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The Political is Personal: The Georgia Equal Rights Amendment Debate in Public and Private Discourse

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THE POLITICAL IS PERSONAL: THE GEORGIA EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT DE-
BATE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DISCOURSE

by

HALEY E. AARON

Under the Direction of Dr. John McMillian

ABSTRACT

Although previous scholars have addressed the legislative parameters of the Equal Rights Amendment debate in non-ratifying states, analysis of amendment supporters' rhetoric has been limited. Examining the public and private writings of activists, This thesis presents the argument that pro-ERA coalitions in Georgia addressed the concerns of their opponents and developed rhetoric that deemphasized connections to the radical women's liberation movement and argued that the ERA would enact legal, rather than social, change. While the educational materials produced by pro-ERA coalitions presented a logical analysis of the amendment's legal ramifications, the personal discourse of Georgia activists presented an emotional defense of the amendment that has often been overlooked in previous studies.

INDEX WORDS: Equal rights amendment, Second wave feminism, Feminism, Pro-ERA, Ratification, Rhetoric, Discourse Analysis

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BATE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DISCOURSE

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my self-proclaimed “two biggest fans:” my grandfather Jackie Hale and my mother Donna Aaron. I’ll let them decide who ranks first.

First, I would like to thank my grandfather for his continued encouragement. Papa Jackie: Some of my earliest memories involve reading the newspaper on Sunday mornings before church. I enjoy discussing the news and look forward to reading your letters. Mail that comes in purple envelopes is always the best. Thank you for encouraging my love of reading and learning.

It is fitting to dedicate a thesis about Southern women to my mother, the strongest woman I have ever known. Mom: you have taught me most of what I know about love, faith, and living and I am eternally grateful. I feel so blessed to know you and call you my mother and my friend. Thank you for your encouragement and your example. In the words of Proverbs 31:30-31: “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all. Charm is fleeting, and beauty is deceptive, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”

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Chapter 1 The Foundations of Discourse: An Introduction to the ERA

In an idealized depiction of their movement, Equal Rights Amendment supporters in Georgia described a diverse network “Of women and children and bosses and crews/And Catholics and Quakers and even Southern Baptists/And black folks and Latinos/And lesbians and Jews.”¹ Ideologically, they envisioned a movement in which women of all races, classes, and religions could unite in common cause to win passage of the ERA and eradicate gender discrimination. A coalition between “women’s rights” organizations and the emerging women’s liberation movement seemed possible, although liberation offered a radical reinterpretation of gender roles and introduced controversial new topics such as abortion.²

However, this vision of diversity and acceptance was never fully reflected in the pro-ERA media campaign, which largely addressed the concerns of white, middle-class Protestants. Images of the homemaker and the nuclear family dominated pamphlets and letters, while amendment supporters distanced themselves from the radicalism of women’s liberation. These publications addressed the challenges presented by an emerging anti-ERA movement that argued the amendment threatened the family and that amendment supporters were anti-religious “women’s libbers.”³ Torn between their desire for diversity and their need to moderate increasingly heated and emotional accusations from amendment opponents, a split between movement ideology and rhetoric formed. Instead of rejecting anti-ERA concerns, Georgia’s single-issue ERA lobbies attempted to moderate the debate, placing themselves between conservative opponents of

¹ “A Tribute To Cathey,” Undated, unsigned poem ca. 1982. Cathey W. Steinberg Papers, W042, Donna Novak Coles Georgia Women’s Movement Archives, Georgia State University Library, Atlanta.

² Sara Evans argues that the liberation movement was able to unite with earlier women’s rights groups in support of the ERA. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 217.

³ See Robin Morris, “Organizing Breadmakers: Kathryn Dunaway’s ERA Battle and the Roots of Georgia’s Republican Revolution,” in *Entering the Fray: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the New South*, ed. Jonathan Daniel Wells and Shelia R. Phipps (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 161-183.

the amendment and radical feminists.⁴ Although they recognized that women's lives were rapidly changing and that anti-ERA models of womanhood were increasingly outmoded, they also identified themselves as both amendment supporters and women with ties to the traditional spheres of church and home.

For such women, the process of creating a lived definition of feminism and reconciling their support of the amendment was both public and private. In their media campaigns, pro-ERA lobbies pragmatically presented the ERA in a way that challenged accusations that the amendment was anti-family and anti-religious; avoided controversial topics; and denied any connections to radicalism or drastic redefinition of social roles. In their individual letters, amendment supporters crafted a more emotional appeal for the amendment and articulated their struggles to reconcile "traditional" images of femininity with the realities of cultural inequality and a rapidly changing social sphere.

In order to understand the development of the ratification debate in Georgia, an analysis of several bodies of scholarship concerning the Equal Rights Amendment is necessary. Early scholars of the amendment address the development of the national debate, describing the formation of national anti-ERA platforms and identifying the factors that led to the split between early second wave feminist organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and more radical feminist organizations, typified by women's liberation collectives. While feminism and the ERA have often been ignored or discussed briefly in studies of the post-war South, an emerging group of scholars is beginning to analyze the amendment debate in greater detail. Their studies suggest that the failure of the amendment in the South elucidates a larger regional trend toward political conservatism. This growing body of regional scholarship includes a small

⁴ This project will focus on organizations that solely focused on passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and organizations that provided support to the state's ERA umbrella organizations, such as ERA Georgia, rather than multi-issue women's organizations such as NOW. These organizations will be identified as "single issue lobbies."

number of works specifically analyzing the amendment's failure in Georgia. However, these analyses fail to fully address the split between ideology and rhetoric that this work will explore.

In addition to addressing national and regional scholarship surrounding the amendment, it is also essential to examine works that address the formation of ERA coalitions and analyze how organizations that supported the amendment during the legislative debates moderated the later ratification debates. In order to understand how the ratification debate took form in Georgia and throughout the South, one must first understand how coalitions were formed and what types of women joined these organizations. Umbrella coalitions such as ERA Georgia relied on the support of a vast network of organizations such as the American Association of University Women; Church Women United; and the League of Women Voters of Georgia, organizations that exhibited long-term support for the amendment.⁵ Scholars have addressed this early support, but analysis of these organizations later support during the ratification debates is limited.

The Equal Rights Amendment: A Brief Introduction

Debate of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment spanned much of the 20th century. The simple statement – “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex” – was met with apprehension and opposition from its first Congressional introduction in 1923 to its ultimate defeat in 1982.⁶ From its introduction, the amendment was freighted with both legislative and symbolic interpretations. As the influence of first wave feminism waned, the amendment represented a rejection of earlier protective

⁵Jeffery G. Jones, “Georgia and the Equal Rights Amendment” (Master’s Thesis, Georgia State University, 1995), 47.

⁶ The quoted text reflects the ERA’s wording during the ratification debates from 1972-1982. Some sources list alternate language for the earlier amendment. When it was first introduced in 1923, the amendment read: “Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction.” Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women’s Eyes: An American History*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2009), 522.

legislation and an increasing commitment to gender equality. The history of the ERA mirrors the development of feminist thought in the United States, reflecting the movement's successes and failures.

Introduced by Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party (NWP) following the ratification of the suffrage amendment in 1920, the ERA represented a significant shift in feminist thought. The NWP, one of the most radical suffrage organizations, rejected movements for protective women's legislation in support of legislation that would ensure women's legal equality. As Nancy Cott argues, early feminists emphasized gender equality in a way that earlier woman's rights activists had not. Suffragists and Progressives utilized narratives of gender equality and emphasized gender difference in rhetorically conflicting ways. "A tension stretched between emphasis on the rights that women (like men) deserved and emphasis on the particular duties or services that women (unlike men) could offer society," Cott writes.⁷ Rhetorical appeals to women's roles as social reformers were essential to the debate. In discussions of suffrage and protective legislation for women, female activists argued that they deserved special consideration under the law because they could provide a unique perspective as wives, mothers, and women. According to this argument, women deserved a voice in the political process not because they were equal to men, but because they provided a different perspective than men.

While first wave feminists still discussed sexual differences, the ideology of gender equality became a central tenet of feminism as Paul and other amendment supporters pursued a vision of legal equality.⁸ The NWP began to draft state equal rights amendments in 1921, despite questions about how the amendments would affect labor legislation specifically written to protect

⁷ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*

women.⁹ NWP leaders who had been involved in earlier Progressive efforts to pass protective legislation that would limit working hours and improve working conditions feared that a federal ERA would eliminate such protections.

While revisions were suggested to preserve such labor legislation, Alice Paul and proponents of equality felt that restrictions would ultimately weaken the amendment. The rift that developed between ERA supporters and activists who sought to preserve sex-specific protective legislation weakened the feminist movement and created dissention between labor reformers (who supported protective legislation) and professional women (who argued that the laws limited women's career aspirations).¹⁰ Socialists such as Florence Kelley were particularly opposed to the broad reforms proposed by the ERA because of the amendment's potential to invalidate the legislative gains made by working class women.¹¹

As the influence of first wave feminism gradually waned, the amendment languished in congressional debate for decades. Although a small number of national women's groups professed their support for the amendment, the ERA remained a relatively insignificant legislative interest, supported by professional women's organizations but otherwise largely ignored until the 1940s, when it gained support from both Republicans and Democrats.¹² The amendment came to a Senate vote in 1946, 1950, and 1953. Protective labor legislation remained a point of contention in the legislative debates; while Senator Carl Hayden introduced a clause exempting such

⁹ Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 120-121.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 121-124.

¹¹ Joan Hoff-Wilson argues that this division between working class and professional middle class interests was one of the most important results of the early movement and "created a division between women reformers that lasted for fifty years." See Joan Hoff-Wilson, ed., *Rights of Passage: The Past and Future of the ERA* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 3, 27.

¹² The ERA was introduced in the Republican Party's platform in 1940 and the Democratic Party in 1944. Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 9.

laws from ERA reform, the “Hayden rider” complicated discussions of the amendment and delayed its passage.¹³

During the decades that the ERA struggled to gain Congressional approval, the rights of women were addressed in several other laws. Most notably, women were included in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, within a section of the law proposed to prevent employment discrimination.¹⁴ Women’s inclusion in the law had initially been proposed by Congressman Howard Smith, a Southerner who opposed the Civil Rights Act and hoped that the inclusion of women would prevent the bill’s passage.¹⁵ However, the edited law passed and women were able to present gender discrimination cases for investigation by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). While the EEOC regarded early gender discrimination cases as “something of a joke,” the commission was flooded with gender discrimination cases, as more than 4,000 cases were submitted in the first two years following the law’s passage.¹⁶ Despite the number of gender discrimination complaints filed, the commission remained committed to examining cases of racial discrimination and gender issues were largely ignored.¹⁷

The perceived indifference of the EEOC and other government organizations reinvigorated the long-dormant feminist movement and encouraged the rise of second wave feminism, a movement that would challenge the socially and politically accepted definitions of womanhood throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The second wave gained momentum in 1966, when Betty Friedan and a group of dissatisfied women activists founded the National Organization for Women (NOW). The organization’s statement of purpose called for “a new movement toward

¹³ Mary Frances Berry, *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women’s Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 60.

¹⁴ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 72.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 71.

¹⁶ Carl M. Brauer, “Women Activists, Southern Conservatives, and the Prohibition of Sex Discrimination in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act,” *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 1 (February 1983): 37.

¹⁷ Rosen, *World Split Open*, 73.

true equality for all women in America, and toward a fully equal partnership of the sexes.”¹⁸ The organization was initially created to lobby for more equal rights legislation for women, but later backed more controversial legislation, including abortion.¹⁹ While NOW’s support of controversial issues would prove to be a liability for more pro-ERA lobbies in conservative states such as Georgia, NOW still reflected a more conservative approach to lobbying than more socially radical feminist organizations.

As the amendment gradually gained congressional support during the 1940s, 50s and 60s, a number of social changes were occurring that set the stage for the emergence of second wave feminism and the anti-feminist countermovement. In three decades, rapid changes in women’s socioeconomic and legal status created new opportunities for feminist organizations; however, such changes also introduced a level of tension that the anti-ERA movement would utilize to defeat the amendment in 1982.

The ten-year battle for the ERA developed on two fronts. Activists engaged the social and political upheavals of the post-war era. In many ways, the ratification debate developed into a broader discussion of women’s transitioning social roles and the resurgence of political conservatism. The foundation of amendment support and opposition reflects larger debates over the meaning of domesticity, women’s role in the workplace, and the role of the federal government in the lives of individual citizens.

The discussion of women’s social roles was an essential component of the public ERA debate. Definitions of women’s social roles provided by amendment proponents and opponents in the 1970s and 1980s were shaped by social shifts that had originated two decades before. In the 1950s, a new image of suburban domesticity entered into the American cultural conscious-

¹⁸ Betty Friedan, “Statement of Purpose,” In DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women’s Eyes*, 668.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 667.

ness. At the same time this domestic culture developed, it was subverted by changes in the workforce. Historian Elaine Tyler May describes a generation of women that idealized domesticity as increasing numbers of women expressed the desire to enter the home, rather than the workplace. Despite the growing idealization of domesticity, May argues that the role of “full-time housewife” increasingly became an economically unviable role as levels of middle class consumption rose. While married women were discouraged from working outside of the home, an increasing number of married women entered the workforce.²⁰

Even as the image of the housewife gained popularity in the 1950s, the idealized image of post-war domesticity failed to match the reality of a growing population of working wives and mothers. Amendment opponents may have presented the housewife as timeless role steeped in tradition, their depiction drew on images of the “professional” homemaker developed in the 1950s. Even at the height of domestic culture, the seeds of second-wave feminism were being planted, to later emerge in the cultural upheaval of the 1960s.

The development of the ratification debate was also influenced by the development of an increasingly strong grassroots challenge to the political liberalism of the 1960s. The strength of emerging anti-ERA coalitions reflected the success of conservatism. Liberal thought shaped the development of the civil rights legislation that feminists would use to challenge gender discrimination in state and federal courts, and the Left’s commitment to broadly defined equal rights legislation aids in the ERA’s congressional passage.

The emergence of New Right conservatism complicated the amendment debate, however. Analyses of grassroots conservatism suggest that conservative activists were educated, middle-class men and women who became involved the anticommunist movement and continued to

²⁰ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 167.

support single-issue campaigns such as the anti-ERA movement.²¹ By the time the ERA was presented for state consideration in 1972, the conservative movement had developed into a strong coalition capable of defeating an amendment that had gained widespread liberal support. When amendment opponents argued that the ERA would be used by the Supreme Court to introduce drastic social change, they were drawing on powerful conservative narratives. The social and political transitions of the 1950s and 1960s influenced the development of the later feminist and anti-feminist movements and the amendment ratification debate.

The feminist movement of the 1960s rapidly changed as younger feminists flocked to the emerging women's liberation movement. This new movement rejected the legislative reform proposed by NOW and instead sought to redefine the social concepts of sex and gender.²² Through consciousness-raising sessions and spontaneous demonstrations, women's liberationists sought to examine their personal experiences as women and address the "everyday" inequalities that the patriarchal system seemed to encourage.²³

While the women's liberation movement was decentralized and consisted of a loose conglomeration of groups across the country the attractive, single journalist Gloria Steinem became a recognized spokeswoman for the new movement.²⁴ In 1972, Steinem cofounded *Ms.* magazine, which would serve as a platform for the discussion of women's liberation issues.²⁵ Using her

²¹ For an introduction to the development of grassroots conservatism, see Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) and Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²² Women's liberation groups valued the development of small coalitions and individual validation, rejecting the more centralized organizational style of NOW. Consciousness-raising, small-group discussions that politicized the personal experiences of participants, was essential to the development of women's liberation. DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes*, 675-676.

²³ *Ibid*, 676.

²⁴ Susan J. Douglas. *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 227.

²⁵ Rosen, *World Split Open*, xxiii.

magazine and her growing fame, Steinem supported a radical reexamination of traditional social structures, and described marriage as a form of slavery that “makes you half a person.”²⁶

The rise of the women’s liberation movement and the reemergence of a strong feminist movement would invigorate the ERA debate; however a new wave of opposition to the amendment was also rising. Newly founded anti-ERA groups would not only challenge emerging women’s liberation groups, but would also force more conservative supporters to adapt their tactics and ideologies to an increasingly hostile debate which ERA advocates had failed to anticipate.

Just as Gloria Steinem became the face of the women’s liberation movement, Phyllis Schlafly became the voice of the anti-ERA movement. Through her organization, Stop ERA, Schlafly argued that the Equal Rights Amendment was a harmful amendment, supported by a minority of “women’s lib agitators” that failed to speak for the majority of American women.²⁷ Schlafly argued that the ERA would force housewives unwillingly enter the workforce and eliminate “women’s right to privacy,” ushering in forced equality and integration of sex-segregated public facilities, including restrooms.²⁸ In her book *The Power of the Positive Woman*, Schlafly wrote that women and men were inherently different and that true equality between the sexes was impossible. Instead of calling for equality, she suggested that women should embrace gender differences and find individual success within the current system.²⁹ Rather than being oppressed, women were privileged, protected by legislation that recognized the physical differences between men and women and social institutions such as marriage, in which women could expect to receive financial support from their husbands. Feminists created a narrative of patriarchal op-

²⁶ Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 231.

