

CONSERVATIVE THOUGHT  
AND THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT IN KANSAS

by

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B.S., UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY, 1996

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN, 1999

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department Of History  
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2008

## **Abstract**

Despite an impressive history of woman-friendly legislation, Kansans tend to be socially conservative. The Equal Rights Amendment, first proposed in 1923, was the culmination of over a century's worth of women's activism attempting to remove the strictures of coverture and to recognize women as citizens in their own right, not as wives or as mothers of male citizens. After largely ignoring the amendment for fifty years, Congress finally passed the ERA in 1972 and submitted it to the states for ratification. Almost immediately, the real and imagined consequences of the legislation provoked a passionate debate among mostly middle-class white women about the meaning of American womanhood. Liberals hoped that the ERA would remove existing barriers to women's educational and professional life; conservatives feared that the ERA would cause women to focus on selfish interests outside of their households, rotting the foundations of family life and American strength.

In Kansas, women from both camps converged to discuss the future of the ERA at the feminist-organized Kansas Women's Weekend of July 15-17, 1977, resulting in Kansas sending a conservative faction to the federally funded National Women's Conference later that year. Conservatives failed to derail the convention's feminist agenda, nor were they able to enact a rescission of Kansas' ratification, but in the long run they succeeded in creating widespread uneasiness about the social consequences of the ERA. The vitriolic anti-ERA campaign demonstrated the extent to which female dependency still defined both male and female conservatives' views on the interrelatedness of family, religion, manliness, and national strength.

This dissertation explores a volume of letters to Kansas legislators expressing anti-ERA sentiment. The letters provide a unique lens through which to examine the passions aroused by the ERA among grassroots conservatives. Contextualizing this issue are other conservative reactions to feminist activity from the Revolution onward that consistently demonstrate how conservatives valorize female dependency. Although the liberal position regarding women's rights has changed significantly over two hundred years, conservative reaction has invariably embraced and elevated the patriarchal family as proper and necessary to the smooth functioning of a Christian republic.

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Approved by:

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## **Acknowledgements**

This paper would not have been possible without the continuing help of the faculty, staff, and graduate students of the history department at Kansas State University. First among those was Dr. Sue Zschoche, whose many hours of guidance and discussion brought me to this topic in the first place. Her constant reassurance and generously offered intellectual discourse were instrumental in bringing this paper to fruition. Also assisting me were Drs. Don Mrozek, Lou Williams, and Joe Aistrup of the Political Science department, who added valuable insights and corrections to my work.

Special recognition is due to the United States Air Force Academy department of history and Col. Mark Wells for selecting me to pursue a PhD and to study women in American history. I truly appreciate the opportunity—my life has been immeasurably enriched by this experience. I hope that I can transfer my excitement for the knowledge gained in the course of my research to the cadets.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Robert and Kathryn Lowenthal; my sister and brother-in-law, Wendy and David Simeur; and my good friends Doug and Bettina Kennedy for listening to me rant about this topic for years and for providing the wisdom of their experience. I cannot thank you all enough.

## **CHAPTER 1 - Introduction**

In the summer of 1977, Kansas women from around the state met in Wichita to celebrate the Kansas Women's Weekend. Originally organized as a state precursor to the federally funded National Women's Conference to be held in November, planners scheduled three days of workshops and meetings to discuss issues affecting women. Despite the addition of contentious topics such as lesbian rights and abortion, the issue generating the most attention was the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This brief piece of legislation barring discrimination on the basis of sex had been at the center of a whirlwind of controversy since its passage by Congress in 1972. Many states quickly ratified the amendment but by 1977, progress had stalled and supporters despaired that the ERA might not achieve the needed three-fourths supermajority of state ratifications to achieve inclusion into the Constitution by the expiration of its deadline in 1979. Although Kansas had been one of the first states to ratify, the feminist organizers of the Kansas Women's Weekend and the National Women's Conference designed the meetings as venues to discuss how to reenergize the amendment and press for enough additional ratifications to make the ERA law.

Not all women favored the ERA. Just after the ERA passed in Congress, opposition to the amendment grew to encompass a significant and nationally mobilized base of social conservatives. While ERA supporters hoped that the legislation would remove remaining barriers to women's full financial, social, and political participation in American life, opponents feared that it would erode necessary distinctions between men and women, encourage women to abandon their moral and maternal responsibilities in the home, and lead to social upheaval. The

spare wording of the amendment offered few clues to what the true consequences of its adoption would mean, leading the two factions to speculate, sometimes wildly, about the perceived effects. The Kansas Women's Weekend was organized by and for ERA supporters but opponents, irritated that the federal government had funded it and the national conference without consideration for their opposing views, vowed to attend and make their opinions known.

Feminist organizers wished to discuss strategies to invigorate and pass the ERA, not to waste time debating conservatives over whether the ERA was a good idea. Realizing that their conference was about to be overrun and derailed by women who were hostile to the conference's purpose, they employed a number of strategies in an attempt silence the interlopers. Chaos ensued as organizers attempted to neutralize the unwanted and disruptive element. Organizers finally succeeded in taking three different votes on the ERA, all of which narrowly passed.<sup>1</sup>

Conservatives cried foul when they discovered the lengths to which feminist organizers were going to exclude them. Calling themselves the "pro-family" delegation, conservative women found themselves without a federally funded platform from which to object and therefore believed that they had an obligation to attend the Kansas Women's Weekend to publicize the negative consequences of the ERA. A number of conservative women strenuously objected to the organizers' attempts to minimize their impact, including being told of the conference only at the last minute, being denied entrance to the hall due to suspicious fire code maximums, having their microphones turned off in mid-sentence, having their objecting motions denied, and being tricked into going home for the night before a final vote was taken on the ERA. They rejected the pro-ERA votes from the Weekend as having been rigged. A few weeks later, the two groups met again to choose delegates for the National Women's Conference in Houston later that year

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Hanna (State Coordinator, Kansas Citizens Against the ERA), Eudora, to Sen. Edward F. Reilly, Topeka (July 1977?), Reilly Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

and the conservatives succeeded in having a majority of the representatives elected from their side. In Houston, the pro-family Kansas delegates were captured on film protesting the feminist agenda by standing and turning their backs on organizers during a motion.<sup>2</sup> What was going on in Kansas? The state quickly passed the ERA but active opponents insisted that the ERA did not represent their version of womanhood. Anti-ERA sentiment in Kansas in the 1970s represented a small sample of the larger national debate conservatives had waged throughout American history against frightening social changes that they thought would result in the destruction of the patriarchal family and, by extension, the nation.

### **The National Debate**

At its heart, the ERA addressed the matter of women's dependence on men as political, social, and economic actors, an issue unresolved since the American Revolution. When the Founders embraced John Locke's idea of natural rights and representative government, they did not intend these rights to extend to women. Considered central to the functioning of the republic was a citizenry of equals, and equality could be assured only by financial independence. White American men, as the heads of households, were at least nominally independent. Women, however, were legally bound by the custom of coverture which placed their entire personhood under the control of their husbands. They were inherently unequal and dependent. After it became clear that the gains of the Revolution would not apply to them, generations of women thinkers wrestled with the incompatibilities of coverture and liberty in America. Northern conservatives resolved the logical conundrum by pointing to women's presumed superiority in the realms of morality, piety, domesticity, and patriotic motherhood. Out of this framework

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<sup>2</sup> Jo Freeman, accessed 16 April 2008; available from <http://www.jofreeman.com/photos/IWY12.html>; Internet.

came the ideology of separate spheres, which divided the sexes into different, complementary entities.<sup>3</sup> This view of women as naturally suited only for the care of the home and the moral instruction of children defined the conservative position until the end of the twentieth century.

For conservatives, societal strength was predicated on complementary gender roles. Men were naturally suited for work outside the home; the family's financial support depended solely on the father's labor. Women were naturally unsuited for paid labor, either physical or intellectual, and reached their full potential as the family's moral center only when they confined their energies to homemaking and childrearing. The disruption of either of these roles would result in the degradation of both sexes and imperil the family's survival. Women incited by radicals to leave their proper place in the home would neglect their husbands and children, causing men to become irresponsible and children to run wild. Men failing to provide enough income to support their wives and children could also destroy their families, but conservatives often blamed male failure on women's moral failure: the "true woman" inspired male breadwinning. Women's economic and political dependency, therefore, was the linchpin in family stability, and family stability was in turn linked to national vitality.<sup>4</sup>

The power of the ERA was that it imagined women solely as individuals, without regard to their relational roles. If the ERA could really eliminate all forms of sexual discrimination (and many believed that it could not), its passage would mean that women could finally achieve full independence outside of marriage, thus offering them both a choice and a safety net.

Conservatives feared that too many women would reject marriage and children, even those who

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<sup>3</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1980); Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966).

were already married with children, and the family would disintegrate along with the nation. The fundamental question contemplated by feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the 1890s remained: were women to be considered independent actors, with all of the same privileges and immunities that citizenship accorded men, or were they to be viewed primarily through their relational roles as wives and mothers?<sup>5</sup> The question was as vexing to Kansas Women's Weekend attendees as it was to nineteenth-century suffragists and, with the failure of the ERA, it remains unanswered.

### **The Problem of Kansas**

Kansas is an interesting case because scholars generally consider it to have had an unusually progressive history in terms of women's rights, which were granted early and liberally. On the surface, this seems to be the case. A short list of women's accomplishments in the state looks impressive: in the 1850s, "popular sovereignty" encouraged abolitionist New Englanders to colonize the state to keep it from being a slave counterweight to the free Nebraska Territory. In 1861, the state's constitutional convention was attended by women's rights activists Clarina I. H. Nichols, who encouraged delegates to include women in the constitution with provision for equal educational opportunities, the right to vote in school district elections, equal standing on child custody matters, and equality in holding real and personal property. In 1867, Kansas held the nation's first, albeit unsuccessful, referendum on women's suffrage. In 1880, Kansans added the prohibition of alcohol, an issue largely supported by women, to the state constitution. In 1887, Kansans voted to grant women municipal suffrage, allowing them to run for city offices.

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Solitude of Self," (1892), accessed 1 December 2007; available from <http://www.lclark.edu/~ria/stanton.solitude.html>; Internet.

In April 1887, Susannah Medora Salter of Argonia became the nation's first woman mayor. In 1894, Populists, an agrarian-rights party, elevated women's suffrage as a key issue and Kansas again voted on the issue. In 1912, Kansans finally passed state-wide woman suffrage, anticipating the federal amendment guaranteeing it for all American women by eight years. In 1972, Kansas became the seventh state to ratify the federal Equal Rights Amendment, prohibiting discrimination against women.

The list is misleading however—Kansas history usually favored socially conservative or moderate views emphasizing women in traditional roles as a man's helpmeet. Kansas women's work in abolition, suffrage, and temperance was almost always couched in moral terms that were easy for traditionalists to accept. According to the ideology of separate spheres, maternal instinct and a heightened sense of moral duty were traits that women were supposed to have in abundance, so turning these emotions on social problems outside the home was not too much of an intellectual reach for even extreme conservatives. The issue of woman suffrage met with the most success in Kansas when activists sold it as necessary to preserving the moral nature of the home against corruption and vice. Kansans were especially hostile to women activists seen as strident or aggressive, preferring women to maintain propriety while meekly asking men for increased participation as a reasonable expansion of their natural place as a homemaker and mother.<sup>6</sup>

The Equal Rights Amendment was an exception because supporters hoped that it would encourage women, free from sexual discrimination, to leave the home and find fulfilling careers outside of their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Kansas women's rights activists thought

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<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Edwards, "Marsh Murdock and the 'Wily Women' of Wichita: Domesticity Disputed in the Gilded Age," *Kansas History* 25, No. 1 (Spring 2002); Wilda M. Smith, "A Half Century of Struggle," *Kansas History* 4, No. 2 (Summer 1981).

that, given the state's seemingly progressive history regarding women, the ERA would be heartily embraced by the liberal, forward-thinking constituents of the state. They were correct—the Kansas legislature ratified the ERA immediately and never seriously considered rescission of that ratification for the remainder of the ERA's lifespan. But again, this history masks the roiling debate that many Kansans carried on throughout the 1970s. Four separate bills attempted to rescind the ERA, two attempts were made to submit it to a referendum, and one bill attempted to declare Kansas's ratification null and void at the expiration of the ERA's original seven-year deadline in 1979. None of the bills made it out of committee due to the exertions of a few politicians who were either committed to the ERA's passage or were concerned with other legislation and did not want to waste time debating moves of dubious legality. At each juncture, torrents of mail flowed into key politicians' offices, including state and U.S. senators, representatives, and two Kansas governors, protesting the ERA as immoral, unbiblical, subversive, and disruptive to American values.

Not all Kansans were conservative or traditional; in fact, state archives contain more pro-ERA mail than anti-ERA mail. The tone, however, is entirely different. While pro-ERA missives tended to be short postcards or telegrams urging support, anti-ERA letters were generally handwritten pleas begging legislators to stop a potential catastrophe. Although the letters still in existence cannot be examined as a random sample, it can be gathered from the surviving examples that anti-ERA activists in Kansas were a vocal and large minority, that they placed huge pressure on legislators to rescind the ERA, and that they truly believed that the ERA would result in devastating and irreversible social damage. They were aided in these beliefs by the nation's leading anti-ERA activist, Phyllis Schlafly, who produced volumes of material spelling out the real and imagined effects of the ERA, all of which were cause for alarm.

Schlafly's Catholicism was a turn-off to many of her potential allies from evangelical Christian churches, so she wisely enlisted the help of Texan and Church of Christ member Lottie Beth Hobbs, leader of Women Who Want to be Women, later called the Pro-Family Forum.<sup>7</sup> Hobbs sat on the board of Schlafly's Eagle Forum and was her primary lieutenant in winning over conservative Protestant women. In Kansas, Barbara Hanna of Eudora founded Kansas Citizens Against the ERA, citing Hobbs as one of her main sources. She was not aware that Hobbs was affiliated with Schlafly, a testament to Schlafly's keen organizing acumen.

Although anti-ERA women in Kansas lost the battle to rescind the amendment in the state, they, along with their fellow activists in other states, succeeded in publicizing their objections to the point that state ratifications slowed to a trickle, stopped, and then reversed. Kansas conservatives won the war against the ERA and, in the process, energized a powerful base of conservatives who have become a major interest group within the state's dominant Republican Party.

## Overview

This work will necessarily move between the national scene and the particulars of the women's rights movement in Kansas. Kansas was not an isolated case; its convulsions over women's rights in general and the ERA in particular reflected much of the same animus found in the national debates. To fully understand why Kansas had such a vocal and energized conservative faction opposing the ERA, this work will trace the roots of conservative thought regarding women from the founding of the nation through the 1970s. Far from mere

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<sup>7</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* 6, No. 4 (Nov 1972); Lottie Beth Hobbs, Women Who Want to be Women organization newsletter ("pink sheets").

background, the struggles over the nature of women vis-à-vis the state, woman suffrage, federal intervention in the “private” realm, and the Red Scares of the 1920s and 1950s reflect a remarkably consistent conservative outlook that views the traditional role of women in the home as both central to and essential for the proper functioning of the republic. For centuries, conservative women have viewed themselves as the last line of defense against creeping radicalism which, they claim, threatened to undermine the Christian foundations of American culture. The Kansas anti-ERA women who turned their backs to the podium at the National Women’s Conference in 1977 were not the stooges of misogynist men nor were they brainwashed housewives. They were the representatives of a long line of conservatives that consistently opposed any policy or social movement that they believed threatened to break up the traditional, patriarchal household as the central building block of the nation.

To unlock the complex arguments of American conservatives, Chapter 1 begins with an explanation of the English common law custom of coverture which arrived with the first English colonists in America. A wife’s abject dependence on her husband, as prescribed by coverture, served as a starting point for generations of American women’s rights advocates who found the custom to be incompatible with the rhetoric of liberty inspired by the Revolution. Many early feminists equated the problem with slavery, leading to an early fusion between abolitionists and woman suffrage proponents. Social conservatives countered with the ideology of separate spheres, which drew from both conservative Christian teachings that placed a woman in submission to her husband and the demographic trends of the Second Great Awakening which resulted in the conversion of far more women than men.<sup>8</sup> The resulting view recognized women as the seemingly more pious sex and elevated them as the moral guardians of the home.

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelicalism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

Conservative women could easily reject the public political and economic goals of the early suffragists because they found far more value in the private moral instruction of their families. In Kansas, women proved to be a significant political force beginning with Clarina Nichols's activism at the state's constitutional convention. Although women failed to win state suffrage in 1859 or in 1867, a powerful women's temperance presence succeeded in pushing through prohibition and municipal suffrage as home-protection measures.

Chapter 2 covers the fusion between radicals, moderates, and some conservatives in the final push for woman suffrage beginning in the 1890s. It begins with a discussion of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's "The Solitude of Self," which remains the credo of individualistic feminism. The publication of this speech reflected the radical edge of the suffrage debate which was too much for most women to accept. Suffragists scored a major coup when the head of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Frances Willard, agreed to throw the weight of her formidable but conservative organization behind the goal of votes for women. Willard's skillful oratory blurred the line between feminism and conservatism, developing a brilliant argument that described suffrage not as a *right* but a *duty* of moral womanhood.<sup>9</sup> Using this reasoning, suffrage could be embraced by conservative women who wished to remain the center of their homes but were also compelled to vote against public vices that could threaten their private spheres. The most conservative women, most of whom were highly privileged, continued to object to suffrage as threatening the status quo.<sup>10</sup> Their arguments were nearly drowned out by the masses of women clamoring for suffrage, especially after World War I, but their activism succeeded in forming a devoted base of conservative opponents to social change and provided the rhetoric used in later

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<sup>9</sup> Richard W. Leeman, ed., *"Do Everything" Reform: The Oratory of Frances Willard* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> *Woman's Protest* and *Woman Patriot*, publications of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS).

conservative agitation. Kansas women had an opportunity for state suffrage in 1894 with the rise of the agrarian radical Populist Party, but hard times and aggressive lobbying by national suffrage figures doomed the measure among conservative Kansas men. Learning hard lessons from this campaign and taking a cue from Willard, suffragists toned down their individualist rhetoric and emphasized the necessity of mothers' votes, banned national figures considered too radical from lobbying in the state, and led a far more effective grassroots campaign resulting in the granting of woman suffrage in the state in 1912.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars often assume that after woman suffrage passed in 1920, women generally abandoned public activity and retreated to their homes. Chapter 3 disproves that misconception, addressing right-wing women's antiradical activism from 1920 into the early 1960s. Once the Nineteenth Amendment passed granting women the vote, the coalition supporting the amendment immediately dissolved. Radical woman activists continued to press for increased access to public life for women, including the introduction to Congress of the first Equal Rights Amendment. Moderates rejected the ERA, believing that women needed special protections instead of equality, and turned to peace activism and Progressivism as vehicles by which to improve the everyday lives of American women and their children. Conservative women found little common cause with their former suffrage allies in any of these causes. For them, the ERA threatened to remove support for dependent women and erase divinely ordained gender differences. Peace activism eroded the nation's strength by placing defense in the hands of international committees. Progressive reforms reflected excessive governmental paternalism, attempting to replace both the wisdom of the father and the moral guardianship of the mother in the home by appointing federal agents to oversee pregnancy, motherhood, child labor, and

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<sup>11</sup> Smith.

education.<sup>12</sup> Adding to conservative women's unease was the menace of Communism, which they believed imperiled the family by abolishing private property, which in turn destroyed personal responsibility. As the Progressive era turned into the New Deal era, conservative angst reached a fever pitch as many suspected President Franklin D. Roosevelt's policies of harboring socialist and Communist elements. As the extreme right embraced demagogues such as Gerald Winrod of Kansas, Gerald L. K. Smith, Father Charles Coughlin, and Senator Joseph McCarthy in the following decades, more respectable groups of conservative women worked for many of the same goals through Republican women's clubs and aroused a considerable base of conservative support.<sup>13</sup> During this period, Kansas' strong ultraconservative base generated many of the arguments that were used in the later fight against the ERA.

Chapter 4 addresses the momentous social changes of the 1960s on the national stage. Supreme Court rulings mandated racial desegregation, lessened the influence of rural areas in Congressional apportionment, removed prayer from public schools, legalized birth control for both married and unmarried couples, forced busing to integrate schools, and legalized abortion. Cultural trends favored individual empowerment through the civil rights and women's movements. Conservatives blamed the influence of radicals for these social trends and strenuously objected to what they saw as the loss of local and familial control in favor of unwanted federal paternalism. Unable to neutralize decisions from the Court, conservatives drew a line in the sand over women's liberation and the reenergized Equal Rights Amendment. Leaders in the women's liberation movement were smeared as man- and child-hating lesbians

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<sup>12</sup> Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

who selfishly insisted on women's equality to satisfy their own misplaced ambitions which, if unchecked, would destroy the traditional family and the basis for American strength.

Chapter 5 examines the ERA fight in Kansas with an emphasis on the conservative opponents' arguments. The perceived hazards of the ERA motivated conservative women to mobilize in unprecedented numbers. Primarily known for her virulent anti-Communist writings and activism within women's auxiliaries of the Republican Party, Phyllis Schlafly galvanized a nationwide grassroots protest against the ERA. Conservatives within Kansas undertook a furious letter-writing campaign to their elected officials both begging and demanding that the ERA be stopped in some way. The Kansas Women's Weekend provided the most public forum for conservative backlash, turning what should have been a rubber stamp of feminist National Women's Conference goals into near-pandemonium. Kansas politicians in a position to affect the ERA were generally in favor of the amendment, hampering the conservatives' efforts, but the far right's extreme antipathy for the ERA and women's liberation remained a potent force in the state for years after the expiration of the ERA deadline.

Based on this analysis, the women who mobilized against their own equality in the 1970s can be dismissed neither as crackpots nor as anomalies. Using Kansas as a case study, it is clear that the conservative arguments used by anti-ERA activists have long roots that extend back to the earliest years of the nation. American social conservatives have always feared radicalism as the opposite of liberty, which they define as the exercise of power at the lowest possible level. Where modern liberals differ from social conservatives is over their definition of the lowest possible level: the former believes that the individual is paramount; the latter considers the patriarchal family to be an indissoluble unit. Using this logic, if families are the building block of the nation, then the strength of families is directly proportional to the strength of the nation.

Conversely, weakened families translate to an enervated nation ripe for takeover by radical elements. Conservatives, therefore, regard with suspicion all policies or trends that might incite discord within the family unit, erode the father's power, or tamper with the mother's inculcation of moral virtue. Historically, these threats have included socialism, Communism, government welfare, restrictions on child labor, and especially women's liberation as centrifugal forces tending to break apart families. Ironically, this strand of antifeminism has rarely provided a forum for open misogynists. Indeed, the most vocal and well-organized antifeminist campaigns in history have been largely the work of women themselves. This seemingly illogical fact—that women would work against the attainment of their own rights—is comprehensible only if their antifeminism is seen as part of a broader current of conservative thought which has remained remarkably consistent throughout American history.

### **Other Works in the Field**

The ERA in Kansas has not been studied as a separate topic, although some authors have touched on the state as part of a larger ERA study. Conservatism in the women's movement is also a somewhat neglected field, and few works take a comprehensive approach to the entirety of women's history in America. Of those consulted, some stand out as particularly helpful.

Women in the Revolutionary era are treated by Linda K. Kerber in *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, in which she explains the proscribed role of women in the new Republic and how they learned to accept and flourish in the role of "Republican mothers."<sup>14</sup> Nancy F. Cott's *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in*

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<sup>14</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1980).

*New England, 1780-1835* argues that even as antebellum women were barred from full political or economic participation, their limitation to a separate sphere provided the ideology and fellowship necessary for the later growth of a women's movement.<sup>15</sup>

After the Revolution, women hoped to assume more rights and privileges than accorded under the English common law custom of coverture, but their hopes soon faded. Rosemarie Zagari's article "The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America" explains that women were not included in the Jeffersonian definition of universal white manhood citizenship but rather fell into a different category.<sup>16</sup> This category, described by the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, emphasized privileges flowing from duties performed, not rights granted by nature. A woman's maternal and household functions were soon recast not as duties or obligations but as natural impulses guided by a moral purpose. Ruth H. Bloch's "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America" discusses changes in the definition of "virtue," from a manly characteristic defined by independence and patriotism to a feminine one marked by purity, morality, and motherhood.<sup>17</sup> Feminine virtue became so sanctified that Barbara Welter refers to its adherents as a cult, in her "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860." Welter argues that the early nineteenth century's perfect woman was defined as sexually pure, religiously pious, contentedly domestic, and willingly submissive to patriarchy.<sup>18</sup> Those women who failed to measure up to the ridiculously high standards risked social ruin.

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<sup>15</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Rosemarie Zagari, "The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (Apr 1998), 203-230.

<sup>17</sup> Ruth Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1987), 37-58.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), 151-174.

Throughout the nineteenth century, religion and women were intertwined. Barbara L. Epstein's *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* examines this connection as well as women's role in the First and Second Great Awakenings as the necessary religious node of a household.<sup>19</sup> Due to the perception that women possessed an enhanced spirituality, women were expected to convert their skeptical husbands and were even permitted to disobey a patriarchal master who forbade religious involvement by invoking God or Jesus as a higher male authority. This defiance provided the needed emotional and moral justification to combat evils outside the home and spurred women's involvement in temperance and abolitionism. The section on Women's Christian Temperance Union leader Frances Willard explains how Willard was able to use this model to encourage conservative church women to move beyond temperance to various home-related causes, including settlement houses, pure food and water activism, and suffrage, and to see them as necessary and right outlets for women's unique moral and maternal talents. Willard's talent for convincing conservative women that voting was needed in order to "mother" the outside world was a strategic victory that cannot be underestimated in the history of woman suffrage and was arguably more important in achieving suffrage than all of the speeches of more well-known suffragists.

In the early twentieth century, extreme religious conservatism again swept the nation in the form of Fundamentalism, detailed in George M. Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1920*.<sup>20</sup> This movement united disparate groups of religious conservatives and despite their near-extinction after the

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<sup>19</sup> Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

<sup>20</sup> George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Scopes “monkey trial” of 1925, established important religious and political structures that would be used by the similarly-minded fifty years later.

One of the most important books mentioned in this study is Kim E. Nielsen’s *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare*.<sup>21</sup> This pathfinding work definitively establishes the connection between antifeminism and antiradicalism. Once the Nineteenth Amendment was passed in 1920, antisuffragists had to turn their energies elsewhere. These conservatives strongly opposed Bolshevism and saw the peace movements of the 1920s, supported by many prominent feminists, as radical, Bolshevik plots. Nielsen demonstrates the ideological connections among a perceived weakness in national security, radical subversion, and feminism; her model can be expanded to describe ultraconservative circles of the 1950s. The pattern was reversed with the start of the Cold War: ultraconservative anti-Communist activist Phyllis Schlafly was concerned only with subversion and national defense until 1972, when she was asked to speak about the pending ERA. She immediately framed the amendment as a threat to America’s national security due to its supposed destruction of patriarchy and traditional American values and she became the nation’s leading antifeminist in her struggle to kill the ERA.

Social and cultural attitudes about women are harder to discern than historical events, but generalized trends are described in Sheila M. Rothman’s *Woman’s Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*.<sup>22</sup> The 1950s seemed like a retrenchment of conservative, almost Victorian social values, but Elaine Tyler May’s *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* explains that this period was anomalous within the

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<sup>21</sup> Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare*, (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman’s Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978).

overall trajectory of increasingly liberal American gender relations.<sup>23</sup> Fear of nuclear war and anti-Communism caused traditionalists to attribute more value to the nuclear family and the “containment” of women’s sexuality than may have otherwise been the case, making the freedoms of the 1960s less of a sexual revolution than a correction to an unusually and artificially conservative period.

The rise of far-right conservatism in the 1950s is well documented in several contemporary books written before the resurgence of conservatism in the early 1980s. Two anthologies, *Protest from the Right* edited by Robert A. Rosenstone<sup>24</sup> and *Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History*, edited by Richard O. Curry,<sup>25</sup> present the leading ultraconservative thinkers in excerpts from their speeches and materials. Paul A. Sexson and Stephen B. Miles, Jr. wrote *The Challenge of Conservatism: Its Role in the Coming Head-On Collision* explicating the various groups and ideas driving the conservative movement in the early 1960s, providing a primer of the orthodox version of conservatism at the time.<sup>26</sup> The Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, an organization dedicated to eradicating anti-Semitism, published Arnold Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein’s 1964 *Danger on the Right* as a warning, examining the leading ultraconservative organizations and their theories.<sup>27</sup> The enumeration of the various groups shows where they diverged but more often where they shared resources, leadership, and ideology. It is a virtual “Who’s Who” of 1960s ultraconservatism and was

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<sup>23</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone, ed., *Protest from the Right*, (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1968).

<sup>25</sup> Richard O. Curry and Thomas M. Brown, eds., *Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).

<sup>26</sup> Paul A. Sexson and Stephen B. Miles, Jr., *The Challenge of Conservatism: Its Role in the Coming Head-On Collision*, (New York: Exposition Press, 1964).

<sup>27</sup> Arnold Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein, *Danger on the Right*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1964).

enormously helpful in discerning how each group was interconnected to the others and to their predecessors.

Conservative women's activities from 1920 to 1960 have been largely ignored by historians, but several recent monographs are beginning to fill in the gaps. Catherine E. Rymph's *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* is, like Nielsen's book, invaluable.<sup>28</sup> Rymph's seminal work examines Republican Party women's clubs, which were unattached in any official way to the Party but worked for many of its goals. Women Republicans tended to be more conservative than the men of their party, and the women's clubs tended to distill this conservatism into a form that many in the Republican National Convention found to be disturbingly far to the political right. It was in these clubs that Phyllis Schlafly found her political voice. Glen Jeansonne's *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II* is a polemic about the farthest-right women of the World War II-era.<sup>29</sup> These women, organized into various anti-Communist groups and a so-called mother's movement, virulently protested the policies of Roosevelt's New Deal and even flirted with fascism in their desire to keep Communism out of America. Their views were evident in the writings of many conservative opponents of the ERA, protesting governmental intrusion into the home and the creeping Communism of the Jewish conspiracy. Rebecca E. Klatch adds to the topic in *Women of the New Right*, which examines women of the new Republican coalition that brought Ronald Reagan to power in 1980.<sup>30</sup> She divides them into two groups: the social conservatives and the "laissez-faire" conservatives. The first group is

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<sup>28</sup> Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right, The Mothers' Movement and World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Rebecca E. Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

disturbed by the erosion of the patriarchal family and excessive government paternalism in the form of atheism in schools and federally funded abortions. The second group is concerned with economic paternalism, objecting to government welfare programs and entitlements to those who should be providing for themselves. Both groups hate Communism and socialism and have found strength in their desire for limited government, even if it is for different reasons.

Emerging from this conservative phalanx were Phyllis and J. Fred Schlafly, who had participated in numerous ultraconservative groups. Phyllis Schlafly's rise as an anti-Communist leader and antifeminist was chronicled in the highly sympathetic biography by Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*.<sup>31</sup> He acknowledges her help on the project, and her mark is evident in the inordinate amount of space devoted to her political and national security thoughts with a single chapter devoted to her defining life's work against the ERA. More is available from Phyllis Schlafly's book *Feminist Fantasies*,<sup>32</sup> which is a frustratingly undocumented collection of her writings, many of which were originally published in *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*. Both the original source of her writing and sources of material mentioned in each piece are omitted. The best expression of ultraconservative, evangelical fervor is Jerry Falwell's *Listen, America!* which contains a rich source of unvarnished antifeminism.<sup>33</sup> Falwell's arguments demonstrate his antipathy toward changes in society and in the traditional family, providing emotional arguments that his followers could use in local combat with more liberal thinkers. Ruth Murray Brown's *For A "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* discusses the ERA as a seminal event in the

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<sup>31</sup> Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *Feminist Fantasies*, (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980).

consolidation of the Religious Right and draws connections between important anti-ERA activists including Schlafly and Hobbs.<sup>34</sup>

The history of the ERA itself is expertly presented in Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart's *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation*,<sup>35</sup> Jane J. Mansbridge's *Why We Lost the ERA*,<sup>36</sup> and Mary Frances Berry's *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women's Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution*.<sup>37</sup> Mathews and De Hart focus on the debate in North Carolina, home of conservative U.S. Senator Sam Ervin, Schlafly's main political ally in the ERA's defeat, but also address the national structures and players that shaped the debate. Mansbridge discusses the history of the ERA starting with its submission to Congress in 1923 and details its progress until 1982. Berry looks at the ERA vis-à-vis the failed Child Labor Amendment. She argues that the rules for passing an amendment always favor a vocal minority, who can concentrate on defeating it in only one-quarter of the states while proponents must get three-quarters of the states to ratify. Constitutional issues affecting women throughout American history are exhaustively detailed in Sandra F. VanBurkleo's "*Belonging to the World*": *Women's Rights and American Constitutional Culture*, which also contains an essential discussion of coverture and its implications.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>36</sup> Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

<sup>37</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women's Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986).

<sup>38</sup> Sandra F. VanBurkleo, "*Belonging to the World*:" *Women's Rights and American Constitutional Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Two of the most revealing works were written by disillusioned feminists who saw their dreams of female solidarity fracture and dissolve despite the passion of its members. Ruth Rosen's *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* contains a number of poignant passages about her personal involvement in the women's movement and her frustration over power struggles, the elevation of minor issues, and the loss of a moderate constituency.<sup>39</sup> Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War on American Women* makes a half-hearted attempt to blame the failure of the women's movement on the machinations of scheming men, but often points the finger at younger women who, in her view, betrayed the spirit of the movement in favor of personal advancement and an attempt to "have it all."<sup>40</sup> The anger and disappointment of these baby-boomer feminists is instructive in discerning the weaknesses of the ERA movement and how a well-organized hierarchy like Schlafly's STOP-ERA could exploit these fissures.

Locally, Craig Miner's *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* was invaluable in painting the national picture through the eyes of Kansans.<sup>41</sup> His book was used almost exclusively for reference in the Kansas sections because there are precious few Kansas histories in existence and even fewer that treat social and cultural issues. Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* is more of a polemic than a history, but his examples point out the socially conservative nature of Kansans

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<sup>39</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, (New York: Viking, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1991).

<sup>41</sup> Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000*, (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2002).

and why backlash movements appeal to them.<sup>42</sup> His point is that the modern Republican Party's use of emotional social issues has hijacked constituents who, due to their economic position, would generally vote Democratic. Gay marriage, abortion, prayer in school—according to Frank these are all unsolvable issues but they are trumped up to gain emotional support among people who will then be taken for a ride through reduced government spending on their actual needs. Frank underestimates the average Kansan's ability to discern what may or may not be in his or her economic best interest, but he hits the bull's-eye in his assessment of Kansans' concern for emotional, controversial social issues. The ERA debate in Kansas reveals the perceived distance between the aims of feminists and the mundane details of lived reality. A 1971 Loretta Lynn country song called "One's On the Way" captured that perceived disconnect:

*They say to have her hair done, Liz flies all the way to France,  
And Jackie's seen in a discotheque, doin' a brand new dance.  
And the White House social season, should be glitterin' 'n gay.*

*But here in Topeka, the rain is a fallin',  
The faucet is a drippin' and the kids are a bawlin'.  
One of 'em a-toddlin' and one is a crawlin',  
And one's on the way.*

*I'm glad Raquel Welch just signed a million dollar pact,  
And Debbie's out in Vegas workin' up a brand new act.  
While the TV's showin' Newlyweds, a real fun game to play.*

*But here in Topeka, the screen door's a bangin',  
The coffee's boilin' over and the wash needs a hangin'.  
One wants a cookie and one wants a changin',  
And one's on the way.*

*Now, what was I doin', Jimmy get away from there,  
Darn, there goes the phone.  
Hello honey, what's that you say?*

*You're bringin' a few ole buddies home? You're callin' from a bar?*

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter With Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004).

*Get away from there! No, not you honey, I was talkin' to the baby.  
Wait a minute, honey, the door bell,  
Honey, could you stop at the market and...Hello?  
Hello? Well I'll be.*

*The girls in New York City, they all march for women's lib,  
And Better Homes and Garden shows, the modern way to live.  
And the pill may change the world tomorrow, but meanwhile, today.*

*Here in Topeka, the flies are a buzzin',  
The dog is a barkin' and the floor needs a scrubbin'.  
One needs a spankin' and one needs a huggin',  
Lord, one's on the way.*

*Oh gee, I hope it ain't twins again<sup>43</sup>*

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<sup>43</sup> Loretta Lynn, "One's on the Way," lyrics by Shel Silverstein, recorded in 1971.

## **CHAPTER 2 - Coverture and the Foundations of Women's Activism**

The positions of both the pro- and anti-ERA women were rooted in the historical position of women in America, although each group relied upon a very different interpretation of the past. For pro-ERA feminists, the history of women in America had been an incomplete two hundred year-long struggle to secure for women the same right to one's own person and recognition of full citizenship that had been afforded men by the Revolution. Anti-ERA conservatives viewed this same history as a series of increasingly dangerous steps away from what they saw as natural and divinely ordained gender differences. They valorized an indissoluble American family in which all family members worked together under the leadership of a benevolent patriarch.

For both groups of ERA activists, any examination of women's place in American history necessarily started with coverture, the law and custom which kept women in a perpetual state of civic, legal, financial, and social dependency, first as daughters and then as wives. Coverture, an essential part of English common law, was first imported with English colonists and continued to govern American women's lives until well into the nineteenth century. As American white men condemned and shed the dependency relationships of highly stratified English society after the Revolution, they ignored the pleas of some educated women who wished to be similarly freed from the dependency of coverture. In fact, a series of moves by the new federal and state legislatures confirmed and deepened the reach of coverture over the lives of all women.

Since the Revolution, the obvious disparity between women's and men's constitutional positions has been continually noted, attacked, and in some quarters, defended. The two hundred year-old struggle involving women's rights in America begins with coverture and the

applicability of the Revolution to women. For women's rights activists, the question remains: are women to be considered as beings who are fully separate and independent from their relational roles as daughters, wives, and mothers? In essence, is coverture to be perpetuated, completely overthrown, or partially preserved? The answers to the question of women's proper place have been diverse, but three broad groupings have been characteristic of women's rights activism. Radicals believe women to be independent actors who should be regarded as equals with men in all realms. Moderates think that women have a duty to protest public wrongs, but that this duty should not target the private sphere of marriage or the family. Conservatives believe that the nation's strength is directly tied to the moral force of mothers in the home. For them, endangering or removing the maternal influence in the private household can destroy families and American society. These three positions regarding women remained remarkably intact over the two centuries between the American Revolution and the fight over the ERA, and each group retained arguments that were developed during the early national period. To fully understand the position of the conservatives in the 1970s, it is necessary to uncover the foundations of their ideology and the early sources of their anxiety.

### **Coverture**

At the founding of nation, women's legal, civil, and political position remained untouched by the Revolution: the law and custom of coverture continued to define women's status. This common-law tradition, the culmination of centuries of case law, held that upon marriage women had their legal identities subsumed or "covered" by their husbands. Sir William Blackstone's 1765 *Commentaries on the Laws of England* codified the principle:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and

consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and *cover*, she performs every thing; and is therefore called . . . a *feme-covert* . . . [she] is said to be *covert-baron*, or under the protection and influence of her husband, her *baron*, or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her *coverture*. Upon this principle, of a union of person in husband and wife, depend almost all the legal rights, duties, and disabilities, that either of them acquire by the marriage.<sup>44</sup>

As wives, women related to their husbands according to the same rules governing a subject's relationship to a king. Her dependency and his authority, like that of any other subordinate-superior relationship, were clearly defined, perpetual, and non-negotiable. This custom governing women was not at all unusual at the time; in fact, all of British society was characterized by layers of deference based on status, age, wealth, and gender. For example, women and children received their status from either their husband or father, so high-status women could often expect deference from low-status men.<sup>45</sup> This hierarchical system was captured and analyzed by the British philosopher and Stuart monarchy apologist Sir Robert Filmer in his work *Patriarcha* (published posthumously in 1680). To support the divine right of kings, Filmer concluded that regal power was an extension of a father's absolute right to rule over his household, using God's decree to Eve in Genesis 3:16 that "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee"<sup>46</sup> and the Fifth Commandment's call to "honor thy father"<sup>47</sup> as support.

Conservative Filmerian thought governed the earliest British settlements in America, especially in New England. Puritans attempted to set up a patriarchal, hierarchical society in

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<sup>44</sup> William Blackstone. *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. Vol. 1 (1765), pages 442-445, accessed 11 November 2007; available from [http://womenshistory.about.com/cs/lives19th/a/blackstone\\_law.htm](http://womenshistory.about.com/cs/lives19th/a/blackstone_law.htm); Internet.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> Gen. 3:16 (King James Version).

<sup>47</sup> Ex. 20:12 KJV.

which all women were subject to their husbands and all men were subject to governance of their social superiors. Coverture was an integral part of this system, prohibiting married women from owning property, entering into a contract, sitting on a jury, or controlling wages earned. Because a woman had no identity separate from her husband, he acted as her legal and public representative in all matters. The reach of coverture was so extensive that in many cases, a married woman was not liable for criminal action because it was assumed that she was acting under compulsion of her husband. Single adult women were extremely uncommon at the time and unmarried girls were the wards of their fathers, so the majority of American women remained in a legal position of dependency for the entirety of their lives. Occasionally an orphaned heiress or a wealthy widow with no sons would find herself in sole control of an estate, but the legal barriers to her disposing of property or drawing up legal documents encouraged most women, out of necessity, to find a husband at the earliest opportunity. There were also cases of high-status widows steadfastly refusing to enter into another marriage so as to retain control over property, but the social upending caused by these relatively rare instances ensured that no lasting precedent could be established to protect women's interests.

More often, widows were left with small amounts of property and debt. To keep widows from becoming a drain on the public economy, American colonial societies observed the principle of the "widow's third," in which a widowed woman was given for her use one-third of her husband's estate before any other debts were addressed. After her death, the widow's third would revert to the heir, generally the oldest son. The Puritans' desire for a purely Filmerian society worked for a time when the settlements were small and governed by church authorities. As the settlements grew into cities and church membership waned, more and more colonists were strangers to each other, removing the burden of communal support for the destitute. By the

eighteenth century, as commerce gradually replaced farming as the most profitable economic endeavor in New England, courts were increasingly tempted to waive the widow's third to free up precious capital for investment. Individualism rooted in capitalism displaced Filmerian deference as a preferred system of social organization in the Northern colonies, but only for men.

In the South, Filmerian hierarchy also dictated the organization of early colonial societies but the earliest settlements, due to the dearth of women, dictated that a male landowner, not necessarily a patriarch, would be the nominal head of household. As population ratios evened and the numbers of families grew, the Southern paterfamilias became the political and social head of the household's women, children, servants, and slaves as in other Filmerian societies. Unlike the urbanizing tendencies of New England, the South's rural nature and oligarchy of wealthy planters ensured the survival of a rigid hierarchy. In the relative absence of such communal social structures as cities, churches, or municipal governments, each household became a fief unto itself with the father as the authoritarian head. Rural courts were loath to interfere with the undisputed power of the male head of household unless his behavior was truly outrageous, reinforcing a brotherhood of familial power among all Southern men that some mistook for political egalitarianism. In fact, wealthy planters, generally in charge of legislation and judicial action, consistently upheld the primacy of the father in his own household as a carrot to encourage poorer yeomen farmers to maintain deferential class relationships.

### **Revolutionary Political Theory and Coverture**

At the dawn of the Revolution, the rigidly conservative Filmerian system was on its way out. Monarchy and its apologists no longer held much sway for American colonists fed up with their subordinate position at the periphery of the empire. For many patriots, patriarchal hierarchy

was a perfectly reasonable system to govern the private life of the home, which was composed of a number of dependents, but became authoritarian, stifling, and unfair when applied to the government of independent men. Gaining popularity during the mid-eighteenth century were the works of John Locke, whose *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) specifically refuted the arguments of his contemporary, Filmer. Locke invoked the entire Fifth Commandment to “honor thy father *and thy mother*” as evidence that Filmer’s logical links between biblical decree, patriarchy, and absolutism were flimsy at best. Locke, more expansive in his treatment of women than some of his Enlightenment contemporaries, noted that God’s decree that the woman’s husband rule over her in Genesis 3:16 was not a reward for Adam but part of a larger punishment for the couple due to a sin in which they had both shared. Locke argued that a mother has a right to respect from her children based on her relation to them directly, not due to her position as the father’s wife; that mothers have a direct responsibility for their children; and that women should control their own property. He even argued that the primary function of marriage was to protect children during their prolonged minority, but that once that function had been concluded there was no reason why marriage should not be governed like other dissoluble compacts. Having dispensed with Filmer’s patriarchal arguments using women as a logical wedge, Locke set off on his discourse, first contemplated by Aristotle, that state power must be based on the equality of men and the consent of those men to be governed.<sup>48</sup>

In the colonies, Locke’s feminine counterpoint was quickly lost on founding fathers attracted to Locke’s more compelling anti-monarchical arguments. Abigail Adams’ 1776 entreaty to her husband John Adams that he “Remember the Ladies” when formulating a code of laws

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<sup>48</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1980), 18; Norton, 11.

because “all Men would be tyrants if they could” met with the same fate as Judith Sargent Murray’s 1790 appeal as “Constantia” to equalize educational opportunities for men and women: they were ignored.<sup>49</sup> In the heady days leading up to the Revolution and in its immediate aftermath, very few thinkers seriously considered extending the rights of citizenship to women at a time when Americans had enough trouble trying to figure out which men were to be citizens. Bit by bit across the developing nation an unstated bargain was struck: all white men regardless of property qualifications could be eligible for citizenship, but these men would retain absolute power in their own households by excluding women and slaves from similar consideration. As Ellen Carol DuBois has noted, “The exclusion of women from participation in political life . . . was so absolute and unchallenged that it did not require explicit prescription. It was simply assumed that political ‘persons’ were male.”<sup>50</sup> The persistence of patriarchy in the household did not mean that contemporaries were ignorant of the logical conundrum presented by “deriving political authority solely from the actions of adult men while simultaneously claiming that all people were naturally born free.”<sup>51</sup> To justify the existence of two separate and hostile ideologies, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theorists reformulated the function of women.

Pre-Revolutionary Filmerian thought placed women, like men, in a complex web of social relations based on wealth, status, and demographic markers. The Revolution necessitated the outward dismissal of these gradations for political purposes but maintained them at the private level to govern social relationships inside and outside the household. A case at the end of

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<sup>49</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, Braintree, 31 March 1776, in Alice S. Rossi, ed., *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 10.

<sup>50</sup> Ellen Carol DuBois, *Woman Suffrage and Women’s Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 33.

<sup>51</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 298.

the Revolution demonstrated the extent to which coverture continued to govern a woman's position, even in extreme circumstances. The petitioner was a man seeking the return of his Tory family's abandoned property. His lawyer argued that the land was from his mother's separate estate (an inheritance from her father), and that the mother, now dead, had been a loyal American. She had desired to remain in America to retain her property rights during the Revolution, but her husband was a Tory who desired that she return to London with him. This interesting case put the rights of American women to the test: could a woman commit treason by following the wishes of the husband to whom she was legally bound, or was she supposed to rebel against him and retain her property rights, but break the law that compelled her to live with him if he so desired? The courts chose the more conservative approach by upholding coverture: "She is bound by law to live with him if he required it . . . as freedom of will is the essence of all crimes, a woman cannot commit a crime of this sort, not even this species of treason, by obeying her husband."<sup>52</sup> Men were expected to demonstrate republican virtue by sacrificing everything for their nation, but women were judged incapable of upholding the same standards. Owing allegiance to their husbands, women were, in effect, incapable of treason. Believing that the power of the republic resided in the independence of white men who were the uncontested barons of their households, the founding fathers time and again upheld coverture.

