WOMEN OF THE HEARTLAND

TRADITION AND EVOLUTION IN THE MISSOURI WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

A Thesis
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

JOHN C DEKEN

Dr. Catherine E. Rymph, Thesis Advisor

JULY 2009
Thesis Approval

The undersigned, in their character as thesis committee duly appointed, have examined the thesis entitled

WOMEN OF THE HEARTLAND
TRADITION AND EVOLUTION IN THE MISSOURI WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

presented by John C. Deken,
a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts,
and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

____________________________________________
Professor Catherine Rymph, chair

____________________________________________
Professor Jeffrey Williams

____________________________________________
Professor Steven Watts
Women of the Heartland

Acknowledgements

Despite having an undergraduate history degree, some years of teaching experience, and a comprehensive array of lesser papers under my belt, I found this thesis, a coherent work of this magnitude, incredibly daunting. That it stands complete at all is due only incidentally to me, and rather more significantly to a number of people without whose assistance it could not have come to fruition. For the initial encouragement and confidence to pursue graduate study, I am indebted to Jeff Williams. For a welcoming environment and quick acceptance at the history department, I owe John Wigger and my inimitable mentor, Catherine Rymph, who further has done more than anyone to suggest sources and criticize arguments, and has generally borne a Herculean share of the burden of making my work fit for perusal (if indeed it is so).

Undoubtedly, Diana Rahm deserves a title of nobility for allowing me to make her workspace my own far too often while this work was in progress. Kristy Janda and Brett Kirkpatrick, who too frequently gave up their own free time when I sought diversion from the research notes, deserve a full measure of thanks also. In creating those research notes, Bill Stolz, Mary Beth Brown, and the staff at the Western Historical Manuscript Collection were both indefatigable and invaluable.

Those other professors who were under no obligation to offer the mentoring they did – Jeff Pasley, Michelle Morris, Carol Anderson, and especially Steve Watts – are reserved a special place in the pantheon of selfless heroes. As for more mercenary heroes – who received as many drinks as they bought – Kristin Henze and Mike Marden deserve mention, not least for the examples of creativity and diligent scholarship they set in spite of my best efforts to corrupt them.

Without the faculty and staff of the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation, neither this degree nor the thesis capping it would have been possible. And without the creative support of Mike Jeffers in the face of an inflexible and self-righteous school district administration, I could not have found the time to do this work.

I have saved for last the greatest underwriter of this work. In time, in money, in emotional support and commiseration, in sleepless nights and pretended interest, no one has offered more support than my favorite wife and only love, Liz Deken. The many words on this page make no dent in the debts I owe to those who have made this work what it is. Nevertheless, in the traditional style, I concede that the many remaining defects in the thesis belong to me alone.

John C Deken
Georgetown University
8 July 2009
# Table of Contents

 Acknowledgements ii

 List of Abbreviations iv

 Introduction
 The Case for an Analysis of Missouri 1

 Chapter I
 The National Women’s Movement 36

 Chapter II
 What The National Movement Created In Missouri 64

 Chapter III
 Issues Inspired By Tradition 93

 Chapter IV
 Issues Inspired By Women’s Liberation 119

 Chapter V
 The ERA Ratification Debates 144

 Afterword 169

 Appendix
 Missouri Delegates to the National Women’s Conference in Houston, 1977 172

 Bibliography 173
List of Abbreviations

AAUW American Association of University Women
BPW Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs
CORE Congress of Racial Equality
CR Consciousness-Raising (used of discussion groups)
CSW Commission on the Status of Women
ERA Equal Rights Amendment
IACSW Interstate Association of Commissions on the Status of Women
IWY International Women’s Year (declared for 1975 by the United Nations)
LWV League of Women Voters
MACWC Missouri Association of Colored Women’s Clubs
MU University of Missouri at Columbia
NBFO National Black Feminist Organization
NFRW National Federation of Republican Women
NOW National Organization for Women
NWPC National Women’s Political Caucus
PCSW President’s Commission on the Status of Women (vs. state CSW)
SDS Students for a Democratic Society
SNCC Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
STOP ERA Stop Taking Our Privileges (Phyllis Schlafly’s organization)
WEAL Women’s Equity Action League
WPC Women’s Political Caucus (used for local chapters of NWPC)
YWCA Young Women’s Christian Association

Additional Abbreviations Used in Citations

WHMC Western Historical Manuscript Collection
  WHMC SL#### at University of Missouri-St. Louis
  WHMC C#### at University of Missouri-Columbia
  WHMC SUNP or WUNP unprocessed collections
Introduction

The Case for an Analysis Of Missouri

Between the Appalachians and the Rockies lies the enormous mass of what is sometimes called Middle America. Historians of the turbulent twentieth century have generally preferred to tell a “national” story based in the coastal centers: New York, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and so on. But by doing so, they run the risk of failing to see clearly what they describe. By discussing the women’s movement from both national and Missouri perspectives, I hope to bring this anamorphic picture of social activism more clearly into view.

The New Morality of the 1920s raised women’s hemlines, promoted illegal drinking, and trumpeted sexuality as natural and healthy. The upside-down world of the Great Depression sent healthy, job-seeking adults to sit at home idle, while children and full-time homemakers sought desperately to supplement the family income, and government inaugurated an era of unprecedented influence on private life. World War II ushered in a massive regime of mobilization and self-sacrifice, and the integration of women and minorities into an industrial workforce in numbers never before seen. It is no wonder, then, that so many Americans tried to retreat in the postwar world to a cocoon of consumerist consensus.

Consensus, alas, was not to be found. The Red Menace demanded a massive military industrial complex. Continued racial discrimination became increasingly less bearable to a generation promised Freedom From Want and Freedom From Fear by FDR. Wide income gaps continued to mock Nixon’s promise of American abundance – made
in Moscow, no less. These discrepancies encouraged people from many backgrounds to question social structures, and heightened expectations for equality in groups from African-Americans to blue-collar workers to American women.

After 1960, national conversation increased about the proper role of women in American society. The debate reached into all facets of social, economic, and political life: access to education; child-raising and educating; choice of occupation and chances for advancement; the possibility of full-time homemaking; military and jury service drafts; the rewards and even the definition of marriage; the availability of birth control and abortion – all became parcel of the debate over feminism. Because positions on these issues were intensely personal, local studies are better able than national surveys to explain why people took the stances they did.

One position argued for reformed social attitudes and large-scale government intervention to attack entrenched inequalities based on sex. As a shorthand, I will refer to these as “feminists.” Another extreme were those who insisted that contemporary or past understandings of gender held the keys to social harmony, individual happiness, and public virtue. Regardless of whether these ideals were historical facts, nostalgic myths, or some combination of both, supporters believed themselves to be defending traditional ideals; hence, I will use for them the term “traditionalists.” I will also refer to them as “antifeminists” to the extent that they seem to me to be organizing consciously in opposition to feminist groups.

In the second half of the twentieth century, attitudes toward proper roles for women in US society underwent a dramatic shift. Economic pressures, changes in thinking about civil rights, and grassroots activism all contributed to the change, seen
most clearly in the rise of a national movement in the 1960s. There has been a tendency to study “the women’s movement” through the behavior of organized feminist groups. Such study is natural, in that physical records often exist for many of these groups. It is also essential, especially in defining the direction and goals of the organized movement, and it will play a prominent role in this investigation. But it does not and cannot address fully the interactions of that movement with the actions and thoughts of the vast remaining mass of women. Some did not participate directly in a movement, and others organized against so-called feminists. By looking at some of the ways feminist groups responded to opposition or indifference, I hope to offer a less introverted view of the women’s movement in one state – Missouri. For a description of the opposing side, I have relied heavily on Donald Critchlow’s political biography of Republican and anti-ERA activist Phyllis Schlafly. While my primary aim is discussing organized feminist activity, I will try to show especially in my final chapter the ways in which feminist and antifeminist activity interacted.

Feminism, according to historian Linda Gordon, is a state of mind that describes “those who disapprove of women’s subordinate status, who believe that women’s disadvantaged position is not inevitable and can be changed, and who doubt the ‘objectivity’ of history as it has been previously written in a male-dominated culture.”¹ Feminist complaints of the 1960s, by definition, revolved around the unthinking societal assumption of male superiority. Therefore, organized groups attacked a whole host of major issues. Their targets often included such direct evidence of unfairness as pressure on women to remain in the home, unequal access to education and jobs, and sole female

---

Women of the Heartland

responsibility for child care. Less obvious societal practices that activists came to oppose were many, including for example the widespread violence and intimidation against women, or the kinds of artistic, body image, and etiquette concerns that reflected prejudicial assumptions.

Despite the broad focus that this diffuse movement implies, I will endeavor to avoid the assumption that all women’s activity is feminism. Contemporary accounts of the 1960s and 1970s are especially prone to what Ruth Rosen identified as “first woman” syndrome, celebrating a lone achievement without larger analysis.² Twenty years ago, Nancy Cott asked for a clarification, a re-definition of “feminism” along the same lines as Gordon: critiquing male supremacy, believing that it is alterable, and with intent to contribute to that alteration. “Such a definition,” said Cott, “does not posit that what women do of a public or civic character is in itself feminist, unless a challenge to male domination is present.”³ This understanding would return feminism to its essential base: a conscious critique of inequality.

Liberal feminist groups in the late 1960s adopted the rhetoric that characterized the movement for African-American civil rights. This feminist rights rhetoric culminated in Congressional passage of an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1972, which became the focus of both feminist and traditionalist activism. Despite the risk of inaccurately portraying the ERA as the only feminist issue, some discussion of it is crucial to understanding the basis of hopes and fears on both sides. Congress passed the ERA with bipartisan support, and national polls consistently showed majorities in favor of

³ Nancy Cott, “What’s in a Name? The Limits of ‘Social Feminism’; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women’s History,” Journal of American History (Dec 1989), 826.
ratification. Nevertheless, the ERA was never ratified, as the number of approving states failed to reach the required three-fourths. National approval and national polls flatten out the state-by-state variation critical to understanding debates over the status of women. Focusing on a state where ERA failed will reveal more about the complex interactions of feminist and traditionalist thought than we can determine from national-level histories.

Inequality continues to thrive in unacknowledged assumptions about women’s proper roles, and many histories of feminism understate the influence of traditionalist thought. Molly Ladd-Taylor, in the introduction to her history of *Mother-Work*, elucidates the difficulties of transcending mythic, traditional understandings of women’s work:

> In the years I worked on this book, I was often asked the title. Invariably, when I answered “mother-work,” it was assumed I meant “working mothers,” women with children employed outside the home. Despite more than twenty years of second-wave feminism, “mother-work”—meaning women’s unpaid work of reproduction and caregiving—still seems to many like a contradiction in terms.4

Much discussion of gender equality still suffers from an unacknowledged understanding that private domesticity is natural to women, rather than actual labor by them.

This particular problem does not impact Winifred Wandersee’s work on 1970s activism, nor is it a major problem in Ruth Rosen’s excellent synthesis of the women’s movement.5 But these two, like much existing work, are national almost exclusively in scope. The analysis of women’s liberation done by Sara Evans is full of individual and local activity, but mostly in the large cities where Students for a Democratic Society established antipoverty programs, or where the early consciousness-raising groups were

---

located. Thus, national legislative and bureaucratic change is well-documented, as are group movements based out of New York, Chicago, and Washington. Although such work has provided a useful overview and a compelling narrative of change over time, the single-level focus has often lacked a view of the interplay between the different levels of government and society. More should be done to contrast the local and national trajectories of change. To make that possible, more work is needed at the state level and below, in order to provide the basis for a synthesis of the women’s movement with a better claim to comprehensive coverage.

The Equal Rights Amendment ultimately failed by only three states. Were the fifteen that never approved wholly opposed to feminist ideas? Were some issues more important than others? What conditions shaped the feminism that did exist in those states? In order to develop a more thorough understanding of those questions, this study will attempt a comparison of state-level activism to that which characterized the national movement. Did they stem from the same roots? Did they establish the same goals? Did they try to follow the same routes to achieve those goals? What particular local factors might explain the differences?

Focusing on the women’s movement in Missouri, this work will attempt to strike a balance between local and national events, between personal details and larger trends. Any local studies might serve this purpose of more closely analyzing changes in the status of women. But Missouri in particular is interesting not least because of its pivotal role in the debates over ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment – which ultimately failed by only a three-state margin. ERA passage cannot, of course, be the only measure

---

of change. Women’s status is not a binary enslaved/liberated proposition – and thousands of Missouri women would have contested the description of the ERA as liberating in any case. But still, women both for and against the ERA saw it as a symbol of an entire set of changes in American society. I am led to ask, then, to what extent did women’s organizations in Missouri mirror the activism at the national level, leading up to and including the fight over ERA?

A focus on Missouri offers several advantages to the researcher. First, the state established early in the 1960s an official Commission on the Status of Women, and many of its records have been preserved. Second, two of the major liberal feminist organizations – the National Organization for Women and the National Women’s Political Caucus – established chapters in Missouri prior to the ERA controversy. Their records, though sparse, allow comparison and contrast with the parent organizations at the national level. Third, the General Assembly – Missouri’s legislature – deadlocked on ratification. Though the Missouri Senate did reject the ERA, the Missouri House actually approved it. This offers a striking example of the warring influences of feminism and antifeminism in the state.

A discussion of Missouri will be clearer with a basic understanding of the state’s urban geography. The majority of feminist controversy – both events and activists – comes from the cities. Largest was St. Louis, on the Mississippi River at the Illinois border, and on the routes to Chicago, the East Coast, and the South. Second was Kansas City, on the Kansas border and the routes to the West and Northwest. Third was Springfield, several hundred miles south of Kansas City, on the route to Oklahoma, Texas, and the Southwest. These three constitute Missouri’s largest population centers.
Though Columbia and Jefferson City were much smaller, they deserve analysis because of their symbolic and political importance as, respectively, the seats of the state university and the state government. Both are also located centrally in the state, which provides greater geographic coverage.

