pledge to do all in our capacity to see that the Equal Rights Amendment is ratified at the earliest moment. We urge all Americans to join us in this effort.”²¹⁸

This decision would later lead conservatives to equate International Women’s Year and all of its activities as a program pushed forward by feminists.

²¹⁸ National Commission on the Observation of International Women’s Year, “...To Form a More Perfect Union...,” 219.

Congresswoman Margaret Heckler and actor Alan Alda served as co-chairs of the ERA Committee of the IWY Commission and directed the committee's first action to be that of developing a national program to educate the general public about the ERA. A public opinion poll undertaken by the IWY Commission further underscored the importance of such a national program, for the polling results indicated that while a majority of women favored changing women's status in society, an equal number of women remained unfamiliar with the proposed amendment.

The Commission concluded that a singular overarching organization would be needed to unify and coordinate the existing ERA programs and resources into an effective campaign. Early in 1976, ERA Committee co-chairs Heckler and Alda announced the formation of a new nongovernmental umbrella organization created to educate the general public about the Equal Rights Amendment. Named ERAmerica, the new organization would be co-chaired by Liz Carpenter, former press secretary for Lady Bird Johnson, along with Elly Peterson, a prominent figure in the Republican Party. Representing over 120 groups including labor unions, religious, and political organizations, ERAmerica set forth to advise Pro-ERA state coalitions on effective techniques for lobbying, testifying before legislatures, presenting persuasive research, and effecting public education campaigns.²¹⁹ Many organizations that had previously opposed the Equal Rights Amendment in favor of preserving protectionist legislation, now had the assurance of extensive federal and state laws to safeguard workplace conditions for working women. After decades opposing the amendment, the

²¹⁹ Critchlow, 227.

ERA now became a labor demand.²²⁰ National organizations, including the National Federation of Business and Professional Women, National Women's Political Caucus, the League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, the National Organization for Women, and Common Cause stepped forward with promises of office space and staff to set ERAmerica in motion.²²¹

IWY's Mexico City Conference

As the IWY National Commission in Washington, D.C. directed activities across the nation, the world watched as Mexico City hosted the first United Nation's International Women's Year conference in the summer of 1975. The conference was attended by 1,300 delegates from 130 countries along with 7,000 additional men and women who wanted to take part in this historic event. Despite the large number of attendees traveling to Mexico City, conference rules dictated that only official delegates could take part in the conference.

Upon learning of their intended exclusion from this historic event, non-delegates attending from the United States voiced their anger and disgust. To ameliorate this situation, the American Ambassador to Mexico, John Jova, arranged for the American Embassy to host an informal meeting for the U.S. delegates and non-delegates. Shortly after the meeting commenced, a group of

²²⁰ Annelise Orleck, "Feminism Rewritten: Reclaiming the Activism of Working-Class Women," *Reviews in American History* 32.4 (Dec. 2004): 599 as quoted from Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Feminism: The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 204), 195.

²²¹ National Commission on the Observation of International Women's Year, "...To Form a More Perfect Union...", 219-220.

women began vocally assaulting the delegation, furious that the government and the appointed U.S. delegates felt that they could accurately represent the concerns of all women across America.²²² This initial women's conference would foreshadow the contentious events to come, for as the women of America found their voices, more often than not, they evoked a discordant rather than harmonious sound.

The delegates attending the conference at Mexico City endured protracted debates over issues concerning women's status and experiences around the world. Wishing to create a list of goals to present to the United Nations, the conference delegates debated and introduced nearly 900 amendments before ultimately producing a unified set of goals called the World Plan of Action. The World Plan of Action presented a formulation for worldwide improvement of women's status by enforcing existing laws and developing new programs to safeguard equality and autonomy for women in the socio-economic, political, legal, and cultural norms of their perspective societies.

There were, however, resolutions in the World Plan of Action that the American delegation could not support. The American delegation rejected the resolutions calling for a new economic world order and a condemnation of Zionism; foreshadowing future divisiveness surrounding the IWY. On December 15, 1975, the United Nations General Assembly adopted 10 resolutions of the World Plan of Action. While the United States could only support eight of the ten

²²² Jill Ruckelshaus, "Who Shall Speak for Our Nation's Women?: An American Dialog," reprinted from *Redbook*, 1976 in National Commission on the Observation of International Women's Year, "...To Form a More Perfect Union...": *Justice for American Women*, 365-366.

resolutions, nonetheless, the consideration undertaken by the General Assembly revealed significant worldwide support for the goals of the Mexico's IWY conference.²²³ American women who had attended the conference in Mexico City returned home with renewed determination to expand these discussions to their home states.

In July 1976, the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year began the arduous process of designating IWY Coordinating Committees for each state. The National Commission determined that each State Coordinating Committee must be broadly representative of both the categories stipulated by Public Law 94-167 and the participants of the conference. The Commission sent letters encouraging nominations to over one thousand national and state organizations; hoping to find individuals who had some familiarity with conference planning, credibility in their state, and a willingness to devote the significant time required for a credible conference.²²⁴

However, this ostensibly pro-feminist action undertaken by the federal government soon morphed into a stellar example of "unintended consequences." The effect of this mandate literally engaged and unified antifeminists across the country. According to Marjorie Spruill, who has studied the ramifications of International Women's Year, the very fact that the federal government welcomed policy guidelines by feminists across the nation sounded a warning bell to

²²³ National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, "...To Form a More Perfect Union...", 8, 363-364.

²²⁴ National Commission of the Observation of International Women's Year, "Selection Process of the State Coordinating Committees," Jean Ford Papers, box 25, folder 3, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

conservatives. This fact, coupled with the IWY debates over women's and family issues, politicized the previously dormant conservatives and led to the rise of the Pro-Family Movement and the emergence of the New Right Conservative Movement that proved instrumental in electing ERA opponent Ronald Reagan to the White House.²²⁵

IWY Citizens' Review Committee

In February 1977, Vermont led the nation in hosting the first of the congressionally-mandated statewide conferences for women. Both Pro and Anti-ERA groups watched carefully, as all expected Vermont to set the precedent for the state conferences to follow. Attorney Nellie Gray, president of March for Life, arrived from Washington, D.C. to observe the conference. Upon learning that the Vermont conference's resolutions not only espoused reproductive freedom, but also supported the Equal Rights Amendment and Gay Rights, Gray felt it time to fight back. She contacted Rosemary Thomson, a director of the Illinois Eagle Forum and member of STOP-ERA. Together, with a handful of other conservative women, they formed the IWY Citizens' Review Committee (CRC).

The Citizens' Review Committee combined religious imperative and political urgency in their attack on feminism for its derisive role in women's devolution since World War II.²²⁶ Now the self-appointed vanguard of traditional family values, the CRC also became the sounding alarm against any perceived

²²⁵ Marjorie J. Spruill, "Gender and America's Right Turn," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 72.

²²⁶ Erin M. Kempker, "Women at the Crossroads: Feminists, Conservatives, and Gender Politics in Indiana, 1950-1980," (Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 2008), 232.

feminist-driven agenda. National Chair Rosemary Thomson and the Citizens' Review Committee proceeded to contact church leaders and Pro-Family/Pro-Life organizations across the states. Despite the stringent guidelines set forth by the National IWY Commission, the Citizens' Review Committee took issue with the composition of the State Coordinating Committees. Their central complaint focused on the diversity or non-diversity of the delegates chosen to represent women's concerns at the national conference. Thomson critiqued state coordinating committees for their overwhelming feminist representation. For according to Thomson, diversity meant equalizing the Pro- and Anti-ERA composition. This would prove problematic across the states.²²⁷

The tone of the antifeminists' message oftentimes sounded apocryphal, as the traditional and religious women decried the effects of a humanist driven feminism producing a generation without moral absolutes. Noting in her book, *The Price of LIBerty*, Thomson warned, "Two centuries later – spawned by humanism – Women's Lib, with the axe of apostasy, hacks away at the faith of our founding fathers...[t]he entire global community has adopted the view that there is no living God; therefore, there are no absolutes, no right or wrong. Call it secular humanism, progressive education, behavioral science, socialism, internationalism, communism, liberalism or feminism – the aim is diabolically synonymous. No wonder Scripture teaches us that Satan is the prince of this world. He is, indeed, alive and well on planet earth, urging its sisters to unite!"²²⁸

²²⁷ Rosemary Thomson, *The Price of LIBerty*, (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1976), 92.