To explain the persistence of these dichotomous public and private systems, post-Revolution political theorists had to come up with new ways to discuss gender inequity in the context of newly won American liberty. Linda Kerber examines a unique strand of patriotism suitable for women which she calls "republican motherhood" that was the prototype of separate spheres ideology in the North. The realities of the early national period altered Americans'

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<sup>52</sup> Kerber, 131.

wartime fixation on the exercise of public service as the apotheosis of manly virtue. Civic self-sacrifice, once linked to the boycott of luxury wares and mobilization for combat, became increasingly difficult to equate with patriotism in a peaceful capitalist economy. More important to the new nation was the training of capable statesmen, marked by temperance, piety, and frugality. These values were not public but private, learned not from political pamphleteers but through churches, educational institutions, and the home. Embedded in the ideology of republican motherhood was the belief that woman's heightened emotionalism made her particularly susceptible to grace and moral instruction. Mothers, as the first instructors of future republican leaders, bore a special and new obligation to inculcate virtues, now defined as feminine and domestic, to balance the untamed spirit of their republican sons. Women, as mothers, must curb the rough manners and animal passions of their male family members, tenderly shaping them into ideal citizens. Furthermore, according to Daniel T. Rodgers, "It was repeatedly claimed, by American and English moralists both, that women's influence over men gave them the power to reform the manners and morals of society," indicating that women's role might in some ways extend out of the home.<sup>53</sup> In fact, during the Revolutionary period, Mercy Warren Otis and John Quincy Adams both approved of women's discussion of political events with men and women outside their domestic circle, as long as it was undertaken for a virtuous purpose.<sup>54</sup> Rodgers notes that republican motherhood was a deeply ambiguous concept, but it served to offer women otherwise excluded from the republican values of the time "a connection with the Founding and with public life."<sup>55</sup> As the Revolution receded in time, women's political

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<sup>53</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (June 1992), 46-47.

<sup>54</sup> Kerber, 84, 112.

<sup>55</sup> Rodgers, 32.

role was rolled back to the confines of her home, allowing the proper discussion of politics to occur only with her husband or in the teaching of her children.

In the South, republican motherhood failed to take hold because the iron-clad authoritarianism of the patriarch was never seriously questioned. Women were segregated by gender as in the North but they could not claim dominion over the home as it was the seat of patriarchal authority. Very little changed in the South from the pre-Revolutionary days until the Civil War and the traditional Filmerian schema continued to hold sway both in private life and just under the surface in public. As men paid lip service to the egalitarian nature of politics, women maintained a caste system of status that governed social relations in and out of the household. The system was held in place by slaveholding women who, according to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “propounded the virtues of an ideology that, in its positive aspects, celebrated the virtues of corporatism, hierarchy, and the proper submission of some members of society to others.”<sup>56</sup> Its negative aspects were rigid castes that divided women into those who deserved deference and those who were expected to give it. The private hierarchies of the Southern household ensured that women defined themselves by class and status over gender, stunting any type of mutual “sisterhood” until well into the twentieth century.

The Filmerian system still popular in the South gave rise to a second attempt to reconcile women’s mandated position under coverture with American liberty. Rosemarie Zagarri explains a strand of thought that avoided placing women into the egalitarian system of Locke, who described natural rights inherent in one’s personhood, by substituting philosophies developed in the Scottish Enlightenment, which maintained Filmerian deference by defining privileges as

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<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 96.

flowing from duties performed. In this context women, like slaves or feudal serfs, depended on the largesse of a master who, in turn, had obligations to his dependents. A woman was duty-bound to bear children, raise and instruct those children, maintain the health and cleanliness of her family, and assist in the management of household affairs. In exchange, she was to be provided with the necessities of life and the loving care of a benevolent husband. These authors still clung to Locke as the chief philosopher of rational governance, but they flatly denied that his theories could be applied to women.

Some advocates of this dual system attempted to resolve the obvious logical problems by conflating woman's duties with rights, citing a woman's "right" to choose a husband, raise her children (along with her husband), preside over domestic affairs, and cultivate civilization.<sup>57</sup> Another contemporary author whom Zagarri quotes seized upon Locke's idea that a marriage contract could be viewed as any other social contract and tried to equate a wife with a citizen. As a social compact of his own devising could voluntarily be undertaken by man, so could marriage to a man of her choosing voluntarily be undertaken by woman. Just as man sacrificed some of his natural rights when assenting to government, woman lost some of her rights when entering into marriage. Man could protest unjust government; woman could argue with her husband. Man might alter the articles of agreement in a constitutional government. Man might also determine that his government has become tyrannical and by his right, dissolve the compact. Women, however, did not have these last two rights, nor did the author try to extend the analogy to include cases of tyrannical marriage: "When entreaty is unavailing, it is her duty to submit to

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<sup>57</sup> Rosemarie Zagarri, "The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, No. 2 (Apr 1998), 221.

the control of that government she has voluntarily chosen,” thus invoking both the voluntary nature of a Lockean government with the submission to authority required of the Filmerian.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the tortured logic of early American coverture apologists, a woman’s rights, unlike the natural rights of a man, were controlled by a superior adjudicator who could add to or reduce them at his will. The law allowed very few remedies for a woman who found herself in an intolerable situation—as a man and his wife became one person under coverture, a protesting wife was legally a man arguing with himself. In the North, the Lockean system overturned “perpetual and absolute” consent to authority in public relationships. In private, however, women hoping for a share of political influence through republican motherhood soon found their influence reduced to pre-Revolutionary levels as the chaotic individualism unleashed by egalitarian politics necessitated the strengthening of authority in the household. In the South, patriarchy persisted unaltered by Revolutionary rhetoric. In both cases, coverture continued to define the status of women as politically invisible.

### **The Ideology of Separate Spheres**

Republican motherhood may have failed to take hold in the North, but the idea of defining the sexes by unique and “natural” traits found many advocates. Viewing women as the moral guardians of the home and naturally gifted with virtue allowed defenders of coverture to valorize the marginal role of women in American society. The growing perception that women and men were wholly different physically and psychologically gave rise to the notion that they should inhabit separate physical places, or “spheres.” The industrialization of the North dictated that middle-class men leave their homes for a separate workplace, which was man’s sphere.

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<sup>58</sup> “For the Weekly Museum,” *Weekly Museum* (New York), 16 March 1793, quoted in Zagari, 217.

Women, once full participants in the household economy, continued their domestic and child-rearing responsibilities in their sphere of the home but were now eliminated from the generation of household income. According to separate spheres ideology, women still maintained a subordinate role in the home but they could feel secure knowing that they were performing a most important function as the moral ballast of society. Adding to the separation of the sexes was the disproportionate appeal of evangelical Christianity to women, which deepened the conviction of many that women were naturally more moral, pious, chaste, emotional, and susceptible to God's grace than rugged, rational men. Separate spheres ideology has remained a remarkably persistent theme in conservative circles; much of the anti-ERA literature of the 1970s referred to woman's special role in the home and her calming moral influence as a counterweight to feminist claims.

Waves of revival activity sweeping the nation in the early nineteenth century widened a growing gender divide. Historian Barbara Leslie Epstein notes that the trend began with the first Great Awakening of 1740-1744, where women learned to act against the authority of the male head as defined by coverture. Under the law, a husband could prevent his wife from seeking conversion by withholding his permission, but many fervid women believers denied their husbands' prerogative by invoking the power of God the Father as the ultimate male authority.<sup>59</sup> The Second Great Awakening of 1797-1840 intensified this effect because many men rejected the excesses of spiritual conversion in favor of the rationalism of the Industrial Revolution, leading to a large gender imbalance among the converted. The feminization of church membership in the North eroded the power of men in this important social center and although

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<sup>59</sup> Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 31.

women were still barred from official roles, they began to exert influence. Numerous women's auxiliary and benevolent societies working in the local community sprang from Northern churches, leading to the growth of an independent women's consciousness apart from that of the family and household. Southern churches experienced similar disproportionate conversions among women, but the large female church membership failed to wrest any control away from the far more entrenched male leadership. One Southern planter noted that evangelical activity had transformed his town into "a great family," hammering home the idea that conversion might be egalitarian, but authority was still patriarchal.<sup>60</sup> Lacking the North's large numbers of proximally located middle-class women, the South failed to develop any distinct women's consciousness in spite of their common evangelical church base.

The ideology of separate spheres is best described by Barbara Welter, who examined numerous women's magazines, literary journals, and religious tracts of the early nineteenth century to reveal the near-sanctification of four traits considered essential to woman's nature and necessary for the proper functioning of society. The chief of these virtues was piety, from which the three other attributes flowed. Piety was necessary not just for the woman's personal spiritual health but to provide an engine by which she would uplift those around her: "the vestal flame of piety, lightened up by Heaven in the breast of woman' would throw its beams into the naughty world of men. So far would the candle power reach that the 'Universe might be Enlightened, Improved, and Harmonized by WOMAN!!' She would be another Eve, working in cooperation with the Redeemer, bring the world back 'from its revolt and sin.'"<sup>61</sup> Antebellum men were

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<sup>60</sup> Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 158.

<sup>61</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), 152.

supposedly untamed and closer to nature, more wild and rebellious than women. Woman, then, as the moral center of the family, had an obligation to improve her otherwise uncultivated family through her modest example and quiet instruction. As women overwhelmed men as church members, piety became almost completely feminized as a virtue.

Purity was the measure of a woman's worth. Maidens duped into illicit affairs with city slickers were often driven to madness or suicide, or at least that is what the ladies' magazines claimed. Woman's purity in marriage could never be called into question, for rumors to the contrary could be death for her reputation. Purity also extended beyond the bedroom to cover any type of subversive or unusual behavior unfitting for woman's proper place. Welter relates the following anecdote from a contemporary source involving a fictitious female student musing with her male teacher over the comfortable but scandalous trousers outfit popularized by feminist

Amelia Bloomer:

The girl expresses admiration for the bloomer costume—it gives freedom of motion, is healthful, and attractive. The "Professor" sets her straight. Trousers, he explains, are "only one of the many manifestations of that wild spirit of socialism and agrarian radicalism which is at present so rife in our land." The young lady recants immediately: "If this dress has any connexion with Fourierism or Socialism, or fanaticism in any shape whatever, I have no disposition to wear it at all . . . no woman would so far compromise her delicacy as to espouse, however unwittingly, such a cause."<sup>62</sup>

Already in the antebellum era women's desire to emerge out of coverture came to be associated with radicalism, socialism, and revolutionary social upheaval. Women, socially venerated as guardians of the home and therefore key members of the republic's family ethos, could not afford to give even the impression of impropriety.

Submissiveness was, as Welter notes, the most feminine of a woman's virtues. It was believed that submissiveness, being the legal state of a woman under coverture, was natural to

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 157.

her sex. The woman who rightly embraced her submissive position would not only be more comfortable living a private, dependent life but could also fulfill her role as a Christian to depend completely on her husband as her lord and master. Welter found numerous sources pressing submission as the path to feminine happiness due to the inherent nature of weak and ignorant womanhood: “She feels herself weak and timid. She needs a protector.” “A really sensible woman feels her dependence. She does what she can, but she is conscious of her inferiority, and therefore grateful for support.” “True feminine genius is ever timid, doubtful, and clingingly dependent; a perpetual childhood.” Submission was therefore a sort of game women played with men. Deprived of real power, women turned to childlike behaviors, meekness, apparent timidity, and an exaggeration of physical weakness (often brought on by the torturous fashions of the day) to cajole and manipulate men into providing things they needed or desired. Women unable to directly challenge their husbands used submission as a sort of passive resistance in a highly repressive society that allowed them few other choices.

Domesticity was tied to piety—the home is where the woman provided moral instruction, nursing, sustenance, and physical care to her husband and children. A happy and comfortable home was deemed essential for the regeneration of men entrusted with the public welfare of the republic, and the wife’s job was to provide it. As he went out into the harsh, brutal world, he performed mental combat to earn a living for his family. He returned in the evening dissipated and spent, in need of the comfort and satisfaction that could be provided only by his wife. Her moral presence, her timid charm, her maternal warmth, combined with a sparkling home and a hearty meal could restore him to the strength needed for another day in the public realm. The ideology of separate spheres obscured the disadvantaged role in which women were placed under coverture but also bestowed upon them the important role of their family’s moral guardian. By

attaching cultural significance to womanhood, it was a short leap for some to believe that women had either permission or a mandate to attack vice wherever it existed. Separate spheres ideology and the cult of “true womanhood” defined the conservative position of Northern intellectuals in the first decades of the nineteenth century. These ideas were supplemented only by the addition of antiradicalism in the 1920s as the basis for conservative antifeminism in the late twentieth century.

### **Abolition, Temperance, and the Question of Women’s Public Activism**

Whereas Enlightenment-era American women had protested their lack of political power through writing, often in private or pseudonymous pieces, abolition provided a cause of such important dimensions that some women became convinced that public activism was necessary to combat slavery. Many of these women, eager to protest public evils but unwilling to tinker with their subordinate role in the home, defined a moderate position. Abolition was the chief moral issue of the early nineteenth century and rose to national urgency with the publication of William Lloyd Garrison’s radical abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* starting in 1831. Although Garrison’s rhetoric appealed to many bright, active Northern women who felt compelled to do something to prevent the loathsome moral evil of slavery, women’s subordinate position under coverture and custom prevented direct action. Two sisters, Sarah and Angelina Grimké, defied convention to begin a very public abolition crusade, encouraging both Northern and Southern women to join them. Sarah Grimké, daughter of a Charleston slave owner, witnessed a slave whipping as a child which deeply disturbed her. She secretly and illegally taught her personal slave to read and taught Bible classes to the slaves as a teen. She eventually moved to Philadelphia and converted to the more woman-friendly Quaker church along with her younger

sister, Angelina. The two women wrote prolifically on the evils of slavery and spoke publicly on the issue, provoking protest from conservative men and women who believed that women should not be allowed a public role in American society.

Withering social criticism of the Grimké's public activism gained a national audience after the publication of Angelina Grimké's *An Appeal to Christian Women of the South* (1836), which encouraged morally upstanding women to protest slavery not just through private dialogue with their husbands but by active, public resistance. Grimké argued that women's Christian duty compelled them to action by imagining a dialogue with Southern women:

But perhaps you will be ready to query, why appeal to *women* on this subject? *We* do not make the laws which perpetuate slavery. *No* legislative power is vested in *us*; *we* can do nothing to overthrow the system, even if we wished to do so. To this I reply, I know you do not make the laws, but I also know that *you are the wives and mothers, the sisters and daughters of those who do*; and if you really suppose *you* can do nothing to overthrow slavery, you are greatly mistaken. You can do much in every way: four things I will name. 1st. You can read on this subject. 2d. You can pray over this subject. 3d. You can speak on this subject. 4th. You can *act* on this subject.<sup>63</sup>

Grimké appealed to women in their relational roles as abolition activists (mother, sister) but also called on them to act as individuals, a highly subversive idea at the time. She justified her call by citing the scores of women in the Bible who took courageous stands and submitted to martyrdom in defense of a greater good. Like the evangelicals of the Great Awakenings, Grimké challenged women to appeal to a higher male authority in God to justify their actions and protest evil laws created by men: "The doctrine of blind obedience and unqualified submission to *any human* power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, is the doctrine of despotism, and ought to have no place among Republicans and Christians."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Angelina Grimké, "Appeal to the Christian Women of the South," *The Public Years of Sarah and Angelina Grimké: Selected Writings 1835-1839*, ed. Larry Ceplair (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 54-55.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

The Grimké's letter to "Southern" women was most likely a rhetorical device, for the sisters knew full well that abolitionist literature was banned in the South and censored in the mail. Hoping to find many allies among sympathetic Northerners however, the sisters instead met with fierce opposition from conservatives. A number of Massachusetts Congregationalist ministers responded to *An Appeal* with an 1837 pastoral letter rejecting the Grimké's rationale for defying the social and political restraints of coverture. These traditionalists believed that the social prohibitions against women's public activism outweighed any benefit to the cause of abolition, thereby placing social order above moral righteousness. Women, they asserted, needed to confine their outrage to private settings and to gentle appeals to their husbands, for "when she assumes the place and tone of a man as a public reformer, our care and protection of her seem unnecessary; we put ourselves in self-defence of her; she yields the power which God has given her for protection, and her character becomes unnatural."<sup>65</sup> Not surprisingly, the male power establishment profoundly objected to the encroachment of women into the exclusively male public sphere.

More surprising was the objection of other women to the Grimké's call for action. One critic was Catharine Beecher, a New England educator who felt the sisters' activism violated Christian principles which obligated them to stay in the private domestic sphere. Her argument against *An Appeal*, published as "An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism," also invoked Christian principles, but cited domesticity and submissiveness as the only proper roles for women. She thought that women's greatest power was the quiet exercise of moral example which, when employed with piety and meekness, could not help but influence the true power brokers: "the

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<sup>65</sup> "Pastoral Letter: The General Association of Massachusetts to Churches under Their Care," *New England Spectator*, 12 July 1837, in *Women's Rights Emerges within the Antislavery Movement 1830-1870: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Kathryn Kish Sklar (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 120.

fathers, the husbands, and the sons, will find an influence thrown around them, to which they will yield not only willingly but proudly.” Women acting directly threatened to upend social order and to infuriate men who found their rightful sphere encroached upon: “But the moment woman begins to feel the promptings of ambition, or the thirst for power, her aegis of defence is gone. All the sacred protection of religion, all the generous promptings of chivalry, all the poetry of romantic gallantry, depend upon woman’s retaining her place as dependent and defenceless, and making no claims, and maintaining no right but what are the gifts of honour, rectitude and love.”<sup>66</sup> For conservatives like Beecher, women’s active work in the abolition movement undermined their privacy and nullified male protection. By forfeiting their domestic sphere for the soapbox, women removed themselves from the protective husk of the home and exposed themselves to great personal danger. What Beecher left unstated was her concern that publicly active abolitionist women might incite a backlash from men against *all* women, endangering the private privileges upon which dependent wives relied completely. This fear remained a constant in conservative antifeminist rhetoric and was one of the centerpieces of Phyllis Schlafly’s anti-ERA argument in the 1970s. For conservatives, the Grimké sisters’ inflammatory rhetoric threatened the foundations of authority and social order.

Sarah and Angelina Grimké rejected Beecher’s logic, believing that women’s subjugation to man was based upon corrupt translations of the Hebrew Bible. Like Locke, they believed that God’s admonition to Eve following her sin that she would be subject to her husband was more of a prediction of her fate rather than a prescription for her treatment, but they added that the error had been repeated and codified over the years by men desiring to rule over their wives. Angelina

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<sup>66</sup> Catharine Beecher, "Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism," *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere*, ed. Jeanne Boydston et al., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 127.

Grimké responded to Beecher by writing, “Here then I plant myself. God created us equal; – he created us free agents; – he is our Lawgiver, our King, and our Judge, and to him alone is woman bound to be in subjection, and to him alone is she accountable for the use of those talents with which Her Heavenly Father has entrusted her. One is her Master even Christ.”<sup>67</sup> Grimké rejected Beecher’s conservative appeal to the uniqueness of feminine virtue but also rejected radical individual feminism: she took care to submit to patriarchy even though she invoked the Godhead as the ultimate male authority.

The philosophical divide between the Grimkés and Beecher defined the first great split between woman activists in the nineteenth century. Before this time, there was hardly a women’s consciousness to speak of except for the infrequent written protest of unfair political or educational opportunities. By the 1830s however, Beecher and the conservative adherents of “true womanhood” clung to a private, moral role that attempted to change woman’s condition only through the steady and meek application of moral suasion to the men in their households. The Grimkés represented a new, moderate woman activist who believed in the sanctity of the home but also in the religious imperative of moral reform on earth. Their allegiance to God compelled them to act out against intolerable evils, rejecting the quiet, private role of previous generations of women as insufficient to deal with modern tribulations.

Abolition was the most openly political of many social issues that appealed to American women whose moral responsibilities some translated into an obsession with home protection. Vices such as alcoholism that could afflict the harmony of the home met with stern disapproval. Historian Alice Rossi notes, “Alcohol was a threat to women, for it released men from the moral

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<sup>67</sup> Angelina Grimké Weld, *Letters to Catherine E. Beecher, in reply to An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, addressed to A. E. Grimké* (1837) accessed 21 November 2007; available from <http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/whm2000/grimke4.html>; Internet.

control they had learned from a diet of preaching and scolding from ministers and mothers alike.”<sup>68</sup> Added to the moral implications of men’s drunkenness was the danger presented to women’s tenuous position as dependents. If a woman had an alcoholic husband who wanted to drink all of his wages, leaving her nothing with which to buy food, she had to make do. If he wanted to come home and beat her in a drunken rage, she had no legal recourse. If he forced her to work, took her money, and then drank that too, she could only stand by, helplessly, because he had legal possession of any wages she earned. Alcoholism was on the rise in the nineteenth century especially among the working class, a problem attributed by many to the pressures inherent in an increasingly technical industrial society. In response, many middle-class Northern women formed temperance societies to work for the moderation or complete abolition of alcohol consumption both in their homes and in society, hoping to eliminate the poverty and abuse to which women and children were often subject.

Underlying the activism of temperance crusaders was an unspoken anxiety about the fragility of women’s position under separate spheres ideology. Women’s economic position had eroded since colonial times as workplaces left the home, especially in the increasingly industrial North. Women who had once been significant contributors to the household economy with their labor of spinning, weaving, animal husbandry, gardening, and light farming now were wholly dependent on their husbands’ financial support and were physically and socially barred from most income-generating work. Those few occupations that were still considered women’s work, including cooking, laundering, and sewing, were the domain of lower-status women who had few other choices. Prostitution was the last resort of the truly desperate and was often invoked as the ultimate calamity that could befall a woman. The nineteenth century brought a new

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<sup>68</sup> Rossi, 272.

dimension to women's concerns because of their relatively new and utter dependence on their husband as both head of household and sole source of income.

### **First-Wave Feminism**

Temperance, like abolition, provided a creative, moral outlet for some of the nation's brightest woman thinkers. Before the Civil War, Elizabeth Cady Stanton began her career as an activist in the temperance movement, joining the Daughters of Temperance in 1848 and making a mark as a temperance leader in New York. Stanton extended her protest of public evils to the private realm of marriage, defining a third, radical position. Stanton's work pressed for legal solutions for women to protect their families from the harmful effects of their husbands' alcohol abuse, culminating in New York's Married Women's Property Law of 1848. This act stated that women currently married or to be married in the future could retain control over their real and personal property which "shall not be subject to the disposal of her husband, nor be liable for his debts, and shall continue her sole and separate property, as if she were a single female." Gifts were set apart for her personal use, and contracts made before marriage were ruled to remain in full force after marriage.<sup>69</sup> The combined force of this law, in addition to laws made in other states, was the first substantive blow to coverture and the legal basis of women's abject dependency since the formation of the American colonies.

Abolition and temperance societies, led by such intellectual powerhouses as the Grimké sisters and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, provided a forum where activist women could meet each other and exchange ideas. Membership in women-only auxiliary societies or ladies' groups encouraged women to set up their own conventions, one of which resulted in the meeting of

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<sup>69</sup> Married Woman's Property Law, The Law Library of Congress, accessed 21 November 2007; available from [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhtml/awlaw3/property\\_law.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhtml/awlaw3/property_law.html); Internet.

Stanton and Lucretia Mott, a Quaker minister, abolitionist, and early feminist. Mott became Stanton's mentor, and the two women eventually agreed to organize a conference to discuss women's lack of rights under the persistent laws of coverture. Stanton and Mott organized the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, today widely regarded as the beginning of the first wave of feminist sentiment in the United States. The two women devised a women's "Declaration of Sentiments" modeled on the Declaration of Independence, which they felt had unjustly excluded them. Their complaints included the lack of the franchise, lack of voice in crafting laws to which they were subject, denial of rights granted to the most ignorant of men, denial of representation, the many legal and financial injustices of coverture, and the limitation of educational and professional opportunity. Of the nearly three hundred sympathizers at Seneca Falls, many felt that the Declaration was too strident and too revolutionary, threatening to infuriate men and upset the social status quo. Particularly troublesome to them was the inclusion of suffrage among the women's demands, which seemingly rejected a man's authority over his household by granting his wife equal (and potentially nullifying) political power. Ultimately, only one hundred of the attendees signed the Declaration, attesting to a new division among radical and moderate activists. Very little came of the Seneca Falls convention in terms of real gain, but the Declaration of Sentiments remained an individualist manifesto around which feminists could rally well into the twentieth century.

One of the women who refused to sign the Declaration was moderate Amelia Bloomer, made famous by her invention of a loose trousers outfit for women. Bloomer desired women's rights but wanted to work within existing frameworks so as to not infuriate men by moving outside the domestic circle. Bloomer's more conservative views on women's place marked an important distinction among women's rights leaders, which eventually included minister

Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Lucy Stone. These women formed a moderate wing of women's rights activists who rejected some of the more abusive tenets of coverture but chose to move in more limited circles according to the tenets of Christian morality. In contrast, the radical wing, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, used the natural rights ideology of Locke and the Revolution to argue that women, as humans, were deserving of the same rights as men. The most important way the two activist factions diverged was over the issue of the home. Stanton believed that coverture-based marriages were inherently inequitable. She argued for marriage as a contract that could be dissolved like any other, regardless of the effect on society. Divorce could only be possible as a real option to abused women if they had means of support available to them outside of their husband's income, which served as the basis for Stanton's belief in securing rights for women as individuals, not as wives or mothers. This seemingly permissive view horrified moderate leaders, several of whom were ordained women ministers and committed to the idea of women's rights for the morally uplifting effect their activism would have on society. Moderates believed that marriage, once undertaken, was sacred and indissoluble. Divorce was morally untenable and socially impossible to the moderates because they wanted to strengthen the moral role of the family in society, not to destroy it.

In 1851, Bloomer introduced her friend Susan B. Anthony to Stanton, a meeting that would have historic significance. Anthony, who had also begun her early career as a temperance and abolition activist, immediately recognized her intellectual camaraderie with Stanton, and the two women began a long and productive friendship based on the radical idea of women's individual equality. As Stanton and Anthony struggled with Brown Blackwell and Stone over whether radical or moderate ideas were to be pursued most aggressively, the movement began to attract attention from fringe groups. One such group was the "free-lovers." Like some feminists,

free-love advocates criticized marriage, but their objection was based not on a woman's legal death upon marriage but on monogamy's restriction of people's natural attraction to more than one person. These countercultural sympathizers created unfavorable press for the women's movement and permanently associated reform with radical social restructuring and sexual liberty. Reformer Robert Owen predated Karl Marx's work by several decades when he railed against the "trinity of evils" affecting Americans: private property, organized religion, and marriage. John Humphrey Noyes preached that no man had the exclusive right to one woman and founded his utopian Oneida Community in 1848 by implementing a "complex marriage" in which all members were married to all of the others. Charles Fourier, credited with coining the term "feminism" in 1837, drove off would-be supporters of his brand of women's rights by rejecting Christian marriage as perverse and advocating equal sexual license for men and for women. Most damaging was Stanton's association with Victoria Woodhull, a free-love enthusiast, spiritualist, and suffragist. Woodhull was a sharp orator and spoke before Congress's Judiciary Committee in 1871 to assert that the Fourteenth Amendment had granted women equal rights, but her gains for the movement were erased by her private eccentricities. Several months after her appearance before Congress, she gave a notorious speech at Steinway Hall in New York, in which she admitted,

Yes, I am a Free Lover. I have an inalienable, constitutional and natural right to love whom I may, to love as long or as short a period as I can; to change that love every day if I please, and with that right neither you nor any law you can frame have any right to interfere. And I have the further right to demand a free and unrestricted exercise of that right, and it is your duty not only to accord it, but, as a community, to see that I am protected in it. I trust that I am fully understood, for I mean just that, and nothing less!<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Victoria C. Woodhull, "A Speech on the Principles of Social Freedom," November 20, 1871; accessed 3 December 2007; available from <http://gos.sbc.edu/w/woodhull.html>; Internet.

Woodhull's demands included not just political rights for women but also social equality with men, including the ability to take lovers without shame or loss of social status. Stanton, ever the radical, agreed with many of Woodhull's arguments but Anthony, the more pragmatic of the two, realized that the association with Woodhull was poisonous to the movement, not to mention personally galling as Woodhull consistently stole the spotlight with her outrageous pronouncements. Anthony finally staged a coup at a women's meeting by denying Woodhull a platform from which to speak and prematurely closing the meeting. Much to Stanton's chagrin, Woodhull was purged from their organization but the association of women's rights with sexual license never completely disappeared. For the next century and a half, feminism would always be tainted by the fear that women's emancipation would come at the expense of traditional, monogamous marriage.

The Woodhull controversy heightened what was by then an open split in the women's rights movement. In the years after Appomattox, activists had hoped that they would gain the franchise along with emancipated slaves, but it was not to be. The shunting aside of women's demands in favor of former slaves in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments caused a rift in the women's movement. The radicals, represented by Stanton and Anthony, demanded immediate woman suffrage, easier divorce, and increased educational and professional opportunities. The moderates, led by Stone and Brown Blackwell, supported rights for black men as their first priority and believed that the inclusion of women's demands might jeopardize that goal.

Stone and Brown Blackwell attempted to define a middle position for women that avoided the perceived anarchy of female individualism while still opening additional paths out of coverture. The result was not always logically cohesive. Brown Blackwell believed that men

were unsuited for representing women in politics, so allowing women to vote without opening opportunities for women to represent themselves was an empty move. She urged women to pursue professions and desired that men take on a larger share of the housework, but still believed that women's primary role was care of the home and family. She and Stone insisted that the sexes were different, but equally authoritative, which meant that a healthy, normally functioning family featured a husband and wife as co-equal heads. The husband would not have "ownership" of his wife as under coverture—she would be able to vote, have a profession, run for political office and own a business, but would also still take care of the children and the home. The moderates opposed liberalizing divorce laws, an area in which they diverged from Stanton's desire for easily attainable divorce for the physical protection of abused women and children. Due to her Christian perfectionist background, Brown Blackwell argued "that the married partner can not annul his obligations towards the other, while both live. . . . All divorce is naturally and morally impossible, even though we should succeed in annulling all legalities."<sup>71</sup> Brown Blackwell's utopian vision allowed for a wife to separate from an alcoholic husband for her safety, but neither could remarry. In May 1869, Stanton and Anthony formed the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) to demand woman suffrage immediately without concern for other social issues. Stone and several of her friends objected to Stanton's radical individualism and her disregard for the ongoing problems with black suffrage and formed the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) in November 1869 to urge a more moderate course for woman suffrage.

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<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *et al.*, *History of Woman Suffrage* (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1881), vol. 1, p. 723.

## Legal and Constitutional Challenges

Radical woman activists were led to believe that the Republican Party would endorse woman suffrage along with black suffrage in the Fifteenth Amendment, which was ratified in 1870. When blacks were explicitly enumerated in the amendment's provisions but women were not, Stanton and Anthony felt betrayed. Their bitterness toward the Republicans caused them to abandon political solutions altogether and to seek a constitutional remedy. Stanton and Anthony believed the Constitution implied women's full citizenship, so they devised a strategy known as the "new departure" to argue for their interpretation. Their plan invoked four distinct parts of the Constitution, the first of which was the Preamble, which states,

We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The second was the Fourteenth Amendment:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Third, the Fifteenth Amendment:

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

And lastly, Article Four, Section Two:

The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States.

These four sections of the Constitution can be read to indicate that the *people* of the United States established the Constitution; that *all persons* born or naturalized in the United States are

*citizens*; that it was the right and a privilege of *all citizens* to vote, that *all citizens* are entitled to the *same* privileges and immunities. Stanton and Anthony believed that if the government defined women as persons, which it clearly did, then as persons women are citizens, as citizens they have the right and privilege of suffrage, and the government may not exclude any citizens from this privilege. Although women were not specifically included in the Constitution, according to Stanton and Anthony, neither were they specifically excluded and thus retained the same rights as any other citizen.

Using this logic, Anthony attempted to vote in the election of 1872. She succeeded in casting a ballot but was promptly arrested. Her case garnered huge amounts of publicity but stood no chance of success. Her trial judge was Supreme Court Associate Justice Ward Hunt, who instructed the jury beforehand to deliver a guilty verdict, refused to poll the jury for their opinions, and delivered an opinion which he had written before the case began. Anthony, however, was allowed to address the court and delivered a stirring speech denying the legality of the verdict. She declared, "For any State to make sex a qualification that must ever result in the disfranchisement of one entire half of the people, is to pass a bill of attainder, or, an *ex post facto* law, and is therefore a violation of the supreme law of the land. By it the blessings of liberty are forever withheld from women and their female posterity. To them this government has no just powers derived from the consent of the governed. To them this government is not a democracy. It is not a republic. It is an odious aristocracy; a hateful oligarchy of sex; the most hateful aristocracy ever established on the face of the globe." Anthony argued that denying the vote to women was a new legal development, an *ex post facto* law, which illegally curtailed constitutionally guaranteed privileges. The fact that women had never actually voted, thereby exercising the privileges allotted to them as citizens of the United States, was irrelevant. Her

attempt to vote was, in her interpretation, perfectly legal and the denial of that privilege was a grievous injury.

Following Anthony's trial, the Supreme Court delivered three decisions which made women's legal position much less subject to interpretation. The first was a series of cases known collectively as the *Slaughter-House Cases* (1872), which were the first to test the new provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Supreme Court was loath to tackle a case brought directly by a freedman because of delicate political considerations but succeeded in indirectly gutting the Fourteenth Amendment by addressing peripheral issues. Independent butchers of New Orleans brought three cases to court objecting to a new state law requiring livestock handling and conversion to food be handled by a corporation. The stated purpose of the law was to control and consolidate the pollution caused by waste products, but the independent butchers believed that it was an expensive, state-regulated scheme to force them into combination with political patrons or out of business. They brought suit arguing that the law denied them the privileges and immunities of United States citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment. In an elaborate ruling, the justices decided that national citizenship and state citizenship, before considered to be concurrent and inseparable, were actually two different things. The Fourteenth Amendment, therefore, applied only to national citizenship and had no bearing on one's relation to the state. The court also ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment had been designed primarily to protect freed slaves and could not be invoked to claim equal protection of the laws in cases not involving racial discrimination. The *Slaughter-House Cases* did not directly address women, but laid the groundwork for rejection of women's suffrage on the basis of more restrictive state laws. If state

citizenship rights were proscribed by state law, then *Slaughter-House* removed objection based on the idea of national citizenship and constitutional arguments.<sup>72</sup>

Immediately following *Slaughter-House*, the Court heard *Bradwell v. The State of Illinois* (1872), in which Myra Bradwell, a woman lawyer, sued to gain access to the Illinois bar under the Fourteenth Amendment's "privileges and immunities" clause. A lower court denied her claim on the grounds of her status as a feme-covert, stating that "a married woman would be bound neither by her express contracts nor by those implied contracts which it is the policy of the law to create between attorney and client."<sup>73</sup> The Supreme Court upheld the ruling but rejected coverture as the reason, instead citing the Fourteenth Amendment's provisions as not including the right to practice a profession. The majority opinion was written by Justice Samuel Freeman Miller, who invoked *Slaughter-House* to deny that the privileges of state or national citizenship could be invoked to protect one's economic livelihood: "there are privileges and immunities belonging to citizens of the United States, in that relation and character, and that it is these and these alone which a State is forbidden to abridge. But the right to admission to practice in the courts of a State is not one of them. This right in no sense depends on citizenship of the United States. It has not, as far as we know, ever been made in any State, or in any case, to depend on citizenship at all."<sup>74</sup> The court skirted the issue by claiming that her case was a state issue and had no bearing on federal citizenship.

Justice Miller cited legal and constitutional argument to invalidate Bradwell's case, but the concurring opinion by Justice Joseph Philo Bradley denied her claim from a social perspective, "[b]eing contrary to the rules of the common law and the usages of Westminster

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<sup>72</sup> *Slaughter-House Cases*, 83 U.S. 36 (1872).

<sup>73</sup> *Bradwell v. The State of Illinois*, 83 U.S. 130 (1872).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

Hall from time immemorial.” Because coverture was the law of Illinois, the Supreme Court could not overturn it by allowing Bradwell to make legal decisions on her own behalf, as a married woman. Bradley’s comments begin with a discussion of the “natural” differences between the sexes, “the civil law, as well as nature herself, has always recognized a wide difference in the respective spheres and destinies of man and woman. Man is, or should be, woman's protector and defender. The natural and proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex evidently unfits it for many of the occupations of civil life. The constitution of the family organization, which is founded in the divine ordinance, as well as in the nature of things, indicates the domestic sphere as that which properly belongs to the domain and functions of womanhood.” Bradley continued his argument by defining the condition of coverture as essential to the well-being of the greater society, “The harmony, not to say identity, of interest and views which belong, or should belong, to the family institution is repugnant to the idea of a woman adopting a distinct and independent career from that of her husband. So firmly fixed was this sentiment in the founders of the common law that it became a maxim of that system of jurisprudence that a woman had no legal existence separate from her husband, who was regarded as her head and representative in the social state; . . . a married woman is incapable, without her husband's consent, of making contracts which shall be binding on her or him. This very incapacity was one circumstance which the Supreme Court of Illinois deemed important in rendering a married woman incompetent fully to perform the duties and trusts that belong to the office of an attorney and counselor.” Finally Bradley invoked the relational roles of wife and mother as the truest expression of womanhood, to which the great bulk of women should rightfully devote themselves: “It is true that many women are unmarried and not affected by any of the duties, complications, and incapacities arising out of the married state, but these are

exceptions to the general rule. The paramount destiny and mission of woman are to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother. This is the law of the Creator. And the rules of civil society must be adapted to the general constitution of things, and cannot be based upon exceptional cases.”<sup>75</sup> Bradley cites legal and biblical precedent as reasons for continued exclusion of women from the professions. Furthermore, he invokes coverture as the rule and the rare feme-sole as the exception, noting that legislation for the exception was contrary to the “rules of civil society” and must be disavowed. Bradley’s argument is a model of conservative reasoning and a striking apology for the continuation of coverture. His inability to see women beyond the roles of dependent wife and mother were the majority opinion of the time; only a few radical women even attempted to step outside these fixed boundaries.

Two years later, the Supreme Court heard a third case relating to women and the Fourteenth Amendment. Twenty-one year old Virginia Minor, a Missouri suffrage activist, attempted to register to vote. A Missouri state registrar of voters, Reece Happersett, refused her. Minor’s husband, Francis Minor, brought the case for her, since she was prohibited from suing on her own behalf, and lost. The Minors then took her case to the Supreme Court. Like the New Orleans butchers, they invoked the Fourteenth Amendment’s provisions and Virginia Minor’s privileges and immunities as a citizen. In *Minor v. Happersett* (1874), the Court upheld the original decision based on a Missouri law allowing only male citizens of the United States the right to vote. In the decision, Chief Justice Morrison Waite agreed that women were of course persons, and that numerous references within the Constitution and in other legal sources conferred citizenship on native-born or naturalized women, the same as men, but that citizenship and suffrage were separate and distinct privileges. “If the right of suffrage is one of the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

necessary privileges of a citizen of the United States, then the constitution and laws of Missouri confining it to men are in violation of the Constitution of the United States, as amended, and consequently void. The direct question is, therefore, presented whether all citizens are necessarily voters.”<sup>76</sup>

Waite noted that at the time that the Constitution was adopted, “we find that in no State were all citizens permitted to vote.”<sup>77</sup> He continued, affirming two points of law. First, he noted that citizenship and the right to vote were not synonymous; second, no legal precedent had ever been established that would indicate that women did or should have the right to vote: “No new State has ever been admitted to the Union which has conferred the right of suffrage upon women, and this has never been considered a valid objection to her admission. On the contrary, as is claimed in the argument, the right of suffrage was withdrawn from women as early as 1807 in the State of New Jersey, without any attempt to obtain the interference of the United States to prevent it.” He continues, noting that more recently, the states of the Confederacy had been readmitted without reference to female suffrage, “Since then the governments of the insurgent States have been reorganized under a requirement that before their representatives could be admitted to seats in Congress they must have adopted new constitutions, republican in form. In no one of these constitutions was suffrage conferred upon women, and yet the States have all been restored to their original position as States in the Union.” He cited numerous examples of state constitutions that separated citizenship from suffrage, concluding, “Certainly, if the courts can consider any question settled, this is one. For nearly ninety years the people have acted upon the idea that the Constitution, when it conferred citizenship, did not necessarily confer the right

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<sup>76</sup> *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 U.S. 162 (1874).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

of suffrage. If uniform practice long continued can settle the construction of so important an instrument as the Constitution of the United States confessedly is, most certainly it has been done here.” He finished with the parting shot, “Our province is to decide what the law is, not to declare what it should be.”<sup>78</sup> Waite felt it was an inappropriate use of the Court’s power to legislate into creation woman suffrage where before it had never existed, a view that would circumscribe women’s political agitation for nearly another half-century. Suffragists would have to find another tactic to overturn the limitations of coverture.

### **Women’s Place in the New State of Kansas**

Out West, politics took on a different character. Originally organized as half of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, Kansas suffered from Illinois senator and onetime presidential candidate Stephen Douglas’s failed theory of popular sovereignty. The notion that the people of a territory could decide whether or not to allow slavery caused massive immigration of Christian abolitionists from New England and pro-slavery “border ruffians” from Missouri, each attempting to flood the region with a favorable constituency. Hostilities broke out between the two sides in 1855 and for the next four years, each faction claimed legitimate control over the state government and wrote a constitution favoring or abolishing slavery. In 1859, the pro-slavery faction that had been supported by the federal government began to lose power under the mounting numbers of abolitionists in the state and could not resist the organization of the anti-slavery Wyandotte Constitutional Convention.

One of the major organizers of the Wyandotte Convention was Clarina Irene Howard Nichols, an moderate activist in abolition, temperance, and women’s rights, who had moved to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

the territory two years earlier from Vermont. Due to her help in drumming up support around the state for the abolitionist constitution, state leaders allowed her to sit in on the convention's proceedings and to request increased political protection for women. Nichols's agitation for increased women's rights followed an even more conservative course than that laid out by Antoinette Brown Blackwell. Never was Nichols quoted as having espoused equality, individualism, or human rights as a reason for women's increased political participation. Instead, she took up the favored rhetoric of the time in separate spheres ideology and sought to expand that sphere to include voting. Her rationale for this extension was that women, as the "guardian angels" of the home, needed to have the political clout to lobby for and insist on changes when existing laws affected their families. Like Brown Blackwell and the other moderates, Nichols rejected Stanton's easy-divorce plank and her more radical individualist arguments and instead focused on women's essential voice in local school affairs, stating, "I want to have this power [to protect] myself and my children, because I do not possess the power which ought to belong to me as a mother."<sup>79</sup>

Nichols' insistence on Christian motherhood as the basis for political participation allowed her to support half-measures and to resist combining woman suffrage with other, less popular measures such as black suffrage. She succeeded in persuading the delegates to grant women control of real and personal property, the right to their earnings, divorce, child custody, and a homestead exemption naming women as equal partners. The delegates did not explicitly allow women to vote in municipal school board elections, but approved a provision that allowed them to vote at school meetings and kept the door open for increased participation later. She also worked to ensure that woman suffrage, though not initially approved because of worries that the

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<sup>79</sup> Marilyn Schultz Blackwell, "Meddling in Politics: Clarina Howard Nichols and Antebellum Political Culture," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, No. 1 (Spring 2004), 31.

constitution might not be acceptable to the federal government, would be considered at a future date. Nichols' demure, ladylike stance calmed men's fears that women in politics would inevitably lead to the abandonment of the home and social chaos. Her masterful use of domestic virtue as the reason for inclusion, not exclusion, of women from politics set a precedent within Kansas politics that would continue to shape women's legislation until the 1970s.

After the Civil War, Kansans revisited the issue of woman suffrage. Driven by Kansas Senator Sam Wood, a colorful and somewhat notorious character, the 1867 woman suffrage referendum was seen by some as Wood's attempt to muddy the waters surrounding the simultaneous referendum on black suffrage. Wood strenuously protested against such charges, going on record with progressive rhetoric that invoked Locke: "If women are not human beings, then they are not entitled to the rights of human beings; but if you once raise them above the brute creation and admit them to be human beings, that ends the argument."<sup>80</sup> Whatever his motivations, Wood campaigned earnestly and called in Lucy Stone and her husband Henry Blackwell, Stanton, Anthony, and activist Reverend Olympia Brown as hired guns to sell the issue around the state. This campaign marked the first time a state considered a constitutional provision for woman suffrage in the history of the United States, but the campaign was unsuccessful. Historians cite a number of reasons for the failure, including the negative association of women's rights with black rights, the lack of subtlety of the women's rights activists, and the calling in of "outside agitators." The campaign was undoubtedly hurt by the radical rhetoric used by the most prominent speakers. One story alleges that a Kansas politician told the unmarried Susan B. Anthony that all women should be married, implying that if her

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<sup>80</sup> Sam Wood, quoted in Sister Jeanne McKenna, "'With the Help of God and Lucy Stone,'" *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* 36 (1970), 18.

interests were properly focused in the home then she would not be stirring up trouble. Historian Wilda Smith noted, “Miss Anthony retorted that to do so, it was essential to find some decent man, and one could not be found among the Kansas politicians who had forsaken woman’s cause.”<sup>81</sup> This type of comment was not taken lightly by the men of Kansas, who felt they owed nothing to women of this type. In the successful suffrage campaign of 1912, one Kansan woman activist wrote to another, “We must have speakers to plead our cause, and not make a demand for justice. Men will grant us anything as a favor if its justice has been proven, but they will not be commanded to do even justice.”<sup>82</sup> Taking this advice in 1867 may have advanced the cause in the state more so than lofty liberal arguments delivered by strange Eastern women.

Following the defeat of both the woman and black suffrage referenda in 1867, Kansas women shifted their focus to temperance. Most temperance women were not married to alcoholics, but feared the disastrous effects of alcohol abuse if their husbands did succumb. Women’s place as dependents was precarious and temperance served a dual purpose. First, women agitators hoped to steer all men away from the potentially damaging consequences of excessive drink, especially their husbands on whom they solely relied for support. Second, the rhetoric of temperance undermined the absolute control traditionally wielded by the husband over his family, citing alcohol as a legitimate cause for a woman to seek divorce in an emergency in order to protect herself and her children. Following this logic, temperance crusaders placed the welfare of women and children above the rights of men to govern their family, subtly exploding the still-powerful bonds of coverture.

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<sup>81</sup> Wilda M. Smith, “A Half Century of Struggle,” *Kansas History* 4, No. 2 (Summer 1981), 94.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

In Kansas, women staged a series of prayerful protests against saloons, invoking the 1867 state law that required liquor dealers to gain the signatures of half of the men and women of a municipality before they could get a license.<sup>83</sup> In the winter of 1874-1875, a massive series of grassroots temperance protests burned throughout the Midwest, inspired by similar protests in New York and Ohio, resulting in the formation of a Kansas chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1878.<sup>84</sup> One woman from Lawrence, like her predecessors in the Great Awakenings, appealed to God as a higher authority than her male relatives, justifying her public appearances and speeches from the pulpit against strong drink as the mere fulfillment of God's calling: "Women have been the greatest sufferers; the arm of the law has been tried and not proved strong enough and they [women] have taken their cause to God in prayer."<sup>85</sup> Key to the temperance crusaders' argument was that the saloon violated the public-private divide by interfering with the family. Drunk men who abused their wives and children or withheld wages spent on drink harmed others who had no means of protection or other avenues of financial support. Even men who drank in moderation in saloons deprived their families of their manly influence in the home. Some men saw this reasoning as an attention-grabbing ploy by grasping, shrill women. One noted that the best way to keep men out of saloons was to create attractive homes for their husbands and children.<sup>86</sup> The protests, however, spurred legislators to move and the state adopted a constitutional amendment banning the sale of alcohol in 1880.

The amendment did not immediately halt liquor consumption in Kansas; in fact, many towns flagrantly ignored the amendment. The Kansas WCTU continued to demonstrate against

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>84</sup> Nancy G. Garner, "'A Prayerful Public Protest': The Significance of Gender in the Kansas Woman's Crusade of 1874," *Kansas History* 20, No. 4 (Winter 1997-1998), 218.

<sup>85</sup> Mrs. George March of Lawrence, quoted in Garner, 220.