For the core of my study, I will trace in some depth the activity of three groups: the Missouri Commission on the Status of Women (CSW); the National Organization for Women (NOW), along with its Missouri chapter; and the National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC), to include its Missouri chapter as well. I will attempt throughout these discussions to represent the ways in which traditionalist or antifeminist sentiment shaped the goals and rhetoric of these groups. I will try to expand that state-level analysis by highlighting points of convergence and divergence between the national story and the course of the women’s movement in Missouri.

I have cast this thesis as a study of the organized women’s movement in Missouri. I freely admit, however, that using the term “organized” for the major women’s groups is often giving more credit than strictly deserved. Since the movement was so diffuse, there has been much difficulty in defining its goals; no one group was vested with the authority to speak for the movement. Nevertheless, by combing the organizational records of the WPC, the CSW, and NOW, I believe I can make some generalizations about what those groups, at least, intended to accomplish.

These three groups were what the standard typology calls “rights” groups. Consciousness of gender inequality, in its varied strains, had coalesced into an amorphous but publicly recognized movement by the late 1960s. Many activists of the time and historians since have differentiated between a “women’s rights” and “women’s
liberation” wing of the movement. The rights wing was made up of those activists who
aimed for female participation in mainstream society on the same terms as men. Thus,
this wing dealt in formal, institutional politics and aimed at institutional safeguards like
the Equal Rights Amendment or other legislative and court remedies. The liberation wing
dealt in personal choices, guerrilla theater, and consciousness-raising; included New
York groups like the Redstockings and WITCH (Women’s International Terrorist
Conspiracy from Hell); and aimed for the complete restructuring of American society. By
this taxonomy, the CSWs, NOW, and the NWPC are rights groups, and any topics related
to women’s liberation are beyond the scope of this work.

But to some extent, the distinction between rights and liberation is a false
dichotomy. The yin-yang relationship between “rights” and “liberation” activities helped
ensure a blurring by the mid-1970s. I follow Winifred Wandersee in asserting that
liberationists brought “new issues into the body politic that had never before been
addressed by the mainstream political system,” and that rights activists “picked up on
many of these issues – abortion, lesbianism, wife battering, rape.” Thus she uses, as I do,
the umbrella term “women’s movement.”7 I will use that term to refer collectively to the
activities and goals of the CSWs, NOW, and the NWPC, including the ways in which
those were influenced by women’s liberation activity. Following Linda Gordon, I will
also use the term “feminist” to refer to groups and individuals whose activity can be
characterized as tending to ameliorate the subordination of women.

Before describing just what the women’s movement was fighting for in Missouri,
as well as what opponents were fighting against, it is necessary to get some idea of how
they viewed society’s gender roles. Is there such a thing as a cultural definition of true

7 Wandersee, xv-xvi.
womanhood? If so, what are the characteristics of it in America? Some have traced it in various forms back into the American Revolutionary era. The rise of the middle class and Victorian morality, the fight for suffrage and its attendant “woman question” about double standards and status, the Rosie the Riveter campaign, all have their supporters, and all provide important pieces of the development of American femininity. To understand the midcentury debates about womanhood and the conflicting definitions of “traditional” women, it will be useful to quickly sketch the ways in which gender roles developed in the decades preceding them.

The rise of mass production in the late nineteenth century increasingly removed the processes of production from the middle-class home. The gender ideology that accompanied this shift, known as Victorianism, emphasized separate spheres for men and women. Thus, men were to enter the sordid work world and provide for their families, while women would develop the private sphere of nurturing, morality, religion, and homemaking. The expectation that women worked selflessly for the good of others was a key component of domesticity ideology, and it helped lead to the widespread practice of volunteerism among middle-class women who had the money and time. Though excluded from formal economics and electoral politics, many middle-class women used this ideology of women’s uniqueness as a springboard to public activism. Historian Estelle Freedman has emphasized the building of separate female institutions as a strategy for sexual equality, as a way of projecting women into the public sphere. She cites the

---

General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the Women’s Trade Union League, among other examples, to support this claim that women redefined themselves “by the extension, rather than the rejection, of the female sphere.”9 These women’s clubs would later provide many ready-made activists for the postwar women’s movement.

Building on knowledge of women’s public activism, other authors have emphasized that women did enter politics, in ways structured by the requirements of Victorian ideology. Paula Baker insists that earlier historians overlooked women’s participation because they looked only at voting records and electoral politics – a limited, gendered view of politics. Kristi Andersen develops this further, showing how the involvement of women in reform at the turn of the century helped shift the government toward social welfare and the nature of American politics decisively toward lobbying, voter education, and nonpartisan “good government” rhetoric. She reasserts the claim of women’s explicitly political presence in reshaping the culture of government through claims of civic virtue and decidedly Progressive changes in the ‘political calculus’ of the 1920s. The development of the welfare state itself, once interpreted mainly as an outgrowth of the Depression experience and World War II big government, is now seen to stem strongly from woman-influenced reforms during the Progressive Era. Lobbying, education of the grassroots, and interest-group politics all became integral parts of the political landscape after having been pioneered by women.10

In the arena of government welfare and social work, Linda Gordon and Regina Kunzel have detailed the effects of social work professionalization on unwed mothers, showing that the public’s view of them changed from victims to delinquents. Correspondingly, the amount of public enthusiasm and state support dwindled. Gordon explicitly notes with chagrin the culpability of the welfare reformers in helping to create such a stigma, and the fragmentation of US society that a stratified system of welfare benefits has created: “While universal benefits [would] reinforce social coherence, the US welfare system exacerbates resentments.” Molly Ladd-Taylor adds to this scholarship, showing that maternalist reform helped children only at the cost of reinforcing the gendered division of labor.11 Women were told at once that they were failures if they did not devote themselves to their children, and that they were failures if they could not afford to do so. The middle class was building a model of motherhood that increasingly excluded the poor.

Gwendolyn Mink illuminates further the stigmas attached to the welfare system, showing how the post-New Deal evolution of Aid to Dependent Children and Social Security emphasized moral culpability of the poor while disregarding structural causes of poverty. Building on this work, Kriste Lindenmeyer shows how the US Children’s Bureau carefully sorted possible recipients, deciding who was or was not worthy based on cultural suitability. Cultural norms belonging to the white middle class were entrenched and enshrined as natural. These decisions created a two-tiered system of public assistance: the first tier was entitlement or insurance programs – universally

approved, and bestowed on those who matched cultural norms; the second was means-tested welfare programs – publicly stigmatized, and subject to scrutiny to enforce cultural norms.  

Down to the 1960s, family policy supported by the US government mirrored the early-century push to limit women’s public activism and confine them to the home. According to historian of the family Stephanie Coontz, “state policy continued to be unambiguously aimed at…paternal breadwinning; maternal domesticity; prolonged childhood; [and] repression of female sexuality…. [that] Government activity contributed to the illusion that such characteristics represented a timeless, natural American family. Robyn Muncy’s study of the Children’s Bureau notes that middle-class women reformers tried “to impose their preferences on every family…This narrow view imbued their campaigns with cultural chauvinism that pitted them against many foreign-born mothers and midwives of color.”14 Those reformers assumed that their own ideals of gender roles and family structure were both universal and natural. When those who were worried about the rising 1960s feminist movement looked for a definition of the traditional family, and examples of “saving” it, these recent activities offered one model.

To discuss the “natural” role of women and men – or of blacks and whites, two other groups whose socially constructed behaviors often got biological explanations – was extremely common in the early part of the twentieth century. Gender and race were explained in overlapping ways that helped to construct the white male as the pinnacle of

evolution and the rightful holder of public power in society. As Gail Bederman describes the mainstream white understanding of Darwinian progress, “It was imperative to all civilization that white males assume the power to ensure the continued millennial advancement of white civilization.”

Gwendolyn Mink explains how that centrality of race applied to understandings of womanhood: “The racial specificity of the Anglo American maternal ideal held Black women outside the boundaries of domesticity, as breeders, sluts, and the caretakers of other women’s homes and children.” In that way, the universal ideal held by traditionalists at midcentury conveniently glossed the fact that the ideal itself had never been even potentially accessible for large segments of the population. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham makes a strong case for the importance of tying race to gender when she says, “Gender, so colored by race, remained from birth to death inextricably linked to one’s personal identity and social status. For black and white women, gendered identity was reconstructed and represented in very different, indeed antagonistic, racialized contexts.”

The elision of black women from models of womanhood was one factor that kept them out of the midcentury feminist movement for some years after its creation. Nevertheless, I will attempt to illuminate some of the ways in which changing gender ideals were reflected among middle-class black women as well as white.

Many black women joined the same types of organizations white women did, supporting the ideals of nuclear family, male breadwinner, and both civic and domestic virtue which characterized the so-called traditional family. In her work on the black

---

16 Mink, 51.
Baptist church, Higginbotham shows both advantages and pitfalls of this politics of respectability. It promoted a collective assistance model of racial solidarity and “racial uplift,” even while it acquiesced in the dominant model that blamed black poverty and “broken homes” on a cultural pathology. At and after the turn of the century, many of these women attempted to adopt Progressive models of civic maternalism while experiencing racial discrimination, as well as sexism from both black and white communities.18

As the early decades of the century wore on, middle-class women’s unique role became less and less tied to public activism and more and more tied to unpaid domestic labor, even as that labor became less and less economically necessary. The long-running transformation of the American citizen from producer to consumer was in the full flush of its triumph, and this shift had a particular impact on middle-class women, whose “domestic labor came to consist chiefly of budgeting and shopping rather than making. From place of labor for self-support, the home had become the place of consumption.”19 The increase in consumption became tied to women, whose responsibility it was to spend the family budget wisely and ensure a comfortable standard of living for its members. Ironically, the very changes that pulled production out of the home and increased women’s identification with home consumption also acted after World War II to pull women out of the home, as families needed ever-expanding incomes to keep up with the

19 Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation Of America: Culture And Society In The Gilded Age (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).
rising standards of living.\(^{20}\) This pressure on women to work, however, clashed with two other early-century demands on women.

Middle-class notions of the ideal family structure had shifted in the first half of the twentieth century. The separate-spheres Victorian ideal had expected much of a woman’s emotional fulfillment to come from other women, social groups, and children. Clearly, no working woman could successfully maintain these social and domestic ties. But responding to popularized Freudian ideas, cultural ideals early in the century shifted away from mothering and homosociability to favor a romantic couples model, demanding that women cut back on nurturing children to focus on complete intimacy with the husband. As Stephanie Coontz comments, “the hybrid idea that a woman can be fully absorbed with her youngsters while simultaneously maintaining passionate sexual excitement with her husband was a 1950s invention that drove thousands of women to therapists, tranquilizers, or alcohol when they actually tried to live up to it.”\(^{21}\) When pressure to work is added into this mix, the rise of concern about the status of women becomes easier to understand.

Domesticity, volunteer activism, welfare and poverty, consumerism, a unique politics, non-participation in the work force – these various aspects of womanhood helped form the basis for 1960s conversations about the status of women. They also formed the psychic base for those seeking a composite “traditional womanhood” to raise in opposition to feminism, which was at the same time trying to appropriate tradition to further its own goals.

\(^{20}\) Coontz, 154.  
\(^{21}\) Ibid, 8-9.
Changing demands from women and the increasingly feminist orientation of women’s groups were bound up in a nationwide changing understanding of rights, largely created by the civil rights movement in which many women participated. A redefined concept of “rights” was articulated by Franklin Roosevelt during the Depression and World War II, seized on and utilized by the racial Civil Rights Movement, and adopted by increasingly self-conscious groups such as women in the 1960s and ’70s. As described by historian Thomas J. Sugrue, “The twin pillars of these newly enumerated rights as President Roosevelt defined them were ‘equality’ and ‘security.’…The ‘rights revolution’ – that is, the extension of citizenship to include positive rights – fundamentally shifted the terms of the debate in the civil rights movement…. ”22 Not only were women participating in the redefinition of rights, they also benefited from what John Skrentny and others have termed the “black analogy,” in which disadvantaged minorities received government support to the extent that they were able to present their situation as similar to that of oppressed African-Americans.23

Sugrue has described civil rights activists’ viewpoint on the movement as being bigger than just legal segregation, which for them “was one part of a larger, multifaceted battle.” The women’s movement, both nationally and in Missouri, exhibits all of the facets Sugrue includes: “fights for prohibition against discrimination in the workplace” were the essential spark for the creation of the National Organization for Women. Although “the opening of housing markets” was not in itself a women’s issue, open housing and desegregation battles were fought by the League of Women Voters (LWV)

and by the Missouri Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (MACWC), and they helped to bring St. Louis women such as Harriett Woods into public activism. Traditional women’s activity also provided the springboard for women’s work on “the provision of quality education, the economic development of impoverished communities, and untrammeled access to the consumer marketplace,” all of which were goals adopted by one or more of the organized feminist groups in Missouri. As Sugrue finishes, “the keyword linking these battles was ‘rights.’”24 The concept of rights, enormously elastic, helped to weld together disparate aspects of a women’s movement even as it had the racial civil rights movement.

