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Evangelical Equality: The Feminism of Phyllis Schlafly

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Evangelical Equality: The Feminism of Phyllis Schlafly

by

Elizabeth L. Erwin

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
Conceptual Theory	5
Schlafly Pushed to the Margins	9
Equal Rights Amendment & Schlafly	16
Houston, 1977	26
Conclusions	36
Vita	42

ABSTRACT

The association of modern feminism to a decidedly liberal social platform excludes unfairly women who classify themselves as conservatives. New conservative feminism solves for this exclusion by situating motherhood in a position of power. This paper argues that Phyllis Schlafly's speech in Houston on November 18, 1977 qualifies as a significant feminist moment in American History because it offers a feminist model of how women can be politically effective. While Schlafly would be the first person to dismiss such a label, her political trajectory suggests otherwise. By examining the roles marginalization and silencing have played in her career and how she has utilized these traditionally oppressive tools to her advantage, Schlafly's unique contribution to feminism takes shape.

Introduction:

When Phyllis Schlafly took the stage in Houston on November 18, 1977, she was heavily embroiled in a political fight that called into question the very legitimacy of her lived experience as an American female. Deemed a traitor by her opponents and ignored by mainstream media, Schlafly came to Houston a political exile of a women's movement insistent upon silencing her. Her speech in Houston not only afforded her the opportunity to reclaim her voice publicly but it also provided the means by which to turn her marginalization into a position of power.

This paper argues that Phyllis Schlafly's speech in Houston qualifies as a significant feminist moment in American History because it offers a feminist model of how women can be politically effective. While Schlafly would be the first person to dismiss such a label, her political trajectory suggests otherwise. By examining the roles marginalization and silencing have played in her career and how she has utilized these traditionally oppressive tools to her advantage, Schlafly's unique contribution to feminism takes shape.

At the center of our argument is the idea that culture has two spheres: the dominant sphere and the marginalized sphere. The Dictionary of Sociology offers this definition: "A dominant culture is one that is able, through economic or political power, to impose its values, language, and ways of behaving on a subordinate culture or cultures. This may be achieved through legal or political suppression of other sets of values and patterns of behavior, or by monopolizing the media of communication."¹ Marginalization then refers to the space people or groups are relegated to as a result of suppression by the

dominant culture. While the feminism of this era was a rebuke of the dominant culture's laws and social customs regarding equality between the sexes, the specific issue of the ERA was not as clear-cut.

When it was first proposed in 1919, the legislation had neither political nor social support in large degrees. Over time, however, the institutions of which the dominant culture was comprised-political, social and media- started to support the bill. By the time Schlafly entered the fray, the ERA was, according to Gallop polls, supported by the majority of Americans as well as politicians on both sides of the aisle.² The media, too, gave its tacit support for the amendment via its positive coverage of the ratification efforts by proponents. In essence, the ERA enjoyed such wide-scale support that passage was considered to be inevitable. It was, after decades of arduous work, a reflection of the dominant culture's perspective. In relation to Schlafly, pro-ERA advocates classify as those in the dominant sphere because of their unequal access to media resources and Presidential support. Here we see too that who occupies which sphere, either the sphere of the dominant culture or that of the marginalized culture is fluid.

It is argued that the second wave of feminism focused almost exclusively on the concerns of middle class, white women. This paper suggests one additional qualifier: *liberal*, middle class, white women. And just as feminism expanded to include the unique experiences of minority females so too must it expand to include the unique experiences of evangelical females. In order to have a true collective orientation of American feminism, the structural, cultural and historical conditions distinctive to female conservatives must

¹ *A Dictionary of Sociology*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Dominant Culture," <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O88-dominantculture.html> (accessed April 5, 2012).

² *National NOW Times*, Now National Era Campaign Launched, Feb. 11, 1979.

be explored in order to understand the unique power relations contained within that identity. Positioning Schlafly's experience in Houston within feminist theory allows us to examine the implications of Schlafly's experience in broader terms than even Schlafly's own ideology would allow. This is beneficial not only because it imbues the motherhood experience of women previously excluded from feminist research with gravitas but also because it challenges the sense of victimization inherent in most feminist research.

As the undisputed figurehead of the anti-ERA movement in the 1970s, Schlafly was a lightning rod for feminists incensed by her rhetoric and frustrated by her political maneuvers.

Equal parts hard lined debater and media strategist, Phyllis Schlafly ushered in a new era of political activism. By reinterpreting the legal inequities between the sexes as advantageous to females, Schlafly offered American women a new feminist narrative--one that did not include inherent victimization at its core. In doing so, she "succeeded in doing something nobody had ever done. She had mobilized the conservative women of this country into a powerful political unit."³

In many respects, Phyllis Schlafly is the embodiment of the feminist ideal. Not only did she manage to have a thriving career as a political activist while balancing her roles as wife and mother but she also refused to have her voice silenced by the dominant culture. Raised in a family of educated, working women, Schlafly emulated their example by working her way through college as a weapons tester, earning a master's degree from Harvard in Political Science, managing political campaigns, and running for

³ Lynn Rosellini, "Victory Is Bittersweet For Architect of Amendment's Downfall," *New York Times*, July 1, 1982.

Congress herself. And yet, when asked to name her proudest accomplishment, Schlafly cites her role as mother to her six children. So, who is this woman and how did she manage to lead one of the most successful grassroots campaigns in American History?

Conceptual Theory:

Drawing from feminist theory, sociology and communications theory, a conceptual theory that speaks to the stages of Schlafly's feminist evolution develops and is appropriate to understanding Schlafly's politics from an interdisciplinary perspective. While there exists no one universally agreed upon feminist theory, most researchers do acknowledge the critical role of power.⁴ For the purpose of this paper, power is conceived of as a resource "that can be possessed by individuals in greater or lesser amount."⁵ Ann Cudd best explains this analytic feminist approach to power in her book Analyzing Oppression. She argues that four conditions must exist if power is to be thought of as oppressive⁶. First, individuals who belong to non-dominant culture social groups are at risk for unjust treatment.⁷ Second, these individuals are unjustly harmed because they are a member of the social group.⁸ Third, the harms suffered by the individuals are unjust and are a by-product of coercion.⁹ Fourth, the privilege condition must be present which means "coercive, group-based harms count as oppression only when there exists other

⁴ Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses On Life and Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 123.

⁵ Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," in *Rethinking Power* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 31-32.