²²⁸ Thomson, *The Price of LIBerty*, 30-35, 84, 118.

No longer debating the Equal Rights Amendment as a single issue campaign, both feminists and anti-feminists now hastened to out-organize their opponents, engaging in an all-out ideological battle over the authority to dictate gender roles.

Nevada's IWY Coordinating Committee

As the national battles intensified, women in Nevada began their nascent efforts to coordinate a statewide women's conference to be held in June 1977. The National Commission selected former State Assemblywoman Jean Ford to chair Nevada's IWY Coordinating Committee. As one of the few women to have served in Nevada's legislature, Ford had a proven record of leadership in the community, within women's organizations, and during her tenure in the Nevada Legislature. Ford had just lost her bid for the Nevada Senate, and had subsequently re-entered graduate school. Given the current flexibility of her schedule and appreciation for the opportunity at hand, she welcomed the chance to chair this committee.

Frankie Sue Del Papa, a young attorney from Reno, Nevada had read about this recent Congressional legislation, and subsequently, became very interested in being appointed to the Nevada's Coordinating Committee. Earlier, Del Papa had experienced a taste of political activism during her years in law school at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. There she joined the campaign to save the historical headquarters of Alice Paul's National Woman's Party. Now practicing law in Reno, Del Papa eagerly anticipated the women's conference and hoped to assist in the organizing efforts. She contacted both Nevada's U.S. Senator Howard Cannon and the IWY

Commission in Washington, D.C. to inquire about the selection process. Shortly before its first planning meeting in December 1976, Del Papa received the long-awaited notification that she too had been selected to serve on Nevada's IWY Coordinating Committee.²²⁹

The new members of Nevada's IWY Coordinating Committee soon found that great dissatisfaction existed throughout the state regarding the selection of IWY appointees. Many women felt strongly that they should have been selected and vocalized their dissatisfaction to the Committee. Several prominent women in the state, who felt that they had been overlooked, boycotted the conference altogether. Despite this, the Committee moved forward to plan their first meeting. Josephine Gonzales and Renee Diamond, who had agreed to be the Temporary Convenors of Nevada's Coordinating Committee, called for its initial meeting to be held on December 6, 1976 at the El Dorado Hotel in Reno; whereby the Committee would launch its plans.²³⁰ Here the thirty-three members of Nevada's Coordinating Committee quickly elected Jean Ford as Conference Coordinator and Frankie Sue Del Papa as Vice- Coordinator. The Committee then divided into subcommittees to brainstorm about the conference's program, outreach, finance, and special projects.

One of the first major decisions made by the committee concerned selecting the location of the conference. Geographically, Nevada is composed of

²²⁹ Frankie Sue Del Papa with Roselyn Richardson-Weir, "An Oral History of the Nevada Women's Conference," (Reno: University of Nevada Reno, 1977), introduction.

²³⁰ Letter from IWY Commissioner Elizabeth Athanasakos to Jean Ford, Jean Ford Papers, box 34, folder 1, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

vast amounts of unpopulated desert with two main clusters of population: Reno in the North and Las Vegas in the South. Since the largest population bloc resided in the southern portion of the state, the committee decided to hold the conference in Las Vegas. Las Vegas committee members immediately voiced their concern about the conference turning into a territorial North and South contestation. And indeed, North–South regionalism did create an ongoing dilemma in the planning process despite the Committee’s efforts against it.

After the Committee had been meeting regularly for over three months, they faced an unexpected challenge. On March 28, 1977, the Federal Register published volume 45 number 59 of the *Public Welfare Rules and Regulations* which governed the conference protocol. Well into their conference planning, Nevada’s Coordinating Committee now received the federal regulations by which they were bound. The federal rules and regulations stipulated state funding, the scope of permitted expenditures, agenda and reports back to the Commission, regulations concerning any employees of the coordinating committee and guidelines concerning contributions. As frustrating as this became for the Committee, they had no choice but to adjust to the new guidelines. There was no time to lose. Their statewide conference would be part of the historic International Women’s Year and it was less than three months away.²³¹

In February and March of 1977, several members of the Committee actively worked during the Nevada Legislative Session for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. While no rules or restrictions barred this activity,

²³¹ Del Papa with Richardson-Weir, “An Oral History of the Nevada Women’s Conference,” 10-13.

Coordinating Committee Chair Jean Ford chose instead to disassociate herself from the legislative battles over the ERA, hoping to maintain a semblance of objectivity for the upcoming conference. Ford did not want the state women's conference to become a flashpoint for controversy. Therefore, she encouraged the Nevada Coordinating Committee not to highlight the Equal Rights Amendment during the upcoming conference. To further a sense of inclusivity, the Coordinating Committee encouraged a wide array of women to attend the conference and met with prominent members of the LDS Church to solicit their views and encourage their involvement. The Committee performed this outreach with the hope of preventing their statewide conference from devolving into another ERA battleground.²³²

In March 1977, the Humanities Committee approved a grant to fund a four-day 1,400 mile tour of rural Nevada to educate women about the upcoming statewide women's conference set for June 17th-19th in Las Vegas, Nevada. As chair of the tour, Jean Ford was joined by former Reno Assemblywoman Mary Frazzini; Renee Diamond, who was active in the Democratic Women's Club of Clark County; and League of Women Voters member, Mary Forrester. The four women traveled by van around the state for four days, visiting the northern Nevadan cities of Tonopah, Carson City, Fallon, Reno, Winnemucca, Elko, and Caliente. A truly ambitious undertaking! At each town, the panel spoke at the library or another public place, addressing three main topics. First, Women and Health: What are the unmet health needs? What public health services currently

²³² "Nevada Women's Conference: Pre-Conference Planning," Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 5, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

exist? And what are the existing crisis intervention services? Secondly, Women in the Home: what is the legal status of homemakers in Nevada? What are the property rights of women in Nevada? How are homemakers' contributions to the household treated? Thirdly, Women in the Workforce: Are there discriminatory practices in effect for hiring and determining salaries? The panel encountered all the usual unforeseen challenges, such as underestimating driving time in between the cities, an unreliable postal service for timely delivery of materials, and problems with local logistics. However, over the course of the four days, the women spoke to several hundred people and handed out conference information and registration forms, stating, "Now, this is just a little sampler of what we're going to do for three days in Las Vegas in June. Come." As the tour finished, the women believed it to be a successful endeavor, as most attendees at every stop felt that the conference's planned program would be informative and balanced on important issues.²³³

As the Nevada Conference neared, the Coordinating Committee became aware of other state conferences being overrun by Anti-ERA activists. No one on the Planning Committee wished for that same fate in Nevada. For the most part, the insurgents appeared to be members of the LDS Church and other conservative religious groups. Wishing to circumvent this situation in Nevada, Chair Jean Ford met with Senate Majority Leader Jim Gibson, himself a leader in the LDS Church. Ford stressed that the Planning Committee did not wish to see

²³³ "Narrative Report: Nevada Women's Conference Grant, 'To Form a More Perfect Union: Issues for Nevada Women,'" Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 6, University of Nevada Las Vegas; Ford with Ford, 243-244.

a confrontation at the conference, but instead, wanted the LDS women to take part in the conference and express their views. The Committee's only option was to be as inclusive as possible and venture forward. As a show of their sincerity, the Planning Committee therefore invited the eighty-member LDS Women's Choir to sing at the conference.²³⁴ The Planning Committee moved forward with trepidation, as no one would know the outcome of their outreach until the conference itself.

Women involved in the planning efforts also wanted a diverse group to represent Nevada in Houston. Therefore, they strove to include women from as many racial and socio-economic backgrounds as possible for Nevada's delegation to Houston. They also knew that they would have the numbers to elect a majority of delegates for Houston that supported the IWY World Plan of Action. So, instead of risking a rupture in the Nevada conference, they decided to include a short list of the "Antis" as possible delegates, even though it was well known that the "Anti's" did not support IWY's World Plan of Action.²³⁵ By early March the Nominating Committee began its deliberations of nominees to be considered for Nevada's official delegation to attend the National Houston Conference. Of the sixty-three names submitted, the Committee considered twenty-four nominees to fill Nevada's twelve delegate slots.