Women’s clubs like the American Association of University Women (AAUW) were quick to adopt this concept. AAUW lawyer Sara Feder helped lobby for equal pay rights and served on the inaugural Missouri CSW. Another founding CSW member, Alberta J. Meyer, had previously served as state president of the Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs (BPW) – another long-standing women’s club championing feminist issues by the 1960s. Historian Jane Mansbridge notes BPW in particular as a crucial training ground for early feminist activism and a consistent supporter of feminist programs.25

One of the early feminists to gain national attention, Betty Friedan released The Feminine Mystique (1963) to publicize the discontent of suburban housewives. Historian Joanne Meyerowitz, among others, has taken issue with Friedan’s characterization of the mainstream media as a monolithic force driving women into domesticity. Meyerowitz

---

24 Sugrue, xvi; Maya Miller (national human resources chair) to local and state LWV presidents, Apr 15, 1971, League of Women Voters of St. Louis Records (SL0282), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO; Public Affairs bulletin, 1954, Missouri Association Of Colored Women’s Clubs, Records, 1932-1986 (C3801), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
finds women’s magazines of the 1950s to contain not only domestic ideals (as had Friedan), but also “admiration for women whose individual striving moved them beyond the home.” She identified significant support for wage work and participation in political life, and she claimed after counting article totals that magazines of the 1950s actually focused less on domesticity than had magazines of the ’30s or ’40s. But that tension between the domestic ideal and the pressure to succeed in other areas was one of the keys creating a huge group of alienated women that fueled the women’s movement. Friedan was one of the founding members of the National Organization for Women in 1966, and a vocal proponent both of the National Women’s Political Caucus after its formation and of the ERA. Many historians cite her influence in driving the women’s magazines as well as other public voices from ambivalence about domesticity to full-throated support for female equality.

One of the women Friedan implicitly described in her book was Harriett Woods, a Cleveland-born graduate of the University of Michigan. Woods abandoned her job writing for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* to have children in the 1950s, then rejoined the workforce part-time when her children started school. She entered neighborhood politics in her St. Louis suburb to combat the loud traffic that woke her children, and went on to participate in civic housekeeping groups such as the League of Women Voters. Woods entered the ranks of government proper upon being appointed to fill a vacated city council seat in 1967. Immediately following the 1971 creation of the National Women’s Political Caucus, dedicated to electing female politicians and supporting them and their

---

issues, Woods helped launch the St. Louis chapter. A major issue of the Caucus was promoting a sex-based Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution, a half-century-old proposal finally passed by Congress in 1972. Woods rose through the ranks of city and state government, eventually running as Democratic candidate for the US Senate.28

Not all Missouri women who followed the Woods trajectory from housewife to politician shared her views. Mary Gant, a Kansas City Democrat, was elected to the state House of Representatives in 1966. She went on in 1972 to win a seat as the first woman in the Missouri Senate. But in contrast to Woods – who followed her into the state legislature – Gant was not in favor of the ERA, and indeed, led a staunch opposition to its ratification.29 Gant raises the question of how far Missouri women and Missouri legislature accepted feminist ideals, and how much influence traditionalist sentiment still had.

By intensively examining local material, I hope to be able to draw some conclusions about the ways in which Missouri women helped shape their own activism – along with the amorphous national women’s movement but also distinct from it. That movement clearly broadened in the mid-1960s, coming to incorporate a wider variety of goals and methods than its initiators had anticipated. Traditionalists like Schlafly and even many moderates charged that the movement had become radicalized by the early 1970s, losing its ability to engage the existing governmental and social institutions. Others, such as historian Alice Echols, would say that “cultural feminism” blunted the

radical edge of women’s liberation by abandoning public activism in favor of private lifestyle changes, so that liberation lost out and “liberal feminism became the recognized voice of the women’s movement.”30 Whichever broader meaning is ascribed to those changes, they were reflected at the Missouri level in a broadening of issues and concerns addressed by organized feminist groups.

Missouri mirrored national trends in rising consciousness of inequality, in formation of feminist groups such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the National Organization of Women (NOW), and the National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC), and in agitation for change. However, speaking generally, Missouri women tended to act later and more slowly as compared to the activists in the national women’s movement. To fit conditions in Missouri, local activists modified the precise goals of the CSWs, NOW, and NWPC. These state-level feminists promoted such national issues as the Equal Rights Amendment, equal pay regardless of sex, a state minimum wage, and tax and credit reform. The issue of abortion produced a less coherent response. Missouri feminists in these groups were more willing than leaders of the national women’s movement to downplay the abortion issue, despite the fact that Missouri feminists did line up with the national leadership on the Equal Rights Amendment and programs to benefit the economic and racial underclasses, including complaints to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Activists often saw abortion as a counterproductive issue and therefore downplayed it. Though some effort to separate abortion from other goals did occur nationally, it was underway earlier and more decisively in Missouri than at the national level.

30 Alice Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism In America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 243. For a fuller treatment, vide Ch. 6, “The Ascendance Of Cultural Feminism.”
Considering the prominent place that contentious debates over sexual preference played in the national women’s movement, it is surprising that Missouri feminists were mostly silent on the issue. Though the connection cannot be drawn with certainty, the silence suggests either that it did not seem an important issue to them, or that they assumed they would make no headway in the social and political environment of the state. In either case, it represents a marked difference from the national movement, which wrestled for a decade with the question of whether a pro-woman stance included supporting the right to free choice of sexual preference.

Though it is difficult to identify with certainty the precise causes of feminist shifts in rhetoric over time, it is clear that they were accompanied by changes in the status of women. A variety of anecdotal and statistical measures support this idea of changing conditions in Missouri between 1960 and 1980. Business records show that more child care was available. Newspaper help-wanted advertisements abandoned the practice of segregating by sex. More women were seeking and obtaining positions of private as well as civic authority. Credit, divorce, and contraception were more widely available. Social problems like race and gender-exclusive legal language received more public attention. It is overstepping the bounds of this study to say that the women’s movement accomplished these things. However, it is fair to say that such changes were included in the goals of the Missouri CSW, and of state-level NOW and WPC activists.

A number of conditions peculiar to Missouri influenced the shape of changing goals and rhetoric. One of the foremost among these was the strong history of traditional female activism in Missouri. To some extent, that activism itself shaped the opinions and activities of feminists in the state. But out of that tradition also developed organized
activism that opposed groups such as the CSWs, NOW, and the NWPC. I will reserve the term “antifeminism” for this intentional opposition. Opponents of feminism built a rhetorical unity among themselves by imagining a traditional past of women’s activity. Motherhood, homemaking, volunteerism, women-as-consumers, a unique political style, and biological essentialism were elements of this rhetorical traditionalism, based in truths, half-truths, and myths collected from across the previous half-century of women’s activity. I have adopted from Jane Mansbridge the term “traditionalist” to describe women who subscribed to this mythic image of womanhood. She also notes that traditional homemakers became a huge factor in the opposition to the ERA, and especially so among those who belonged to fundamentalist churches. Even though a majority of homemakers actually supported the Amendment, the rhetoric of traditionalism was extremely effective in mobilizing and uniting a wide variety of opposition activists.

Antifeminists promoted many ideas rooted in a mythic traditionalism, including the biological essentialist idea that women’s qualitative physical differences from men translated into social roles ordained by nature or by God. Generally, they supported women’s adoption of stay-at-home motherhood as a sole vocation, and they campaigned for a traditional version of social morality. Thus, they opposed the Equal Rights Amendment and spent much time actively fighting to link it to the issues of abortion and freedom of sexual preference as a strategy for defeating all three in Missouri.

Historian Donald Critchlow illustrates traditionalist sentiment throughout his biography of Phyllis Schlafly. A St. Louis native and a firm believer in the moral

31 Mansbridge, 13.
32 Ibid, 5-6.
uniqueness of women, she helped organize anticommunist drives in the 1950s and the Goldwater candidacy in the 1960s, while battling for leadership of the National Federation of Republican Women. Critchlow characterizes her and her compatriot women of the Right as holding firm to “anti-communism, anti-feminism, and pro-family” values, and emphasizes their “conviction that the nation must not stray from its religious foundations.” Schlafly’s belief that American society was weakening from within persuaded her to spearhead the anti-ERA push in the 1970s, placing her in diametric opposition to the feminist movement.

One persistent myth regarding the women’s movement is that Democrats were the party of feminism, and Republicans were the party of traditional roles. Though there is some general validity to these associations (particularly by the end of the 1970s), the reality is more messy. Catherine Rymph’s work has shown one side of this complication, that Republican feminism did exist as a strong force in the national party organization. Another complication is the ambivalent stance of many Democrats regarding feminist goals. Nationally, Sam Ervin (D-NC) is one example, but the trend is of particular interest in Missouri. Both Missouri senators, Thomas Eagleton and Stuart Symington, were Democratic and opposed to abortion liberalization. Eagleton, in particular, held strong positions in favor of right to life and of a Life Amendment to the US Constitution. Democratic state senator Mary Gant, as already noted, was heavily against the Equal Rights Amendment. On the reverse, Republican Governor Christopher

Bond strongly backed the ERA in the 1970s, before shifting later like much of his party to a more conservative stance in line with the rise of the New Right.

Missouri feminists contended with an active opposition movement within the state. I will examine the interplay of this pro-family opposition movement with Missouri feminism. Linkage of ERA with other socially liberal positions encouraged the development of Midwestern antifeminism, which in turn helped kill the ERA in Missouri and shape the changes in Missouri society and government. Those interactions also helped determine the extent to which Missouri feminist groups adopted the goals and strategies of the national women’s movement.

In light of the fragmented nature of the national women’s movement, it is difficult to say what the goals of the movement were at any given time. But there were certain long-lasting commonalities, and there were also occasional collaborative statements by several major national feminist groups. One of the most broad-based of such statements was released in 1975 for the UN’s International Women’s Year by a federation called the Women’s Action Alliance, which numbered among its member groups not only NWPC and NOW, but also more traditional groups like the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women. It also included the National Black Feminist Organization, La Leche, and the YWCA. In all, the Alliance signed 44 different women’s organizations to back its “U.S. National Women’s Agenda.”

That Agenda demanded “full equality under the law” through an ERA or inclusive interpretation of the Constitution. And the Agenda explicitly listed a number of requirements for its definition of “full equality,” including “Participation in the Political Process,” “Meaningful Work and Adequate Compensation,” “Quality Child Care for All
Women of the Heartland

Children,” and “Quality Health Care Services,” among others. Winifred Wandersee claims that “as late as the National Women’s Conference of 1977 there was a broad agreement among movement people concerning social policies to benefit minority women, reproductive rights, free choice of sexual preference, and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).”

Whichever listing of particular goals is used, it is clear that Missouri’s women’s movement was active in seeking them. In terms of which was most emphasized, significant grassroots and legislative opposition to a formal ERA helped to create a Missouri women’s movement that differed somewhat from its national parent movement. Analysis of both feminist activism and everyday family life in Missouri reveals undeniable societal change. Nevertheless, change was uneven, with child care and job opportunity gaining much more widespread support than reproductive freedom.

Liberal feminism in Missouri found its roots in the same traditional women’s activity that initially sparked a national movement: essentialist domesticity, maternalist municipal housekeeping, club-based volunteerism and civil rights agitation. Participation in those activities, in Missouri as well as nationally, led to the establishment of groups that explicitly sought legal rights for women to equal those of men. But emotional and cultural ties to that traditional activity also sustained a strong current of resistance to feminism in Missouri. This rhetoric of the women’s movement and its opponents did shift over time. Arguments revolving around equal pay, for example, faded despite continued inequality. In the early 1960s, feminist groups in Missouri were heavily focused on the issue of equal pay, seeking parity with men for similar occupations and supporting the

37 Wandersee, xii.
passage of an Equal Pay Act. By the mid-1960s, following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that issue coexisted with a seemingly equally important fight against discrimination in hiring and promotion; to put it another way, these groups had begun to fight for access to more occupations, instead of simply equal pay in the ones already open. The equal pay and job discrimination issues sporadically resurfaced and continued to be important, but by the early 1970s, they had lost pride of place to other issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment. As another example of changing rhetoric, feminists continued to fight for the ERA, even after its repeated failure in the state legislatures. It is almost counterintuitive that even as the very institutional changes ERA was intended to create were slowly appearing and gaining wider public acceptance, agitation both for and against ERA ratification intensified.

During the first decade of their existence (and often much sooner), most of these groups at the national level significantly broadened their goals to include many aspects of the social liberation of women. At the state level, this process was often less thorough or at least slower due to several factors: internal dissension within women’s groups, negative public opinion in the state population, or constraints imposed on women’s activism by the state legislature. Opposition to the national women’s movement (derisively tagged “women’s lib”) coalesced around the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, portrayed as the bane of traditional femininity. Detractors asserted that ERA would draft women into combat, force tax-funded abortion, and ruin home life. Faced with strong traditional opinion in their state, Missouri feminists remained mostly subdued on the controversial issue of sexual orientation, and made regular attempts to divorce unpopular abortion advocacy from their statewide ERA lobbying effort. Antifeminist
arguments did not overturn the national majority in favor of ERA, but enough traditional sentiment remained in Missouri to prevent legislative approval, helping to halt the Amendment three states short of ratification. The rejection did not come for lack of any homegrown feminism, but in spite of it, caused by the same factors that helped shape Missouri feminist groups. In short, though Missouri feminism grew from the same roots and followed the same initial trajectory as national feminism, their paths diverged somewhat due to internal dissension, negative public opinion, or constraints imposed by the state legislature.

Especially for those who are not closely familiar with the development of a national women’s movement, it is necessary to quickly tell that story. There is not space to do it justice here, but an outline of it should suffice to make sense of the Missouri story. That outline forms the core of my first chapter. I would like to be able to offer a simple measurement of the status of American women – perhaps a rating from one to ten, or on a color-coded scale analogous to the terrorist threat level. But of course, one reason that such heated controversy developed over the status of women is the impossibility of such a simple measurement. I will attempt, therefore, to offer a wide variety of general description, specific statistics, and individual anecdotes to sketch the picture. After explaining some of the ways that traditional women’s activism blossomed into feminist activity, I will describe the development of an organized women’s movement and its expansion under the rubric of women’s liberation.

Readers who are already familiar with the national story may prefer to skip on to Chapter Two, which will offer a microcosm of that story as it relates to Missouri.
Women’s club work and civil rights activism helped create a foundation for feminist activism, which operated in an environment uncertain as to what proper women’s roles ought to be. Generally, these feminists’ goals matched those of their national parent organizations, although the local branches were often slower to form and occasionally less willing to challenge societal norms.