²⁷ Phyllis Schlafly, “The Fraud Called the Equal Rights Amendment,” May 1972, Jane Culbreth Papers, Birmingham Public Library Archives, Birmingham.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New Rochelle: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 14-16.

pression because they were unable to recognize the benefits of womanhood and fulfill their role as “positive women.”³⁰

Influenced by Schlafly’s rhetoric, amendment opponents throughout the nation argued that the ERA would eliminate traditional gender roles and harm the nuclear family. Anti-ERA rhetoric broadened the amendment debate, moving beyond a discussion of the potential legislative impact to address the larger social changes. Amendment opponents not only criticized the ERA, they also questioned the social impact of feminism itself. Instead of acknowledging the diversity of pro-ERA coalitions, amendment opponents identified all amendment supporters as radical feminists who were anti-marriage and anti-family. In anti-ERA rhetoric, amendment supporters were tied to the most socially radical contingent of the feminist movement, the women’s liberation movement. This simplified depiction of amendment proponents and opponents influenced how the ratification debate was framed in national media coverage.

As historian Susan J. Douglas suggests, the ERA debate was increasingly portrayed as a “catfight” between anti-ERA “conservatives” and the more socially “radical” women’s liberationists. This debate, Douglas argued, left women without a “moderate” example of women who supported the amendment, yet did not radically re-envision the social relationships between men and women. “Reeling between two very different visions of how women should behave and what they should aspire to, we searched for a resolution that gave us power but didn’t cost us love,” she wrote. “In this struggle, we got little help from the mass media, which seemed, when it came to women, only able to provide caricatures of extremists on each side.”³¹

³⁰ As Martha Solomon observes in her analysis of anti-ERA rhetoric: “The supporter of ERA is pictured not as a person who seeks to open up new possibilities for her sex but as a warped, negative misanthropist bent on spoiling for others what she herself cannot enjoy.” Martha Solomon, “The Rhetoric of STOP ERA: Fatalistic Reaffirmation,” *The Southern Speech Communication Journal* 44 (Fall 1978): 47.

³¹ Douglas, *Where the Girls Are* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 222.

Rather than addressing the complex views and perspectives among proponents and opponents, media coverage of the ERA reflected a relatively small number of views presented by a few national figures. The image of “radical” amendment supporters and “conservative” amendment opponents fails to reflect the true diversity within the ERA debate. Members of Georgia’s single-issue ERA coalitions were rarely radical “women’s libbers” that rejected family and religion; instead, they developed rhetoric that reflected not only a commitment to feminism, but also support of traditional women’s roles.

Historiography: The National Ratification Debate

While descriptions of the national ERA debate may not fully reflect the experiences of Georgia activists, analyses of the national movement are an essential factor of ERA historiography. In the years following defeat, scholars identified a number of legal factors that contributed to the ultimate failure of the ERA. Analyzing historical debates over previous amendments and considering the unique nature of the ratification process, early scholars contextualized the ERA’s defeat. Mary Berry, Janet Boles and Jane Mansbridge highlight a number of factors including ineffective organization among amendment supporters and the development of opposition in key states.

Analyzing the success and failure of previous Constitutional amendments, Mary Berry addresses a number of problems that the ERA and its supporters faced. Successful ratification required a consensus (or perceived consensus) both nationally and state-by-state; in order to gain the necessary level of support, ratification debates were lengthy and involved a deep level of local activism.³² In addition, for an amendment to be truly effective, the proposed legislation’s ef-

³² Berry, *Why ERA Failed*, 3.

fect must be clearly expressed and a majority of constituents must believe that passage is the only way to enact a societal change. In her case study of Prohibition, Berry argues that although the 18th amendment achieved an “artificial consensus” which led to its ratification, enforcement proved difficult and unpopular.³³ In case studies of two successful amendments related to women’s suffrage and the creation of the income tax, Berry points to the development of widespread regional support, extended public debate, and connection to larger social movements as major factors leading to ratification.³⁴ According to her historical analysis, amendments are most likely to be ratified “during periods of reform, and not during periods of reaction” when a majority believes that passage is necessary to enact an essential change.³⁵

Tracing the ERA’s history from its initial introduction in 1923 to its ultimate defeat in 1982, Berry addresses both the organizational failures of amendment supporters and the political atmosphere that shaped the debate. She argues that amendment supporters failed to anticipate the development of opposition and respond to the doubts raised by the anti-ERA.³⁶ Amendment opponents were more successful at developing grassroots support and spreading doubt about the ERA in unratified states, while pro-ERA coalitions were organized nationally and failed to gain the same level of state-by-state support.³⁷ Since proponents failed to anticipate and respond to the development of a strong countermovement, they organized late in the ratification process and remained ineffectively organized throughout the campaign. Late stage efforts such as the 1978 boycott of unratified states failed to sway the opposition and gain votes. Although the boycott brought increased attention to the ERA and placed pressure on leaders in large cities to push for

³³ Berry argues that support for the amendment was largely symbolic, rather than an actual desire for enforcement. *Ibid.*, 21, 29.

³⁴ For more information, see Chapter 2: “Adopting an Income Tax: The Sixteenth Amendment” *Ibid.*, 11-20 and Chapter 4: “Gaining Woman Suffrage: The Nineteenth Amendment” *Ibid.*, 30-44.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁶ Berry, *Why ERA Failed*, 64.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

ratification, it did not place pressure on legislators from rural areas whose support was essential.³⁸ Pro-ERA campaigns ultimately failed to address the concerns of a broad constituent base because their rhetoric appealed to a limited number of supporters and failed to effectively address the concerns of women in unratified states.

Despite the failures of pro-ERA coalitions, the amendment's failure can also be attributed to the changing political climate. Berry argues that the amendment gained widespread congressional support in 1972 following the successes of liberal social reform. "ERA came from a Democrat controlled Congress at the tail end of the civil rights and war on poverty movements of the 1960's," she writes.³⁹ Federal support for liberal reform efforts gave the ERA the consensus needed for passage; however, the same level of support did not exist throughout the nation. Opposition to federal control and social change remained strong in certain regions, particularly in the South, where racial reforms remained controversial.⁴⁰

Even though the ratification deadline was extended and women continued to gain legal advances through state and national rulings, such support did not translate into votes for the ERA. Instead, Berry argues that judicial support for gender equality and feminist goals undermined calls for the amendment's passage. Gradual legislative changes seemed to suggest that the ERA was unnecessary to challenge and rewrite discriminatory laws. Gender discrimination could be eliminated on a case-by-case basis, making the passage of a more sweeping amendment unnecessary.⁴¹ Questions over controversial issues such as abortion and the draft continued to burden the ERA as it was reintroduced to Congress for reconsideration in 1983. As legislators pro-

³⁸ Ibid., 68-69.

³⁹ Ibid., 82-83.

⁴⁰ Berry argues that amendment opponents tied the ERA to other social reform movements. "Governmental actions required to implement equality – school desegregation, busing, affirmative action – all became controversial and threatening to some people," she wrote. Ibid., 85.

⁴¹ Mary Berry, *Why ERA Failed*, 99.

posed revisions to the amendment, the ERA was transformed from a simple and sweeping declaration of women's equality to a complicated series of restrictive clauses.⁴² Both the language of the original amendment and previous legislative support had vanished after the amendment's failure in 1982.

Political Scientist Janet K. Boles also argues that the pro-ERA's lack of early organization and its national focus contributed to the ratification failure; she criticizes amendment supporters' efforts as "a case of too much, too late."⁴³ Utilizing interviews with supporters and opponents in Illinois, Texas and Georgia, Boles addresses why the ERA ultimately failed despite having strong early support from both political parties and a number of powerful national lobbies.⁴⁴ She identifies three major phases of the ratification debate: an early lobbying period from 1972-1977 when national organizations sought support for the amendment utilizing traditional fundraising and lobbying techniques, a second phase from 1977-1979 defined by the development of the national boycott which placed national pressure on unratified states and the successful ratification deadline extension, and a final phase from 1980-1982 when the ERA became the primary focus of a massive national mobilization and media campaign led by NOW.⁴⁵

National pro-ERA lobbies were most successful in gaining state ratification during the first phase before grassroots opposition had fully coalesced and public debate over the amendment was limited.⁴⁶ In this early period of the debate, national organizations that utilized traditional lobbying techniques and were able to provide money, experienced lobbyists and other re-

⁴² Ibid., 102.

⁴³ Janet K. Boles, "Building Support for the ERA: A Case of 'Too Much, Too Late,'" *PS* 15, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 572.

⁴⁴ Janet K. Boles, *The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment: Conflict and the Decision Process*, (New York: Longman, 1979), 3.

⁴⁵ Boles, *Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment*, 573-574.

⁴⁶ Amendment supporters gained a string of early successes, as 22 states ratified the amendment with little public or legislative opposition in 1972. Ibid., 3.

sources mobilized successfully.⁴⁷ As the amendment encountered increased opposition from anti-ERA coalitions, the focus of the debate shifted from traditional lobbying and an emphasis on educating legislators to a public opinion campaign that stressed public education and media attention.⁴⁸ Amendment opponents complicated the debate by casting doubt on the ERA's potential consequences, emphasizing a series of controversial gender issues that were unrelated to the legislation.⁴⁹ As the public debate of the amendment grew more and more heated, the anti-ERA shaped the debate by introducing new issues, identifying themselves as the defenders of family and tradition, and presenting an oversimplified image of "radical" amendment supporters.⁵⁰ Once the amendment entered the "community conflict" stage and public opinion took precedence over legal analysis of the amendment, the anti-ERA gained the upper hand.⁵¹

National pro-ERA lobbies had the resources to provide educational materials and influence legislators; however, such organizations faced significant challenges in responding to the doubts raised by the anti-ERA in the public arena. In addition to responding to unexpectedly heated and emotional debate, amendment supporters needed to convince constituents that the ERA would provide necessary change, which would prove especially difficult. "The side working for the adoption of a new policy is at a great disadvantage," Boles wrote. "Proponent campaigns almost inevitably are defensive in nature."⁵² Forced into a defensive rhetorical position, pro-ERA groups were unable to present an effective case for ratification.

Boles argues that the national media campaign undertaken by NOW was ill-suited to gaining support in unratified states because NOW was considered a radical organization that

⁴⁷ Boles, *Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment*, 15.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁵¹ Ibid., 15.

⁵² Ibid., 18.

failed to address the needs and interests of socially conservative women who were wary of the amendment's potential for social redefinition.⁵³ The national lobbying model that had benefited the pro-ERA in early ratification efforts would become a liability in states where the debate was prolonged and amendment opponents gained strength. Boles argues that when the ratification debate was publicly contested in states such as Georgia, the traditionally lobbying models of the national ERA were ineffective in crafting a response that addressed the specific needs of state constituents.

Finally, in *Why We Lost the ERA*, Jane Mansbridge writes that the ratification debate was complicated as amendment supporters and opponents exaggerated the results of the amendment. She conjectures that if the ERA had been ratified, it would have enacted limited legal changes immediately.⁵⁴ Rather than acknowledging the limited effects of the amendment, pro-ERA organizations continued to lend their support to controversial social transformation, arguing that the amendment would support drastic changes.⁵⁵

As anti-ERA forces gained strength, amendment supporters presented the amendment as a largely symbolic gesture suggesting that the amendment represented a general victory for "equal rights" rather than emphasizing the predicted legislative results of ratification. "Their implicit strategy was to get people to agree to the principle of equal rights, enshrine that principle in the Constitution, and then let the Supreme Court decide what this principle actually meant in practice," Mansbridge writes.⁵⁶ This symbolic approach failed to address anti-ERA concerns that the court would broadly interpret the amendment and enact radical changes.⁵⁷ A broadly written amendment remained unpopular among politically conservative opponents. Once opposition had

⁵³ Janet Boles, "Building Support for the ERA," 575.

⁵⁴ Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1.

⁵⁵ Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA*, 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

strengthened in a number of states, the ERA became a politically polarized issue and failed to gain ratification. Opponents saw this broad appeal to equality as a threat rather than a benefit. The legislative successes of other feminist efforts also weakened the pro-ERA's arguments for passage. As the Supreme Court passed down decisions that favored gender equality, amendment opponents argued that legal inequalities were sufficiently addressed under existing legislation.⁵⁸

A number of factors shape early analyses of the national ratification debate. Berry, Boles, and Mansbridge draw similar conclusions concerning the development of amendment support and the challenges facing amendment supporters. In their analysis of the ratification process, they argue that activists supporting legislative change face greater challenges than their counterparts. Supporters must not only create a national lobby to conduct research and gain Congressional approval, but also gain the necessary level of state consensus to gain and maintain support in at least 38 states. In order to succeed, pro-ERA coalitions needed to maintain a network of strong state organizations and prevent the development of strong state opposition. In contrast, amendment opponents only needed to create strong grassroots coalitions in a small number of states and introduce doubt that ratification was necessary and beneficial. Since they advocated reform, amendment supporters were already on the defensive, tasked with explaining why the ERA was essential. Once significant opposition had been introduced, chances for ratification were drastically reduced.

In addition to the general problems faced by all amendments, the ERA faced a number of specific challenges. Although the amendment was introduced at a time when a number of civil rights reforms had been passed, opposition to desegregation, busing, and other equal rights legislation was rising. During the state ratification process, opponents related the ERA to unpopular social and legislative changes. By opposing the amendment, state legislators could reaffirm their

⁵⁸ Ibid., 46-47.

support of state's rights and voice their disapproval of social changes mandated by the Supreme Court. Amendments that were narrowly defined were more likely to achieve ratification, while broadly defined legislation such as the ERA met with greater opposition.

Finally, Berry, Boles, and Mansbridge argue that the development of the pro-ERA movement also contributed to the amendment's ultimate failure. During the early stages of the Congressional debate, the amendment was supported by a number of national women's professional organizations rather than a specific pro-ERA lobby. In the final stages of the legislative debate in 1972, amendment supporters organized a coalition to provide research and educational materials to legislators. While this national approach was effective in reaching federal legislators, it proved less effective in developing support in key states. Pro-ERA coalitions failed to develop organized state coalitions in response to rising anti-ERA sentiment. This failure to adjust to the state ratification campaign allowed amendment opponents to gain ground, particularly in the South, where the amendment suffered its most resounding defeat.

The historiography of the national movement is largely legislative in scope. Rather than analyzing the organizational development of national ERA lobbies or discussing the development of pro and anti-ERA rhetoric, Berry, Boles, and Mansbridge devote most of their monographs to explaining the ratification process and contextualizing the ERA's defeat in relation to the success and failures of earlier amendments. By emphasizing the political nature of the debate, the historiography of national ratification provides only a limited analysis of the social dimensions of the debate and of the developing movement. Later analyses of the amendment debate in the South and in Georgia address how race, class, and social tradition influenced the debate.

The Amendment Moves South

While Southern historians have begun to address the impact of second-wave feminism and conservative backlash in the region, significant questions remain unanswered. The amendment gains only a passing reference in larger synthetic texts concerning the post-war South, which usually describe amendment supporters as a small coalition of white middle class professionals who largely ignore the interests of working class women or minorities.⁵⁹

However, a few monographs and journal articles more closely examine the ERA and the development of second-wave feminism in the South. These works identify and pursue a series of common themes within the regional movement, emphasizing how race and religion shaped the views of Southern women. In addition, the discussion of Southern distinctiveness is carefully weighed. While some scholars argue that the ERA debate in the South took on specifically regional characteristics, others argue that amendment supporters and opponents simply mirrored national debates. Three contrasting approaches to the ratification have shaped the historiography of second-wave feminism in the South.

In the first analyses of the second-wave feminism in the South, historians such as Sara Evans, Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart explore how Southern activists engaged and influenced the larger national debate, ultimately reflecting the same approach as national activists. In later analyses, historians argue that the feminist movement in the South develops apart from the national movement, typically arguing that the ERA fails to gain support in the South because feminism never gains a stronghold in the region. Finally, a new generation of scholars is more critically analyzing the convergence and divergence of national and local campaigns.

Stephanie Gilmore and Schuyler VanValkenburg argue that Southern feminists not only utilized

⁵⁹ See Numan Bartley, *The New South 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 425-428 and James C. Cobb, *The South and America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 228-229.

the organizational tactics of their national counterparts, but also addressed community concerns in a unique way that was not necessarily reflected within the larger movement.

As the ratification debate developed in the 1970s and 1980s, a number of scholars analyzed the development of ERA lobbies in the South. These studies represent the earliest scholarly analysis of the movement and influenced the first historical analyses of the amendment. In a survey of amendment supporters and opponents in North Carolina, political scientists Theodore S. Arrington and Patricia A. Kyle argued that both amendment supporters and opponents were members of a political elite which resembled “traditional” activists in socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and personality.⁶⁰

Arrington and Kyle surveyed four groups of activists: men and women who opposed the amendment, and men and women who supported the amendment.⁶¹ They found that amendment supporters were active in a variety of political campaigns while the anti-ERA coalition was comprised of individuals who had little or no previous political experience.⁶² In addition, they documented a number of differences between the women who rallied on opposite ends of the debate.