<sup>86</sup> Garner 225.

these abuses and grew into an umbrella organization that supported everything from hot-meals kitchens, kindergartens, and libraries to woman suffrage. The Kansas Equal Suffrage Association, composed of many WCTU women, pressed the issue of women's stake in choosing school board representatives and won for Kansas women the right to vote in municipal elections in 1887. A few Kansas women identified with the radical individualism of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but the vast majority of activists took a more conservative stance, couching expanded political activism in domestic terms as the moral work of mothers for the betterment of society. Even this moderate stance, however, provoked a backlash. *Wichita Daily Eagle* editor Marshall Murdock provided the voice of traditionalism throughout the 1880s, lacing his criticism with a vague threat of violence for women who stepped outside the home:

We count it a high privilege to be permitted to defend womanly women, and to praise ever the accomplishments of their hands and hearts, and to acknowledge their spiritual and refined superiority over man as the more perfect being of the two; but, when a woman unsexes herself and gets down to the grosser level of man, we never expect to stop and ask anybody's permission to treat her with any consideration we could not give the grosser animal.<sup>87</sup>

Murdock's barbs separated women into two categories, "womanly women" and the "grosser" sort, who could hardly be considered women. The former group he described as a presence in the home that should "be there, ever."<sup>88</sup> The latter group was composed of women who had forgotten their place or had been compelled to vote in 1887 by aggressive suffragists. The idea that they would want to leave the home was simply inconceivable to him. His anti-suffrage argument would be echoed by conservatives opposing women's rights in the state for the next century. Suffrage, he wrote,

would destroy the distinction that holds man a worshipper at woman's shrine, in which . . . he finds his whole world of happiness centered. The "home life" constitutes all, everything. . . . This "home life" ideal is the incentive for which man struggles, for which

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<sup>87</sup> Marshall Murdock, editorial in the *Wichita Daily Eagle*, Oct 5, 1884, quoted in Rebecca Edwards, "Marsh Murdock and the 'Wily Women' of Wichita: Domesticity Disputed in the Gilded Age," *Kansas History* 25, No. 1 (Spring 2002), 8.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct 3, 1884, quoted in Edwards, 7.

he builds cities, constructs great enterprises of every conceivable character, and for which he even institutes and maintains governments. . . . Take the wife-life, take the mother-life from either the hut or the palace and the “home” is gone. Female suffrage proposes to take these lives from these homes, leaving them but a hollow mockery, for which men would not struggle for even an hour.<sup>89</sup>

Embedded in his argument was the notion that women were the beneficiaries of male largesse, the tender recipients of all of the achievements of the human race. Murdock and other antifeminists bought into the contemporary idea that men were barely civilized and that the only influence keeping them from becoming barbarians was the dependent needs of their families. Men labored and built and sacrificed because they had substituted concern for their family for primal, animalistic urges. Society was predicated on this substitution, and men required a household of dependents to keep the pressure on. A man without dependents had no motivation to act in a civilized fashion; bachelors were often considered an unruly, destabilizing force. Women who attempted to escape from dependency therefore threatened the entire premise of social order by removing a man’s essential need to take care of her. A dominant woman was as abhorrent as a submissive man to traditionalists, therefore the idea that women who adopted a “male” persona should be treated as roughly as an unpleasant man was not illogical.

By the late nineteenth century, woman thinkers had separated into three separate camps. The ideology of separate spheres motivated conservatives like Catharine Beecher, the Supreme Court justices of the post-Civil War era, and Marshall Murdock to subscribe to the cult of “true womanhood.” For them, woman’s place was literally in the home, where they were expected to exude motherly virtue and to motivate men to provide for them through their submissive dependency. Republican motherhood, Christian evangelicalism, and moral activism provided the framework for moderates to attempt to overturn the excessive strictures of coverture while

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., Apr 6, 1887, quoted in Edwards, 10.

maintaining highly differentiated gender roles and the holy bonds of matrimony. Moderates like Antoinette Brown Blackwell, Clarina Nichols, and members of the WCTU believed that women were unnecessarily proscribed by custom and that their natural motherly impulses, if properly channeled, could benefit both the private and public realms. For radicals like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, however, Lockean natural rights applied to all people and flowed from the Creator. These rights were illegally impinged upon by men seeking to dominate women. Of these three camps, the moderates would come to dominate the debate in the early twentieth century. Stanton, the great philosopher of radical individualism, commanded respect as the grand dame of the women's movement, but her writings were increasingly out of touch with the growing waves of more moderate women. According to Nancy Cott, "[t]hroughout the nineteenth century feminists saw women's progress not in opposition to but at one with esteem for home and family; their radical demand was to include a role in the civil and public sphere among women's rights and prerogatives. . . . But the majority of women upheld woman's sphere in order to enhance their status; they staked their major claim to social power on their 'vocation.'"<sup>90</sup> At the heart of the debate was women's economic dependence. Throughout the nineteenth century and until World War I women were simply not in a position to demand individualism because very few had any other means of support other than marriage. Striking at marriage as the cause rather than the solution to women's problems was an idea that was both offensive and revolutionary, challenging women to make demands of their husbands on whom they were entirely dependent. Most were not ready to do so. Woman activists' arguments with each other about the proper function of women in American society were largely academic because all were still subject to coverture. Until the late 1880s, the radical and moderate camps

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<sup>90</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 205.

were defined more by their ideological differences than for any progress made on behalf of women. This would begin to change in 1890.

## **CHAPTER 3 - The Making of the Suffrage Coalition and Antisuffrage Women**

From the first days of the English colonies in America to the late nineteenth century, American married women were made legally invisible by the laws of coverture. Augmented by the conservative ideology of separate spheres in the nineteenth century, women were relegated to the private realm of the home where their presumed superiority in moral virtue valorized them as the center of a harmonious family unit. Custom and conservative Christian precedent discouraged women from any public expression or activity, even if it was to protest evils that they feared might affect their homes, but some abolitionist and temperance women rejected this prohibition as unnecessarily strict. Moderate women activists pointed to women's inherent morality as the reason why they *should* protest public evils; radical women took this argument a step further to protest coverture and marriage itself as seriously flawed social constructs prohibiting women from exercising their God-given rights as individuals. Although moderate arguments changed over the years to reflect the necessities of the times, radical and conservative rhetoric developed during these early years continued to echo through the late twentieth century.

From 1890 to 1920, women became increasingly vocal in their demand for suffrage. In the interest of political expediency, radical Susan B. Anthony teamed with her former rivals, the moderates, and with the fairly conservative women of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) to press for a federal amendment. Essential to the formation of this coalition were the radicals' suspension of their marriage critique and the soothing oratory of WCTU head Frances Willard, who convinced otherwise conservative women that their moral duties in the

home *required* them to vote if for no other reason than to paralyze the corrupting, home-destroying liquor interest. Extreme conservatives, however, were not swayed by Willard's logic. Mostly privileged women, vocal antisuffragists attempted to preserve the status quo by invoking separate spheres ideology and the specter of babies abandoned by their self-seeking, politically active mothers in an effort to deny all women the ballot. Woven into the antisuffragists' arguments were protests against insidious radicalism, which they feared might gain a toehold in America through the votes of overly emotional women touched by the human misery radicals promised to eliminate. The Nineteenth Amendment passed over the antisuffragists' protest in 1920, but the chasms separating radicals from moderates and conservatives from ultraconservatives continued to widen for the remainder of the century, becoming evident again in the fight over the ERA.

### **Radical and Moderate Suffragists Fuse**

Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment in February 1869, allowing former slaves to vote, but women were excluded from consideration. Radicals like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, both abolitionists and temperance activists in addition to their work for women, grew weary of neglecting their own desires to support black suffrage. Conversely, black male activists could not be persuaded to take on woman suffrage as an equally important issue. With the release of the Fifteenth Amendment to the states for ratification, Stanton and Anthony abandoned black suffrage and formed the all-women National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) in May 1869. NWSA, originally quite radical, espoused Stanton's desire for easier divorce laws, a woman's right to "voluntary motherhood" (meaning her right to sexually refuse her husband), increased employment opportunities to allow women a measure of financial

independence separate from marriage, and a constitutional amendment guaranteeing woman suffrage. The women activists who were not ready to renege on their pledge to support black suffrage joined Lucy Stone, who formed the more moderate American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) with fellow abolitionist and activist Julia Ward Howe in November 1869. AWSA attracted more cautious women and men who believed that woman suffrage was a noble goal but that it needed to be pursued slowly and politically; they favored a state-by-state campaign over a national policy.<sup>91</sup> The names of each group's newspaper revealed their orientation: the NWSA paper was entitled *The Revolution* while the AWSA paper claimed the more modest moniker *Women's Journal*.

By the late 1880s, women serious about suffrage realized that they could not continue as a divided movement. Anthony provided the engine to reunify the two groups. NWSA had been growing less radical despite Stanton's drift leftward, and Anthony strongly desired amalgamation. Talks between Stanton, Anthony, suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt, WCTU president Frances Willard, and activist Reverend Anna Howard Shaw, among others, toned down radical demands and ironed out differences, leading to the formation of the joint National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1890 with Stanton as its first president.

### **Stanton's "The Solitude of Self"**

Stanton was not pleased with the final, more conservative outcome of the NAWSA merger negotiations and took on a lyceum circuit tour that occupied much of her two years as president. She resigned in 1892, delivering a profound statement of woman's rights as individuals in her farewell speech, "The Solitude of Self," defining the radical position that

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<sup>91</sup> Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 136-148.

women be afforded the same opportunities as men. She gave the speech several more times, including to the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, which ordered ten thousand copies be printed and distributed. The ideas she discussed in this speech have been continuously revisited by later feminists seeking a précis for the idea that women belong to themselves. Her opening sentences referred to the individual liberalism of Locke which rejected the hierarchy of Filmer for the individual conscience:

The point I wish plainly to bring before you on this occasion is the individuality of each human soul; our Protestant idea, the right of individual conscience and judgment—our republican idea, individual citizenship. In discussing the rights of woman, we are to consider, first, what belongs to her as an individual, in a world of her own, the arbiter of her own destiny, an imaginary Robinson Crusoe with her woman Friday on a solitary island. Her rights under such circumstances are to use all her faculties for her own safety and happiness.

Stanton defined women as solitary human creatures from whom the burdens of life could never be fully lifted even by the most caring husband. She invoked the Protestant idea that each person had to be able to read the Bible on his or her own to truly know the Word of God as evidence that no person could be a proxy for another, either in salvation or in life. Coverture and dependency were logically flawed systems because a husband's protection was not guaranteed, thus leaving a wife in a perpetually precarious position. Illness, death, abandonment, drunkenness, loss of affection—any of these conditions befalling a man could leave his wife and children penniless and unable to procure the barest necessities, yet this was the only choice open to them.

In her next section, she cited the opinions of three prominent Englishmen who had lately gone on record as opposed to women's rights outside of the traditional sphere:

. . . it is only the incidental relations of life, such as mother, wife, sister, daughter, that may involve some special duties and training. In the usual discussion in regard to woman's sphere, such men as Herbert Spencer, Frederic Harrison, and Grant Allen uniformly subordinate her rights and duties as an individual, as a citizen, as a woman, to

the necessities of these incidental relations, some of which a large class of woman may never assume.

It is interesting that Stanton chose to cite Spencer, Harrison, and Allen, because none were American and each had, at one time or another, supported women's rights. Spencer abandoned woman suffrage late in life due to its perceived ties with socialism. He feared that women, supposedly the more emotional and generous of the sexes, would be "anxious to provide immediate public good without any thought of more direct public consequences," delaying "evolutionary progress by encouraging dangerous social upheaval."<sup>92</sup> Spencer felt that women were incapable of serious, reasoned thought and would be susceptible to emotional appeals used by fringe groups. This line of argument was used by later woman antisuffragists. Harrison was considered a radical and a Positivist whose support for trade unions and working-class men conflicted with his otherwise sympathetic feelings toward women. Allen, author of *The Woman Who Did* (1895), attempted to support women's rights with his story about an Englishwoman who eschews marriage, bears her dead lover's child in Italy, and brazenly returns to England to raise the child as a single mother. As the daughter matures she becomes embarrassed by her mother, who, in an attempt to save her daughter's wounded reputation through a public expression of shame, commits suicide. The book was condemned by both conservatives and feminists, the former shocked by the heroine's lack of remorse, the latter angry that the story ended with a traditional moral lesson. Perhaps Stanton singled out these men as traditionalists because she felt betrayed by their lack of consistent support. Nevertheless, subsequent sentences reveal the injustice of categorizing women solely by their relational roles:

In discussing the sphere of man we do not decide his rights as an individual, as a citizen, as a man by his duties as a father, a husband, a brother, or a son, relations some of which

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<sup>92</sup> John S. Haller, Jr. and Robin M. Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 63.

he may never fill. Moreover he would be better fitted for these very relations and whatever special work he might choose to do to earn his bread by the complete development of all his faculties as an individual.

The law assumed that all women were middle-class white women with small children, married to benevolent husbands. Stanton attempted to show that the model fit poorly and, for many widows, orphans, single women, childless wives, poor women, and wives of abusive husbands, it scarcely fit at all. Stanton goes to the radical extreme by dismissing relational roles completely—regardless of whether the model fit many women or not, it was as inappropriate to define all women as mothers as it was to define all men as fathers. Women who had children were not materially different from those who did not have children; they continued on as human beings and members of society regardless of the impermanent social construct of familial relationships. On this point particularly, she separated herself from moderate women activists who clung to the family as the defining feature of a woman's social life.

Stanton's prose soared to a crescendo when she compared the journey of life to a craft at sea. Each person commands his or her own vessel; none can steer the craft from shore to shore (from birth to death) but the pilot:

No matter how much women prefer to lean, to be protected and supported, nor how much men desire to have them do so, they must make the voyage of life alone, and for safety in an emergency they must know something of the laws of navigation. To guide our own craft, we must be captain, pilot, engineer; with chart and compass to stand at the wheel; to watch the winds and waves, and know when to take in the sail, and to read the signs in the firmament over all. It matters not whether the solitary voyager is man or woman; nature, having endowed them equally, leaves them to their own skill and judgment in the hour of danger, and, if not equal to the occasion, alike they perish. . . . The talk of sheltering woman from the fierce storms of life is the sheerest mockery, for they beat on her from every point of the compass, just as they do on man, and with more fatal results, for he has been trained to protect himself, to resist, to conquer.

Stanton appealed to men with her storm analogy—she challenged them to think of their wives as helpless widows without their husbands to protect them. Again she emphasized the foolishness

of placing one sex in charge of the other, regardless of men's most tender affection for women. At some time in her life, a woman will be alone and will need to understand how to take care of herself. She follows this argument with a gripping example of how women routinely struggle alone in childbirth with none to help in what was, at the time, a dangerous and repeated brush with mortality:

Whatever the theories may be of woman's dependence on man, in the supreme moments of her life he can not bear her burdens. Alone she goes to the gates of death to give life to every man that is born into the world. No one can share her fears, no one mitigate her pangs; and if her sorrow is greater than she can bear, alone she passes beyond the gates into the vast unknown.

Stanton concluded her argument by stating her desires:

But when all artificial trammels are removed, and women are recognized as individuals, responsible for their own environments, thoroughly educated for all the positions in life they may be called to fill; with all the resources in themselves that liberal thought and broad culture can give; guided by their own conscience and judgment; trained to self-protection by a healthy development of the muscular system and skill in the use of weapons of defense, and stimulated to self-support by the knowledge of the business world and the pleasure that pecuniary independence must ever give; when women are trained in this way they will, in a measure, be fitted for those hours of solitude that come alike to all, whether prepared or otherwise. As in our extremity we must depend on ourselves, the dictates of wisdom point of complete individual development.

In short, Stanton demands that all of the pursuits and occupations of men be open to women, for only then will all American citizens be truly free. For her, dependency was inherently unfair and stifling; independence allowed each person to reach his or her true potential, thus improving society one by one. "Pecuniary independence" was essential to women's demands because coverture usually denied women the command of any money, forcing them to pursue continuous marriage as their sole career option and only means of financial support. Stanton blasted the remnants of coverture that persisted even after many states adopted married women's property acts, condemning the notion that a man could be completely responsible for another responsible

adult, even if that person was his wife: “Who, I ask you, can take, dare take, on himself the rights, the duties, the responsibilities of another human soul?”<sup>93</sup> Stanton’s masterwork was considered highly subversive and radical until the women’s movement of the 1970s dusted it off, and even then retained the power to shock social conservatives. The idea that women were individuals and not merely mothers or wives provided the clearest delineation between radicals and moderates or conservatives for nearly a century.

The individualist thoughts contained within “The Solitude of Self” pushed Stanton to the fringes of the women’s movement. *The Woman’s Bible* (1895), undertaken by Stanton and a committee of other women, pushed her out completely. This work challenged the Anglican Church’s 1888 Revised Version of the Bible as narrow and conservative when pertaining to women. The feminist version contained numerous individual commentaries on what the women considered to be mistranslations or misunderstandings of Bible passages that seemed to prescribe women’s dependency. Most conservatives invoked the Bible when denouncing feminists, so it was important to Stanton that the Bible be disarmed as ammunition. Her aim was clear from the introduction: “[The Bible] teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned, and sentenced.” She sarcastically recalled conservative interpretations of Genesis 3:16 and passages from the epistles of Paul denouncing women in public: “Marriage was for her to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man’s bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital questions of the hour, she was

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<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “The Solitude of Self,” (1892), accessed 1 December 07; available from <http://www.lclark.edu/~ria/stanton.solitude.html>; Internet.

commanded to ask he husband at home. Here is the Bible position of woman all summed up.”<sup>94</sup> Her efforts backfired. Conservatives, evangelical Christians, ministers, and church women blasted Stanton’s efforts as obscene and immoral. For the many Christians who viewed the Bible as the literal word of God, Stanton’s attempt to reinterpret the sacred writings was blasphemous. NAWSA refused to let her sit on the stage after 1895 fearing that her increasing radicalism would alienate more conservative and religious women from the common cause of woman suffrage, a move Anthony protested out of loyalty to her friend. Stanton did not particularly care because she knew that her public career was nearing its end, but Anthony eventually backed down because she could not afford to aggravate the huge new suffrage constituency of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union.

### **Frances Willard and the Making of Conservative Suffragists**

In 1892, with Stanton out of the NAWSA leadership and Lucy Stone dead, Anthony became the recognized leader of the suffrage movement. She and her colleagues realized that “women’s rights” was an explosive and ill-defined topic, so over Stanton’s objections, NAWSA leaders agreed to scrap other issues and focus solely on suffrage. This move was essential to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and should have provided an important lesson for later activists, who insisted on lumping in with the ERA homosexual rights, federal daycare, and abortion rights, to name a few, which were controversial enough to torpedo the amendment regardless of the well-organized opposition. By limiting women’s activism to suffrage, NAWSA

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<sup>94</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman’s Bible* introduction, quoted in Geoffrey C. Ward, *Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 200.

leaders removed distractions preventing radicals and conservatives from working together for a single goal.

The most important figure in the new suffrage coalition was Frances Willard. As a champion of moral purity and social reform, Willard became enamored with temperance during the nationwide protests of 1874. Believing liquor prohibition was the key to alleviating poverty, Willard took on the issue as the best hope of bettering conditions for dependent women. She was elected president of the WCTU in 1879 and served as its unitary head and oracle until her death in 1898. Under Willard, the WCTU grew into a national presence with reorganized committees, increased membership, and decentralized regional chapters so that controversial local issues might not take away from the all-important national work of temperance. In contrast to NAWSA's suffrage focus, Willard's policy was to encourage WCTU members to "do everything," meaning that they should tackle any issue affecting women simultaneously, including temperance, suffrage, anti-prostitution campaigns, tougher rape laws, sabbatarianism, prison reform, and the outlawing of obscene literature. She later spun these various concerns into the umbrella of "home protection," meaning that women had a duty to protect their homes against evil influences and were morally better suited to the task than men.

Willard spent her career gently steering her WCTU followers to support issues that had been previously considered radical, including suffrage. Her tactics avoided direct confrontation with men and Stanton's individualist philosophy in favor of a more practical approach. The argument worked: Willard's 150,000 WCTU members mostly threw their support behind Anthony's 13,000-member NAWSA in the early 1890s, making suffrage a national concern. Willard's masterful rhetoric spun the issue of suffrage in a way that middle-class moderates

could understand without abandoning their concern for the family and their desire to maintain distinct gender roles within their families.

First Willard, though single herself, extolled the virtues of marriage: “For, folded in its heart, we find the germ of every home; of those beatitudes, fatherhood and motherhood; the brotherly and sisterly affection, the passion of the patriot, the calm and steadfast love of the philanthropist. For the faithfulness of two, each to the other, alone makes possible the true home, the pure church, the righteous Nation, the great, kind brotherhood of man.”<sup>95</sup> By stating her affections and admiration for married people, Willard established herself as a kindly former educator who had happened not to marry, rather than a radical who eschewed this most traditional of choices. This declaration was necessary to mollify those who might have remembered Victoria Woodhull’s free-love pronouncements or Lucy Stone’s refusal to take her husband’s name, both of which were shocking to the evangelical Christian women who formed the bulk of WCTU membership. Having established her credentials as a mainstream, demure Christian lady, Willard presented the problem of coverture as one of inhibited civilization: “The most that even Christianity itself could do at first, though it is the strongest force ever let loose upon the planet, was to separate one man and one woman from the common herd, into each home, telling the woman to remain there in grateful quietness . . . . Thus, under the conditions of a civilization crude and material, grew up that well-worn maxim of the common law, ‘Husband and wife are one, and that one is the husband.’” Willard presented coverture as having been necessary in more barbaric times when women needed physical protection: “But such supreme power as this brought to the man supreme temptation. . . . The *femme couverte* is not a character

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<sup>95</sup> Frances Willard, “A White Life for Two” (1890), quoted in “*Do Everything*” *Reform: The Oratory of Frances Willard*, ed. Richard W. Leeman (New York, Greenwood Press, 1992), 160.

appropriate to our peaceful, home-like communities, although she may have been and doubtless was a necessary figure in the days when women were safe only as they were shut up in castles and when they were the booty chiefly sought in war.”<sup>96</sup> American civilization was now advanced enough that coverture was outdated and inappropriate to contemporary gender roles.

Willard echoed the moderate conception of “co-equal” heads of household first expressed by Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell as the ideal formulation of a marital household. “Husband and wife are one, and that one is—husband and wife. I believe they will never come to the heights of purity, of power and peace, for which they were designated in heaven, until this better law prevails.” Willard took one step beyond the moderates of the 1870s by intimating that not all marriages were undertaken for pure motives but immediately recanted by indicating that co-equality will ensure that future marriages not suffer the same defect: “One undivided half of the world for wife and husband equally; co-education to mate them on the plane of mind; equal property rights to make her God’s own free woman, not coerced into marriage for the sake of support, nor a bond-slave after she is married.” For Willard, marriage was the natural place for women that simply needed some updating: “these are the outlooks of the future that shall make the marriage system, never a failure since it became monogamous, an assured, a permanent, a paradisiacal success.”<sup>97</sup> When compared literally, Willard’s enumeration of women’s problems and their proposed solutions differed little from Stanton’s in “The Solitude of Self,” but Willard tied these solutions to the necessity for the proper functioning of the home rather than individual self-actualization. Following her reasoning, true love is necessary for marriage, good marriages are necessary for strong homes, and strong homes are the foundation of civilization itself. The

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 169.

present laws prohibited true love by placing one half of the marriage partnership at the mercy of the other, extinguishing any flame of affection that might have once existed. Only the most enlightened husband, acting contrary to the customs of the time, could embrace his wife as an equal. Willard's proposed overthrow of coverture would encourage all husbands to act in this way, strengthening marriages and homes throughout the nation.

Having shored up marriage as the proper choice for women but describing obstacles impeding its harmonious functioning, Willard described *why* women had an interest in opposing the status quo. "Hands which have just put aside the beer mug, the decanter, and the greasy pack of cards are casting ballots which undermine our Sabbaths, license social crimes that shall be nameless, and open 250,000 dram-shops in the shadow of the church and public school. I solemnly call upon my countrymen to release those other hands, familiar with the pages of the Book of God, busied with sacred duties of the home and gracious deeds of charity, that they may drop in those whiter ballots, which, as God lives, alone can save the state!"<sup>98</sup> This passage is particularly noteworthy because it addresses a number of Willard's themes. First, she cited liquor as the source of all vice including gambling and the "nameless" social crime of prostitution. Second, she linked alcohol consumption and the associated social vice to the family, noting that these debauched men with their sinful lifestyles were plainly visible to children and respectable ladies going to school or church. Third, she asked men to "release" women to vote not based on their natural rights or inherent citizenship, but as the enemy of licentiousness through their natural role as the guardians of morality, virtue, Christianity, and charity. Willard cleverly noted the traits of "true womanhood" and used these demure feminine virtues as the reasons why women *must* vote. She also sidestepped the negative images of

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<sup>98</sup> Frances Willard, "Home Protection" (1879), quoted in Leeman, ed., 125.

woman suffragists by asking men to allow women to vote rather than demanding they stop oppressing women's rights. Willard's appeals to women as domestic creatures who must save the nation from nefarious forces allowed dependent wives to envision an increased political role without the social upheaval that full equality entailed.

Home protection was a constant theme in Willard's oratory. She painted alcohol as the primary cause of women's misery, so women must be enfranchised (at least locally) to protect themselves and their children:

Take the instinct of self-preservation (and there is none more deeply seated): What will be its action in woman when the question comes up of licensing the sale of a stimulant which nerves with dangerous strength the arm already so much stronger than her own, and which at the same time so crazes the brain God meant to guide that manly arm that it strikes down the wife a man loves and the little children for whom when sober he would die? Dependent for the support of herself and little ones and for the maintenance of her home, upon the strength which alcohol masters and the skill it renders futile, will the wife and mother cast her vote to open or to close the rum-shop door over against that home?<sup>99</sup>

Her imagery was so vivid that even women whose husbands were teetotalers could legitimately fear that the opening of a saloon nearby would turn their peaceful spouse into a raving lunatic. Men could not be counted upon to eradicate liquor interests from their towns because they were naturally more susceptible to their animal passions. Women's enfranchisement would actually ensure their ongoing dependence when their husbands, released from temptation by her moral vote against liquor, could properly fulfill the position of provider for his household. Willard insisted that women did not desire the vote for their own selfish or mannish reasons, but due to their moral desire to preserve the family.

Willard recrafted the suffrage issue in a way that made conservative Christian women comfortable with this liberal idea. She never opposed equality in a public speech but quietly replaced this tactic with the more familiar themes of piety, purity, submissiveness, and

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 128.

domesticity as reasons why women must protest their proscribed role. She first explained why Enlightenment-era thinkers and later radicals failed to gain traction. “During the past years the women who pioneered the equal suffrage movement, and whose perceptions of justice were keen as a Damascus blade, took for their rallying cry: ‘Taxation without representation is tyranny.’ But the average woman, who has nothing to be taxed, declines to go forth to battle on that issue.” She next elevated temperance as the only cause for which “average” women are willing to fight: “Since the Crusade, plain, practical temperance people have begun appealing to this same average practical woman, saying ‘With your vote we can close the saloons that tempt your boys to ruin’; and behold! they have transfixed with the arrow of conviction that mother’s heart, and she is ready for the fray.” She recalled the arguments popular after the Revolution from the Scottish Enlightenment and appealed to motherhood as the true passion of women. “Not rights, but duties; not her need alone, but that of her children and her country; not the ‘woman,’ but the ‘human’ question is stirring women’s hearts and breaking down their prejudice to-day.” It is easy to see how Willard, one of the best-loved women in America in the 1890s, could sway masses of conservative Christian women to the cause of suffrage with her next sentence, “For [women] begin to perceive the divine fact that civilization, in proportion as it becomes Christianized, will make increasing demands upon creation’s gentler half; that the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount are voted up or voted down upon election day; and that a military exigency requires the army of the Prince of Peace to call out its reserves.”<sup>100</sup> Her recasting of the issue as one which women must undertake, despite their natural aversion to enter the messy world of politics, as a duty of holy importance. Women who failed to hear the

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 130-1.

clarion call of the franchise should not be surprised by their towns and families drifting into dissipation.

Anthony warmly welcomed the entrance of the WCTU into her ranks of suffragists and personally admired Willard as a brilliant strategist. The fusion of temperance with suffrage served to unify disparate groups of women but was not necessarily a winning strategy when presented to all-male constituencies. During California's 1896 woman suffrage vote, Anthony begged Willard to maintain a low profile in the state so that the hard-drinking Western pioneers would not associate woman suffrage with temperance. Willard tried her best to minimize WCTU activity but the issue lost anyway. The friendship and alliance, however, endured, even under wilting attack by Stanton and fellow suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage. Stanton warned Anthony not to be "dazzled by the promise of a sudden acquisition of numbers to our platforms with the wide-spread influence of the Church behind them, if with all this comes a religious proscription that will undermine the secular nature of our government."<sup>101</sup> Gage simply called Willard "the most dangerous person on the American continent today" for her perceived attempt to, as historian Geoffrey Ward noted, put "God into the Constitution, prayer into the schools, and liquor out of the realm of choice."<sup>102</sup> Stanton and Gage were both wary of the influences of Christianity, Stanton because of her early exposure to Second Great Awakening preacher Charles Grandison Finney and his visions of damnation; Gage because of her belief that the Christian Church actively oppressed women. These two women were correct in suspecting that WCTU women would not be well-chosen allies to exact a revolution in women's place, but Anthony had

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<sup>101</sup> Geoffrey C. Ward, *Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: An Illustrated History* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1999), 173.

<sup>102</sup> Ward, 176.

narrowed her focus to the single-minded pursuit of woman suffrage and she elected not to question the principles underlying her ten-fold increase in supporters.

Willard's politics eventually drifted leftward, causing her to identify first with labor and then with socialism as the most perfect form of Christian government on earth. She advocated government lawfully acquiring all parts of a civilization, requiring all to work enough to give them "the finest physical development," and "permitting all to share alike in the advantages of education and refinement." By 1897, she was identifying herself as a Christian socialist and her audience of WCTU ladies as "beloved comrades." She favorably recognized various left-leaning groups such as the British Fabians and the social democrats opposing Kaiser Wilhelm of Prussia.<sup>103</sup> Willard's move toward socialism was reflected in the WCTU only by Willard's magnetism, but was abandoned by the group after her death in 1898. Willard's easy use of the term "socialist" also fell out of favor, but many of her ideas remained current. Her advocacy of the eight-hour day, child labor laws, minimum wage laws, better working conditions for women, labor unions, regulation of utilities, worker's compensation, and government-sponsored health and retirement plans were renamed the "Social Gospel" and found favor with a new generation of Progressive reformers in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>104</sup> With Willard's death, the WCTU melted into the background of the suffrage movement but continued to channel moderate and even conservative women into lobbying for the vote.

Although a number of interesting parallels between the suffrage movement and the ERA campaign can be noted, one critical difference may have been responsible for both the success of suffrage and the failure of the ERA. Woman suffrage was aided immeasurably by the presence

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<sup>103</sup> Frances Willard, "President's Address, 1897" quoted in Leeman, ed., 178, 181.

<sup>104</sup> Leeman, 93.

of Frances Willard as a conservative champion, while ERA suffered due to its lack of an analogous figure. Willard, beloved head of the WCTU, decided that suffrage could be viewed as an extension of women's role in the home, throwing her support and that of her huge organization behind NAWSA's goal. The ERA's most famous champions, however, were Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Bella Abzug, all of whom were considerably more radical than the average woman at the time. Had a prominent leader in a moderate to conservative women's organization embraced the ERA as furthering the ideals of traditional womanhood, the amendment's history may have been quite different.

### **Kansas Populism and Woman Suffrage, 1894**

In 1894, Kansas women again had an opportunity to press for state suffrage. Suffragists' confused aims and a lack of political savvy doomed the effort, although hard times and the presence of political radicals in the government had made suffrage an uphill battle in any case. Suffragists learned their lessons in this campaign and would not fail again. In this campaign, suffrage was championed by women of the Kansas WCTU, the leading social reform organization in the state, who had found success pressing for a state amendment prohibiting the sale of alcohol but also endeavored to strengthen public education, improve water and food quality, tend to the destitute, lobby against one-sided prostitution laws, and study communicable diseases. Their aims were also highly political, supporting child labor laws, protective legislation for women workers, and of course, woman suffrage. When a number of Kansas WCTU women formed the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association (KESA) in 1884, both organizations petitioned the Kansas legislature for municipal woman suffrage, claiming that women needed the vote to ensure that their work would be fostered by favorable legislation, thus

achieving “the protection of our homes.”<sup>105</sup> The vast majority of these Kansas women were not radical suffragists, but social conservatives attempting to expand their sphere of the home to encompass issues that affected their lives. Their aims found significant popular support, first in 1880 with the nation’s first-ever state constitutional amendment banning the sale of alcohol, then again in 1887 with the nation’s first-ever granting of municipal woman suffrage. The first piece of legislation to which Kansas women contributed was raising the age of protection for girls from ten to eighteen years old. Both the WCTU and the KESA had worked for this legislation, hoping to keep adolescent girls “out of the clutches of pimps and white slave traders” in the belief that all prostitutes had been duped into the profession.<sup>106</sup> Despite the conservative nature of Kansas’s women activists, the state plowed new American ground year after year, leading the *New York Times* in 1887 to dub it “the great experimental ground of the nation.”<sup>107</sup> That may have been true, but the spirit of the reforms was perhaps better caught by Eva Stevens of Anthony, Kansas, who wrote to the governor to urge him to support municipal woman suffrage in 1887: “My dear Governor do not imagine that the women . . . want to enter the political field—far from it, but very many of us are in earnest on this matter & crave a voice in any measure that touches The Home & believe that we—Man & Woman—are to be coworkers together that the highest goal of all may be more speedily accomplished.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Michael L. Goldberg, “Non-Partisan and All-Partisan: Rethinking Woman Suffrage and Party Politics in Gilded Age Kansas”, *Western Historical Quarterly* 25, No.1, (Spring 1994), 27.

<sup>106</sup> June O. Underwood, “Civilizing Kansas: Women’s Organizations, 1880-1920,” *Kansas History* 7, Vol. 4 (Winter 1984/1985), 304.

<sup>107</sup> Goldberg, 23.

<sup>108</sup> Eva Stevens to John Martin, 7 Feb 1887, Martin Papers, Governor’s Papers, 27-05-01-07, Kansas State Historical Society, quoted in Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2002), 167-8.

An economic downturn starting in the mid-1880s turned many Kansans' focus from social to political reform. Severe weather and a prolonged drought exacerbated the problem for the state's large population of farmers, leading to the formation of a new third party, the Populists, in 1890. The Populist platform encompassed many concerns of the agricultural majority, including land, monetary, and transportation reform, and quickly grew into a potent force in the state. Populists granted special attention to women as an integral part of the farm economy and could afford to promise sweeping changes while still a minority party. By 1893 the Populists had gained the governorship, putting the Republicans in a bellicose mood for the upcoming 1894 election. Suffragists eager to press their luck from their victories in the 1880s leaned on Populist leaders as most likely to support a state constitutional amendment granting woman suffrage while at the same time lobbying Republicans and Democrats for the same purpose. In their attempt to stay above the dirty business of politics—to argue simply for the justice of their cause—suffragists failed to take into account the sheer necessity of partisan tactics.

The first to respond to suffragists' request to support state suffrage were the Kansas Democrats, who turned them down flat. Most of the state's small population of Democrats was composed of German and other immigrant groups, who maintained highly patriarchal families and a strong tradition of beer-drinking and other alcohol consumption. As in the rest of the nation, woman suffrage was tied tightly to prohibition, so Democrats wishing to maintain their small immigrant voting bloc could not afford to consider either issue. The Democrats delicately

responded to the state woman suffrage association by writing that they opposed woman suffrage “as tending to destroy the home and family.”<sup>109</sup>

The next were the Republicans, whose singular aim in the election was a “redeeming” of Kansas from what they believed to be the anarchistic governance of the Populists.<sup>110</sup> Woman suffrage had never been a permanent plank in the Republican platform and their support over the years had been primarily for pragmatic reasons. According to historian Michael Goldberg, the Republicans realized that due to the bottoming-out of the economy and their uphill battle against the reactionary Populists, “the issue of woman suffrage was a luxury too politically risky in which to indulge during hard times.”<sup>111</sup> Through much wrangling with suffragists, who had counted on the Republicans’ historical support of black enfranchisement to carry over to the protection of all marginalized groups, the Republican convention could not seem to find a compelling reason to support a woman suffrage resolution, despite some good intentions. They finally supported the following resolution, satisfying none: “While disclaiming any desire to make it a test of party fealty, we recognize the justice of the pending suffrage amendment and ask in every Republican its just and earnest consideration.”<sup>112</sup> Suffrage was simply not a pressing issue for Kansas’ major political party.

The Populists had the most difficult decision. While the Democrats could point to their immigrant bloc as a reason to oppose suffrage outright and the Republicans could get away with a neutral position to essentially table the issue, the Populists knew that they controlled no solid

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<sup>109</sup> Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage* vol. 4, p. 646, quoted in Wilda M. Smith, “A Half Century of Struggle: Gaining Woman Suffrage in Kansas,” *Kansas History* 4, No. 2 (Summer 1981), 90.

<sup>110</sup> Goldberg, 34.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>112</sup> *State Journal*, 6 June 1894 in *Woman Suffrage Clippings*, vol. 1, quoted in Goldberg, 35.

voting bloc and needed to find a compromise that would maximize their political presence in the state. Their primary task was convincing voters that the ineffectiveness of their reform program and the corruption of their political apparatus were temporary problems that could be solved by the control of more legislative seats. Making the problem more difficult was a continuous onslaught of smears and panicked reports emanating from the Republican-controlled press. Historian Walter T. K. Nugent summed up the two major Populist problems. First, they were the incumbent administration during the ruinous Panic of 1893 and the subsequent depression and were generally blamed for the state's economic calamities. Second, the strike of the American Railway Union against the Pullman Company, led by socialist Eugene V. Debs, "set somber citizens, at the goading of the Republican press, quaking beneath their blankets in fear of the anarchy and violence of Populists and labor unions."<sup>113</sup> The Populists now had to answer to a constituency demoralized by an economic bust and frightened by social turmoil. It behooved them to look as conservative as possible while still advocating reforms they thought might alleviate economic problems. Woman suffrage did not fit this prescription.

Realizing that they did not possess the strength or organization of the two major parties, the Populists sought to fuse with the scanty Democrats against the Republicans for the election of 1894. Unfortunately, the two parties had little in common other than opposition to Republicans. Two major sticking points were prohibition and woman suffrage, both of which the Populists supported and the Democrats rejected. Seeking to push fusion through, Populist Party chairman John Briedenthal packed his resolutions committee with anti-suffragists, but a

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<sup>113</sup> Walter T. K. Nugent, "How the Populists Lost in 1894," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* 31, No. 3 (Autumn 1965), 246.

pro-suffrage resolution passed anyway with the vociferous support of Kansas Woman Movement activist Annie Diggs and Susan B. Anthony, in town for the occasion.<sup>114</sup>

Despite her success with the Populists, Anthony's presence in the state may have cost suffragists the amendment. Failing to understand party politics in Kansas, Anthony allowed her smoldering resentment of the Republican Party, borne of the Republican-led controversy over the exclusion of women in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and solidified with Republican-held Kansas' rejection of woman suffrage in 1867, to cloud her judgment. Allying with Bostonian George Train, a hugely wealthy investor, temperance advocate, radical, and rabidly anti-Republican Democrat, Stanton and Anthony seemed to signal that they had made suffrage a partisan issue. While stumping for suffrage in Kansas in 1887, Anthony further alienated Republicans by objecting to their platform of farm aid over social reform, stating, "I have read your platform thoroughly and can find nothing in it but irrigation. You seem to offer no redemption of Kansas except water, and I hope there will be enough of that to wash your dirty selves clean."<sup>115</sup> She attempted to urge Republican convention delegates to support a state suffrage amendment "in a short speech uncomplicated by political tact," according to Goldberg, warning delegates "If you leave [the amendment] out you are dead."<sup>116</sup> Anthony's posturing could not have been more destructive to the movement and shocking to Kansas suffragists, who continued to cling to the value of enfranchisement for the advancement of family morality. According to historian Wilda M. Smith, Kansas suffragists went out of their way to prove that they valued tradition: "As proof of their womanliness, women not only held bazaars, food sales, and fancy goods sales, but also arranged booths and furnished meals for such gatherings as fairs

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<sup>114</sup> Goldberg, 36.

<sup>115</sup> *Barton County Beacon*, 28 June 1894, quoted in Goldberg, 38-39.

<sup>116</sup> *Republican Party Clippings*, vol. 1, 45, Kansas State Historical Society, quoted in Goldberg, 35.

and picnics.” Others made and sold dresses, canned fruit, gardened and sold vegetables, or, for the more affluent, did their own housework to earn and save money to support the cause. By the time of the campaign, however, the damage was already done.

The failure of woman suffrage in 1894 can be directly attributed to the partisan nature of the election and the highly charged atmosphere between the Populists and the Republicans. Suffrage was a critical issue only for suffragists; neither party needed to support it and both probably lost votes by failing to oppose it outright. Fusion between Democrats and Populists failed to materialize due in part to their opposing ideas on woman suffrage, and the Democrats eventually held a separate nominating convention. For suffragists, the messy political situation debilitated their organizations. Kansas women, despite their national disenfranchisement, almost always placed party loyalty above suffrage, as Republican women continued to support local Republican candidates despite the party’s refusal to support an amendment. This development foreshadowed many later political questions in which a unified “women’s bloc” proved to be a phantom. Women tended to express the same economic and class loyalties as the men in their families, and not even suffrage could persuade them to change political parties. At election time, only the self-destructing Populists could claim to support woman suffrage but few Kansans could claim to support Populists anymore. The measure lost, 130,000 to 95,000, with one quarter of the electorate ignoring the amendment question entirely.<sup>117</sup> Woman suffrage was a reasonably popular idea in Kansas, but the dismal and tumultuous year of 1894 could not have been a worse time to bring the issue to a vote. Goldberg provides an apt summary of the affair: “At a time when everything seemed uncertain, such a leap into the unknown probably did not appeal to a

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<sup>117</sup> Goldberg, 41.

number of men. Add to this group those men who never really liked the idea of woman suffrage in the first place, and the suffragists' formidable task becomes clear."<sup>118</sup>

In the aftermath of the election, Populists lost in a nationwide sweep of Republican candidates and would enjoy only brief success again in 1896 as a fusion party under the popular Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan. In Kansas, the Populists' influence evaporated, leaving suffragists again with little choice but to lobby the Republicans. After another Republican sweep in 1900, Populist Annie Diggs resigned as president of the state suffrage association, "since she did not wish to be responsible for any opposition to their cause."<sup>119</sup> Suffragists had learned several bitter lessons, which anticipated many of the problems later feminists faced with the ERA. First, women's issues would always be a sideshow to political and economic issues in any election. Second, women activists in the state found that national leaders often framed suffrage as necessary for women's individualism, which generally did not appeal to socially conservative Kansans who desired to preserve gender distinctions and the primacy of the family. Inviting in outsiders to agitate for reform usually backfired with conservative voters, both men and women. Finally, Kansas women learned that party politics must be learned, cultivated, and harnessed. Nonpartisan activities worked well in social and club settings, but the reality of legislative influence had to be faced and brought to bear on women's concerns, regardless of the seemingly apparent justice of the issue. Women activists learned these lessons in Kansas in 1894 and used them to their advantage in 1912, but the knowledge seems to have been lost after that.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>119</sup> Anthony and Harper, 648, quoted in Smith, 91.

## **The Doldrums of the Suffrage Movement, 1896-1910**

As the Kansas suffrage campaign of 1894 stalled out, so did the national suffrage campaign. In 1869, Wyoming became the first United States territory to extend suffrage to women and also allowed them to hold public office. Between 1870 and 1896, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho granted women suffrage and several other states held unsuccessful referenda on the issue. But from 1896 until 1910 when Washington State voted for woman suffrage, NAWSA realized no new gains. Central to suffragists' problems were the deaths of the movement's most prominent leaders including Willard (1898), Stanton (1902), and Anthony (1906). Leadership during the doldrums may have inadvertently complicated the suffrage issue by pursuing a piecemeal approach, pressing needlessly complex and emotional arguments to advocate suffrage, and appearing to represent radical interests. All of these issues afflicted later ERA advocates but, like the suffragists, they refused to change tactics, contributing to their ultimate failure.

Before she died, Anthony selected the next two presidents of NAWSA but they failed to bring the unity and purpose to the campaign that the older leaders had. The first was Carrie Chapman Catt, who served from 1900-1904 but was overshadowed by Anthony and stepped down after only one term to nurse her ailing husband. Anthony replaced her with Anna Howard Shaw, a Methodist minister, medical doctor, temperance activist and suffragist who had become a close friend of Anthony's in her later years. Shaw served from 1904 until 1915, a stagnant period in the suffrage movement that many blamed on Shaw's poor organizational skills. Shaw's greatest strength was her oratory which most often focused on exegeses of Bible passages pertaining to women. Her favorite targets were five passages from the epistles of Paul in which he seemed to command women to be subordinate to men, including Paul's assertion that man was created for Christ but woman was created for man (1 Corinthians 11:3-12), that women should not speak in church but ask their husbands any questions (1 Corinthians 14:34-

35), that women should not usurp authority over man but should be silent in subjection (1 Timothy 2:11-15), and two passages that instruct women to subject themselves to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33 and Colossians 3:18-19). Shaw spent her life disarming conservatives who used these passages to uphold coverture and the necessity of separate spheres for the sexes, especially during her fight to achieve ordination in the late 1870s, and would not change tactics as the times changed.

Shaw persisted in casting the suffrage issue as a moral and Christian duty. Unlike Willard, who kept her Christian rhetoric generalized and did not attempt to prove that the Bible could be subject to misinterpretation, Shaw's antagonistic stance was comparable to Stanton's in *The Woman's Bible*. Shaw said that suffragists must fight through a religious phase of reform in which it must "meet all the obstacles reared by religionists, by theologians, and by a class of people who are always afraid that religion born of God, emanating from God, the soul and the life of world, will be overthrown by a few of God's simple human children; and these people fearing that God—I speak reverently—shall not be able to hold His own against a few."<sup>120</sup> For conservatives like many of the members of the WCTU, Shaw's position could be seen as insulting and snide. Others thought she was twisting the divine Word of God to suit her narrow political ends, such as in the following speech excerpt:

And God said in the beginning, "It is not good for man to stand alone." That is why we are here tonight, and that is all that woman's suffrage means; just to repeat again and again that first declaration of the Divine, "It is not good for man to stand alone," and so the women of this state are asking that the word "male" shall be stricken out of the Constitution altogether and that the Constitution stand as it ought to have stood in the beginning and as it must before this state is any part of a Republic.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Anna Howard Shaw, "God's Women," quoted in Wil A. Linkugel and Martha Solomon, eds., *Anna Howard Shaw: Suffrage Orator and Social Reformer*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 132.

<sup>121</sup> Anna Howard Shaw, "The Fate of Republics," quoted in Linkugel and Solomon, eds., 150.

Shaw was the right woman to wage the biblical battle, but the biblical battle was the wrong campaign to win the war for women's suffrage. In pressing the question of religion, Shaw may have unwittingly splintered the movement between NAWSA members' different denominations and offended theologically conservative women. Denying Paul's injunctions against women speaking in church in an attempt to prove woman's worthiness to enter politics made the suffrage movement needlessly complex—voting did not imply public speaking, nor was it an inherently religious function. Historian Mary Jo Buhle wrote that in the suffrage movement, “[i]nternal unity was, moreover, constantly threatened by principled disagreements. . . . the sanction for women's rights was disputed: did they need to find justification in the Bible or could the Word be treated as a mere historical metaphor describing a stage of human events long since passed?”<sup>122</sup> These esoteric questions deflected attention away from more pressing and practical tactics.

Due to her political conservatism, Shaw failed to capitalize on the many state suffrage campaigns occurring during her tenure. Although no state approved suffrage from 1896 to 1910, New Hampshire held an unsuccessful vote on the issue in 1902, making it only the second eastern state to consider the issue (Rhode Island failed to pass a woman suffrage measure in 1887). From 1910 to 1915, however, when Shaw stepped down in favor of her own predecessor Carrie Chapman Catt, ten additional states or territories granted women the right to vote, making the total number seventeen. Another five had considered woman suffrage at some point but had voted it down. Shaw's refusal to press for a federal amendment or to coordinate local and state efforts frustrated many of the younger, more fervent members who formed a splinter group within NAWSA in 1913 called the Congressional Union, headed by radical suffragist Alice Paul.

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<sup>122</sup> Mary Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle, eds. *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 13.