When the Steering Committee met in May, just five weeks prior to the conference date, only eighty-four persons had pre-registered for the conference.

²³⁴ Ibid., 238-240.

²³⁵ Diamond with Dziedziak, 53.

This was a disappointingly low response. However, the conference brochures had just been mailed out and fortunately, registrations began pouring in over the next few weeks. The word had gotten out about the women's conference and people began taking notice. One issue continuing to plague the Steering Committee was that of finding volunteers to work the conference. The committee could find no base of membership from which to draw. This prompted them to form the Nevada Women's Task Force; a volunteer-based organization which drew its membership from a variety of existing organizations across the state. Coordinating such an organization from across Nevada proved challenging, as the state contains many rural enclaves distant from any city. However, federal agencies proved cooperative and the use of their FTS lines provided the task force members with long distance phone lines free of charge.²³⁶

The National IWY Commission in Washington, D.C. had been very helpful in guiding Nevada's Coordinating Committee's program planning. Their publication, *To Form a More Perfect Union* clearly enumerated the goals set forth by the National IWY Commission and provided guidelines for the states to follow in their own conference planning. Additionally, they provided workshop handbooks to Nevada's Coordinating Committee and a document entitled, "Legal Status of Nevada Homemakers." According to Frankie Sue Del Papa, the vice-coordinator of Nevada's Coordinating Committee, "Washington was forever sending us pamphlets. We have boxes of pamphlets on everything, from arts

²³⁶ "Nevada Women's Conference: Pre-Conference Planning," Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 5, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

and humanities to problems of older women to teenage pregnancy, all kinds of pamphlets and federal publications.”²³⁷

Nevada’s Women’s Conference

As the June Conference neared, the Coordinating Committee identified the goals of the conference, as a time to:

- “Recognize the contributions of women in both the state and nation;
- Examine the role of women in Nevada’s economic, social, cultural, and political development;
- Identify the barriers that prevent Nevada women from participating fully and equally in all aspects of state and national life;
- Seek consensus on means by which such barriers can be removed.”²³⁸

Plans for the conference’s speakers, workshops, art, music and films revolved around these goals. The conference held numerous workshops on topics of general interest to women. Many workshops addressed issues pertaining to women and work, such as: Administration and Management, Communications and Public Relations, Educational Services, Running Your Own Business, Selling Products and Services, Skilled Crafts and Trades, and Social and Health Services. Other workshops dealt with legal and financial issues, personal enrichment, and family resources, with such titles as: Assistance for Abused Women, Child Care Alternatives, Health and Nutrition, Marriage Enrichment,

²³⁷ Del Papa with Richardson-Weir, 13.

²³⁸ Sari Phillips, ed., “Choices: Exploring the Lifestyles of Nevada Women,” Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 7, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Money Matters, Single Parenting, and Strengthening Family Relationships.²³⁹

One of the goals of the conference emphasized international development. Jill Derby, a northern Nevadan and doctoral student in Anthropology at UC Davis, agreed to lead a workshop titled, “Women World Wide.” Jill had lived in Saudi Arabia for three years and would serve as a Nevada delegate to Houston later that year. Her political activism would continue over the years, serving as University Regent, Nevada’s State Chair of the Democratic Party, and eventually, running for the U.S. Congress.²⁴⁰

After more than six months of preparation, the Nevada Women’s Conference commenced on June 17, 1977 with the number of participants totaling nearly 1,400. Prior to the conference’s Opening Session, the Planning Committee set aside several hours for political caucusing and campaigning for delegate candidates for Nevada’s delegation to Houston. For many women, this was a first-time experience at caucusing and campaigning, which traditionally had been unfamiliar to most women in Nevada and across the nation. The reaction from participants to this informal politicking varied widely from that of feelings of disgust to that of admiration. Conference leaders understood that whether or not women approved of the behind-the-scenes politicking, an awareness of the political process would be critical in moving any major issue forward.²⁴¹

²³⁹ “Nevada Women’s Conference Program,” Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 6, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁴⁰ Del Papa with Richardson-Weir, 13.

²⁴¹ “Nevada Women’s Conference: Pre-Conference Planning,” Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 5, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

As attendees wandered through the Las Vegas Convention Center, they visited information booths on display in the convention hall's annex area. Volunteers from the state Democratic Party offered voter registration for conference attendees. Other organizations, such as the League of Women Voters, Nevada Hunger Task Force, and numerous service organizations provided informational materials and explanations of local projects and services. The Nevada Right to Life and STOP-ERA organizations also provided informational booths for conference attendees. Over the course of the three-day weekend conference, these booths became the sites for frequent heated exchanges over the issues of abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment.²⁴²

Florence McClure, co-founder of Community Action Against Rape, worked a booth distributing literature and information about the crime of rape. From her vantage point, she quickly perceived the rumors circulating that the Anti-ERA and Anti-Abortion advocates were trying to "take over" the conference. While in the end that never happened, the differing ideologies of the participants fueled the emotion of the weekend, as each group felt their message represented the verity of women's lives.²⁴³

As vice-chair of the Coordinating Committee, Frankie Sue Del Papa oversaw the conference's program, and therefore, became intimately engaged in the details of the conference itself. According to Del Papa, the STOP-ERA and Pro-Life people attending the conference accomplished what other conference

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Florence McClure, "Where It All Began – Seneca Falls, N.Y., 1848 to Las Vegas, NV, 1977," *Action* (April 1992), Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 6, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

attendees couldn't do on their own – unify their opposition. As Del Papa noticed, when the Pro-Life and STOP-ERA attendees began handing out their literature and registering in great numbers; it initially frightened the other conference attendees. However, it ultimately created the effect of uniting the disparate northern and southern participants; encouraging them to leave their regional differences behind and agree on a single slate of delegates to attend the National Women's Conference.²⁴⁴

When the Program Committee had suggested inviting *MS. Magazine* founder and vocal feminist, Gloria Steinem, as the conference's luncheon speaker, Conference Chair Jean Ford had reservations. At that time, Ford did not consider herself a feminist. She thought Steinem a controversial figure and feared that her presence would only bring trouble for the conference. Despite Ford's misgivings, the Committee invited Steinem to speak. Featured as the conference's Saturday luncheon speaker, Steinem drew a crowd of over 1,100 who attentively listened to her call for unity among those with similar goals in the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment. The vast majority of attendees loved her speech; including Ford, who was impressed, but mostly just relieved.²⁴⁵

The final day of the conference commenced with Chair Jean Ford presiding over the morning's Plenary Session. As the first order of business, the Resolution Committee presented the proposed resolutions to the conference body. Any resolution requiring debate would be held for action until after all the

²⁴⁴ Del Papa with Richardson-Weir, 16-17.

²⁴⁵ Ford with Ford, 219, 238-239.

resolutions were considered. Resolution Committee chairs Jan MacEachern and Mary Frazzini read the 20 Workshop Resolutions under consideration. The attendees voted to adopt nine of the resolutions and hold eleven resolutions for amendment. Of the nine resolutions adopted, the following two resolutions were adopted by unanimous vote:

“Workshop Resolution #7: Single Forever Workshop

RESOLVED, that the Nevada Women’s Conference encourage improved State and Federal statutes regarding credit opportunities, to prohibit discrimination because of marital status, sex, race, creed or sexual preference.

Workshop Resolution #16: Women in Politics Workshop

WHEREAS, women offer an untapped source for candidates for public office; and WHEREAS, funding support for women’s campaigns is limited; therefore be it RESOLVED, that:

- 1) The Nevada Women’s Conference urge that broad based efforts be carried out by women for the purpose of funding political campaigns for women; and
- 2) Women candidates of all ages seek and work for the support of their political parties; and
- 3) Recommendations of women for appointment to boards by women’s organizations be commended and expanded.”²⁴⁶

As previously noted, the Nevada Coordinating Committee did not wish to highlight the Equal Rights Amendment at its conference, fearing that it would be too controversial. Therefore, it did not place the Equal Rights Amendment under consideration as a Nevada resolution.²⁴⁷

The Resolution Committee then presented the National IWY Core Resolutions as listed in “To Form a More Perfect Union” report of the National

²⁴⁶ “Nevada Women’s Conference Plenary Session Minutes June 19, 1977 11 AM,” Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 8, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁴⁷ Del Papa with Richardson-Weir, 16.