⁶ Ann Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

social groups who derive a reciprocal privilege or benefit from that unjust harm.”¹⁰ This definition is appropriate to our examination because it analyzes power within the context of dominant and marginalized cultures. It is these power relationships derived from privilege that provide the basis for our inquiry.

Social science researcher Robyn Fivush best articulates the relationship between power, privilege and voice:

Views from more culturally accepted standpoints are considered the center, whereas views from less accepted standpoints are at the margins. The view from the center is given “voice.” It is the accepted version of our shared socially constructed reality, whereas views from the margins are “silenced.” These stories are either not heard or these perspectives are not validated. In this sense, power gives voice.¹¹

Consequently, if power is able to give voice, then it stands to reason that it too can take it away.

Researchers Dendrinis and Pedro argue “speech and silence can be used as tools of domination only by those who are empowered to use them.”¹² In other words, the ability to silence is something available to the dominant culture but not necessarily marginalized groups. Silencing techniques include the ways the dominant culture suppresses the female voice. Examples of silencing strategies include ridicule, controlling the conversation taking place in the media, and censorship of ideas. These silencing

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22-23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹ Robyn Fivush, “The Feminist Model of Autobiography,” in *The Mediated Mind: Essays in Honor of Katherine Nelson* (Mahwah: Erlbaum, 2002), 6-7.

¹² Check entry

techniques then lead to “the denial of equal social and political rights, and of access to most positions of public influence.”¹³

Most of the existing feminist research explores silencing in the context of female oppression by males.¹⁴ This paper argues for a different approach to feminist power relationships based upon the silencing strategies advanced by Marsha Houston and Cheris Kramarae. They argue that the employment of silencing strategies is often done so that the marginalized group’s voice is perceived as “lacking universality.”¹⁵ It is not only a denial of that woman’s experience but it is also a means of controlling the public narrative. Houston and Kramarae contend that “women who write or talk publicly about their lives are courageous since these accounts often counter men’s records of women’s lives; the accounts and their tellers are considered troublesome and subversive.”¹⁶ Our research takes this idea one step further to illustrate that these female truth tellers are not only countering men’s records of the female experience but also records created by females within the dominant culture.

Dendrinis and Pedro note that in conversations with females, men typically are the ones in control. But what happens when that conversation is exclusive to females and still contains the power dynamics inherent in feminist research? Is it possible then to apply feminist theory to a movement that is by its own definition anti-feminist? Current

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁴ Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression,” in *Rethinking Power* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 183-193.

¹⁵ Marsha Houston and Cheris Kramarae, “Speaking from Silence: Methods of Silencing and Resistance,” *Discourse Society* 2 (1991): 390.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

research suggests the answer is yes. As posited by Judith Stacey, new conservative feminism offers a conceptual framework by which to examine the uniqueness of the conservative female experience. This theory provides a nod to the themes of nineteenth century domestic feminism that advocated for “a division of labor between women and men” but also “represents a struggle over what feminism will mean in the next political period.”¹⁷

Judith Stacey’s new conservative feminism “is a repudiation of sexual politics, the distinctively radical core of the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s.”¹⁸ There are three core tenets of new conservative feminism. First, it adopts a “pro-family” stance in which sexual politics are viewed as a threat to the family.¹⁹ In other words, the politicization of the interpersonal relationships between males and females is viewed as detrimental to the stability of the family because it automatically situates males in the position of the aggressor. Second, new conservative feminism affirms traditional female roles, most specifically that of the mother.²⁰ Rather than linking domesticity with subservience, it advocates that motherhood is actually a position of power. Third, new conservative feminism does not view the struggle against male

¹⁷ Judith Stacey, “New Conservative Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 9, no. 3 (1983): 579.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 561.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 561.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 563.

oppression as being a legitimate battle.²¹ Instead, it is an issue dismissed as a simple distraction from larger issues.

By itself, new conservative feminism does not offer a model appropriate to our inquiry. Yet, what it does offer is a new lens by which to consider the act of silencing. By recasting who occupies the role of the oppressor, new feminist theory allows us to consider silence in a less gender identified way. It is no longer assumed that maleness equates to power over femaleness. Rather, power is situated in the dominant culture and males don't necessarily always occupy that base.

Schlafly Pushed to the Margins

To understand how Phyllis Schlafly's convention in Houston qualifies as a feminist moment, it is first necessary to understand her experience with marginalization. This is important not only because it provides context to Schlafly's politics but also because it also illustrates how Schlafly saw her marginalization in terms of ideas and not sex. By considering how the Republican Party marginalized Schlafly, it is clear that Schlafly learned valuable skills about working from the margins that she would later employ in her battle against the ERA.

When Schlafly wrote *A Choice, Not an Echo* in 1966, she created a rift among the members of the Republican Party that has yet to truly heal.²² Up until the publication of the book, Schlafly had occupied a position of privilege within the party. Not only had she served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1956 and 1960, but she

²¹ *Ibid.*, 562-563.

²² Carol Felsenthal, *Phyllis Schlafly: the Sweetheart of the Silent Majority* (Garden City: Regnery Gateway, 1982), 163.

was also viewed as a defense expert whose expertise was routinely requested by sitting Presidents. Yet, it was her position as the unanimously elected vice president of the National Federation of Republican Women (NFRW) that was Schlafly's position of greatest visibility.

Intended to be a warning to delegates on how the "kingmakers" of the party were selecting only candidates they could control, *A Choice, Not an Echo* is largely cited as being a pivotal turning point in Schlafly's role within the party. According to Schlafly, the "kingmakers" were a group of men of significant power who were robbing the "grassroots" of their choice by establishing figurehead candidates they could manipulate.²³ The rhetoric contained in Schlafly's book incited many of the elite of the Republican Party who were particularly appalled that such sentiments would come from women within their own party. For her efforts, Schlafly was publicly tagged with the label of troublemaker.

As Republican state committees scrambled to suppress the book, support within the Party markedly switched from moderate Nelson Rockefeller to ultra-conservative Barry Goldwater.²⁴ Many established members of the Republican Party attributed this change to Schlafly's book and so, when Goldwater went on to secure the Republican presidential nomination and then suffer a crushing defeat, Schlafly became an easy scapegoat. Party officials quickly pinned the defeat on Schlafly arguing that it was her manipulations that led to the selection of an ultra-conservative.

²³ Justin Raimundo, *Colin Powell and the Power Elite* (New York: America First Books, 1996), page 6-8.