Having clarified the chronology, the third and fourth chapters will offer a more thematic exploration of particular issues. What did the women’s movement aim for? To what extent did Missouri mirror the national movement? What local conditions explain the differences? How did these goals or conditions change over time? For example, all three of the Missouri feminist groups leading this study were more restrained on the abortion issue than were their national counterparts. Polk’s City Directories for St. Louis, Kansas City, and Springfield throughout this period offered no entries for family planning, birth control, or abortion. All three feminist groups, however, matched fairly closely the national line supporting the expansion of child care services. During the early part of the period in question, Polk’s offered only the category “Baby Sitter,” which almost exclusively listed single women in their homes. By the mid-1970s, Polk’s listed all child care services under the heading “Day Nurseries.” 1962’s Kansas City directory, for instance, showed twenty-four baby sitters, and thirty-three other child care entries under various headings. The 1979 directory, by contrast, listed only eight baby sitters, while other child care entries had ballooned to ninety-one.38 Seemingly, both the acceptable terminology and the availability of child care changed across the 1960s and 1970s. Chapter Three will show primarily the evidence of issues related to traditional

38 Polk’s City Directory, Kansas City, MO, 1962, 1979, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, MO.
activism and liberal feminism, while Chapter Four is weighted toward liberation-inspired issues, though there is naturally much overlap in these categories.

My fifth chapter takes on in greater depth one issue: the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Following its passage by the US Congress in 1972, the ratification in state legislatures became a focal point of controversy between feminists and antifeminists. Both sides claimed exaggerated potential effects, and heated argument was rather the norm than the exception. A divided state, Missouri had perhaps more than its share of debate on the issue, and ratification came up repeatedly for votes in the General Assembly. In the end, Missouri decided not to ratify; this chapter attempts to help explain why not, in terms of the larger arguments about feminism in Missouri. It also shows that the strong current of traditionalism in the state shaped feminist activism, and shaped its outcomes in the short term.

As for the long term, 1992 was lauded by a number of commentators and media outlets as the “Year of the Woman,” because of the large push for female candidates and appointees at all levels of government. There were a record ninety female candidates nominated by the major parties in Missouri, counting Missouri House and Senate, and the statewide executive offices. After the November elections, women held a record thirty-seven General Assembly seats out of 197 total. More recently, the gender balance in General Assembly seats going into the 2008 elections was thirty-nine women of the 197 total seats. That total includes the seven female senators, who are accompanied by twenty-seven men. I have argued that both Missouri and the nation built movements

---

39 O’Connor, 1.
40 Rebecca Beitsch and Bria Scudder, “Female Lawmakers Say Discrimination Remains In Missouri’s Legislature,” Columbia Missourian, May 13, 2008,
strongly opposed to women’s subordinate status between 1960 and 1980. As the statistics just quoted highlight, those organizations by no means eliminated inequality.

Contingency, the idea that events didn’t have to happen the way they did, is an essential concept for historians. It is a large part of why individual actions and ideas matter – because they influence events. By investigating the details of liberal feminist activism in Missouri, it is my hope that we can learn something about the possibilities and limitations of collective action. Certainly, feminists in Missouri were limited by the political and social environment of the state. Nevertheless, they were by no means silent or ineffective in advocating their chosen issues. Local conditions matter – but so do activists.

When Eleanor Roosevelt and Esther Peterson successfully convinced Kennedy to create a Commission on the Status of Women in 1961, they were trading on political capital built through long years of traditional women’s activism. Two years later, when Betty Friedan released *The Feminine Mystique*, she was attacking the way traditional womanhood disempowered women. The year after that, as Phyllis Schlafly championed the Goldwater candidacy, much of her strength came from a mobilized partisan political base of traditional women. Historical models of women’s activism and conflicting myths of traditional womanhood were intimately bound up in the politics of the 1960s.

The ideals of middle-class womanhood in the early part of the twentieth century were often expressed in church charities, volunteer groups, and women’s clubs, many of them united under the umbrella of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs or its segregated counterpart, the National Association of Colored Women. After the suffrage amendment passed in 1920, many women channeled their civic activism into the nonpartisan League of Women Voters (LWV). Others moved into party work, but rarely into positions of leadership or national power.

One traditional women’s concern expanded and taken up by new feminist organizations was consumer protection. Harking back to consumer crusader Florence Kelley and her National Consumer’s League in the early decades of the century, activists aimed at protecting American citizens from unsafe products and the misleading claims of rapacious businesses. Consumer protection spoke to women’s domestic roles as clothiers,
caterers, and home decorators. Charles McGovern, in his analysis of American consumerism, has traced the promotion of American mothers as scientific, bureaucratic “purchasing agents” in a business model of the American home. Early efforts to create feminist organizations often included attempts at government support for consumers – read women.

The domesticity that was so important to 19th-century middle-class gender ideology provided a certain kind of springboard to women’s public activism. Many of the goals and methods of turn-of-the-century Progressive reform were created by American women. With its maternal selflessness and moral improvements, the reform impulse drew from ideals of republican motherhood and Victorian reform that situated society’s more virtuous nature firmly in its female half. The Progressive women’s “municipal housekeeping” work closed saloons, opened soup kitchens and settlement houses, and lobbied for child labor regulations and public education. That work also defined a gendered style of nonpartisan, moral-crusading politics that continued to characterize much women’s activism after suffrage, most notably in the work of the League of Women Voters. The rhetoric of the moral crusade was later used widely by traditionalists such as Schlafly.

The association of women with domestic duties carried over into women’s roles outside the home. For example, women in the political parties were often relegated to door-to-door canvassing, envelope stuffing, and social hostessing, with little or no chance to hold substantive leadership roles. Marion Martin, founder of the National Federation of Republican Women, had envisioned a loyal partisan organization that would slowly bring

---

women into the mainstream of party life. But in her book on Republican women, Catherine Rymph notes that “by the 1950s the Republican women’s club movement had become a network of supportive female auxiliaries steeped in domestic metaphors that reinforced postwar ideals of family and suburban life,” performing for the party all the little tasks that Rymph calls “the housework of government.”42 Many of these women were increasingly willing to agitate for substantive access to party power.

By the middle of the twentieth century, a new generation of women had begun to agitate for a reopening of the “woman question.” The American Association of University Women (AAUW) provided one network to link well-educated and often frustrated women across the country. Women at the bottom of the political party ladder had begun to organize their own support bases in groups like the National Federation of Republican Women (NFRW). Women in the male economic world tied themselves together and exchanged industry contacts in groups like the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs (BPW). Women found these groups a ready-made network for passing on feminist ideas and organizing action in the 1960s.

The connection between traditional ideals and women’s activism was also made in the civil rights work of the 1950s. Both black and white women of all social classes became involved in the movement. In many ways, civil rights work fit with traditional models of women’s political activism. It was frequently based in the churches, it was focused on greater societal good rather than personal gain, and it was dominated by volunteer rather than paid activists. But an unanticipated consequence of white women’s participation was their identification with strong public role models they found in

---

Southern black women. Sara Evans captured the link between this civil rights work and nascent feminist activity: “It was from this network of southern women, whose involvement dated from the beginning of SNCC, and who understood their commitment in the theological formulas of ultimate commitment, that the earliest feminist response emerged.” This jump from civil rights to feminism tended to characterize white women much sooner than black, which helps explain the overwhelmingly white face of liberal feminism in the 1960s.

Black female civil rights leaders consistently put race ahead of gender, especially up through the mid-1960s. They tended to swallow their frustration with sexism in view of the goal of racial civil rights. Historian Anne Standley has identified Ella Baker and Septima Clark as two rare examples of influential women who did challenge male sexist assumptions – in their case, leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference that backed Martin Luther King, Jr.’s nonviolent resistance movement. But white women in the movement often felt increasingly marginalized, encouraging many to abandon civil rights and focus on gender exclusively. The question – addressed fully as they exited the civil rights movement – was what could be done to improve the position of women vis-à-vis men? Sara Evans writes that “they confronted this dilemma with the tools the movement itself had given them: a language to name and describe oppression; a deep belief in freedom, equality, and community – soon to be translated into ‘sisterhood’; a willingness to question and challenge any social institution that failed to meet human

---

needs; and the ability to organize.”\textsuperscript{45} Standley agrees, claiming that participation in the civil rights movement raised self-esteem and enhanced empowerment for women, offering “the confidence necessary to combat all forms of oppression.”\textsuperscript{46}

Historical traditions of social and political activism are not sufficient in themselves to explain the force or the timing of the feminist upsurge of the 1960s. There were a variety of major demographic shifts that contributed to social upheaval in postwar America. Over the course of the 1950s, the US suburban population actually doubled, from 36 million to 72 million.\textsuperscript{47} The burgeoning female suburban population, addressed by Friedan in 1963, was a key element of grassroots support for feminism.

Another significant trend of the period with significant impact on the status of women is what statisticians call “an abrupt increase in the size of an annual population cohort,” or what ordinary humans refer to as the Baby Boom that followed the Second World War. The children of that boom of 1946 and ’47 began to reach draft age in 1964, and to vote in 1967. For women especially, the 1970s was the decade in which the largest proportion of people were in the 25-50 working-adult age bracket.\textsuperscript{48} If working women were experiencing discrimination, there were more of them to care by the 1960s. Life expectancy for all Americans had been steadily climbing since the end of the war, with white women achieving an average of 75 years by about 1965. Nonwhite women’s life expectancy was growing still faster in this period, but starting from a much lower average. It rose by 1965 to match that of white men, at about 68 years.\textsuperscript{49} Combined with

\textsuperscript{45} Evans, 99-100.
\textsuperscript{46} Standley, 185.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 210.
broader access to birth control, this trend offered the average woman many more years of life outside the period of child-bearing and -raising. Filling that time with non-domestic activities raised many women’s consciousness of inequalities in American society.

During the 1960s, civil rights demands for social equality led to a growing chorus of voices calling for an investigation of gender inequality by the federal government. John Marshall Harlan, writing the Supreme Court’s opinion for the 1961 gender equity on criminal juries case Hoyt v. Florida, declared that “woman is still regarded as the center of home and family life.”50 That statement of the timeless traditional role of woman was somewhat absurd even as Stone penned it, considering the enormous variety of other roles held by women, not least in the workforce. Inequities there, far from improving, seemed actually to be worsening. The late 1950s had seen a steady erosion in women’s median income relative to men’s, a trend which continued in the next decade. In 1960, median annual earnings for a female worker were approximately 60 percent of male median earnings.51

Women’s activism in other fields combined with their increasing awareness of sex-based inequality to turn them toward the federal government. Consumer advocate and labor rights lobbyist Esther Peterson joined forces with Eleanor Roosevelt to support the 1960 John F. Kennedy presidential run, in return for the promise of a federal agency devoted to women’s concerns. Peterson had worked in the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), helping shift the organization from general moral uplift to desegregation work. She was also active in New York City labor circles from the Great Depression on, and she brought all of these contacts to bear in the campaign for federal

---

51 Ferriss, 141.
investigation of sex inequality. Responding to the pressure, Kennedy created the President’s Commission on the Status of Women on 14 December, 1961. Roosevelt served as its first chair, until her death the following year, while Peterson was appointed head of the Women’s Bureau, in the Department of Labor. She was eventually moved up to Assistant Secretary of Labor. Reflecting the continued influence of traditional images, Peterson was not only influential in lobbying for a sex-based Equal Pay law, by she also helped created the consumer-protection requirements for food nutrition labels and sell-by dates. Over the next six years, a national network of state commissions on the status of women was established which tied activists together and collected information on the position – equal or unequal – of women across the nation.52

The rising discussion of sex-based inequality converged in the 1960s with increasing emphasis on equal rights in various forms and with the availability and willingness of middle-class women to volunteer for social causes not only to produce new feminist groups but also to change the orientation of existing women’s groups. For example, groups like the Business and Professional Women’s Clubs (BPW) and the American Association of University Women (AAUW), both originally dedicated to social networking and self-help, contributed many activist women to the new Commissions on the Status of Women. BPW was closely linked to the emerging feminist consciousness, and as the organization’s modern website boasts, “President Kennedy recognized BPW/USA’s leading role in securing passage of the Equal Pay Act by giving BPW/USA’s National President the first pen he used when signing the Act into law.”53

Following study and recommendations by the President’s CSW, Congress had enacted that Equal Pay Act in 1963. Falling under the broader New Deal heading of 1938’s Fair Labor Standards Act, the new law was designed to ease the differential between men’s and women’s wages. Under the law, a wage differential based only on sex constituted money owed to the injured employee. In theory, a woman could seek not only an appropriate raise, but also the cumulative back wages to the activation of the law.\textsuperscript{54}

This provision was intended to provide redress for discrimination, but also to encourage speedy compliance, the idea being that it would be more efficient for industry to police itself than for a government agency to investigate every case. A sense of optimism and national unity shines through here; what employer would not want to remedy inequality, if only it were pointed out? Though important symbolically, the act in the end affected very few women directly. However, Congress enacted the Equal Pay Act at a time of rippling formation of state CSWs. Riding these two waves, many women made efforts to coordinate local actions against inequality into a comprehensive national network.

It was not only overtly political women who helped support this growing network. Many middle-class women who were veterans of the work force, highly educated, or both began to be disillusioned with the idealized housewife role presented in the 1950s media. That predicament was recognized by more and more women, but it was only slowly adopted into public consciousness. Investigative journalist Betty Friedan began to study how widely that disillusionment had spread. She noted that the strange malaise among housewives had been commented on in many national news media outlets, including \emph{Newsweek, The New York Times, Time,} and \emph{Harper’s Bazaar}, but it was generally treated

as an inexplicable and isolated phenomenon. Friedan published a book-length treatment of this research in 1963: *The Feminine Mystique*. She intended to publicize the “problem that has no name” and to encourage disillusioned suburban women to speak out. What Friedan addressed was a newly established critical mass of white, middle-class women who were looking for an outlet.