Commission for the Observance of International Women's Year with the recommendation of approval. The conference body voted to adopt eight of the National IWY Core Resolutions with seven resolutions held for amendment and one resolution presented as nonvoting; as introduced for informational purposes only. The attendees then proceeded to debate those resolutions held for amendment, with the most heated exchanges centering over reproductive freedom. Ruth McGroarty, State Director and Board Member of National Right to Life presented the Pro-Life Resolution, which she proposed to replace Core Resolution #13 that focused on reproductive freedom. This proposal was rejected by a majority of conference participants. Janine Hansen, northern co-chair of Nevada STOP-ERA, proposed changing the second section of the Equal Rights Amendment to, "Congress *and the States* shall enforce..." Attorney Frankie Sue Del Papa stated that the actual verbiage approved by Congress for the ERA could not be amended.²⁴⁸ No further discussion ensued.

Due to anti-ERA activity occurring at other state conferences, significant concern existed amongst the Election Committee regarding the possibility of Anti-ERA manipulations during the voting process. Election Committee member, Myram Borders, a journalist at the Las Vegas News Bureau, carefully chose poll watchers to make sure all voting was legitimate. Known for her wicked sense of humor, Borders decided to take an extra precaution to counter any untoward influx of Anti-ERA votes. She enlisted her friend, Beverly Harrell, to be a poll watcher. At the time, Harrell was the owner and madam of the Cottontail Ranch,

²⁴⁸ [Italics mine] "Nevada Women's Conference Plenary Session Minutes June 19, 1977 11 AM," Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 8, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

a brothel in Esmeralda County. A striking woman with reddish-blond hair, Harrell donned pink heart-shaped sunglasses to complete her caricature. Sure to be noticed, she intermingled with Anti-ERA attendees at the polling place, doing her best to divert them from harnessing additional Anti-ERA votes.²⁴⁹ In the end, while many Anti-ERA activists only attended the conference with the intention of voting down the resolutions and electing anti-ERA delegates; their numbers were insufficient to affect either the resolution slate or Nevada delegation going forward to Houston.²⁵⁰ Of the nearly 1,400 conference attendees, 918 participated in voting; electing an overwhelmingly Pro-ERA delegation to attend Houston's National Women's Conference in November that same year.

The delegation elected to represent Nevada at the National Women's Conference consisted of: Jean Ford, coordinator of the Nevada Women's Conference, founder of Nevadans for ERA, and former State Assemblywoman; Frankie Sue Del Papa, Reno attorney and member of Nevadans for ERA; Kate Butler, state coordinator for Nevadans for ERA and a legislative lobbyist; Ruby Duncan, founder of Operation Life and past president of Clark County Welfare Rights Organization; Renee Diamond, president of Clark County Women's Democratic Club, board member of Operation Life, and member of Nevadans for ERA; Chris Everhart, a Reno realtor and member of Northern Nevadans for ERA; Mary Gojack, a Pro-ERA state senator from Reno, member of NOW, and

²⁴⁹ Ford with Ford, 241; Millisor, interview.

²⁵⁰ Del Papa with Richardson-Weir, 16.

member of Washoe County Democratic Women's Club; Josephine Gonzales, a Reno resident, director of the Community Health Program for Indians and chair of the Board of Directors for Centro De Informacion Latino Americano; Jan MacEachern, longtime member of the League of Women Voters and the Clark County Health Systems Agency; Blaine Rose, a planning specialist with the Economic opportunity Board of Clark County, a director of Planned Parenthood of Southern Nevada, and wife of Lieutenant Governor Bob Rose, who cast the tie-breaking Senate vote in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment during the 1977 Nevada Legislative Session four months earlier; Sue Wagner, a Reno assemblywoman and member of Nevadans for ERA; and Lois Whitney, a council member of the Elko Indian Colony and a VISTA volunteer for Community Outreach.²⁵¹ The alternative delegates elected represented the Anti-ERA sentiment present in the state: Assemblywoman Karen Hayes, Adelene Bartlett, Carrie Bagley, Janine Hansen, and Patricia Little.²⁵²

Feedback from the conference proved generally very positive. Of the 212 evaluations forms returned, 89% checked "Let's do it again!"²⁵³ National IWY Commissioner, Gerridee Wheeler, who attended the Nevada conference, felt that Nevada conference was the best organized conference she had seen, with the greatest representation per capita of any state conference to date.²⁵⁴ The Las

²⁵¹ "Meet Women's Conference Delegates," Las Vegas Sun [n.d.], Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 6, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁵² "Nevada Women's Conference Follow-Up," Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 5, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Del Papa with Richardson-Weir, 17-18.

Vegas League of Women Voters of Las Vegas Valley sent conference chair, Jean Ford the following congratulatory message, “The organization of registration and voting processes was outstanding and we were impressed by the numbers of women that came from all over the state and by your great success in allowing everyone to be heard. You did a marvelous job.”²⁵⁵ One attendee shared, “Not only was Steinem’s speech enlightening and invigorating, but the conversation at my table was as well worthwhile. Everyone was excited about their workshops and were sharing experiences. There was a good flow of ideas and excellent vibrations. People were working together – a refreshing surprise.”²⁵⁶

However, not all feedback after the conference proved positive. Angry participants and non-participants wrote to the local newspapers and deluged Chair Jean Ford with letters complaining that she was unpatriotic. At the opening ceremony of the conference, Ford had asked the audience to remain seated when the Color Guard brought in the American Flag. Letter after letter angrily derided her and the conference planners for wasting taxpayers’ money and exhibiting disrespect to the flag and country. This appeared to be a coordinated campaign, since most of the onslaught of letters followed this format.²⁵⁷ In hindsight, Ford commented that she probably should have told the audience that she had been asked by the Color Guard themselves to keep the audience

²⁵⁵ Letter from League of Women Voters of Las Vegas Valley to Jean Ford, 23 June 1977, Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 8, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁵⁶ “Nevada Women’s Conference Follow-Up,” Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 5, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁵⁷ Jean Ford Papers, box 30, folder 4, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

seated, so everyone could see the flag. This overly harsh response from the community over a seemingly minor issue only highlights the disparity between the conservative's gender ideology and the perceived threat of International Women's Year.

Ruth McGroarty, director of Nevada's Right to Life wrote, "We feel that it is a sad note on which to end this conference that the majority of women at this conference supported the killing of the unborn by approving Resolution 13, which supports abortion on demand."²⁵⁸ Glenna Snow of Boulder City shared, "[The] whole conference was slanted pro-ERA. As a professional woman, I do not want such radicals to represent me."²⁵⁹ Adelene Bartlett and Janine Hansen, both IWY alternate delegates and members of Nevada's STOP-ERA movement, submitted a "Minority Report" to the IWY secretariat in Washington, D.C. following the Women's Conference, "to show why no further federal funds should be appropriated for any State or National Women's Conference." According to the authors, a Pro-ERA bias prevailed throughout the conference; from the composition of the Coordinating Committee, to selection of speakers, and topics for workshops. Additionally, they charged the conference organizers with a disregard of parliamentary procedure, and attendees with an intolerance and hostility toward women with opposing viewpoints. Lastly, they complained that

²⁵⁸ "Conference ends on 'sad note,'" *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 22 June 1977, Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 6, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁵⁹ "Nevada Women's Conference Follow-Up," Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 5, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

the conference condoned lesbian activity, unrestrained blasphemy, pornography, and obscenities in speeches and exhibits.