²⁴ Meg Greenfield, "The Goldwater Precedent," *Newsweek*, August 1994, 64.

In shades of what was to come in Houston, Schlafly found herself marginalized for her views. By deeming Schlafly's politics as outside of the center, officials in the Republican Party, comprised overwhelmingly of affluent, white men, effectively moved Schlafly to the margins of the party. Yet, their core reason for doing so was based on Schlafly's ideas on the future of conservatism and not her sex. At the time, there was a movement afoot in the Republican Party to silence any voice construed as disruptive to the overall agenda of the party.²⁵ The arguments made by Schlafly in *A Choice, Not an Echo* certainly fit that bill. For her part, Schlafly dealt with this surprising turn by becoming uncharacteristically quiet in the face of an avalanche of criticism. Yet, even that was not enough for the kingmakers who were about to silence Schlafly by removing her from her most public platform.

In Houston, it would be female feminist organizations with the support of the male dominated Congress and Presidency who would actively work to silence Schlafly. Within the Republican Party, however, it was the female core constituency of the National Federation of Republican Women (NFRW), a 500,000 auxiliary association. By all rights, Phyllis Schlafly had been next in line for the presidency of the NFRW. However, the kingmakers, still smarting over the Goldwater defeat, publicly deemed her too conservative and threw their support behind Southern Californian Gladys O'Donnell. For the women in the organization who wanted Schlafly out, this move by the kingmakers provided a base of power from which they could work.

²⁵ David S. Broder, "Who Controls the Republican Party," *Spokesman Review*, May 11, 1967.

The 1967 election for the presidency of the NFRW was fraught with contention and pitted two ideologies against one another. On one side were the women who occupied largely official positions within the Republican Party including the Federation board and state officials. This contingent, led subversively by outgoing President Dorothy Elston Kabis who used her position to limit Schlafly's access to NFRW resources, believed that moderate Republican views were the way to win national elections.²⁶ Their concern was that the rhetoric espoused by Schlafly would divide the party and leave them vulnerable in the upcoming national elections. Gladys O'Donnell, their candidate of choice, was a politically active moderate whose grandmother like appearance and quiet demeanor made her the physical and rhetorical opposite of Schlafly.

Conversely, Schlafly's supporters, made up primarily of the rank and file, felt that power was running amuck within the party and that the calculated efforts being taken against Schlafly was an effort to purge the party of ultra-conservatives. They pointed to a number of decisions made by the party's establishment, including changing the election year in a private vote and the establishment of a seven person nominating committee, to support their claim that a "coup d'état" was in full effect.

Unlike with the male Republican establishment who had caught her off guard after the Goldwater defeat, this time Schlafly was prepared for the battle. Most importantly, she began to appreciate the political benefits of being positioned in the margins. She "cast the election in moral terms--principle versus self-aggrandizement; democratic expression against rule by insider clique; the rank and file against the

²⁶ Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 294.

kingmakers.”²⁷ This rhetoric that was only possible because those in power had cast her from the mainstream.

Critics of Schlafly have continually attempted to silence her from their positions of power. For example, GOP Chairman, Ray Bliss, attempted to prevent Schlafly from gaining a delegate list even though it was the right of every candidate.²⁸ In doing so, it was hoped that Schlafly would be cut off from the rank and file who supported her. Similarly, a letter written by Goldwater designed to showcase his neutrality in the election was heavily edited by still President Dorothy Elston to seemingly illustrate Goldwater’s support for Schlafly’s rival, Gladys O’Donnell.²⁹ It was only after Goldwater himself sent the unedited letter to Schlafly that his true position became apparent.

Most interestingly, however, was the charge levied against Schlafly that she was not a good mother. Labeled by her opponent as a “brainy snob who ought to stay home with her husband and six children,”³⁰ it was an ironic charge to be levied at a woman whose name would become synonymous with support for the role of the homemaker.³¹

²⁷ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: a Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 149.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁹ Carol Felsenthal, *Phyllis Schlafly; the Sweetheart of the Silent Majority* (Garden City: Regnery Gateway, 1982), 121.

³⁰ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: a Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 186.

³¹ Sara Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press/Regional, 2011), 232.

Critics in the NFRW argued that Schlafly's responsibilities as a mother prevented her from putting forth the energy required of an NFRW president. To make their point, these same critics engaged in a media campaign designed to portray Schlafly's aspirations as neglectful to the welfare of her children.³²

All of this came to a head when the election for a new president of the National Federation of Republican Women was called to order. In a move that is eerily similar with what transpired in Houston, the “NFRW leadership excluded conservatives from the platform and filled the program with so-called ‘unity speeches from nearly every moderate-liberal Republican available.”³³ And, as would happen in Houston, Schlafly was not allowed to address the convention.

Ultimately, Schlafly lost the election but her experience in dealing with the dominant culture of the Republican Party taught her that there was value in operating from the margins. To Schlafly, who never used her sex as an excuse as to why her voice was being belittled within the party, it was her staunch conservative views that set her apart from other Republicans. According to biographer Carol Felsenthal, Schlafly had “never been part of the Republican Ivy League establishment, perhaps because she is a woman, but perhaps also because her anti-communist views have always been too unfashionably strident, her isolationist tendencies too strident.”³⁴ So when she was

³² Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: a Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2005), page 148.

³³ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁴ Carol Felsenthal, *Phyllis Schlafly: the Sweetheart of the Silent Majority* (Garden City: Regnery Gateway, 1982), 283-284.

effectively ostracized from power positions within the party, it was, according to Schlafly, a reflection on her ideas and not her sex.

Schlafly believed firmly that she had never been discriminated against for being female and often stated:

Women who blame sexism for their failure are just looking for an excuse. Some of these women are lazy, others have been brainwashed into thinking there is something wrong with 'just being a housewife,' so they try to achieve in areas they have no aptitude, no qualifications. When they fail, as they are bound to, instead of staying home or getting a job suited to their abilities, they make a job running around the country wailing about discrimination.³⁵

In Schlafly's opinion, women were set apart from men in a manner that promotes access to certain advantages such as exclusion from the draft and the social expectation that a man was responsible for the economic support of his wife. Schlafly's contention was that these differences made women beneficiaries rather than victims.