The discontent of many married women built on the concerns of the rising number of single and divorced ones. Younger women were increasingly likely to be single and households were increasingly likely to be headed by a single person. The decade also saw a rise in the divorce rate. Missouri had not at that time established no-fault divorce, and the rates in the state lagged somewhat behind national trends. First-marriage rates spiked in the late 1960s, as the baby boom generation began its scramble for licenses. The average woman’s age at first marriage in 1955 was lower than at any point since 1890. But then the first-marriage age began to creep back up. About 1973, marriage rates began a steep and steady decline, particularly among never-married women. Divorces per capita rose by almost 50 percent in the decade 1970-1980.

Statistician Abbot Ferriss was already worried about these trends in 1971, since “the incidence of certain types of pathological behavior is greater among single persons and those in broken homes than is the case among intact marriages.” However, he admitted that “even so, the evidence does not completely condemn the single life nor does it entirely sanction a conjugal existence.” One social impact of rising divorce frequency was the formation of support groups, such as Parents Without Partners.

---

55 Evans, 15-16.
57 Ferriss, 53; Rosen, 9.
Another trend related to the rise in single living was the decline in childbearing by younger women. In 1960, almost 4 in 10 firstborn children were delivered to women less than twenty years old. A similar proportion of firstborns went to mothers in the 20-24 age group. For some years thereafter, both proportions actually increased. But by the mid-1970s, both had leveled off and begun to drop, and the balance between them had shifted to the slightly older age group, a trend toward delayed childbearing consistent with the increasing involvement of women in public life.58 Another impact of these changes was growing concern about the status of women who did not fit neatly into a nuclear family – and who certainly did not match a domestic model of womanhood.

Though women had worked throughout the Depression, Second World War, and 1950s, they were doing so increasingly in the 1960s and 1970s. Abbott Ferriss claimed that the greater participation was “especially noticeable since 1964 in the younger, more vigorous ages – 20-24 years, 25-34 years, and 35-44 years.” He also noted that more married women were likely to work not just to support their unemployed husbands but for careers in their own right. Their incomes were becoming essential to support the standard of living the middle class had begun to take for granted in the 1950s. However, women were not breaking into “the more remunerative professional and technical occupations” nor successfully challenging “the segregation of women in typically female-linked occupations.”59 If domesticity had launched many women into politics early in the century, the inequalities of working bid fair to do the same in the 1960s.

After the CSWs were established and Friedan’s book helped raise consciousness of gender inequality, it became more evident that women as women suffered from

58 Taeuber, 17.
59 Ferriss, 118-19.
significant handicaps, and pressure built for specific governmental action. Women’s activism gained steam from the analogy between women and racial minorities as oppressed groups – though certainly, there were many who rejected that analogy. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, among other provisions, guaranteed redress to those who experienced employment discrimination. The act was almost derailed in Congress over the issue of its Title VII, which included women as a protected category. In fact, women were included largely as a tactic to kill the bill, on the theory that no self-respecting member of Congress would vote for so absurd a provision. But the law did pass, and a federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established to oversee the job discrimination provisions. Many women’s rights activists who since the early 1960s had been collecting evidence of inequality began after 1964 to agitate for enforcement of Title VII.

The EEOC was initially reluctant to investigate complaints of sex inequality. Its members saw their concern as primarily with overturning racial discrimination. In the face of this institutional refusal to recognize women’s inequality, the National Organization for Women (NOW) formed as a lobby group in 1966 to pressure the Commission to investigate.\textsuperscript{60} The original NOW statement of purpose, among other goals, supported the establishment of child care programs to benefit working women. At the same time, it advocated job retraining for women who had stayed home with children but then wished to enter the workforce later.\textsuperscript{61} NOW aimed thus to promote women’s issues in the larger society by using established institutional forms. In other words, NOW intended to create change from within the system.

\textsuperscript{60} Rosen, 73-5.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 79.
Many women disagreed over the proper purpose and direction of the women’s movement. For example, a subset of feminists was upset with what they saw as NOW overstepping its bounds in rights activism in the late ’60s, especially in the area of abortion. This group of women created the Women’s Equity Action League (WEAL), which dedicated itself to a more specific attack on “legal, educational, and administrative inequities.”62 Rather than expanding to a broad-based social critique of American society, WEAL and many other liberal feminist activists preferred not to blunt the force of their efforts.

Becoming convinced that majority-male legislatures were unresponsive to feminist concerns, many activists pressed for an increase in elected women. Across the nation, many women who did reach the legislature did so following their political husbands, or by special gubernatorial appointment. Sometimes referred to as the “widow track,” this path to office was an important means of access in the decades following ratification of the suffrage amendment.63 From the bipartisan examples of this trend, one can conclude that national party leadership was at least open to increasing the participation of women, even if the small numbers give the lie to any idea of an active campaign for parity. It was rare for party leaders before the 1960s to select a female candidate in her own right.

At a Washington, D.C. conference in 1971, a group of women formally organized the nonpartisan National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC). The goal of the

63 Matthews et al have noted that in the early half of the twentieth century, the “likely route to officeholding for women lay through widowhood –as the ‘relic’ of a deceased male officeholder.” Vide Glenna Matthews, Karen M. Paget, and Linda Witt, *Running as a Woman: Gender And Power in American Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 31.
organization was to encourage women to become politically involved, to support them in voting and running for office, and to help them coordinate their pro-woman activities once elected.64 Though its membership was increasingly weighted toward Democrats as the decade wore on, the Caucus did include some prominent Republican feminists. The organization publicly stated itself opposed to “racism, sexism, institutional violence and poverty.”65

Expressing perhaps more idealism than realistic expectation, activist Susan Davis of Chicago gushed in the summer of 1971 that “In the foreseeable future, women will be a mass force organized so that, on cue from our organizations, we can vote candidates in and out of office, boycott a product with an offensive ad campaign and close down wars by not paying taxes.” Of the new NWPC, she commented that “The Caucus will field slates of feminist, anti-racist candidates, influence both parties to support women and organize women on the state and local levels.”66 NWPC’s explicit link of feminism to antiracism recalls both the “black analogy” and the civil rights background of many feminist activists.

In this context, it is ironic that partly because of the focus on the well-educated or professional woman (who was most often white), conversations about the status of women frequently overlooked racial disparity and implicitly treated white women’s concerns as all women’s concerns. For example, black women’s activist Maxine Williams noted that in general, white feminists felt “that marriage and the family are the roots of women’s oppression, while to black women of the middle class that thought is

64 Rosen, 89.
65 Wandersee, 23.
66 The Spokeswoman: an independent monthly newsletter for all women (2:2), Aug 1, 1971, Metro St Louis NOW (National Organization For Women) Records, 1971-1979 (SL0175), folder 10, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO.
abhorrent and to black lower-class women their oppression is completely racial.”67 But even as the civil rights movement mobilized white women to fight for racial equality, it subjected them to sexist pressures that drove many away.

By the 1960s, younger white women had become a key component of student civil rights work. But their gender-based discontent was real and growing even within the movement. In the Southern offices of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), female members made coffee and typed memos. Potentially dangerous field work was generally reserved for men. Sexual tension also mounted, as female volunteers were pressured to prove their commitment to the movement by making themselves sexually available.68 It is probably true, considering the overlapping goals of much 1960s activism, that a broadly defined sexual liberation was sought by many members of the civil rights movement, both male and female. But the emphasis on sexual freedom was often less than liberatory, making it difficult for women to control their own bodies. At a SNCC staff retreat in 1964, white members Casey Hayden and Mary King presented “SNCC Position Paper (Women in the Movement),” asking for reevaluation of this unequal treatment. The paper led to conversation but little substantive action. It also led to dismissal or implicit rejection of their concerns, as in Stokely Carmichael’s half-joking response that “The only position for women in SNCC is prone.”69 Despite demonstrated evidence of leadership capability, women were steadily frozen out of civil rights activism as the movement shifted both to more traditional patriarchy and to revolutionary militancy.

67 Rosen, 281.
68 Evans, 77-8.
69 Evans, 85-7.
Similar roles awaited these women even after leaving the south, in the New Left and anti-Vietnam war movements many joined. They found gender chauvinism in their own organizations. For example, the New Left college-student group Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) boasted chapters across the country, including at Washington University in St. Louis. The group had a membership that roughly reflected the gender ratios in the general student population. But the imbalance in favor of men became steadily more pronounced as one moved up the levels of leadership. Their frustration was articulated by King and Hayden, now of SDS, in a brief 1965 document they titled “A Kind of Memo.” Dismissed and ridiculed by most male activists, the memo also sparked serious soul-searching and conversation among many movement women, and helped lead to the eventual departure of many of these activists from the male-dominated anti-war and revolutionary leftist groups.

Sympathizing with other victims of sex-based discrimination but not feeling comfortable or well-represented in mainstream women’s groups, a group of activists founded the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) in 1973. Consistently smaller and less visible in news coverage than the white feminist organizations, the NBFO nevertheless signified the potential for a reunification of the divided consciousness of black women. Indeed, according to historian Ruth Rosen, despite the fact that they joined organized feminist groups in smaller numbers than did whites, black women consistently

---

70 A brief discussion of the St. Louis SDS chapter can be found in Kenneth S. Jolly, *Black Liberation In The Midwest: The Struggle In St. Louis, Missouri, 1964-1970* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 169; the ties between SDS women and male chauvinism can be found in Evans, 112.
71 Rosen, 115, 123.
showed more support for feminist goals than did white women in general-population polls throughout the 1970s.  

The exodus of young feminists from the progressive movements of the early 1960s added a radical flair to the women’s movement. Many also came from families with “old Left” backgrounds – socialists, Communist Party agitators, Popular Front journalists. These “red-diaper babies” provided significant underpinning for early feminism. The influence of these radical roots can be seen in a variety of ways. For instance, radical feminism insisted on the need for an attitude of sisterhood, a consciousness and solidarity that had much in common with the Marxist principles many of them espoused. Similarly, the radical position tended to highlight social construction of gender, over the biological essentialist claims that had been such a mainstay of first-wave suffragist feminism. On a more problematic note, the radical insistence on solidarity occasionally froze out dissenting voices, which led some women to feel marginalized and helped to create the antifeminist backlash of the late 1970s.

Leaders of groups like NOW, which tried to create change while maintaining direction and focus in a movement, often came under fire from the left as well as the right. While taking hits from traditionalists who saw NOW threatening social values, they also were engaged with radicals who felt NOW was not really attacking root inequalities in society. A highly publicized example of this battle on the left is the issue of lesbianism. Liberal feminists like Betty Friedan wanted to keep the focus on employment and civic discrimination; others found sexual orientation an essential freedom inextricably tied to

---

72 Rosen, 282-85.
73 Evans, 124.
74 Alice Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism In America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 6, 11.
the others, and symbolically representative of a movement in which women identified in solidarity with other women. These struggles made it difficult for the movement to find a coherent direction, while at the same time the edgy vanguardism of more radical elements sometimes undermined public support in more traditionalist areas of the country.\footnote{Rosen, 230-32.} The antiauthoritarian and radically democratic strands of thought that helped to tear apart the student antiwar movement also affected women’s rights. In a practice known as “trashing,” women would sometimes attack those who seemed to be taking too much control or limelight for themselves. The result could often be self-destruction within the organization, rather than inclusion or constructive improvement.\footnote{Wandersee, 46 on NOW’s organizational crisis, 68 on “trashing.”}

At the end of the 1970s, a group of disgruntled members in California launched a reformist newsletter to reacquaint NOW with what they called “true feminism,” based on their “belief that a feminist consciousness is now lacking in much of NOW, particularly national NOW officers….” Their definition of feminism deserves to be quoted at length for what it shows about opposition to the liberal rights orientation of NOW: “By feminism we mean more than the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment and other civil rights reforms. We mean the struggle to develop new ways of working together in this world that incorporate all women and ideologies, not just white, middle-class, capitalist American women who can pass for ‘straight’ whether they are lesbian or not.”\footnote{\textit{The Loyal Opposition} (1:2), Sep 1980, Metro St. Louis NOW (National Organization For Women) Addenda, 1977-1980 (SL0708), folder 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO.} The inclusion of radical social change and broader issues such as lesbianism in the discussion of feminism increased the stakes of the movement. As might be expected, the emotional commitment of activists on all sides of the movement increased commensurately. These
high emotions were already typical of a national conversation characterized by inflammatory rhetoric and publicity stunts.

In August of 1968, amidst a long hot summer of Vietnam protest, riots, assassinations, the annual Miss America beauty pageant had gone forward in Atlantic City. Seizing on it as a symbol of male-defined standards of appearance and cultural shackles on women’s potential, a group of liberation-minded women planned a public protest on the scene. Through loose newspaper coverage and exaggerated speechmaking, the idea spread that women at this protest had burned their bras in protest. Though this image is contradicted by sound historical scholarship, the bra-burning radical liberationist became a powerful rhetorical symbol for opponents of the women’s movement.78

To some extent, the entire women’s movement did undergo a radicalization in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In what is the definitive study of the radical liberation wing, historian Alice Echols clearly illustrates the influence of decentralized women’s liberation activity on the liberal rights groups.79 For example, two phrases of great significance to the women’s movement appeared within the circles of liberationist groups in 1968 and quickly reproduced themselves across the women’s movement generally. One, first used by Carol Hanisch, implied the political uses and meanings of women’s everyday lives: “The personal is political.” The other, to describe the dawning awareness of gender inequality that was coming to women in conversation, in the media, and in their own lives, was first used by Kathie Amatniek: “consciousness-raising”.80 In the essay “A Broom of One’s Own,” Charlotte Bunch noted that “there is no private domain of a

78 Evans, 214.
80 Rosen, 196; Amatniek took the name Kathie Sarachild as a defiance of the prevalent patriarchal naming system.
person’s life that is not political and there is no political issue that is not ultimately personal.”81 Both phrases were characteristic of the locally-organized women’s groups that were arising pandemically across the country across 1967 and 1968.82

“Consciousness-raising,” or sometimes “CR” for short, became a crucial force driving change in gender attitudes among women. CR as a practice involved small groups of women relating personal anecdotes about their lives. Any experience in which a woman was made aware of herself as a woman would be fair game – examples of job discrimination and sexist jokes, certainly, but also family expectations, or self-censorship, or the emotions caused by advertising and popular media. As the name suggests, this practice helped many women to identify their own lives as part of a larger pattern of the status of women in American society. Dedicated CR groups proliferated rapidly after the inception of the practice.