Nevada STOP-ERA member and alternate IWY delegate, Carrie Bagley, flew to Washington, D.C. to testify before an ad hoc congressional committee in the hope of stopping the National Women's Conference slated for November 18-21, 1977 in Houston. As coordinator of the Nevada Women's Conference, Jean Ford, responded by stating, "My first impression is that they [ad hoc meetings] are being called by an anti-ERA sympathizer in Congress who wants to give the anti-coalition of anti-ERA, anti-abortion, Anita Bryant, Phyllis Schlafly force a chance to yell and make noise...[I]t's a part of a very well thought out, dangerous plan by a dangerous group of people that are trying to discredit the facts."²⁶⁰

Northern Nevada co-chair of STOP-ERA, Janine Hansen, accused the organizers of the women's conference of blatant tokenism, since Assemblywoman Karen Hayes proved to be the only member of the Coordinating Committee opposed to the ERA. Following the protocol of the national Citizens' Review Committee, Hansen warned, "For the future, lists of women from throughout the state who represent our positions and who haven't been given the chance to serve on advisory commissions such as this will be sent to the President, the governor, members of the state legislature and other state

²⁶⁰ C.J. Schiffler, "Vegas Women Clash," *The Valley Times*, 12 September 1977; "Nevada Women's Conference Minority Report," Jean Ford Papers, box 30, folder 1, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

officials, so that there will be no excuse for such a colossal misrepresentation of the women in Nevada.”²⁶¹

Despite the public criticism, the Nevada Delegation chair, Jean Ford, and the rest of the twelve member Nevada delegation commenced their work in preparation of the National Women’s Conference to be held later that same year. Often invited to speak about the Nevada Women’s Conference, Ford recalled one such instance where she was approached afterwards by a young woman who said, “You know, I really wanted to come, but I was afraid to come, and I didn’t.” When Ford inquired as to why she was afraid to attend the conference, the young woman replied, “I couldn’t imagine that women could put something like that on, and I didn’t want to see it fail.” Ford never forgot that stunning confession of fear-induced inaction. Recognizing this year as one of great opportunity for women, Ford would resolutely lead the way to Houston.²⁶²

Clash of Political Cultures: Houston, Texas

During November 18-21, 1977, approximately 20,000 women and men attended the National Women’s Conference held in Houston, Texas. As the first of its kind, the Houston Conference attracted 1,500 members of the press; becoming an instant magnet for the media. Participants varied from students and housewives to businesswomen and politicians. Prominent feminists, such as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem attended alongside three First Ladies: Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, and Rosalynn Carter. Viewed as a crowning

²⁶¹ “LV Women’s Conference ‘guilty of blatant tokenism’” [n.d.], Jean Ford Papers, box 33, folder 6, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁶² Ford with Ford, 242, 255-256.

achievement of the Second Wave Feminist Movement, the conference accomplished two goals. First, as mandated by Public Law 94-167, the conference succeeded in broadening the feminist movement beyond the white middle-class core. In fact, the state delegations were so diverse that some minority groups' representation at the conference exceeded their percentages in the national population. Secondly, the participants were able to move beyond the internecine ideological and strategic battles that had plagued the feminist movement. Participants of the conference exhibited a spirit of earnest dialog and compromise, with the resolutions of the National Plan of action reflecting many of the goals of both the middle-class equality-driven feminists and those of the more radical separatist feminists.²⁶³

Presiding Officer Bella Abzug presented the IWY Commissioners, who represented a diverse array of race, age, and background. Several Commissioners were editors of women's magazines: Sey Chessler of *Redbook*, John Mack Carter of *Good Housekeeping*, Gloria Steinem of *Ms.* magazine, and Lenore Hershey of *Ladies' Home Journal*. All ensured lively coverage in their perspective publications. Many Commissioners were policymakers from national women's organizations, such as: Eleanor Smeal, president of NOW, Jane Culbreth, former president of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Ruth Clusen, president of the League of Women Voters, and Mildred Jeffrey, chair of the National Women's Political Caucus. Commission Chair, Bella Abzug addressed the conference participants

²⁶³ Marjorie J. Spruill, "Gender and America's Right Turn," in *Rightward Bound*, 72-75.

exuberantly from the podium, with a large banner simply stating “WOMAN” unfurled behind her across the stage. Abzug proclaimed with unabashed enthusiasm, “We are a multitude. We are alive and kicking, and we shall get livelier. The women’s movement has become an indestructible part of American life.”²⁶⁴

The delegates arriving at the Houston Conference had been charged with one main objective: to vote on the twenty-six plank National Plan of Action. The IWY National Commission had suggested that each state consider the fourteen core resolutions emanating from those listed in the “To Form a More Perfect Union...” report of the IWY National Commission. Over the course of 1977, the various state conferences debated these core resolutions and brought them to a vote. Any core resolution that had been approved by more than twelve state or territorial conferences was then included in the proposed National Plan of Action; along with additional recommendations by the Commission. Most of the final twenty-six planks in the National Plan of Action resulted from this state/territory conference voting process.

Women attending the conference experienced both conflict and camaraderie as a multitude of caucuses discussed and debated the various planks. The caucuses that formed represented a wide array of issues and groups, such as: Arts, Peace, Youth, Women in Sports, Minority Women, Lesbian Women, Jewish Women, Poor and Low Income Women. A woman from

²⁶⁴ Caroline Bird, “Houston Day by Day,” in *The Spirit of Houston: The First National Women’s Conference*, National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), 124-125.

the Farm Women Caucus told a lobbyist from Washington, D.C., “If you aren’t now living on a farm, you can’t possibly understand the need we feel to be identified as farmers in our own right, rather than as farm wives. After all, we did not marry the farm!”²⁶⁵

The Plan of Action brought together a broad array of demands that made clear that the time was past for any internecine divisiveness. Representing the minority women’s caucus, Coretta Scott King proclaimed, “Let the message go forth from Houston and spread all over this land. There is a new force, a new understanding, a new sisterhood against all injustice that has been born here. We will not be divided and defeated again.”²⁶⁶ As the conference participants discussed and debated the National Plan of Action, they ultimately adopted seventeen of the planks by a large majority. As eighty percent of the delegates approved the National Plan of Action, there existed a definite consensus of the direction promoted by American women. Core to this consensus lay the demand for the final ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.²⁶⁷

While 1977 provided the promise of momentous feminist victories, this historic moment simultaneously solidified antifeminist forces in greater numbers than ever before seen. For as women thronged to the Albert Thomas Convention Center in Houston in support of the National Plan of Action,

²⁶⁵ Caroline Bird, “Houston Day by Day,” in *The Spirit of Houston: The First National Women’s Conference*, 132.

²⁶⁶ Sarah M. Evans, *Tidal Wave*, (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 141, as quoted from Bella Abzug and Mimi Kelber, *Gender Gap: Bella Abzug’s Guide to Political Power for American Women*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 58.

²⁶⁷ National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year, *The Spirit of Houston*, 11.

oppositional forces gathered in the nearby Astro-Arena to halt what they viewed as a world gone array. Proclaiming the International Women's Year as a "Front for Radicals and Lesbians,"²⁶⁸ Phyllis Schlafly had urged her anti-ERA readers to write to their congressmen in opposition of Public Law 94-167's appropriation of \$5 million of taxpayers' money to fund the women's conferences.

Now in Houston, Schlafly and the 20,000 men and women gathered in the Astro-Arena as a Pro-Family antifeminist counter-conference. Because of the vast media coverage, the IWY Conference provided Phyllis Schlafly and her STOP-ERA followers a public venue with which to spar feminists in front of a national audience. Schlafly declared that the Women's Lib movement had doomed itself by embracing abortion, lesbianism, pornography, and Federal control. Despite the twenty-four remaining planks approved at the IWY Conference, Schlafly and the STOP-ERA members constantly highlighted the IWY Conference resolutions on abortion and lesbianism. To Schlafly and her followers, this proved that the Houston Conference was part and parcel of a greater radical agenda.²⁶⁹

There were clear divisions of philosophies among the women representing Nevada, but all looked to Houston with a sense of eagerness for what was to come. The Nevada delegation arrived ready to debate those issues felt most strongly about: domestic violence, discrimination in the workplace, and the plight of poor women; all critical in Nevada. According to Ford, while there was much

²⁶⁸ *Phyllis Schlafly Report* 11:1, 2 (August 1977), Jean Ford Papers, box 31, folder 3; Critchlow, 244-248.