Having narrowly lost her campaign, Schlafly concentrated her efforts on American military policy. Here again Schlafly staked out a position for herself that operated from the margins more than from the center. As Kathleen Sullivan notes, "Imagine having a very attractive, pregnant mom as an authority on the defense situation in the early 60s and that was Phyllis Schlafly."³⁶ While she would publish five books dealing with defense issues, her role in the debate was still considered something of a sideshow. Even her co-author on some of those books, General Daniel Graham, was amazed that a woman would have such a complete and technical understanding of defense issues. As Graham would later recall, "the most remarkable thing about Phyllis,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

³⁶ *On the Wings of an Eagle: The Story of Phyllis Schlafly*, DVD, directed by Eagle Forum (Alton, Illinois: Eagle Form, 1994).

when we started working together, was to find a woman who in fact understood national security.”³⁷ But for Phyllis Schlafly, military policy was about to take a backseat to another cause.

The NFRP political defeat also served as the final push Schlafly needed to form her own conservative political organization. This group, ostensibly started to collect donations for conservative causes and politicians, provided Schlafly with a forum to express her views on her terms. Originally called the Eagle Trust Fund, Schlafly’s organization would later be rechristened the Eagle Forum during the battle over ERA and served as Schlafly’s main vehicle of communication with supporters.

Equal Rights Amendment & Schlafly:

Originating from the campus social protests of the 1960s, feminism’s second wave was a direct challenge to the customs of the time.³⁸ Betty Friedan, whose book *The Feminine Mystique* is cited as being a major galvanizing force in prompting the second wave of feminism argued that the American housewife was a victim of a malaise for which there was no name. Friedan also stated in the book her desire for “something more than my husband and my children and my home” and argued that this was a sentiment shared by many housewives in a similar position.³⁹ Also notable at the time were protests over Civil Rights and Vietnam in which women were not granted access to positions of power. All of these factors, coupled with President Kennedy’s Presidential Commission

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Nancy MacLean, *The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000: a Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009), 117.

on the Status of Women detailing the inequities existing between the sexes, contributed to the formation of a new women's liberation movement.⁴⁰

The second wave also focused more on specific issues such as employment rights, abortion rights, gay rights and educational opportunities for women far more than its predecessor had done. As a result, opposition forces developed around singular issues within the feminist pro-ERA platform rather than over the ERA itself. For example, abortion was a lightning rod for inspiring conservative women to unite against the ERA. One organization, the National Right to Life Committee, counted over 11,000 women in its membership.⁴¹ Schlafly ascertained that bringing those singularly focused organizations into the anti-ERA fold would result in a larger membership, many of whom would possess valuable community organizing abilities. Social movement researcher Nancy MacLean contends Schlafly "concentrated on feminism's vulnerabilities, among them a propensity for inflammatory critiques of conventional families, an emphasis on personal freedom that could be construed as individualism heedless of other's needs, and a focus on abuse that appeared to embrace victimhood" as a means of buoying membership at the grassroots level.

By any objective standard, the Equal Rights Amendment appeared destined for ratification. To achieve passage, three-fourths of the states, meaning 38 out of 50, needed to ratify the ERA by March 1979. Supported by the mainstream, the amendment was

³⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 18.

⁴⁰ Nancy MacLean, *The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000: a Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009), 66.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7, 134.

hailed as legislation that would finally solve the legal and social inequities between men and women.⁴² Yet, to Phyllis Schlafly and the STOP ERA movement, it signaled a legal precedent to usher in a decidedly liberal social agenda.⁴³ To understand how this issue played out politically in terms of coalitions, it is first necessary to develop a context for both the amendment and the historical positions of both major political parties.

Initially crafted by Alice Paul of The National Women's Party, the ERA was introduced into Congress in 1923 before it was quickly voted down. And while it was introduced in "every Congressional session between 1923 and 1970," it wasn't until 1972 that passage appeared a distinct probability.⁴⁴ Having the support of key political figures, the media and the public, all of the factors were in play for a quick passage.

As it would later be used as the basis for contention between pro-ERA and anti-ERA factions, the wording of this amendment is important to consider. It reads:

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

Historically, the ERA was a position supported by the Republican establishment. In fact, support was so strong that the ERA was a plank included in every national Republican

⁴² compiled by Renee Feinberg, *The Equal Rights Amendment: an Annotated Bibliography of the Issues, 1976-1985* (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), 2-3.

⁴³ Phyllis Schlafly, "A Short History of the Era," *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, <http://www.eagleforum.org/psr/1986/sept86/psrsep86.html> (accessed March 10, 2012).

⁴⁴ Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1986), 43.

convention from 1940 until 1980.⁴⁵ The amendment also had the support of three Republican Presidents: Dwight D. Eisenhower, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford and was largely considered a non-divisive issue. At the time, ERA was consistent with the traditional positions taken by the Republican Party. For example, in 1940, the Republican National Committee adopted a rule mandating that women be equally represented on all RNC committees.⁴⁶ For many, the ERA was simply a natural extension of this move toward equal representation within the party.

Gaining the support of the Democratic Party establishment for the ERA, however, was a somewhat rockier endeavor. Labor unions, led by the American Federation of Labor, strongly opposed the amendment fearing the repercussions it could have in the workplace. Fearful of losing this voting base, northern Democrat politicians were either silent on the issue or publicly criticized it.⁴⁷ Yet, for southern Democrat politicians not so beholden to union organizations, the ERA was far more desirable legislation. In 1944, the two sides brokered a truce in which the ERA was added to the party's national platform. Still, no Democrat President publicly came out in support of the ERA until Jimmy Carter. This was around the same time that the AFL-CIO dropped its opposition to the amendment as well.

The two political parties seemingly came together in 1972 when Representative Martha Griffiths, a Democrat, secured passage of the amendment in the House of

⁴⁵ David Frum, *How We Got Here: The 70's: The Decade That Brought You Modern Life--For Better or Worse* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 244-248.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 247-248.

⁴⁷ Jo Freeman, "Whatever Happened to Republican Feminists," Jo Freeman, <http://www.jofreeman.com/polhistory/repubfem.htm> (accessed March 11, 2012).

Representatives. After passing the Senate as well, the ERA was officially endorsed by Republican President Richard Nixon. One of the strongest and most well organized voices calling for the passage of the ERA was the National Organization for Women (NOW). This powerful lobbying group, which developed as a successor to John F. Kennedy's Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, had substantial Washington contacts they were able to utilize to garner support for the ERA. On the Republican side, the ERA was being championed strongly by the President of the National Federation of Republican Women, Gladys O'Donnell, and the co-chair of the Republican National Committee, Mary Crisp. Clearly, in 1972, on this issue, those who held power in the United States government were largely in agreement. Ratification seemed all but certain to be achieved by the March 22, 1979 deadline.