While women from both groups were married, middle aged and white, the majority of women opponents were stay-at-home housewives with less education than the three other groups. Approximately half of pro-ERA women identified themselves as working professionals, compared to only eight percent of the anti-ERA women surveyed.⁶³ Although minor socioeconomic differences can be identified between North Carolina activists and their national counterparts, this survey ultimately suggests that regional activists share many of the same socioeco-

⁶⁰ Theodore S. Arrington and Patricia A. Kyle, “Equal Rights Amendment Activists in North Carolina,” *Signs* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1978): 666-680.

⁶¹ Arrington and Kyle, “Equal Rights Amendment Activists in North Carolina,” 667.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 668-669.

⁶³ 52% of pro-ERA women surveyed identified themselves as professionals, compared to only 8% of female opponents. In contrast, only 13% of pro-ERA women identified themselves as full-time housewives, compared to 62% of anti-ERA women. Arrington and Kyle, “Equal Rights Amendment Activists in North Carolina,” *Ibid.*, 673.

conomic characteristics of the national activist elite that had previously been examined. Arrington and Kyle's survey of North Carolina activists provides insight into the racial, social and economic similarities between amendment supporters and opponents in the South, their conclusions are based on a relatively small number of survey responses.⁶⁴ In addition, their survey was completed in May 1975, so it fails to reflect later developments in the ratification debate.

In one of the first efforts to historicize the women's liberation movement, Sara Evans argues that the movement emerged as female activists began to challenge their secondary role in organizations such as SNCC and the SDS. Evans devotes a chapter to the influences shaping white women's activism within the civil rights movement, and their later challenges to the patriarchy. She argues that in order to challenge racism, activists also had to acknowledge the problematic racial connotations that surrounded images of "Southern white womanhood."⁶⁵ In order to overcome such images, she argues individuals such as Casey Cason (later Hayden) drew inspiration from their religious beliefs.⁶⁶

Evans ultimately draws a correlation between the religious student movements that swept Southern campuses in the 1960s with the earlier women's club movement that swept the South in the 1870s.⁶⁷ While both movements allowed Southern women to conceptualize new responses to an embedded racial and gender narrative, organizationally, the emerging liberation movement's decentralized structure reflected limited connections to the earlier mission societies.⁶⁸ In both leadership style and lobbying method, pro-ERA lobbies in Georgia reflected the earlier religious clubs more closely than the liberation movement. Evans also suggests that the ERA debate

⁶⁴ Arrington and Kyle base their findings on a collection of 89 surveys that included responses from only 14 anti-ERA women and 37 pro-ERA women. *Ibid.*, 667.

⁶⁵ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics*, 25.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 29, 27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 222-223.

forged stronger ties between “women’s rights” groups, which were primarily interested in legislative issues, and the liberation movement, which emphasized the radical reinterpretation of gender roles within society. While the Congressional debate may have united conservative and radical feminists, the heated ratification debates in the South encouraged the development of tension, rather than unity.⁶⁹

One of the first notable case studies of the ERA in the South, Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart’s *Sex, Gender, and The Politics of ERA: A State and a Nation* examines the development of the ratification debate in North Carolina. However, Mathews and De Hart conclude that state debates reflected the national atmosphere of the amendment debate, rather than suggesting a uniquely regional approach.⁷⁰ Utilizing state legislative records; the papers of U.S. Senator Sam Ervin, one of the major opponents of the bill; and interviews conducted with amendment proponents and opponents, Mathews and De Hart argue that the ratification debate not only represented a discussion of the amendment itself, but also sheds light on a deeper questioning of feminism. They suggest that the concerns of amendment supporters and opponents reflected fundamentally different approaches to defining womanhood. Pro-ERA activists utilized the analytical construct of “gender,” which suggests that many of the differences between men and women are socially constructed, rather than biologically predetermined.⁷¹ Amendment opponents defended more traditional, “antimodern” interpretations of “sex” as a series of divisions that were determined by biology, rather than custom.⁷²

This close attention to differing visions of womanhood makes Mathews’ and De Hart’s analysis particularly valuable. Their chapters on connections between the ERA and the earlier

⁶⁹ Ibid., 217.

⁷⁰ 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), xi.

⁷¹ Ibid., xii-xiii.

⁷² Ibid., xi.

suffrage movement are also notable, and will be addressed more closely in a later discussion of first wave feminism. Finally, while Mathews and De Hart make a strong case against Southern exceptionalism, their use of “national” figures with North Carolina connections may have influenced their conclusions, as their chapter devoted to national amendment opponent Sam Ervin suggests.

In a later article entitled “Second Wave Feminism(s) in the South: The Differences that Difference Makes,” De Hart argues that the region led the nation by addressing how the “differences” of class and race influenced the development of the feminist movement. Rather than being “a stunted offshoot of a more powerful national movement,” she writes instead that Southern feminism is “representative of the mainstream movement.”⁷³ Emphasizing the development of African American feminism, De Hart suggests that black women created an alternative vision of feminism in order to address both racial and gender inequalities. Rather than lagging behind national feminists, she argues that Southern women addressed the difficulties of racial and economic differences earlier than their national counterparts. “Southern feminists confronted issues of gender, race, and class as well as questions about the definition of feminism that were dealt with in the ideology and scholarship of the national movement a full decade later,” De Hart wrote. “Thus, southerners were among the first feminist to learn the difference that differences make.”⁷⁴ While De Hart argues that an analysis of Southern feminisms can ultimately enrich and diversify the historical analysis of second wave feminism, she concludes that Southern feminism is not regionally distinct, but reflects the development of the larger movement.

The discussion of regional distinctiveness is essential to the conclusions of Evans and Mathews and De Hart. Evans argues that young activist’s involvement in the civil rights cam-

⁷³ Jane Sherron De Hart, “Second Wave Feminism(s) and the South,” in *Women of the American South: A Multicultural Reader*, ed. Christie Anne Farnham (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 282.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 275.

paigns throughout the South was essential to the development of the women's liberation movement. Through the experience of challenging racism in Southern society and sexism within civil rights organizations, Evans argues that the leaders of the liberation movement first learned to articulate narratives of patriarchal expression and politicize their personal experiences. Unlike Evans, Mathews and De Hart argue regional distinctiveness played a limited role in the development of the ratification debate in the South. Instead, they argue that activists in North Carolina reflected national, rather than local, interests. Although they disagree about the importance of regional differences in the development of the ratification debate, both Evans and Mathews and De Hart devote much of their research to proving or disproving Southern distinctiveness in the development of second-wave feminism; they also agree that the Southern movement ultimately reflects or influences the larger feminist movement, rather than developing apart from the national movement. Southern feminism may have developed at a different pace than the national movement, but these scholars ultimately conclude that regional differences do not significantly influence the ERA debate or the development of second wave feminism in the South.

A second group of scholars has rejected the assertion that Southern feminism merely reflects national concerns. Instead, they argue that the regional movement develops apart from its national counterpart, addressing distinctive regional concerns and developing a unique rhetorical approach. In her synthetic narrative of Southern women's history, Margaret Ripley Wolfe argues that the Equal Rights Amendment failed to gain widespread support in the region because second wave feminism did not appeal to Southern women. Instead, Wolfe writes that the national movement alienated a core group of professional women that might have otherwise lent support

to the ERA.⁷⁵ Ratification failed because feminism failed in the South, not because national political concerns were reflected more strongly in the region.

Joan Carver argues that the distinctive political culture of Florida resulted in a close and prolonged legislative debate. Split between rural and urban constituents and “traditional” and “liberal” political cultures, the amendment was debated five times between 1972 and 1979.⁷⁶ Carver argues that the legislative debate was relatively uncontroversial during the initial vote in 1972, but stalled as the ratification debate shifted from a legislative debate over the legal intent of the amendment to a public debate over the symbolic meaning of gender equality.⁷⁷ Although amendment supporters in Florida gained significant national attention and support, the state ratification debate reflected a number of uniquely Southern concerns.⁷⁸ As the debate grew increasingly heated discussions of states rights became a central issue.⁷⁹ Carver’s concern with the unique political atmosphere of Florida and the state’s rights debate suggests that the state legislative debate developed in a distinctive way.

A final group of scholars studying second-wave feminism in the South has more closely analyzed the ways in which local and national organizations have converged and diverged. Stephanie Gilmore complicates the discussion of local and national feminist interaction by critically considering organizational differences that emerged. Gilmore addresses possible connections between radical and moderate feminists in her analysis of a series of campaigns staged by the Memphis branch of the National Organization for Women. Gilmore argues that although scholars have created a division between liberal and radical feminist organizations, such divi-

⁷⁵ Margaret Ripley Wolfe, *Daughters of Canaan: A Saga of Southern Women* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 198.

⁷⁶ The amendment was voted on in 1973, 1974, 1975, 1977, and 1979. Joan S. Carver, “The Equal Rights Amendment and the Florida Legislature,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (1982): 457-458.

⁷⁷ Carver, “The Equal Rights Amendment and the Florida Legislature,” 480.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 457.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 470.

sions were tenuous at best. She defines the terms “liberal” and “radical” largely along organizational rather than ideological differences, suggesting that liberal organizations championed legislative causes and were organized bureaucratically, while radical organizations were defined by their grassroots, nonhierarchical approach to social issues such as domestic violence and the commodification of women.⁸⁰ Gilmore draws examples from two case studies to address the liberal and radical activism of Memphis’ NOW chapter. She argues that the organization displayed a liberal approach to the Equal Rights Amendment, limiting their activism to the traditional lobbying tactic of letter writing and failing to address anti-ERA rhetoric that was deeply tied to definitions of traditional Southern womanhood.⁸¹ In contrast, NOW used more radical techniques when protesting domestic abuse and pornography, staging marches and relying on grassroots techniques to raise awareness and create a system of shelters for victimized women.⁸² Ultimately, Gilmore argues that “lived feminism” is neither liberal nor radical, but a combination of both.⁸³

While Gilmore’s questioning of the divisions drawn between liberal and radical organizations complicates the discussion of second wave feminism, her analysis primarily emphasizes organizational divisions, rather than ideological divisions within the movement. In addition, her analysis of NOW provides a fresh look at how the goals of national and local feminist coalitions may diverge. Nevertheless, such an analysis of feminist coalitions fails to introduce the presence of more narrowly defined single-issue lobbies, organizations that supported the ERA but developed less strict ties to multi-issue feminist groups. Such lobbies coded their support of the amendment in much different ways, avoiding controversial topics which larger feminist organi-

⁸⁰ Stephanie Gilmore, “The Dynamics of Second-Wave Feminist Activism in Memphis, 1971-1982: Rethinking the Liberal/Radical Divide,” *NWSA Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 95.

⁸¹ Gilmore, “Dynamics of Second-Wave Feminist Activism in Memphis,” 100-104.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 105-110.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 96.

zations were forced to address. Therefore, one can suggest that such single-issue lobbies exhibit a more conservative feminism, drawing imagery from first wave feminism, as well as exploring new organizational models presented by newer feminist organizations.

Schuyler VanValkenburg adopts much the same approach in her analysis of the NOW chapter founded in Richmond, Virginia.⁸⁴ VanValkenburg argues that Richmond NOW's activism can not be defined as either liberal or radical, as the movement utilized a variety of liberal, radical, and conservative approaches.⁸⁵ She also argues that individual organizations expressed a level of autonomy apart from the national movement, picking and choosing which approaches best suited their cause rather than strictly adhering to the national organization's goals or lobbying tactics.⁸⁶

Studies of ratification in the South emphasize the intersections between local and national organizations. Sara Evans and Jane Sherron De Hart argue that Southern feminists were at the forefront of the national movement, influencing the development of the women's liberation movement and addressing the complexities of race and class. A second group of scholars has argued that regional debate develops separately, with unique local concerns deeply shaping the tenor and approach of Southern ERA lobbies. The final school of historiography suggests that while the national movement influences the development of Southern feminism, a number of distinct characteristics also develop within local movements. Analyses of the Georgia debate address questions of regional distinction, but also address the issues of race and social traditionalism in greater detail.

⁸⁴ Schuyler VanValkenburg, "Defying Labels: Richmond NOW's Multi-Generational Dynamism," (Master's Thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010). <https://digarchive.library.vcu.edu/handle/10156/3014>.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

The ERA In Georgia

In addition to analyses of national and regional debates, there is a developing body of scholarship concerning the ratification debate in Georgia. In his unpublished thesis, Jeffery G. Jones addresses the development and division of amendment coalitions in the state, arguing that the development of coalitions such as Georgians for the Equal Rights Amendment and the Council for the ERA reflected a radical/moderate split among women and organizations supporting the amendment.⁸⁷ While Jones discusses the development of a coalition of “conservative feminists” who supported the amendment and other legislative changes while rejecting women’s liberation and shifting social roles, he argues that their dissatisfaction with radical feminism stemmed from a deep connection to the image of gentility and femininity represented by earlier depictions of “southern womanhood” rather than an attempt to address the concerns of amendment opponents.⁸⁸

An examination of personal correspondence penned by amendment supporters in Georgia presents a different narrative. While such women may have publicly rejected interactions with radical feminists and controversial national figures, they privately drew support and encouragement from such “radicals,” and expressed the desire to create a more diverse coalition. Southern identity undoubtedly played a significant role in the ratification debate. Nevertheless, the movement by conservative amendment supporters to distance themselves from controversial issues was also a strategic move to address concerns raised by amendment opponents.

In “Stop Taking Our Privileges: The Anti-ERA Movement in Georgia, 1978-1982,” Kristina M. Graves also argues that amendment supporters in Georgia express a different style of ac-

⁸⁷ Jones argues that G-ERA represented the concerns of radical organizations, while Council for the ERA reflected the views of older and more traditional organizations, such as the League of Women Voters; this organizational split occurred in 1973. The Council would later become ERA Georgia. See Jones, “Georgia and the Equal Rights Amendment,” 45-49.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

tivism than national feminist organizations which supported the amendment, taking a “diplomatic, often concessionary approach to equality” in an attempt to avoid connections radical feminism, and presented their cause as part of a single-issue movement for legal equality, rather than part of a larger crusade against the patriarchy.⁸⁹ Graves also suggests amendment supporters equivocated their connections to the broader feminist movement; however, she fails to address how such activists created rhetorical images of conservative feminism, drawing on their roles as mothers, wives, church members and activists to justify their support of the amendment.⁹⁰

Although she briefly draws on oral histories and manuscript collections compiled by amendment supporters, Graves’ analysis primarily focuses on the development of anti-ERA coalitions in Georgia. Ultimately, she argues that amendment opponents in Georgia represented a larger national movement of women that staunchly defended women’s traditional roles in a time in which such roles were challenged by the feminist movement. She suggests that in order to fully understand the development of contemporary women’s history “we must open ourselves up to the possibility that the women’s movement was actually two separate movements, one that advocated equality and liberation and another that advocated for protection and traditional roles.”⁹¹

Graves’ identification of the anti-ERA movement as a second flank of the women’s movement rather than as an irrational or reactionary movement that failed to address the needs or desires of women presents an interesting set of questions concerning how historians approach feminism. Should feminism be defined as a radical social movement to redefine gender norms, or is there also a place in the narrative to discuss socially conservative feminists? If so, should such activists be identified as women whose calls for social change were undermined by the need to

⁸⁹ Kristina M. Graves, “Stop Taking Our Privileges: The Anti-ERA Movement in Georgia, 1978-1982,” (Master’s Thesis, Georgia State University, 2006), 41-42. http://digitalarchive.gsu.edu/history_theses/12.

⁹⁰ Graves, “Stop Taking our Privileges,” 43.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

reach more conservative audiences, or does their rhetoric reflect a personal adherence to earlier definitions of womanhood? Or does their rhetoric reflect a combination of both individual conservatism and a response to anti-ERA concerns? While these questions cannot be definitively answered, an analysis of movement publications and personal activist's correspondence suggests that amendment supporters in Georgia reflected some combination of both social conservatism and a desire for broader change that is undermined by the need to address conservative opponents of the amendment.

Both Jones and Graves describe a pro-ERA movement in Georgia that reflected a more socially conservative tone than nationally recognized feminists such as Gloria Steinem. Jones argues that this social conservatism arose from activist's deeply rooted commitment to earlier visions of "Southern womanhood." Graves takes an alternative approach, arguing that amendment supporters in Georgia avoided connections to perceived radicalism and adopted "concessionary" language in order to appease potential critics and craft a definition of feminism "that could be explained and justified to the men in their lives."⁹²

Both approaches require consideration. Pro-ERA publications suggest a direct and pragmatic response to the concerns of amendment opponents, often addressing the needs of the anti-ERA's targeted group of "average" housewives and stressing the amendment's potential for political, rather than social, change. In oral histories and letters, many amendment supporters suggest a deep personal connection to conservative images of motherhood, the family, and Southern evangelical tradition. However, other letters and intra-organizational publications express challenges to such traditional approaches.

A final unpublished thesis addressed the activism of black women in the Georgia ratification debates. In "Searching for Sisterhood: Black Women, Race and the Georgia ERA," Jennifer

⁹² Graves, "Stop Taking Our Privileges," 41.