²⁶⁹ Critchlow, 246-248.

debate over the controversial resolutions focusing on the rights of lesbians and the Equal Rights Amendment, the delegates nonetheless reviewed a wide variety of important issues. Ford maintained that while oppositional forces tried to make it look as though all conference attendees were either lesbians or ERA advocates - that simply was not true.²⁷⁰

The Nevada delegation sat across the aisle from the New York delegation. Jean Ford and Carol Bellamy, the leader of the New York delegation, became aware of the presence of anti-feminists intent on obstructing the conference. Using parliamentary maneuverings, the antis would seek to control the microphones and limit debate. With a microphone stationed in between the Nevada and New York delegation, Ford and Bellamy therefore instructed their delegations to maintain control of the microphone, allowing pro-women delegates access to the floor.²⁷¹ Most of the women had never attended a conference of this magnitude. Therefore, while parliamentary maneuverings and obstructionist tactics did occur, most women simply found themselves in awe of this experience. Nevada delegate Renee Diamond remembers the conference participants as “[F]rom the lowliest, smallest community on some island in the Pacific to the White House, there were women of conscience [who] cared about other women. I thought that was just momentous.”²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Ford with Ford, 245.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 242, 245.

²⁷² Diamond with Dzedziak, 57.

However, the ugliness of society appeared in Houston as well. Robert Shelton, Imperial Wizard of the United Klans of America proclaimed, “I will be in the vicinity of the IWY meeting in Houston. Some of our women members and sympathizers will be in the meetings to oppose what is going on. Our men will also be there to protect our women from all the militant lesbians. It’s not safe for a decent woman to be there.”

Being in Houston for the first time, Nevada delegates: Renee Diamond, a forty-year-old married Jewish woman; Ruby Duncan, a mid-forties single black mother; and Elaine Mills, the young lesbian founder of NOW in Southern Nevada – all decided to room together at the hotel. Elaine recalls the exhilaration of the conference, but also the awful hysteria that showed itself at Houston. As the roommates walked down a Houston street, they noticed the police holding the Ku Klux Klan at bay. The Klansmen angrily displayed signs that said, “Get out of town - Niggers, Dykes, Kikes!” The women looked at each other and said, “That’s our room!” Leaving the air of intolerance behind on the streets, the friends confidently locked arms and strode toward the convention center. They had worked throughout the year within a gender-identified community to address critical issues for women. Now as actors in a much larger political arena, they lent their voices to effect change. Houston was *their* moment!²⁷³

While Nevada’s Anti-ERA delegates represented a minority viewpoint in Houston, once back in Nevada, they wasted no time in sharing the “horrors” of

²⁷³ “International Women’s Year Conference Houston 1977,” videotaped panel of the Women’s Summit Conference, (Las Vegas, 1998), in the possession of Dr. Joanne Goodwin, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Houston to willing audiences. Nevada Assemblywoman Karen Hayes, one of Nevada's alternate and anti-ERA delegates, became a regular speaker at LDS Stakes and Relief Societies. She distributed a two page synopsis of the Houston conference that closed with the warning given to the participants at Schlafly's Pro-Family Counter Conference at the Astro-Arena: "The United States is the last beacon of hope and liberty where parents have the right to determine what road their children will take, not the State. The Lesbians, Homosexuals and Pro-abortion people are just beginning their fight. We have to match them through love, prayer and POLITICAL ACTION. AMERICA IS STILL IN THE HANDS OF THE REAL MAJORITY – GOD FEARING PEOPLE. LET'S NOT LOSE WHAT WE HAVE TO THE RADICALS!! WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?"²⁷⁴

LDS member, Renee Rampton became so incensed that she recorded one of Hayes' speeches and published it with a letter to the LDS leadership intimating her disgust, "How shameful!!! How disgraceful!!! How sad that Karen Hayes should defile the Lord's house with her disgusting literature!!!...How horrible that perverted minds would look for the sick and sensational and bring it back to Nevada...One can always find what one is looking for, and there are those who found trash at Houston, placed there and paid for by those who paid the price of a booth, and bought by those who also pay the price...There are those who found great and marvelous things at Houston, and I would hope that those who care might ask others who attended the conference with a positive attitude the question, 'What happened at the IWY conference in Houston?' Their

²⁷⁴ Jean Ford Papers, box 30, folder 1, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

minds might be relieved, and they might be able to find that it was not a chamber of horrors.” According to Rampton, Hayes boasted that she had given sixty such speeches.²⁷⁵

As a Nevada delegate, Renee Diamond stated, “[T]he conference had this kind of hall with organizations, commercial enterprises that were so fun – the early T-shirts with the feminist stuff on it, the buttons that I still have. I guess it’s like ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder.’ So is scandal. So is ugliness. They went expecting to find it and they looked for it. We went expecting to have a positive experience and we did...I came home with a cookbook and a Wonder Woman T-shirt for my daughter.”²⁷⁶

The year of 1977 that had opened with such promise, now came to an unceremonious close. The National Women’s Conference of Houston did present a historical first, but its unforeseen ramifications would deal a deadly blow to the feminist movement and the Equal Rights Amendment’s ratification campaign. At the urging of Phyllis Schlafly, America’s conservative “Silent Majority” had become energized and vowed publicly to tackle the feminist movement in order to save American family and traditions.

Many delegates returned to their states to form follow-up commissions on the status of women or report to their existing Commission on the Status of Women. The Nevada delegates did not. Nevada’s Commission on the Status of

²⁷⁵ “Letter to the editor,” 16 April 1978, Renee Rampton Papers, box 1, University of Nevada Reno; Renee M. Rampton, “The Role of the Mormon Church in the 1978 Nevada Election,” Jean Ford Papers, box 4, folder 38, University of Nevada Reno.

²⁷⁶ Diamond with Dziedziak, 58; Rampton, interview; “International Women’s Year Conference Houston 1977,” videotaped panel of the Women’s Summit Conference.

Women had been disbanded years ago. In the early seventies, Governor O'Callaghan revived the commission, but renamed it the Commission on the Status of People.²⁷⁷ When the Nevada delegates came back to Nevada, they found the anti-ERA sentiment growing. To conservatives in the state, the IWY conferences only served to highlight what they disdained – the feminist threat. Now approaching a 1978 ERA state referendum, Pro-ERA activists faced an organized opposition determined to end the protracted debate over equal rights. In November 1978, the conservative forces fired back, defeating the ERA Referendum with a decisive 2:1 victory. This resounding defeat sealed the fate of the Equal Rights Amendment in Nevada. While it would be introduced against in the 1979 and 1981 legislative sessions, no further debate would ensue. Nevada had rejected the ratification of the ERA.

²⁷⁷ Ford with Ford, 246-247.

CONCLUSION

“Whether in the end this amendment is the way women will achieve legal equality or not, it is still true that the struggle over its ratification has provided the greatest political training ground for women in the history of the world.”²⁷⁸

No proposed constitutional amendment in recent memory has produced the degree of emotion, both in scope and intensity, as that of the Equal Rights Amendment. First proposed as a succinctly written constitutional amendment, the ERA languished in Congress for forty-nine years before the resurgent women’s movement rallied it to victory in 1972. Now before the state legislatures for ratification, the ERA quickly devolved into intense ideological warfare. Placing gender at the core of this conflict, ratificationists insisted upon unmitigated equality under the law, while opponents resolutely clung to the fixity of women’s differences: as necessary moorings amidst a sea of rampant social change.

During the first decades of congressional debates, protective legislation had trumped the Equal Rights Amendment, with such leaders as Florence Kelley and Eleanor Roosevelt insisting upon safeguards for women workers. To these leaders, the ERA represented a privileged women’s ideology, posing a dangerous threat to their hard-fought legislative protections for working women. Many women’s organizations also joined the opposition during this time, including: The Women’s Christian Temperance Movement, the American Association of University Women, the National Council of Jewish Women, and

²⁷⁸ Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic*, 157-158. A member of the LDS Church, Sonia Johnson founded Mormons for ERA and led the national campaign to expose the Mormon Church’s covert campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment. For her actions, Johnson was excommunicated by the LDS Church in December 1978.

the League of Women Voters. These organizations had joined forces to fight existing discriminatory practices by addressing “specific bills for specific ills”; leading to such victories as the Sheppard-Towner Maternity Act; child labor laws; and married women’s right to name, citizenship, domicile, contract, and inheritance.²⁷⁹

Over the course of forty-nine years, congressional debates over the ERA ebbed and flowed as various matters of national concern, such as the two World Wars, the Great Depression, Roosevelt’s New Deal, and Civil Rights required much congressional attention. American women were changing during these years as well. The flapper of the twenties who transgressed gendered boundaries with new styles of dress and public activities came to be replaced by women who answered the country’s call for wartime work force. Over these decades working women marched, went on strike, and built coalitions with middle-class advocates seeking to broaden the discourse concerning conditions for working women. During these same years, leading opponent of the ERA, Senator Samuel Ervin, Jr. opined about the natural “physiological and functional” differences between the sexes. Senator Ervin’s solicitude about protecting women’s more delicate character proved largely emblematic of the conservative viewpoint that resisted both feminism and the ERA.²⁸⁰

By the time the resurgent women’s movement rallied the ERA to congressional victory in 1972, much had changed. Since 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) had been amended several times over to cover a much

²⁷⁹ Becker, 7-8.