The emphasis on personal liberation and self-efficacy in CR groups and the emphasis on equality that characterized much of the expanding “rights” discourse converged to help create a trend toward direct democracy within many organizations of this period. The campus rebellions of SDS, Ella Baker’s emphasis on youth control of SNCC, and Phyllis Schlafly’s campaign to mobilize grassroots Republicans are all examples of this trend. Women in civil rights organizations often benefited from this trend to develop leadership experience they might not otherwise have obtained. They then carried that experience into feminist organizations.

82 Evans, 207-11.
The small-group culture of women’s activism was often tied together loosely at the local women’s center. Single-issue groups exploring women’s health, rape, battering, or other analyses could come together and cross-fertilize ideas at this usually non-profit or college-affiliated location. Churches and unaffiliated community centers sometimes served the same purpose.

The decentralized character of the women’s movement was evident in many details, not least in the way that the actions of individuals often filtered back to influence the organized groups. For example, in 1970, Kate Millett released the explosive Sexual Politics, which analyzed misogyny and violent sex acts in literature. One of the details she noted was the frequently-appearing fake orgasm, symbolic of women’s sexual experience as defined by men. Artists, poets, and writers like Millett helped to convince many activists that an LWV-like focus only on electoral politics was insufficient.

In a similar way, feminism had an enormous impact on public and governmental attitudes toward the treatment of women. For example, Susan Brownmiller’s 1975 Against Our Will, an exploration of the meaning of rape, helped to highlight its coercive violence. One of the effects of this conversation was to discourage the public and juries from excusing rape as the result of high spirits or uncontrollable desire inspired by the victim. As Ruth Rosen described the thought-shift involved in publicizing rape and marital rape, “By ‘naming’ such hidden crimes, feminists generated the kind of debate that could turn a ‘custom’ into a crime.” Fact collection, reinterpretation, and publicity were crucial components of the women’s movement, especially in its early years.

---

83 Wandersee, 90-91.
84 Rosen, 153.
85 ibid, 182.
Consciousness-raising and the conflation of the personal and political helped to radicalize discussion in many mainstream feminist groups, including the National Organization for Women. One of the factors hampering the effectiveness of rights groups like the CSWs, NOW, and NWPC was their position within the established institutional structure. Many activists – particularly younger women – noted that although NOW challenged the system by demanding formal public equality, its activity often did not attack the systemic inequality that permeated American society. Such ambiguity alienated many poor women or black women. It also led liberal feminists to acquiesce in such things as the redefinition of welfare. Rather than a public assistance program, welfare became a hostile mandate that blamed victims of poverty for their own condition. Liberal feminists, in the words of historian Sara Evans, “were not prepared to question the mainstream itself, nor to carry their critique into the operation of sex roles in every aspect of life,”86 because they still focused narrowly on legal civil rights.

However, there is other evidence that the lines between rights and liberation were more blurry than the names suggest. Septima Clark, famous for her southern civil rights work, joined NOW in 1968. She claimed that she had developed a consciousness of gender and the emotional ability to criticize male leaders of SCLC as a result of publicity instigated by NOW.87 NOW’s discussion of equal rights for women came to include not only enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, but also the formal Equal Rights Amendment demanded by Alice Paul a half-century earlier. In addition, the more radical

86 Evans, 21; The welfare example referred to is the WIN program, one of many 1970s cutbacks in government social spending; cf. Jennifer Mittelstadt, Welfare To Workfare: The Unintended Consequences Of Liberal Reform (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
87 Standley, 196.
feminist activists were advocating greater liberation of women in society at large, to include abortion and child care.88

Consciousness-raising had become so institutionalized by the end of the 1970s that NOW had published an in-house manual for the process. There is indeed irony in having a set of centrally-created rules for a free-form local practice. But in fairness, the manual was created based on countless such local sessions, and it incorporated the concerns of locally active women. The principle behind the entire CR process was summed up neatly: “THERE ARE NO PERSONAL SOLUTIONS TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS – only adjustments, accommodations, temporary loopholes – and pain.” Thousands of women came to recognize through CR that the pain, the feelings of inadequacy, and the failure to meet expectations were system-wide and shared, not individual. What to do with them? The fourth and last stage of NOW’s explicitly-planned CR was “activism.”89

Particular topics were recommended for CR sessions, giving some idea of the focal points of feminist concern. The NOW manual recommended “Roles and Stereotyping” and “Rape and Violence” as essential to any session, helping to clarify just what equality and oppression would look like. To examine what women themselves should look like, one group explored “Our Bodies, Our Image.” The manual also suggested several optional topics as examples of discussions that might offer a chance to share experiences unique to being a woman: “Mothers and Daughters,” “Women, Money, and Employment,” and “Stirrup Table Blues.” Reflecting the particular concerns of feminist activism and the accusations of exclusion aimed at movement leaders, the guide

88 Evans, 214-17.
Women of the Heartland

recommended conversation about the ties between “Lesbianism and Feminism,” the impact of “Double Discrimination: Race and Sex,” and the knotty question, “Do Women Like/Trust Women?” Other topics included “Women, Sexuality, and Choice,” overlapping the earlier discussion of control of women’s bodies but expanding to birth control, emotional understandings, and other aspects of intimacy, further explored in the session “Committed Relationships and Feminism.”90 Since the sessions were shaped partly by these topics and partly by the experiences that women brought to them, a wide variety of activism and further research came to flow from the consciousness-raising experience.

Partly because of the spreading diversity of goals, the number of NOW National Task Forces had ballooned to thirty-one by 1974. This expansion reflected the realization that systems of oppression interlocked, and women’s status affected and was affected by an enormous variety of situations. It also reflected the impact of radically democratic feminism, which was hesitant to reject any member’s concern. Established liberal feminist concerns such as “Child Care,” “Education,” and “Legislation” gained attention, as did the feminist/liberationist crossover “Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations.” But Eleanor Roosevelt might have been surprised to find focus on “Women and Arts” and on “Broadcasting – FCC,” considering that her original commission had rather narrower concerns. Betty Friedan, notorious for holding the line against involvement in lesbian politics, found her own seminal work adapted by the group on the “Masculine

90 Ibid.
Mystique.” NOW struggled at the national level to maintain focus while also keeping the support of its local chapters.

Despite – or perhaps because of – this organizational unwieldiness, feminist ideas continued to gain ground in US society. Three federal government actions in 1972-73 highlight the increasing influence of feminist ideas: Title IX, Roe v. Wade, and the ERA. The first was slipped into federal law in anxious hope that it would not be noticed. According to one of its 1974 implementers, “I suspect that the great majority of men and women who voted for Title IX didn’t even know Title IX was in” the Education Amendments act passed by Congress in 1972. As historian Susan Ware describes it, Title IX took the antidiscrimination provision that had been applied to employment and expanded it to include “any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” The law was hatched when the University of Maryland rejected a job application from new-minted Ph.D. Bernice Sandler in 1969, telling her that she “came on too strong for a woman.” Finding support from NOW and the Women’s Equity Action League, Sandler and the antidiscrimination lobby recruited Representative Martha Griffiths to help shepherd the bill through. Only after passage did the National Collegiate Athletic Association realize what a commitment the law suddenly implied for the promotion not just of women’s education, but of women’s sports as well. With the support of federal administrators in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, women’s athletic participation skyrocketed.92

91 The Inside Story: How NOW Operates, publicity booklet from Jane Plitt, executive director, NOW national office, Jul 1974, NOW Records (WHMC SL0175), folder 86.
92 Susan Ware, Title IX: A Brief History With Documents (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 3, 35-39; the implementer quote comes from HEW worker Gwendolyn Gregory.
Reproductive rights advocates had long held that birth control decisions belonged in the home, rather than in the statehouse. Women’s health advocates overlapped this position with an insistence that abortion should be a medical rather than a legal decision. After the widespread legalization of early-term abortion following the Supreme Court’s 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*, the number of recorded abortions rose dramatically, to perhaps 1.5 million annually at the end of the decade. After its initial rise, the abortion rate per woman stayed roughly constant from the late 1970s on into the mid-1980s. Across the same time period, the unwed adoption rate dropped. That is, of babies born to never-married women, fewer and fewer were being placed for adoption – a shift claimed by partisans as a decline in unwanted pregnancies. The drop was over fifty percent between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, and a similar drop occurred in the following decade.93

In 1970, married-couple households constituted just over seventy percent of the total. Single fathers were a lonely two percent, and single mothers not quite nine. Ten years later, married couples represented just over sixty percent, single fathers had shown little change, and single mothers had exhibited a barely significant increase. What represented the rest of the change? A rise in unrelated roommates and in single living, both categories that underwent significant expansion in this period. A more dramatic swing in household type characterized the black American population. Starting with a higher proportion of single-mother households (near thirty percent), the black population saw significant increase in that category, to near forty percent by 1980. Black women were more than twice as likely throughout the 1970s to have an abortion as were white women. At the same time, the number of married-couple households dropped from near

93 Taeuber, 223, 236.
the national average to well below it.\textsuperscript{94} Demographic trends reinforced the social impacts of government decisions.

The women’s movement was clearly tied together with the other social movements of the 1960s and ‘70s. Part of that atmosphere of the anti-establishment counterculture was the so-called sexual revolution. In popular mythology, this revolution entailed a lowering of the barriers of middle-class morality and a wild abandon in sexual relations. Helen Gurley Brown’s \textit{Sex and the Single Girl}, for example, helped to popularize this image. In practice, the liberation granted to male sexual behavior was often not extended to women, who had to deal with a double standard all the more vicious for its hidden character. Discontent with that standard encouraged many young women in the development of a gender consciousness.\textsuperscript{95} Both changes in family structure and changes in sexual mores were frequently decried by traditionalists and blamed on the women’s movement.

When Congress approved the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, liberal feminists endorsed its guarantee of civil rights. But both feminists and their opponents were quick to tie the ERA to ongoing social changes as well. More than that, both sides emphasized the possibility of increasing change that might be implemented by the amendment. Thus, while Congressional passage illustrated the impact of the women’s movement on the national government, many came to view the state-by-state ratification votes as a referendum on feminism.

The bitter arguments about feminism were often reduced by the late 1970s into stereotypical caricatures of masculinized, political, working women vs. feminine,

\textsuperscript{94} Taeuber, 223, 290, 292.
\textsuperscript{95} Rosen, 52.
traditional, stay-at-home moms. But many feminists had families – even traditional ones – and many antifeminists were politically active. Further, national polls throughout the 1970s showed that the average homemaker supported ratification. However, it is true that the most active subset of the traditionalist movement was homemaker women involved in fundamentalist churches, and working women did support the amendment in higher numbers than did non-workers. Also reinforcing the connection of politics and working feminists was the fact that working women were more likely to vote than those not in the labor force, according to a census survey done in reference to the 1968 presidential election.96

Organized labor was generally supportive of the Commissions on the Status of Women, but hesitated to endorse any sort of Equal Rights Amendment. The fear of an end to particular protective legislation for women workers overrode concerns about gender inequality.97 Esther Peterson, champion of the Equal Pay Act, had a labor background and had reached political maturity in the fights to get protective legislation, and many such activists were leery of abandoning their limited protections for an amendment that might extend protection to all workers, but might at the whim of the courts be used to strike it down for all workers. Organized labor eventually shifted to support ERA, led in 1970 by the United Auto Workers and followed by the majority of unions some years later.98 The details of that shift are bound up in the struggle over the ERA itself, a struggle to define womanhood and the nature of civil rights. Discussion of that is best held until after establishing the path that women’s groups traveled to establish

97 Rosen, 66.
98 Mansbridge, 8-10.
their support for ERA. Having been introduced to some of the issues, groups, and people
that made up the women’s movement in Missouri, we turn now to examine in more detail
the goals of these groups and the ways in which they paralleled their national
counterparts.
What The National Movement Created In Missouri

In Missouri as nationally, feminist activism grew out of women’s clubs, civil rights activism, consumer protection work, and other trends already present before 1950. In civil rights, for example, the Chicago founder of the Congress of Racial Equality helped create a St. Louis chapter in 1947 with local activists Margaret and Irvin Dagen. Just over half of the initial members of this chapter were women, exhibiting the same trend of female participation visible in other aspects of the civil rights movement. This strong female leadership also had a significant Old Left background in labor unionization, again typical of early feminists. Margaret Dagen, for instance, held a Cornell Ph.D. in labor relations.

The strong women’s presence in civil rights groups matched a reciprocal civil rights activism in women’s groups. For example, the 1951 Missouri convention of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) endorsed the desegregation of public schools. In University City, Harriett Woods helped create a local group called “freedom of residence” to fight the housing segregation that plagued the St. Louis area as intensely as it did other urban areas around the nation. Making connections between the civil rights movement and the women’s movement is problematic, in some respects, because of the ways that each movement jealously guarded its hold on public sympathy.

Black women, for example, often felt pressed to declare their identities and loyalties as one group or the other. But clearly, they were members of both groups, sharing the concerns of both. In 1962, DeVerne Lee Calloway became the first African-American woman elected to Missouri’s General Assembly. She served in the House, a Democrat of St. Louis’s 13th District. Early and steadily she championed greater state support of welfare and public education, in line with Democratic party civil rights priorities. But women’s concerns overlapped; Calloway was a strong proponent as well of reproductive rights.\(^{102}\) It is impossible to separate Calloway the supporter of civil rights from Calloway the supporter of women’s rights.