## Kansas Suffrage Success in 1912

After the dramatic, contentious, and unsuccessful attempt to pass woman suffrage in Kansas in 1894, the issue's ultimate passage in 1912 appears anticlimactic. State suffragists spoke to the legislature every year starting with 1894 and attempted to bring the issue to referendum nearly every year starting with 1904.<sup>123</sup> In almost every measurable way, Kansas suffragists modified their tactics to maximize advantages that would ensure the issue's passage in 1912. Taking advantage of increasingly favorable property rights, more women had more money to finance the campaign. The automobile allowed suffragists to stump in far-flung places and in a greater number of locales. By 1912, Kansas had been a prohibition state for over thirty years and, despite the hatchet job Carrie Nation performed on many of the remaining saloons, Kansans had mostly made peace with the law, weakening the connection between temperance and woman suffrage. Even the Democrats reassessed their earlier opposition and "in some instances went to great lengths to explain why they had formerly been against equal suffrage." Some interpreted this reversal as a way to curry favor with constituents after the issue's inevitable passage.<sup>124</sup> Kansas suffragists also dissociated suffrage with other controversial Progressive measures, such as the eight-hour work day and protective legislation for women and children. Mrs. Laura Johns, who had been president of the Equal Suffrage Association during the 1894 campaign, wisely advised the leaders of the 1912 campaign to avoid letting the national association dominate the effort as it had probably contributed to the issue's failure during her tenure.<sup>125</sup> Another suffrage activist involved in the successful Washington state campaign urged Kansans to take a softer stance than in previous campaigns: "Do not allow any woman speaker to

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<sup>123</sup> Miner, 187; Underwood, 302.

<sup>124</sup> Wilda M. Smith, "A Half Century of Struggle," *Kansas History* 4, No. 2 (Summer 1981), 94.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

abuse any man, even if he is the veriest blackguard in existence. You are asking something of them, and while I know it is gall and wormwood to be compelled to ask some of the specimens whose only claim to manhood is that they wear trousers, yet remember always, they have the vote.”<sup>126</sup> These terms were gladly accepted and implemented by the state suffragists, who withdrew from the national association and asked them to refrain from sending any workers unless they were specifically requested. By this final campaign, Susan B. Anthony had been replaced by Anna Howard Shaw as the president of NAWSA but the change caused no difference in tactics at the national level. Shaw agreed to stay out of Kansas and offered her services if requested, but could not resist making a number of statements that undermined the effort. She was on record criticizing the tactics and internal divisions of the Kansas suffragists, attached inordinate and pessimistic importance to the Kansas campaign as establishing the direction that the rest of the nation would inevitably follow, and was quoted as saying “It looks very much as if Kansas is going to act as South Dakota did, spend the first year quarrelling for the glory and the last year finding there was no glory to quarrel over.”<sup>127</sup> Kansans greatly benefited from removing outside suffrage influences; Shaw made enemies of a number of prominent men in Nebraska while campaigning there in 1914 which likely contributed to the state’s failure to pass a suffrage amendment until the national amendment made the point moot in 1920.<sup>128</sup>

The Kansas campaign was not a cakewalk, however. Many men still felt that women were best served by remaining in the home or concerned with home-protection issues, as stated

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>128</sup> Hickman, 59.

by J. W. Adams, a representative from Sedgwick County: “We don’t doubt the integrity of women, we don’t doubt their ability; we don’t doubt their valor. But I do not believe we should divert the minds of women with politics.” A man from Larned invoked the conservative religious rhetoric that had come to define the Kansas faithful by stating that “the Great Creator, knowing the end from the beginning, and seeing the delusion of Satan, under which mankind would become dissatisfied with the natural order of things . . . wisely settled this question of man’s domination by Divine decree.” The state was flooded with antisuffrage literature in the months preceding the election, but it had little effect—Kansas men voted to enfranchise women in the 1912 election.<sup>129</sup>

The campaign of 1912 relied on the lessons of 1867 and 1894 to tap into Kansans’ proclivity for traditional gender roles, making the suffrage issue more palatable for the male voters upon whom it depended for passage. Following suffrage, Kansas could boast the seating of the first jury containing women, placing twenty-three women in appointive official positions, and the admittance of nineteen woman lawyers to the bar, but most women could still claim to be serving as advocates of home protection.<sup>130</sup>

### **The Antis**

Although Frances Willard had convinced a large number of moderate and conservative women to take up the cause of suffrage as an extension of their moral roles as wives and mothers in the home, a significant minority of ultraconservative women remained opposed to suffrage. Organized antisuffragists tended to be privileged women who feared that woman suffrage might

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<sup>129</sup> Miner, 221-222.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 222.

upset their well-to-do status and dilute the votes of their husbands. Although antisuffragists and anti-ERA women are not demographically identical—anti-ERA women tended to be less well-off and less educated than privileged ERA advocates—the arguments both groups used to oppose the extension of women’s right are strikingly similar. Antisuffragists worried most about the absence of the woman and her moral influence from the home, even for the few minutes required to vote, which, they argued, would irreparably weaken the family.

There were a number of women’s state antisuffragist groups formed in the 1890s, starting with New York and then Massachusetts. By the 1910s, twenty state antisuffrage groups merged into an umbrella group called the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS). NAOWS was particularly active in the Northeast, attracting privileged women who opposed liberal or leftist social trends including Populism, Progressivism, socialism, and unions due to the perceived threat to the social and economic status quo.<sup>131</sup> Foremost among these concerns was the demise of traditional gender roles, which these women equated with class status.

Until 1910, NAOWS publications focused their scorn on the four Western states of Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho, the only four states that had unequivocally granted woman suffrage at that time. From their Eastern standpoint, NAOWS women viewed Western woman suffrage as having been approved “only by the crude, raw, half-formed commonwealths of the sagebrush and the windy plains, whence have come in endless procession foolish and fanatical politics and policies for a generation or two.”<sup>132</sup> For antisuffrage women, Western states were strange and perverse, as evidenced by the persistence of polygamy in Mormon Utah even after woman suffrage would have allowed sensible women to vote it down. As threatening

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<sup>131</sup> Susan E. Marshall, “Ladies against Women: Mobilization Dilemmas of Antifeminist Movements,” *Social Problems* 32, No. 4 (April 1985), 350.

<sup>132</sup> *New York Times*, 5 May 1913, quoted in Jensen, 41.

as woman suffrage was to the customs cherished by the antisuffragists, they could dismiss its adoption in the West as a social experiment in gender inversion that could at least be contained at a remote distance. However, the extension of limited or unlimited woman suffrage in Washington, California, Oregon, Arizona, Kansas, Illinois, Nevada, and Montana between 1910 and 1914 demonstrated to antisuffragists that radical ideas were gaining traction in areas with significant urban and commercial interests. NAOWS redoubled their efforts, publishing a newspaper called *The Woman's Protest* to raise awareness of the threat to family order.

As the antisuffragists built a national campaign to defeat votes for women, they had to develop more sophisticated arguments than those used against the Western states. On the surface, these women who agitated to prevent their own political enfranchisement seem illogical. Suffrage promised to give women a political voice for the first time in American history, yet antisuffrage women did not wish to participate nor did they wish for other women to participate. Although NAOWS never matched the two million members NAWSA claimed at its peak in 1917, NAOWS still appealed to enough Americans to claim 350,000 members at its peak in 1916.<sup>133</sup> With this large of a constituency, it is safe to assume that the women opposing their own political rights were neither crazy nor did they represent a radical fringe movement. The characteristic these women shared was the fear that gaining political power would antagonize men to the point that women would forever forfeit the economic support of dependency. Being dependent and not having to labor defined upper middle-class womanhood; the loss of this “privilege” threatened the loss of economic and social status. It was in the interests of the

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<sup>133</sup> Elizabeth V. Burt, “The Ideology, Rhetoric, and Organizational Structure of a Countermovement Publication: *The Remonstrance*, 1890-1920,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 75, No.1 (Spring 1998), 75.

women who joined NAOWS to maintain the status quo against any and all assaults on their privileged position.

Antisuffragists clung to gender roles exaggerated by middle-class Victorian culture. Like conservative and moderate women thinkers before them, they envisioned the ideal role for women as angels of the home. Food preparation, laundry, decorating, cleaning—middle-class women were expected to oversee the performance of these jobs but their major function was childbearing and child rearing, a task at which women were thought to be especially suited due to their superior morality. A married woman was supposed to take her mothering seriously, forming her entire adult identity around this function. “The virtuous woman was first and foremost—even exclusively—a mother,” notes historian Sheila Rothman, and “their husbands are . . . only children of larger growth, to be loved and cared for very much in the same way as their real children.”<sup>134</sup> Unrelated men were to be met with motherly affection, as one might treat members of an extended family. Sexuality was strictly taboo and even married couples were supposed to live, as Frances Willard described, “a white life for two” including the limitation of family size through abstinence. This would not be easy, however, for men were naturally bestial. A female writer of 1886 stated the problem simply:

Few women understand at the outset that in marrying, they have simply captured a wild animal, and staked their chances for future happiness on their capacity to tame him . . . at the core of his nature he cherishes still his original savagery, the taming of which is to be the life work of the woman who has taken him in charge. . . . The duty is imposed upon her by high heaven, to reduce all these grand, untamed life-forces to order . . . to make them subservient to the behests of her nature, and to those vast underlying interests which, to these two and to their posterity, center in the home.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), 82; Eliza B. Duffy, *The Relations of the Sexes* (New York: 1876), 219, quoted in Haller and Haller, 100-101.

<sup>135</sup> [Anonymous], *Letters from a Chimney-Corner*, 1886, quoted in Haller and Haller, 90.

The author described woman's job as making man *subservient* to her nature and to the interests of the home—this was only to be accomplished by gentle, silent example, not through actual domination. Woman's superiority was in moral force; man was superior in all other realms. The virtuous woman never resorted to nagging or threats to achieve her feminine purpose because she knew that she was completely dependent on her husband for financial support and physical protection from all of the other bestial men in the world. Only the presence of a steadfast feminine moral force could tame the animal lurking beneath the surface of all men. Men, being naturally bestial, could be tamed only by tapping into an innate desire to protect their families. Women therefore exaggerated their helplessness to maximize men's protective feelings. Denying a woman's vulnerability, exaggerated or not, by attempting to expand her role outside of the home and into politics was, therefore, as foolish as it was unnatural.

Politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not an arena for the weak of will. The partisan nature of political discourse, paired with the all-male constituency, made political rallies raucous affairs consisting of shouting, jostling, cajoling, and intimidation, as candidates exhorted their faithful to seize a majority. Candidates provided alcohol in plentiful quantities and lobbied at saloons. In cities, machine politicians often resorted to buying votes either by outright payments of cash or through the promise of favors or patronage. Voting could be dangerous if a voter did not support the right candidate; the secret ballot was not available nationwide until 1892. Politics was a dirty business, and although it was necessary for men to sully their hands with it from time to time, conservative women shunned these vulgar activities as outside of their sphere.

Agitation for woman suffrage struck conservative women as the height of folly. The arguments made for suffrage—women's natural rights, the need to "clean up" politics, the

expansion of motherhood to the public sphere—did not make sense to them. Did suffragists not know that they would be biting the hands that fed them? Antisuffragists feared that votes for woman would lead to the demise of the home as women left their traditional sphere for the murky world of politics. “The writings of the Anti-suffragists were filled with warnings,” noted historian Billie Barnes Jensen:

Woman suffrage, they said, might cause the end of chivalry—men would lose their manners and end their generosity; wives might lose the economic support that the law required the husbands to provide. Divorce might become rampant, and men might cease to support their children. The respect that women received from a society which recognized their value as mothers might end, and in its place would come contempt and disrespect. Finally, they even warned that men might resort to violence against women who overstepped the boundaries of propriety by demanding political equality.<sup>136</sup>

Within this list were the fears that men, released from the drama that cast them as dutiful providers and their wives as helpless dependents, would simply leave their wives to their own devices. If women could vote and earn incomes, men were no longer required in the home. The valorization of womanhood that began with republican motherhood, when respect for women as superiorly moral was substituted for the destruction of their earning potential, might cease to exist. One antisuffragist charged, “Suffrage offers men an easy escape from duty and chivalry to women which we are still old-fashioned enough to hope they will resist.”<sup>137</sup> Another claimed that suffragists were secretly working for unscrupulous husbands who desired to end their wives’ right to lifetime financial support.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Billie Barnes Jensen, “‘In the Weird and Woolly West’: Anti-Suffrage Women, Gender Issues, and Woman Suffrage in the West,” *Journal of the West* 32, No. 3 (July 1993), 44.

<sup>137</sup> Marshall, 350.

<sup>138</sup> Tally Fugate, “Where Angels Belong: The Oklahoma Antisuffrage Movement,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 82, No. 2 (Summer 2004), 202.

Other dire predictions followed. Some thought women, consumed with their new political role, would abandon their children or fail to protect them from sickness and death. Others feared that prostitutes would sell their votes or vote for immoral and corrupting influences such as gambling. The medical opinions of the time supported the prediction that women, prone to nervousness, might faint at the ballot box. Still others justified male-only enfranchisement by linking it with national security, claiming that the ability to defend one's country was a necessary prerequisite for the right to cast ballots.<sup>139</sup> Conservative women knew that they were the disadvantaged party in the marital power relationship, but they also felt that the advantages of being dependent outweighed any advantage that might be gained by wresting from men an expanded role. Woman suffrage meant the end of political dependency, but it was also the end of separate spheres ideology.

Although fear of social change and a decline in women's dependent status comprised the bulk of antisuffragist arguments, others used contemporary social science to augment their opposition. Some believed that conditions for women in the recent past were much worse, and that custom and the steady tide of progress had convinced men to support and protect their wives. "The woman suffrage movement is a movement against the tide of social progress," antisuffrage journal *The Remonstrance* declared in 1907. "If it were to succeed it would turn back the tide of social progress [and] . . . mark a return to unfavorable conditions from which women have slowly and with difficulty emerged."<sup>140</sup> This view was also supported by quasi-scientific thought which cast the differentiation of the sexes as a mark of higher evolution. The sex of an insect could scarcely be perceived, but rodents could be differentiated with difficulty.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Burt, 74.

Large mammals were clearly distinguishable as male or female. For some, sex differences were the mark of civilization and progress. “To blur these all-important sex-distinctions, for example by women taking over activities previously dominated by men, would be to send mankind backward on the evolutionary path.”<sup>141</sup>

Some of the more moderate antisuffragists still invoked separate spheres ideology, but allowed for women to leave the home for the right reasons. They recognized that women had made important gains through their service organizations and women’s clubs in correcting social problems, but had achieved success only by maintaining political neutrality. Voting would actually harm political interests in which women had made some headway: “Since casting the ballot would necessitate a woman’s alignment with a political party, becoming a voter would rob her of her political neutrality and nonpartisanship and consequently diminish her influence with legislative or other governmental authorities that had so far been responsive to women’s requests on the very grounds of their political disinterestedness.”<sup>142</sup> To allow women to vote would lessen her effectiveness in mothering the world, a role with which she was specially endowed and morally compelled to perform. The least conservative simply dismissed suffrage as unnecessary. As stated by Mrs. Gilbert Jones, woman suffrage “has not brought about one single benefit that cannot be found in other States where women do not vote.”<sup>143</sup>

Unfortunately for antisuffragists, their very platform limited the ways in which they could agitate against suffrage. NAOWS women cited the very Bible passages that Anna Howard

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<sup>141</sup> Jensen, 44.

<sup>142</sup> Manuela Thurner, “‘Better Citizens Without the Ballot’: American AntiSuffrage Women and Their Rationale During the Progressive Era,” *Journal of Women’s History* 5, No. 1 (Spring 1993), 41.

<sup>143</sup> Mrs. Gilbert Jones, “Some Impediments to Woman Suffrage,” *North American Review* 190 (Aug. 1909), 167, quoted in Jensen, 49.

Shaw had spent her life refuting to prove that it was un-Christian for women to speak in public, or worse, to instruct men in mixed audiences. One anti-suffrage broadside predicted “freedom of women” would be gained only “through the overthrow of the Religion of Christ.”<sup>144</sup> In holding this position, antis hamstrung their political efforts to oppose suffrage by eliminating public protest as a tool for gaining support. Instead, they relied on word-of-mouth warnings, speeches in their own private women’s clubs, courting men to be their mouthpieces, and personally appealing to state representatives to oppose woman suffrage. In many states, these behind-the-scenes tactics forestalled the consideration of woman suffrage until the Nineteenth Amendment made further action pointless.

### **World War I and the Nineteenth Amendment**

In 1915, Anna Howard Shaw bowed to the internal pressure exerted by more radical members of NAWSA and the newly formed Congressional Union and stepped down as president. She was replaced by her predecessor Carrie Chapman Catt, who was only nominally Christian and immediately eliminated the religious and biblical squabbling of Shaw’s tenure from the NAWSA agenda. Her goal was to focus political pressure on state campaigns to ensure a federal amendment to the Constitution would be ratified by the required three-fourths majority. According to Beverly Zink-Sawyer, Catt “refused to allow any other cause to divert the focus of the NAWSA’s agenda, saying, ‘As a matter of fact we do not care a ginger snap about anything but that Federal Amendment.’”<sup>145</sup> Her persistence and focus paid off: by 1918, twenty-six states

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<sup>144</sup> Evelyn A. Kirkley, “‘This Work is God’s Cause’: Religion in the Southern Woman Suffrage Movement, 1880-1920,” *Church History* 59, no. 4 (1990), 512.

<sup>145</sup> Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists: Women’s Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 219.

extended at least partial suffrage to women, including the antis' Northeastern strongholds of New York and Rhode Island.

The American entrance into World War I on the side of Britain and France interrupted the suffrage campaign. Catt encouraged members to continue their work quietly and to assist in the war effort. Alice Paul's semi-autonomous Congressional Union, which in 1916 became the independent National Woman's Party (NWP), refused to follow Catt's lead and instead became even more radical by adopting the controversial tactics of British suffragists to gain media attention for a federal amendment. NWP members engaged in demonstrations, parades, and mass meetings which succeeded in drawing attention, often unfavorable and violent, to their cause. Their notorious acts of civil disobedience included the first-ever picket of the White House in 1917, in which NWP women publicized their belief that President Woodrow Wilson was personally responsible for women's continued disenfranchisement. After their arrest for obstructing traffic, demonstrators including Paul participated in a prison hunger strike which led to rough treatment and forced feedings.

Radical NWP women provoked charges of disloyalty and unpatriotic behavior due to their opposition to the war and attacks on Wilson's character. At the forefront of these accusations were the antisuffragists, who charged NWP women with treason and painted them as "pro-Germans, pacifists, and socialists." Moderate NAWSA women, who were actually helping in the war effort, fared little better as antis accused them of participating only to receive the vote. One antisuffragist stated, "[our] love of country has no string attached."<sup>146</sup> The conservative antis, desperate to stall the suffrage effort, attempted to curry favor by demonstrating their unflagging patriotism and support for the war. The distinction became a badge of pride for the

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<sup>146</sup> Fugate, 209.

antis.<sup>147</sup> Their work was appreciated but not successful in curtailing the demand for woman suffrage. In 1917, bowing to overwhelming pressure, Wilson declared woman suffrage an urgently needed war measure and supported its passage through Congress in 1919. After months of debate, Tennessee became the last state needed to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment in the summer of 1920.

The suffrage campaign of 1890 to 1920 proved that women with differing world views and different ideas of how women should fit into society could work together for a progressive goal. This, however, was the first and last campaign for women's empowerment that would see such unity. Moderates and radicals could not agree on a suffrage goal before 1890, and they could no longer agree on a unified path for women's progress after 1920. The conservative women who advocated suffrage largely returned to their homes and refrained from further activism or joined with the ultraconservatives, who had opposed suffrage as tending to destroy the traditional family and continued to oppose radicalism after 1920. Many suffragists were confused by the antis, finding women's opposition to their own political voice illogical. The antis, however, thought that they were the ones acting as true women by protecting their families from the subversive and corrosive element of radical feminism. This strand of women's conservatism continued to coalesce over the next fifty years as the nation faced the controversial programs of the New Deal and two Communist Red Scares. By the 1970s, conservative antifeminist women would be ready to take on feminists and the ERA, and this time they would not lose.

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<sup>147</sup> Thurner, 43.

## **CHAPTER 4 - Antiradicalism and the New Deal, World War II, and the Cold War**

Once the Nineteenth Amendment passed, the narrowly focused suffrage coalition immediately collapsed. Many former suffragists saw their work as done and retired from public agitation, limiting their activity to local benevolent societies and private social clubs. Those women who remained politically restive fragmented based on their perception of women's role in American society. Radicals such as Alice Paul of the National Woman's Party pressed for women's full equality through a constitutional equal rights amendment, demanding full inclusion into American society as individuals, not as wives or mothers. These women denied separate spheres for men and women and thought that women needed to advance educationally and economically to be active participants in the American republic. This strain of individualist feminism persisted essentially unchanged from Stanton's nineteenth-century writings through the 1970s but attracted a relatively small following.

More popular was the idea that women were the moral center of the family, which was shared by both moderate and conservative former suffragists. The two groups diverged over how the government should support women's role in the post-suffrage era based on a fundamental disagreement over the role of men in the family. For moderate former suffragists, such as Carrie Chapman Catt of NAWSA, men had a financial obligation to support their families but were often incapable of fulfilling that obligation due to poor wages, alcoholism, or some other social impediment. In the absence of government intervention, those women and children depending on an unsupportive man (or without a man entirely) were doomed to poverty

and sickness. The Progressives proposed a two-pronged solution to lift these families out of misery, both of which emanated from the federal government. First, they attempted to prop up men through such actions as peace activism to prevent warfare from depriving a family of its male support, union organization to demand better wages for male workers, and the regulation of capitalism to allow more power at lower levels. Second, they proposed programs to aid impoverished families, including a plan to educate expectant mothers in the care of their babies, a law restricting child labor, and a law requiring special treatment for female laborers. These women activists advocated a statist solution to social problems and tended to attribute high levels of importance to “experts,” thinking that those with credentials or special training were uniquely qualified to instruct those who lacked formal expertise in almost every area, from national economic planning to education to motherhood.

Conservative women vehemently opposed Progressive solutions based on their belief that the male head of a family was the seat of individual American power. For these women, structures attempting to prop up men emasculated them by removing their power to choose the conditions of their employment or, in the case of peace activism, to defend the nation. Programs designed to aid poor families tampered with both men’s innate need to support their wives and children and their ability to direct their families’ activity. Progressive solutions struck at conservatives’ idea of masculinity, which diminished the strength of the patriarchal family, which, as the foundational unit of American society, threatened to erode the basis of national strength. Conservative women during the Progressive era felt that their families were under siege by wrong-headed and aggressive government interference, which could only be stopped through similarly aggressive protest and watchful vigilance. Taking on the mantle of crusaders, conservative women abandoned the earlier idea that women should refrain from public activism

and instead appropriated the moderate rhetoric of the suffrage era to cast themselves as the final bulwark against their families' moral harm. Conservatives' nineteenth-century fears of dissipation fueled by alcohol, prostitution, gambling, and a decline in religiosity became, after 1920, focused antipathy toward leftist radicals as the source from which all anti-family, and therefore anti-American, vice flowed. Toward this end, conservative women thought that the proper role for the national government should be limited to national defense, which would prevent an attack from radical foreign forces, but that the prevention of subversion was the job of local communities led by women, who were uniquely qualified to spot threats to the home front. From the 1920s to the 1970s, conservative women became increasingly active through the formation of ultraconservative Republican women's clubs and the support of right-wing demagogues in an attempt to shield their families from moral decline incited by left-wing radicals.

### **Antisuffragists Become Antiradical Antifeminists**

In 1920, antisuffrage women lost their battle, but they were not defeated, instead transferring their fears of woman suffrage to a more generalized fear of radicalism. They were joined by many conservative women who had supported suffrage to protect the family but opposed any further expansion of women's public role. Women formerly organized as the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) shifted their focus from antisuffrage to antiradical topics, marked by changing the name of their publication from *The Woman's Protest* to *The Woman Patriot*. The new paper's masthead contained a purpose statement that changed a number of times, reflecting their changing priorities. In 1918 editions, the paper proclaimed support "For Home and National Defense Against Woman Suffrage,

Feminism, and Socialism.” A 1921 edition was “Dedicated to the Defense of Womanhood, Motherhood, The Family and the State AGAINST Suffragism, Feminism and Socialism.” By 1922, the paper settled on its final purpose, “Dedicated to the Defense of The Family and The State AGAINST Feminism and Socialism.”<sup>148</sup> These seemingly disparate issues found a common home with the deeply conservative former opponents of woman suffrage, who saw each as a threat to the primacy of the family, the physical strength and leadership of the man, and the moral superiority of the woman. Central to the study of this phenomenon is Kim E. Nielsen’s seminal *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare*, which is the only work in the field that demonstrates the progression of conservative women’s thought from antisuffrage activity directly into anti-Bolshevism, antiradicalism, and antistatism during the 1920s. For conservatives, woman suffrage was the tip of an iceberg that threatened to collide with the fragile hull of American culture. Lurking just below the surface was the alleged threat of feminist-led Progressive reform begun around the turn of the century, and barely perceptible but still menacing were Communist, socialist, populist, and internationalist radical conspiracies fueled by the Red Scare of 1919-1920. Conservatives of the 1920s saw threats to the family everywhere.

The first of the antifeminists’ fears started even before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment when war broke out in Europe. Numerous women’s groups agitated for a peaceful end to the conflict, even sending representatives to Europe to attend peace rallies. The outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the subsequent separate peace raised suspicions among conservatives that American peace activists were agents of an international communist order,

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<sup>148</sup> Tally Fugate, “Where Angels Belong: The Oklahoma Antisuffrage Movement,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 82, No. 2 (Summer 2004), 216; *The Woman Patriot* 1, No. 3 (11 May 1918); Vol. 5, Nos. 3 and 4 (22 January 1921); Vol. 6, No. 3 (1 February 1922).

willing to sue for peace by selling out America's allies. When the U.S. entered the war, those Americans who continued to call for a peaceful end to the war were treated as traitors. Some of the most outspoken pacifists were members of Alice Paul's National Woman's Party who picketed the White House to raise publicity for the cause of woman suffrage with signs addressing President Woodrow Wilson as "Kaiser Wilson." This provocative gesture did little to allay conservative fears that women's rights were part of a much larger conspiracy to destroy American values from within. *The Woman Patriot* linked the desire for expanded women's rights with male ineptitude, claiming that only the "slacker and the coward" voted for woman suffrage in order that "women will vote for peace-at-any-price, so that he may not be obliged to fight for his country."<sup>149</sup>

Once the Versailles Treaty was signed, peace activists and politicians attended numerous international conferences and treaties in an attempt to prevent a future recurrence of the war's ghastly carnage. The League of Nations was President Wilson's brainchild but it failed to have the desired impact on world events when Congress refused to approve American involvement. The Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928) was the most idealistic of these 1920s-era treaties, "providing for the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy." The Washington Naval Arms Limitation Treaty (1922) established ratios of battleships that each nation could maintain in relation to the other great powers, attempting to prevent future arms races. All of these measures were hailed by woman peace activists as positive measures to prevent the loss of their sons and husbands. For conservative women, however, they represented a severe curtailing of American strength and will, placing the nation's national security in the hands of international committees dominated, in their view, by radicals. Particularly worrisome to woman antiradicals were

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<sup>149</sup> *The Woman Patriot* 1, No. 6 (1 June 1918), 6.

seventeen women's organizations and twenty individual women considered to be members of an international "social-pacifist" movement. Several conservative women organized these groups and women into a chart with lines tracing the connections among them, creating what became known as the "spider web" chart. The "web" of lines attempted to convince the suspicious that the pacifist groups were connected in conspiracy. The four organizations with the most lines emanating from their boxes were the National Council for Prevention of War, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Women's Joint Congressional Committee (a women's lobby on Capitol Hill), and Women's Committee for World Disarmament, highlighting conservatives' linkage of pacifism and feminism with socialist subversion.

In the post-suffrage era, many conservative women activists found renewed strength and purpose in an extreme version of conservative nationalism. Combating the international threat of socialism allegedly perpetrated through pacifism in the 1920s were the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Originally founded in the 1890s as a patriotic social club for women who could trace at least one ancestor to the Revolutionary War, the post-Versailles Treaty DAR defined their motto "God, Home, and Country" as a defense of American military strength. As they promoted the buildup of the nation's defenses, the DAR simultaneously attacked those they believed to be undermining their work. Central to their idea of national strength was male strength, the vector through which defense was carried out. DAR women believed that the two were connected so closely that any attempt to erode the protective, patriotic instincts in men, both in public and in private, would strike at the security of the nation. Conversely, any attempt to weaken the nation's defense would enervate men. DAR leadership, according to Nielsen, "believed that the advocacy of peace by U.S. women—largely women they believed to be feminists—contradicted the ideals of female citizenship, for women were to

support the military and physical strength of men. They believed that female peace activists were radicals and feminists who sought to destroy the patriarchal family along with the nation.”<sup>150</sup> They did not, however, believe that they were warmongers. Grace Brosseau, president-general of DAR from 1926 to 1929, stated, “normal, human mothers and wives . . . do not believe in war,” but boys required the cultivation of “the instincts of courage and self-preservation.” Lacking these instincts, “the net result will be in lack of virility, initiative and productivity.”<sup>151</sup> Masculine strength was the source of national strength; the erosion of either one, for DAR activists, would cause the other to crumble.

DAR women eventually expanded their efforts from opposing pacifism and disarmament to campaigns against social welfare legislation and statism, viewing all of these movements as striking at the independent, masculine core of the nation. The legislation of Progressive reformers, including a whole host of programs spanning from electoral regulation to the breakup of trusts to clean food and water, alarmed conservatives. Central to their beliefs about male strength in wartime was the understanding that the central unit of the nation was the family (not the individual), and that the man was the head of the family. This patriarchal model ensured social order when each man was the master of his family and his property. Any alteration of this arrangement, whether it was from an internal family power imbalance fueled by feminism or the excessive intrusion of paternalistic government programs, eroded masculine power and the independence of the family. Key to this argument was the ironic idea that masculinity needed to be propped up by watchful, morally righteous women. Just as Frances Willard argued that women required the vote to eliminate liquor from their communities in order to save their men,

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<sup>150</sup> Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2001), 59.

<sup>151</sup> Grace Brosseau, address before the Continental Congress, *DAR Magazine*, May 1927, 333-334, quoted in Nielsen, 58.

DAR women encouraged protest against excessive feminine interference that might disarm their men.

Exaggerated gender roles borne of separate spheres ideology defined the conservative woman's understanding of politics. As Nielsen notes, antifeminists "argu[ed] that social welfare measures *feminized* liberalism by promoting a political culture characterized by *dependency*. Explicit in their arguments was the belief that the liberalism promoted by progressive women created feminist women, weak men, and a federal government that impinged upon male domains of power."<sup>152</sup> To this end, conservatives used "adherence to and support of the patriarchal family as a measuring stick of patriotism,"<sup>153</sup> and also inverted the argument to imply that all those who did not belong to or support patriarchal families were radicals. Feminists, Progressives, and Bolsheviks, all of whom concerned themselves with the problems of women and children within the patriarchal family, could be painted with the same subversive brush. These ideals were put to the test in 1919 in Seattle, when over 25,000 shipyard workers went on strike to protest their diminishing wages due to the end of wartime orders. Seattle's mayor Ole Hanson cast the strike in radical terms, equating labor leaders with Bolsheviks and calling for the people of Seattle to show their Americanism. Hanson was particularly suspicious of single male strikers, drawing a parallel between their lack of dependent family members and a lack of stability, charging them with a proclivity towards radicalism. With this accusation, Hanson drew on the familiar idea that men without family duties were deprived of both the motivation to act in a civilized fashion and the civilizing power that came with family leadership. The gendered

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<sup>152</sup> Nielsen, 6.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 5.

equation of patriarchy with patriotism led him to write that Americanism “is founded on family love and family life; Bolshevism is against family life.”<sup>154</sup>

For conservatives, one of the dangers of the new female suffrage was that emotional, sensitive women could be lobbied by radicals to view their programs with tender sympathy. As weaker vessels, women were particularly vulnerable to socialist or communist propaganda. They could not be expected to understand its true purpose, which was far darker than they could imagine. Underlining conservatives’ paranoia throughout the 1920s was the belief that Communism would collectivize private property and private relationships. As international Communism invaded each nation, government programs would weaken family ties to the point that each adult person was considered an equal worker for the greater good, making women directly subject to the government without any protective male buffering of her citizenship. With the diminishing of familial relationships, women could not be claimed by individual men, making all women and children the property of the state. Nielsen explains the fear:

As each man lost exclusive rights to his property to the Bolshevik government, so did he lose exclusive claim to his woman and children. That left women and children without male protection, and like dominoes, all the bulwarks of social order subsequently were falling. The new Bolshevik government, investigators argued, nationalized the bodies of innocent women just like other industries and resources, for the good of the Bolshevik state and the lust of the Bolshevik male. Easy divorce laws encouraged promiscuity and female prostitution. Red Guards forced refined and delicate women to do the harsh physical labor ordinarily reserved for men. They tore children from their mothers and placed them under the control of the state.<sup>155</sup>

The perceived terrors of Bolshevism ran in a straight line to Progressive reform that sought top-down social amelioration. Government programs that removed women and children from the

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

complete authority of the male head-of-household were seen as precursors to the complete abandonment of patriarchy and a downward slide into Communism.

Conservative women believed that only they could demonstrate true American patriotism by adhering to patriarchal family structures, shoring up male authority by their robust exercise of home protection. Encountering the same problems with antiradicalism that they had with antisuffragism, namely, their ideological revulsion from entering the public sphere, conservative women reasoned that to save the nation, according to Nielsen, it was their civic duty to expose subversion wherever they saw it, “regardless of the discomfort or distaste for activism that they might feel.”<sup>156</sup> Central to this activism was the celebration of tradition and a resistance to government paternalism that eroded the power of the individual home. Antifeminists added a new grievance that antisuffragists had not, namely, that government paternalism eroded the authority of the man *and* the woman. Social welfare had always been the concern of women, but for conservatives, feminist-led Progressive-era government programs designed to alleviate poverty or to bolster infant health stepped on the toes of conscientious middle-class mothers and clubwomen who had built elaborate social networks and aid organizations to combat these problems. If men were the head of the home and women the heart, government paternalism struck at both.

A surge in woman-led antifeminism coincided with the first Red Scare of 1919-1920. A prominent conservative figure of this era was Margaret C. Robinson, a former antisuffragist and later the longtime president of the Massachusetts Public Interests League (MPIL), an antifeminist group. Robinson believed that women’s primary role as citizens of a republic was to be the guardians of the home and family. It was up to women to detect and repel subversive influences

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 52.

within their sphere, just as it was men's role to detect and repel enemies of the nation's security. Robinson, like many other conservatives, valued order over individual freedom, celebrating women's subordination as natural and healthful to the proper functioning of men. According to Robinson, attempts to lure women out of the home struck at men's natural desire to shoulder "the responsibility for wife and child," denying men this "steadying and civilizing influence."<sup>157</sup> The patriarchal family was the only true seat of power from which all social, political, and economic power flowed. Anyone who acted outside of this structure was in danger of becoming a radical. Furthermore, order and stability flourished best in an environment where men were free from government interference and had complete control over their families and local social conditions.

### **Conservative Women Oppose Progressive Family Reforms**

Progressive reformers of the early twentieth century met with great success in pushing through family and moral reform programs, despite conservatives' disapproval. The first momentous change in women's status was the Supreme Court's ruling in *Muller v. Oregon* (1908), which decreed that women laborers could be treated differently than male laborers in terms of minimum wages, maximum hours, rest breaks, and the provision for facilities for resting and eating under certain circumstances. This ruling was noteworthy because it provided an exception to the Court's earlier position, given by Justice Rufus Peckham in *Lochner v. New York* (1905), that government regulation of wage and labor contracts represented the "an unreasonable, unnecessary and arbitrary interference with the right and liberty of the individual

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<sup>157</sup> Margaret Robinson, "The Feminist Program," *Unpopular Review* 5 (April 1916), 318-31, quoted in *ibid.*, 66.

to contract in relation to labor.”<sup>158</sup> Progressives found the *Lochner* decision abominable because it outlawed any government regulation of the labor conditions of dangerous industries, such as mining, thereby placing laborers at the mercy of their employers, but reformers like social activist Florence Kelley saw an opportunity for change if the subject of a labor case was an exploitable woman instead of an independent man. Her work contributed to the *Muller* decision in which a woman’s body was deemed to be a compelling governmental interest. Justice David Josiah Brewer wrote the decision:

That woman's physical structure and the performance of maternal functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence is obvious. This is especially true when the burdens of motherhood are upon her. Even when they are not, by abundant testimony of the medical fraternity continuance for a long time on her feet at work, repeating this from day to day, tends to injurious effects upon the body, and as healthy mothers are essential to vigorous offspring, the physical well-being of woman becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race.<sup>159</sup>

Kelley, a socialist, was a deep believer in women’s need for protective legislation but also hoped that provisions would eventually be extended to all workers.

Conservatives accepted the *Lochner* decision because it provided men the maximum authority to choose their own employment, but were ambivalent about *Muller* due to its sole effect on laboring women, few of whom filled conservative ranks. They did not remain silent about Kelley’s next pet project, a proposed Child Labor Amendment, which enraged conservatives to the point that they began to muster the strength to block and roll back many Progressive reforms aimed at women and children. The 1924 text for the proposed amendment read:

*Section 1.* The Congress shall have power to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of persons under eighteen years of age.

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<sup>158</sup> *Lockner v. New York*, 198 U.S. 45 (1905).

<sup>159</sup> *Muller v. Oregon*, 208 U.S. 412 (1908).

*Section 2.* The power of the several States is unimpaired by this article except that the operation of State laws shall be suspended to the extent necessary to give effect to legislation enacted by the Congress.

Conservatives, especially women of the DAR, vehemently opposed this amendment as limiting the power of the patriarchal head of family. Under this amendment Congress, not fathers, would have the power to regulate children's labor. Northern conservatives bristled at the proposed legislation, painting a nightmare scenario in which the government posted federal agents in each home to make sure children helping with chores were not exploited by their own parents.

Southerners objected to the limitation of child labor in their struggling economy where often all members of a family had to work to make ends meet. With vocal opposition from conservatives both north and south of the Mason-Dixon Line, only five states ratified the amendment before the Great Depression made other issues more pressing. The amendment was never ratified but, due to its lack of specified deadline, technically remains an open issue.

A successful family-centered law enacted by the Progressives was the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1920, ordering federal monies to the states for the support of prenatal and infant care education programs in an attempt to lessen the effects of poverty on infant mortality. The act passed and operated for most of the decade, but not without shrill opposition from conservatives who viewed it as even more governmental interference in family life. Particularly odious to conservatives were provisions funding traveling nurses and child-care specialists, many of whom were unmarried and childless professional women and therefore suspected of being feminists, to direct the education and nutrition habits of expectant mothers. A number of Congressmen gave voice to conservative angst, such as Senator Thomas Bayard of Delaware, who invoked Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* co-author Friederich Engels and Progressive Florence Kelley to describe the Sheppard-Towner Act as part of the "Engels-Kelley program" for the "central

control and standardization of children.” He went on to say that it was a Red plot, part of the “worst form of communism . . . the feminist phase,” which included “arousing women against men, wives against husbands, and providing community care for children, legitimate and illegitimate,” and to “remove the economic foundations of monogamous marriages.”<sup>160</sup> Senator James Reed of Missouri and others read their objections into the *Congressional Record*, noting that the Child Labor Amendment, the Sheppard-Towner Act, and several other government-sponsored programs represented a socialist plot to collectivize citizens through cradle-to-grave supervision: “The government bureaucracy created by the Sheppard-Towner Act would control the infancy of all children, the Child Labor Amendment would render parental control ineffective, the proposed federal department of education would subject them to congressional dictates, the current attempt to make uniform marriage and divorce law in all the states would subject their marital relations to federal control, their income would be taxed, and finally, their estates would be taxed.”<sup>161</sup> The imposition of government regulation into every aspect of the family was un-American and smacked of a plot to subvert laissez-faire structures in place since the nation’s founding. Conservatives deemed men’s right to protect and control the women and children in their lives to be inviolable.<sup>162</sup>

Not all Progressive reforms were government-led. Many Progressive Christian woman reformers supported the Social Gospel movement and its foremost intellectual, Walter Rauschenbusch, who advocated government reform as a means of “social salvation.” Rauschenbusch thought that temporal suffering was due to social and political forces that could

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<sup>160</sup> Senator Thomas Bayard of Delaware, *Congressional Record*, July 3, 1926, quoted in Nielsen, 105.

<sup>161</sup> Summary of objections to various government programs excerpted from *Congressional Record*, quoted in Nielsen, 92.

<sup>162</sup> Nielsen, 109.

be mitigated only by concerted Christian involvement in the public forum of social welfare. By enacting Progressive Christian reforms, Rauschenbusch hoped to alleviate poverty-induced vice, which in his view, was the main impediment keeping humans from divine favor. He took aim at conservative Christians' belief that the Second Coming of Christ would resolve social problems, rendering any attempt to alleviate suffering before that event fruitless. "One of the most persistent mistakes of Christian men has been to postpone social regeneration to a future era to be inaugurated by the return of Christ," Rauschenbusch stated, "but the element of postponement in it to-day means a lack of faith in the present power of Christ and paralyzes the religious initiative. It ignores the revelation of God contained in nineteen centuries of continuous history."<sup>163</sup> Conservative evangelicals attacked Rauschenbusch's program as removing Protestant Christians' obligation for individual repentance and a complete dependence on the saving grace of God, in effect, placing temporal needs ahead of spiritual cleansing. In John Stormer's ultraconservative 1964 polemic, *None Dare Call It Treason*, he looked back on Rauschenbusch's teachings as "basically a restatement of the Marxian dogma of Economic Determinism—'change the economic environment and man will be transformed.'"<sup>164</sup> For conservatives, both evangelical and otherwise, Rauschenbusch's use of the Gospel to agitate for social restructuring was a thinly-veiled attempt to subvert traditional, patriarchal family values in favor of socialist government paternalism.

Many right-leaning Christian women rejected the liberal Social Gospel and instead embraced an ultraconservative form of Protestant Christianity known as fundamentalism. This reactionary movement began in the 1910s when a number of evangelicals funded by a Southern

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<sup>163</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907; reprint, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 345, 346.

<sup>164</sup> John Stormer, *None Dare Call It Treason*, (Florissant, MO: Liberty Bell Press, 1964), 124.

California oil millionaire published a series of books called *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915).<sup>165</sup> This series, meant to be the definitive work on American evangelical Protestantism, found much less mainstream acceptance than was hoped, but formed the basis for a powerful movement within evangelical Christianity, especially in the rural Midwest and South. By the early 1920s, fundamentalist Christians had boiled down the multi-volume series to a four-way heresy test. The true believer acknowledged 1) special miracles such as the Virgin Birth, 2) the inerrancy of Scripture, 3) the “special theory” of Christ’s substitutionary atonement, and 4) the second coming of Christ to set up a millennial kingdom.<sup>166</sup> Other fundamentalist authors supplemented this core of teachings with the belief in salvation by faith alone, condemning both the Catholic and Protestant Social Gospel insistence on good works as necessary for the exercise of Christian faith. Fundamentalists became known for their anti-modernism, specifically their opposition to the teaching of Darwin’s theory of evolution in schools, and intolerance of any compromise in their narrowly focused beliefs.<sup>167</sup> By the 1920s, fundamentalists had come to view history as a dualistic struggle between God and Satan, as historian George Marsden has put it, dividing “all reality into neat antitheses: the saved and the lost, the holy and the unsanctified, the true and the false.”<sup>168</sup> Although fundamentalism suffered a near-fatal blow due to the negative media coverage of the Scopes trial in 1925, a rump survived in rural areas like Kansas which

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<sup>165</sup> George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 118.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 171. Substitutionary atonement was the belief that Christ’s death on the cross substituted and atoned for all of mankind’s sins; Christ’s sacrifice took the place of man’s deserved punishment for his sinfulness which allows forgiveness by a just God. The millennial kingdom referred to the belief that Christ’s Second Coming would usher in a period of one thousand years of peace and harmony; this millennium, however, would be preceded by a period of untold tribulation. Fundamentalists were defined by their pessimistic outlook of world events, which they often interpreted as signs of the end times.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 119, 164.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

increasingly appealed to social conservatives as the century progressed. By the 1980s, conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists had gained enough adherents to constitute a powerful and vocal minority within the Republican Party.

Alongside the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Christian fundamentalists sprang up a number of groups protesting the decline of the patriarchal family. The Sentinels of the Republic, founded in 1922, believed that patriots had supported the nation through the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, and now they were being called upon again to defend the nation against a third crisis, “federal paternalism and other forms of communism.”<sup>169</sup> Nielsen explains that while individual patriarchy was embraced as the natural order, patriarchy exerted by the “big father” in Washington eroded individual men’s exercise of power and was thought to be detrimental to individual persons and the nation.<sup>170</sup> Like the DAR, the Sentinels opposed the Child Labor Act and the Sheppard-Towner Act as government interference in the family.

The Ku Klux Klan, which included a little-studied but powerful arm of Klanswomen, also experienced rebirth in the 1920s based on an array of fears stemming from the perceived loss of patriarchal control of “native” white men. “The Nordic Americans have been gradually arousing themselves to defend their homes and their own kind of civilization,” wrote Hiram Evans, head of the Klan in 1926. “To do this they have had to reject completely . . . the whole body of ‘Liberal’ ideas which they had followed with such simple, unquestioning faith.” He continued:

The plain people now see that Liberalism has come completely under the dominance of weaklings and parasites whose alien “idealism” reaches its logical peak in the Bolshevik platform of “produce as little as you can, beg or steal from those who do produce, and kill the producer for thinking he is better than you” . . . Our forefathers had standards—the

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<sup>169</sup> Nielsen, 55.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 109.

Liberals today say they were narrow!—and they had consciences and knew that Liberalism must be kept within fixed bounds. They knew that tolerance of things that touch the foundations of the home, of decency, of patriotism or of race loyalty is not lovely but deadly.<sup>171</sup>

Evans' invocation of "the foundations of the home" was not accidental; he knew that conservative women who considered the home to be their battleground against radicalism constituted a major portion of his base. Kathleen M. Blee's *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* touches on the unique and complementary activities of Klanswomen to draw on "familial and community ties—traditions of church suppers, kin reunions, and social celebrations—to circulate the Klan's message of racial, religious, and national bigotry." She concluded that the Klan's most infamous activities, including electoral corruption, night riding, and gang terrorism, were carried out by Klansmen but that these acts of vigilantism were supplemented by "the less public actions of Klanswomen—the 'poison squads' that spread rumor and slander or organized consumer boycotts."<sup>172</sup> The activities of this most notorious group are often considered to have been confined to the South, but it was the Midwest that provided both the birthplace and the nervous middle-class conservative constituency for the second Klan of the 1920s. The Klan became the repository of "100 per cent Americanism," by which members measured the loyalty of other citizens. Those failing to conform to the ideals of the antebellum South were looked upon with suspicion and often met with violence.

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<sup>171</sup> Hiram Evans, "The Klan's Fight for Americanism," *The North American Review* 223 (March 1926), 33-63, quoted in Stanley Coben, ed., *Reform, War, and Reaction, 1912-1932* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 221-2.

<sup>172</sup> Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3.

## Progressivism in Kansas

Once suffrage was achieved in 1912, most moderate Kansas women reverted to socially conservative roles last seen in the 1870s. Middle-class women's clubs, once the vanguard of social change in the state, scaled back their efforts to patriotic or purely social activities.

Historian June O. Underwood described the change:

Local, state, and federal governments had taken over most of the specific activities in which they had been engaged previously; prohibition and suffrage, which had been [the clubwomen's] most important concerns, were achieved. In going home, women could place their faith in domestic tranquility, in democratic procedures, in the votes of their own sisters. Yet their home sphere was narrowed by the success of their activities. They no longer had crusades to spur them to aggressive, independent action. In their clubs they were reduced to single, sometimes erratic issues such as flags in the school and antibolshevism, or to Tuesday teas and bridge parties. Whatever their public successes, they had to go back to the domestic enclosure, now more limited than before, because that was what they had fervently extolled in their public crusades.<sup>173</sup>

Like later ERA activists, suffrage was the one issue on which a broad coalition of conservatives, moderates, and radicals could agree. Once it was achieved, the deep ideological gulfs separating American women reemerged. The fundamental questions facing woman activists since the early nineteenth century remained unanswered. Were women to be treated as individuals, were they to occupy the position of co-equal heads of the family, or were they to be the dependent but moral hearts of a family? The answer to that question dictated women's ideological position on divorce laws, property laws, and the opening of full educational and professional opportunities.

In Kansas, a particular form of Progressivism prevailed that reflected the growing power of activist conservative women who feared for the moral health of the state's families. Differing from national conservatives who held socially conservative views but rejected government interference in the family, Kansas conservative women pressed for socially conservative reforms through aggressive state action. Conservative groups like the DAR and the Women's Relief

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<sup>173</sup> Underwood, 306.