With only eight more states needed to pass the ERA, Phyllis Schlafly entered the fray. Initially uninterested in the legislation and preferring to direct her attention toward military defense strategies, Schlafly grudgingly agreed to take a look at ERA materials prepared for an upcoming debate in which she was scheduled to participate. Almost immediately she took issue with the amendment. Labeling it anti-family and destructive, Schlafly believed the amendment was designed "to eliminate the role of the stay-at-home wife by making it socially disdained, economically disadvantaged, and legally shorn of traditional protections."⁴⁸

In February 1972, Phyllis Schlafly publicly declared war on the ERA via an article in the *Phyllis Schlafly Report* entitled "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for

⁴⁸ Robert Brent Toplin, *Radical Conservatism: the Right's Political Religion* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 164.

Women.” Directly challenging the assumptions about homemakers made by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, this article laid out Schlafly’s arguments against the amendment. Believing that the amendment was “not an honest effort to secure better jobs for women who want or need to work outside the home,” Schlafly took particular exception to the first two articles.⁴⁹

Article one, Schlafly argued, would eliminate protections and make women subject to the draft, eliminate a woman’s automatic right to alimony and child support and leave in question the custody of a child in the event of a divorce. In essence, it was an attack on the “law and customs” meant to protect the homemaker and the family. Schlafly contended:

I believe in equal pay for equal work. I do not believe in hiring unqualified women over qualified men to remedy some oppression of twenty-five years ago. The claim that American women are downtrodden and unfairly treated is the fraud of the century. The truth is that the American woman has never had it so good. Why should we lower ourselves to ‘equal rights’ when we already have the status of special privilege?⁵⁰

Furthermore, Schlafly insisted that the Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act accomplished the stated goal of the ERA without opening up potential land mines of litigation. By concentrating on what the American woman would lose under ERA, Schlafly hoped to appeal to those women in the margins who felt as though their voices weren’t being heard.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Nancy MacLean, *The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000: a Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009), 117.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁵¹ Phyllis Schlafly, “A Short History of the Era,” *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, <http://www.eagleforum.org/psr/1986/sept86/psrsep86.html> (accessed March 10, 2012).

Coming into existence for the singular purpose of defeating the ERA, Schlafly's STOP ERA was a classic countermovement. With both sides competing for legislative power, pro-ERA advocates already had their network in place. Schlafly recognized immediately that she would need both a publicity machine to get her message out as well as rhetoric that would appeal to women at the grassroots. Because the Eagle Forum, Schlafly's conservative watchdog group started during the debacle with the NFRW, was a functioning political interest group, many of the administrative needs of Schlafly's campaign were already in place. *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* served as the main vehicle for Schlafly to espouse her views and was capable of being disseminated outside of traditional media channels. For instance, copies of the report circulated in churches across the country and were picked up by local television and radio stations. Similarly, the Eagle Forum provided a structure like-minded organizations could emulate.

The next step in shoring up support for the cause was to create a network wherein local groups would be empowered while simultaneously reinforcing Schlafly's position as the movement's leader. Schlafly first turned to the women who had supported her during her failed bid for the National Federation of Republican Women. This list, including Ann Patterson from Oklahoma, Irma Donnelson from Ohio, and Kate Hoffman from Illinois, represented women who had pull at the local level but were not major political players.⁵² Next, Schlafly sought out the support of religious and conservative organizations whose ideology matched her own. Ultimately, evangelical churches such as the Church of Christ, Southern Baptists, Mormons, Orthodox Jews and Roman Catholics

⁵² Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: a Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 218-220.

joined the movement. This was the first time that female members of evangelical churches across the spectrum worked publicly and in greater numbers than their male counterparts.⁵³ Schlafly hoped to draw upon the existing membership of these organizations in order to have a reserve of manpower. By early 1973, “STOP ERA organizations existed in twenty-six states and were especially strong in states critical to the ratification of the ERA.”⁵⁴

As special interest coalitions, each side had distinct advantages and disadvantages. For the pro-ERA advocates, support at the national level via the Carter Administration meant access to funding and traditional channels of media. Yet, an onslaught of emerging divisions within the pro-ERA forces meant that there was no one person in charge who symbolized the movement. As Political Scientist Jeffrey M. Berry notes, sometimes “the quality of leadership may be more important than the quality of cause or the strength of the disturbance.”⁵⁵ Pro-ERA supporters inadvertently provided the STOP ERA movement with a powerful figurehead in Schlafly. By directing insults in the media against Schlafly specifically, pro-ERA advocates imbued her with authority Schlafly was then able to manipulate to her advantage. Additionally, the pro-ERA coalition was becoming splintered over disagreement as to the inclusion of abortion and

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁵⁴ compiled by Renee Feinberg, *The Equal Rights Amendment: an Annotated Bibliography of the Issues, 1976-1985* (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), 2-3.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey M. Berry, “The Origins and Maintenance of Public Interest Organizations,” in *Lobbying For the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 26.

lesbian rights in their platform as well as division on how best to achieve their political goals.⁵⁶

In contrast, STOP ERA was highly organized and had a charismatic leader at its helm. Additionally, while all members were socially conservative, STOP ERA had at the grassroots level what Christopher Bosso refers to as a “denser and more internally diverse” populace.⁵⁷ Yet, despite this cohesion, STOP ERA did not initially have the support of the establishment. In fact, Republicans were initially divided as to how best proceed on the issue. But the biggest obstacle for STOP ERA out of the gate was the disparity in access to the media.

Not having access to the same venues as pro-ERA advocates, specifically the national media, Schlafly attempted to prevent further ratification by going after the amendment at the state level. It was at this point, that Schlafly’s public voice began to gain momentum. And ultimately, it was this voice that the pro-ERA contingent, led primarily by feminists, attempted to silence in Houston.

John Burger writes, “Most social movements appropriate and recodify the languages of the existing dominant social order they wish to change.”⁵⁸ How pro-ERA supporters framed and responded to Schlafly illustrate the intentional side of ritual adoption, or the tendency by a minority to use the majority’s rhetoric in making its case.

⁵⁶ Robert Brent Toplin, *Radical Conservatism: the Right's Political Religion* (Lawrence, Kan.: Univ Pr of Kansas, 2006), 162.