Powell Gonzalez discusses the role that black activists and racial rhetoric played in framing the discussion of the amendment in Georgia. Gonzalez argues that the historiography of second wave feminism and the ERA, typified by the early contributions of Mary Berry, Janet Boles and Sarah Evans, created an enduring interpretation of second wave feminism as movement dominated by white, middle class activists who address the split between liberal and radical definitions of feminism, rather than directly addressing issues of race.

Using oral histories and manuscript collections housed at Georgia State University, Gonzalez argues that black women were active in pro-ERA lobbies such as ERA Georgia. In addition, she argues that amendment supporters drew inspiration from the civil rights movement, and created pamphlets and other resources to encourage black women to view the ERA as civil rights legislation, rather than strictly as a “women’s issue.” Amendment opponents gained little or no support from black women, but they used references to “states rights” and other issues which was coded to appeal to the racial sentiments of white southerners who opposed the civil rights movement. Because of such debates over the issue of race, Gonzalez argues that ERA debates in the South were inherently different from ratification debates in the rest of the country.⁹³

Description of Project

While scholars of amendment ratification in Georgia have closely analyzed the evolution of the state legislative debate, the organizational formation of amendment support and opposition, and the influence of race in shaping ratification debate. However, a significant gap exists in

⁹³Jennifer Powell Gonzalez, “Searching for Sisterhood: Black Women, Race and the Georgia ERA,” (Master’s Thesis, Georgia State University, 2006). http://digitalarchive.gsu.edu/history_theses/3.

current state, regional, and national historiography. The majority of monographs and articles addressing the development of the ratification debate address either the political aspects of ratification or the development of pro-ERA organization. Such studies fail to closely address the development of the public rhetoric developed by amendment supporters. In addition, these analyses also fail to address the internal dynamics of pro-ERA lobbies. Using newspaper articles, pamphlets, internal memos and personal correspondence, I will analyze the public and private discourse of pro-ERA activists in Georgia.

The next chapter will analyze how the local media framed the ERA debate and address the institutional rhetoric developed by amendment supporters in educational pamphlets. An analysis of these pamphlets suggest that national organizations craft a more targeted and emotional appeal in support of the amendment than local pro-ERA lobbies, which focus on producing a more concise analysis of how the amendment's passage would affect Georgia law. In addition, instead of providing coverage of a diverse group of issues, these general interest pamphlets addresses the concerns of housewives, reflecting amendment supporters' attempts to appropriate and refine an image first created by the anti-ERA.

In the third chapter, I will address the development of personal discourse. This chapter examines both the public and private letters of Georgia activists to analyze the emotional arguments presented on behalf the amendment, as well as discussing the ways in which women defined their activism and their movement. Although previous historical analyses have argued that pro-ERA rhetoric was logical and anti-ERA rhetoric was emotional, the personal discourse of amendment supporters suggests that there is both an institutional/logical approach to the amendment as well as an individual/private approach. While amendment supporters privately expressed

a desire to reach a more diverse group of women, activists' public testimony presented a socially conservative image that would appeal to a small group of mostly white, middle class women.

Ultimately, amendment supporters in Georgia walked a fine line between tradition and transformation. Amendment supporters recognized value of women's traditional social roles, and their rhetoric suggests a desire to gain support from socially conservative women. Through their personal reflections they expressed the desire to address the needs of a broader coalition of women and offer practical legislative solutions for women whose needs were not addressed by the image of the stay-at-home housewife. However, their attempts to respond to the traditional images presented by the anti-ERA limited their ability to address the concerns of a more diverse group of women.

Chapter 2 Building Bridges, Influencing Discourse: Moderation in ERA Rhetoric

Introduction

In 1976, readers of Georgia newspapers such as the *Atlanta Journal* were presented with a number of conflicting depictions of feminism. Newspaper articles, editorials and political cartoons alternately depicted the movement as floundering or triumphant. On January 1, an article chronicled the failures of International Women's Year; "1975 Was a Dismal Year For Most Women's Causes" the headline declared.⁹⁴ Although Georgia women highlighted some legal successes, the wage gap and other economic inequalities remained a concern. The article suggested that International Women's Year resulted in limited advancements for feminist issues; while IWY was not a complete failure, the newspaper described it as a disappointment.

Four days later, an editorial cartoon presented an image of an active and successful movement. Under the banner "Leap Year 1976," a determined woman identified as "women's lib" chased down a beleaguered "male chauvinist," rapidly gaining ground.⁹⁵ The woman was depicted in an aggressive, even angry stance, which could be considered a negative depiction of feminism. However, considering the "leap year" banner, the leaping woman and the frightened chauvinist, the cartoon suggested that even though feminists (or more specifically, women's liberationists) were aggressive, they could successfully "leap" over chauvinism and make gains for women. Despite the perceived failures of the previous year, the feminist movement was still identified as a powerful coalition that could ultimately achieve its goals.

In Georgia, media coverage of the Equal Rights Amendment debate and transitions within the broader feminist movement reflected questioning of women's shifting social roles and

⁹⁴ Helen C. Smith, "1975 Was a Dismal Year For Most Women's Causes," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, January 1, 1976.

⁹⁵ "Leap Year 1976," Editorial Cartoon, *Atlanta Journal*, January 5, 1976.

concern over the perceived aggressiveness of national feminist movement. Local coverage of women's issues often reflected a tone of ambivalence, reporting divisions and conflicts within the feminist movement while seriously addressing the concerns voiced by feminists. Pro-ERA coalitions in Georgia were aware of the discussions surrounding the feminist movement, and they took local media coverage into account when shaping their rhetoric. Addressing conflicting depictions of the feminist movement, amendment supporters could have chosen to enter the debate by aggressively pushing for a radical redefinition of social roles. Instead, most pro-ERA coalitions in Georgia distanced themselves from the most radical contingents of the feminist movement and presented a more conservative legal defense of the amendment. This strategy allowed amendment supporters to address the concerns of socially conservative Georgians and amendment opponents; however, by addressing these more conservative audiences, they limited their ability to engage a broader and more diverse audience.

Methodology: What is Discourse?

Amendment supporters crafted a nuanced defense of the ERA; however, their rhetoric did not develop independently. Instead, pro-ERA rhetoric developed in response to concerns presented by amendment opponents, the local media, and the general public. In shaping educational materials and advertising, single-issue lobbies avoided discussion of controversial topics, deemphasized potential social changes, and disassociated the ERA from radical national figures. Rather than developing a standalone discussion of the amendment, pro-ERA groups in Georgia engaged the rhetoric of amendment opponents. In order to contextualize the activism of amendment supporters, it is necessary to examine the nature of the broader discourse concerning the amendment.

The term “discourse” is an interdisciplinary concept defined and utilized by linguists, sociologists, and historians. Broadly defined, discourse refers to the way in which symbols and statements are defined and redefined during the process of discussion and dissemination. While rooted in linguistic theory, discourse has moved beyond the study of text to explore actions and visual symbols. Any action or image that can be imbued with social meaning may be considered part of a larger discourse.⁹⁶

Symbolic action is an essential component of discourse; however, interpretation of such actions is also important. Debate is necessary for the development of discourse. As diverse groups discuss an issue, the initial parameters of the debate shift. As Robert Perinbanayagam writes, discourse can be defined as “an interactional act capable of containing multiple significations, all of them delineating a self and an other in varying forms of dialogues and relationships.”⁹⁷ Even a single text within a larger discourse can address a number of concerns and address multiple audiences; Mikhail Bakhtin argues that texts exhibit *heteroglossia*, engaging multiple approaches at once.⁹⁸ By participating in discourse, individuals and organizations engage the ideas of others, and create new definitions of their organization and their cause through such interactions.

Re-occurring symbols are defined and redefined throughout the course of a debate. For example, in discussions of the housewives’ role, there is a noticeable shift between anti-ERA rhetoric (which presented the housewife as threatened by feminism and the ERA) and pro-ERA rhetoric (which identified the housewife as an unequal partner in the family, unable to care adequately for her children without the amendment). Although amendment proponents and oppo-

⁹⁶ Jan Blommaert, *Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

⁹⁷ Robert S. Perinbanayagam, *Discursive Acts: Languages, Signs, and Selves* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011), xiv.

⁹⁸ Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland, “Introduction: Perspectives on Discourse Analysis” in *The Discourse Reader*, ed. Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland (New York: Routledge, 1999), 9.

nents both utilized the same image of “traditional housewife,” they defined the housewife’s social role and relationship to the amendment in very different ways.

Feminist scholars have further expanded the field of discourse analysis by emphasizing the ways in which power is expressed and subverted within discursive space. Feminist definitions of discourse engages Foucault, who argues that power is “a dispersed and decentered force that is hard to grasp and posses fully.”⁹⁹ Just as definitions of symbols and power are broadly defined, sites of discourse also vary broadly, as participants engage in debates “from courtrooms to street corners.”¹⁰⁰ Wherever actors can engage in debate, discourse flourishes, establishing and reestablishing societal norms. By engaging in discourse, individuals critically consider their definitions of themselves, their community, and their opponents.

Defining the ERA debate as a discourse and identifying amendment supporters and opponents as actors clarifies further discussion of how and where the ratification debate took shape, as well as examining definitions introduced by proponents and opponents. Discussion of the amendment took shape in three major discursive sites: in local media coverage, in public relations material published and distributed by pro-ERA lobbies, and in the personal letters and interviews of individual activists. In this chapter, I will address media coverage and institutional rhetoric; I will discuss private discourse in chapter three. Faced with conservative media coverage and strong anti-ERA rhetoric, amendment supporters in Georgia modified their organizational rhetoric to address the concerns over how the amendment would affect families and alter social relationships between men and women.

⁹⁹ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 8.

¹⁰⁰ Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class and Citizenship*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 79.

Attempting to placate amendment opponents and socially conservative citizens and legislators, pro-ERA lobbies in Georgia avoided comparisons to unpopular national feminist figures and organizations, relied on legislative analysis rather than emotional rhetoric, and attempted to address the concerns of amendment opponents and reach the anti-ERA's core audience of traditional housewives and mothers. Moderating the national and local debates and analyzing the rhetoric of amendment opponents, amendment supporters contributed to local discourse by creating a defense of the amendment that also validated traditional women's roles.

Media Discussion of the Amendment

In 1976, Atlanta councilwoman Panke Bradley observed that the feminist movement had failed to address the concerns of socially conservative wives and mothers, women whose involvement was essential to the growth of the movement. "They are the women who value their woman's role and seem to feel that many of the more militant elements are putting down their wifehood and motherhood," she declared. "People like me have a role to play as a bridge. I can identify with both and don't see the two as mutually exclusive."¹⁰¹

During the Equal Rights Amendment debate, amendment supporters in Georgia sought to bridge the gap between amendment opponents and traditional constituents who were wary of the amendment and the emerging women's liberation movement. Influenced by anti-ERA depictions of feminists as radical and anti-family, many citizens and legislators believed that the ERA would introduce unwanted social changes. Amendment supporters in Georgia carefully moderated the local debate, introducing alternate images of feminism and downplaying the social

¹⁰¹ Helen C. Smith, "1975 Was a Dismal Year for Most Women's Causes," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, January 1, 1976.

changes that the amendment could potentially introduce. Local media coverage illustrated the depictions of radical feminists and amendment opponents that influenced pro-ERA rhetoric.

For amendment supporters in Georgia, connections to national feminists were often a burden, rather than a benefit. In local newspapers, discussion of national feminist figures was limited and often presented an unfavorable depiction of feminism. This suspicion of national feminism can be gauged by briefly examining the local media's portrayal of Betty Friedan.

Author of *The Feminine Mystique*, a formative work of feminist thought, and the first president of NOW, Friedan was a well-known feminist spokeswoman. Rather than emphasizing the advances of second wave feminism when Friedan visited Atlanta in 1976, local media coverage emphasized divisions within NOW. In an article published by the *Atlanta Journal*, Friedan frankly discussed the need to address fragmentations within the movement. "We have to find out exactly who is betraying us and move on," Friedan declared.¹⁰² Although NOW was described as a "conservative" feminist coalition, the discussion of divisions within the movement suggested that the movement was struggling. The article also suggests that "conservative" and "radical" were common distinctions utilized to describe the feminist movement. Rather than emphasizing the successes of feminism, the article emphasized its failures.

A parallel can be drawn between the relatively negative portrayal of Friedan and the feminist movement with another profile of Friedan published a year later in the *Atlanta Constitution*. The newspaper published a personal essay written by Friedan detailing her "reclamation" of cooking, a traditionally domestic task that she had previously abandoned. However, she denied that reentering the kitchen reflected a return to pre-feminist domesticity. "No, I am not announcing public defection from the women's movement," she wrote. "I think in fact I'm just coming out on the other end of women's liberation." While Friedan emphasized the reclamation of cook-

¹⁰² Jean Tyson, "NOW Facing Its Problems, Friedan Says," *Atlanta Journal*, January 9, 1976.

ing as a self-fulfilling art, rather than a burden, the local headline deemphasized this redefinition and simply declared: “A Rediscovery: Betty Friedan Finds Her Own Roots Again.”¹⁰³ As a feminist leader, Friedan addressed concerns of movement divisions and radicalism; by emphasizing such accusations rather than the causes that Friedan championed, local newspapers questioned the effectiveness of the national movement, and by extension, Friedan’s leadership. A year later, Friedan the chef received positive media coverage for “rediscovering” her traditional roots. When feminists declared a commitment to women’s traditional social roles, they received positive local coverage; when they failed to discuss women’s traditional roles or rejected those traditions outright, they were regarded with suspicion.

In response, Georgia pro-ERA coalitions limited their public connections to the most controversial national figures. In 1974, a rift developed between moderate and radical amendment supporters in Georgia, in part over a pro-ERA parade featuring Gloria Steinem.¹⁰⁴ The most militant organizations, including the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance and the Socialist Workers Party, supported the proposed march while more traditional amendment supporters opposed Steinem’s participation.¹⁰⁵ Amendment supporters split into two separate organizations. Georgians for the ERA (G-ERA) was a coalition of the more radical organizations, while the Georgia Coalition for the ERA represented the interests of more mainstream supporters, such as local chapters of the League of Women Voters and the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Betty Friedan, “A Rediscovery: Betty Friedan Finds Her Own Roots Again,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 20, 1977. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers, W003, Donna Novak Coles Georgia Women’s Movement Collection. Georgia State University Library, Atlanta.

¹⁰⁴ Jones, “Georgia and the Equal Rights Amendment,” 46.

¹⁰⁵ Boles, *The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment*, 76.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

While conservative pro-ERA organizations and activists maintained some level of contact with national feminist leaders and “controversial” amendment supporters, they typically relied on more conservative national and local figures to publicly campaign for the ERA. Local activists such as Margaret Miller Curtis, a prolific letter writer and a member of ERA Georgia, acknowledged that such national figures “were not all that different from other women, just far more outspoken about their views,” local depictions of outspoken feminists as “strident, radical man-haters” limited moderate amendment supporters’ public connections to many well-known feminist spokeswomen such as Friedan and Steinem.¹⁰⁷

Local amendment supporters avoided connections to radical figures, instead introducing new spokeswomen who were portrayed as traditional housewives and mothers, rather than militant women’s liberationists. Popular speakers included women such as Anne Follis, the president of the national Housewives for the Equal Rights Amendment (HERA). One Marietta reporter offered the following description of the HERA leader: “Anne Follis is very feminine, and very pretty, and would very much like to stay at home in Urbana, Ill. with her Methodist minister husband Dean and their three small children.”¹⁰⁸ By describing Follis as a feminine wife, mother and Methodist, the reporter challenged anti-ERA depictions of amendment supporters as radical, anti-family, anti-Christian “women’s libbers.” Follis’s approach was so effective that amendment supporters donated copies of her book to area churches. The book reflected the socially conservative image amendment supporters in Georgia sought to emulate; rather than donating other contemporary works that critically engaged women’s liberation, local supporters provided a

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Miller Curtis, *Life as a Feminist in Georgia: A Personal Recollection* (Atlanta: Georgia State University Women’s Collection, 2010), 57.

¹⁰⁸ Maggie Willis, “Housewife Anne Follis Travels for Equal Rights Law,” *Marietta Daily Journal*, November 7, 1978. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

more moderate selection.¹⁰⁹ Spokeswomen such as Anne Follis that identified themselves as conservative women seeking legislative change rather than social reform received positive media coverage in Georgia. By reconciling amendment support with family and religious commitments, such spokeswomen attempted to bridge the gap between traditional opponents and radical feminists.

Georgians with national connections were also effective supporters of the amendment. Members of the Carter family were especially outspoken in support of the amendment. In an ERA briefing, Jimmy Carter addressed the need to address questions about the amendment state-by-state and described his efforts to campaign for ratification in Georgia. “We all need to understand the particular feeling and political philosophy that prevails in the unratified states,” Carter declared. “We can’t expect New York principles and ideals and political attitudes to be the same as they are in South Carolina, North, Carolina, Georgia – and Florida, or even Illinois.”¹¹⁰ In recognizing regional distinctions, Carter addressed a unique characteristic of the ratification debate. Amendment supporters in Georgia could not rely on the unpopular rhetoric of many national organizations; instead, they formulated their own response to local concerns.