Corps found members interested in spreading anticommunist propaganda. The Good Government Club, according to Underwood, “distributed jingoistic hate literature against urban social reformers’ efforts to nationalize a child labor law.”<sup>174</sup> Moderate groups, however, such as the League of Women Voters (which grew out of NAWSA) organized a chapter but found little support. Kansas women generally remained committed to separate spheres ideology and domestic issues despite their blazing speed in achieving political power. In fact, Kansas women’s political success can be attributed to their almost total reliance on separate spheres ideology to advance their cause. Underwood notes that women’s commitment to domesticity “insinuated that reforms were necessary to bolster the health of women’s private domestic sphere.” She added, “an analysis of the reform activities of the women’s organizations verifies their preoccupations with reforms which spoke only to appropriate domestic issues.”<sup>175</sup>

As the tide of Progressivism reform rose nationwide, Kansas women jumped at the opportunity to strengthen the moral fiber of the state’s families. Wide-ranging reforms, many of which were led by women, included the building of public libraries, the granting of open admission to state universities for men and women, the approval of primary elections, regulation of public utilities and municipal commissions, anti-cigarette legislation, the introduction of initiative/referendum/recall, workmen’s compensation, laws governing eugenic matrimony for the mentally disabled, and a bank guaranty law. According to Kansas historian Craig Miner, overzealous social reformers choked the legislature of this era with minor “hobby bills” attempting to regulate even the most trivial subjects, such as the proposed but unsuccessful 1915 bill “forbidding women under forty-five from using face powder, rouge, hair dye, bleaching

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

powder, and tooth powder or from wearing earrings,” as agents of deception afflicting would-be suitors.

In addition to statewide woman suffrage, passed due to organized pressure from WCTU women concerned with family morality, Kansas Progressives displayed a conspicuously female influence in the subject of their reforms. Two of their plans illustrate the point: the first attempted to strengthen local police departments for the increased enforcement of vice laws, including prostitution and temperance laws, and the second allowed for a commission to regulate and censor every motion picture to be shown in Kansas. The latter move sprung from the 1915 release of *Birth of a Nation*, which depicts the Ku Klux Klan as heroic saviors of white virtue amidst black perfidy. Kansas blacks and Union veterans objected to the film as an exaggerated and inaccurate portrayal of history, leading to a state ban. Later, the state instituted a new agency in the Kansas State Board of Review, comprised mostly of staunchly conservative Christian women, which operated until the 1950s and was one of only seven movie censorship boards in the nation. Many Kansans enthusiastically endorsed the Board’s work as preserving the moral fabric of the nation: “The movie screens,” wrote a man from Wichita, “are the prime factor in demoralizing and destroying our homes. . . . Thousands of girls receive their first thrills of sex knowledge in the movies. Every step taken, showing the unfaithfulness of wives, is vividly portrayed and including forgiveness and reconciliation. . . . Are we drifting into open ‘Free Love?’”<sup>176</sup> Kansans could stomach progressive economic and political measures but still felt strongly conservative about moral and social conformity.

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<sup>176</sup> G.W. Butts to Henry Allen, July 10, 1919, Allen Papers, Governors’ Papers, 27-08-08-06, Kansas State Historical Society, quoted in Miner, 260.

The tide of sweeping reform lost momentum with America's entry into World War I. Like the rest of the nation, Kansas experienced a strong conservative backlash to the heady days of the 1910s, most of which focused on the large population of rural German-speakers. Conservative mobs attempted to "Americanize" them through the suppression of the German language, threatening them with mob activity, and passing the WCTU's long-awaited dream of a "bone-dry" prohibition law that closed all of the remaining loopholes of the poorly-enforced 1880 prohibition amendment, even for medicinal purposes, as a blow to German beer-drinkers. When American men went to Europe to fight, the Kansas Young Women's Christian Association attempted to protect their morals by organizing women to go to Paris and run "hostess houses" to protect soldiers from the "harpies of the French streets."<sup>177</sup> Extreme patriotism and its companion, moral conservatism, were the hallmarks of wartime Kansas. Governor Arthur Capper stated in 1918, "You have got to line up with Uncle Sam, or leave Kansas. We now have nearly one hundred state guard units who will see that disloyalty does not get a foothold in Kansas."<sup>178</sup>

Capper had reason to worry. On the left of the political spectrum was the nation's premier socialist newspaper, *Appeal to Reason*, which was published in Girard, Kansas, and was believed to be a primary vehicle inciting labor uprisings, immigrant agitation, and Bolshevik propaganda throughout the state. The *Appeal* advocated a number of radical social changes, such as companionate marriage, and featured editorials by radical socialist women. It was blamed for inflaming a 1921 women's march in Cherokee County composed, according to the *Topeka Journal*, mostly of "strong, highly temperamental foreign women" in support of the women's

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<sup>177</sup> Miner, 238.

<sup>178</sup> *Topeka Capital*, 1 May 1918, IWW—Non-Partisan Clippings, Kansas State Historical Society, quoted in *ibid.*, 246.

striking miner husbands and relatives.<sup>179</sup> On the right was surging Kansas membership in the Ku Klux Klan, which had forty thousand members in 1922. The ultraconservative Klan had a number of targets including “modernism” and “urbanism” and, in attacking Germans, Jews, and Catholics, alienated about one-quarter of the Kansas population. Their strength was broken only after a sexual scandal involving the Klan’s Imperial Wizard, William Simmons, shocked the moral sensibilities of Kansans enough to deny it a renewed charter in 1925.<sup>180</sup>

### **Opposition to the New Deal in Kansas**

Progressive reforms came to a halt in 1929 with the beginning of the Great Depression. The nation’s economic troubles were exacerbated in Kansas by a free-fall in farm prices and the ecological disaster known as the Dust Bowl in which millions of cubic yards of drought-baked topsoil simply blew away. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s deficit-fueled New Deal, designed to pump government funds into America’s crashing economy to replace lost consumer spending, struck many Kansans as either a dangerously leveraged fiscal policy or the work of leftist infiltrators. For the economic and social conservatives of the state, the best way to deal with a depression was to cut spending and shore up traditional values, not to radically alter the system. By the end of the 1930s, however, Kansans, typically suspicious of any form of government intervention in their private economic affairs or in their families, bought into government paternalism out of sheer desperation, accepting millions in aid from the Public Works Administration, the Works Progress Administration, and the Agricultural Adjustment Act.

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<sup>179</sup> *Topeka Journal*, 14 December 1921, quoted in *ibid.*, 250.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

Despite the amount of aid flowing into the state, Kansans' buy-in to the economic fruits of the New Deal had almost no effect on the conservative values of the state's residents, nor did it alter the belief that Roosevelt's liberal agenda was dangerously close to the centralizing program of Soviet Communists. The family and its economic unit, the family farm, occupied a romantic place in the Kansas imagination. Aid from the federal government was seen as a necessary evil to preserve this favored social and economic system, but most Kansans were anxious to get back to a measure of self-sufficiency. One Yates Center investor who held stock in a corporate wheat farming organization wrote to Governor Woodring that "I think the sooner this corporation farming is nipped in the bud the better for young future American farmers and American homes. . . . I would rather see my stock in this company dwindle to nothing than to see one American farm home ruined."<sup>181</sup>

Kansans may have grudgingly accepted some economic relief provisions of the New Deal out of necessity, but their desperation did not change their firm belief in individual property ownership, limited government, and local control, making the majority of New Deal programs objectionable. Many Kansans, especially women, combined these conservative political views with conservative religious views, specifically evangelical or fundamentalist Protestantism. For these Christians, the primary means of ensuring both private and public order was to place each member of society under the control of a family patriarch, assisted by his morally upright wife, who would guide their families according to biblical principles.

Although fundamentalism lost widespread public credibility after the highly publicized 1925 Scopes trial, in which lawyer and politician William Jennings Bryan endured a savage

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<sup>181</sup> Chester Sanders to Harry Woodring, January 29, 1931, Woodring Papers, Governors' Papers, 27-11-01-05, Kansas State Historical Society, quoted in Miner, 285.

cross-examination as an expert on the inerrancy of the Bible, many in rural areas continued to embrace fundamentalism's core beliefs. Rural women were especially enamored with the tenets of this strain of religious conservatism due to its emphasis on male dominance, complementary gender roles, the sanctity of the home and the importance of the pious woman in it, the necessity of moral vigilance as conducted by women, and the targeting of foreign elements as disruptive and poisonous to American patriarchal families. One of those keeping fundamentalism alive was Gerald B. Winrod of Wichita, an evangelical preacher and rabid anti-Communist who developed a strong following in the late 1920s and early 1930s in Kansas, especially among women. Through his organization The Defenders of the Christian Faith, founded in 1925, and his publications *The Defender* and *The Revealer*, Winrod supported Prohibition and racial segregation and opposed the teaching of evolution in public schools and Jews in the government. His beliefs were seemingly confirmed by his exposure to a document allegedly discovered in Russia at the beginning of the century called *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. This document, despite having been proven to be a hoax only a year after its 1920 publication in English, continued to provide a source of so-called facts for anti-Semites such as Winrod, who probably read it in the early 1930s. The Protocols purportedly listed the means by which an international cabal of Jewish conspirators agreed to destroy Gentile civilization by means including control of the media, seizure of international finance, the necessity of replacing the traditional social order, the propagation of ideas such as Darwinism and Communism, encouragement of alcoholism, curtailment of civil liberties, distribution of pornography, the destruction of Christianity to be replaced by atheism and then Judaism, and the desire for national bankruptcy.<sup>182</sup> Central to the cabal's plan was the breakup of traditional Christian

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<sup>182</sup> Text of "The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion," accessed 4 January 2008; available from

families, which were the bulwark of morality and civilization. *The Protocols* may have been a fraud, but for fundamentalists like Winrod and his religiously conservative women followers, they seemed to confirm a pessimistic view of world events that they feared were unfolding before them.

Winrod's fear of nefarious Jewry was confusing to many rural Americans, but he supplemented his argument by listing dangerous internal threats cropping up throughout American culture. In sermons, he won over scores of socially conservative women by railing against movies, dances, smoking, gambling, boxing prize fights, drinking, and the erosion of the "great American home," which was society's defense against dissipation. He especially loathed Darwinism, which he believed destroyed children's morality by teaching them that they were mere beasts.<sup>183</sup> As a premillennialist, Winrod felt powerless to stop the trials of the end times but hoped to save the better part of American civilization by a return to faithfulness. He allegedly saw the "hidden hand" of the Elders of Zion in the New Deal and claimed that if taken to its "logical end," it would result in a Communist America.<sup>184</sup>

Another of Winrod's much-publicized proclivities that met with favor in Kansas was his support for Nazism and Hitler, due in part to the state's large population of German-speakers or those with German heritage. In the late thirties and early forties, Kansas became a rallying point for the German American Bund, a German heritage group that was overtly pro-Nazi.<sup>185</sup> At a Washington's Birthday celebration in 1939, the Bund held a 22,000 member rally at New York's

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<http://www.theprotocolsofzion.org/>; Internet.

<sup>183</sup> Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 91-2.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 113, 109, 104.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

Madison Square Garden, proclaimed the rights of white Gentiles as the nation's "true patriots," booed President Roosevelt, and chanted "Heil Hitler."<sup>186</sup> Bund leader Fritz Kuhn praised Winrod by name as an "outspoken patriot," saying, "We—the German American Bund—organized as American citizens, with American ideals, and determined to protect ourselves, our homes, our wives and children against the slimy conspirators who would change this glorious republic into the inferno of a bolshevist Paradise—we, I say, will not fail you when called upon to give every lawful support in our power in the fight to break the grip of the palsied hand of Jewish Communism in our schools, our universities, our very homes." Kuhn's rhetoric specifically appealed to women in his mention of schools, universities, and homes as the targets of Jewish Communism because these were the least prepared to resist infiltration and could be the most devastating to the nation's values. Communism threatened to replace the family patriarch with the state, destroying the seat of power for American individualism, just as striking at the family's moral base was essential to dismantling the nation's Christian ethos. Winrod, closely associated with Kuhn, spread similar ideas through his periodicals, which enjoyed enormous success in Kansas. Socially conservative women seized upon his brand of conservatism, featuring anti-Semitism and anti-Communism, as the insidious agents of family destruction.

### **Far-Right Women Organize**

Conservative women followers of Winrod and Kuhn noted that Communism's focus on schools and homes put them on the front lines of antiradicalism. Starting with the granting of

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<sup>186</sup> U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed 4 January 2008; available from <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005684>; Internet.

suffrage in 1920, women struggled to establish a voice within the existing political parties to address their concerns. The Democratic Party established an equal number of positions for women on the Democratic National Committee, but the Republican National Committee (RNC) remained the preserve of men, with the party appointing only a token number of women to largely ceremonial positions. To fill the gap, right-leaning women formed both nonpartisan interest groups to advocate for conservative issues and unofficial Republican women's clubs. In the 1930s, these clubs experienced a surge in membership from women who strongly opposed the centralizing provisions of the New Deal. In 1937, the RNC attempted to strengthen the party by bringing the independent women's clubs into line. Many clubs were anti-New Deal but were not specifically pro-Republican; by forming the National Federation of Women's Republican Clubs, the Republican Party hoped to harness these women to help oppose the Democrats in a national election. They were only partly successful. The Federation's main purpose was to distribute party-approved educational materials to the clubs to focus their activity for party purposes. Many women, however, were unwilling to abandon their independence. According to historian Catherine Rymph, the RNC-appointed Federation head Marion Martin "sought to temper extremism among women. She tried to dissuade women from turning what she saw as reasonable objections to the New Deal (that it was creating a corrupt and wasteful bureaucracy, for example) into an equation of the New Deal with socialism. Such irresponsible rhetoric, Martin feared, might cause people to 'question our whole system of government.'"<sup>187</sup> For many of the clubwomen, however, the New Deal *was* dangerously close to socialism, which is what had prompted their membership in the first place. For these ultraconservative, anti-Communist

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<sup>187</sup> Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 90.

women, their activism was a moral crusade that they were unwilling to compromise for political expediency.

By the late 1930s, fear of war occupied much of conservative women's thoughts. Although many of these women were the same who had opposed the peace movements of the 1920s, their objections contained nuanced but important differences. Conservatives thought that the post-Versailles conferences and treaties were flawed because they attempted to subordinate American defense to a committee of international members. This was unacceptable because it weakened the ability of the American government to make decisions necessary to protect its citizens. In the late thirties, however, conservatives viewed Roosevelt's interest in the outbreak of war in Europe as a leftist conspiracy. According to diplomatic historian Laura McEnaney, women on the far right believed that

New Deal Democrats (financed by Jewish international bankers) were steering the United States into an internationalist foreign policy that would lead inevitably to permanent cycles of global war. Sustained armed conflict overseas, they argued, would take men from families, creating a society of female-headed households. It would accelerate what they believed were New Deal trends toward intrusive, centralized government and concentrated executive branch power. And war would create unprecedented opportunities for unregulated, extra-familial sexual activity. In sum, war and internationalism would disrupt the private, autonomous nuclear family which [ultraconservatives] believed was the most fundamental institution of democracy.<sup>188</sup>

Based on this ideology, ultraconservative women were not necessarily militarists nor were they pacifists; rather, they advocated military action or isolation depending on the forces pulling the nation into war. Wars, these conservatives believed, were sometimes necessary, but this particular war was not. Roosevelt's concern over Hitler's nationalist expansion, which targeted Jews and Communists, made those on the far right believe that Roosevelt was overly concerned with the fate of Jews and Communists. Much to Marion Martin's chagrin, women opposed to

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<sup>188</sup> Laura McEnaney, "He-Men and Christian Mothers: The America First Movement and the Gendered Meanings of Patriotism and Isolationism," *Diplomatic History* 18, No. 1 (Winter 1994), 50-1.

Roosevelt's interventionism in Europe joined conservative, isolationist clubs in much higher numbers than moderate, Republican clubs.<sup>189</sup>

### **The Mothers' Movement**

Isolationist women who believed that Roosevelt was endangering the nation formed the so-called Mothers' Movement of the pre-World War II years. Led by the rabidly anti-Communist and anti-Semitic author Elizabeth Dilling, the movement's greatest success was organizing a protest to disrupt Congressional hearings on the lend-lease bill, bearing signs which read, "Kill Bill 1776, Not Our Boys."<sup>190</sup> These women played up the sympathies aroused by women's maternal instincts to bring attention to their ultraconservative political concern. Dilling had become a lightning rod for conservative angst with the publication of her polemical books. *The Red Network: A Who's Who and Handbook of Radicalism* (1934) catalogued her extensive list of subversive people and groups whom she believed were working to undermine the nation. *The Roosevelt Red Record and Its Background* (1936) detailed Roosevelt's "Jew Deal" and its alleged derivation from the *Communist Manifesto*. According to historian Glen Jeansonne, Dilling argued that "Roosevelt was implementing Marx's measures for communizing a nation, such as the abolition of private property, a progressive income tax, restriction of inheritances and the confiscation of dissidents' property."<sup>191</sup> Very few New Deal programs escaped Dilling's ire and she linked each one to a subversive element of radicalism. *The Octopus* (1940) placed Jews

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<sup>189</sup> Rymph, 90.

<sup>190</sup> McEnaney, 52.

<sup>191</sup> Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 23.

at the center of the communist conspiracy and attempted to trace Bolshevik and socialist influences back to Jews. Dilling was assisted in her work by three religious leaders: fundamentalist Gerald Winrod of Kansas, Detroit-based Catholic priest Father Charles Coughlin, and fundamentalist minister Gerald L. K. Smith, all of whom galvanized ultraconservatives, especially women, with their fiery propaganda about the perceived threat of Communism.

During the first half of the 1930s the most popular figure in America, judging by the amount of mail received each week, was Father Coughlin. Coughlin made a name for himself by broadcasting his weekly sermon first on a regional network and later on the nationwide CBS network. Before long, Coughlin's faith-and-morals message took on political overtones with Coughlin espousing particular economic fixes for the country's Depression-era woes. Coughlin's message echoed some of the same sentiments promulgated by the Populists of the 1890s and the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, calling for "a re-awakened America—an America that stands 100 percent for Americanism—an America that still stands by the traditions of our forefathers—traditions of liberty, traditions of Godliness, traditions upon which we must establish a sane Christian nationalism."<sup>192</sup> Like Gerald Winrod and Elizabeth Dilling, Coughlin was an anti-Semite but, at first, he had the sense to limit his excoriations to more general terms such as the "international conspiracy," lacing his rhetoric with indictments of Communism and international bankers. In the mid-thirties Coughlin began to denounce Roosevelt and in the process, lost most of his mainstream audience. By 1938, his speeches rang with overt anti-Semitism while his publication *Social Justice* reprinted and distributed the fraudulent "Protocols of the Elders of Zion." Coughlin was closely associated with the German American Bund and was recognized by Fritz Kuhn in the same speech as Gerald Winrod. Ultraconservative groups

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<sup>192</sup> James P. Shenton, "Fascism and Father Coughlin," *Conspiracy: the Fear of Subversion in American History*, Richard O. Curry, ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), 180.

fearing international conspiracies of Jews and Communists could now proudly proclaim their own interconnection as the groups shared information, propaganda, leadership, and tactics.

Gerald L. K. Smith had different roots. Born in Wisconsin, Smith became an intimate advisor of Louisiana Senator Huey Long. After Long's assassination, Smith became a vocal opponent of Roosevelt's foreign policies and founded the America First movement targeting Jews, internationalists, communists, and Roosevelt as agents of radicalism. His magazine, called *The Cross and the Flag*, paid special attention to women as mothers. Playing to ultraconservative women's concerns, Smith asked, "Who is better qualified to cooperate with us in our America First movement than the mothers of our heroic sons?"<sup>193</sup> Smith's movement attracted a number of prominent supporters, including automobile tycoon Henry Ford and aviation hero Charles Lindbergh, who lent respectability to Smith's pronouncements.

By the early 1940s, ultraconservatives numbered in the millions, many of whom were angry mothers. Added to the quasi-religious and woman-friendly organizations headed by Winrod, Coughlin, and Smith were the National Legion of Mothers of America (to which the *Chicago Tribune* attributed ten million members alone), the Women's National Committee to Keep the U.S. out of War, and We the Mothers Mobilize for America.<sup>194</sup> Unlike other isolationist groups, these did not disband after Pearl Harbor. Roosevelt's alliance with the Soviet Union's Josef Stalin confirmed to these women that conspiracy had taken hold in America. Dilling, Winrod, and Smith were arrested for attempting to overthrow the government and faced trial along with four others. The resulting "Great Seditious Trial of 1944," advocated by Roosevelt himself, ended in a mistrial when the presiding judge died, but the prosecution had

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<sup>193</sup> Jeansonne, 36.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

been waging a losing battle in trying to prove the defendants' specific intent to overthrow the government. Many considered it a show trial.

### **Conservative Agitation during the Cold War**

With the death of Roosevelt, the end of World War II, and the return of prosperity, many conservatives hoped to see the New Deal rolled back. Instead, President Harry S Truman continued many of the policies of his predecessor, confirming to those on the right that radical influences continued to direct the government in Washington. Conservative women, especially, saw Communist threats everywhere and feared that the family would soon be broken apart by excessive statism. Many women who had suspended their anti-New Deal activism during wartime out of a sense of patriotism came rushing back to conservative Republican women's clubs, attesting to their fear that communism was a real and present threat. Of immediate danger was the establishment of the welfare state, which they believed to be the first mark of Communist infiltration. Individual responsibility, fostered within the moral, patriarchal family and checked by local democratic structures, was rapidly being replaced, they argued, by centrally directed government programs. People who once relied on their individual drive and the responsibilities of the family unit to provide the necessities of life would soon come to depend completely on government largesse, sapping them and the nation of vitality. Once people's needs were met through government channels, they would cease to desire individually owned property, thus opening the door to collectivism and, eventually, slavery.

Conservatives timed the beginning of America's takeover by radicals with the start of the New Deal and the establishment of the welfare state. Conservative authors Paul Sexson and Stephen Miles, Jr. wrote in a 1964 polemic that "Nazi Germany was just as much a welfare state

as New Deal - Fair Deal - New Frontier America. Indeed social security was given its start in Bismarck's Germany as a device—not too dissimilar to its role in Naziland—to keep the populace contented and amenable to the grand designs of the state.”<sup>195</sup> The idea that American social security programs were enacted for the same reason was the unstated but obvious conclusion. The authors continued, citing the state's desire to replace traditional roles even at the family level:

The essence of the welfare state is that the state pretends to know what the welfare of its citizens calls for—and has appointed itself the provider of that “welfare.” Before, “welfare” was something between individuals, or at most between an individual and a small group, perhaps in its implications not too different from “love” or “loyalty”; now, it was to be handled on a vast, impersonal, organized basis. Before, the family and the individual were the units of responsibility, and the citizenry guided, protected, and financed the state; now, the state accepted responsibility for the “welfare” of its citizens and for their guidance, protection, and financing. Before, initiative came from individuals, and the state was simply a vehicle reflecting that initiative; now, the state was to be the spark plug, devising the doctrines and the slogans (even when they seem most “liberal”), and the citizen was to be “free” from all the unsettling and necessitous conditions that give rise to initiative.<sup>196</sup>

The destruction of the family, with its specific and differentiated sex roles, was the ultimate blow to American civilization. Many Americans still lent credence to separate spheres ideology, believing that men were good citizens only when held in check by family responsibility. If a father's concern for his wife and children was removed either by their lack of need due to feminists in the workplace or because the state had taken over his responsibility to provide for them, male citizenship would lose its basis for moral governance and society would fall apart. At the very core of conservatism and ultraconservatism was the primacy of the individual family led by a man. All other structures flowed from the patriarchal family, so an attack on the

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<sup>195</sup> Paul A. Sexson and Stephen B. Miles, Jr., *The Challenge of Conservatism: Its Role in the Coming Head-On Collision*, (New York: Exposition Press, 1964), 92.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-4.

American government would necessarily be an attack on families and vice versa. Anti-Communists regularly invoked the family as the final repository of American values.

Conservatives believed that mid-century Americans faced a life-or-death struggle against creeping communism, socialism, collectivism, internationalism, liberalism, and statism and often combined these fears with evangelical Christianity to paint the threat as a Manichaeian battle between good and evil, or God and Satan. This was evidenced by conservatives' frequent reference to "godless communists" or "atheistic communism" as the dark opposite to Christian democratic capitalism. A leaflet distributed by a Christian anti-Communist organization noted the neat meshing of evangelicalism with the fear of Communist subversion: "This battle, the war-to-death struggle between freedom and communism, is actually a battle between Good and Evil, between the forces of Christ and of the Anti-Christ."<sup>197</sup> As Communism would end Christianity and Christian family ethics, Americans needed to view the threat as affecting their immortal souls.

It is interesting to note that the Depression-era threat of "international banking interests," a euphemism for Jews, was subsumed completely into the threat of Communism which had been of secondary importance in previous decades. Due to the decimation of Europe's Jewish population and the ascendance of the Soviet Union in World War II, ultraconservatives reconsidered their primary foe as Communists, although the "Eastern banking interests" of New York, also meaning Jews, remained an important bogeyman in conservative circles. With the new focus on international Communism, ultraconservatives branded Democratic presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson and their administrations as Moscow-directed, but similarly condemned the Eisenhower and Nixon administrations as having been engineered by

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<sup>197</sup> "A Call to Action to Every Real American" leaflet, (Tulsa, Okla.: Christian Crusade, n.d.), quoted in Robert A. Rosenstone, *Protest from the Right* (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1968), 2.

the “Eastern banking interests” of the Republican Party, which were, of course, composed of Jewish Communists. No one could be trusted; enemies were everywhere.

It was generally presumed among ultraconservatives that one of the tactics Communists would use to subversively gain control was to weaken American moral values. Like government welfare programs, newly relaxed moral standards would appeal to Americans’ base instincts for immediate gratification, granting rewards without responsibility or social consequences. Because women had traditionally considered themselves to be the protectors of their families’ moral health, along with the nation’s, this threat spurred many women to ultraconservative activism. A Los Angeles businessman summed up the present dangers, listing mostly structures in which women retained authority: “Individual responsibility for morals, saving and education are products of religion, the family, the schools and business. Therefore, Russian propaganda will be directed towards proving that religion is not true, that the family should be broken up, that the schools should not educate—only play, in what is called ‘progressive education,’ and business should not make a profit but go broke.”<sup>198</sup> Loosened sexual mores were a precursor to nationalizing women and children; the dismissal of Christian doctrine was a cover for atheism. Social change away from the values of the traditional patriarchal family was a sign of dissipation, moral breakdown, and imminent national collapse. Once Americans were brainwashed into believing that they desired these social changes, Communist infiltrators could convince them to bring the changes about. This world view, according to historian Robert Rosenstone, was born of the anti-modernism that characterized many conservatives since the Industrial Revolution. The pace of change in American life was too much for some who longed

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<sup>198</sup> Joe Crail, “A Businessman’s Look at Communism vs. Capitalism,” (Los Angeles: n.d.), 8, quoted in Rosenstone, 7.

for an idealized past of absolutes. Historians since the 1960s have revealed that there was never a time in American history in which consensus, conflict-free social hierarchy, shared faith, and unswerving patriotism were universal, yet ultraconservative women clung to this illusion and condemned their own time as evidence of the nation's downward spiral from a golden past. Historian and chronicler of conservatism Robert Rosenstone summarized this sentiment when he wrote in 1968, "Extremists are both angered and terrified by the fact that America has changed from the untroubled society they think it once was to one that has become too complex and relativistic in its beliefs. This longing for a simpler life, coupled with extreme anger at those they think have caused the changes, and an apocalyptic vision of approaching Armageddon, are most characteristic of rightist minds."<sup>199</sup>

## McCarthyism

In 1950, ultraconservatives found their champion in Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin. McCarthy, a relatively unknown and undistinguished junior senator, gained national fame after a February 9, 1950 Lincoln Day speech to the Republican Women's Club of Wheeling, West Virginia. His remarks were not recorded so there remains a discrepancy in the number he used, but most sources indicate that he said approximately the following words, "I have here in my hand a list of 205—a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department."<sup>200</sup> This shocking revelation, that admitted Communists

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<sup>199</sup> Rosenstone, 14.

<sup>200</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Feb 10, 1950, quoted in Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 49.

were employed and working in the highest levels of government, confirmed what many ultraconservatives already suspected. McCarthy became the new champion of their cause and gained a huge following nearly overnight, despite the fact that he never revealed any of the names supposedly on the list. Historian Catherine Rymph muses over why McCarthy chose a Republican women's event for his pronouncement rather than a larger, more diverse forum: "this venue was a logical one for the particular speech McCarthy gave. He seems to have understood his hostesses well. In his speech, he hit not only on the themes of communist subversion in the State Department, but also on communism's threat to religion and morality."<sup>201</sup> McCarthy knew that the most vehement anti-Communists were women afraid for the safety of their homes.

Like Father Coughlin, McCarthy believed that the sheer number of his supporters represented a personal mandate and that his political accusations, no matter how outrageous, would be jubilantly received by fawning admirers. For a while, he was correct. McCarthy's first targets were within the Truman administration, most notably in the person of George Marshall, the man who had crafted the post-war economic bail-out of Europe for which he had received the Nobel Peace Prize. McCarthy blamed Marshall's foreign policy for the "loss" of China to the Communists in 1949. From there, McCarthy leveled charges of Communist conspiracy, Communist infiltration, and Communist control of numerous organizations within the government, singling out many low-level or marginal figures for personal attack. When Eisenhower succeeded Truman in 1953, McCarthy stayed on the offensive, accusing Eisenhower

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<sup>201</sup> Rymph, 113.

of being soft on China during the Korean War. He lumped together Eisenhower's administration with those of Roosevelt and Truman, calling them "twenty-one years of treason."<sup>202</sup>

McCarthy's most famous moments came in 1954, when he accused the U.S. Army of harboring Communists. Due to the publicity surrounding McCarthy's accusations, the Senate formed a committee to investigate the charges resulting in thirty-six days of testimony broadcast on live television to an estimated audience of twenty million viewers. McCarthy and his witch hunt did not receive favorable treatment in the media; many viewers found his style to be unsavory, aggressive, confrontational, and mean-spirited. His reputation did not recover, nor was he helped by popular TV host Edward R. Murrow's condemnation of his tactics as having confused Americans and promoted fear. Even anti-Communists retreated from McCarthy, feeling that he was hurting their cause. At the end of 1954, McCarthy received the final blow with a rare censure motion by the Senate. He continued his attacks to empty chambers until his untimely death in 1957 at age 48, likely from the effects of alcoholism. Even in his final disgrace, however, McCarthy maintained a base of loyal supporters. Speaking in eulogy of McCarthy, Congressman Wint Smith of Kansas said, "In a world which has lost its understanding of the concepts of right and wrong, truth and error, good and evil, and seeks only to adjust itself to what is expedient, a man like Senator McCarthy is a living contradiction of such Machiavellianism."<sup>203</sup> McCarthy's popularity, in some circles, combined with other events of the mid-1950s, catalyzed a change in the conservative demographic that specifically affected Kansas and lasted through the end of the century.

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<sup>202</sup> Albert Fried, *McCarthyism, The Great American Red Scare: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 179.

<sup>203</sup> *Memorial Services Held in the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, Together with Remarks Presented in Eulogy of Joseph McCarthy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1957), 343-4, quoted in Rogin, 228.

Historian Seymour Martin Lipset speculated that McCarthy's Catholicism made him appeal to a large segment of Catholics who were already vehemently anti-Communist, and that his Wisconsin roots helped to cement the Midwest as the new seat of conservatism. From the 1950s on, he suggested, the most conservative social and economic Republicans tended to hail from the Midwest or from rural areas, and they "profoundly wishe[d] to preserve the status quo in its own areas—not simply in terms of rural virtues but in terms of the local prestige and economic power of the elites that have since the decline of agrarian radicalism controlled the Republican Parties of the rural and small-town Middle West."<sup>204</sup> These conservatives, secure in their own region's moral superiority and suspicious of the interests of big cities and the East, marked a new center of right-wing power. These momentous political changes made the Midwest and Kansas more conservative, eroding the prospects of the ERA decades later.

### **Supreme Court Intervention in Kansas**

Conservatives disgusted by federal intrusion into private and local affairs faced a new challenge in 1954 when the government outlawed racial segregation in public schools. Happening nearly simultaneously as McCarthy's televised hearings, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* was a suit brought by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) on behalf of several black families specifically challenging the 1879 Kansas law permitting (but not requiring) racial segregation in elementary

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<sup>204</sup> Michael Paul Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1967), 221.

and middle schools of towns with a population larger than 15,000.<sup>205</sup> According to the defense lawyer for Kansas, Paul E. Wilson, the suit targeted Kansas due to its “unique history and relatively small black population, [which was thought to] offer less resistance to a lawsuit to end segregation than states where patterns of discrimination were broader and more firmly entrenched.”<sup>206</sup> The decision in favor of *Brown* is often summarized by Chief Justice Earl Warren’s ruling: “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.”<sup>207</sup>

Conservatives looked on the *Brown* decision as an important and ominous step toward increased federal control over American culture. Like the anti-feminist women who opposed the Child Labor Amendment and the Sheppard-Towner Act of the 1920s, those on the far right saw race relations as a family affair to be dealt with in each community in the manner in which elected officials saw fit to adjudicate them. Outlawing racial segregation in states in which majorities clearly sought to preserve it was, to conservatives, an unlawful and undemocratic overstepping of federal power. Right-wing author Rosalie Gordon quickly discerned a communist plot in *Brown*: “By that decision the Supreme Court handed to the central government a power it had never before possessed—the power to put its grasping and

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<sup>205</sup> As heard before the Supreme Court, the *Brown* case combined five cases regarding racially segregated schools. In addition to the Kansas case that provided the title, cases from Delaware, Virginia, South Carolina, and Washington, D.C. were included.

<sup>206</sup> Paul E. Wilson, *A Time to Lose: Representing Kansas in Brown v. Board of Education* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 25.

<sup>207</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

omnipotent hand into a purely local function. . . . It will not be long before the socialist revolutionaries have what they want—control by the central government of what to teach and what not to teach.” She continued: “Along with this has gone a continuation of the practice of the Roosevelt-packed Court in taking from the states and their citizens control over their own resources and their own livelihood in 1954.”<sup>208</sup> Between McCarthy’s anti-Communist alarm-raising and *Brown*’s federal mandate to integrate despite local majorities’ opposition, many Americans felt drawn to conservatism as a way to stop liberalizing political and social change.

### **A New Conservative Alliance**

After 1954, Senator McCarthy’s influence waned in importance but the ultraconservative movement to which he subscribed continued to grow and change. Unfavorable reaction to the civil rights movement would add even more groups to conservative rolls, but by the late 1950s new constituencies were already clearly evident. Sexson and Miles presented a list of groups involved in extreme conservatism, extracted and compiled from Seymour Lipset’s longer 1955 essay *The Radical Right*:

1. People who belong to such “filiopietistic organizations as the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Colonial Dames, veterans’ organizations, historical commemoration societies, patriotic groups, etc.”
2. “The man who makes money himself [and] feels aggrieved about social reform measures which involve redistribution of wealth.”
3. Low-income groups. “The lower a person is in socioeconomic status or educational attainment, the more likely he is to support McCarthyism, favor restrictions on civil liberties and back a ‘get tough’ policy with the communist states.”
4. “The former isolationist group, especially its German base, [which] was under a need to justify its past, and to a certain extent, to gain revenge.”
5. Catholics [who] “as a religious group are more prone to support anticommunist movements than any other sect with the possible exception of the fundamentalist

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<sup>208</sup> Rosalie M. Gordon, *Nine Men Against America* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: n.d.), 14, 19, quoted in Rosenstone, 9.

Protestant churches.” (In passing, Lipset explains that “the current anticommunist crusade has united the two most morally and sexually inhibited groups in America, the fundamentalist Protestants and the Irish Catholics.”)<sup>209</sup>

Of note is the first group, composed of and backed by women, who were the driving force behind the anti-feminist and anti-Bolshevik movements of the 1920s. It was these women who continued to be interested in the defense of the home and maintenance of traditional values well into the 1970s. The addition of the other four groups to conservatism lifted traditionalist women from marginality to prominence, allowing their opinions to be presented on the national stage along with the political and economic demands of other constituencies.

With the return of “normalcy” after the twin crises of the Depression and World War II, 1950s America enjoyed a decade-long boom in economic prosperity. Lipset opined that depressions incited calls for economic reform but that booms created movements excluding marginal groups from full social equity, listing the nativist Know-Nothings of the 1850s, the anti-Catholic American Protective Association of the 1880s, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, and the Progressives of the first two decades of the twentieth century as examples to “illustrate the way in which American society has thrust up major protest movements in periods of prosperity, thereby confounding the general assumption that protest politics are primarily products of depressions.”<sup>210</sup> In assessing the early 1950s, Lipset found that the far right fell into this pattern: they opposed unions, the income tax, the liberal welfare state and its encroachment on the patriarchal family, and even intervention in World War II, preferring to see the Communist Soviet Union and Fascist Germany duke it out amongst their competing radical ideologies. These concerns, however, were too fragmented to attract a cohesive following. Anti-Semitism

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<sup>209</sup> Sexson and Miles 163-4, based on Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Radical Right: A Problem for American Democracy,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 6, No. 2 (June 1955), 176-209.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

had lost its attractiveness as an all-purpose specter after the Holocaust, so the far right turned to anti-Communism as the only cause which could effectively appeal to large segments of the American population.<sup>211</sup> And appeal it did. McCarthy's wild-eyed accusations were only the beginning of the anti-Communist movement; following his censure and fall from prominence, legions of far-right organizations cropped up to satisfy the demand for conservative protest against what many felt to be liberalism run amok. Most of these groups were headed by men, but all of them, like the Republican Party itself, relied on the exertions of women activists to stuff envelopes, drum up neighborhood support, hold meetings in their homes, organize mailing lists, answer telephones, and perform what Catherine Rymph called the "housework of government."<sup>212</sup> Women's marginalized position within these groups and willingness to do the tedious chores were a testament to their strong moral opposition to Communism, which they viewed as a crusade against evil. Like the moral activists since the antebellum period, women continued to comprise the most outraged members of these ultraconservative groups.

### **Republican Women's Clubs**

Starting with the election of Elizabeth Farrington as president in 1948, the National Federation of Women's Republican Clubs again diverged from the RNC. Unlike Marion Martin's strategy, which was to channel women's club activity for the good of the party, Farrington sought to expand the reach of the party by embracing more diverse elements. Included in these clubs were former members of the Mothers' Movement, followers of Gerald L.

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<sup>211</sup> Lipset, 185, 195.

<sup>212</sup> Rymph, 4.

K. Smith, anti-Semites, anti-New Dealers, McCarthyites, and, of course, anti-Communists.<sup>213</sup>

Farrington encouraged conservative women's proclivity to see political issues in terms of moral crusades, but in doing so, she inadvertently delayed women's access to real power. According to Rymph, "The Federation's theme of women's unique moral authority (rather than equality) and its emphasis on the religious nature of politics resonated deeply with women who were driven to politics by their passionate commitment to particular issues. These were women who had little reason to expect reward for compromise. Rather, they were committed to ideas on which they would not equivocate, earning them a reputation for being more conservative than the party as a whole."<sup>214</sup> Member of Republican women's clubs rarely sought public praise from the party nor did they expect to rise to positions of political prominence. Instead, they desired to organize and channel their moral outrage in a way that would publicize and mitigate their fears. Freed from the demands of political compromise, women's clubs became the redoubt of the most conservative members of the Republican Party.

### **The John Birch Society**

The largest, best-organized group for post-war ultraconservatives was the John Birch Society (JBS). Robert J. Welch, Jr., a wealthy retired candy manufacturer from Massachusetts, started the organization in 1958 and acted as the society's leader and main mouthpiece through the society's heyday in the 1960s. JBS included a large number of women members who held mini-JBS meetings in their living rooms. Welch was a vocal supporter of McCarthy and picked up the reins of American anti-Communism after the senator's death. He advocated a watchful

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 129.

vigilance for Communists in the United States government, mistrusted liberals and even moderate Republicans, and saw conspiracies around every corner. Welch maintained secret lists of the society's rolls so the total number of adherents cannot be known with any certainty, but it was thought to number in the tens of thousands at its peak. One of the founding members was Fred Koch, founder of the Wichita-based oil conglomerate Koch Industries, one of the largest privately-held corporations in the country. Many high-level Birchers led other conservative organizations, tending to make the hierarchy of conservative groups resemble the infamous "spider web" chart of the 1920s. JBS members found Welch's "Little Blue Book" of core values to be similar in many ways to earlier ultraconservative thought, but Welch refused to tolerate anti-Semitism or racism. By eliminating these distracters, Welch could recruit a maximum number of conservatives and focus their activities on a single issue. The rejection of demographic hatemongering also separated the John Birch Society from other conservative groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, thus making it respectable to a broader constituency.

Welch obsessed about Communist plots to take over America. He was convinced that certain plots had already been enacted and that others were waiting to be hatched in the government, in schools, and in churches, which resonated with his women members. He accused President Eisenhower of being a Communist and of taking orders from Moscow. Conservative critics Arnold Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein, writing on behalf of the Jewish B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, noted that JBS members implemented their anti-Communism in a two-pronged attack which corresponded with conservative members' rigid gender conceptions: first, they strenuously opposed the weakening of America's defenses or its male defenders by rejecting any type of international cooperation or "one-world" initiatives. Second, they elevated the nuclear family and the moral power of women by opposing any type of socialism or statism

which might erode local and family sovereignty.<sup>215</sup> The John Birch Society's core messages resonated with many in America who considered themselves to be rugged individualists who made their own luck, especially small Midwestern businessmen who felt increasingly at odds with the nation's swing left since the Depression. Welch wrote, "[t]he true *americanist* believes that the individual should retain the freedom to make his own bargain with life, and the responsibility for the results of that bargain; and that means are as important as ends in the civilized social order which he desires."<sup>216</sup> Central to this theme was the ability of men to direct their families of dependents free from government intervention.

Welch boasted of the existence of several thousand JBS chapters scattered throughout all of the states, but the largest numbers were found in California, Texas, Florida, Michigan, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, and Kansas. Wichita had a particularly strong following, due no doubt to the influence of Fred Koch.<sup>217</sup> The John Birch Society maintained a high profile through its publication, *American Opinion*, and through the strength of its numbers. In 1963, Senator Stephen Young of Ohio reflected woefully on the group's prominence by likening it to its predecessor racist and ultraconservative movements that had not fared well in the light of history:

The influence of early American right hatemongers has remained in robust good health for a century. The heirs of the past few decades have been legion. They wore hoods and lynched Negroes as Ku Klux Klan members in the 1920's. They goosestepped among the fascistic Silver Shirts and Fritz Kuhn's German-American bund and joined Father Coughlin's Christian front in the 1930's. Today they read as gospel Gerald L. K. Smith's hate sheet, *The Cross and the Flag*, or have been swept into the John Birch Society, in

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<sup>215</sup> Arnold Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein, *Danger on the Right* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1964), 39.

<sup>216</sup> Robert Welch, "Americanism versus Amoralism," *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (fourth printing; Belmont, Mass.: John Birch Society, 1961), quoted in Rosenstone, 21.

<sup>217</sup> Forster and Epstein.

my opinion the most dangerous organization in the United States today. I regret that it has so many members in my state of Ohio.<sup>218</sup>

## **The Christian Crusade and Return of Fundamentalism**

Fundamentalist Christians have always been some of the most conservative Americans due to their embrace of patriarchy, belief in rigid and complementary gender roles, and antipathy toward feminism, which they viewed as tending to destroy the all-important home. Building on the popularity of fundamentalists Gerald Winrod and Gerald L. K. Smith, Tulsa evangelical preacher Reverend Billy James Hargis reenergized and expanded the fundamentalist movement through his radio and television ministry called the Christian Crusade. Although Hargis founded his ministry before Welch started the John Birch Society, the two groups later worked hand-in-glove with Hargis as a leader within JBS. While Welch tried to keep racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Catholic sentiment out of his organization, Hargis embraced all three. He enticed large numbers of conservative women into his organization by targeting schools, where he saw Communist plots in the teaching of sex education, desegregation, and a decline in Bible reading. Like Father Coughlin, Hargis openly advocated political solutions to Communist infiltration and was one of the first to recognize the common ground shared by politically conservative Republicans like Barry Goldwater and socially conservative Democrats such as Strom Thurmond and Harry Byrd. Hargis reportedly advocated fusion in a speech at the Third Annual Convention of the Christian Crusade in 1961, touching on a number of topics appealing to ultraconservatives. According to a local newspaper, Hargis worked himself into “a fire-and-brimstone” frenzy, urging conservatives from both parties to form a new party representative of their shared values.

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<sup>218</sup> Senator Stephen Young, “Danger from the Far Right,” *Congressional Record*, 88<sup>th</sup> Congress, Sess. I [1963], pp. 15178-80, quoted in Rosenstone, 91.

“Take a second look at the civil rights legislation . . . [i]f you want to serve nobody but a blue eyed German at your place of business, that is your right.” He took aim at “one-world” organizations as hamstringing America’s sovereign will, condemning the United Nations as “that traitorous outfit in New York City.” With his parting words, he announced that Communists, if not stopped, would ensure that “[t]his coming Thanksgiving may be the last legal one we Americans will celebrate!”<sup>219</sup> Hargis’s hysteria recalled the dramatics of the McCarthy hearings, and in fact Hargis had once been a speechwriter for McCarthy.<sup>220</sup> Hargis knit together evangelical Christianity, anti-Communism, and hatemongering at each of his conventions, selling propaganda for his causes and for the John Birch Society together so that attendees, large numbers of whom were women, might choose a number of defenses against the insidious forces of Communism.<sup>221</sup>

Like many before him, Hargis saw a tremendous decline in America’s morals and blamed the change on Communism. In a 1960 publication, Hargis wrote,

Communism, however, has come along with insistence that America no longer look toward God, but instead toward government. Communism, through its associates, liberalism, progressivism, socialism, and modernism is creating class warfare within America, fomenting hatred, stirring up various so-called “social crises,” destroying love of country, perverting morals of young and old, casting aside beloved traditions, banning the Bible from American schools, and in general reducing the proud and free American citizenship to an insignificant, helpless, hopeless pawn of giant government.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Forster and Epstein, 75.

<sup>220</sup> Adam Bernstein, “Evangelist Billy James Hargis Dies; Spread Anti-Communist Message,” Nov 30, 2004, *Washington Post* Online, accessed 12 January 2008; available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/articles/A20975-2004Nov29.html>; Internet.

<sup>221</sup> Forster and Epstein, 84.

<sup>222</sup> Billy James Hargis, “The Faith of Our Fathers,” *Communist America: Must It Be?* (Tulsa, Okla.: Christian Crusade, 1960), quoted in Rosenstone, 26.

Arguments like these resonated strongly in the Midwest and with rural, conservative, evangelical Christian women. Hargis aimed his message at the “lonely patriots” who felt helpless to stop their family’s way of life from slipping away to corporations and far-reaching liberal government programs.<sup>223</sup> Hargis painted a communist dystopia in which the American values of individual ownership and patriotism were gone: “Under Communism, no one as an individual can say, ‘My land, my farm, my home, my automobile, my cattle, or even my dog.’” He quoted conservative Kansas Congressman Wint Smith as saying, “Under Communism you cannot possess anything except your picture with a card (with your serial number), your residence and the place where you work by government order. Of course, you would never say, ‘This is my country,’ because you belong to godless, atheistic, international Communism.”<sup>224</sup>

Hargis’s strategy to link change with Communism and Communism with the Devil appealed to many disaffected evangelical Christians. Urgent political action was needed. Aided by Hargis and other fire-breathing radio and televangelists, fundamentalism returned as a force in American Christianity. These Christians, already extremely conservative on social issues, were easily converted to political conservatism. Author David Danzig noted that fundamentalists’ propensity to see the world in black and white, combined with American Protestants’ historical adherence to “city upon a hill” exceptionalism, resulted in the uplifting of American democratic capitalism as God’s chosen political and economic system. He wrote,

given the association that came to be developed between the “Protestant ethic” and the ideology of 19th-century capitalism, it is not surprising that fundamentalism should always have had a strong disposition to regard the revisions of this ideology (which were partly inspired by Protestant liberals) as the work of heretics and atheistic radicals, infected with and spreading false doctrines in a conspiratorial manner. In fundamentalist eyes, departures from nineteenth-century capitalism have carried with them the

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<sup>223</sup> Bernstein.