⁵⁷ Christopher Bosso, “Filling Advocacy Niches,” in *Environment, Inc.: From Grassroots to Beltway* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

⁵⁸ John R. Burger, *One Handed Histories: The Eroto-Politics of Gay Male Video Pornography* (New York: Hayworth Press, 1995), 4.

Michael Rogin explains what he calls the American “countersubversive tradition” as demonization used as a tool of elites to suppress political dissent: “the creation of monsters as a continuing feature of American politics by the inflation, stigmatization, and dehumanization of political foes.”⁵⁹ One example of the dehumanization tactics levied against Schlafly concern the charges that she was a Nazi and a member of the Ku Klux Klan. And while there was never any evidentiary link between Schlafly and the two organizations, it didn’t stop pro-ERA advocates from making the link. Feminist Jo Ann Horowitz labeled Schlafly a “friend to the KKK” in a debate the two women were having on a college campus and the narrative took off.⁶⁰ For instance, on the cover of the national magazine *Advocate*, Schlafly’s photo was superimposed next to Larry Hicks, president of the Ku Klux Klan signifying the assertion that the two were in cahoots. Similarly, cartoonist Garry Trudeau, a known pro-ERA advocate, featured Schlafly in his wildly popular *Doonesbury* comic with the tagline: *Hey Phyllis, your sheet is showing*.

While the intentional manipulation of the dominant paradigm by a minority can influence culture favorably for a minority, the unintentional side effect of ritual adoption carries with it harms destructive to the minority. Darsey writes, “Social movement theory implies that groups struggling against oppression tend to assume the character of the oppressor.” As we’ve examined, the dominant culture has two patterns of discrimination: silencing and demonization. Pro-ERA advocates in their struggle against Schlafly adopted these patterns of discrimination.

⁵⁹ Michael Paul Reagan, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 273.

⁶⁰ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: a Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 252.

HOUSTON, 1977

Having been effective in slowing down ratification, Schlafly's leadership was becoming known to the key players involved in trying to pass the ERA. Initially, she was dismissed by her opponents as little more than a rabble-rouser with no long-term staying power. Many within the pro-ERA movement were so convinced that women would unilaterally support the amendment that no plans as to how to address potential opposition were ever formulated.⁶¹ Having been caught off-guard by Schlafly's well-run network, pro-ERA advocates quickly sought to discredit her. By examining the silencing tactics employed against Schlafly in Houston as well as how Schlafly's response rhetoric meets the criteria of new conservative feminism, Schlafly's speech in Houston is transformed into a major moment in American feminism.

In order to silence, one must be working from a position of power. For pro-ERA advocates, their access to the vast majority of traditional media meant that they not only carried the perception of power, via Presidential support, but that they also had access to the tools of power, specifically television.⁶² In many respects, the initial coverage of the ERA by the media was simply a reflection of the general views held by society. The move toward ratification was initially swift. By the end of 1973, thirty states ratified the ERA with little fanfare. Additionally, "more than 450 organizations with memberships well over fifty million" endorsed the ERA helping to fuel the perception that it was a

⁶¹ Janet K. Boles, "Building Support For the Era: A Case of Too Much, Too Late," *PS* Autumn (1982): 572.

⁶² *ABC Nightly News*. February 4, 1977, ABC, 5:00PM

mainstream issue.”⁶³ Gallop Polls and the Harris Survey also consistently indicated support for the ERA outpaced criticism by two to one.⁶⁴ From 1972-1974, efforts to pass the amendment were largely described in positive terms by nightly news coverage on all three major networks.⁶⁵ The same is true for how the ERA was covered on television talk shows and in women’s magazines during this period.⁶⁶ Most accounts emphasized themes of equality and civil rights without directly linking the cause to a specific strain of feminism. Opposition to the amendment was not prevalent in mainstream media outlets and most agencies covered the story by speculating about possible outcomes to the legislation rather than questioning its passage.⁶⁷

This tacit support of the amendment by the mainstream media added to the air of invincibility felt by pro-ERA advocates. Not surprisingly, it was from this vantage point which pro-ERA feminists accepted Schlafly’s offer to debate the legislation. On college campuses across the United States, Schlafly turned up to debate the merits of ERA. Her formidable opponents, a virtual who’s who of the feminist movement in the late 1970s, often became frustrated by these exchanges.⁶⁸ Not only was Schlafly publicly unflappable

⁶³ compiled by Renee Feinberg, *The Equal Rights Amendment: an Annotated Bibliography of the Issues, 1976-1985* (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), 2-4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-20.

⁶⁵ *National NOW Times*, Now National Era Campaign Launched, Feb. 11, 1979.

⁶⁶ Mathilda Butler and William Paisley, “Equal Rights Coverage in Magazines,” *Journalism Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (1978): 157-60.

⁶⁷ *ABC Nightly News*. January 18, 1977, ABC, 5:00PM.

⁶⁸ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: a Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 226.

but also the heated exchanges caught the eye of reporters looking for stories. Not only did the decision to debate Schlafly ultimately showcase the schism in political thought among pro-ERA supporters but it also gave Schlafly entry into the national dialogue taking place on television.

By 1975, Schlafly was expanding her audience through appearances on national programs such as *Donahue* and the *Mike Douglas Show* and through her position as commentator on the CBS owned radio program, *Spectrum*. This media exposure provided her with an air of legitimacy on the national level she hadn't had prior. Her appearances, carefully calculated, were meant to showcase her rhetoric as that of the Christian majority and that of her opposition as the immoral minority. While she was in the process of rewriting the public narrative on the amendment, Schlafly was still operating from the margins in both political access and public perception. To the leadership of the pro-ERA movement, however, Schlafly's sudden visibility was an issue that needed to be addressed quickly.

Ridicule, as defined by Dendrinis and Pedro (1997), is an effective way of silencing an opponent because it can be used against the rhetoric of a speaker as well as the traits exhibited by the speaker. For example, while Schlafly's views were ridiculed so to was her appearance and affect. By mocking Schlafly's views as well as her personally, pro-ERA supporters hoped to undermine her arguments. One such instance occurred on a *Firing Line* episode in which Professor Brenda Eddy from Georgetown and Dr. Ann Scott, from the National Organization of Women, attempted to portray Schlafly as out of

touch and labeled her position as “nonsense.”⁶⁹ Similarly, Bella Abzug attempted to thwart Schlafly's appearance on *Donahue* by referring to her as “that silly woman.” But for pro-ERA advocates, these exchanges were not having the desired effect. Instead of silencing Schlafly, these tactics seemingly bolstered her position. Set against Schlafly’s smiling and personable demeanor, the feminists who debated Schlafly came across as aggressive and radical.