²⁸⁰ Mathews and De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA*, 28.

broader sampling of workers and working conditions. As director of the Women's Bureau and Assistant Secretary of Labor during President Kennedy's tenure, Esther Peterson directed much attention to the plight of working women. The establishment of the President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 focused federal attention on employment policies and practices of the federal government and federal contractors; social insurance and tax law; labor legislation; political, civil, and property rights; and new and expanded services necessary for women as wives, mothers, and workers.²⁸¹ Because of these federal enactments, the unions and working-class organizations that formerly opposed the ERA no longer viewed it as a danger to their working conditions.

However, by the 1970s our nation was a country in turmoil. The brutalities of the Vietnam War and the scandal of Watergate filled the evening news. Social unrest abounded as new contingencies voiced their disapproval of the status quo. While these new groups called for social change, a Conservative Right solidified to reclaim the traditional roles and values for women and family. In Nevada, this was evident most clearly in the Mormon Church, whose Relief Society's served as a ready organization with which to politicize the faithful membership.

When the issue of ERA's ratification reached Nevada in 1973, Phyllis Schlafly had already hit most of the state legislatures with her STOP-ERA literature. Pro-ERA legislators, such as Jean Ford, Eileen Brookman, and Mary Gojack realized there was little time to lose. Educating themselves on the issue, they teamed with Pro-ERA women from communities North and South to form

²⁸¹ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, 72.

ERA Coalitions and Nevadans for ERA. Activists began their grassroots organizing across the state; educating rural communities about the ERA, canvassing neighborhoods, lobbying legislators, testifying before the legislature, and engaging in debates. This grassroots activism forged a new women's political community, where women with shared beliefs and convictions enjoyed a new political space with which to engage and inform.

Nationally and in Nevada, profound uncertainty existed about the amendment's broader social and political implications. The opponents' initial reaction of petty panic about shared restrooms quickly escalated into apocalyptic alarm over the government raising our children in state-run childcare facilities and women forced into the brutalities of military combat. What had begun as a single-issue campaign; that of equality under the law, now devolved into an ideological battle over gender relations. Here ERA advocates and opponents took opposing sides in the dichotomous battle over equality versus difference.

While ERA advocates espoused the emancipatory vision of natural rights, those in opposition resisted this imposition of equality. America had just experienced a decade of profound social change. Many felt that society was transforming too quickly. A backlash swelled that first focused on Civil Rights and busing, but quickly spread to encompass new controversial issues, such as feminism, abortion, and gay rights; all of which were interpreted by opponents as an attack on the family and the traditional American way of life.²⁸² In their world, gender differentiations provided protection and comfort; not obstacles and

²⁸² Jo Freeman, "Social Revolution and the Equal Rights," *Sociological Forum* 3.1 (Winter 1988): 149-50.

restrictions. To Anti-ERA women these gendered distinctions were inexplicably bound to their personal identities. In Nevada and elsewhere, Anti-ERA women testified before their legislators for protection from this feminist assault that threatened to change gender relations as they knew it. This “equality” was a right they neither requested nor wanted.²⁸³

As Nevada State Assemblywoman Margie Foote said, “Women are already superior. Why would you want to go backwards?”²⁸⁴ This reflected the sentiment of thousands of Nevada women, who held traditional values and lifestyles. To these conservative women, the family structure itself proved more important than their individual identity. For in their perspective, the dynamics and organization of the family required a surrendering of a woman’s individuality in order to conform to her familial role and position.²⁸⁵ To these conservative women, the very thought of inferring a plethora of new social, cultural, economic, and political changes proved overwhelming. Ratificationists repeatedly quoted polls indicating a majority of Americans favored equal rights. However, the majority of Americans, including these traditional women, were not eager to embrace what they perceived as an impending gender revolution.

The ERA ratification campaign bears an instructive lesson in acknowledging relevant history during the development of public policy. As Jane Sherron De Hart contends, “[O]ne of the most striking aspects of the ten year

²⁸³ Mathews and De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA*, 218-219.

²⁸⁴ Foote, interview.

²⁸⁵ Donald G. Mathews, “Spiritual Warfare: Cultural Fundamentalism and the ERA,” *Religion and American Culture* 3.2 (Summer 1993): 138.

ratification struggle is how suspect the very concept of equality had become in the wake of two decades of litigation, legislation, and executive orders on behalf of civil rights for minorities.”²⁸⁶ ERA advocates who felt the exhilaration of the revitalized women’s movement soon caught the abrasive riptide of conservative counter forces that demanded an adherence to existing gender traditions and mores. With “on account of sex” ascribed in the very text of the proposed amendment, the ensuing discussions escalated into litanies over gender conflicts. Anti-ERA women placed personal beliefs and values front and center; buttressing themselves from what they perceived as a feminist affront ready to cast them into a capricious public domain.

Phyllis Schlafly’s hyperbolic rhetoric led the national Anti-ERA movement to demonize and problematize those working for its passage. As the ERA ratification campaign commenced, Schlafly pointedly characterized it as:

“Anti-family, anti-children, and pro-abortion. It is a series of sharp-tongued, high-pitched, whining complaints by unmarried women. They view the home as a prison, and the wife and mother as a slave...Women’s lib is a total assault on the role of the American woman as wife and mother, and on the family as the basic unit of society...They are promoting Federal ‘day-care centers’ for babies instead of homes. They are promising abortions instead of babies.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Jane Sherron De Hart, “Equality Challenged: Equal Rights and Sexual Difference,” *Journal of Policy History* 6.1 (1994): 40.

²⁸⁷ *Phyllis Schlafly Report 5* (February 1972), as quoted in Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 305.

As the national leader of ERA's opposition, Phyllis Schlafly's own personae symbolized the difficulties in discerning the complexities of gender norms. Schlafly espoused traditional gender roles for women and always presented herself as a housewife and mother of six children from Alton, Illinois. However, in reality Schlafly ran an effective and efficient national STOP-ERA campaign, traveling extensively to testify before state legislatures, writing the STOP ERA and Eagle Forum newsletters; even managing to earn her law degree during this period. While the early opponents of the ERA had fought it on the grounds of preserving protectionist reforms and legislation, Schlafly's pointed rhetoric mobilized scores of conservative women who stepped into the political arena as protectors their own traditional beliefs and values.

In Nevada, ERA opponents frequently testified before the legislature, stressing that the family is the basic strength of this country. They feared that the ERA would undermine that unit by forcing all women to work. Additionally, they contended that women would lose their social security and be forced to fight in combat. According to the opponents, Nevada already had legislation protecting women, thus making the ERA an unnecessary addition to the constitution. This contingency argued forcefully to protect the existing social order; a structure that afforded them consistency and protection. To them, the ERA suggested the promise of utter social upheaval with no safeguards against the ramifications of tinkering with gender relations. As northern Nevada STOP-ERA leader Janine Hansen said, "We want guarantees, not promises."²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ Nevada Legislature. *Nevada Legislative Record*, (Carson City, 1977), "Minutes of Joint Hearing," 2 February 1977.