Georgia media outlets addressed the “Carter connection” to the ERA, discussing the first family’s participation in pro-ERA campaigns. Local newspapers covered the local lobbying efforts of the President and First Lady.¹¹¹ Daughter-in-law Judy Carter became an outspoken ERA supporter, rejecting anti-ERA claims that the amendment would harm the family. “Georgia law

¹⁰⁹ Anne Bowen Follis, *I’m Not a Women’s Libber, But* (New York: Avon, 1981). For an alternative analysis of religion and women’s liberation, see Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women’s Liberation* (Waco: Word Books, 1974).

¹¹⁰ Jimmy Carter, “Remarks White House ERA Briefing,” February 12, 1980. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹¹¹ Selby McCash, “Rosalynn Promotes ERA in Breakfast Talk Here,” *Atlanta Journal*, undated clipping. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers. Frederick Allen, “Aide Questions Report of Busbee-ERA Pledge to Carter,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 27, 1979. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

won't be pro-family as long as we deny equal rights to half the parents in the state," Carter said, speaking on behalf of Georgia wives and mothers.¹¹²

The Carter family's support of the ERA strengthened the rhetoric of pro-ERA lobbies in Georgia. Amendment supporters seized the opportunity to champion their cause, arguing that as Jimmy Carter launched the state into the political spotlight, the Georgia legislature should also lead by passing the ERA. *Atlanta Journal Constitution* columnist Carole Ashkinaze drew a direct connection between Carter's election and the amendment's failure. She wrote:

It seems to me a sad commentary on the state of our thinking in Georgia that we could send a devout and highly principled man, who is strongly in favor of the ERA, to the White House, yet deny 51.3 per cent of the voters who elected him the right to first-class citizenry in the eyes of the rest of the nation, and the law.¹¹³

Ashkinaze's comment not only reflected the correlation that amendment supporters drew between Carter's election and the ERA, it also presents the amendment as a symbolic move towards equality, a natural step in the procession towards legal equality. In the article, Ashkinaze wrote that the anti-ERA discussion of women's social "privileges" had complicated a straightforward debate of the amendment's legal benefits. Amendment opponents, she argued, had developed "an ugly scare campaign" that had derailed the amendment debate.¹¹⁴

In moderating the ratification discourse in Georgia, ERA supporters faced a number of difficulties. Local coverage of feminism and national feminist leaders could frequently be ambivalent or even negative, making national connections difficult to utilize. In addition, pro-ERA coalitions were faced with the difficult task of combatting anti-ERA declarations that the amendment would radically change gender roles. For amendment supporters to successfully ad-

¹¹² "Carter's Kin Pushing ERA," unknown newspaper, January 8, 1978. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹¹³ Carole Ashkinaze, "State Says Yes to Carter Yet No to ERA," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, January 22, 1977. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

dress the concerns of socially conservative Georgians, amendment supporters needed to downplay the possibility of social change and deny ties to the more radical contingents of the feminist movement. Spokeswomen who could bridge the gap between the feminist discourse of social and political transformation and the anti-ERA fear of rapid social change fared best in the Georgia discourse. By declaring their support of family and traditional religion, amendment supporters in Georgia addressed the concerns presented by their opponents. In shaping local media coverage of ratification, pro-ERA lobbies in Georgia supported spokeswomen who personally bridged the gap between feminist activism and fulfilling traditional women's roles. In their educational pamphlets, amendment supporters took a different approach to the same issues, developing an impersonal defense of the amendment that still addressed the concerns presented by the anti-ERA.

Race, Faith and Family: Debates Within Institutional Rhetoric

Nationally and regionally, pro-ERA groups addressed the social concerns raised by amendment opponents, in addition to explaining the legal significance of the amendment. Proponents also assured unconvinced Americans that the amendment was not a platform to introduce radical social change. Many ERA lobbies used institutional pamphlets to distance themselves from the women's liberation movement and argue that the amendment would benefit, rather than harm, housewives and the traditional family. These trends become apparent in national and state discussions of race, religion and class. In Georgia, amendment supporters limited discussion of many controversial issues such as abortion and the draft; however, they made an exception by presenting detailed discussions of other heated issues such as race and religion. While Georgia-specific literature is often presented in a straightforward question and answer format, these pam-

phlets suggest that state ERA coalitions considered questions of race, religion, and family to be essential to the development of the local debate.

For both national and Georgia-based ERA groups, a history of racial distrust was difficult to overcome. Although predominately white amendment lobbies attempted to address the needs of black women through pamphlets, presentations and other resources, the groups failed to create a multiracial coalition and the amendment was seen largely as a white woman's concern.

National organizations attempted to address the specific needs of black women through narrowly targeted publications such as Frankie Muse Freeman's "What's in it for Black Women" pamphlet.¹¹⁵ The pamphlet addressed the fact that black women faced higher arrest rates than men because of their gender. In addition, it described the amendment's benefits for working women. "Black Women have always been 'working women,'" Freeman asserted. "Apart from whether we wish to acquire the sole status of housewife, the fact is that the highest unemployment rate in the nation is among non-white women, ages 16-21."¹¹⁶ By briefly discussing the occupation of housewife, the pamphlet acknowledged the fact that many women were financially unable to become full-time homemakers. In addition, the comment suggests that the role of housewife is a secondary issue of importance to black women, who, according to the pamphlet, are less likely to occupy the role than white women.

Pamphlets distributed by Georgia ERA which specifically addressed the concerns of black women reflected broader national and regional influences. ERA Georgia republished copies of a South Carolina pamphlet with the Georgia organization's contact information printed on the back flap. "Black+Female = Double Jeopardy" the publication proclaimed, and proceeded to

¹¹⁵ Frankie Muse Freeman, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. *What's in it for Black Women?* Women's Printed Collection – Pamphlets, Donna Novak Coles Georgia Women's Movement Collection. Georgia State University Library, Atlanta.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

address economic and legal benefits that black women could expect from the passage of the amendment. The pamphlet drew a direct correlation between the ERA and the civil rights movement, suggesting that support of the amendment would benefit the entire black community, rather than just black women. “Each gain for black women’s rights is a gain for all black people – a gain that strengthens our position legally,” the pamphlet assured readers. “The fight for the ERA will carry forward the struggles around many other issues which affect black women not only as women but as members of an oppressed community.”¹¹⁷ Proponents did not ask black women to support women’s issues and ignore racial oppression; instead, amendment supporters suggested that the amendment was one step in a broader campaign for social equality.

The Georgia pamphlet addressed the economic inequalities faced by working women, placing a special significance on single mothers. According to the publication, black women led 39% of female-headed households, and half of the women lived below the poverty level.¹¹⁸ While publications targeting general audiences also addressed the problems faced by single mothers, the discussion of higher arrest rates was typically not featured in general publications, but was included in the publication targeting black women. In a section outlining the legal benefits of the amendment, the pamphlet noted that under current laws, women faced longer prison sentences than men and that black women were disadvantaged by both their race and their sex.¹¹⁹ The section on legal inequalities suggested that because of economic and residential discrimination, black women were more likely to be arrested than white women.¹²⁰ Many pamphlets produced for a general audience emphasized the amendment’s benefits for women in civil cases, such as divorce. In contrast, the publication targeted toward black women placed a greater em-

¹¹⁷ ERA Georgia, *The ERA and the Black Community*. Women’s Printed Collection - Pamphlets.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

phasis on criminal law and displayed the assumption that black women were more likely to become involved in crime than white women, although higher criminal rates were arguably attributed to environmental factors, rather than racial differences. While such attempts to reach black women may seem problematic, it is important to acknowledge an attempt by pro-ERA lobbies to earn wider multiracial support for the amendment. It is also important to note that pamphlets released by the Georgia ERA lobbies addressed the same issues as national publications.

Religion was also an important point of contention for amendment supporters and opponents. In July 1978, Phyllis Schlafly and the Eagle Forum organized a nationwide prayer vigil in order to “pray to stop the extension of the ERA time limit, to stop the killing of the unborn, and to stop the moral decline in America.”¹²¹ Schlafly and other anti-ERA activists tied the amendment to issues such as abortion and moral decline, concerns that drew heated denunciation from the Christian fundamentalists and the religious right. By connecting the ERA to such issues, anti-ERA activists drew a direct line between the amendment, moral decline, suggesting that amendment supporters were not only the enemies of “traditional” housewives, but also the enemies of Christianity.

Other amendment detractors rejected the ERA – and by extension, its supporters – more directly. Upon reading of the ERA’s defeat in Georgia, one amendment opponent declared his joy that “the Christians of America” had “so far defeated the wrong and sinful feminist ERA.”¹²² He also described amendment supporters as a “group of strident women Bible teaching haters” and suggested that churches were justified in excommunicating amendment supporters such as Sonia Johnson, a Mormon who was excommunicated from her fellowship for supporting the ERA. In speeches, debates and personal correspondence, both anti-ERA groups and individual

¹²¹ Morris, “Organizing Breadmakers,” 177.

¹²² Letter from Bud to Alice, January 13, 1981. Carole Ashkinaze Papers, W043, Donna Novak Coles Georgia Women’s Movement Collection. Georgia State University Library, Atlanta.

supporters portrayed not only the ERA but also amendment supporters as a threat to their religious beliefs.

Anti-ERA groups did not provide the exclusive interpretation of God's position on the proposed amendment. Instead, religion served as yet another platform for dialogue between the ERA's supporters and detractors – who both claimed God, and reputable religious organizations, among their advocates. By arguing that anti-ERA organizations misconstrued the effects of the proposed amendment, emphasizing support from denominational organizations, and providing a differing interpretation of Biblical passages, pro-ERA groups in Georgia and throughout the nation attempted to show that God was on *their* side.

While religiously affiliated pro-ERA groups and other national religious organizations debated both the amendment and the changing role of women in religion, Georgia ERA groups created a nuanced analysis of the intersection between gender and faith, often quoting or reinterpreting scripture to support their views. While most national organizations listed religious groups that supported the amendment, such groups provided only a limited theological justification for amendment support. In Georgia, both literal and ideological “holy ground” often became contested space that both amendment supporters and detractors claimed, providing a more detailed theological analysis of women's roles to support their arguments than most national groups provided.

Through organizations such as People of Faith for the ERA in Georgia, an interdenominational coalition that rejected the religious fundamentalism of amendment opponents, pro-ERA activists sought to dispel the perception that all religious individuals opposed the passage of the amendment.¹²³ Instead, they touted the support that mainstream

¹²³ Margaret Miller Curtis, *Life as a Feminist in Georgia*, 34.

religious organizations had given the proposed amendment. In addition to providing lists of organizations that supported the ERA, one pamphlet quotes at length from a resolution passed by the General Assembly of the United Methodist Church in 1972. During their meeting in Atlanta, the assembly accepted a resolution that read in part:

The Gospel makes clear that Jesus regarded women, men and children equally. In contrast to contemporary, male-centered society, Jesus related to women with respect and sensitivity, as individual persons. Current attitudes toward women in the U.S. are blatantly discriminatory, based on stereotyped ideas of a woman's abilities and proper roles in society, rather than her actual potential and rights as an individual.¹²⁴

The organization chose to quote a statement released in Georgia, which drew local connections, as well as established "legitimate" ties between the Equal Rights Amendment and mainline Protestantism. Although the support of other faiths is mentioned, Christian interpretations dominate the text of pamphlets produced by the People of Faith for the ERA in Georgia. The theological interpretation presented by faith-based organizations such as People of Faith for the ERA in Georgia only quoted Biblical passages and relied heavily on scripture drawn from the New Testament.

While anti-ERA activists often quoted passages of scripture that emphasized the Biblical inferiority of women and argued that such verses provide an example of social norms, amendment supporters argued that such verses represented a now-outdated historical patriarchy rather than a model for the continued subordination of women. Instead, pro-ERA pamphlets and letters quoted scriptural passages that emphasized the equality of Christians and the importance of pursuing justice. In one pamphlet, People of Faith for the ERA in Georgia and ERA Georgia argued that instead of providing a model of women's subordination, the Bible provided examples of social equality, through the teachings and actions of Jesus and his followers. Amendment support-

¹²⁴ People of Faith for the ERA in Georgia Pamphlet. Women's Printed Collection – Pamphlets.

ers argued that Jesus “broke the traditions and taboos for his time regarding the treatment of women,” by traveling with them.¹²⁵

Amendment supporters rejected the legalism of religious fundamentalists and instead emphasized Biblical examples of for equality, social justice and universal love. “The Equal Rights Amendment means doing unto others as you would have them do unto you,” one pamphlet declared, drawing connections between the amendment and the Golden Rule.¹²⁶ The main text of the pamphlet recounts the story of Jesus’s encounter with an adulteress who is condemned to death. As her accusers prepared to stone her, enacting the punishment outlined in Mosaic law, Jesus approaches them and states, “The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her.”¹²⁷ When none of the accusers claim to be blameless, Jesus tells the woman to “go...and sin no more.”

ERA supporters quoted this passage as an example of the rejection of a legalistic (and fundamentalist) interpretation of scripture that rigidly applied traditional laws (or gendered social roles) to situations in which they no longer applied. “Often, we too, become enslaved to legalistic interpretation of law and fail to relate to each other in a spirit of love,” the pamphlet states. “Or as Christ pointed out in Matthew 15:6, ‘For the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God.’”¹²⁸ Instead of being wedded to tradition, the pamphlet encouraged a more liberal interpretation of scriptural passages that focused on the development of socially just laws – such as the ERA – rather than rigidly opposing the amendment for the potential social changes that anti-ERA activists decried and pro-ERA supporters denied. The pamphlet reads:

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ People of Faith for the ERA in Georgia and ERA Georgia. *The Equal Rights Amendment Means Doing Unto Others as You Would Have Them Do Unto You*. People of Faith for the ERA in Georgia Pamphlet. Women’s Printed Collection – Pamphlets.

¹²⁷ John 8:2-11.

¹²⁸ People of Faith for the ERA in Georgia and ERA Georgia. *The Equal Rights Amendment Means Doing Unto Others as You Would Have Them do Unto You*. Women’s Printed Collection – Pamphlets.

The ERA cannot make a stingy husband more generous, or a lazy wife more helpful, because the ERA cannot change hearts.

What the ERA can do is prevent government from depriving us of rights by using our sex as an excuse to do so.

Law cannot substitute for love, but it acts in behalf of love when it attempts to provide justice.¹²⁹

This reinterpretation of Biblical passages moved away from the fundamentalist interpretations that pro-ERA groups attributed to amendment opponents who attempted to identify themselves with a sense of religious liberalism, rather than the “anti-religious” label attributed to them by some anti-ERA campaigns. Therefore, activists created a discourse that connected the ERA to religious belief while still rejecting fundamentalist depictions of women as submissive and subordinate. Rather than ignoring the religious dimension of anti-ERA rhetoric, amendment supporters in Georgia engaged the potentially controversial topic and redefined the discourse. By challenging the anti-ERA’s religious rhetoric, conservative pro-ERA lobbies not only presented an alternate image of Biblical womanhood, but also challenged their opponents’ interpretive authority.

Finally, in addition to addressing race and religion, both national and regional pro-ERA groups addressed issues of class, focusing much of their efforts on how the amendment would affect housewives. Even in an analysis of the economic role of women, pro-ERA lobbies were forced to discuss the changing social roles of women.

As anti-ERA groups championed traditional images of the stay-at-home wife, economically supported by a loving husband, they also argued that such roles were threatened by the proposed amendment. National pro-ERA groups challenged this assertion in a variety of ways. Publications targeting housewives argued that the ERA would help women make a larger contribution to family life and urged even happily married traditional housewives to support the amend-

¹²⁹ Ibid.

ment in order to protect themselves in case of divorce or the death of their husbands. These analyses suggested that the role of an economically supported stay-at-home housewife, rather than being a reality for most women, had become a middle class ideal that many women could not attain or maintain. Instead, pro-ERA groups argued that without the ERA the career of housewife was a tenuous economic position at best.

Pamphlets released by national organizations argued that the proposed amendment would allow women to contribute more to the family. A pamphlet published by the American Association of University Women rejected the anti-ERA claim that the proposed amendment would “destroy the family.” Instead, the Association argued that the amendment would strengthen the family by recognizing a housewife’s contributions. “ERA will strengthen the family unit by ensuring that marriage may be a true partnership,” the pamphlet stated.¹³⁰

While many publications argued that the amendment would lead to greater legal and economic equity between husbands and wives, they do not issue a significant challenge to issues of social equity. For example, although a pamphlet published by the League of Women Voters touted the ERA’s benefits for “mothers and wives” who were “among the hardest working people in America,” it also included a section that clarified that the amendment would not “interfere in private relationships.”¹³¹ The pamphlet assured its readers that while the amendment would provide women with equal economic access to family assets, but clarified that the ERA “doesn’t say who should open the door, or drive the family car, or wash the dishes.”¹³² While amendment supporters stressed the importance of allowing wives the opportunity to take occupy a legal and eco-

¹³⁰ American Association of University Women. *Spirit of '76 ERA*, 1976. Women’s Printed Collection – Pamphlets.