<sup>224</sup> Hargis, quoted in Rosenstone, 28.

corruption of virtually sanctified socio-economic doctrines and have consequently helped to undermine the Christian society. . . . Fundamentalism today supports a super-patriotic Americanism . . . <sup>225</sup>

Conservative women, who were generally more religious and more conservative than conservative men, flocked to Hargis's movement. These women embraced the Christian Crusade's message that Communism, with its emphasis on atheism and one-world government, was the opposite of American Christianity. Those working to undermine democracy, to erode capitalism, to replace patriarchal families with government agencies, or to dictate to local governments from a federal level, were clearly Communists and in league with the Devil. True to the fundamentalist roots of the 1910s, these beliefs allowed no compromise. Hargis's Christian Crusade was joined in its approach by numerous other Christian ultraconservative organizations, including Dr. Frederick Schwartz's The Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, the Rev. Carl McIntyre's 20<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation Hour, and Edgar Bundy's Church League of America.

### **The Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation and The Manion Forum**

The ultraconservative Catholic outlets of the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation and The Manion Forum were relatively small groups in the 1950s but are important in the light of history due to the membership of Phyllis Schlafly, later the nation's leading antifeminist. Despite many ultraconservative evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant groups openly smearing American Catholics as agents of the internationalist and hierarchical Catholic Church, many American Catholics like Schlafly nevertheless found common cause with ultraconservatives. Father

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<sup>225</sup> David Danzig, "The Radical Right and the Rise of the Fundamentalist Minority," *Commentary* (April 1962), quoted in Rosenstone, 120.

Coughlin may have started the trend by his break with Roosevelt. He was followed by the Catholic Senator McCarthy, whose vitriol succeeded in converting many avowedly anti-Catholic right-wingers to his cause, including Billy James Hargis. The Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation was run by the Schlafly family: executive director Eleanor; her brother J. Fred, a lawyer; and his wife, Phyllis. Robert Welch once described Phyllis Schlafly as a “very loyal” John Birch Society member although she has denied it and it cannot be confirmed because the rolls are not public. J. Fred Schlafly spoke at Dr. Frederick Schwartz’s Christian Anti-Communism Crusade schools and was once considered a “faculty” member, proving the Schlaflys’ commitment to right-wing issues.<sup>226</sup>

The Manion Forum, headed by former dean of the Notre Dame law school Clarence Manion, advocated the standard fare of ultraconservatism including states’ rights, a rebirth of patriotism, American economic power unencumbered by union activity, and the destruction of Communism, but was unusual in its organization which demonstrated conservatism’s growing interconnectedness. At one time, Manion’s business manager was Leo F. Reardon, who had been an advisor and personal representative to Father Coughlin and was active in Coughlin’s weekly publication *Social Justice*.<sup>227</sup> Manion was also a member of the John Birch Society and was on the editorial advisory committee of the Society’s monthly magazine, *American Opinion*. He was a member of the national advisory committee of Hargis’s Christian Crusade. Starting in 1958, Manion was legal counsel to the Citizens Foreign Aid Committee, which according to Forster and Epstein, was “a Far Right lobbying group which boasted that it was the ‘only national organization’ devoted to the single objective of ending all foreign aid except that which

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<sup>226</sup> Forster and Epstein, 271.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 115-6.

would ‘strengthen our strategic fighting forces.’”<sup>228</sup> He had also been a leader in Gerald L. K. Smith’s America First Committee, an isolationist group opposed to American intervention into European problems in the late 1930s. Manion was a key supporter of Phyllis Schlafly in her first steps into far-right Republican politics and became a linchpin in the consolidation of ultraconservatives into a Republican interest group. The foundations of Phyllis Schlafly’s political activism played an enormous role in her later work as the nation’s leading ERA opponent.

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 121.

## CHAPTER 5 - The ERA Era

From the 1920s through the 1950s, conservatives feared that government would attempt to replace the authority of the father and the moral guidance of the mother in the home with centralized, paternalistic programs, opening the door to radical infiltration and Communist takeover. As conservatives surveyed the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s, many believed that these fears were becoming reality. One of the most galling changes was the umbrella of social legislation called the “Great Society,” which conservatives saw as paternalism run amok. Added to this were numerous liberation movements, all of which challenged conservative assumptions of American life. Conservatives were especially suspicious of the growing women’s movement, which they believed would tear apart the traditional American family as women abandoned husbands and children for a career outside the home. Although conservative Republicans succeeded in achieving the nomination of their candidate, Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, for the Republican ticket in the 1964 presidential election, Goldwater was trounced in the election and the conservative coalition within the party broke apart. Denied power on a national stage, ultraconservatives began a powerful grassroots movement to organize like-minded citizens against what many of them perceived to be a cultural war on their values. The Equal Rights Amendment ending discrimination based on sex became the nation’s foremost test of conservatism. Led by Phyllis Schlafly, darling of the far right, ERA opposition wrapped up all of the vexing questions of the previous forty years into a single issue. The spare wording of the ERA encouraged acrimonious debate while allowing no firm answers; all experts could agree upon was that the ERA might result in change, and that change might be momentous. Feminists,

having worked for equality for years without success, clung to the ERA as a panacea for righting all remaining forms of discrimination. Conservatives, eager to resist further social change and willing to go to the mat over the home and family, saw untold evils in the ERA which only nuanced minds could discern. Schlafly took it upon herself to publicize every possible family-eroding consequence of the ERA in her newsletter, *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, which reached out to a sizeable conservative base and was passed around and quoted in numerous other publications. She harnessed groups appealing to other constituencies, including Lottie Beth Hobbs' evangelical Women Who Want to be Women, shaping the conservative position across numerous demographics nearly single-handedly. The ratification process for the ERA coincided with the coalescing of far-right conservatism, lending Schlafly the political base she needed to stop the ERA's ratification. The depth of conservative feeling was demonstrated in Kansas, a state with a conservative past but an impressive track-record of woman-friendly legislation. The patterns of disagreement over the ERA displayed the irreconcilable differences between conservative, moderate, and liberal constituencies in both Kansas and the nation in the 1970s.

### **Constitutionally Approved Statism**

In the early 1960s, conservatives were still somewhat fragmented. The popularity of youthful president John F. Kennedy buoyed many Americans' opinion of the executive branch and made organizations like the John Birch Society seem the province of malcontents. Following Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon Johnson was left with the work of implementing Kennedy's social legislation in the face of massive opposition in the South and elsewhere. Much of this legislation flowed from a series of Supreme Court decisions starting with *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), which conservatives thought

eroded morality, increased paternalistic government, and spelled a dangerous loss of power within families.

After *Brown*, the Court took on a number of cases that focused on social problems. In 1962, the Court heard *Baker v. Carr*, which contended that, contrary to the state's laws, Tennessee districts had not been reapportioned since 1901, leaving the voters of growing urban counties underrepresented in favor of overrepresented and shrinking rural districts. This issue had been decided by the Court once already in *Colegrove v. Green* (1946) when Justice Felix Frankfurter dismissed the complaint, declaring, "Courts ought not to enter this political thicket."<sup>229</sup> The Court deferred to the states to enforce their own laws, believing that purely political questions were not appropriate for consideration by the Court. *Baker v. Carr* revised this decision, alleging that fairness issues were at stake. Justice William J. Brennan, Jr., writing the majority opinion for the court, declared, "The injury which appellants assert is that this classification disfavors the voters in the counties in which they reside, placing them in a position of constitutionally unjustifiable inequality vis-à-vis voters in irrationally favored counties. A citizen's right to a vote free of arbitrary impairment by state action has been judicially recognized as a right secured by the Constitution."<sup>230</sup> This decision was strengthened by two others decided two years later, *Reynolds v. Sims* and *Wesberry v. Sanders* (1964). In the first, the provisions of *Baker* were extended to cover apportionment of state legislatures and in the second, Congressional districts. The three cases together are often referred to as "one man, one vote," meaning that the citizens of states are constitutionally protected from being underrepresented within that state.

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<sup>229</sup> *Colegrove v. Green*, 328 U.S. 549 (1946).

<sup>230</sup> *Baker v. Carr*, 369 U.S. 186 (1962).

The losers in “one man, one vote” were rural constituencies which had historically been favored over suburban populations. The conservative argument against *Reynolds* and the other cases centered on whether or not it was constitutionally necessary to have proportionately equal districts, using the U.S. Senate’s apportionment of two senators per state, regardless of population, as a counterexample. Opponents of “one man, one vote” feared that each state would be forced to apportion so that urban counties would dominate each state’s legislature, leaving the interests of the rural counties hopelessly outnumbered. Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois, formerly a Senator McCarthy supporter, sponsored an amendment to allow disproportionate representation, but it failed to gain traction.

An even more contentious issue was raised in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) in which public high school students in New York objected to a prayer recited every morning to “Almighty God.” Justice Hugo Black upheld the plaintiffs’ objection, writing, “Neither the fact that the prayer may be denominationally neutral nor the fact that its observance on the part of the students is voluntary can serve to free it from the limitations of the Establishment Clause, as it might from the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, both of which are operative against the States by virtue of the Fourteenth Amendment.”<sup>231</sup> In *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963), agnostic defendant Edward Schempp successfully challenged a Pennsylvania law requiring his children to hear and read selections from the Bible in a public school. *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) outlawed a state’s reimbursing of nonpublic (mostly Catholic) schools for teachers’ salaries, textbooks, and instructional materials as long as they continued to teach religion classes. Conservative Christians fought back by citing numerous spiritual references by the Founders and in America’s history. They argued that prohibiting the practice of any religion, even in non-

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<sup>231</sup> *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962).

denominational form, was to advocate atheism, yet these arguments did not and have not reversed the trend of the Court to eliminate all references to religion in public.<sup>232</sup>

In 1965, the Court heard *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which challenged the state's rarely enforced 1879 ban on contraceptive devices. Earlier challenges to the law had been dismissed on technicalities, so Estelle Griswold, Executive Director of the Planned Parenthood League of Connecticut, opened a birth control clinic in New Haven specifically to bring suit. She was arrested, tried, found guilty and fined \$100. Griswold brought her case to the Supreme Court, where her conviction was overturned. Justice William O. Douglas wrote the majority opinion:

The present case, then, concerns a relationship lying within the zone of privacy created by several fundamental constitutional guarantees. And it concerns a law which, in forbidding the use of contraceptives rather than regulating their manufacture or sale, seeks to achieve its goals by means having a maximum destructive impact upon that relationship. Such a law cannot stand in light of the familiar principle, so often applied by this Court, that a "governmental purpose to control or prevent activities constitutionally subject to state regulation may not be achieved by means which sweep unnecessarily broadly and thereby invade the area of protected freedoms." [*NAACP v. Alabama*, 1958]. Would we allow the police to search the sacred precincts of marital bedrooms for telltale signs of the use of contraceptives? The very idea is repulsive to the notions of privacy surrounding the marriage relationship.<sup>233</sup>

*Griswold v. Connecticut* invoked a new principle, the constitutional right to privacy, which the justices had formed through the interpretation of various Bill of Rights amendments and Court precedents. *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972) successfully extended *Griswold's* right to use contraceptives within marriage to unmarried couples, citing privacy and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Three more cases have been added to this list: *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985) outlawed Alabama's one minute of silent prayer, *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992) outlawed clergy-led prayer at high school graduations, and *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 (2000) outlawed student-led prayer at high school football games.

<sup>233</sup> *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479 (1965).

<sup>234</sup> *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, 405 U.S. 438 (1972)

Federal interference in state affairs again surfaced in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971), which contended that although *Brown* had outlawed *de jure* segregation, *de facto* segregation still existed due to the persistence of racially unmixed neighborhoods and their schools. The NAACP brought suit on behalf of six year-old James Swann, alleging that the unmixed schools resulted in the same lack of opportunity and funds for black children as existed before *Brown*. The Court agreed, arguing that busing students out of their neighborhoods was necessary to achieve racial balance within schools. The outcry against this decision was loud and diverse, as many upwardly mobile families complained that they had chosen a specific neighborhood intentionally for the improved schools, only to have their children bused back into inner-city schools. Many lower-income black families objected to their children being forced to take long bus rides out of their neighborhoods and resented the implication that sitting next to white children would somehow make their own children smarter. These cries were especially loud in Boston, which experienced acrimonious debate and a series of lawsuits filed by angry parents to stop or revise the busing plan. Busing continued in most places until 1999.

The most contentious of all of the Supreme Court cases of this era was *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which used the right to privacy established in *Griswold* to affirm a woman's right to end a pregnancy by abortion for any reason up until the point of viability, set at approximately the 28-week point. In the companion case *Doe v. Bolton* (1973), the Court ruled that abortion after the point of viability had to be justified by the need to protect the mother's health. The firestorm generated by these decisions was immediate and unrelenting. Unlike *Griswold*, which outlawed seldom-enforced bans on contraceptives in the few states where such laws existed, *Roe* affected nearly every state's ban on abortion. Conservative Protestant groups and the Catholic Church

came out strongly in opposition to the decision, declaring abortion to be as sinful as murder. *Roe v. Wade* became a unifying factor within the conservative movement as groups united over little more than their moral outrage at abortion found common cause with each other.

By 1973, conservatives had reason to be concerned about the series of socially liberal decisions handed down by the Supreme Court since 1954. In a mere twenty years, from the conservative point of view, the Court had defied local will by forcing the integration of racially separate schools, banned the sacred tradition of prayer and Bible-reading in schools, removed the responsibility inherent in sexual activity by endorsing contraception for both married and unmarried couples, forced parents to send their children far away and into strange neighborhoods for school, and removed rural constituencies' ability to object to all this legislation by dramatically reducing their apportionment within the states. Many of these decisions struck at the basis of family power by weakening the paterfamilias while strengthening women's claim to individual autonomy. For conservatives and for increasing numbers of moderates, inspired to move to the right in their political leanings in the face of these outrages, the liberal decisions of the Supreme Court confirmed an all-out assault on the family.

### **Cultural Change**

Momentous political changes also challenged Americans from the fifties to the seventies, marked by the notable leftward swing by the Supreme Court but exacerbated by an unpopular war in Vietnam and an explosive youth movement. While nineteenth-century liberals demanded individual freedom to operate within the capitalist market and Progressive-era liberals demanded protection for people from corporate power and governmental reform, in the 1960s, liberals now

demanded individual rights, social insurance, and public welfare programs.<sup>235</sup> Harkening back to the Scottish Enlightenment, conservatives considered liberals' demands to be not "rights" but "privileges," and argued that privileges flowed only from duties performed. Ultraconservative authors Sexson and Miles discussed the problem:

But with their victory over what they were (and still are) pleased to call *laissez faire*, the liberals' interest in duties seems to have evaporated. Instead, they spend their energies trying to establish the right of Negroes to attend the same schools whites do; the right of teachers to defy orders of the legislators and even of their own administrative superiors; the right of soldiers to escape discipline; the rights of all young people to attend college; the right of old people to have free medicare; the right of writers to write whatever they want and readers to read whatever they choose, no matter how pornographic; the right of homosexuals to practice their persuasion; the right of suspected communists and fellow travelers to be immune from "persecution"; the right of hardened criminals to escape capital punishment; the right of romantically inclined (but not wedded) couples to be furnished with birth control information and aids; the right of labor unions to require all employees of a given company to join the union; the right of the government to spend more than it takes in; the right of mothers to receive aid-for-dependent-children allotments for their illegitimate offspring (and at the same time "see" the fathers); the right of colonial nations to be independent; the right of underdeveloped nations to economic development; the right of everyone to be happy.<sup>236</sup>

Particularly infuriating to these authors were "rights" which, they said, liberals conflated with paternalistic entitlements. Recalling the rhetoric of the Filmerian system, conservatives believed that complex webs of social responsibility enveloped all members of a society. Demanding privileges but shirking the responsibilities inherent in the granting of these privileges to the government was illogical, irresponsible, and destructive to the rest of society forced to endure the consequences of poor decision-making. Responsibility was held at the family level and in local communities. Pressing for increased federal oversight removed the checks on socially irresponsible behavior, eroded family control, empowered those without the discernment to

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<sup>235</sup> Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 9-10.

<sup>236</sup> Sexson and Miles, 106.

exercise it, and struck at the moral foundations of the nation. Conservatives felt that these “rights,” if granted, would destroy America.

Many conservatives thought that liberal entitlements were problems of the government’s own creation but that they could be reversed with the proper application of political principles. These principles included the rooting out of all possible Communists, a rebirth of civic religion in the form of evangelical or fundamentalist Christianity, the end of federal meddling in local affairs, the rebuilding of a strong military to fend off Communist threats in the world, laissez-faire capitalism and low taxes (except for national defense) to make America’s economy the strongest in the world, and a crackdown on lax morality. Conservatives valued individual responsibility above all and wanted government structures in place to ensure that all members of the society would be forced to rely on their own resources. Also important were social order, dependence on the Divine, and the strength of the traditional, patriarchal, hierarchical family. Sexson and Miles noted, “The conservative sees society as a finely woven fabric all the threads of which the welfare state begins to rot. The mutual pressures and linkages of traditionally organized society keep individuals ‘straight’ . . . . When the welfare state tells individuals, in effect, that they can do whatever they want to do, not only does society begin disintegrating, but the individual, as a civilized, Christian being, also disintegrates.”<sup>237</sup>

From the Christian Right, clergymen saw moral decay in nearly every aspect of American youth culture. The Reverend David A. Noebel, writing in 1966, argued that popular music was inspiring young people to shirk their duties and to question their loyalty as Americans. “Even more dangerous in the eyes of the right is the new combination of the dangerous beat of rock ‘n’ roll with the potentially dangerous lyric of folk music. . . . The synthesis could well spell the

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 95.

doom of the United States of America, for no nation can long endure with its younger generation singing itself into defeatism, pessimism, peace-at-any-price mentality, disarmament, surrender, fear of death, hatred toward the South, atheism, immorality and the negation of patriotism.”<sup>238</sup> Such accusations recalled the hysteria of the late 1910s, when conservatives believed that woman suffrage was a foil for “slackers” who were hoping that pacifist women voters would not force them to fight for their country. In this case, however, it was not merely women but Communists, atheists, and liberals who were to blame.

Since the days of Father Coughlin in the 1930s, evangelical Protestants and Catholics had occasionally found reason to discuss their mutual interests, despite longstanding antipathy of the evangelicals for “papist” American Catholics. By the 1960s the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly called the Mormons), a group despised by both Protestants and Catholics, entered the political scene as an important conservative constituency. Known for their traditional family values, clean living, and emphasis on financial independence, Mormons had always espoused conservatism but had not been able to gain political prominence nationally due to their history of polygamy, separatism, and inclusion into Holy Scripture books not accepted by other Christians. The Church officially outlawed new polygamous marriages in 1904 and by the 1950s most remaining polygamists had passed on, removing this unusual practice from national scrutiny. Church leaders also made an effort to downplay the significance of the Book of Mormon when making statements intended for an audience outside their community. Ezra Taft Benson, Eisenhower’s Secretary of Agriculture and later the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, wrote a conservative tract warning against the dangers of socialism and communism. In his use of biblical quotations, warnings against immorality, and evocation

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<sup>238</sup> Rev. David A. Noebel, *Rhythm, Riots and Revolution* (Tulsa, Okla.: Christian Crusade, 1966), 212, quoted in Rosenstone, 8.

of traditional American values, he brought his once-marginal Church directly into the mainstream. He compared the fall of Rome as described in Will Durant's eleven-volume *The Story of Civilization* with the present calamities afflicting America, using the similarities as a dire warning against immorality as a cause of national downfall. Durant "tries to point out from what history reveals why this great Roman Empire fell," Benson wrote, which

started with the breakdown of the home and the family; the limitation of children; the refusal to assume the obligations of honorable parenthood; the deferment and avoidance of marriage. Sexual excesses were indulged in outside the marriage covenant. The practices of contraception and abortion became prominent, reduced fertility resulted. Sex ran riot and moral decay resulted. . . . What about our attitude as a nation regarding the sacred obligations of parenthood. No more sacred obligation has been placed upon men and women than that of honorable parenthood. We cannot escape the grave responsibility. The tragedy of broken homes—the breaking of the sacred bonds of holy matrimony on the least provocation is a national blot upon this great nation. The divine law: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is still in force. Sexual sin is next to murder in the category of crimes in the sight of God. Our record is such that it should have a sobering effect on all true Americans interested in the future welfare of this nation.<sup>239</sup>

Benson focused on the family as the seat of moral authority—those who shirk their family responsibilities either by breaking their marriage vows or by limiting the size their families are in a state of sin. The increasing percentage of sinful Americans threatened to destroy the fabric of the nation. With Mormons achieving mainstream respectability, conservatives gained a large new constituency in Utah and parts of Arizona, Nevada, and Idaho.

On the eve of the 1964 presidential election, conservatives were in the beginning stages of massive transition. Included under the conservative umbrella were fiscal conservatives (including the dreaded "Eastern banking interests"), evangelical Christians, Midwestern Catholics, Mormons, disaffected Southerners disgusted by desegregation enacted by Southern Democrat Lyndon Johnson, anti-Communists, leftover anti-New Dealers, libertarians, militarists,

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<sup>239</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, "The Decline of National Morale," from *The Red Carpet: A Forthright Evaluation of the Rising Tide of Socialism—The Royal Road to Communism* (Salt Lake City: 1962), quoted in Rosenstone, 31, 33.

and opponents of labor unions. Historian Richard Hofstadter believed he found common threads running through the conservative movement. Applying a model originally developed by Norman Cohn for his study of European millennialist sects of the Middle Ages, Hofstadter noted that conservatives were marked by the same style “made up of certain marked preoccupations and fantasies.” These included:

the megalomaniac view of oneself as the Elect, wholly good, abominably persecuted yet assured of ultimate triumph; the attribution of gigantic and demonic powers to the adversary; the refusal to accept ineluctable limitations and imperfections of human existence, such as transience, dissention, conflict, fallibility whether intellectual or moral; the obsession with inerrable prophesies . . . systematized misinterpretations, always gross and often grotesque . . . ruthlessness directed toward an end which by its very nature cannot be realised—towards a total and final solution such as cannot be attained at any actual time or in any concrete situation, but only in the timeless and autistic realm of phantasy.<sup>240</sup>

For those like Hofstadter on the opposite side of the political spectrum from conservatives, this assessment was no exaggeration. It was true that conservatives, both new and old, could point to upsetting social and political trends around which they could rally but they had a harder time finding a positive platform of change on which all of the disparate constituencies could agree.

### **Draft Goldwater**

The diverse population of those considering themselves to be “conservative” espoused such a plurality of opinions that they were difficult to form into a viable political constituency. In the run-up to the 1964 Presidential election, however, some well-connected conservative activists succeeded for the first time in fusing together a constituency to represent their interests. In the early 1960s, Clarence Manion, the well-connected conservative voice of *The Manion*

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<sup>240</sup> Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” abridged from Chapter 1 of *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1964), quoted in Rosenstone, 147.

Forum, proposed that the conservative wing of the Republican Party gain the party's presidential nomination for one of their own. This was not an unprecedented move; in 1952 the conservative wing tried to nominate Senator Robert Taft of Ohio but thought that they had been outmaneuvered at the last minute by Eisenhower's "Wall Street handlers."<sup>241</sup> Taft, the son of former president William Howard Taft, had made a name for himself as a conservative Republican, anti-communist, isolationist, small-government advocate, and opponent of international organizations like NATO, which he believed interfered with American sovereignty. Taft was a popular candidate and, despite Eisenhower's victory, proved to be a conscientious politician by graciously supporting Eisenhower through his election and his domestic agenda afterward. Taft was elected Senate Majority Leader in 1953 but died a few months later, removing the conservatives' best hope to win the Party's nomination. A decade later, Manion devised a strategy whereby disillusioned Southerners would nominate Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas, made famous by his refusal to integrate Little Rock schools until Eisenhower sent in the National Guard, and Northern conservatives would name another, yet to be determined, conservative candidate. At the Republican National Convention, Manion's people would engineer a compromise ticket between the two groups and hopefully gain the nomination. Manion abandoned this strategy after a charismatic Senator from Arizona, Barry Goldwater, became the obvious choice for both sections.

Goldwater, grandson of a wealthy department store magnate, became known as "Mr. Conservative" due to his militant anti-Communism (he had been a supporter of Senator McCarthy), opposition to labor unions, and strident defense of nuclear weapons as a necessity to protect the nation against Communist infiltration. He won over the South by opposing the Civil

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<sup>241</sup> Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 9.

Rights Act of 1964. Goldwater was not a racist—he had supported the Arizona NAACP and had overseen the integration of the Arizona National Guard—but thought that the 1964 Act unconstitutionally extended the federal power to regulate commerce to private citizens and employers. Manion realized that Goldwater’s popularity in the South made moot his support of Faubus and went to work puffing Goldwater for the nomination. His first move was the publication and distribution of a Goldwater “memoir” entitled *Conscience of a Conservative*. This book, considered a manifesto of conservative thought, discussed Goldwater’s major interest areas of anti-Communism, libertarianism, and fiscal conservatism, as well as education, the excesses of agricultural policy and farm subsidies, wrong-headed social welfare programs, and the dangers of an income tax. Manion arranged for the book to be ghostwritten by conservative Catholic writer L. Brent Bozell, Jr., who had gained publicity by writing an impassioned defense of McCarthy with his friend and brother-in-law, conservative commentator William F. Buckley, Jr. *Conscience of a Conservative* was a hit, and Manion made sure to distribute copies to each Republican delegate.

Another polemic making the rounds early in 1964 was *A Choice Not an Echo* by Phyllis Schlafly. Her book pumped Goldwater as the only man for the job of President, representing a true choice as a conservative, not an echo of the Democratic Party in the form of a liberal Republican from the Northeast. Schlafly’s book also flew off the shelves; a historian of the Goldwater campaign, Rick Perlstein, noted that “she never placed an ad; she never contacted a single bookstore—and 600,000 copies were in circulation around the country by June. Most were purchased in lots greater than 100. One businessman bought 30,000. One man told her, ‘Your book is the first book I ever read. I couldn’t even get through *Tom Sawyer*.’”<sup>242</sup> Manion

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 349.

had known the Schlaflys for years, having recruited Phyllis's husband, Fred, for the first Draft Goldwater Committee in 1959, and he became a key distributor of Phyllis Schlafly's book.<sup>243</sup>

Fierce campaigning consumed much of 1964, and Goldwater's staff went out of its way to recruit conservative women to the campaign. Citizens for Goldwater-Miller encouraged the formation of Goldwater-friendly "Mothers for a Moral America" units in every major city, and appointed prominent women like film stars Dale Evans and Hedda Hopper, Nancy Reagan, and Ivy Baker Priest Stevens, former assistant chair of the RNC, to its executive board. Each delegate for the Republican National Convention had to be lobbied and won for Goldwater. In Kansas, expert political maneuverings by the Goldwater faction foiled liberal Republican Governor John Anderson's attempt to steer his state toward the liberal Northeastern candidate, Nelson Rockefeller. Shady back-room deals succeeded in eroding Anderson's support system and put Goldwater delegates over the top.<sup>244</sup> Kansas conservatives, with moral support lent by Goldwater supporter and John Birch Society founding member Fred Koch, had spoken. Goldwater's staff pulled similar moves in enough states that, by the time of the convention, Goldwater had enough delegates to defeat Rockefeller, thereby becoming the first ever far-right nominee for the Republican Party.

The machinations of Goldwater's campaign managers may have worked to their advantage within the party but Goldwater was crushed in the national election. He received only forty percent of the popular vote and carried only five states in the Deep South and his home state of Arizona, for an electoral drop in the bucket of 52 votes, compared to Lyndon B.

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<sup>243</sup> Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 111, 124.

<sup>244</sup> Perlstein., 324.

Johnson's 486. Some speculated that Goldwater's monumental defeat was due at least in part to the nation's shock at the November 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy and Americans' unwillingness to see a third president in scarcely more than a year. Another contributing factor in Goldwater's loss was the perception that he was prepared to use nuclear weapons at the slightest provocation, which played out in a negative slogan war in which the Goldwater campaign's "In your heart, you know he's right" was countered by the Johnson campaign's "In your heart, you know he might" or "In your guts, you know he's nuts."<sup>245</sup> The latter slogan was conceived by Johnson campaign organizer Bill Moyers, who was also the mastermind behind the infamous "Daisy" commercial which showed a little girl counting the petals picked off a daisy cutting to the countdown to a nuclear explosion. The implication was that Goldwater was a dangerously unbalanced warmonger, while Johnson was a careful, sober man.

Goldwater's campaign was an important organizing structure for conservatives, many of whom met each other and built networks in 1964. Decades later, many prominent conservatives could point to their shared work on the Goldwater campaign as central to the movement's organization and growth later. Goldwater's defeat was not the end of the feisty politician, who served in the Senate until 1987, but it was the end of conservatives' brief control of the national Republican Party until Ronald Reagan's victory in 1980. During these sixteen years in the political wilderness, conservatives had to find other ways to express their opinions.

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<sup>245</sup> Wikipedia, c.f., "Barry Goldwater," accessed 17 January 08; available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barry\\_goldwater](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barry_goldwater); Internet.

## The Federation Purges Schlafly

One of the conservatives left in the cold after Goldwater's defeat was Phyllis Schlafly. Born Phyllis Stewart, she was raised in a politically conservative, Catholic household in St. Louis. Her father was a staunch Republican who, despite losing his job during the Depression, refused to accept welfare payments because he believed that eventually, someone would have to pay for "Roosevelt's war on the free-enterprise system, this planned economy, and the welfare state he was building."<sup>246</sup> She was a top student and a quick study, earning a master's degree from Radcliffe College in 1945. According to her biographer, Donald T. Critchlow, the young Phyllis Stewart worked from 1945-1946 at the conservative American Education Association, which cautioned in a pamphlet, "The tide of radicalism may be receding momentarily, but this certainly does not mean that America has returned to sound fiscal policies, put an end to deficit spending, to economic experimentation, and stopped making utopian plans for the future."<sup>247</sup> The group's opposition to the New Deal, liberalism, welfare policies, and government paternalism influenced Stewart and, during her time at the AEA, she received an education in conservatism that guided her future in politics.

She married J. Fred Schlafly, an Alton, Illinois, lawyer, in 1949 and the two proceeded to involve themselves in a variety of conservative activist groups including support for conservative Senator Robert Taft's unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 1952. The Schlaflys were vehement anti-Communists and supported Fred C. Schwartz's Christian Anti-Communist Crusade "schools." Phyllis Schlafly burst on the national scene with *A Choice Not an Echo*, distributed

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<sup>246</sup> Carl Pfeifer [Bruce Stewart's brother-in-law], quoted in Carol Felsenthal, *Sweetheart of the Silent Majority*, 18; quoted in Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 21.

<sup>247</sup> American Enterprise Association, "A Statement of Purposes: Extracts from an Address by Lewis H. Brown, June 1, 1945," quoted in Critchlow, 26.

by Clarence Manion, and it was through Manion that she became involved in the John Birch Society and many other ultraconservative organizations that shared leaders and grassroots organizational tactics. Schlafly wrote a number of other conservative tracts in the 1960s that expose her political stance, including *Inside the Communist Conspiracy* (1961), *The Gravediggers* (1964, intended as a companion to *A Choice Not an Echo*), *Strike from Space: How the Russians May Destroy Us* (1965), *Safe—Not Sorry* (1967), and *The Betrayers* (1968). All of these works contained variations on the same theme, that the Johnson administration and especially Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara believed that freedom was doomed and Communism was inevitable. To preserve a measure of power in the new era, they were actively engaged in weakening U.S. defenses through funding cuts and limitations on nuclear weapons in order that the Soviets could more easily take over.

Schlafly desperately desired a position of power within the Republican Party and the conservative movement. She ran unsuccessfully for Congress twice, once in 1952 and once in 1970, but found greater success leading like-minded conservative women in Republican women's clubs. During Goldwater's candidacy, Schlafly ascended to the presidency of the Illinois Federation of Republican Women's Clubs and became the National Federation's vice president. In 1966, outgoing Federation president Dottie Elston feared that Schlafly might wage a successful campaign to succeed her and place the conservative faction marginalized by Goldwater's defeat in control. This would make the National Federation of Republican Women's Clubs, already more conservative than the rest of the Republican Party, so unrepresentative that Elston feared the entire organization of women would cease to be relevant to the party. To mitigate the danger of Schlafly's candidacy, Elston implemented a number of tactics. First, Elston supported the more moderate Californian Gladys O'Donnell as her

successor. Second, the Federation Board of Directors approved a rule change that moved its elections to odd-numbered years (when there were no Congressional or Presidential elections), effectively extending Elston's term to 1967. Moderates responsible for the change hoped that Schlafly's high tide of support reached in 1964 would continue to erode over the course of an additional year. The same board approved moving the site of the electing convention from Los Angeles, a Schlafly stronghold, to Washington, D.C., which was dominated by moderates. Finally, moderates national leaders attempted to ensure that local moderates would maintain control of the state Federations, which sent delegates to the national convention. The tactics worked, although Schlafly bitterly protested them, and she lost, 1,910 to 1,494.<sup>248</sup>

Schlafly protested the election as having been rigged against her and included a chapter in her 1967 book *Safe—Not Sorry* on the campaign to deny her the Federation presidency. Schlafly's defeat, however, contained the seeds of her future sources of strength. According to historian Catherine Rymph, Schlafly took 1,000 of her supporters into another room after her defeat at the convention and suggested that the form, in her words, a separate "grass-roots organization made up of just plain old American women and mothers who believe in the cause of constitutional government and freedom." She asked the supporters to think and pray about it, but she ultimately decided to remain in the Federation, urging her followers to do the same but to protest by withholding some of their dues. She did not, however, give up on her vision, starting *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* in August 1967, three months after her defeat, to publicize her ultraconservative opinions to 3,000 of her supporters.<sup>249</sup> Over the next five years, this newsletter would grow into one of the leading sources of ultraconservative and antifeminist thought.

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<sup>248</sup> Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 181.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

## **Second-Wave Feminism**

For years, conservatives had positioned themselves as the true opponents of international Communism, leaving all those to the political left of far right as agents of Moscow or dupes. This was the conservative agenda, but the truth was that most Americans, regardless of political proclivity, feared the strength of the Soviet Union. Since the end of World War II, Communism indirectly threatened the United States through a string of victories in China (1949), the partition of Korea (1953), the formation of the Warsaw Pact (1955), and the crushing of a Hungarian attempt to reestablish democratic structures (1956). National self-confidence was again shaken in 1957 when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite, thus establishing superiority in the "theater" of space. In the first year of his presidency, John F. Kennedy faced two new challenges. First, the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961 proved that Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution in Cuba was more popular than previously imagined and that the United States would have to come up with a policy to deal with a Communist nation only ninety miles from Florida. Second, West Berlin, an outpost of democracy surrounded on all sides by Communist East Germany, was officially separated from the rest of the city by the building of the heavily militarized Berlin Wall in August 1961. Kennedy was a Democrat, but despite the protestations from the far right, he was no Communist. Fearing that America could be overtaken by the Soviet Union economically, Kennedy established the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) in December 1961 in an attempt to mobilize America's entire population against the Soviet threat. He appointed Franklin D. Roosevelt's widow, Eleanor, a savvy behind-the-scenes politician in her own right, as the chair.

The PCSW worked for nearly two years to analyze state laws that affected women and to determine what legislation might be needed to free up women to work for national security purposes. They faced a number of obstacles. First, the problem of protective legislation versus

equal rights for women, first raised during the Progressive era and serving as a wedge to women's solidarity after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, had never been fully addressed. Labor opposed Alice Paul's equal rights amendment when it was first proposed in 1923 and continued to do so for decades after, believing that "equal rights" for women would put them at disadvantages so great that they would be unable to compete with men on the job market. Business and professional women generally supported equal rights, thinking that protective legislation required employers to follow so many special precautions for the protection of women's health that it was simply easier to employ men, keeping most women underemployed in clerical "pink collar" jobs. Second, many states in 1961 still did not allow women to serve in public roles, such as sitting on juries. The traditional family composed of a breadwinning father, a homemaking mother and their children was still the model that most Americans attempted to emulate, and which most lawmakers accepted as a given, even if economic necessity forced many women to work outside the home. The rhetoric of the time upheld this model as a positive American good as compared with the Communist ideal of full employment, even for women, relying on the government to care for children.

Not wanting to alienate constituencies, Kennedy's PCSW submitted a report in October 1963 that recommended a moderate course. Their recommendations addressed only public sphere opportunities; private relationships between men and women, such as marriage, remained outside the scope of this committee. To placate labor, a Democratic stronghold, the report omitted any mention of an equal rights amendment, despite the legislation's perennial presence in Congress. Following a strong endorsement by the PCSW, Congress passed an Equal Pay Act in 1963 but limited its application to women working in jobs *identical* to those of men (a relatively small group) and excluded agricultural and domestic service jobs. Following delivery

of the report, the PCSW morphed into a number of different organizations, including numerous state commissions and the national Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women. A number of federal and state commission members, frustrated by their lack of progress and the reluctance of the federal Women's Bureau to move away from protective legislation as its default position, broke off to form the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966.<sup>250</sup>

Raising awareness of women's subordinate social position was the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. This book ignited a firestorm of controversy and is considered to be a seminal work in the "second wave" of feminism, distinguished from the first wave of suffrage feminism that ended in 1920. Friedan's work famously prodded "the problem that has no name," that of middle-class feminine discontent at the limitation of their aspirations and careers, endless cycles of household cleaning and cooking, and the depression that often went hand-in-hand with raising children in the isolation of suburbia. What she found, through a series of surveys sent to her former classmates in the Smith College Class of 1942 and interviews with other women, was that the June Cleavers of the world were pitifully lonely and bored to tears. She cited a number of examples of women who were alcoholics, addicted to anti-anxiety drugs, frigid or despondent, filling their days in the company of toddlers or in vapid bridge parties, endlessly decorating and redecorating their homes in an effort to stave off despair.

Friedan wrote about visiting an "upper-income development" that contained twenty-eight wives:

The mystique of feminine fulfillment was so literally followed in this community that if a little girl said: "When I grow up, I'm going to be a doctor," her mother would correct her: "No, dear, you're a girl. You're going to be a wife and mother, like mummy." But what was mummy really like? Sixteen out of the twenty-eight were in analysis or analytical psychotherapy. Eighteen were taking tranquilizers; several had tried suicide; and some had been hospitalized for varying periods, for depression or vaguely diagnosed psychotic states. ("You'd be surprised at the number of these happy suburban wives who simply go

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<sup>250</sup> Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 591.

berserk one night, and run shrieking through the street without any clothes on,” said the local doctor, not a psychiatrist, who had been called in, in such emergencies.) . . . It was in these women that I first began to notice the tell-tale signs of the problem that has no name; their voices were full and flat, or nervous and jittery; they were listless and bored, or frantically “busy” around the house or community. They talked about “fulfillment” in the wife-and-mother terms of the mystique, but they were desperately eager to talk about this other “problem” with which they seemed very familiar indeed.<sup>251</sup>

The women’s husbands, saddled with supporting their family in a respectable fashion, worked late and required peace when they returned from the rat-race, not unlike the stereotypical middle-class husbands of the nineteenth century. This left the wives, often well-educated and successful when single, with little adult companionship or stimulating conversation for the better part of their married lives.

*The Feminine Mystique* challenged the model for women’s middle-class respectability, that of dependent wife, mother, and homemaker. Conventional wisdom held that these roles were the fulfillment of a woman’s natural desires and that activity outside the home was unnecessary, unsavory, unnatural, and, for some, blasphemous. Since the earliest days of American history, women were considered to be the center of the home, the glue that held together husband, children, morality, social status, and the physical home. As seen in previous chapters, every attempt that women activists made to expand their interests outside the sphere of the home met with conservative backlash and public controversy. The moves into reform activity or politics that met with the most success cast women’s interest as the natural outgrowth of their special natures and maternal instincts. Those that met with the least success attempted to browbeat men into accepting women as equal partners in a natural democracy. Friedan’s work upset this illusion by asserting that women were *not* especially suited to homemaking, that the mind-numbing drudgery of housework was as unpleasant for a housewife as it was for anyone.

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<sup>251</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1974 reprint), 225-6.

She acknowledged that raising children, while a natural desire for most women, was not always an unmitigated delight. Most significantly, she noted that many women had the desire for a separate, personal identity outside of that of their husbands and children, an identity that included the satisfaction of earning an independent income.

Many critics of Friedan's work point out that by interviewing Smith College women, she was cherry-picking Northeastern middle- to upper-class white women who were unusually bright, and that the problems she discussed were either exaggerated or could be limited to this small group. There is some merit in this criticism, but it should be noted that this is the exact group of women who had been, historically, the agents of expanded women's roles in American society. It was these women who first pressed for expanded education for women, became the first ministers, formed the core of the abolition movement, attended the Seneca Falls Convention, colonized Kansas as Free Soilers, and formed the first woman suffrage associations. Friedan knew that this group was an important bellwether for the rest of the nation's female population. Her book catapulted her to fame as an important spokesperson for the burgeoning women's movement, inspiring her to become one of the founding members of NOW and to serve as its first president.

### **Political Changes for Women in the 1960s**

Since 1923, the "elephant in the room" of any women's group seeking improved conditions was the theory of equal rights. In over four decades of women's suffrage, woman activists had failed to agree on whether women required protection or deserved equality. In the nineteenth century, very few Americans believed that women and men could achieve equality on any level, with the notable exception of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The excesses of the "cult of

true womanhood” placed value on hyper-feminine traits such as physical smallness, childlike mannerisms, delicate voices, exaggerated emotionalism, and frailty. Women who could do the work of men or were physically imposing were essentially ignored as counterexamples by both conservative anti-suffrage activists and moderate “expanded sphere” pro-suffrage activists. By the 1920s, frailty and the clothing that enforced this condition (corsets, elaborate hairstyles, long skirts, tight boots) had fallen out of vogue and were replaced with the image of the boyish, athletic New Woman who could hold her own with men. By the 1940s, the positive images of “Rosie the Riveter” demonstrated to an American public committed to full wartime mobilization that women could work at heavy labor and still retain their femininity. In fact, many wartime films and photographs depicted women engaged in industrial work exaggerating their womanliness with bold red lipstick and cinched-in coveralls. Although wartime employment for women did not lead to permanent social change, the idea that women were “naturally” suited only for light domestic work and childrearing became less believable.

As noted by Jane J. Mansbridge in her history of the ERA, in 1940 the Republican Party, facing a third election against popular president Franklin D. Roosevelt, added an equal rights amendment to its platform hoping to win over woman voters. The Democratic Party opposed an ERA due to the objections of the labor interest and Southern traditionalists but changed their position for the 1944 election, knowing that the possibility of the amendment passing both houses of Congress was slim. In the 1950s some notable opponents of an ERA, including Eleanor Roosevelt, reversed their opposition due to their support for the United Nations, which included in its Charter the affirmation of “equal rights of men and women.” In 1950 and 1953 an ERA passed in the U.S. Senate but only after the addition of the “Hayden rider,” which declawed the legislation by stating that the amendment “shall not be construed to impair any rights,

benefits, or exemptions now or hereinafter conferred by law upon persons of the female sex.”<sup>252</sup>

The House recessed without a vote both years. Mounting political pressure to codify women’s equality was redirected by the PCSW of the early 1960s which did not specifically mention the ERA but noted that “a constitutional amendment need not now be sought in order to establish [equality].”<sup>253</sup>

True change at the political level began to happen for women only by accident. The 1964 Civil Rights Act outlawed Jim Crow laws and segregation for black Americans and was strongly opposed by Southern traditionalists. Angered by Title VII, which stated that “it shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, or national origin,” conservative Virginia Senator Howard W. Smith struck back.<sup>254</sup> Knowing that there were many Congressmen opposed to women’s rights, he engineered the addition of the word “sex” after “religion” in an attempt to stymie the legislation. The trick backfired and the Act was passed with “sex” as a protected category. The Act established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) as a clearinghouse for discrimination complaints but was not noted in its early years for its strong stance on women’s issues. In 1967, the newly-formed NOW placed passage of the ERA on the top of its list of demands for change. Until then, the most vocal supporters of an ERA were the Women Lawyers and the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs (BPW), who had begun supporting the measure in the 1930s. All groups initially faced opposition from labor, according to Mansbridge, “but by 1970

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<sup>252</sup> Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 9.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>254</sup> Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, SEC. 2000e-2, Section 703.

both the federal courts and the . . . EEOC had interpreted Title VII as invalidating protective legislation, and had extended most traditional protections to men rather than removing them for women.”<sup>255</sup> Labor, having been forced to abandon protective legislation, dropped its historic objection to the ERA, clearing the way for a unified movement to force the measure’s passage.

### **Women’s Lib**

Interest in the ERA had traditionally occupied equal-rights feminists left over from the suffrage movement and professional women who saw first-hand the economic disadvantages of their sex. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, leftist and radical women joined the growing women’s movement when the Civil Rights movement fractured. Many of these women, idealistic and socially conscious, had been originally drawn to the movement to outlaw discrimination against blacks in the South, but as it grew more radical, thought that they were being used and abused by the male leaders. Most were angry about the subordinate roles they were given, such as typing, cleaning, and cooking. Some resented finding power only through sexual relationships with male leaders. Women of the radical civil rights group Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) banded together to write “SNCC Position Paper Nov. 1964,” which demanded that women be given more equalized roles within the group. SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael famously responded “The only position for women in SNCC is prone,” repeating the comment often and unabashedly to drive home the point.<sup>256</sup> Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), one of the most radical civil rights groups, advocated an all-out

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<sup>255</sup> Mansbridge, 9-10.

<sup>256</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 108.

revolution against American paternalism overseas but largely ignored women's objection to patriarchy at home. In a recent interview, the 1963 president of SDS admitted as much:

“The SDS Old Guard,” Todd Gitlin later conceded, “was essentially a young boys’ network. . . . Men sought [women] out, recruited them, took them seriously, honored their intelligence—then subtly demoted them to girlfriends, wives, note-takers, coffee makers. . . . Ambition, expected in a man, looked suspiciously like ball-busting to the male eye. An aggressive style, which might pass as acceptably virile in a man, sounded ‘bitchy’ in a woman.” . . . The SDS line on women was, of course, that women’s struggles were “secondary” to the fight against capitalism and imperialism.<sup>257</sup>

Like the abolitionist feminists of the 1860s, radical women of the 1960s soon found that hitching their hopes to a civil rights movement for racial minorities did not necessarily translate into sympathy for their unique complaints. Women disillusioned with their invisibility within revolutionary and radical groups eventually found a home in NOW and formed other, more militant groups that demanded women's liberation, the establishment of women-only separatist communities, the overthrowing of patriarchy and capitalism, or the end of marriage and heterosexual sex. The most radical groups were small in membership but received a disproportionate amount of media coverage, perpetuating the mistaken belief that all women in favor of sex-based reforms were “women's libbers” bent on destroying the traditional family. The radicals had little in common with the women studied in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* or with BPW members, but added to the movement a more insistent demand for feminist individualism first heard in Stanton's “The Solitude of Self.”

One of the most outspoken and radical of this new group was Ti-Grace Atkinson, founder of the New York group The Feminists. Atkinson had left NOW shortly after its founding because she thought that it was not radical enough. According to feminist historian Ruth Rosen, Atkinson became a media star “not only because of her tall, svelte Brahmin looks, but also

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 118, 135.

because she predictably provided reporters with such provocative sound bites as ‘Marriage means rape’ and ‘Love has to be destroyed.’” In 1970, she blasted marriage as comparable to slavery on the *CBS Evening News*, refusing to cede that the problems of traditional marriages could be solved by social tinkering. She said, “People say, well, couldn’t we get rid of the bad things about marriage? Could you have gotten rid of the bad things about slavery and still have slavery?”<sup>258</sup>

Atkinson’s desire for a sexless society meshed with the movement’s increasing association with lesbianism. Feminist author Ruth Rosen discusses the shift in power within the movement to place lesbians at the vanguard for their strong desire to live without men. Feminists who were married or enjoyed heterosexual relationships first believed that they could either declare solidarity with lesbians by vocally supporting their elevation in the movement or declare themselves to be “political lesbians” dedicated to advancing feminism apart from men. This attempt to straddle both worlds did not catch on:

In 1972, Robin Morgan found herself caught in the crossfire between lesbian and heterosexual feminists. The First Lesbian Feminist Conference in Los Angeles had invited her to give its keynote address. Criticized and questioned by lesbian feminists as to why she—a wife and a mother of a son—was going to address the fifteen hundred lesbians at the conference, she responded that she was an engaged activist in the movement who supported lesbians. In New York, Radicalesbians had recently warned her, “Don’t you dare call yourself a lesbian—you live with a man and you have a child.” Like other women, Morgan was discovering that in such an environment, you could not, after all, simply identify yourself as a “political lesbian.”<sup>259</sup>

Motherhood was a difficult issue in the most radical circles. On one hand, it was a natural function for women and it separated them from men, so it was considered to be a good thing. On the other hand, pregnancy meant heterosexual sex, which meant communing with the enemy and

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<sup>258</sup> *CBS Evening News*, March 9, 1970; Ti-Grace Atkinson interviewed by David Culhane, script p. 14, Marlene Sanders Collection, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University; quoted in Rosen, 298.