As the IWY women's conferences crossed the states throughout 1977, support for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment waned. Under the leadership of Eleanor Smeal, the National Organization for Women redirected its focus to extend the time period for ERA's ratification, while seeking to infuse new energy into the state campaigns. In the fall of 1977, NOW announced an economic boycott on all the remaining non-ratified states, including Nevada. Although an ERA supporter, Nevada Governor Mike O'Callaghan responded by stating, "Threats don't work here."²⁸⁹ Coverage in Nevada's local newspapers was immediate and extensive; much of it angrily deriding the activists for hurting the economy of our state. One popular columnist declared, "Now, since Congress knuckled under to pressures exerted by this vocal group of females, the economic blackmail can be expected to continue here until our own political leaders tire of being kicked in the guts and vote the 'right way.'"²⁹⁰

The NOW economic boycott was not the idea or responsibility of Nevada ERA activists. However, once enacted by the National NOW, Nevada activists tried their best to participate. Convinced that the Mormon Church stood as the greatest obstacle to Nevada's ratification, Naomi Millisor, president of the local Las Vegas NOW chapter at the time, shared lists of Mormon-owned businesses to members; encouraging them to take their business elsewhere.²⁹¹ In the end,

²⁸⁹ "Nevada Politicians Face ERA Dilemma," *The Valley Times*, 23 November 1977.

²⁹⁰ Dick Odessky, "Boycott Costing Vegas Millions," *Las Vegas Sun* [n.d.], Jean Ford Papers, box 30, folder 3, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁹¹ Millisor, interview.

this grassroots attempt to revitalize the ERA campaign did little to promote the cause.

With frequent front page newspaper admonitions against the boycott, public vitriol quickly targeted ERA advocates. State coordinator of the Nevadans for ERA, Cynthia Cunningham responded to the public outcry by admonishing state legislators. According to Cunningham, the blame for the boycott belonged to the legislators who refused to ratify the amendment despite knowing a majority of Americans supported its ratification. Not only had the boycott triggered increased public scrutiny of the ERA, but it had also produced escalating violence against the Nevadans for ERA. Cunningham in fact, confirmed that one of NERA's offices had been wiretapped, members' cars vandalized, and homes burglarized.²⁹²

In March 1978, Attorney General Robert List, along with several other Attorneys General from non-ratified states, filed suit against the National Organization for Women, seeking an injunction against the NOW boycott for violating the Clayton and Sherman anti-trust acts. Ultimately, the lawsuit was dismissed, but only after a public frenzy of blaming ERA advocates for crippling the economy of the state. While some organizations did take their conventions and conferences elsewhere, in the end, the economic boycott did not hurt Nevada's economy. While the ERA advocates' "crippling of the state" was far from the truth, it would unfortunately remain core to the oppositions' memory.

²⁹² "ERA Fans: Blame Legislators, Not Us, For Boycott," *Las Vegas Sun*, 28 February 1978.

When the Nevada Legislature convened for its 1979 session, the ERA ratification efforts had all but died. Three months earlier, Nevadans had resolutely rejected the Equal Rights Amendment in a 2:1 Advisory Referendum vote against the amendment. Pro-ERA activists were burned out, feeling that they had been doing double-duty fighting for the Advisory Referendum while campaigning for Pro-ERA candidates.²⁹³ Now returning as a state senator, Jean Ford noted the changing course of opposition to the ERA. She reflected that the earlier arguments had centered on the vagueness of the amendment itself; leaving individuals feeling uncertain about its effect. She also recognized that Nevadans were wary of the amendment's Section 2 that denoted the "power of Congress to enforce." Nevadans historically opposed turning over state power to the federal government. Lastly, while earlier arguments had tied the ERA to abortion and characterized it as a threat to destroy the family, Ford documented that after the Houston Women's Conference, opposition now focused on the issue of lesbianism and the negativity of NOW's economic boycott.²⁹⁴

Unsurprisingly, when the Equal Rights Amendment was introduced in both the 1979 and 1981 legislative sessions; opposition moved for "no further motion" ending any further legislative debate. In 1980, the Republican Party officially dropped its endorsement of the ERA; the first time since 1940.²⁹⁵ This foreshadowed the nation's reification of conservative values as the Religious

²⁹³ Diamond, interview.

²⁹⁴ Handwritten notes, Jean Ford Papers, box 30, folder 2, University of Nevada Las Vegas.

²⁹⁵ Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 172.

Right now replaced the rights agenda in public policy. There would be no serious revival of the Equal Rights Amendment nationwide or in Nevada.

However, the women's political culture energized by the Equal Rights Amendment's ratification campaign lived on. Individuals and agendas changed over time, but women continued to share this political community. ERA activists who later ran for public office had a ready base of campaign volunteers in their former ERA cohorts. Frankie Sue Del Papa continued in the public sector; becoming Nevada's Attorney General and Secretary of State. Sue Wagner remained in the legislature throughout the 1980s, became Nevada's first elected female Lieutenant Governor in 1990, then served on Nevada's Gaming Commission. Although Sue ran as a Republican, loyal Democrats of the ERA campaign supported her campaign with unabated enthusiasm. Partisan politics could not permeate this core of women who had battled together for the ERA. Diehard Democrat, Harriet Trudell says with unabated delight that Sue is the *only* Republican she has *ever* voted for.²⁹⁶

After Jean Ford served one session in the State Senate, she went into business for herself, but remained active in women's issues. She founded the Nevada Women's Archives in Reno and Las Vegas, taught at the University of Nevada Reno (UNR) and served as the interim Director of UNR's Women's Studies Program. Ford also founded the Nevada Women's History Project; a statewide organization formed to preserve the contributions women have made to Nevada. Through her continued women-centered activities, Ford energized students and women from communities North and South to make greater

²⁹⁶ Trudell, interview.

investments in understanding and remembering the continuum of women's political culture in our state.

Years later in 1990, former Nevadans for ERA members grew increasingly concerned with the current conservative murmurings about banning abortion. Joining forces with along with new activists, these women organized a statewide political campaign to protect Nevada women's reproductive freedom. Called Campaign for Choice, these activists organized around the former Anti-ERA attitudes voiced during the seventies and spun that sentiment to favor their cause. Vivian Freeman, Martha Gould, Mylan Roloff,²⁹⁷ and Sue Wagner joined women in the North; while Renee Diamond, Harriet Trudell, and Naomi Millisor worked with campaigners in the South. Learning from the rationale used by the ERA's opposition, the campaign coordinators played on Nevadans' insistence on self-governance and fear of federal intrusion to successfully pass the referendum securing Nevadans' reproductive freedom.²⁹⁸

Southern Nevadans for ERA co-chair, Renee Diamond remained active in the Democratic Club in Las Vegas, while serving one term in the state Assembly. Diamond routinely welcomed young women and teenage girls to participate in local campaigns; ensuring a political culture that extended to the next generation. Activists Naomi Millisor and Harriet Trudell remained active in the Clark County Democratic Party to the present day. In the 1980s, Trudell left Nevada for Washington, DC to serve as an aide for then Congressman Harry Reid. In 1990,

²⁹⁷ Mylan Roloff remarried and changed her last name to Hawkins.

²⁹⁸ Mylan Hawkins, interview by author, digital recording, Reno, Nevada, 4 October 2007.

Millisor and Trudell spent several months in Louisiana as part of National NOW's drive to put more women into elected office. Again in Washington, DC during the 1990s, Trudell worked as a lobbyist for the Feminist Majority Foundation.²⁹⁹

ERA opponents, Janine Hansen and Karen Hayes both remained politically active. Hayes served a lengthy tenure in the Nevada Assembly, while Hansen would become a regular fixture at the state legislature as a lobbyist for various conservative causes. However, most of the Mormon women who had worked against the ERA's ratification resumed their previous interests and remained out of the public political domain. While the Mormon Relief Societies still remained central to these women's lives, the very politicized nature of that organization evident during the ratification campaign had long since subsided.

The ratification campaign both nationally and in Nevada had witnessed the morphing of the drive for legal equality into a battle over the ideological authority to dictate gender relations. Nonetheless, whether as ERA advocates or vocal opponents, this campaign compelled women to fight for those values held dearest, expanding the sphere of politics well beyond that of public office. This politicization of Nevada's women would change the composition of our elected offices, alter legislation, open the legislative chambers, and expand the scope of political discourse. In shaking women's gendered beliefs and core values, the Equal Rights Amendment's ratification campaign invigorated women's political voice and created new political spaces. The story of Nevada's ERA ratification campaign is not one of failure, rather it is one of women sharing common beliefs

²⁹⁹ Millisor, interview; Trudell with Dziedziak; 96-102; Diamond with Dziedziak, 35-36.

and convictions; becoming energized and engaged in new political communities to effect social change.

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