¹³¹ League of Women Voters. *ERA Means Equal Rights for Men and Women*, Equal Rights Amendment – League of Women Voters U.S. Women’s Printed Collection – Pamphlets, Women’s Collection, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

¹³² *Ibid.*

conomic role equal to that of their husbands, the social role of housewife is still narrowly defined in most national amendment literature.

An emotional appeal launched by national pro-ERA lobbies stressed that tragedy could strike even happily married women who had limited protection without the benefits of the amendment. Such publications were typically addressed to the stay-at-home housewives, women that were “threatened” by the amendment according to anti-ERA groups. “All marriages end in either death or divorce,” one pamphlet reminded its married readers. “A woman cannot depend on ‘her man’ for lifelong support.”¹³³ This trend can also be seen in a pamphlet titled “ERA: A Bread and Butter Issue,” which featured images of a happy wife and family on its cover. However, the text envisioned a harrowing future for families unprotected by the ERA. Addressing housewives, the pamphlet read:

You probably are happy with your life. Most women are. You have a loving husband who supports and cares for you and for your children. You enjoy the satisfactions of homemaking, your chosen career. So why should you bother about and Equal Rights Amendment? But situations change. Your husband may become sick, lose his job. Still worse, he may die. Did you know that, in this country, one out of every six women is a widow? Widows and single women over 65 have less money than any other group in our society. Their average annual income is only \$1,397, well below the poverty level. You may be one of these women.¹³⁴

Women forced to enter the workplace after divorce or the death of a husband would face the ugly reality of economic discrimination, a reality that would harm not only them, but also their children. “Costs of feeding a family continue to rise,” the pamphlet stated. “When a mother must support her family, should her income be less than that of a single man, simply because she

¹³³ American Association of University Women. *ERA, The American Way*, Women’s Printed Collection – Pamphlets.

¹³⁴ American Association of University Women. *ERA: A Bread and Butter Issue*. Women’s Printed Collection – Pamphlets.

is a female?”¹³⁵ Such pamphlets suggested that even happily married housewives faced a precarious existence without the ERA, where the support and “special privileges” touted by Schlafly and other anti-ERA activists could rapidly vanish.

Unlike national pro-ERA lobbies, amendment supporters in Georgia did not utilize emotional rhetorical appeals in their educational publications. While Georgia supporters’ reluctance to address social change reflected the language of national publications, Georgia publications tended to simply provide a legal explanation of the amendment’s benefits for wives and mothers, rather than relying on the rhetorical devices utilized by national organizations. In question and answer format, amendment supporters in Georgia addressed how the proposed amendment would affect state law. In many of these pamphlets, amendment supporters detailed how legislative changes would directly affect housewives and refuted anti-ERA claims that the amendment would harm the family.

Addressing the claim that women would be forced to work outside the home in order to provide half of a family’s income, one pamphlet stressed the fact that “all women do work,” whether they were employed outside the home or were stay-at-home housewives. Instead, the pamphlet argued that the ERA would benefit housewives by recognizing their work as an economic contribution to the family. “When the state law requiring husbands to be the sole support of their families is changed, the implied ‘duty’ of the wife –owing her services to him – will be eliminated,” it read. “An equal non-monetary contribution to the economic well-being of the family will be recognized.”¹³⁶ Even pamphlets pro-ERA groups created to specifically target housewives relied almost entirely on an analysis of the legal ramifications of the amendment, rather than the more emotional appeals used by national organizations. A pamphlet produced by

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ League of Women Voters of Georgia. *Yes ERA! 1776-1976*, 1976. Women’s Printed Collection – Pamphlets.

Georgia Homemakers and Housewives for ERA argued that an emotional debate of social change distracted from highlighting the legal benefits of the amendment. “There has been a great deal of rhetoric about the partnership of marriage and the importance of homemaking and the rearing of children; there has been precious little action to make it an economically secure and dignified role!” the pamphlet read. “The ERA would give legal recognition to the value of the homemaker’s contribution.”¹³⁷ The organization traced the roots of women’s legal inequality to English Common Law and argued that under legal rulings without the ERA, women were considered “at most a superior servant to her husband...only chattel, with no personality, no property, and no legally recognized feelings or rights.”¹³⁸ By developing arguments in support of the amendment, Georgia organizations did not directly address that the debate over the social roles that wives and mothers should occupy.

Conclusion

While ERA supporters in Georgia addressed many of the same issues that national pro-ERA groups contended with – including race, religion, and class – amendment supporters in Georgia defined such debates in a new way. Perhaps the most pronounced differences between the Georgia campaigns and the national campaigns are how organizations addressed religion. While national organizations listed religious groups among amendment supporters but provided a limited theological defense of the amendment, pro-ERA groups in Georgia provided a nuanced interpretation of scripture that stressed the Biblical pursuit of social equality and challenged the legalistic interpretations of women’s subordinate role provided by fundamentalist Christians and embraced by anti-ERA groups.

¹³⁷ *Georgia Homemakers and Housewives for ERA Pamphlet*. Women’s Printed Collection – Pamphlets.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

Differences in approach to race and class can also be seen, although they are not as drastic as the differences in religious approach. In their discussion of race, pro-ERA groups in Georgia closely reflected the rhetoric of national groups, which emphasized the benefits that amendment would provide working women and addressed inequalities within the criminal justice system. While national pro-ERA groups presented a variety of arguments encouraging housewives to support the amendment, ERA supporters in Georgia tended to focus more exclusively on answering questions concerning how the amendment would change the legal status of housewives in the state, rather than crafting a more nuanced emotional appeal. Although women in Georgia and across the nation were challenging the traditional narrative of the “happy housewife,” both state and national ERA groups argued that the passage of the amendment would only result in political change rather than social change, responding to anti-ERA accusations that the amendment would endanger the nuclear family.

Finally, amendment supporters in Georgia devoted particular attention to the public perception of the women’s liberation movement and changing gender roles; in response, conservative ERA lobbies distanced themselves from radical spokeswomen and presented local activists as socially traditional. For Georgia activists, “bridging the gap” between amendment opponents and radical feminists was essential.

Chapter 3 The Political is Personal: Individual Testimony in the ERA Debate

Introduction

In January 1976, Robert Potts wrote popular *Atlanta Constitution* columnist Celestine Sibley. Distraught by the death of his wife and the mother of his eight children, Potts wrote a long and moving tribute, which Sibley quoted in part. “She was a powerfully good and strong and accomplishing woman. . . . For 43 years she gave me the strength and courage that I lacked and was a pillar of strength to the children,” he wrote.¹³⁹

Potts was appalled that Social Security failed to cover his wife’s burial expenses because she had never worked outside the home; he felt that her contributions were ignored, that a lifetime spent cooking, cleaning, and caring for a family was discounted. Describing the administration’s dismissal, Potts wrote: “In effect the statement said: ‘Your wife was a non-productive drone and parasite. Bury her in a potter’s field or cast her out on boot hill and forget her.’”¹⁴⁰ He concluded that a society that ignored the equal contributions of women was unjust and uncivilized.

Utilizing the example of his wife, Potts expressed his support for the Equal Rights Amendment, arguing that the legislation would legally recognize the contributions of housewives. By connecting his personal experience to the larger amendment debate, Potts crafted a powerful emotional appeal. Through interviews, letters to the editor, and personal correspondence, individuals such as Robert Potts used personal experiences to justify their commitment to the Equal Rights Amendment and the larger feminist movement.

This chapter will explore the development of such personal testimonies within the Georgia ratification debate. An analysis of amendment literature and internal memos suggests that

¹³⁹ Celestine Sibley, “He Urges Support of ERA,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 1976. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

organizations such as ERA Georgia not only encouraged activists to express their individual support of the amendment, but also visualized letter-writing campaigns as a way to develop the diverse grassroots coalition they saw as necessary to gain legislative support.

The suggestion that pro-ERA lobbies utilized emotional rhetoric and personal testimonies rejects previous scholarly analyses of the ratification debate which argue that amendment supporters relied on detailed legislative analysis and logical rhetoric while amendment opponents developed an emotional response to cast doubt on the amendment's viability. While amendment supporters may have criticized their opponents' rhetoric as emotional and irrational, they also adapted the models of personal testimony introduced in the anti-ERA debate.

Defining Personal Discourse

Personal discourse is defined here as an individual response to a broader political or social debate, which often involves an emotional testimony of personal experiences which relate to the issue. Such narratives may be influenced by organizational discourses, such as the educational pamphlets produced by pro-ERA coalitions; however, they move beyond a simple restatement of organizational talking points or use of form letters. Personal discourse may be shared publicly, through letters to the editor or interviews republished in local newspapers, or shared privately between activists through internal memos or individual correspondence not meant for publication.

This broad definition of personal discourse moves beyond public and private distinctions to analyze the myriad ways that individual testimonies are used to promote and analyze a social movement's larger goals. In Georgia, personal discourse operates in three distinct ways. First, public testimony allowed individuals to define their personal activism in a way that challenged

anti-ERA claims that amendment supporters were anti-religious, anti-family radicals. Such public responses were essential in the development of pro-ERA's grassroots approach, which relied on responses from individual women to succeed. Secondly, the development of a private response to the Equal Rights Amendment gave individuals the opportunity to either articulate their personal commitment to the cause or their apprehension over certain discussions presented by pro-ERA lobbies. Finally, private correspondence between Georgia activists addressed the personal difficulties and internal organizational conflicts that pro-ERA coalitions faced.

If logical and legal analysis was central to the educational and media campaigns created by amendment supporters in Georgia, personal testimony was essential to the movement's grassroots lobbying efforts. While the preceding chapter shows that logical appeals and legal analysis constituted a large part of the educational and media campaigns created by pro-ERA organizations in Georgia, amendment supporters' use of personal and emotional rhetoric should not be ignored.

Historiography: Emotionalism within the ERA Debate

The development of such personal and emotional rhetoric among pro-ERA activists is often discounted in scholarly analysis of the amendment debate. When examining the rhetoric of amendment opponents, scholars have identified three defining characteristics: use of religious language, a staunch commitment to maintaining sexual difference, and strongly voiced opposition to the perceived dangers of the ERA. By identifying conservative women's fear of the social changes proposed by feminists and portraying the amendment as a threat to gendered identity, anti-ERA coalitions encouraged women to develop an emotional and personal response to the amendment. By focusing on the anti-ERA's use of emotional rhetoric and the pro-ERA's politi-

cal connections, a historiographical image of rational, unemotional amendment supporters and irrational, emotional opponents has emerged. However, an analysis of the published and unpublished writings of ERA supporters in Georgia suggests that pro-ERA coalitions also encouraged the use of similar emotional language.

In two journal articles, Jane Sherron De Hart and Donald G. Mathews address examples of emotional individualism and religious expression within the ratification debate. In her analysis of Southern feminism, De Hart identifies amendment supporters as individuals with deep ties to liberalism whose families had previously supported suffrage and opposed segregation.¹⁴¹ While De Hart emphasizes the political beliefs of pro-ERA activists, she discusses amendment opponents' fear of social change. "To women who did not consider themselves oppressed, 'liberation' appeared not as an attack on traditional gender categories but rather as an assault on women's security and very identity," she wrote.¹⁴² Conservative women viewed social redefinitions of gender as a threat to their personal identity, a fear that was ultimately reflected in their response to the amendment. "The free-floating anxiety aroused by the enormity of social change demanded by feminism had acquired concrete focus in the ERA," De Hart wrote.¹⁴³ For amendment opponents, the ERA became a symbol of feared social change; anti-ERA rhetoric reflected the anxiety of individual activists. While De Hart does not specifically address the emotionalism of the debate, by emphasizing amendment supporters' political connections and opponents' fearful rhetoric, her analysis suggests a division between political and emotional approaches.

Donald G. Mathews' analysis of religious overtones in the ratification debate complicates the depiction of amendment opponents as more emotional than their pro-ERA counterparts. Instead, Mathews acknowledges that there was an emotional component of rhetoric on both sides

¹⁴¹ Jane Sherron De Hart, "Second Wave Feminism(s) and the South," 278-279.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

of the debate. “The author is not saying that anti-ERA women were ‘more emotional’ than ratificationists – they probably were not,” he wrote. “Emotion was not to be dismissed by simply saying that opponents were hysterical ‘screaming women.’”¹⁴⁴ Mathews addresses the tendency of previous scholars to dismiss amendment opponents as emotional and irrational, rather than critically addressing the development of emotional rhetoric by activists on both sides of the ratification debate. Although Mathews makes a significant observation, his discussion of emotion is an aside, and he fails to closely address the development of emotional rhetoric among amendment supporters.

Other scholars have more directly posited a rhetorical split between logic and emotion in ERA rhetoric. Janet K. Boles writes that pro-ERA lobbies produced material that provided a detailed legal analysis of the amendment’s potential effects, reflecting amendment supporters’ commitment to providing educational materials and clarifying misunderstandings about the nature of the proposed amendment.¹⁴⁵ Rather than discussing emotionally charged social and cultural questions related to gender, pro-ERA rhetoric merely addressed the legal ramifications of ratification. She also argues that amendment supporters, committed to the feminist principle of “sisterhood,” were reluctant to create a malicious image of their opponents.¹⁴⁶ Anti-ERA rhetoric was more likely to rely on emotional rhetoric, address controversial social changes related to the feminist movement, and portray their opponents in an unflattering light. Boles argues that instead of directly addressing the ERA, antis introduced “new and distinct issues logically unrelated to the amendment” to inspire controversy and utilized “inflammatory language” to malign amend-

¹⁴⁴ Donald G. Mathews, “‘Spiritual Warfare:’ Cultural Fundamentalism and the Equal Rights Amendment,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 3, no 2 (Summer 1993), 149-150.

¹⁴⁵ Janet Boles, *The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment*, 105.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

ment supporters.¹⁴⁷ Boles suggests that the anti-ERA not only relied on emotional rhetoric to state their case, but specifically introduced language that would evoke public fear of the amendment and its supporters.

In her analysis of ERA rhetoric in the South, Martha Solomon argues that amendment opponents developed a model of “witnessing,” defined as “a public affirmation of personal beliefs and values,” to express their personal distrust of the amendment. “Usually, these public affirmations were only tangentially related to the economic, political, and social issues raised by supporters,” Solomon explained. “Instead, they were emotional appeals to traditional, shared values.”¹⁴⁸ Rather than responding in kind, Solomon suggests that amendment supporters rejected what they considered the “irrational emotionalism” of the anti-ERA testimonies, relying instead on the development of a logical campaign that stressed the legal ramifications of the proposed amendment.

The observation that amendment supporters discredited their opponents’ emotional appeals as overly emotional and nonfactual is not unfounded. Even as they attempted to address questions raised by their opponents, pro-ERA activists expressed frustration over what they saw as anti-ERA attempts to derail the ratification debate. In Georgia, organizers held workshops on “how to convince your lukewarm neighbors and confound your hot-headed opponents.”¹⁴⁹ At a fundraising luncheon, guest speaker Marlo Thomas declared: “The anti’s don’t have truth, or right, or numbers – they only have fear.”¹⁵⁰ Although amendment supporters disparaged their opponents as “hot-headed,” they did not completely reject the emotional and personal rhetorical

¹⁴⁷ Janet Boles, *The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment*, 105.

¹⁴⁸ Martha Solomon, “On a Tupperware Pedestal: The ERA and the Southern Experience,” in *A New Diversity in Contemporary Southern Rhetoric*, ed. Calvin M. Logue and Howard Dorgan (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 237.

¹⁴⁹ ERA Georgia, Inc. “Yes ERA Day General Meeting,” January 17, 1979. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹⁵⁰ “ERA Georgia Fundraising Luncheon,” January 24, 1979. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

style of their opponents. Just as they modified their pamphlets and educational materials to target the anti-ERA's audience of housewives, amendment supporters also adopted the anti-ERA's emotional rhetorical style.

Emotionalism and Social Movement Theory

Despite the limited discussion of pro-ERA emotionalism in previous studies, scholars of feminist theory and social movement theory have addressed the use of emotional rhetoric in greater depth. Historian Verta Taylor argues that an understanding of emotional subtext is necessary to understand how women challenge patriarchal oppression, as well as how they, as individual activists, are socialized into the larger feminist movement. She argues that individual activists are driven to activism by anger over oppression and that such women gain the emotional benefits of friendship as they become involved in a larger social movement.¹⁵¹ Taylor also suggests that emotionally motivated action can be identified “as a site for articulating the links between cultural ideas, structural inequality, and individual action.”¹⁵² An analysis of emotional rhetoric and personal discourse sheds light on how individual women analyzed, adapted and questioned the narrative presented by the local media and state ERA lobbies. A discussion of personal rhetoric shows how individual activists either accepted popular discourse or challenged the vision of conservative activism introduced by Georgia pro-ERA coalitions. As Sociologist Belinda Robnett argues, a discussion of both individual and collective activism is necessary in order to provide a complete image of how social movements develop. “A holistic theory ought to address both the emotional/internal motivations discussed by collective behaviorists and the ex-

¹⁵¹ Verta Taylor, “Watching for Vibes: Bringing Emotions Into the Study of Feminist Organizations,” in *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, ed. Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 224.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 227.

ternal and presumably more rational concerns over resources and political opportunities emphasized by resource mobilization theorists,” she writes.¹⁵³ By ignoring or discounting the development of emotional rhetoric within the pro-ERA lobby, historians have overlooked an essential component of how the experiences and concerns of individual activists shape the collective response of a political organization. While pro-ERA lobbies in Georgia developed an expansive and logically driven educational response to the campaign, amendment supporters were also encouraged to articulate emotional and individual appeals in public discourse. In addition, an analysis of emotional rhetoric is essential to understanding how individual activists responded to the challenges of intra-organizational politics. By representing amendment supporters as logical and non-emotional, scholars have provided an incomplete image of movement rhetoric and the organizational challenges facing activists.