As the battle of the ERA waged, feminist leaders became increasingly frustrated by their inability to stop Schlafly. So they attempted to silence her with increasingly violent rhetoric instead. No longer the dismissive ridicule first employed, the rhetoric used became decidedly biting and, in some cases, violent. On various occasions, leaders in the pro-ERA movement declared Schlafly should be “hit,” “smacked,” “punched,” and “burned at the stake”⁷⁰ These comments were made by Florence Kennedy, Joanie Caucus, Harlan Ellison, and Betty Freidan, respectively. Such proclamations were at odds with the anti-violence stance many of these same individuals espoused. On April 16, 1977 this rhetoric of violence came full circle when activist Aron Kay hit Schlafly in the face with a pie. The incident, mocked by the press and feminist leadership, left Schlafly with evident facial bruising. Realizing that efforts at ridicule were having the opposite effect of their intended purpose, a new approach to silencing Schlafly was adopted. The pro-ERA forces would simply censor her.

⁶⁹ William F. Buckley Jr, *Firing Line*, DVD, directed by Hoover Institution Video Library (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2008).

⁷⁰ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: a Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 252.

First appointed by President Ford in 1975, the U.S. Commission on the International Women's Year was charged with holding state conferences to assess the needs of American women.⁷¹ It would culminate in a national conference comprised of delegates selected at each state conference. From the start, public funding of the conference was an issue for Schlafly and the STOP ERA movement. When having her supporters write their congressmen urging them to vote against the funding didn't work, Schlafly tackled the issue at the state level. By the time the federal funding for the state conferences became available, both sides were engaged in a heated battle.

While state commissions were balanced in terms of age, race and income, they were not balanced when it came to stances taken on the ERA. Schlafly contended that as these were commissions receiving federal funding, equal representation of viewpoint was required. Fights broke out between the two sides and states with a strong evangelical base such as Missouri, Ohio, Hawaii, Washington, Montana, and Idaho were able to secure positions on the commissions.⁷² In the final tally, the anti-ERA movement was able to secure twenty percent of the delegate slots for its members.⁷³

⁷¹ Michael Lind, "The Radical Center or the Moderate Middle," *New York Times Magazine*, December 3, 1995, 43.

⁷² John M. Crewdson, "Mormon Turnout Overwhelms Women's Conference in Utah," *New York Times*, July 25, 1977.

⁷³ Ruth Murray Brown, *For a Christian America* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2002), 111.

With the federally sponsored five million dollar conference about to convene, Phyllis Schlafly was informed that she would not be allowed to speak.⁷⁴ Ostensibly the reason given was that she had not followed proper protocol; a charge Schlafly denied vehemently. In the end, no person advocating against the ERA was invited to speak at the conference. The decision to censor Schlafly on this national stage was an attempt by pro-ERA advocates to control the message coming out of Houston.⁷⁵

This approach to silence, explained by Dendrinis and Pedro (1997), is an attempt at consensus building through the perception that there is no legitimate voice in opposition. By preventing Schlafly from speaking, organizers attempted to marginalize her viewpoint and silence her rhetoric. They also illustrated their position of power by having the resources necessary to exclude Schlafly. Conference organizers, who were almost unilaterally feminists, believed that by silencing Schlafly in Houston they would be able to present a unified proposal for equity to the American public that would be seen as being supported by the majority.⁷⁶ And yet, the exact opposite happened.

Miscalculating Schlafly's response to her exclusion from the National Women's Conference, many pro-ERA supporters were shocked at what was about to unfold. Instead of returning home to prepare for more state ratification battles, Schlafly used the opportunity to espouse her rhetoric on her own terms. Calling upon Lottie Beth Hobbs,

⁷⁴ Debbie Mauldin Cottrell, "National Women's Conference, 1977," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pwngq> (accessed March 25, 2012).

⁷⁵ Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson, MS.: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 268-270.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 267-269.

President of the Pro-Family Forum, Schlafly set about to create a rival convention to take place simultaneously in Houston.⁷⁷ Holding the event in the Houston Astrodome, the 20,000 seat capacity venue was filled to capacity with supporters. Schlafly emphasized to the media that not only was her conference filled, but attendees had paid their own way to attend unlike the federally supported delegates at the International Women's Conference. Schlafly also used her exclusion from the official convention as a way of highlighting her marginalized status to the media. She was able to use her situation to highlight that the conference didn't speak for all women as it claimed but just those who agreed with its dogma. By showcasing the rising tensions in Houston, Schlafly was able to increase media interest in the event which she then parlayed into greater visibility for her speech. In fact, media coverage of both the official conference and the Pro-Family rally spearheaded by Schlafly and Hobbs intensified dramatically, most likely owing to the drama unfolding almost on a daily basis.

Knowing that the eyes of the national media were on her, Phyllis Schlafly took the stage in Houston on November 18, 1977. She wasted no time in clarifying what she saw as the underlining reason for the division between the two groups:

There are many differences between this meeting and the one next door. We started out by offering a prayer and I think you should know that at that other meeting, they didn't have a prayer. They just started out with a moment of silence for fear that they would offend many of their members that were present. I'm very proud that they excluded me from that convention and I'm here where we're not ashamed and not afraid to ask God's blessing on this crowd assembled here today.

⁷⁷ Rosemary Thomson, *Price of Liberty* (Carol Stream: Strang Communications Co, 1978), 138-147.

With these words, Schlafly reframed in simple terms the debate over the ERA. It was no longer just about securing equal protections under the law for women, as the pro-ERA advocates maintained, but now it was a moral battle for the future of America with God placed squarely in the middle.

Schlafly also used her turn at the podium to drive home what she deemed the illegitimacy of the National Women's Conference. Calling into question both its legitimacy and its truthfulness about its objectives, Schlafly didn't mince words over her perception that the National Women's Conference and ERA were frauds being perpetrated against the American public:

The whole thing was designed as a media event; a charade to go through the motions of these phony state conferences and national conferences in order to pass resolutions that were pre-written and pre-packaged a year and a half ago and published in June 1976 and then after it was all over to then tell the Congress and state legislatures that this is what American women want. By coming here today, you have shown that this is not what American women want.