Rights advocates initially focused attention on pay discrepancies. In 1963, the same year as the federal law, Missouri’s General Assembly passed an equal pay bill, written by Dr. Sara Feder of the University of Missouri at Columbia (MU). Feder had been serving as state legislative chair for the AAUW,\(^ {103}\) and was soon to be vice-chair of the first Missouri Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Twenty-four of the twenty-seven members originally appointed to that commission attended the first meeting in April of 1964, including Feder, and Alberta Meyer of the Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs (BPW). As was typical for middle-class women of the time, each married women was listed in the minutes of that meeting by her husband’s name: the secretary signed as “Mrs. Robert W. Leigh.” Unmarried women were listed under their own names, preceded by the formal “Miss,” and the two PhDs were given as “Dr.” with their own names.\(^ {104}\) Far from being wild-eyed revolutionaries, the women Governor

\(^{102}\) O’Connor, 4.

\(^{103}\) Ibid.

\(^{104}\) Meeting minutes, April 20, 1964, Missouri Commission on the Status of Women, Papers, 1963-1974 (C3903), folder 1, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
John Dalton selected for this first commission were middle-class volunteers with strong roots in the women’s clubs and civil rights activism.

These nascent feminists entered public life largely through the channels that had shaped women’s public activism since 1920. In a way similar to women’s involvement in civil rights, the CSWs in many ways continued the trends associated with traditional views of female activism. The Missouri commission was staffed entirely by female volunteers – despite the fact that some of them held full-time jobs. Members accepted the governor’s appointment knowing that they would serve without pay. It is perhaps significant in this connection that the founding chair and vice-chair were listed as Dr. Blanche Dow and Dr. Sara Feder, respectively. Professional women of some standing might have been able to arrange their work schedules to accommodate such volunteer work; it is unlikely that manual or clerical workers would have had the same flexibility.105

Democratic Governor Dalton was replaced in the elections of 1964 by his Secretary of State, Warren Hearnes. At a CSW meeting the next June, Sue Shear moved that a recommendation be made to Hearnes that he reappoint a commission for the coming year.106 That simple motion carried a world of implications for the status of this body. The commission, in addition to lacking salaries or even the most symbolic of stipends, also received no appropriation of operating funds. The little “funding” the CSW obtained came from private group donations – recorded in late 1968, for instance, from BPW chapters and from the Group Action Council of Greater St. Louis.107 With no statutory authority or budget, the Missouri CSW existed year-to-year at the pleasure of

105 Meeting minutes, April 20, 1964, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.  
106 Meeting minutes, June 1, 1966, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 2.  
107 Meeting minutes, Dec 18, 1968, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.
the governor. An attempt, in the commission’s first year, to convince the Missouri legislature to establish it by law died without ever coming to a vote.\textsuperscript{108} Hence Shear’s motion to gently remind Governor Hearnes of the commission’s existence.

Much more than from the state government, the fledgling commission collected advice and support from other women’s organizations, and from national activists. Margaret Hickey, described simply in the minutes as “chairman of the President’s Council on Status of Women,”\textsuperscript{109} appeared as a sporadic but frequent guest of the CSW. Hickey, nationally known feminist and editor of the St. Louis-based \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal}, had been active with the BPW and YWCA since the Depression. Her advice was useful to the fledgling commission, as was her experience with national women’s conferences. The growing network of liberal feminist activism this visitor represents was able to lobby increasingly for federal and state support of gender equality.

Despite lobbying based in the language of equal rights, Missouri’s government was slow to act. After three years, the General Assembly finally established the CSW by statute in July of 1967. Alberta J. Meyer, an active member since the commission’s creation, was elected chair at the first meeting of this “new” statutory commission on 11 January, 1968, following an official swearing-in by Missouri’s chief justice. Another veteran commissioner and future state representative, Sue Shear, was elected second vice-chair.\textsuperscript{110} Though the CSW had produced ad-hoc reports in the first two years of its existence, its new statutory authority allowed for the compilation of regular annual reports. They presented the first to Governor Hearnes in December of 1968.

\textsuperscript{108} Meeting minutes, October 27, 1965, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
\textsuperscript{109} Meeting minutes, December 11, 1965, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1. The group described was a successor, the more recent version of the Commission Kennedy had established back in 1961.
\textsuperscript{110} Meeting minutes, January 11, 1968, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 2.
commission was from that point a semipermanent group, one that did not require special yearly re-creation. However, nothing in the new law provided money for the group’s activity. Commission leaders lobbied annually for an appropriation. Missouri Senate majority leader William J. Cason, who had initially introduced the bill for a statutory CSW, nevertheless dismissed the idea of state funding for the group as late as 1972. “They are so endowed with their faith,” he confidently stated, “they don’t need money.” This lack of funding often resulted in an inability on the part of the commission to follow through, as in the initiation of widespread or long-term investigations of women’s status, or in the publication of study results.

Many women were uncertain how representative of “women” their own situation was. The initial role of the CSWs was characterized mostly by fact-finding, and the reports they compiled are heavy on description. Much can be learned from finding out what questions the commission asked. What did they find important enough to investigate? Where did they seek to confirm, deny, or classify discrimination? And how did they go about doing so? How does one measure such things as a double sexual standard? Outcomes (financial, or educational, or legal, etc.)? Opportunities? Standards? Such decisions as these are further complicated by values, by religion, by social tradition, and a variety of other factors.

Societal preconceptions about proper roles for men and women exhibited themselves in a myriad of ways. According to an article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the county sheriff’s department had been for years required to notify men when their wives applied for a gun owner’s permit. The prescription did not apply in the other

111 Ann Hurst, “Women’s Faith, Yes: Commission Funds, No,” Columbia Missourian, (Columbia, MO), February 27, 1972, CSW Records (WHMC SUNP 6059), correspondence folder.
Searching for a way to collect such details as this, the Missouri CSW organized committees to research status inequalities.

One method of indirectly describing societal structure is to analyze the types of businesses in operation. The Women at Work committee wanted in 1965 to discover “if discrimination exists” and to “make recommendations for changes” if they found any. The particular areas they planned to investigate were labor and employment, which helps reveal the focus on building a cross-class coalition of women united by gender and the shared experience of working, in whatever form. R.L. Polk & Co. of Detroit, grown to a massive publishing house by the 1960s, attempted to provide a comprehensive listing of businesses for every major urban area in the US, but Polk’s only identified the types of businesses – not the owner’s demographics. Working women in Missouri encountered many of the same obstacles as employed women nationally. Missouri’s chapter of the BPW sent out a confidential survey to self-employed women in 1971. The results of the survey were collated by the Missouri CSW, which had pressed the BPW to issue it. 110 female business-owners from across the state responded, about evenly divided between new start-ups and women who had purchased existing businesses. Though the types of business varied widely, an income range of $7500 annually seemed to be the median. Adjusted for inflation, this would be not quite $40,000 gross income. Only 17 percent had college degrees, and “needed more education” was a common response to the question, “What obstacles [have you] encountered because you are a woman and how did you surmount them?” Other common answers were, “resentment from male peers,” and,

112 Meeting minutes, Aug 9, 1968, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.
113 Meeting minutes, December 11, 1965, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
114 Meeting minutes, Sep 10, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
“keeping house and working.” Overwhelmingly, the women were “outstate,” almost four to one outside the major metropolitan areas of St. Louis and Kansas City.115

For Missouri, Polk’s directories regularly included three cities: St. Louis, Kansas City, and Springfield. These three areas boomed in population and size of economy across the 1950s, as did many cities nationally. The Kansas City and St. Louis urban areas, as defined by the Bureau of the Census, each jumped over 200,000 people in the decade: thirty and twenty percent, respectively. The Springfield area also grew by thirty percent.116

These overall numbers, since they include the stagnant city centers, do not do justice to the rapid expansion of the suburban areas. Kansas City proper only grew by four percent in the decade, while St. Louis actually shrank over twelve percent. The smaller center-state cities of Columbia and Jefferson City, desirable destinations for those fleeing the larger metropoles, increased population between ten and fifteen percent. The big winner was Springfield, with the same benefits as the center-state cities and the added advantage of a larger economy to provide jobs for potential migrants. Partly from a physical expansion in incorporated area, Springfield grew by nearly forty-four percent between 1950 and 1960.117

The St. Louis ring cities, the bedroom communities outside the city limits, deserve special notice because of the large proportion of feminist activists they produced. St. Charles, seat of its own county and just west across the Missouri River from St. Louis,

117 1960 Census, Table 5.
grew forty-eight percent and eventually produced the first county commission on the status of women in Missouri. Florissant, originally a separate French settlement well to the north, became a haven for city-fleers during the decade with a population growth of over 900 percent. Clayton, seat of St. Louis County and home to later ERA sponsor Sue Shear, suffered from both age and proximity to the main city. An anomaly among these suburbs, Clayton lost a negligible five percent. And finally, University City, home of Harriett Woods and her campaign against residential segregation and against “throwaway neighborhoods,” expanded nearly thirty percent. The other ring cities tell a similar tale.118

Statistics from the state at large reinforce this pattern of movement to growing cities. While the total population of the state rose some nine percent, the rural population actually dropped. The difference, of course, was made up by the overall eighteen percent rise in the urban population from 1950 to 1960.119 The beginnings of the women’s movement in Missouri, as in the nation, came out of a period of rapid urbanization as well as rapid suburbanization, with all the problems that attend those. Lack of housing, fierce competition for jobs, increasing urban poverty and destruction of urban neighborhoods all combined with falling urban tax revenues to create significant unrest in the cities. The increasing split between urban and suburban residents led many in the more affluent outside neighborhoods to reject the idea of public assistance for those inside. Women like Harriett Woods participated in movements to bridge these gaps, with limited success. Whatever success they may or may not have found, their work on the social problems of urbanization brought many into public politics for the first time.

118 1960 Census, Table 5.
119 1960 Census, Table 1.
The elections of 1966 brought five new women to the Missouri House. The most prominent of these in the long term was Democrat Mary Gant of Kansas City. Gant’s legislative leadership was notable, as was her later opposition to ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Gant supported equal pay legislation, putting her closely in line with Alberta Meyer of the Missouri CSW.\footnote{O’Connor, 4-5.} Pay disparities, though clearly significant, were measurable and to some extent containable. The more open-ended prohibitions on discrimination after 1964 were more powerful, but they also raised more questions about the ramifications of feminism. This ambiguity was reflected in administrative confusion; by 1968, the five-year-old Equal Pay Law was being administered partly by Missouri’s Industrial Commission, and partly by the Human Rights Commission.\footnote{Meeting minutes, Dec 18, 1968, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.}

Concern for employed women was widespread in the CSW, but these activists’ varied backgrounds led them to focus on women’s other roles as well. For example, the connection between women’s activism and consumerism was made strongly in Missouri. The Missouri Commission on the Status of Women instituted official meetings on consumer affairs. In addition to all of the members, and the government officials presenting, guests at a 1969 meeting included Congresswoman Leonor K. Sullivan (D-MO), well known for her civil rights activism, and Rhobia Taylor, head of the Women’s Bureau region and based out of Dallas, Texas.\footnote{Consumer affairs meeting agenda, Mar 21, 1969, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.} The meeting included presentations from the state’s Department of Agriculture; Divisions of Health, Finance, and Insurance; and the Office of the Attorney General. That last, from the AG’s Consumer Protection Division, was the rising political star Christopher Bond, future Republican governor and
US senator. The topics discussed ranged widely, from meat inspection and cosmetics safety to consumer credit and marketing.\textsuperscript{123}

The continuation of older models of women’s activism remained a potent theme in Missouri even as new liberal feminist groups were created nationally. The state’s first NOW chapter was not created until 1970, four years after the national organization. Even eighteen months later, under the active leadership of St. Louisan Mary Anne Sedey, the chapter had only fifty dues-paying members in the entire metro area.\textsuperscript{124} Once in existence, though, Missouri NOW made active efforts to tie in to the women’s network that had grown up around the CSW.

In addition to being a fact-finding body, the state-level CSW was a clearinghouse of information for state groups interested in different sorts of information about women, and the members tried to honor research requests made by the government in Jefferson City as well as by private or business groups. This often meant simply sending copies of the CSW’s annual report, as for example in response to a 1970 request from the St. Louis NOW chapter.\textsuperscript{125}

The fifteen members of the overworked Missouri CSW were rarely all present at meetings. This absenteeism could reflect a lack of popular buy-in to the issues of the Commission (certainly a perennial problem in implementing women’s activism), or more likely the difficulty of juggling a career and often a family in addition to volunteer work for a demanding commission. It is difficult to nail down individual reasoning, as the records include almost no information on the background or family status of members.