Utilizing Personal Contacts

While pamphlets and other educational material produced by pro-ERA lobbies in Georgia may have reflected rational and impersonal discussions of the amendment, other campaigns reflected a more personal and emotional approach. Unlike women’s liberation groups that relied on elaborately staged protests to state their case, amendment supporters used more traditional lobbying techniques. Attempting to mobilize support for the amendment before the 1982 ratification deadline, activists traveled across the state, hosting mini-workshops, coffee hours, and letter

¹⁵³ Belinda Robnett, “African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Spontaneity and Emotion in Social Movement Theory,” in *No Middle Ground: Women and Radical Protest*, ed. Kathleen M. Blee (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 67.

writing parties.¹⁵⁴ The success of such outreaches was dependent upon developing individual contacts with legislators and individuals who might be influenced to support the amendment.

To develop such support, activists in Georgia utilized their contacts within mainstream civic and social groups, often speaking to local organizations. Pro-ERA activists' letters and memos list speaking engagements at local churches, the Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis Clubs.¹⁵⁵ Letters from amendment supporters suggest that activists used their existing social connections to schedule speeches. In a letter to Cathey Steinberg, Margaret Miller Curtis discussed plans to speak about the ERA to the Marietta Rotary Club, where her husband was a member.¹⁵⁶ By speaking to well-respected social organizations amendment supporters presented the ERA as a conservative cause.

While activists relied on preexisting personal contacts to organize speeches and coffee hours, some activists questioned the effectiveness of conservative, traditional lobbying styles. In one letter, Alice Stemmen argued that activists were more concerned with presenting themselves as demure Southern ladies than developing a strategic lobbying campaign that reached new supporters. "It is beyond me why everyone working for ERA doesn't accept the fact that it is purely political and that no matter how sweet and ladylike we are or how many garden clubs we address if we don't get the people we speak to to contact their own representatives and senators or even better in person, nothing will matter at all," she wrote.¹⁵⁷ Stemmen's criticisms suggest that amendment supporters struggled to strike a balance between cultivating a genteel feminine image and developing a more forceful grassroots campaign.

¹⁵⁴ "Caravan," Undated ERA Georgia Program Plan. Box 11, Folder 9, ERA Activism, 1979-1980. Cathey Steinberg Papers.; "Your Invitation to Help Support the ERA in Wayne County." Cathey Steinberg Papers.

¹⁵⁵ ERA Coordinating Council Meeting Minutes, September 15, 1981. Cathey Steinberg Papers. Report on Strategy Session, September 17, 1981. Cathey Steinberg Papers.

¹⁵⁶ Copy of letter from Joyce Parker to *Atlanta Journal*, with handwritten addendum written by Margaret Miller Curtis, December 14, 1979. Cathey Steinberg Papers.

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Alice Stemmen to Jean Cahill, undated. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

Acting as lobbyists, pro-ERA organizers attempted to reach legislators by creating and utilizing the individual contacts culled from a network of activists' friends and neighbors. The minutes of a 1981 strategy session show how such connections were utilized. Attempting to gauge the response of one legislator, amendment supporters talked to his neighbors, contributors, and his mother, and suggested that he would back the ERA. In addition, they made plans to contact his pastor and attempt to gain support from the church.¹⁵⁸

Although activists could utilize their social connections to gain support for the amendment, many Georgia legislators suggested that they would be swayed only by a greater display of constituent support for the amendment. When asked about legislative support in 1976, Representative George Williamson replied: "I would be one of only about 70 or so members who would support it. The figure might be lower. The only way this will be changed is for legislators to become convinced that a large portion of their voters really desire ratification."¹⁵⁹ To gain the support of state legislators, it was necessary for pro-ERA coalitions to mobilize a larger cohort of Georgians willing to express their personal support of the amendment.

In pro-ERA literature, writing letters was not only presented as a simple and easy way for women to show their support, but was also described as "the single most important thing you can do for ERA."¹⁶⁰ In a list of lobbying goals, Cathey Steinberg encouraged area organizers to collect at least 10 letters to send each legislator; the memo emphasized that "each letter should be from an individual who is a constituent of that particular legislator."¹⁶¹ At strategy update sessions, organizers reported letter writing party victories, recording a particularly successful cam-

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Stemmen to Cahill, undated. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from George Williamson to Mrs. DeAnna T. Lockhart, January 8, 1976. Cathey Steinberg Papers.

¹⁶⁰ "I'm Going to Sit Right Down and Write Myself...A Legislator!" Undated handout. Cathey Steinberg Papers.

¹⁶¹ Cathey Steinberg, "Ratification of the ERA: Goals for June, July, August." Cathey Steinberg Papers.

paign when women from Carroll County sent 150 letters over a period of two months.¹⁶² By encouraging individual women to become involved and write their own legislators, pro-ERA lobbies showed the amendment was important to “average” Georgians, not just a small coalition of activists.

Organizations such as ERA Georgia and the Georgia Commission on the Status of Women offered letter-writing guides that stressed the importance of brief letters expressing individual support of the amendment. “Avoid signing petitions or signing or sending a form letter,” one guide suggested. “It is better to write your own letters as legislators are seldom persuaded by form letters or petitions. In fact, they are often annoyed or angered by such devices and refuse to read them.”¹⁶³ Although such guides emphasized the importance of expressing individual opinions, rather than group affiliations, they still offered sample letters and utilized permission slips to send letters on behalf of constituents.¹⁶⁴

By encouraging individual supporters to address their legislators on a personal level, using letters and calls rather than protests and marches, pro-ERA organizations attempted to avoid any connotations of radicalism or controversy. Letter writing guides encouraged women to be concise, “courteous,” and complementary. “The tone of a letter is as important as the tone of voice, a smile, a friendly conversation,” one guide suggested. “After reading a kind word, he or she will be more open to the message that follows.”¹⁶⁵ Rather than presenting their support of the amendment in angry or confrontational terms, letter-writing guides encouraged constituents to present a well-reasoned and polite letter. Through such letter-writing guides, pro-ERA lobbies

¹⁶² Undated Area Update List. Cathey Steinberg Papers.

¹⁶³ Georgia Commission on the Status of Women, “Notes from The Legislative Process,” December 1, 1978. Cathey Steinberg Papers.

¹⁶⁴ Cathey Steinberg, “State of Ratification of the ERA: Goals for June, July, August.”; “I’m Gonna Sit Right Down and Right Myself... a Legislator.” Cathey Steinberg Papers.

¹⁶⁵ Georgia Commission on the Status of Women, “Notes from “The Legislative Process,” December 1, 1978. Cathey Steinberg Papers.

provided potential activists with a simple way to become involved. With just a stamp, some stationery and the right words, women could express their support of the amendment. Letter writing guides encouraged women to become involved in the movement through small steps. Such guides also provided a model of effective lobbying, encouraging women to present themselves as polite, and respectful rather than militant and aggressive.

Personal Testimony in the Public Sphere

The majority of activists who wrote to their legislators and newspapers followed these guidelines; even when they chose to utilize personal examples, they chose to emphasize their connections to traditional values rather than crafting more radical narratives of personal oppression. Through testimony and reflections of personal experience, amendment supporters in Georgia presented themselves as individuals concerned with the wellbeing of their families and children. Moving beyond pro-ERA's heavily theological defense of the amendment, individual activists also reflected on their personal religious experiences. Such personal testimonies provided an emotional repudiation to anti-ERA claims that the amendment was anti-religious and would harm the family.

A comparison of such emotional rhetoric can be seen in coverage of the 1977 legislative debate of the amendment, when the ERA was stalled and sent into subcommittee. Phyllis Schafley, the national leader of STOP ERA, was the anti-ERA's "star witness." Schafley testified that the amendment would eliminate gender divisions in public areas and threaten women's traditional role of housewife. She described women supporters as young and radical women's liberationists who had little respect for marriage. "What right do you have as a new generation to say to women who went into marriage 10 years ago, 'Too bad, Toots, we're changing your mar-

riage contract.’ ... ERA Wipes out homemaker rights.”¹⁶⁶ By portraying amendment supporters as women’s liberationists who rejected marriage and demanded radical social change, Schafley expressed the views of a small but vocal subgroup of the national feminist movement. Activists in Georgia tended to utilize more moderate language and suggested that the ERA’s effects would be largely legislative, rather than social.¹⁶⁷

The testimony of Lieutenant Governor Zell Miller challenged Schafley’s identification of amendment supporters as young and socially radical. Miller supported the ERA not because he advocated the dissolution of marriage or the redefinition of women’s social roles, but because he felt that the amendment would protect and support women like his mother. His personal testimony is reminiscent of the “displaced homemaker” narratives presented in pro-ERA pamphlets, but the powerful emotional appeal of his narrative is not reflected in the Georgia lobby’s dispassionate explanation of legislative change. Miller recalled his mother’s sacrifices and difficulties, saying:

My father died when I was two weeks old. He left a wife with two children with no home. She sold magazines and raised chickens in our house. She worked in a factory and was paid one-half the salary of her male co-workers. I know first-hand what discrimination is. I know first-hand what it is like to have the head of a home be a second-class citizen. I’m speaking for a woman who is too old and tired to speak for herself.¹⁶⁸

Miller’s testimony addressed the harsh economic realities that wives and children faced when the male breadwinner died. His mother was not afforded the opportunity to fulfill the “traditional” role of a stay-at-home mother. She had young children to feed, clothe and shelter. So

¹⁶⁶ David Morrison and Lyn Martin, “ERA Measure Assigned to Senate Subcommittee,” Unknown Newspaper, January 1977. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹⁶⁷ Odone Hill, Georgia President of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs (a moderate organization which supported the amendment) testified before the Senate before Schafley. Her rhetoric is similar to other Georgia supporters. She stated: “ERA applies only to government action, not to social custom.” Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Miller's mother entered a workforce where she faced economic discrimination on a daily basis. For Miller, the ERA did not reflect a dangerous and radical redefinition of social norms; instead, it acknowledged the realities that women faced and provided recourse for women like his mother.

While men such as Potts and Miller presented narratives of wives and mothers whose contributions and struggles were largely ignored by society, women who were unable to speak for themselves, Georgia women also told their own stories. Amendment supporters offered personal narratives of feminist awakening, but they were careful to frame their stories in a way that emphasized their approval of traditional social roles, rather than a more aggressive denouncement of patriarchal oppression.

The *Marietta Daily Journal* published the testimony of Eleanor Babcock, a woman who joined the pro-ERA movement after "reexamining her role as a woman in today's society."¹⁶⁹ Babcock said that she became active in the amendment debate after trying to open a credit card account in her name. Although her finances were in order, she was unable to open an account without her husband's approval. While Babcock was willing to challenge the social assumption that married women should not be able to make financial decisions without their husband's consent, she did not question traditional social roles. In the article, she identified as a "wife, mother, artist, substitute teacher and gardener," a list of self-identifiers that hardly suggests she is a young radical who is an opponent of marriage or family.¹⁷⁰

Personal narratives such as Babcock's reflect an acknowledgement of the legal and economic inequalities that women faced without the amendment. But pro-ERA activists were careful to publicly present themselves as conservative wives, mothers and Christians. They tempered

¹⁶⁹ Susan Conlee, "Mariettans Support Seven-Year Extension for ERA," *Marietta Daily Journal*, July 2, 1978. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

their criticisms of women's oppression by identifying themselves as women who desired legal equality but accepted the need for women and men to maintain separate social roles. For more direct challenges to women's perceived social roles, one must turn to the private letters of ERA activists and individuals struggling to make sense of the emerging feminist movement.

Feminism and its Discontents: Voicing Dissatisfaction in Private Correspondence

Such private correspondence gives voice to women's dissatisfaction in a way that even personal testimony in public letters do not. A series of private letters sent to *Atlanta Journal* reporter Carole Ashkinaze reflect a deeper level of discontent with home and workplace norms than amendment supporters voiced in their public testimonies. Freed from the constraints of presenting a public image of social conservatism, the women who wrote Ashkinaze frankly discussed their frustration at the inequalities they faced at home and in the workplace. These private letters suggest that while amendment supporters publicly limited their discussion of social oppression and instead focused on more conservative narratives of economic and legislative inequality, some Georgia women identified with narratives of patriarchal oppression that reflected the more radical rhetoric of the women's liberation movement.

On May 31, 1980 Ashkinaze wrote an article chronicling the difficulties that a husband faced when his wife of 23 years entered politics. While the husband supported his wife's campaign by babysitting and passing out campaign information, he felt that her decision distanced her from the rest of the family. "She does so well, and is so admired that you'd never guess it," he said. "But her marriage is on the rocks, her children hardly see her, her personal life is a

shambles.”¹⁷¹ By devoting her time and energy by becoming a successful public figure, the “late-blooming wife” seemingly abandoned her earlier commitment to her roles as a wife and mother, and left her bewildered husband to question why her goals had changed so drastically.

For one of Ashkinaze’s readers, the article elicited sympathy not for the husband who was left at home, but for the wife who had redefined herself. Three months later, Ashkinaze received a six-page response from a grateful reader who saw in the “late-blooming wife” a representation of her own story. In the letter, the woman chronicled her struggle to develop a sense of self-worth after she had been defined by her role as a wife, mother and daughter for the majority of her life. She related her memories of a strictly regulated childhood, where every decision was made and enforced by her parents. “I cannot remember having the time to have more than a few thoughts of my own because I was so busy being a robot,” she wrote.¹⁷² Despite the strict regulations, she described growing up to be “the nicest, most polite little girl” who rarely questioned her parents.

As she entered adulthood, the woman continued to play the role of the respectable, dutiful daughter, by searching for a husband, never expressing the desire to remain unmarried. “When we found one, we donned our white wedding gowns (the virgin goddesses), our damn white gloves, said ‘I do,’ and went of to make babies without knowing how or why,” she wrote.¹⁷³

Yet, after raising children and cheerfully performing the role of the “perfect wife and mother,” the woman described a period of questioning and dissatisfaction, which eventually led to an awakening. “After 40 years of living (?), some of us wake up,” she wrote. “. . . We look to our husbands with clear heads and realize that for some 20 years we have made ourselves into

¹⁷¹ Carole Ashkinaze, “‘Late-Blooming Wives’ Leaving Husbands on the Sidelines,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, May 31, 1980. Carole Ashkinaze Papers.

¹⁷² Letter from ‘a reader’ to Carole Ashkinaze, August 11, 1980. Carole Ashkinaze Papers.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

everything for them. EVERYTHING – wife, protector, lover, friend, yes-man, ego-builder, sister, daughter, mother – you name it. And because we were ‘reared’ to be all things to all people, we have fragmented our souls to such an extent that we have no soul left of our own – to call our own.”¹⁷⁴

After this awakening, the “late blooming wife” described her attempt to redefine herself as an individual, as well as a wife and mother – an act that was met with confusion by her husband. “They say, somewhat disdainfully, that we’ve become women’s’ libbers, know-it-alls, aggressive,” she wrote. Instead of supporting the transition, she wrote that husbands “prefer to step aside and look from afar and wonder what has become of that sweet, white-gloved girl they married some 20 years ago.”¹⁷⁵ In her lengthy letter, Ashkinaze’s reader explored the difficulties that “awakening” housewives and mothers sometimes faced when embracing feminist ideas that women could and should claim a space for themselves outside of their familial obligations.

“Those damn white gloves” served as more than a hated article of clothing; instead, they served as a symbol of the unquestioning acceptance of gender roles and the ideas of middle class Southern womanhood. While such letters questioned the “traditional” narrative of the happy housewife adopted by Phyllis Schafley, it also pointed to the unique problems faced by Southern women. While the woman may have expressed dissatisfaction with her role as a housewife and mother, she quantifies her statements at the end of her letter by assuring Ashkinaze that her family was happy and that she and her husband “talk on different plains, but we try to communicate.”¹⁷⁶ These statements – in addition to the fact that the woman wrote the letter anonymously and while her husband was out of town – suggested that although the woman questioned her

¹⁷⁴ Letter from ‘a reader’ to Carole Ashkinaze, August 11, 1980. Carole Ashkinaze Papers.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

roles, she was not willing to reject the role of wifehood and motherhood in order to pursue more radical feminist ideas about marriage.