<sup>259</sup> Rosen, 169.

reverting to gender-stereotyped roles, which were bad things. Having been rebuffed from the lesbian vanguard movement, Morgan began to feel guilty about having a husband. Her child also put her in a suspect class: “I had a male child and had kept him. I couldn’t figure out whether I was supposed to put him in a garbage can or what I was supposed to do, but I felt guilty about that, too.”<sup>260</sup>

Radical groups splintered and sprouted off the main stem of feminism represented by NOW as women attempted to put their finger on exactly what a women’s movement wanted. The problem was, as suffrage feminists found in the 1920s, that women are not a naturally cohesive constituency and that their shared gender makes them natural allies about as much as shared maleness unites all men. At its founding, NOW represented women who desired educational and economic opportunity within the existing capitalist system. By the late 1960s, radicals demanded an overthrow of patriarchy and the capitalism that sustained it in favor of socialist feminism. Lesbian feminism sprung from that branch. By the late 1970s, every identifiable demographic in America seemed to have established an interest group. Rosen remembered attending a conference in which she saw “Jewish, Islamic, Christian, Chicana, African-American, disabled, fat, and anorexic women, along with white lesbian feminists and Third World lesbian feminists, fight each other for visibility.”<sup>261</sup> Even prostitutes and porn stars formed groups seeking safer working conditions in their chosen professions but ran into stiff opposition from both lesbian feminists seeking to abolish heterosexual sex and socialist feminists seeking to abolish these roles as barbaric remnants of a patriarchal society.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 189.

Betty Friedan, as president of NOW, attempted to present a unified front to the women's movement by moving forward with desirable legislation. She declared that in addition to an ERA, NOW was committed to federally funded child care centers for working mothers and a full income-tax deduction for child care costs, hoping to free up women's time so they could pursue higher education or higher-paying jobs. This action met with derision by a number of groups, including women opposed to federally sponsored day care (too Communist), women opposed to working outside the home (too neglectful of children), women opposed to motherhood (too traditional), and women opposed to federally funding anything (too centralized and too expensive). As the movement grew more fractious, women began to take aim at each other rather than the generalized world of men. As remembered by Rosen, "women privately sniped at each other; housewives blasted activists as unpatriotic; working women derided housewives as spoiled and lazy; and housewives accused working women of neglecting their children. A local Girl Scout troop leader shocked one mother who worked as a civilian specialist for the Air Force by refusing to admit the daughters of 'working women' to her troop."<sup>263</sup> Even Friedan, with her famously dictatorial style, found leadership to be an elusive goal. Rosen recalled the anarchy:

Beneath the proclamation of sisterhood, women injured one another deeply. In movement circles, some called it "trashing" or even "psychological terrorism". . . . [Feminist author Jo Freeman] observed how the movement's unwillingness to elect officials, and its tendency to reject emerging talented writers and orators, gave the media complete freedom to anoint their own "leaders." It also created a vacuum in which any woman could promote herself as a leader. Such women were accountable to no one except themselves. Fearful of structure and formal officials, the movement ended up with "leaders" who had the loudest voice, the flashiest public style, or the most time to stay at meetings.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 35-6.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 227, 229.

Echoing this sentiment, Meredith Tax of the Boston women's group Bread and Roses recalled "It's not easy to be a leader in a movement that hates leaders."<sup>265</sup> With the women's movement poised to devour any woman who attempted to unify and direct energy toward a shared goal, and with shared goals nearly impossible to find, the media had carte blanche to puff whichever stories it found most compelling. It was this environment that made Ti-Grace Atkinson and prostitutes'-rights group COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) household names despite the miniscule constituency that each represented.

Amid the rancor, the ERA stood alone. NOW seized on this amendment as its top priority and most of the other liberal women's groups fell in line. The proposed legislation escaped from sectarian sniping due to its vagueness: no one was quite sure what the ERA meant, what it would do, who it would benefit, or how society would be forced to change by its passage. Its wording was simple and differed in no significant way from the ERA drafted by Alice Paul in 1923:

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.
2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.
3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

All ERA watchers realized that the wording was vague and knew that interpretation would be defined by subsequent Supreme Court decisions and federal legislation passed by Congress. Radical feminists hoped that the ERA would revolutionize society; conservatives feared that the ERA would revolutionize society. Moderates, such as the original members of NOW, stood alone in believing that the ERA would result in small but important changes for the average

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

American woman that would allow her to finally escape from the remnants of coverture that kept her at an economic disadvantage.

Buoyed by the hopeful attitudes of radicals and moderates that the ERA would do everything they wanted and nothing they did not want, even though these were often mutually exclusive goals, NOW led a coalition of groups in pressuring Congress to pass the ERA. In 1970, the Pittsburgh chapter of NOW interrupted the Senate subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, chaired by sympathetic Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, and demanded that the committee hold hearings on ERA in 1971. With pressure from Representative Martha Griffiths of Michigan, the ERA passed in the House in August 1971 and, led by Bayh, passed the Senate in March 1972. As soon as the Senate vote was known, a phone call to the Hawaii state legislature, convened in a special session, allowed the last state to be the first to ratify the amendment. Before the end of 1972, twenty-one more states including Kansas ratified, leaving only sixteen more to achieve the three-fourths supermajority required to add an amendment to the Constitution. Despite growing opposition from social conservatives, women's groups clung to the ERA as both a panacea for all of the ills suffered by women in America and as the one issue upon which all feminists, from BPW ladies to Radicalesbians, could agree. Underneath the thin veneer of consensus shared by ERA proponents was the hard reality that the true consequences of the ERA were unknown and would have to be sorted out through legal action. The difficulty lay in determining how the courts would act.

### **Supreme Court Decisions Regarding Women**

In the early 1970s, the Supreme Court established a new stance on gender cases through a series of decisions. The first case, *Reed v. Reed* (1971), involved an Idaho statute that mandated

that males be preferred to females in deciding the executor of an estate. The Reeds were separated spouses who had lost their son; Mrs. Reed wished to be given preference over her husband as executor and challenged the sex-based law. The Court concurred with her in Chief Justice Warren E. Burger's opinion, "To give a mandatory preference to members of either sex over members of the other, merely to accomplish the elimination of hearings on the merits, is to make the very kind of arbitrary legislative choice forbidden by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment; and whatever may be said as to the positive values of avoiding intrafamily controversy, the choice in this context may not lawfully be mandated solely on the basis of sex."<sup>266</sup> This case established that laws arbitrarily preferring one sex to the other were unconstitutional.

In the second case, *Frontiero v. Richardson* (1973), married Air Force lieutenant Sharron Frontiero applied for the additional allowance given to service members with a dependent spouse. The allowance was automatic for male members with a presumably dependent wife, but required justification from female members to prove that their husbands were dependant on them for at least half of their support. Frontiero sued and eventually won. At stake was an issue of fairness: the Air Force claimed that the rule was a cost-saving measure. The allowance was granted automatically to men because most wives were dependents (thus saving the expense of auditors), but granting the allowance automatically to women would be wasteful because most male non-military spouses were not dependents. The prosecution alleged that more money might be lost granting unneeded allowances to wives who were not dependent than the alleged savings in auditing fees. The Air Force failed to provide evidence disproving this claim, leading the Court's decision in favor of Richardson:

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<sup>266</sup> Reed v. Reed, 404 U.S. 71 (1971).

[S]ince sex, like race and national origin, is an immutable characteristic determined solely by the accident of birth, the imposition of special disabilities upon the members of a particular sex because of their sex would seem to violate “the basic concept of our system that legal burdens should bear some relationship to individual responsibility . . . .” (*Weber v. Aetna Casualty & Surety Co.*, 1972). And what differentiates sex from such nonsuspect statuses as intelligence or physical disability, and aligns it with the recognized suspect criteria, is that the sex characteristic frequently bears no relation to ability to perform or contribute to society. As a result, statutory distinctions between the sexes often have the effect of invidiously relegating the entire class of females to inferior legal status without regard to the actual capabilities of its individual members. . . . With these considerations in mind, we can only conclude that classifications based upon sex, like classifications based upon race, alienage, or national origin, are inherently suspect, and must therefore be subjected to strict judicial scrutiny. Applying the analysis mandated by that stricter standard of review, it is clear that the statutory scheme now before us is constitutionally invalid.<sup>267</sup>

While *Reed v. Reed* merely established the unconstitutionality of arbitrary sex-based laws, *Frontiero v. Richardson* established sex, like race, as a suspect class and thereby invoked the Court’s principle of strict scrutiny. The Court’s lower standard, called rational basis review, requires only that the law in question “reasonably” relate to a “legitimate” governmental interest and had been the test used in previous sex-based cases. Strict scrutiny, however, requires that a law be “closely” related to a “compelling” governmental interest and is usually applied to cases in which a fundamental right is at stake. In practice, strict scrutiny applied to race-based cases set a standard so high that the classification has in essence been elevated from “suspect” to “prohibited,” meaning that no law can be considered that makes a distinction based on race. The *Frontiero v. Richardson* decision, in stating that sex cases be subject to strict judicial scrutiny, implied that sex, like race, was also going to be considered a prohibited legal classification in future cases.

The third case, *Craig v. Boren* (1976), revisited *Frontiero*’s establishment of strict scrutiny. Curtis Craig of Oklahoma successfully challenged a state law allowing women to drink

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<sup>267</sup> *Frontiero v. Richardson*, 411 U.S. 677 (1973).

3.2% alcoholic beverages at age 18 but prohibiting men from imbibing until age 21. In this case, the Court split the difference between the *Reed* and *Frontiero* decisions and established an intermediate, “heightened” level of scrutiny which required classification by gender must “substantially” further “important” governmental objectives. This intermediate scrutiny test remains the standard to which the Court has adhered in subsequent cases regarding sex.

### **The Extreme(ly Unlikely) Consequences of the ERA**

For many feminists, the ERA was the vehicle by which sex would be unequivocally elevated to prohibited classification. Only by eradicating gender as a legal category, they reasoned, would women be truly able to achieve equality with men. Like protective legislation, special laws concerning women always provided legal loopholes by which men could exclude women from full participation in society, thus keeping them legally and economically subordinate. Legal precedent established that state legislatures or Congress pass laws, that laws could be challenged up to the Supreme Court, that the Supreme Court could invalidate laws as incompatible with the intent of the Constitution (which was subject to some interpretation by the Justices), and that Supreme Court rulings could be overridden by the passage of a Constitutional amendment, thereby removing legal incompatibility. Feminists hoped that the ERA would send the message to the Supreme Court that laws making distinctions between the sexes were prohibited, in essence overriding *Reed* and *Craig* for the decision made in *Frontiero*.

Constitutional scholars were split on exactly what the ERA would do. If the ERA were passed, and if the Supreme Court interpreted this amendment to mean that sex cases must be subjected to strict scrutiny, there was no guarantee that the court would follow the precedent established with race cases to equate the suspect classification of sex with a prohibited

classification. Strict scrutiny, requiring only that laws be “closely” related to a “compelling” governmental interest, could be used to uphold any number of laws which drew a legal line between men and women. Furthermore, even if the ERA passed and the Court adopted strict scrutiny and strict scrutiny came to define sex as a prohibited classification, then what path would the integration of the sexes take? The logical model was the integration of the races in the South, which most scholars and theorists used to envision a post-ERA America. But the two cases were obviously very different because of privacy concerns. Would women be strip searched by male policemen in case of arrest? Would sex-segregated public bathrooms be combined into a single facility? Would women share hospital rooms and prison cells and locker rooms with men? Would separate athletic teams for girls and boys be outlawed? Would young women be subject to the Selective Service Act at age 18 and forced to register for a draft just like men? For radical feminists, these social changes were inevitable with the passage of the ERA and were necessary for the advancement of feminist ideals. Moderates believed that some of these changes would come about but that others were absurd and could be dismissed by using common sense. For conservatives, especially those in the South, the Supreme Court decisions of the 1960s and 1970s provided no assurance that common sense would guide the application of sex-neutral laws; the most extreme claims of feminist ERA advocates could be just around the corner.

The most contentious of these issues was the draft, which was in full force for Vietnam during the years of the ERA debate and therefore became the topic of most passionate debate. Radicals were committed to overthrowing the status quo and doing away with the concept of gender, understanding that the very definition of “woman” and “man” as immutable and discrete categories carried heavy cultural weight that served to disadvantage women. With women and

men treated as legally indistinguishable “persons,” women might finally be free from the legal remains of coverture and be able to establish themselves as fully equal, independent citizens of the United States. Hand-in-hand with this vision was the necessity of women entering the draft pool. Citizenship had long been tied to military service as a right flowing from a duty, draft-ineligible men notwithstanding. Many women theorists assumed that women could only achieve the full right of equality when they were willing to take on the full spectrum of duties required of men. Women must therefore submit to the draft and willingly fight on behalf of their country, as did men, as a condition of full citizenship. Moderates believed that either women need not be drafted at all or that some might be drafted to serve in their traditional roles as nurses and clerks and aides and in other non-combat roles just as they had in the country’s previous wars. Traditionalists found fault with women in any wartime function and believed that they should remain in the home.

At the heart of the debate was a 1971 article in the *Yale Law Journal* written by Professor Thomas I. Emerson and three of his female law students. Emerson et al. discussed many of the questions raised by a possible ERA and attempted to discern answers to these questions using legal precedent and recent Supreme Court decisions. What was, at best, an educated guess by highly educated people became established fact as both supporters and opponents introduced copies of the article into the Congressional Record. An often-cited passage from the article related to deferments which had generally been granted to “persons who have children, or wives and children, with whom they maintain a bona fide family responsibility in their homes.” The authors discussed how this exemption might apply to mothers:

There are several permissible alternatives to these deferment provisions under the Equal Rights Amendment. Deferment might be extended to women, so that neither parent in a family with children would be drafted. Alternatively, the section could provide that one, but not both, of the parents would be deferred. For example, whichever parent was called

first might be eligible for service; the remaining parent, male or female, would be deferred. A third possibility would be to grant a deferment to the individual in the couple who is responsible for child care. The couple could decide which one was going to perform this function, and the other member would be liable for service. In a one-parent household Congress would probably defer the parent.<sup>268</sup>

As this article was quoted and re-quoted, the musings and uncertainty of the authors' original intent were lost. Instead of presenting three possibilities as to what Congress may choose to do if an ERA were passed (assuming Congress interpreted the ERA as mandating that women be drafted and that national security conditions were dire enough to require a draft), partisans took pieces out of context. Radicals assumed the passage endorsed their desire for women to be drafted regardless of circumstance, thus ensuring that women would never again receive "protective" but discriminatory treatment. Conservatives fixated on the second possibility, assuming that the moment an ERA passed, nursing mothers would be whisked off to war, leaving their helpless babies with their helpless husbands. Moderates liked the first possibility—men with dependent wives and children were usually deferred, so it made sense that women with dependent children would also be deferred. Only healthy, strong, single women would be drafted, if any women were ever drafted at all, and they would serve in functions in which women already served meritoriously. All groups ignored the other possibilities as incompatible with their reasons for supporting or opposing the ERA.

Ironically, radical feminists and social conservatives found common ground regarding the likely consequences of the ERA on a draft. Both groups assumed that an ERA meant a draft with women, both groups assumed that women would be forced into combat roles regardless of physical ability, and both rejected the possibility that Congress would make common-sense

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<sup>268</sup> Barbara A. Brown, Thomas I. Emerson, Gail Falk, and Ann E. Freedman, "The Equal Rights Amendment: A Constitutional Basis for Equal Rights for Women," *The Yale Law Journal* 80, No. 5 (April 1971), 973.

deferments. In the same way, these polarized groups assumed that restrooms would be integrated, men and women would share public accommodations, sports teams would be integrated, etc. In taking these extreme positions, each group defined the debate over the ERA in terms of the least likely scenarios in order to generate maximum debate.

As the ratification of the ERA ground through the nation, conservatives frightened by the doom-and-gloom scenarios painted by both radical and conservative observers ignited a sweeping movement against the legislation. By objecting to the ERA, conservatives found voice for decades of policies to which they objected, reaching out to similarly afraid groups with whom they had previously found little in common. The ERA did serve to unify Americans, but it was far-right conservatives, not women, who were the beneficiaries.

## CHAPTER 6 - Conservative Response to the ERA in Kansas

Twenty-two states ratified the ERA in 1972. In 1973, eight more states ratified, then three more in 1974, one in 1975, and the last in 1977. Five states passed resolutions rescinding their previous ratification, a move that was of dubious legality but never put to the test. In 1978, NOW successfully sued to remove the seven-year deadline for ratification written into the amendment's preamble, allowing for an extension until June 1982. No new states ratified after 1977, killing the amendment for all but a few die-hards who believe that any deadline for ratification of an amendment is unconstitutional. That pace of ratification slowed, stopped, and then reversed was largely attributed to the growth of a vocal, well-organized, conservative backlash against the women's movement in general and the ERA in particular. The leading organization of the conservatives was STOP-ERA (sometimes used as an acronym for "Stop Taking Our Privileges"), a group organized by ultraconservative activist Phyllis Schlafly in September 1972. As the ERA debate intensified, Kansas faced a vocal minority of traditionalists opposed to the state's ratification, urging immediate rescission. Although they were not successful in securing rescission, their rise to prominence in the state and in the Republican Party mirrored a similar coalescing of far right forces on the national stage. ERA supporters in Kansas misread the state's historic support for women's issues as representative of an unusually liberal Midwestern constituency; they did not expect that support to dry up when the traditional home and family came under fire. Kansans has always valued socially conservative principles—previous success in gaining additional rights for women had always been couched in traditional terms. The ERA tested the limits of Kansans' commitment to women, and that commitment stopped when individualism trumped the family.

## **Phyllis Schlafly and Second-Wave Antifeminism**

In December 1971, Phyllis Schlafly was asked to give a speech about the ERA but had neither heard of the ERA nor did she find that it squared with her primary interest in national defense against Communist subversion. She asked for materials to educate herself and decided she was against it. In opposing the ERA, Schlafly tapped into a vast constituency of politically restive but unorganized conservative and religious women who opposed attacks on traditional culture by secular liberals, allowing her to spread her ideas to a much larger group than before.<sup>269</sup> It is possible that Schlafly's adoption of vocal antifeminism was simply the necessary outgrowth of her stymied progress as a political theorist.

The Republican Party, once in favor of the ERA, had noticeably cooled to the idea due to the growing strength of their conservative right wing. Nixon and Ford hardly mentioned it during their administrations (although Betty Ford was an outspoken proponent), and Reagan was actively opposed. Jimmy and Roselyn Carter's support cemented the swing of political support for the ERA to the Democratic Party. Schlafly's opposition to the ERA, once confined to the far-right, became more acceptable to the Republican mainstream as the 1970s wore on, just as her anti-Communism became less acceptable. As the leading Republican woman against reforms championed by other women, Schlafly filled a position that no man could fill in the party. The Republicans did not want her politics but they needed her to mobilize far-right women, so she played the part desired of her as an antifeminist but inserted her politics into the debate in a subtle, masked way. Everyone was happy: the Republicans gained access to a new constituency of traditionalist women, traditionalist women found an organized and savvy leader to represent their concerns, and Schlafly finally found the attention she craved from a party

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<sup>269</sup> Critchlow, 217.

otherwise uninterested in her. That she had to take on the mantle of women's issues instead of her true interest in national defense was an unfortunate side effect, but she worked within the constraints placed upon her. Schlafly's antifeminism, taken from this perspective, was not a break from her past as noted by Critchlow, who wrote that her anti-ERA work "reflected a turn . . . to social issues that would no longer be linked to communism or defense."<sup>270</sup> Her turn to antifeminism flowed directly from her passion for anti-Communism and defense, just as it had for the antifeminists of the 1920s who turned to anti-Bolshevism after their antisuffrage cause was defeated. Anti-Communists had always believed that the erosion of the family was the insidious first step of international conspirators; conversely, liberal programs advocating a radical or even moderate change in the traditional, patriarchal family must therefore stem from Communism. The ERA fit this model for Schlafly. She was careful not to overtly link the two ideas in her prolific antifeminist materials because, having expanded her audience beyond ultraconservative circles, she did not want to alienate her newer members with anti-Communist ranting. She merely painted the ERA as a threat to society, an affront to American traditions, a trick of women's liberationists, and a move against America's Christian heritage. That was enough.

### **Traditionalism Targeted**

The feelings of anger and helplessness that characterized the anti-ERA movement were a direct reaction to the perceived excesses of the women's movement. Women's rights groups found a hierarchical structure impossible because many of the groups were rebelling against hierarchy, patriarchy, and subordination. Those women who tried to be leaders were often

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 217.

pulled down in vicious whispering campaigns. In the leadership vacuum, some of the fringe elements associated with women's liberation found media outlets willing to exploit their sensational and often outrageous claims. There were no filters on what the public heard about the women's movement: anyone who had something to say and could find a reporter willing to listen could gain credibility. Groups representing a fraction of women's rights activists in America often received disproportionate amounts of attention.

Moderates had an even more difficult task in attempting to uplift those who chose education and employment without eroding the alleged privileges of dependent housewives. This balancing act was unnecessary for most radical feminists and most conservative traditionalists, who felt secure knowing that *everyone* must adhere to their ideas, whether they agreed with them or not, to achieve the greater good. For radicals, that greater good was women's complete liberation from patriarchy, dependency, and the remnants of coverture even if that limited individual freedom in the short term. "Betty Friedan once told [pioneering feminist] Simone de Beauvoir that she believed women should have the choice to stay home to raise their children if that is what they wish to do. Beauvoir answered: 'No, we don't believe that any woman should have this choice. No woman should be authorized to stay at home to raise her children. Society should be totally different. Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one.'"<sup>271</sup> A similar "all-or-nothing" stance was initiated by members of a group called "Zero Population Growth" out of Los Altos, California. In a letter mailed to U.S. senators, Executive Director Shirley L. Radl

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<sup>271</sup> "Sex, Society, and the Female Dilemma" (a dialogue between Friedan and de Beauvoir), *Saturday Review*, June 14, 1975, p. 18, quoted in Sommers, 256-7.

urged social control in an effort to stop population growth. The group's Malthusian fears of population outstripping natural resources prompted the following recommendation:

We cannot wait any longer to give women full equality under the law. And in particular, we who are concerned about overpopulation in this nation recognize the urgent need to change women's traditional roles of child-rearing and homemaking by providing every opportunity that will bring them into the vocational mainstream of society. Once equality and opportunity are a reality, women will be free to choose between homemaking and careers outside the home. Thus an incentive will be established to limit the size of their families.<sup>272</sup>

Ms. Radl approved of the traditional roles of child-rearing and homemaking only "once equality and opportunity are a reality," which, depending on the observer, could take a while. In his 1980 book *Listen, America!*, the Reverend Jerry Falwell quoted the proceedings of the "Second Year Women's Liberation." He does not reference his source but if one can assume that this was a legitimate quotation, the organization in question was undoubtedly of the same ilk as Ti-Grace Atkinson's ultra-radical group The Feminists. He claimed to find the following comments in the notes from the meeting:

"We must destroy love . . . love promotes vulnerability, dependence, possessiveness, susceptibility to pain, and prevents the full development of woman's human potential by directing all her energies outward in the interests of others." In the document Declaration of Feminism, we find this: "Marriage has existed for the benefit of men and has been a legally sanctioned method of control over women . . . the end of the institution of marriage is a necessary condition for the liberation of women. Therefore, it is important for us to encourage women to leave their husbands and not to live individually with men . . . we must work to destroy it [marriage]." In her speech in Houston, Texas, Gloria Steinem made this comment: ". . . for the sake of those who wish to live in equal partnership, we have to abolish and reform the institution of legal marriage."<sup>273</sup>

Many conservative, traditional women of this era have been lampooned in history as being unreasonably paranoid about liberals attempting to destroy their way of life. Reading the above

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<sup>272</sup> Shirley L. Radl, Executive Director, Zero Population Growth, Los Altos, CA, to Senator Bob Dole, Washington D.C., Sept 4, 1970, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>273</sup> Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980), 153-4.

comments reprinted in conservative publications might convince some women that there were, in fact, other women who *were* trying to destroy their way of life in an attempt to uplift all women out of patriarchy and dependency. But many women embraced the valorized role of women as framed in separate spheres ideology and placed faith in the institution of the patriarchal family as the seat of American power. Conservatives perceived radicals as targeting traditional gender roles and rejected consideration of the ERA as hastening the end of their way of life.

Antifeminist scholar Christina Hoff Sommers notes the irony:

That is the corrosive paradox of gender feminism's misandrist stance: no group of women can wage war on men without at the same time denigrating the women who respect those men. It is just not possible to incriminate men without implying that large numbers of women are fools or worse. Other groups have had their official enemies—workers against capitalists, whites against blacks, Hindus against Muslims—and for a while such enmities may be stable. But when women set themselves against men, they simultaneously set themselves against other women in a group antagonism that is untenable from the outset. In the end, the gender feminist is always forced to show her disappointment and annoyance with the women who are to be found in the camp of the enemy. Misandry moves on to misogyny.<sup>274</sup>

Sommers' comment unfairly portrays all feminists as misandrists who made men out to be an enemy. In fact, most targeted inequitable social structures left over from colonial times for keeping women in a position of lifetime minority, unable to secure an education or a profession that might lead to self-sufficiency. Conservative women, however, often took criticism of dependency as criticism of their husbands on whom they continued to depend for financial support. By interpreting feminism as anti-man, and by defending men as the rightful protectors and supporters of dependent womanhood, conservative women attempted to build a wall around the fragile world in which they lived to keep out disruptive influences that threatened to destroy what little security remained.

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<sup>274</sup> Sommers, 256-7.

## Conservative Absolutism

The few radicals who believed that all forms of dependency must be outlawed in order to elevate women as a gender were mirrored by a few conservatives who believed that all forms of independence must be removed in order to protect traditional American values. Social conservatives required that each woman maintain her traditional role or risk perverting the impulses of otherwise responsible men, thus jeopardizing the strength of the nation. The Rev. Falwell linked traditional, patriarchal families to Christian values, marking the style of the Religious Right that he helped to consolidate in the late 1970s:

Our nation is in serious danger when motherhood is considered a task that is “unrewarding, unfulfilling, and boring.” I believe that a woman’s call to be a wife and mother is the highest calling in the world. My wife is proud to be called a housewife. She is dedicated to making a happy and rich life for us and our three children. She does not consider her life work of making my life happy and that of loving and shaping the lives of our precious children inconsequential or demeaning. Women who choose to remain in the home should never feel inferior to those working outside, but should know they are fulfilling God’s command for the home.<sup>275</sup>

Falwell admitted that women might “choose” to work outside the home but immediately condemned this choice by praising homemakers for “fulfilling God’s command for the home.” He left this “command” up to the imagination of the reader. But that was not all—women were not off the hook merely by staying home to raise children. They each needed a man to lead them. In his next section, Falwell discussed the joys of marriage and parenting if undertaken in a godly, Christian manner:

Mothering is probably the most important function on earth. This is a full-time, demanding task. It requires a higher order of gentleness, commitment, steadiness, capacity to give, and many other qualities. A woman needs a good man by her side so she will not be distracted and depleted, thus making it possible for her to provide rich humanness to her babies and children. Her needs must be met by the man, and above all she must be made secure. A good man brings out the best in a woman, who can then do her best for the children. Similarly, a good woman brings out the best in a man, who can

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<sup>275</sup> Falwell, 123-4.

then do his best for his wife and children. Children bring out the best in their parents. All together they make a family, a place where people of great strength are shaped, who in turn make strong societies. Our nation was built by such people.<sup>276</sup>

Falwell's complementary gender conception invoked nearly the same rhetoric as separate spheres proponents of a century and a half earlier. Women without men lacked a provider and a protector, and men without women lacked motivation to become productive citizens so as to support a family. The static nature of the traditionalists' position bolstered their belief in an unchanging gender order ordained and established by God himself. The conservatives believed that their insistence that everyone follow their lead was different from similar tactics used by militant feminists because while women's groups sought personal fulfillment through individualism, traditionalists sought strong societies and pure families. Conservatives could thus accuse feminists of selfishness by placing their own foolish, unnatural desires above those of their children and their nation.

Falwell was one of the most conservative of the nationally prominent traditionalists, but he was far from alone in his crusade. Phyllis Schlafly got in on the act, but was careful not to alienate conservative career women or single women by condemning roles outside motherhood and homemaking. Instead, she turned her fire on the selfish feminists advocating an ERA that would surely result in a loss of "privileges" that traditional, homemaking women wanted and needed. It was one thing to go out and work alongside men, but to punish those who were fulfilling their natural roles was quite another. Schlafly herself had six children and consistently presented herself as a homemaker and the happy dependent of J. Fred, yet it was no secret that she had a master's degree, a law degree, and a full-time job traveling around the country as an activist and antifeminist. Without irony, Schlafly kept up an exhausting schedule of speeches,

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 128-9.

rallies, and meetings in far-flung places to sing the praises of remaining in the traditional sphere of home, husband, and children.

One of Schafly's first comprehensive attacks on the ERA was the November 1972 issue of *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, which, after its publication, boosted her mailing list from the original 3,000 supporters she had carried with her from the 1967 Federation presidency defeat to a new base of 35,000.<sup>277</sup> In it, she laid out the main arguments that anti-ERA activists would use for the remainder of the amendment's life. Her four-page, single-spaced newsletter contained numerous examples of a larger injustice: "The laws of every one of our 50 states now guarantee the right to be a woman—protected and provided for in her career as a woman, wife and mother. The proposed Equal Rights Amendment will wipe out our laws which—through rights, benefits, and exemptions—guarantee this right to be a woman. ERA will replace these present laws with a doctrinaire equality under which women must be treated exactly the same as men." This disturbing change would manifest itself in the following ways, paraphrased from the original:

- Laws in every state requiring a man to support his wife and children, protecting her right to be a full-time wife and mother, her right to not take a job outside the home, the right to care for her own children, and her right to be financially supported will be nullified.
- Gender equality will mandate that the sole financial obligation of the husband will change to the requirement that the wife bring in 50% of the household income.
- Gender equality will mean that women must be admitted to West Point on parity with men, women must be drafted equally with men, girls must be eligible for the same athletic teams as boys, and life insurance commissioners may not continue to approve lower life insurance premiums for women based on greater life expectancy.
- A husband will only have to support a wife who is unable to support herself due to "physical handicap, acute state of family responsibility or unemployability on other grounds," meaning that once children are old enough for daycare, the wife will be forced to work outside of the home.
- Dependent wives will lose the Social Security benefits they earn through their husbands.
- Single-sex schools, single-sex restrooms, single-sex physical education classes, and single-sex prison cells will all be outlawed.

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<sup>277</sup> Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 215.

- Women’s liberationists are at the heart of ERA activism; they hate men, marriage, and children.

Schlafly purposefully avoided talking about the ambiguities and anxieties inherent in her traditional model. By describing a homemaker’s lack of income-generating employment and full-time care of children as “rights,” she attempted to glorify these positions of dependency and to erase the financially precarious position that homemaking women occupied. Her rhetoric nearly matched Rosemarie Zagari’s description of the “rights” of women in 1790, which consisted of the rights to choose her husband, raise her children, preside over domestic affairs, and cultivate civilization. Yet women had no fundamental right not to work outside the home, no right to take care of her children all of the time, and certainly no right to be supported financially for life. Many lower-income mothers could not afford to be homemakers. Those who could afford to stay at home were only able to do so as long as the husband was willing and able to support her. In the case of abandonment, divorce, disability, or death the “rights” were instantly revoked. Several Kansas ERA supporters mentioned that they had been homemakers until their husband became disabled, forcing them to seek employment in a deeply discriminatory work environment for which they were educationally unprepared. Schlafly’s repetitive refrain that the “rights” and “privileges” of homemakers were under attack by unscrupulous feminists attempted to both reassure middle-class women that their roles were valuable and to divert attention from the plain fact that homemaking was a job with very little security.

Schlafly’s explication of the ERA referenced constitutional scholar Paul E. Freund’s article entitled “The Equal Rights Amendment is Not the Way,” explaining the possible negative effects of the ERA should it become law, although she also cited the basically pro-ERA article of

Emerson et al. in carefully selected snippets.<sup>278</sup> Schlafly threw a bone to the moderates in this call to arms, reassuring them that they were not evil, just misinformed:

To those business and professional women, we say:

- 1) We support you in your efforts to eliminate all injustice, and we believe this can be done through the Civil Rights Act and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act.
- 2) If the Hayden modification [adding that the amendment “shall not be construed to impair any rights, benefits, or exemptions now or hereinafter conferred by law upon persons of the female sex”] had remained in the Equal Rights Amendment, we would have supported it.
- 3) Without the Hayden modification, the Equal Rights Amendment won’t give you anything—but it will *take away* fundamental rights and benefits from the rest of women. You have the right to lobby for the extension of your rights—but not at the expense of *other* women.<sup>279</sup>

Schlafly again invokes the rights and benefits of homemakers but this time describes them as “fundamental,” as if financially supporting a wife were mandated by the Bill of Rights, in an attempt to shame moderates into backing down. Her tenuous logical connections appeared in subsequent issues of her newsletter as she linked ERA advocates and the homosexual agenda, the legalization of prostitution, the dismantling of rape laws, the erosion of states’ rights, and the entrenchment of legalized abortion, among other issues. Her newsletter, already mailed to her extensive database of John Birch Society members, ultraconservatives, and anti-Communist Catholics, soon found a new audience with conservatives and traditionalists fearing the women’s movement, radicalism, and changing gender roles. In 1972, Schlafly founded the Eagle Forum, an ultraconservative lobbying group for women focused on defeating the ERA and other “anti-family” issues. Using *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, Eagle Forum, and her intensive speaking schedule, Schlafly reached a nationwide audience weary from social change and resistant to further action that might reach into the home.

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<sup>278</sup> Paul E. Freund, “The Equal Rights Amendment is Not the Way,” *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 6, No. 2 (March 1971).

<sup>279</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* 6, No 4 (Nov 1972), 1.

## The ERA in Kansas

The ERA held special appeal to Kansans due to the state's historic role as the first to allow women to vote in local school elections (1861), the first state to hold a vote on state suffrage (1867), the granting of municipal suffrage to women (1887), and the passage of state suffrage years before the federal amendment (1912). The first ERA was introduced to the U.S. Congress in 1923 by two Kansas Republicans, Senator Charles Curtis and Representative Daniel R. Anthony, Jr. (nephew of Susan B. Anthony) as a favor to Alice Paul's National Women's Party. By the time the ERA finally made it out of committee in 1970, Kansans proudly embraced their historic support of measures expanding women's rights as indicative of an unusually progressive population. Most failed to realize that all of the measures favoring women were passed not by radicals, who had been poorly received and may have doomed the 1894 suffrage campaign with their inflammatory rhetoric, but by moderate women asking for the vote in order to extend their traditional sphere. Kansans did *not* have a history of granting women natural or individual rights, they had a history of granting women increased control over the issues that directly concerned their place in the patriarchal family. These issues, such as the election of school boards that would affect their children's education, the right to exclude saloons from their municipalities to prevent household drunkenness, and state suffrage so that women's maternal impulse might reduce corruption and immorality in politics, were all directly related to the separate sphere of home and family.

When the ERA was passed by the U.S. Senate on March 22, 1973, Kansas waited only six days to ratify the amendment. The action was not debated nor was any discussion entered into the record. The only note of discord was registered by Senator Steadman Ball, who said "It astonishes me that so many women want to put something in the United States Constitution pulling themselves down to the level of men. Apparently that is what they want, so I vote

‘aye.’”<sup>280</sup> Some senators and representatives voted against the ERA due to loyalty to Democratic labor interests or conservative rural constituencies but their objections were not enough to doom the bill; the final vote in the Kansas Senate was 34 yeas, 5 nays, and 1 not voting; in the House, 86 yeas, 37 nays and 2 not voting, well over the two-thirds majority needed.<sup>281</sup> By and large, the ratification flew through both houses of the Kansas legislature, putting Kansas on record as the eighth state to ratify the bill.

Even before the ERA passed, conservatives began writing their elected officials in Kansas to complain about the dangerous social consequences that the ERA might usher in. Many of these authors had read copies of *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, but even more read evangelical Texan Lottie Beth Hobbs’ “pink sheets” of anti-ERA information distributed by her group Women Who Want to be Women, later called the Pro-Family Forum. Kansans were more familiar with Hobbs’ work due to the activities of evangelical activist Barbara Hanna of Eudora, who founded Kansas Citizens Against the ERA based on Hobbs’ work. Hanna was not aware that Hobbs sat on the board of Eagle Forum and was a close colleague of Schlafly’s, or that the two women shared information and factoids across their two publications that were directed at different constituencies.<sup>282</sup> Schlafly specifically harnessed Hobbs to reach out to evangelicals who might be turned off by Schlafly’s undisguised Catholicism. In an e-mail interview with the author, Hanna recalled the major players in ERA opposition but it is clear that she was not aware of the anti-ERA groups’ interrelatedness:

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<sup>280</sup> *Kansas Journal of the Senate*, 28 March 1972, 550.

<sup>281</sup> *Kansas Journal of the House*, 28 March 1972, 876.

<sup>282</sup> Ruth Murray Brown, *For a “Christian America”: A History of the Religious Right* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002), 39, 64.

I am familiar with Phyllis Schlafly's organization and her newsletters. While I read them, I worked mainly with Pro-Family Forum. Although we were not opposing groups, I think that Pro-Family Forum was much stronger, and the leader in the efforts – “grass-roots” is certainly correct! I don't even know of any state leader for her STOP-ERA group, although there may have been one. I always liked Lottie Beth Hobbs' methods better and felt she was more diplomatic in her writing, speaking and any type of presentation. Although neither organization was “religious” in nature, everyone knew that Phyllis Schlafly is a Catholic and Lottie Beth Hobbs is a member of the churches of Christ . . . I am also a member of the churches of Christ. Pro-Family Forum always made it clear that while we did have strong religious reasons to oppose ERA, we were not a religious organization. We also had MANY denominations involved with Pro-Family Forum, as well as many Catholics, and we all worked together very well politically.<sup>283</sup>

Hanna's recollections make it clear that the connections between Schlafly's anti-ERA organizations and the pervasiveness of her ideas dominated the debate but were often unknown even to insiders. By 1977, Hobbs was the vice president of Eagle Forum and later disbanded her group to merge with Schlafly's.<sup>284</sup>

### **The Issue of Rescission**

Although anti-ERA letters flowed into Kansas politicians' offices in both Topeka and in Washington, D.C. throughout the 1970s, there were several bursts of activity that coincided with political moves to rescind Kansas's ratification of the ERA. The undoing of a state's ratification had never before been accomplished, although states had attempted it before. A precedent was set in 1868 when two state legislatures (New Jersey and Ohio) attempted to rescind ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. These two states' rescission actions were noted on a report prepared by the Secretary of State and delivered to Congress, but they were nevertheless listed as having ratified. Subsequently, Congress adopted a resolution listing twenty-nine ratifying states,

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<sup>283</sup> Barbara Hanna of Eudora, Kansas, interview by author, 12 September 2007, email.

<sup>284</sup> Murray, 64, 111.

including New Jersey and Ohio, as one more than necessary to fulfill the three-fourths majority needed for adoption into the Constitution.

The legality of rescission again surfaced in 1937 over the proposed Child Labor Amendment. The Amendment had originally been proposed in 1924 by Congress, but Kansas did not ratify it until 1937. Following the state's ratification, members of the Kansas Senate and House of Representatives brought suit against the Kansas Secretary of the Senate, alleging that too much time had passed and that the ratification was invalid. The case reached the Supreme Court in *Coleman v. Miller* (1937). In his decision, Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes noted that "a State Legislature which has rejected an amendment proposed by Congress may later reconsider its action and give its approval, and that a ratification once given cannot be withdrawn."<sup>285</sup> This case established that Congress had the power to decide a timeline for ratification of an amendment, and that if it did not specifically establish a deadline the action was still pending in each state legislature. Under this decision, the Twenty-Seventh Amendment regarding Congressional pay passed in 1992, over two hundred years after its proposal in 1789, and the Child Labor Amendment is still pending having not been given a deadline.

The ERA did not technically match the criteria given in *Coleman v. Miller* because a preamble attempted to avoid the ambiguity of the Child Labor Amendment. It stated, "That the following article is hereby proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution only if ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States within seven years from the date of its submission by Congress."<sup>286</sup> The date of its submission was March 22, 1972, so the deadline for

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<sup>285</sup> *Coleman v. Miller*, 307 U.S. 433 (1937).

<sup>286</sup> *Kansas Journal of the House*, 28 March 1972, 875.

ratification was March 22, 1979. Many conservatives read the *Coleman* decision differently, emphasizing that the decision gave Congress the authority to adjudicate issues related to ratification, so states could legally rescind amendments as long as Congress agreed that the rescissions were legal. Congress had never actually upheld a rescission, but conservatives held out hope that it might, if presented with proof that state legislatures had acted hastily or injudiciously in ratifying the amendment in the first place.

### **The Case of Nebraska**

Kansas's neighbor to the north, Nebraska, ratified the ERA on March 29, 1972, one day after Kansas. The next year, the state legislature was accused of acting hastily, having held no discussion or debate on the issue. The legislature corrected their mistake on February 22, 1973, holding hearings featuring both pro- and anti-ERA speakers. Mrs. R. Hunter of the Nebraska Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution spoke, upholding the DAR's historical aversion for social change as upsetting to the strength of the nation. She cited as reasons to reject the ERA constitutional and legal chaos; the selfishness of women's libbers; the joys of being a wife, mother, and man's "helpmeet;" and the degraded state of Communist women who put their children in daycare so they could join the labor force.<sup>287</sup> A number of other women testified, including a conservative Catholic lay woman and a nun, a woman opposed to the ERA because it would destroy protective legislation for women in industry, a Cuban woman comparing life under the ERA to life under Fidel Castro's Communist regime, and Mrs. Jackie Davison, president of the Happiness of Womanhood League (HOW). HOW was formed in

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<sup>287</sup> Nebraska Senate Government, Military, and Veterans' Affairs Committee Hearing, February 22, 1973, LR 9, p. 13.

opposition to NOW and countered NOW's exaggerated sense of embattlement under patriarchy with an exaggerated picture of happy domesticity. Mrs. Davison testified that she represented 58% of the women in America and another 25% who were working but would rather be at home with their families. She explained her position:

These women in the home in America are the threads that hold the society together. The strength of our country lies in its family. Man was divinely ordained to be the leader of the home. The first commandment that God gave unto Eve was, "Thy desire shall be unto thy husband and he shall rule over thee." The woman in the home has the grave responsibility. The personality, culture, and spiritual development of a child depends on that woman in the home and it is not a role to [be] taken lightly. It is a full-time job, if it is done well. A man and a woman are like a lock and key. As different as daylight and dark. Together this lock and key forms a useful functioning unit. A man and a woman together in marriage form a beautiful useful functioning unit. The ERA would make us all locks or all keys and of no value to each other. This Equal Rights Amendment is part of a major attack on the family . . . . To the men here, I would like to say that you are going to have to do your share of scrubbing the floors, washing the dishes and changing the baby's diaper. I urge you the state of Nebraska to vote to repeal the ratification of the ERA.<sup>288</sup>

Mrs. Davison's characterization of men and women as a lock and key or daylight and dark represented a complementary approach to gender roles. This yin-yang dichotomy viewed each sex as wholly different from the other, "opposite" sex, holding that each sex had a unique and characteristic natural function that could not overlap or be shared with the other. According to HOW, a woman was responsible for child rearing, cleaning, cooking, and household functions. A man was the natural breadwinner. It was as crazy to think of a woman in business as it was to think of a man "changing the baby's diaper." For these conservatives, the ERA represented a dangerous, unprecedented, and unnatural change to the separate-spheres social order ordained by God.

The second half of the hearings featured pro-ERA speakers, including a homemaker who believed in "legal rights on the basis of humanity and personhood, rather than on the basis of

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 28, 30.

biological classification,” a Catholic nun from Omaha, a Lutheran clergyman, and a number of women representing organizations committed to the ERA’s passage. One of the most compelling arguments in favor of the ERA came from Tom Walsh, a lawyer from Omaha. In a speech entered as an exhibit, Walsh contradicted the Schlafly contention that laws in all fifty states entitled wives to financial support by their husbands. He noted that “the Nebraska Supreme Court made this point perfectly clear when it refused to dictate to a husband what standard of living he should provide for his wife in the case of *McGuire vs. McGuire* [1953] . . . although there was ample evidence that the husband, because of extraordinary frugality and not lack of means, had failed to provide a decent standard of living for his wife of many years.” In the decision, according to Walsh, the Court stated,

The living standards of a family are a matter of concern to the household, and not for the courts to determine, even though the husband’s attitude toward his wife, according to his wealth and circumstances, leaves little to be said in his behalf. As long as the home is maintained and the parties are living as husband and wife it may be said that the husband is legally supporting his wife and the purpose of the marriage relation is being carried out. Public policy requires such a holding.<sup>289</sup>

Walsh’s point was clear: laws requiring that husbands support their wives were unenforceable as long as the wife chose to remain with her husband, thus maintaining a legal household. The courts could only get involved in cases of divorce, when one partner was suing another for support. Even in this case, child support was generally the only expense awarded, as alimony was rapidly losing favor across the country. Later, Walsh decried conservatives’ distortion of the Emerson, *et al.* article in regard to a possible draft, quoting the relevant passage that assumed that mothers would likely be deferred. Finally, he saved his sternest criticism for Senator Richard Proud, sponsor of the bill to rescind Nebraska’s ratification:

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<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, Exhibit 5 (Written Speech): Submitted by Tom Walsh.

As for Senator Proud's assertion in the Omaha *World-Herald* article that he authored that the Equal Rights Amendment "is merely a covering for a far more sinister plan, which put bluntly is to get all women, without regard for their own wishes, out of the home and into the work force," I hope for his sake that he was misquoted. The most charitable thing I can say for Senator Proud on this issue is that he must have temporarily lost control of his senses or his emotions or both and that he will return to a more sane state of mind once this debate is concluded.<sup>290</sup>

Again the issue of dependency provoked strong reactions among constituencies on both sides of the ERA issue. Proud believed that the ERA would force the end of women's economic dependency by pushing them into the workforce; Walsh believed that Proud's understanding of the matter was so deeply flawed that it indicated insanity. Compromise was not possible when emotions flared in this way. Finally, ERA supporter and housewife Anne Patrick Trombley ignored constitutional or political arguments and attempted to shock anti-ERA advocates out of their complacency: "The only difference between me and the women who oppose the ERA is that I know the only thing that separates me from the welfare mother is the time it takes a man to walk out the front door and close it behind him."<sup>291</sup> Trombley's argument struck at Schlafly's "rights and privileges" rhetoric, pointing out the rickety social convention that allowed her to stay home only as long as her husband desired her to be there. Having tabled the issue for several weeks, the Nebraska legislature voted with Senator Proud to rescind on March 15, 1973 with 31 for rescission, 17 against, and 1 abstention.

### **Letter-Writing Campaigns in Kansas**

Kansas conservatives had the same reservations as their northern neighbors, but lacked the superior numbers. Kansas Representative Harley D. Huggins (D-Kansas City) submitted a

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., Exhibit 8: Submitted by Anne Patrick Trombley, 13.

bill to rescind ratification in January 1973, but failed to move it forward. Representative Arden Dierdorff (R-Smith Center), Representative Lee Hamm (D-Pratt) and Senator John F. Vermillion (R-Independence) led moves to rescind ratification every year from 1975 through 1978, two attempts to submit rescission to a referendum (1975 and 1977), and one attempt to nullify Kansas's ratification due to the expiration of the seven-year deadline (1978), none of which succeeded. Sen. Vermillion's nullification bill stayed in committee until the end of May 1980 but finally died when it became evident that the ERA would not pass even with an extended deadline.