An act of rebellion, this speech enabled Schlafly to publicly reclaim the voice taken from her by the dominant culture as well as to reframe her role in the struggle. Instead of allowing the feminist portrayal of her as an ineffectual malcontent to be the story, Schlafly rebranded herself in Houston to be a God warrior fighting against the privilege of a radical left. Working from the margins, she utilized the silencing techniques directed against her to her advantage.

Almost overnight, who occupied the dominant and the marginalized spheres of the public debate became unclear. One reason for the confusion was the public splintering of the pro-ERA in Houston. "As virtually every feminist identity or goal had an organization," uniformity of position on issues ranging from abortion rights to gay rights

was not evident.⁷⁸ Additionally, the actual conference was perceived as being unorganized and taken over by special interests. In trying to include all positions by all women, organizers left themselves vulnerable to public dissent among the ranks. Exacerbating this issue was an attempt by the anti-ERA delegates to have an anti-ERA plank added to the conference from the floor of the convention. When the pro-ERA chairwoman denied them, the contingent erupted into chants of “voter scam.”

In stark contrast, Schlafly’s STOP ERA campaign was remarkably cohesive. One of the unintentional side effects of the efforts to silence Schlafly was that it provided to her the opportunity to broaden her agenda for long-term political viability. Prior to the federally funded state conferences, STOP ERA was comprised mainly of southern groups with the sole focus of opposing the ERA. In Houston, Schlafly moved seamlessly away from her original specific agenda to “a well-coordinated pro-family movement with a much broader agenda.”⁷⁹

Schlafly’s rhetoric in Houston was unabashedly that of a new conservative feminist. By elevating the role of the homemaker in her speech and making her marginalization about her stance on the ERA and not her sex, Schlafly reclaimed feminism from the radical left and its assumption of male dominance. Additionally, her refusal to acquiesce to those in power, whether male or female, citing a moral imperative as a mother and wife indicates that she did not link these roles to subservience but instead sees them as a potential bases of power.

⁷⁸ Ruth Murray Brown, *For a Christian America* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2002), 116-120.

⁷⁹ Alice S. Rossi, *Feminists in Politics: a Panel Analysis of the First National Women's Conference* (New York: Academic Pr, 1982), 195.

In the aftermath of Houston, support for the ERA was declining. Not only had a mere one state ratified it since STOP ERA became involved, but three states had attempted to rescind their earlier ratifications. Signs that passage was no longer assured became more common than not. This was brought to a head when the Carter Administration was able to successfully extend the ratification timeline by three years in order to give pro-ERA forces more time to accomplish their mission. Infuriating anti-ERA advocates, this move signaled a change in perception on the issue for both the establishment and the mainstream.

Still, the biggest change as a result of Houston concerned a shift taking place within the Republican Party establishment. Once united on the issue of the ERA, there was now a fight for the political direction of the party. As Michael Lind (1995) explains, “members of the moderate middle tended to be old-fashioned Eisenhower and Rockefeller Republicans who felt alienated by the supply-siders and religious right activists whom since the 1970’s have taken over the G.O.P.”⁸⁰ With Schlafly’s network in place at the state level, a natural extension of their work on the ERA was to support candidates who agreed with their position. As the internal makeup of the Republican Party started to change based upon what was happening at the grassroots level, so too did its position on the ERA. In 1980, it was officially dropped from the party platform signaling a new era in Republican politics.

By June 1982, time was running out to pass the amendment. Increasingly desperate, pro-ERA advocates turned to the media. While some engaged in theatrics,

⁸⁰ Michael Lind, “The Radical Center or the Moderate Middle,” *New York Times Magazine*, December 3, 1995, 72-73.

such as hunger strikes and chaining themselves to the doors of the Senate, others, such as Betty Friedan, began to publicly disavow their previous scorn of the homemaker. As images of pro-ERA factions in the media became more radicalized, Schlafly was training women in her organization how to dress and behave in interviews so as to not appear threatening to the viewing audience.⁸¹ By visually appearing more mainstream, STOP ERA repositioned itself in the media and, by extension, in the minds of many Americans. In the end, despite an unprecedented three-year extension, Schlafly and the pro-family movement defeated the ERA. For Phyllis Schlafly, victory against the ERA as well as her early support of Ronald Reagan's political agenda made her a new center of the Republican Party-- a party that had once scorned her.

Conclusions:

The association of modern feminism to a decidedly liberal social platform excludes unfairly women who classify themselves as conservatives. As Schlafly illustrates, new conservative feminism solves for this exclusion by situating motherhood in a position of power. This strain of feminism doesn't attack traditional culture as much as it celebrates it. As such, women are not inherently discriminated against because their power is a biological imperative. Rather, if they do face discrimination, it is for their ideas. And, as Schlafly demonstrates, that discrimination need not be construed as negative. Instead, it can be utilized for political and social gain.

⁸¹ Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 227.

The relevancy of the marginalization of Schlafly can be seen in its lasting implications. First, Schlafly was able to use the marginalization process as a way to bring attention to her ideas. Although she didn't believe that she faced discrimination because of her sex, she did feel that there were times when she was ostracized for her political and social beliefs. By positioning her message against the immoral confines of a dominant culture controlled by her adversaries, Schlafly used effectively the momentum that comes with being perceived as the underdog. Second, her role as spokesperson for the "silent majority" gave this group its first visible spokesperson and helped to spawn debate over family values. She used the platform to demarginalize the very women the media had insisted via their roles as homemakers and offered a new perspective on what the different roles for the sexes entailed.

From a political science standpoint, the case study of Phyllis Schlafly in Houston offers a number of conclusions worthy of further inquiry. Certainly the history of the Equal Rights Amendment is a contentious one but it signals the impact special interest groups can have upon political ideology and the perceptions of power. The realignment of the Republican Party in the wake of the defeat of the ERA exemplifies the importance of coalition building and how quickly who occupies the center and who occupies the margins can change. As evangelical conservatives under Ronald Reagan replaced moderate conservatives, the Republican Party moved closer to the ideology expressed by Schlafly.

The success of Phyllis Schlafly's agenda is due to her skillful adaption to discrimination and demonology imposed by the dominant political culture. Her refusal to acquiesce to those in authority is a recurring theme in her political career. Never one to

claim victimization, Schlafly is the embodiment of a woman who found lasting public success both in the political arena as well as the domestic arena. By rejecting the inherent victimization of modern feminism and showcasing how the tools of the oppressor can be used to negotiate power, Phyllis Schlafly spearheaded one of the most successful grassroots campaigns in American History and, in the process, accidentally created a new breed of feminist.

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