Ashkinaze also received letters from women who faced discrimination within the workforce. A letter from another anonymous reader related the social and economic discrimination the 53-year-old divorcee faced. She wrote that working women “are slugging it out day in and day out with all the pressures and discrimination blowing like a hard wind in our faces.”¹⁷⁷ Although she supported the goals of the state’s pro-ERA lobbies, she wrote that she was unable to join the campaign herself. “I am also a private person, and therefore, do not let myself be heard publicly,” she wrote. “I also cannot take off from work and bake and carry cakes and pies to the redneck state legislators courting their favor for women’s rights.”¹⁷⁸ While she may have supported the goals of amendment supporters, her depiction of the pie-baking activists can be read with a hint of derision. Her comments suggest that she considers lobbying the domain of privileged women; working women like herself don’t have time to bake and visit the Capitol, therefore she cannot conform to the standards of domestic femininity that are expected by the “redneck” legislators.

While she found herself unable to actively lobby for women’s rights, the woman articulated a strong indictment of economic inequality and sexual harassment in the workplace. “I have worked for years as an executive secretary and composed business letters, speeches, corporate procedures, etc., for top-level executives but my pay has remained in the pits,” she wrote, suggesting that she was stuck in a “pink collar” secretarial job that offered limited opportunities for advancement. She also endured years of unwanted advances from male coworkers, when she was

¹⁷⁷ Letter from “a reader” to Carole Ashkinaze, undated. Carole Ashkinaze Papers.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

“young and considered pretty, and very well married.”¹⁷⁹ Yet, she wrote, her marital status did little to deter her workplace suitors. “That didn’t stop a soul from trying, trying, trying and even letting me know it could help my career,” she wrote. “If I hadn’t ben well married, I may have been tempted for my pay was so low.”¹⁸⁰ Despite this admission, the woman stressed that she did nothing to encourage the attention or “lead anyone to believe I was on the meat market.” “I am a minister’s daughter and we were brought up to be friendly, courteous, and helpful to everyone,” she wrote. “That was shamefully interpreted to be ‘forward.’”¹⁸¹ The woman wrote anonymously, she said, to protect herself against further discrimination in the workplace.

These two anonymous letters, one from a housewife and the other from a secretary, suggest that women in Georgia experienced personal dissatisfaction with their socially prescribed roles and discrimination to an extent that was not fully reflected in either the emotional public testimony of amendment supporters or in the more staid pro-ERA educational literature. Amendment supporters who publicly claimed ties to major ERA lobbies either limited their discussion of how the amendment would affect the social status of women or denied that the ERA would lead to a reversal of traditional social roles. In an attempt to avoid the label of “women’s libber” or “radical,” amendment supporters avoided tying the amendment to emotional critiques of patriarchal oppression. Therefore, amendment supporters were unable to articulate emotional narratives of dissatisfaction within the home or the workplace within ERA literature.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Letter from “a reader” to Carole Ashkinaze, undated. Carole Ashkinaze Papers.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

Things Fall Apart: Internal Correspondence and the Failures of Ideology

Utilizing emotional appeals in the public sphere, amendment supporters crafted powerful and engaging narratives, reflecting powerful support of the ERA. While emotional narratives within the public sphere reflected positively on the amendment, emotional expression within the private letters of Georgia activists did not reflect strength, but discord. An analysis of letters and memos related to the election of ERA Georgia's 1980-1981 President provide insight into the internal fragmentation of the movement.

In the months leading up to the May 1980 election of officers, ERA Georgia President Joyce Parker launched a campaign for her reelection, despite organizational bylaws that limited terms to one term.¹⁸² Through articles published in the ERA Georgia newsletter and letters sent to the organization's members, Parker sought to rewrite the bylaw and serve as president during the final year of the debate. Parker's efforts gained support from Cathey Steinberg, the primary sponsor of the ERA in the Georgia House during the 1981-1982 legislative session. However, several members of the organization's leadership staff, including Jeanne Cahill, supported Carrie Nell Thompson and opposed attempts to rewrite the bylaw.¹⁸³

Activists attempted to limit public discussion of the internal debate. In a letter sent to Linda Tarr-Whelan and representatives from ERA America, Margaret Miller Curtis wrote, "We are attempting to keep this ERA Ga. situation out of the press and on as professional a basis as circumstances will permit."¹⁸⁴ The attempt keep the debate out of the local newspaper was unsuccessful. On May 6, an *Atlanta Journal* headline proclaimed "Leadership Clash Threatens to Splinter State ERA Lobby" and interviewed activists and legislators who supported the candida-

¹⁸² Selby McCash, "Leadership Clash Threatens to Splinter State ERA Lobby." *Atlanta Journal*, May 6, 1980. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Letter from Margaret Miller Curtis to Linda Tarr-Wheelan, April 20, 1980. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

cies of Parker and Thompson. Activists interviewed in the article did not downplay the emotion that surrounded the discussion. “Individuals on each side say it has become an emotional issue capable of splintering the state’s principal ERA-lobbying organization,” *Journal* Reporter Selby McCash noted in the article’s lead.¹⁸⁵ Such coverage of personal and political tensions within the movement was what Curtis and other activists wanted to avoid. While ERA Georgia remained a powerful voice in the amendment debate until the ERA’s final defeat in January 1982, the internal conflict over leadership took its toll. Parker was ultimately reelected president, but a number of the organization’s board members and leaders resigned, protesting her actions and the bylaw changes.¹⁸⁶ As the national ratification deadline rapidly approached, discord within the state’s major pro-ERA group undermined the lobbying efforts of amendment supporters and shattered visions of a diverse yet unified coalition.

According to letters sent on behalf of Parker, the bylaw change had been introduced in an attempt to prevent extensive change within the organization’s leadership ranks. Parker and her supporters argued leaders with previous experience and contacts would be able to lobby more effectively during the final push for ratification. In a letter sent to ERA Georgia members, Cathey Steinberg suggested that Parker’s contacts were essential to the organization’s success. “We don’t have time to rebuild the bridges that Joyce has spent 18 months building,” Steinberg wrote.¹⁸⁷

Internal memos outlining the organization’s campaign strategies for the 1980-1981 legislative session also emphasized the need to maintain the same leadership, rather than developing a

¹⁸⁵ Selby McCash, “Leadership Clash Threatens to Splinter State ERA Lobby.” *Atlanta Journal*, May 6, 1980. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹⁸⁶ Resignation letters from Lou Ann Basham, Margaret Miller Curtis, and Sarah Butler can be found in the Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers. The three women were also listed as nominees for leadership positions in the 1980-1981 election (none ran against Parker directly). See Nominations list, undated (ca. 1980), Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹⁸⁷ Letter from Cathey Steinberg to ERA Georgia Members, May 9, 1980. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

new coalition of leaders. A memo written before the ERA Georgia annual convention in May 1980 defined the organization as a single issue, short-term lobby, rather than an organization devoted to nurturing women leaders. “Opposition to the succession amendment seems to be centered around the question of developing leadership within ERA Georgia,” the memo stated. “Although leadership development is an important aspect of many women’s organizations, it is not central to the purpose of ERA Georgia.”¹⁸⁸ Parker and members who supported rewriting the presidential bylaw identified ERA Georgia as a lobbying organization that needed the commitment of full-time, experienced lobbyists. Their opponents, they argued, were committed to an earlier organizational vision that placed greater emphasis on nurturing a large coalition of women’s leadership. The rhetoric of Parker, Steinberg, and other supporters emphasize the necessity of developing lobbying tactics, rather than giving more women opportunities to lead within the organization.

Activists who opposed the bylaw change and Parker’s reelection campaign did discuss the need to nurture women leaders and engage earlier organizational models. But the assertion that Parker’s opponents were merely interested in “developing leadership” does not fully reflect the complexities of the debate. If supporters of the one term limit were solely interested in training new leaders, it makes little sense that they would support the candidacy of Carrie Thompson, whose resume reflected the experiences of a strong and well-established community leader, rather than an individual who needed opportunities to develop leadership skills.¹⁸⁹ Leadership and organizational style were not the only point of contention; instead, Parker’s opponents argued that her actions reflected a personal power grab which undermined ERA Georgia’s lobbying at-

¹⁸⁸ Undated, Untitled memo (ca 1980). Cathey Steinberg Papers.

¹⁸⁹ A biographical sketch published by ERA Georgia reflects Thompson’s leadership experience and her civic involvement. Thompson worked as the Southeastern Director of UNICEF, and was a member of the Leadership Atlanta Class, as well as holding “numerous leadership positions on major Atlanta civic and community boards.” Nominations list, undated (ca. 1980), Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

tempts and silenced the voices of women who were equally prepared to lead. Therefore, the internal debate addressed both concerns over the organizational style and purpose of ERA Georgia and the management style and effectiveness of individual leaders.

When Treasurer Sarah Butler resigned, she wrote that her experience in ERA Georgia failed to reflect the organizational style of traditional organizations in which Butler had been involved. Opposing the board's communication style, Butler wrote: "I have served on school boards, PTA boards, parent organization boards, church boards, community club boards, political party boards, etc., never have I seen the rights and opinions of the other members of the board so completely and totally violated."¹⁹⁰

Butler had developed a vision of leadership and organizational style through her involvement with a number of traditional civic and social clubs, and she wrote that the organizational style failed to meet her expectations. Her earlier leadership experience shaped her visions of her expectations for shaping her activism in ERA Georgia. While Basham reflected on her previous leadership experience in her resignation from the ERA lobby, other members did not point to earlier organizational experience to challenge. In her resignation letter addressed to Joyce Parker, Lou Ann Basham also reflected on the need to recognize the leadership ability of ERA Georgia's members. Her comments seem to lend support to a more "collective" vision of leadership than Parker's emphasis on individual leadership and lobbying encouraged. Basham wrote:

Neither you nor any other one or two people are 'uniquely' qualified to 'be' ERA Georgia while all the others are scurrying around performing the nitty gritty details at the leader's beck and call. There are literally dozens of women in ERA and in Georgia who are equally as well qualified as you, as me, or as any other one individual. I, for one, am proud of this knowledge and welcome the opportunity to work with other strong, confident and talented people – especially when those people are women. I view them not as a threat but as one of our great untapped

¹⁹⁰ Letter from Sarah Butler to ERA Georgia Board Members, June 2, 1980. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

strengths. . . . I consider it a personal insult that any insinuation of any kind should be made anywhere that only you or Cathey Steinberg – or any other single individual is – are – whatever – the only one capable of leading efforts for a cause that affects me just as much as it affects you.¹⁹¹

Rather than arguing that ERA Georgia needed to train new leaders, Basham suggested that the organization was filled with women who already had the leadership experience needed to facilitate a lobbying campaign. Parker argued that a year's worth of lobbying experience in ERA Georgia qualified her to facilitate the organization's last push to pass the amendment. Basham argued Parker's leadership was not necessary to launch an effective lobby; instead, she suggested that ERA Georgia should not rely on a single leader to develop the final lobby.

ERA Georgia members who rejected Parker's vision of charismatic leadership also questioned her organizational style. Parker's opponents argued that she misused organizational resources to support a campaign that was invalid under the organization's bylaws. They wrote that during the nomination process, Parker utilized the ERA newsletter as a personal platform to launch a reelection campaign and challenge the presidential nominee approved by the nominating committee. Lou Ann Basham opposed Parker's publication of her personal biographical amendment in the newsletter, after Parker had protested the publication of nominee's biographical sketches.¹⁹²

Basham also expressed her disapproval that Parker published a letter she received Representative Pierre Howard in order to support her claims that she had connections to legislators that could not be recreated by a new president. The letter from Howard stated that he looked forward to working with Parker in the future. Basham argued Parker republished the letter without Howard's permission and that she published the letter's date above the newsletter fold, where it was

¹⁹¹ Letter to Joyce Parker from Lou Ann Basham, May 29, 1980, pg. 4. Jeanne Taylor Cahill Papers.

¹⁹² Ibid.

difficult to notice.¹⁹³ The letter was sent in January, when Parker had several months left in her term, rather than at the end of her term as she was planning her reelection campaign. “Letters were received from other legislators stating that they would be ‘happy’ to work with ANY OFFICIAL ELECTED BY ERA GEORGIA,” she wrote.¹⁹⁴ Basham argued that Parker had misrepresented Howard’s letter to bolster support for her reelection, when he and other legislators were willingly work with the lobby whether or not Parker was reelected.

On both sides of the reelection debate within ERA Georgia, activists voiced reflected on their personal leadership experiences and articulated alternative visions of the organization’s purpose. Joyce Parker and her supporters argued that the organization should operate primarily as a lobbying organization under the leadership of a single well-connected president.

Parker’s opponents argued that ERA Georgia should operate under its original bylaws that prevented reelection of officers and suggested that Parker ignored undermined the organization’s board members by challenging the nominating committee’s presidential nominee and cast doubt on the leadership capabilities of other activists. Although activists attempted to keep the reelection debate out of the local media, internal memos and letters reflected the development of internal divisions within ERA Georgia.

Conclusion

Despite the best efforts of amendment supporters to moderate the ratification debate and respond to anti-ERA rhetoric, the amendment fell short of passage not one, but four times.¹⁹⁵ Well-organized opposition, a growing suspicion of federal power, and a trend of social conserva-

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ The ERA was defeated by the House in 1974 and 1982 and by the Senate in 1975 and 1980. Jones, “Georgia and the Equal Rights Amendment,” 108.

tism took its toll. Although amendment supporters engaged their opponents and developed a nuanced response to anti-ERA concerns, pro-ERA coalitions ultimately defended rather than advanced their cause. Amendment supporters were unable to convince Georgia legislators that the ERA was important enough to support in the face of controversy and vocal opposition.

When considering the pro-ERA defeat, an essential question emerges. Why study a failed movement? Although amendment supporters in Georgia were unable to realize their ultimate goal and achieve ratification, their efforts to moderate public discourse provide new insight into interactions between amendment proponents and opponents. Previous studies of the ERA ratification debates have utilized a top-down approach to the debate, exploring how the legislative debate of the amendment unfolded while largely ignoring the personal discourse of activists. In addition, previous scholarship has largely focused on the activism of feminist coalitions such as the National Organization for Women, rather than coalitions created specifically to lobby for the ERA's passage. By focusing on the legislative debates, scholars have provided limited insight into the unique difficulties faced by single-issue ERA lobbies.

Pro-ERA lobbies occupied a unique discursive space. Unlike feminist organizations that were committed to a number of causes, amendment supporters had more freedom to choose which issues to support and which to ignore. In states such as Georgia where opposition to the amendment was strong, amendment supporters could moderate the debate by downplaying controversial issues.

In Georgia, amendment supporters were torn between two visions of activism and two organizational styles. In internal memos and personal correspondence, amendment supporters expressed their desire to reach a more diverse coalition of women. While pamphlets and events reflect attempts to reach black women and labor organizers, the traditional lobbying style favored

by Georgia pro-ERA lobbies was more conducive to reaching white, middle class, socially active women. In addition, pro-ERA attempts to address the anti-ERA constituency of “traditional” housewives and mothers limited opportunities to reach a more diverse coalition. For example, in general interest pamphlets, space that could have been devoted to a discussion of how the amendment would change labor legislation was used to explain the amendment’s affect on home ownership and the economic status of housewives. Although amendment supporters still addressed the concerns of working women and minorities, attempts to reach conservative women arguably limited the organization’s ability to address the needs of a more diverse coalition of women.

Activists familiar with earlier organizational models envisioned pro-ERA coalitions in the style of earlier women’s clubs, emphasizing the need to develop leadership and give women a voice in the political process. A second group of activists argued that that pro-ERA organizations should operate primarily as lobbying organizations and that effective leaders should maintain their positions rather than training new leaders every year. These divisions over leadership style led to tensions within a movement that had already been split over the use of conservative and radical rhetoric.

At a time when the feminist movement was transformed by the development of consciousness-raising sessions and the radical concept that women’s personal experiences reflected patriarchal oppression, ERA activists in Georgia utilized their personal testimonies to not only express their support for the amendment in the public sphere, but also to reflect on how activism had challenged and shaped their views of leadership and selfhood.¹⁹⁶ Letter writing guides published by state ERA lobbies presented a model of traditional lobbying, and amendment support-

¹⁹⁶ For information on consciousness raising and the women’s liberation movement, see Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 196-201.

ers were careful to present themselves as socially conservative wives and mothers within their personal testimonies. The private discourse of Georgia women reflected a more frank acknowledgement of social dissatisfaction and oppression. Finally, the internal letters and memos written by activists suggest that although activists desired to develop a diverse grassroots coalition, major ERA coalitions struggled with internal conflicts. For Georgia women, political support for the ERA became personal.

Amendment supporters in Georgia were torn between the need to address the social concerns presented by the anti-ERA and the desire to address the needs of a broader group of women. While pro-ERA lobbies attempted to “bridge the gap” emerging between socially conservative women and the increasingly radical women’s liberation movement, amendment supporters were unable to engage in cultural debates over the meaning of feminism and develop a defense of the ERA strong enough to overcome fears introduced by the anti-ERA.

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