The rescission and referenda attempts generated furious letter-writing campaigns from both sides, as did other political events publicizing the ERA. Preserved in Kansas's archives are over 2500 letters and telegrams to the elected officials believed to be responsible for the life or death of the ERA in the state. These men were longtime U.S. Senators Robert J. ("Bob") Dole and James B. Pearson (both Republicans), Kansas Senator Edward F. Reilly, Jr. (R-Leavenworth), and Kansas Governors Robert Docking (D, 1967-1975) and Robert F. Bennett (R, 1975-1979). These five men received the bulk of the correspondence, although other state representatives and senators received a trickle of mail. Of these mail recipients, Kansas Senator Reilly was perhaps the only one in a position to do anything due to his position as Chairman of the Federal and State Affairs Committee, which was entrusted with all actions relating to federal amendments including all of the ERA rescission and referenda bills. The U.S. senators and Kansas governors, not being members of the state legislature, could advise or attempt to influence voting members, but were not themselves involved in the state's action regarding the ERA. Unfortunately for conservatives, all five men supported the ERA and were not particularly open to public appeals.

The pro-ERA letter writers tended to follow a similar format: their letters were usually brief, often only one line stating support for the ERA or urging the politician to continue to support the ERA in the face of rescission efforts. Some of the archival files are full of nearly identical telegrams sent in advance of an important vote stating support for the ERA and opposing any attempt to water it down with riders or “crippling amendments” (a favorite phrase). Form letters from BPW, nurses’ associations, woman lawyers’ associations, and other professional or business groups were nearly always supportive of the ERA, along with the expected letters from NOW, Common Cause (a citizens’ rights group), and other liberal lobbying groups from out-of-state. Some of these letters ran several pages long, but most briefly focused on the ERA as necessary to guarantee rights to women that were not already explicitly stated in the Constitution. Some felt the ERA was necessary to guarantee equal pay for equal work; others stated the need for equal treatment under the law or the equalization of family law. A handful felt the ERA was critical for women to achieve their full potential and a tiny fraction wanted the ERA to pass so that abortion would remain legal. A unique refrain was the need to pass the ERA so that Kansas could maintain its position as a leader in women’s rights. Very few letters strayed from these topics and most of the outliers came from other states.

Anti-ERA letters, however, fell into completely different categories. Almost all came from in-state sources and individual households. Most were handwritten on personal stationery. While pro-ERA writers cited the same five reasons why the ERA should be approved, anti-ERA writers cited at least twenty, often listing them one after another in a virtual litany of evils. Many contained personal reflections about how the world has already declined due to the women’s movement and will decline further under the ERA. Evident in these letters are conservatism, traditionalism, fear of modernity, rural values and a desire for simple living, evangelical or

fundamentalist Christianity, and the need to maintain traditional gender roles as directly related to social stability and national strength. Several writers included copies of *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, Hobbs' "pink sheets," direct quotations from one or both of these publications, or derivative materials as proof that dire consequences would follow the ERA. Some featured poor spelling or grammar, reflecting the writer's need to eschew education in favor of farm or family.

Quotations from these letters clearly demonstrate the depth of feeling that the writers held in opposing the ERA. Most letters came from women, and their numbers indicate that opposition to equality was not a radical view held by a lunatic fringe. Like the Nineteenth Amendment, the failed Child Labor Amendment, and the minimally effective Sheppard-Towner Act, the ERA stirred up fears of the federal government interfering in family relationships. Liberals could cite cases like Nebraska's *McGuire v. McGuire* to prove that the state would not and could not interfere in ongoing marital relationships as long as the couple chose to live together, but conservatives like Phyllis Schlafly successfully convinced huge numbers that this would all change under the ERA. Her most successful argument, that rosy-cheeked 18-year olds and the mothers of small children would be packed off to foxholes while sneering feminists and lazy men sat by and let them go, infuriated traditionalists by the idea's very incomprehensibility.

### **The Draft**

Kansas anti-ERA letter-writers most often cited the draft as the reason they opposed the ERA. One woman commented on the draft vis-à-vis the ongoing conflict in Vietnam, writing in 1973, "I am thankful that the ERA did not become law ten years ago or there would be 25,000

young girls killed in combat along with 25,000 men.”<sup>292</sup> In a form letter, Lottie Beth Hobbs’ Women Who Want to be Women passed along the following proof that the ERA would result in national defense degradation, “In Fort Jackson, S.C., an army instructor stated that ‘Lightening up the physical workload on trainees so that women can meet the standards, has led to a deterioration of the program that may cause the men also to be unfit for combat duty.’”<sup>293</sup> Another wrote, “As a reserve commissioned officer, I personally am concerned with the prospects of a weaker national defense posture if women were allowed equal rights with respect to certain combat military occupational specialties.”<sup>294</sup>

Several men wrote to protest drafting women because of the perceived negative effects on morale. One man objected to women being drafted because they might find a loophole not available to men: “You state that this amendment will not ‘prevent women from raising their children should they so desire,’ yet that is exactly what might happen if they are drafted. Or, do you suppose that they take their children to basic training and maybe even into combat. After all if mothers are exempted from the draft there may well be a baby boom among women who desire to avoid military service. Also [such] an action would in effect give women a way to avoid the draft that would not be available to men.”<sup>295</sup> Another man viewed the draft as a fit punishment for women attempting to insert themselves in traditionally male spheres: “I see much

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<sup>292</sup> Angela Weick, Concordia, to Gov. Robert B. Docking, Topeka, April 19, 1973, Docking Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence. [Spelling and punctuation in this and other cited letters has been preserved except where such errors have obscured the original meaning.]

<sup>293</sup> Association of the W's (Women Who Want to be Women), no city, to Sen. Edward F. Reilly, Topeka, (no date), Reilly Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>294</sup> Ronald R. Fischer, Lawrence, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., August 22, 1978, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>295</sup> Kenneth B. Lucas, Lawrence, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., April 24, 1972, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

on TV of women demanding Equal Rights with men. Better jobs and Better Pay. Executive jobs in Business, Industry, Education in Medicine and on and on. I'm for them but, Why not give them Equal Rights all the way, Make them file and register for the Draft into our Armed Services. It might cause them to think again."<sup>296</sup>

Much more common were letters from women who simply did not want to be drafted.

One woman made a particularly poignant plea:

Just because there are a few women who are in favor of complete equality with men and are willing to go along with the draft, is no reason why the other women, the ones who *wish* to be the weaker sex and who like the idea of not being completely equal, should have to put up with their silly nonsense. I'm not saying that women should submit to man's every wish and male chauvinistic ideas but, since the beginning of time, men have always been the ones to do all the fighting. Women have no place in fighting a war and its not *discrimination* when a woman is not allowed to fight as so many of these Women's Lib people feel. Most of the women that are *for* drafting women will be too old to go when it comes into effect and *we* the younger ones, the ones who don't want it in the first place will have to pick up the bill for their childishness. I hope something can be done about this.<sup>297</sup>

The idea of male independence and female dependence on manly strength and virtue permeates these letters. One girl clearly had been exposed to anti-ERA literature, writing, "I am a fifteen year old Junior (female) . . . First [feminist] Mrs. Bella Abzug is over draft age, so why should she care wheather women are drafted. *I* do not want to be drafted, nor do I want my brothers and my boyfriend drafted. I hope that [you] continue to protect me. I believe in equal pay, when the workers deserve it. I do not like my sex being exploited by strippers ect., but this is not just the males fault. I hope you remember we female-future-voters. I do not believe in being drafted."<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Frank T. Priest, Wichita, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., March 15, 1970, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>297</sup> Beth Henry Stilwell, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., November 6, 1972, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>298</sup> Vicki Wilcox, Wichita, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., October 16, 1971, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Her lack of “belief” in a female draft belied the writer’s essential adherence to the ideology of separate spheres. Although she did not want the males in her life drafted, she believed that she, as a female, was deserving of continued protection that she did not request for the men listed.

## **Religion**

The second most-cited reason to reject the ERA was its apparent incompatibility with evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity. Schlafly’s lieutenant Hobbs particularly exploited this constituency in her materials, passed along by Kansan Barbara Hanna. This reason evoked the most powerful statements of all the letters, testifying to the writers’ profound fear that America was losing its Christian heritage and God-given mandate as a new Promised Land. One man wrote to Senator Dole: “Do you want to be the one to answer to God at the day of Judgment that because you allowed E.R.A. to become the 27<sup>th</sup> amendment my children and grandchildren and yours—if you have some—will be thrown into the everlasting burning Hell? You also know that you would go with them. Then you will plead with God but He will not hear you.”<sup>299</sup> This type of vituperation was not uncommon. Other examples cited moral decline, divinely ordained gender roles, or Communist plots to destroy religion and the family. It would not be an exaggeration to note that many in this group truly believed that the ERA was a sign of the apocalypse:

As a father, grandfather and minister of the gospel of Christ I am very concerned about the physical and spiritual future of our nation. While ther is great concern about the polution and destruction of our invironment, there seems to be little concern about the polution and destruction of the minds and morals of the nation. If the Equal Rights

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<sup>299</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Gehring, Moundridge, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., March 14, 1975, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Amendment (ERA) becomes a part of our constitution, it will be the greatest step toward a total moral destruction of our nation that has ever been taken.<sup>300</sup>

Some authors described the ideology of separate spheres as a biblical mandate, believing that proper Christian living demanded that a man leave the home for work while the woman stayed home and raised children. Deviating from this model struck the following three letter writers as blasphemous:

I believe God intended men and women have complementary, not equal roles. I believe this amendment would cause an increase in immorality in our nation.<sup>301</sup>

I feel that it would deny a woman her God-given right to work beside her husband as a housewife and to become the mother of his children. God created woman to be a help meet for man, and I believe that is her position in relation to his.<sup>302</sup>

Please vote *against* women having equal rights as men. It is not *Biblical*!! [Cites numerous Bible verses.] Yes, I'm a woman and I have worked out in the past, but I don't want the responsibility of making the living. My place is to take care of the home.<sup>303</sup>

A popular objection recalled the passages from Paul's epistles that specifically pertained to women. These were the same passages NAWSA's Anna Howard Shaw attempted to reinterpret during the years of the suffrage "doldrums" at the turn of the twentieth century, but conservatives of both periods tended to take them at face value:

I am against the ERA. I feel the Bible teaches we are to be under subjugation to our husbands. Not under their heel, but as a loved and honored person. I'm happy to help my husband by doing the book work for his Irrigation Business and he also helps with the family. We have no laws now to keep us from our rights as the Bible gives them. I fail

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<sup>300</sup> Bill Stachs, Anthony, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, February 7, 1975, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>301</sup> Darryl Buller, Burrton, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., September 26, 1978, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>302</sup> Vera Seal, Douglass, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, February 7, 1975, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>303</sup> Mrs. Harold Hinthorn, Independence, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., August 21, 1970, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

to see where this bill will help the woman who isn't woman enough to help herself. (And I do not mean by crying, being frail ect.)<sup>304</sup>

Many cited the belief, common among conservatives, that the founding of the American republic was guided by God and protected by divine intervention. Tinkering with God's work by passing unnatural social legislation was, for these authors, shockingly wrong-headed:

Our Bill of Rights, our government are based on the Bible principles and the ERA is not. God placed man as the head of the hom as Christ is the Head of the Church. Ephesians 5: 23, 24, 25. When a nation try to improve on God's laws found in the Bible or makes laws of his own that are contrary to God's laws then that nation is asking for trouble.<sup>305</sup>

We do not need any amendment to our constitution as the men who drew up this document were inspired by the Lord and it covered every need of to-day<sup>306</sup>

The Bible say the man should be the head of the house and it will destroy our religious freedoms that our forefathers fought and died for.<sup>307</sup>

In the beginning, the first organization God made was the family. The next was the Mosiac Law to his chosen people. Then finally the Church through Christ to all people. The family and church still hold. Many communists infiltrate our nation and keep trying to tear it down. We should see that this Amendment be Rescinded in our State as soon as possible. [Includes several Bible verses.] I hope you will study this and the papers and have it handy when the time is right for I believe the people of Kansas when they see the evils in it will be glad to change it.<sup>308</sup>

Another nostalgically recalled better times in an idealized past, characteristic of conservative thought:

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<sup>304</sup> Mrs. Lynn Johnson, Copeland, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, March 25, 1975, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>305</sup> Lucy Moody, Dodge City, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, February 2, 1975, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>306</sup> Zelma M. Bailey, Topeka, to Sen. Edward F. Reilly, Topeka, March 18, 1979, Reilly Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>307</sup> Mrs. Ruby McCauley, Stockton, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, March 3, 1975, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>308</sup> Bertha B. Mills, Topeka, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, April 4, 1975, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

We want this world as we have known it. Wives to be wives . . . We need the center of the family Life and that is ‘Love’ as Jesus taught it not as these Hippies express.<sup>309</sup>

A theme that many conservatives cited was the “masculinization” of American culture that would invariably occur under the ERA. When women left the home for work, they were in essence acting as men. Without anyone to fill the role in the home that these women had abandoned, children would suffer:

The family is a divine institution installed by God to bring together, a man and a woman into one. A oneness that thrives on cooperation, of concern for the other, of shared goals. The E.R.A. Amendment will place men and women in a colosseum of competitiveness where our stability as a society and our children become victims in a contest that will surely destroy us all.<sup>310</sup>

One author reflected the ideals of Progressive reformer Florence Kelley by advocating protective legislation to protect women, as the weaker sex and potential mothers, from labor that should be performed by men. Her objection was accented by her belief that these differences were divinely ordained:

A woman is of the weaker sex according to Gods word—should be respected and protected. Every girl is a potential mother not be subject to draft or Hard labor.<sup>311</sup>

Some opponents felt so strongly about the ERA that they lumped into one colossal argument a variety of objections, which all stemmed from the essential immorality of the legislation. The following author wrote a number of letters to legislators, all of which cited the draft, loss of privacy, government intrusion into the home, Communism, homosexuality, and eroded national morality as problems that would be exacerbated by the ERA:

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<sup>309</sup> Mrs. Gareld Sheley, Norton, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., March 3, 1975, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>310</sup> Mrs. Dalice McEndree and employees of Security State Bank, Redfield, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, March 31, 1975, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>311</sup> Mrs. Ray F. Brown, Stockton, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, March 5, 1975, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

If those big mouth lippers [women's libbers] I call them want to go in the army, live in the barracks with men and use the same rest rooms let them, but not force other good mothers and wives taken away from their children and home. They will only make slaves of American women like the Russian women. Dont let them dictate to you as wicked as Sodom and Gamorah [*sic*] was and God had to rain fire down and burn them up. I believe even they would blush what goes on in our country. Please Gov. Bennett do all you can to stop the insanity. They will wish they had minded their own business once they land in an eternal burning Hell. Thank you.<sup>312</sup>

Another woman cited a similar list of concerns:

If this amendment become a law then we have some Dumb people in Congress. I am not married but I have two little neice's that I would not want to grow up in a world like that. If we want that kind of society we can all move to Russia. . . . This bill could cause a very cold war between men and women. Also the divorce rate will go skyhigh. The Marriage rate will go way down. They will say why get married? I pray this does not happen. . . . Would you like to think of your daughter being overeas in a fox hole with a group of men. I wonder how much fighting would get done! I know Jesus Christ as my personal saviour, do you? I don't think so or you would never have passed that amendment. I thank God I am not married because I would not want to bring kids into a world like that. PTL Praise the Lord.<sup>313</sup>

The influence of an array of conservative thought is evident in the above quotations, whether it is fundamentalist Christianity, anti-Communism, anti-radicalism, anti-modernity, or the importance of the patriarchal family. Many of these authors may have subscribed to Lucy Stone's version of moderate feminism from the late nineteenth century, which mixed Christian perfectionism with the reform and improvement of marriage. Others were true Christian conservatives who clung to separate spheres ideology, Pauline proscriptions, and pessimistic premillennialism to support their view that the ERA was of the Devil.

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<sup>312</sup> Ada Endsley, McPherson, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, January 21, 1975, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>313</sup> Mrs. George Sauer, Palco, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, March 4, 1975, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

## Motherhood

A popular theme in anti-ERA circles was the need for women to be home with their children. Traditionalists, like true womanhood adherents in the nineteenth century, believed that women were especially possessed with a maternal nature that amplified their morality and emotions but suppressed their intellect and independence. Because of this ineluctable nature, women would always compare unfavorably with men in the business world. Conversely, only mothers had the special powers necessary to deal with their own children. Children who were left with their fathers, in a daycare, or with other women would suffer grievous psychological damage due to the removal of the maternal influence. Many Kansans bought into this theory, charging that the removal of the woman from the home would equate to the removal of civilization from America. A few excerpts illustrate the point:

If our women (mothers) would stay at home (except for jobs as nurses, teachers etc that more or less pertain to women) raise the family and take care of the home we wouldn't have all the divorces, broken homes, children running wild, drugs etc because they would have care love and the home rule instead of neighborhood hoodlums.<sup>314</sup>

The above author was apparently unaware that nurses and teachers were some of the staunchest supporters for the ERA due to their first-hand experience with the inequalities of the workplace. Others echoed his sentiments, recalling nineteenth-century gender stereotypes to dramatize their concerns:

I say the women should stay home and raise their children instead of being in offices and the children no homes to go to, so run on the streets pick up what they want and beg some neighbors if they will adopt them so you see they dont have a *home* . . .<sup>315</sup>

The greatest percentage of these women *belong* at home anyway, as when their children arrive home from school they will be happy that "mom" is there to greet them.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Lewis Thome, Clearwater, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, January 29, 1976, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>315</sup> Mrs. Ella Thompson, Colby, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1970, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

You know as well as I do that we would not have as much crime as we have if mothers were all with their children.<sup>317</sup>

Womens place was always in the home and I think what is causing so many young folks to go bad is because they haven't a mother to give them the "love and care" they need in their young years.<sup>318</sup>

Key to this argument is the idea that the moral nature of young people can be instilled only by the biological mother. Allowing any other person to care for children is a recipe for hooliganism and societal decline. Again, "true womanhood" appears by valorizing motherhood as a sacred, solemn duty which can be undertaken only by women in the home.

Numerous other concerns offended Kansas anti-ERA advocates. Many wrote in to say that they worried about single-sex bathrooms and public accommodations, fearing a loss of privacy. A large number linked the issue to abortion, many using the peculiar phrase "it would finalize abortion on demand," suggesting a common source for their political outrage. Several dozen mentioned the loss of state power to the federal courts and the federal government. A number mentioned that the ERA would likely legalize same-sex marriages, allow homosexuals to teach in public schools, and mandate the elimination of rape laws since they could not, presumably, be re-written to be sex neutral:

Equal pay for equal work is fine and women already have that. Other equalities this amend would allow are wrong and sinful. For instance the rights it would give homosexuals and lesbians. These people are sick and their way of life is a sin. We don't need this way of life taught in our schools. Marriages between two men or two women

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<sup>316</sup> Inez Potter, McPherson, to Gov. Robert B. Docking, Topeka, March 23, 1973, Docking Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>317</sup> Mrs. Lester Sylvester, Sabetha, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., March 20, 1975, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>318</sup> Mrs. L. Straub, Wamego, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, January 6, 1976, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

would oppose all Christian principals set up by God. What kind of a chance would an adopted child in this kind of home have? Please Sir oppose this amendment.<sup>319</sup>

At 14, I for one am not ready to be raped and not be able to do a thing about it.<sup>320</sup>

Some invoked Schlafly's "loss of rights and privileges" argument by mentioning a loss of protective legislation and social security benefits, the requirement for women to provide fifty percent of the household income, and the necessity for a man to support his family (either for his civic health or to maintain her "right" to support). One author believed that the only force keeping men in their natural role as providers was the law presumably requiring them to support their wives. If the ERA invalidated that, she wondered, "can you imagine how many men would just lye down and force their wives to take over"?<sup>321</sup> Others worried about the pernicious effects of the welfare state, a classic concern of conservatives, but supposed that the women's movement was the catalyst for the expanded need for welfare:

married women whose husbands now provide a generous living for them have Flooded The Job Market to the point where Men with Families Are On Welfare.<sup>322</sup>

Our very lifestyle is being threatened; mothers should get generous gov't welfare so men can have jobs and women can take care of children; women's lib casts homemaking as a terrible oppression.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Paul Martin, Dodge City, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, August 5, 1977, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>320</sup> Margaret MacKay, Douglass, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., March 5, 1975, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>321</sup> Donna Marsh, Norton, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., February 21, 1975, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>322</sup> Mrs. Harvey J. Coulter, Topeka, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., May 22, 1972, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>323</sup> Mrs. Calvin Jones, Junction City, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., January 1, 1971, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Many Kansans believed, like antiradicals of the 1920s, that the ERA would usher in an era of unprecedented federal oversight in the home. Women were to be forced into jobs, children were to be forced into government day-care, and men were to be forced out of jobs to accommodate the influx of women. The men let go from their jobs would not find other ones but would become “slackers” who watched their wives work, raise children and manage the home. They could not help with the children and the home because, naturally, that was women’s work. Denied the civilizing influence of a dependent family for whom to provide an income, men would revert to their bestial nature, causing America to crumble as a nation.

### **Objection to Women’s Liberation**

For anti-ERA women, the tactics of women’s liberationists proved the most galling. Traditionalists objected to women’s movement participants who were too strident, too loud, obsessed with sexuality, and disrespectful of conventional gender roles. They countered with a version of hyperfemininity, baking bread for legislators in a trick they labeled “To the Breadwinners from the Breadbakers.”<sup>324</sup> The exaggerated roles for women each side manufactured were designed to both irk their opponents and to contrast favorably with the other side’s exaggerations. Moderate pro-ERA women attempted to show themselves as thinking individuals, able to compete with men on an equal playing field; moderate anti-ERA women wished to be seen as responsible, intelligent wives and mothers who had chosen a traditional family setting. The moderates, however, failed to gain media coverage. Instead, the pro-ERA movement came to be characterized by the man-hating lesbian and the anti-ERA movement

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<sup>324</sup> Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 70.

featured helpless, dependent women begging men to protect them. These stereotypes filtered into Kansas as anti-ERA women railed against the excesses of the women's movement while playing up their own vulnerability:

I fear the National Organization for women are getting completely out of hand.<sup>325</sup>

The radicals in Womens' Liberation groups don't represent the majority of women in this country who want and need to be in the home and provided for by as husband who is the king of ~~her~~ (pardon me) *his* castle.<sup>326</sup>

I am proud to be a woman and it is obvious that the ERA advocates are not as they are trying to become as much like men as they can. I do not wish to fight in wars—nor do I wish to share the same restroom with a man. I do not want to be subject to the degradation that will run rampant across America if this ammendment is passed.<sup>327</sup>

Another set of authors insisted that the women's liberation movement was attempting to advance its radical agenda through trickery and underhanded tactics. They first pointed out that this group was not representative of women, and then explained that their policies were both corrupt and dangerous to the traditional American way of life:

According to the Associated Press, 3% of the women in the country are in the women's liberation movement—a very noisy, vocal 3% -- and 97% are not.<sup>328</sup>

I know you are badgered in Washington with the very vocal representatives of the movement, who insist they represent all women. I have the right to insist that indeed they do not. The thing that bothers me most about them is that they do not grant others the right to differ with them, resorting to hate letters and unprintable names for anyone who dares to say most American women still believe by the millions in preserving the home and the family way of life. If they do not wish to be married, I do not mind, but I am

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<sup>325</sup> Luther M. Berry (Pastor, Pleasantview Baptist Church), Derby, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., March 8, 1975, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>326</sup> Mrs. Paul E. Jones, Lyons, to Sen. Robert J. Dole, Washington, D.C., August 11, 1970, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>327</sup> Christine Hennessey, Pomona, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., September 28, 1978, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>328</sup> Mildred Johnson, Shawnee Mission, to Gov. Robert B. Docking, Topeka, February 21, 1973, Docking Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

wearry of their saying other women should not marry, if they so wish. Their tired cliché that women should have control over their own bodies reduces women (except in rape cases) to the animal state because they do indeed have control over their own bodies right now—before conception.<sup>329</sup>

The ERA never plays fair. The only word they seem to know is “force”. They use the most unfair, unAmerican, unChristian tactics. . . . Only the devil can think up the things they do to force a vote in their behalf.<sup>330</sup>

The last letter’s complaint that the ERA “never plays fair” tapped into conservatives’ discontent about the direction of federal intervention at the family level. The many Supreme Court decisions of the 1960s and 1970s that liberalized social relations forced change on Americans, many of whom did not desire it. The idea that feminists were manipulating laws to force the ERA’s passage contributed to the conservatives’ feelings of embattlement and that their preferred ways of life were under siege. The anger at women’s movement leaders gaining press coverage while anti-ERA traditionalists seemed to toil with no return began to boil over as the 1970s progressed.

### **Kansas Women’s Weekend**

In the struggle to prevent ratification, national pro- and anti-ERA groups became familiar with their opponents’ tactics. The wildly different views of women’s proper place in American society that each group held resulted in scorn and contempt that was transmitted through each side’s publications, so that local leaders were just as familiar with national pro-ERA figures such as former New York Representative Bella Abzug and feminist leader Gloria Steinem or anti-ERA figure Phyllis Schlafly as their local opponents. As the ERA reached its

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<sup>329</sup> Mildred Johnson (professional speaker), Shawnee Mission, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., February 9, 1972, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>330</sup> Mrs. W. W. Thom, Hardtner, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., August 30, 1978, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

deadline, both sides prepared for a grueling final battle and attempted to use nearly any tactic to press for victory. The United Nations declared 1975 to be International Women's Year (IWY), and women's movement leaders pressured Congress to appropriate money for a conference commemorating the event. Money and plans were finally in place by 1977, with the convention re-titled the National Women's Conference, to be held in Houston. Bella Abzug was the chair of the convention, causing Schlafly and Hobbs to plan a concurrent pro-family conference in the Houston Astrodome. Many states' anti-ERA factions planned to avoid the National Women's Conference altogether, but Kansas pro-family women vowed to fight on at the Kansas Women's Weekend of July 15-17, 1977. From the outset, anti-ERA women felt marginalized, and they probably were. Because the IWY team was controlled by pro-ERA women, one of the goals of the national convention was to push the ERA in states still refusing to ratify. Entertaining long discussions about why the ERA was a bad idea was not in the plans. Kansas anti-ERA women thought that, if Houston was truly a *national women's* conference, the views of all women of the nation ought to be heard. The fact that Congress appropriated dollars to fund the convention but did not offer to fund the pro-family convention added to the traditionalists' embattled feeling of unfairness.

The Kansas Women's Weekend was chaired by Ms. Pat Storey of Topeka, who had also been an administrative assistant for Governor Bennett. The pro-family faction was led by Barbara Hanna of Kansas Citizens Against the ERA. The weekend featured a number of workshops on abortion, the ERA, homosexuality, and other controversial issues, all of which were to be discussed at the end of the session, at which point attendees would vote on a resolution for each issue. In a long letter to Sen. Reilly, Hanna listed a number of ways the convention was skewed to marginalize the pro-family contingent's views. Her major complaint

was a procedural trick that prevented the majority of the pro-family women from participating in the ERA resolution vote. According to her letter, Ms. Storey directed “that all workshops must be covered in consecutive order, skipping none, and therefore a vote could not be taken on this [ERA] resolution to go on to the main areas of concern.” Storey then apparently stated repeatedly that the hall must be emptied by midnight. Hanna wrote, “She intimated that all resolutions not covered by then would be voted on Sunday morning at the general session, which never materialized. Many pro-family persons left feeling they could return and vote on the important issues Sunday morning.” She continued:

At 12:10 a.m. Sunday morning, after the conclusion of what was thought would be the final vote prior to the midnight closing deadline, Ms. Storey immediately called for a vote on the ERA, overlooking several workshops which should have preceded the ERA vote if a consecutive order would have been followed as was previously stated would be the case. All calls for “point of order” by Pro-Family persons were declared “out of order.” A motion to adjourn (so that a more representative vote could be taken Sunday morning) was declared “out of order” by Ms. Storey. The “right” to take a vote on the motion to adjourn was denied.

The ERA resolution passed, 1149 to 944. The pro-family faction, learning what happened later, was furious. Mrs. Hanna’s letter was corroborated by four other letters from anti-ERA women sent to different legislators, objecting to the tactics used during the weekend. One woman noted that anti-ERA women were threatened with being thrown out of workshops and microphones were turned off when anti-ERA women tried to speak.<sup>331</sup> Another said, “Through the IWY coordinating committee, pro-ERA people were notified of the conference months in advance, pro-Family people learned of the conference 1-2 weeks before it occurred. Pro-ERA people controlled the conference, recognizing their own people on the floor, intimidating men, allowing

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<sup>331</sup> Mrs. Pearl Chindamo (and petition), Abilene, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, February 21, 1978, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

pro-ERA people into the Exhibition Hall, and excluding others. These are just a few of the injustices committed.”<sup>332</sup>

Hanna continued her complaint by objecting to non-Kansan speakers, especially the special appearance of Gloria Steinem. Recalling the successful 1912 campaign for woman suffrage in the state only after local leaders barred national feminists from attending, Hanna’s objection is typically Kansan: “Considering the fact that the KWW was supposedly a ‘grass roots’ participation, and considering the fact that Gloria Steinem, the Editor of *Ms. Magazine*, cannot in any way be regarded as representative of the views of the majority of Kansas women, it must then be assumed that Ms. Steinem was brought to Kansas to once again promote the feminist ideas with the complete exclusion of the ‘rights’ of the Kansas Citizens who align themselves with the Pro-Family values.” Hanna’s suspicions that the conference was merely a rubber-stamp of feminist positions and not designed to elicit debate were confirmed by Steinem herself, whom Hanna quoted as saying, “It is not the [federal] mandate to include women who think women are not equal and should not be equal.”

The insults continued. Steinem “completely distorted the facts to make it appear that women were bussed in by male leaders. She intimated that the male leaders were instructing the women on how to vote, etc.” This was particularly galling to Hanna because “Any Kansas legislator who has dealt with any of the Pro-Family groups in the past realizes that the women involved are completely capable of controlling the situation themselves, while recognizing the support and backing of the men who have worked in the background to uphold family values.” The completely un-Kansan nature of the conference was confirmed when Steinem attempted to belittle the conservative Christian women with statements such as “Why is God always portrayed

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<sup>332</sup> Sareta Dobbs, Wichita, to Gov. Robert Bennett, Topeka, August 27, 1977, Bennett Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

as white and male?” and stating that “organized religion has enshrined the idea of male supremacy.” Finally, Steinem dismissed the anti-ERA women by stating that they all must be members of the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klan, Eagle Forum, or Mormons.<sup>333</sup> Hanna may have objected to this point but Steinem’s listing of the most vocal opponents of the ERA was not without merit. The fact that Hanna was not aware of even her own connections to Eagle Forum through Lottie Beth Hobbs proved Steinem’s perceived slight was actually completely accurate.

The partisan tactics used at the Kansas Women’s Weekend raised a number of objections in the fair-minded Kansas constituents. In an email interview with Barbara Hanna, she noted that

When Pro-Family groups would come to the door of the meeting room in Wichita, we were told that the fire marshal would only allow a certain number of people to enter, and our people were turned away. Later, those with the women libber views were allowed to enter. We finally discovered that they had an orange dot on their name tags, and the people at the door were allowing mainly those with the orange dots to enter. We got a few in by using orange dots, too, but many of our people had gone home after standing outside in the hot sun for hours. (We also later did research, and they lied about the number of people the fire marshal would allow in the building. If I remember right, it was more than all of the people at the conference.)<sup>334</sup>

Hanna’s objections were shared by others. One woman was so offended by the conference that it caused her to change her mind about the ERA:

As a participant in the Kansas International Women’s Year Conference, I was horrified at the tactics and lack of correct parliamentary procedure used by pro-ERA forces. If ERA is right and good, then these tactics should not have been necessary. My position has changed from one of neutrality to a strongly anti-ERA stance, mostly because of these tactics used by the pro-ERA people.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Barbara Hanna (State Coordinator, Kansas Citizens Against the ERA), Eudora, to Sen. Edward F. Reilly, Topeka, (July 1977?), Reilly Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>334</sup> Barbara Hanna, interview with author, 10 September 2007, email.

<sup>335</sup> Mrs. Dave Herring, Wichita, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., August 30, 1978, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Another woman felt the same way, noting that if pro-ERA women had to resort to trickery to pass the amendment, then that proved that they were downplaying the true purpose of the ERA:

In the beginning I was definitely for the ERA amendment—until I experienced the Woman’s Convention in Wichita. I was abhorred [*sic*] to see the tactics used to push this through—so as to say this is what the woman of Kansas want. That’s ridiculous—if you were not for everything the Libbers wanted—you were cut off and not even given the freedom to speak—Is that America?? The Anti Man-attitudes that came out in their bitterness opened me to see the selfishness and all for 1 extremists. I believe in the dignity of women—I’m a woman—I believe in the dignity and sacredness of life, of marriage, of the family. To think that our hard earned tax money was and is used to finance this affair hurts me deeply. Many of the things these women stand for is against everything I hold sacred and dear. Since the Women’s Convention we’ve become involved in the political process. We’re working actively for candidates who will express our views and listen to the voice of the people and who’ll uphold the values we share in the sacredness of life, the family, and the dignity of women and men in the eyes of God.<sup>336</sup>

Anti-ERA women finally scored a victory several weeks later when they succeeded in appointing their own representatives to leadership positions as delegates to the National Women’s Convention.<sup>337</sup> According to Hanna, the League of Women Voters oversaw the vote and ensured “equal representation in all areas of ballot preparation, voting, and the counting of ballots.” It is unclear whether the pro-family delegation filed a lawsuit or if they merely appealed to the relatively impartial LWV, but regardless, Hanna triumphantly reported that “[t]he final vote of 13 Pro-Family delegates and only 7 IWY delegates points out the fact that the injunction was successful and did insure ‘equality’ and fair treatment in this one segment of the conference.”<sup>338</sup> Once at the national conference, the pro-family delegates wore sunflower badges with ribbons stating “Majority,” either indicating the pro-family women comprised a

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<sup>336</sup> Mr and Mrs. J. D. Schoenhofer, Wichita, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., August 23, 1978, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

<sup>337</sup> Carolyn Kortge, “Anti-ERA Delegates Notch Spots,” Wichita *Eagle-Beacon*, 21 August 1977, 1B.

<sup>338</sup> Hanna to Reilly (July 1977?).

majority of the delegates sent from Kansas at the conference or that they believed that they represented a true majority of anti-ERA women in Kansas. In a famous picture, the pro-family women stood during a motion, turned their backs to the organizers, and prayed to express their discontent with the feminist agenda.<sup>339</sup> Conservative Kansas women had finally made their voices heard, even though they never succeeded in convincing state legislators to rescind ratification. They were ultimately victorious when the ERA failed to gain the necessary states required for adoption.

### **The ERA in Kansas: What Happened?**

Kansas conservatives lacked the numbers required to force rescission. The 2,640 letters available in state archives that Kansans wrote to their representatives about the ERA do not constitute a random sample for the purposes of statistical regression because the authors were self-selecting, having felt strongly enough about the issue that they were compelled to write. They can, however, be used to draw some general conclusions. Many of the authors wrote multiple letters, and some of the letters are from out-of-state. When the duplicates and the non-Kansans are removed, 2103 authors wrote letters: 1193 were for the ERA (57%), 883 were against (42%), and 24 neutrally requested more information (1%). These numbers roughly correspond to national Roper polls taken from the mid-1970s through the early 1980s indicating that about 50-70% of the national constituency favored the ERA and about 20-40% were opposed, depending on the question asked.<sup>340</sup> Most of the pro-ERA letters came from the cities,

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<sup>339</sup> Jo Freeman, accessed 16 April 2008; available from <http://www.jofreeman.com/photos/IWY12.html>; Internet.

<sup>340</sup> Roper Center Polls, *Public Opinion Online*, ERA questions on survey from 21 October 1974 through 19 September 1983.

especially cities with colleges: Manhattan, Lawrence, Emporia, Topeka, Wichita, and the Kansas City suburbs logged significant pro-ERA majorities although each of these cities also had a sizable anti-ERA constituency. Most anti-ERA letters came from rural areas with the highest concentration south of Wichita.

The ERA's political history in Kansas as having passed easily and never being in serious danger of rescission belied the turmoil caused in the state by its potential implications. All five of the men who had any influence over the bill were in favor of its passage. According to former Kansas Representative Jim Maag (R-Dodge City), the President of the Kansas Senate Robert Bennett (R-Overland Park) and the Speaker of the House Duane S. "Pete" McGill (R-Winfield) were both pro-ERA. McGill was asked by House Minority Leader Richard C. "Pete" Loux (D-Wichita), a friend to women's rights, to keep further discussion of the ERA off the docket.<sup>341</sup> Both McGill and Bennett had different agendas and a busy 1973 legislative schedule, including school finance, reorganized social welfare department, and a uniform consumer credit code.<sup>342</sup> For many busy Kansas lawmakers, the ERA had been settled and was not worth the expenditure of more resources. Several public debates were held in conjunction with moves to rescind in Feb 1973, 1975, and 1977. Anti-ERA speakers trotted out familiar arguments from Schlafly's publications or its derivatives; pro-ERA speakers toed the NOW party line. It is apparent that few, if any, changed their minds as the resulting bills were always bottled up in committee. Contributing to the inactivity were decisions from Kansas Attorney General Vern Miller in 1973 and Attorney General Curt Schneider in 1975 that upheld *Coleman v. Miller* as the basis for not considering rescission. This rejection of rescission by the state's highest legal authorities may

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<sup>341</sup> Carol Duffy McDowell, interview with the author, 1 November 2007, telephone.

<sup>342</sup> Jim Maag, interview with the author, 27 October 2007, telephone.

have precluded dramatic political moves by the legislature. The lapsing of the ERA's 1982 extended deadline without further state ratifications also made the legality of rescission moot, leaving it a yet unanswered political question. Some feminists believe that *Coleman v. Miller* clearly limits a state's action concerning amendments to ratification; once ratification is passed, the state has no further power to act. If a state legislature does not ratify, the issue remains open indefinitely and can be passed at any time. For those in this school of thought, the ERA is still pending, thirty-five states have ratified, the five rescinding states have no power to rescind, South Dakota's bill to nullify ratification after the first deadline is illegal, and the original deadline is not applicable, so any three states that pass the ERA even now would push the amendment to ratification. It is unlikely, however, that the ERA will pass any time soon.

The final triumph of conservative women after the Kansas Women's Weekend in 1977 may not have changed the state's political stance regarding the ERA, but their protest at the national convention proved that they were a significant, cohesive interest group. Their passion and fervid activity to prevent evils resulting from the ERA made clear that not all Kansans embraced individualism as the ultimate expression of womanhood.

## Conclusion

From the beginning of American history, the expansion of women's rights has been met with skepticism. The unusual freedoms accorded scarce women in the colonial period soon disappeared with the arrival of more women and a higher birthrate. Revolutionary women hoping that the Declaration of Independence and the new Constitution would apply to them soon found that "natural rights" were natural only to white men. Early national women seeking increased educational opportunities struggled against separate spheres ideology which seemed to require no such training. Abolitionist women faced critics who found them to be unfeminine harridans for speaking in public to mixed audiences, despite the Christian motivations of many. First-wave women's leaders advocating individualism over dependency like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and their lieutenants were so unpopular in some places, like Kansas, that they were asked to refrain from campaigning so that suffrage might have a better chance. After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, feminists lost their unitary cause and instantly fragmented over which reforms to pursue next. Alice Paul's National Women's Party was marginal and fractious in its support for an ERA, but antifeminists took it on in addition to Bolshevism, radicalism, peace activism, and demilitarization as causes to be defeated. Moderate women found some success pushing protective legislation for women on the basis of separate capabilities, an extension of separate spheres ideology. The Great Depression and World War II represented a low point for women's activism, even though women quietly advanced in many avenues of employment. As the Cold War introduced a new adversary in the Soviet Union, antifeminists used this new bogeyman as the source for unwanted and destructive women's

rights linked to Communism. Communists were out to destroy the traditional American family, so attempts to grant women expanded access to education or employment must be traps set up by Communist infiltrators.

Few antifeminist organizations existed for traditional women in the 1960s, but their pent-up anxiety found an outlet with Phyllis Schlafly's STOP-ERA movement beginning in 1972. As the ERA debate dragged on through the decade, Schlafly expanded STOP-ERA into Eagle Forum, absorbing such other antifeminist groups as evangelical Christian Lottie Beth Hobbs' Women Who Want to be Women, later called the Pro-Family Forum. Eagle Forum still exists and continues to decry feminist and internationalist moves to weaken the United States. Schlafly may still be the face of American antifeminism, but the issue defining her career has been pushed aside in favor of traditional, patriarchal "family values" advocated by many other evangelical and conservative groups such as Concerned Women for America, Focus on the Family, and Promise Keepers. These organizations maintain websites that link to each other, maintaining a concentrated constituency of anti-modern ultraconservatives.

The ERA debate in Kansas was important for a number of reasons. First, although the measure passed quickly, the repeated attempts to rescind ratification generated a storm of letters begging legislators to reconsider, exposing the large population of gender conservatives in the state. Second, conservative women were concerned enough about the ERA to organize into grassroots groups directed at defeating the ERA. Although they were not technically successful in persuading Kansas legislators to rescind, they staged a coup at the feminist-run Kansas Women's Weekend by electing a majority of pro-family delegates for the national convention in Houston and contributed support for lobbying efforts in non-ratifying states. Third, the rift exposed by the ERA between conservatives, moderates, and liberals in the state only widened in

the 1980s and 1990s as the Kansas Republican Party repeatedly changed leadership between the small-government fiscal conservatives and the social conservatives. Many liberal Republicans were driven out of the party, running as Democrats to bypass primaries dominated by ultraconservatives and their supporters. The anti-modern debate ignited by the ERA continues to rage: Kansas conservatives made national news in 1999 when the Kansas State Board of Education voted to remove the teaching of evolution as a science standard, recalling the 1925 Scopes trial. Conservatives board members were ousted by embarrassed voters the next year, only to return in 2005 with the same plan.

The ERA was not the first piece of legislation designed to enhance women's rights but it was the first in which the proponents made no concerted attempt to spin the benefits of the legislation to appeal to moderate and traditional women. The ERA was unabashedly about women's independence as human beings, their unitary citizenship unrelated to familial roles, and the rejection of the legacy of coverture. For moderates, the ERA spoke to their dissatisfaction with the tenuous "privileges" of dependency, which were wholly dependent on the continuing goodwill and earning power of a husband. Only the liberalization of educational and professional opportunities would allow women to finally achieve financial independence apart from their marital choice. Radicals had similar concerns about financial independence but also wished to overturn the existing patriarchal capitalist order rather than to reform it. The two factions' disagreement on how to frame the ERA led to a confusing media blitz that tended to feature activists that would generate the highest ratings, from the beautiful Gloria Steinem to the outrageous Ti-Grace Atkinson. Because of unrepresentative media coverage, the ERA campaign struck many as an in-your-face, aggressive campaign that employed a number of devious strategies to secure victory. One woman expressed her disgust to Sen. Pearson when NOW won

their lawsuit to extend the ERA deadline past the original seven years, complaining that a vocal minority of non-family oriented women were seeking to pressure legislators into passing an amendment that most Americans did not want:

Every amendment for the last 60 years has had a 7 yr. deadline. But now Bella [Abzug] and her bunch want to change the rules and give their amendment 10 yrs., 3 mo. And 8 days, a very peculiar time period maliciously designed to include an extra session of the Illinois Legislature (which always adjourns on June 30). They are planning to railroad the Extension through Congress with a simple majority rather than the 2/3 majority that Article I requires for amendments to the U.S. Constitution. I demand that you never vote for such an unfair bill. We should not change the rules in the middle of the ballgame. The ERA amendment the way the pros want it is rotten. It is filled with all the NOW's which have mostly the lesbians. Let's let the winners win.<sup>343</sup>

Making the situation worse was the fact that anti-ERA activists could point to a number of specific ills the ERA would produce, some more likely than others. The possibility of a women's draft alone, coming on the heels of a devastating pullout in Vietnam, may have sunk the ERA. ERA proponents, however, had few concrete examples of how the ERA would benefit women. The few remaining archaic laws prohibiting women from certain professions or from jury duty were on their way out, and many states like Kansas had already purged their statutes of sexist language. Equal pay for equal work was technically outlawed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and remaining systemic inequities, such as why a college-educated librarian earned less than a high school-educated longshoreman, defied a simple legislative solution.

Comparing the ERA to the 1912 Kansas suffrage campaign reveals some interesting trends. Suffragists succeeded in passing the woman vote because they appealed to traditional gender roles and a woman's need to mother her children, protect her family, and ensure morality in government. Suffrage was not won in Kansas by an appeal to natural rights or by women attempting to fill men's roles, but by women acting as polite, feminine ladies. The campaign

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<sup>343</sup> Mrs. Harvey J. Coulter, Topeka, to Sen. James B. Pearson, Washington, D.C., September 5, 1978, Pearson Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

greatly benefited from the legacy of the WCTU's Frances Willard, who had vowed to support suffrage even while advocating for the traditional family. The ERA, however, found few supporters among traditionalists. The most moderate consistent ERA advocates were probably the Federated Business and Professional Women's Clubs, who had established their support in the 1930s and maintained that the ERA was necessary to fully open many professions to women. Some mainline Protestant church leaders and some Catholics came out in support of the ERA, but just as many, if not more, opposed it. The groups dominating the debate were NOW, which offended many social conservatives by its embrace of homosexual rights, and STOP-ERA, which promised to prevent massive social upheaval by defeating the ERA, thus safeguarding the status quo. For many Americans worn out from the social changes of the 1950s and 1960s, maintaining the status quo sounded like a very good idea.

In Kansas, ERA support generally came from women college students, intellectuals, nurses, lawyers, and BPW members. Opposition came from housewives, farm wives, evangelicals, young women afraid of the draft, and their grandmothers afraid for their safety. What many anti-ERA Kansans could not reconcile was how the ERA might affect their relationships with men. Unlike many of the ERA advocates from the coasts, high-paying professional opportunities were scarce for women outside of Wichita, Kansas City, Topeka, Lawrence, Manhattan, and Emporia. Even those who did live in the cities and supported the ERA generally cited their roles as wives and mothers proudly. Kansas women, regardless of their position on the ERA, were generally conservative in their gender views, a position on which pro-ERA advocates failed to capitalize. Had ERA advocates found a latter-day Frances Willard to explain the benefits of the ERA to conservative women, they might have found more success. Appeals to the evils of patriarchy were bound to fail in the Midwest, where women

tended to embrace the idea of a man as the head of the family as the natural and correct order of family life. Feminist author Susan Faludi attempted to understand why the idea of equality met with such hostility. She answered her own question:

But what exactly is it about women's equality that even its slightest shadow threatens to erase male identity? What is it about the way we frame manhood that, even today, it still depends so on "feminine" dependence for its survival? A little-noted finding by the Yankelovich Monitor survey, a large nationwide poll that has tracked social attitudes for the last two decades, takes us a good way toward a possible answer. For twenty years, the Monitor's pollsters have asked its subjects to define masculinity. And for twenty years, the leading definition, ahead by a huge margin, has never changed. It isn't being a leader, athlete, lothario, decision maker, or even just being "born male." It is simply this: being a "good provider for his family."<sup>344</sup>

This survey question speaks to the essence of ERA opposition in Kansas, which contained elements of the nineteenth-century fear that men were uncivilized. In marriage and fatherhood, otherwise animalistic men channeled their passion into productive work in order to support those who were utterly dependent on their efforts. Male identity was forged through family leadership and the control of the family's only source of income, which enhanced a man's sense of independent masculinity. Through their work, husbands were entirely responsible for the family's financial and social status. Wives in this schema had the duty to remain dependent in order to allow husbands to feel the pressure of responsibility. Removing the necessity to provide for a family threatened to erode a husband's sense of manliness, which would cause him to stop working hard and cease to be a productive citizen, thus destroying the nation one individual—and one family—at a time. Women, therefore, had a national duty to maintain dependence so that men would not fall apart. ERA activists did nothing to allay the fears of women who subscribed to this worldview and actually antagonized them by pointing out that their husbands' protection was fragile at best, an argument that was widely criticized as "anti-male."

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<sup>344</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1991), 65.

In Kansas, conservative anti-ERA women believed that the ERA would come between them and their families; pro-ERA women were still often socially conservative but believed that the ERA might offer some protection should something happen to their husbands. The strength of Kansas conservatives culminating with the ERA proves that the state's seemingly progressive history concerning women's issues was due more to spin than to liberal thought regarding women's individualism. Kansas has always been, and remains, a morally conservative state.

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