\textsuperscript{123} Consumer affairs meeting agenda, Mar 21, 1969, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.
\textsuperscript{124} Collection description, Metro St. Louis NOW Records, 1971-1980 (SL213), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
\textsuperscript{125} Meeting minutes, Jun 6, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
Some of that can be pieced together through inference or because of the women’s involvement in other groups, but the picture is incomplete. One point of note is that all the commission members were women – as opposed to several other CSWs or NOW, for example, which were formed with the explicit intention of including men. Missouri CSW rules held that 8 members constituted a quorum – just over half. Nevertheless, the summer 1969 meeting failed to meet that bar, and the group agreed in September to redefine a quorum down to five members only.\footnote{Meeting minutes, Sep 19, 1969, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.} Again the following year, the issue resurfaced. Meyer included an admonitory note in her letter to absent members following the September meeting, and again a year later.\footnote{Alberta J. Meyer to Missouri CSW members absent from recent meeting, Sep 21, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4, and Alberta J. Meyer to Missouri CSW members absent from recent meeting, Nov 11, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.}

Admonitions were rather unsuccessful in curtailing absenteeism. The CSW held four full-group meetings for 1971. Six members missed all four of them. Three more were absent at least half the time. Even issue-oriented discussions (like a September one about support for the ERA) often veered off into laments about the difficulty of creating change when people cannot come to meetings. The responsibility of organizing the entire statewide women’s movement told heavily on this tiny group, and attempts to increase publicity (and therefore support from other groups) became more pressing. The low point came in November, while discussing the governor’s recent request for a list of members interested in reappointment. Ironically, neither that list nor any other business could be finalized, because the four lonely members at the meeting did not constitute a quorum.\footnote{Meeting minutes, Jan 26, Jul 15, Sep 10, and Nov 5, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.}

In November of 1970, the recently-created NOW chapter again asked the CSW for information, this time on job discrimination. The request itself was not especially
noteworthy, in that the commission regularly received them from all over the state. But
the NOW request also included a proposition that members of the two organizations do
lunch sometime, to talk about common goals and activities. This suggestion piqued the
interest of Chairman Meyer; she presented it to the quarterly CSW meeting with the
comment that she “felt possibly the two organizations might have information of value to
exchange.”129 Her members agreed, and five members of NOW, including Mary Anne
Sedey, were commission guests at the quarterly meeting in January of 1971, at which the
two organizations agreed to work together when possible in research and lobbying.130

Tying local NOW efforts to the national leadership was a loosely organized
chapter structure, in which interested women could set up their own branch of the
organization by agreeing to abide by a set of by-laws. The St. Louis Metro chapter still
has those original by-laws. The chapter had to agree that

The purpose of the [St. Louis Metro] Chapter shall be to take action to bring
women into full participation in the mainstream of American society, NOW,
exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership
with men. This purpose includes, but is not limited to, equal rights and
responsibilities in all aspects of citizenship, public service, employment,
education and family life, and it includes freedom from discrimination because of
marital status or motherhood.131

This mandate is rather broad, but there are two points worth special note. First, it
reiterates a demand for both rights and responsibilities. NOW members consistently held
that obligations were as important to equality as privileges. Second, it outlines a range of
feminist areas of concern: family life and motherhood share space with employment and
education, as well as with voting and officeholding. The last two concerns became

129 Meeting minutes, Nov 18, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
130 Meeting minutes, Jan 26, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
131 NOW Chapter By-Laws (required by national board), Sep 17, 1967, Metro St. Louis NOW (National
Organization For Women) Records, 1971-1979 (SL0175), folder 86, Western Historical Manuscript
Collection, St. Louis, MO.
increasingly important in the early 1970s, as unprecedented numbers of women sought and won political office.

Harriett Woods joined her city government seeking change from within the existing institutional framework, rather than a revolutionary restructuring. She was appointed in 1967 to fill a vacant seat on the University City council. Like many women in the 1960s, her first entry into public office came not through an independent election campaign but at the behest of existing public officials.

Two-thirds of Congresswomen in the half-century after suffrage followed deceased husbands. That “widow track” that carried so many women to political office nationally functioned in Missouri as well. In 1970, Kansas City representative Leon Jordan was murdered. In the subsequent special election, his wife Orchid I. Jordan was elected to the House as a Democrat. Serving for the next 16 years, her perennial issue was state funding for an improved mass transit system, particularly to serve the urban poor.

One year later, Democrat Judith G. O’Connor of St. Louis won admission to the House in a special election following her husband’s auto-accident death. The institutional and public sympathy that helped gain O’Connor the seat by no means eliminated the barriers that limited women’s access to power. Interviewed years later for a story in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, O’Connor recalled a number of unintentional as well as deliberate incidents of discrimination. Perhaps the most telling was a meeting during her first year in the House. Intending to garner support for legislation she was sponsoring, she scheduled a meeting with three senior members of her own party. Upon her arrival, one

---

132 Woods, 40.
134 O’Connor, 5.
of them locked the door, cut off the lights, and asked how serious she was about her legislation. The lights came back on, the door was unlocked, and the incident was treated as a joke, but at least for O’Connor, there was a terrifying heartbeat of uncertainty that only confirmed the tenuousness of women’s hold on equality. Incidents such as these served to push O’Connor rather farther to the political left than women such as Kansas City representative Mary Gant.

The rise in female officeholders, the proliferation of women’s groups, and increasing public interest in feminist issues created a bewildering array of voices speaking for women – often contradicting each other. Multiple women on the Missouri CSW emphasized the importance of establishing a network with and for women’s organizations in the state, both the existing ones and the new ones being created in the 1960s. The CSW also worked to maintain contacts with politically active women in other states. Elly Peterson of Michigan, in her role as Vice Chair of the Republican National Committee, asked the Missouri CSW in the summer of 1970 to provide a list of women in “appointive or elective positions in Missouri government.” A typical sort of informational request for the CSW to receive, this particular one throws into relief two key points. First, Peterson was a critical figure in the Republican party’s identity struggle of the 1960s and ’70s. Thus, the fact that Peterson held a vice presidency in the national committee and made this request points up the presence of “Republican feminism.” Second, the focus on getting women into government positions highlights the shift in women’s activism from the “equal pay” focus of the early 1960s, a shift that helped lead to the 1971 creation of the National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC).

135 O’Connor, 5-6.
136 Meeting minutes, September 21, 1964, and February 5, 1966, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
137 Meeting minutes, Jun 6, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
On 12 February 1972, Doris Quinn of Kansas City and Betty Cook Rottman of Columbia organized the first meeting of the Missouri chapter of the WPC. The first candidate the group recruited was Sue Shear, long active in the state Commission on the Status of Women. Shear went on to win a seat in the Missouri House in the elections that fall, and she continued her activity with the commission and with the WPC. Both Shear and commission secretary Anita Leigh had attended the February meeting of the new Missouri Women’s Political Caucus in Columbia. In return, three WPC representatives from Columbia sat in on the May meeting of the CSW. The women’s network in Missouri built on its own success and expanded dramatically in the early 1970s.

The NWPC was a strong influence on female candidacy, encouraging many women to run who had never before done so, or in many cases even considered it. In 1972, the Equal Rights Amendment was approved by both houses of the mostly-male Congress. Female candidacy in Missouri reflected that attitude shift. In Missouri’s 1970 elections, the major parties offered only twenty-six female candidates as nominees for statewide office. That number jumped to forty-four in 1972. The gender ratio in the Missouri House after the election became ten women to 153 men, still remarkably lopsided but less so than ever before. When the dust had settled, women held approximately five percent of the seats in the General Assembly. WPC members especially hoped that feminist legislation would find increasing support if the numbers of women elected continued to grow.

138 O’Connor, 5.
139 Meeting minutes, Feb 18 and May 19, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
140 Matthews et al, 48, 111, photo following 144.
141 O’Connor, 1, 5.
Among the new women elected was Sue Shear. Serving since the mid-1960s on the governor’s Commission on the Status of Women, Shear represented the city of Clayton. Like University City, Clayton sits in the ring of semi-suburbs just outside the St. Louis city limits. A Democrat, Shear had also maintained for years her membership in the League of Women Voters and the Council of Jewish Women.\textsuperscript{142} Despite the fact that many activists both for and against feminism came to see traditional activism as antithetical to the movement, the typicality of Shear’s multiple memberships and the wide experience of women’s networking expose the dichotomy as absurd.

Both traditionally-oriented organizations and liberal feminist groups turned to the still-unfunded CSW for the collection and exchange of information. Meyer, as chair, was increasingly bombarded by requests for data or research on sex inequality. In February of 1972, for example, she reported receiving letters from private citizens, from several different business and public institutions, and from CSWs of other states.\textsuperscript{143} Probably this growing importance of the commission influenced the General Assembly’s decision that year to finally appropriate funds for the commission’s use.

Other women’s organizations also actively contributed to establishing and maintaining a network. At the 1972 convention for the Missouri Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (MACWC), one of the projects was a survey of clubs to determine cross-membership in a revealing array of other groups. MACWC’s parent organization, like its white counterpart the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, was a creation of the turn of the century, built by self-consciously middle-class women, and initially designed around homosocial volunteerism and the kind of civic motherhood characteristic of Victorian

\textsuperscript{142} Meeting minutes, October 27, 1965, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
\textsuperscript{143} Meeting minutes, Feb 18, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
ideology. The 1972 survey looked at explicitly women’s organizations: AAUW, LWV, sororities, and the YWCA. It also looked at two public service groups: consumer organizations, lumped together generally, and the Red Cross. Interestingly, there was no question about religious organizations, despite the active involvement of many MACWC women in church work. Perhaps the activity was assumed, or perhaps the category was left out because most church work was local rather than statewide. Finally, reflecting continuing civil rights interest in MACWC, the survey counted membership in the Urban League.\textsuperscript{144} The survey offers a snapshot of the overlapping memberships that provided an invisible but powerful skeleton for the women’s movement.

By the late 1960s, the women’s clubs and even the newer liberal feminist groups were being labeled “too conservative” by voices that were also dismissing old-line civil rights groups like the venerable National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or Martin Luther King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Increasing frustration with the slow pace of change and the impotence of legislative remedies for inequality helped drive the creation of the black liberation movements, symbolized so dramatically by Stokely Carmichael’s “black power” rhetoric and the creation of local-action groups like the Black Panthers. Also affected by those conversations, the St. Louis chapter of CORE that Margaret Dagen had helped found twenty years earlier wrote a new constitution in 1968, which according to Kenneth Jolly “represented the organization’s evolution from a civil rights group to a human rights group….\textsuperscript{145} As civil rights groups

\textsuperscript{144} MACWC state convention agenda, Program Committee report, 1972, Missouri Association Of Colored Women’s Clubs, Records, 1932-1986 (C3801), folder 4, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.

\textsuperscript{145} Jolly, 51.
in the late 1960s were expanding their conception of rights, so too did those concepts bleed into other social movements.

But many women were leery of adopting liberationist attitudes. Liberal feminism dovetailed better with old-style civil rights activism which had helped train many of these women. Democrat Leonor K. Sullivan, proponent of civil rights and St. Louis representative to Congress, suggested in 1968 that revolutionary black liberationists needed “the hard hand of parental discipline applied in the proper area of the anatomy.”\(^\text{146}\) The same tension was reflected between “women’s rights” and “women’s liberation” advocates, even as they continued to influence one another. While many women began to identify themselves with a women’s movement, there was continued strife over which goals or activities that movement entailed.

But in other ways, black liberation helped to push women from racial civil rights into women’s activism. In Kenneth Jolly’s study of St. Louis black liberation, he notes that “Black Power challenged gender and race relations…. [It] brought an increasing sense of the movement as a masculine endeavor.” CORE activist Judith Stix remembered being turned off by the mounting emphasis on violence.\(^\text{147}\) Historian Anne Standley has identified two contemporaneous examples in the Southern movement: Jean Smith and Joyce Ladner. These two left the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the late 1960s after coming to the conclusion that racism was linked to a larger social system based in unequal treatment, including discrimination against women.\(^\text{148}\)

\(^{146}\) Jolly, 99.
\(^{147}\) Jolly, 26, 29, 112.
Marcia Hammons, elected president of MACWC in June of 1973, helped steer her black women’s organization in an increasingly feminist direction. While preparing a convention address, she studied the words of national president Juanita Brown, delivered at the 1974 national biennial convention. Brown had noted that women “are more inclined [than men] to become active not only for their self interest, but for the interest of society, the world, and most of all, out of compassion for humanity.” Hammons quoted those words in her own speech, and there is nothing in them inconsistent with traditional essentialist rhetoric. But she also borrowed the sentences, “Yes the Black woman has become a part of the Women’s Liberation. …when we speak of Women’s Liberation, many of us merely smile for we have been liberated so long we just call it work.”

Clearly, there is in these words gentle mocking of the women’s movement. But there is also a recognition of unity and common goals.

The increasing support of black women doubtless contributed to women’s movement success in places like St. Louis and Kansas City, with large black populations. However, support for the goals of the CSW or NOW continued to be difficult to come by in the more rural areas of the state. Mary Anne Sedey of NOW commented in early 1973 that she felt the organization needed help “reaching out into the rural areas of Missouri where we are having some trouble right now.”

Sedey’s awareness of her poor connection with rural Missouri is one intimation of the ways that popular traditionalist sentiment affected the thinking of Missouri feminists. NOW chapters in the large, cosmopolitan cities of the East and West Coasts were arguing about whether to champion

---

149 Marcia Hammons, draft of district convention address, Oct 4, 1974, MACWC Records (WHMC C3801), folder 7.
sexual orientation, and whether heterosexual privilege would qualify as a women’s issue, but the arguments about lesbianism seem to have rarely appeared in Missouri.

The remarkable silence on the subject of lesbianism should not be taken to imply that no dissension existed within Missouri NOW. Mary Anne Sedey, state NOW coordinator by 1973, seemed more worried about internal conflict than about heckling antifeminists as she prepared for one parade and rally that summer. In a letter to “Chris,” Sedey commented on having “Laura’s band” to play at the rally. Seemingly in view of past experiences with the bandleader, Sedey was hesitant. “Also somehow we’ve got to get a commitment from Laura that she will not bad mouth the parade, the organizations involved, or individuals involved from the platform.”151 The level of concern suggests that it would not be the first time Laura had offered negative comments about other members of the local women’s movement.

“Chris” was the recipient of Sedey’s letter. She was probably Chris Guerrero, Sedey’s successor as St. Louis chapter president and another major organizer of the parade. Responsible for arranging celebrity appearances, Guerrero had received a note also from Missouri’s Senator Eagleton (D), claiming a prior commitment and declining to participate in the demonstration.152 Perhaps he was legitimately engaged elsewhere. However, the vagueness of his response and his history of underwhelming support on women’s issues raise skepticism. Many public figures who had offered indifference or tacit support for early actions (like creating a CSW) became more hesitant as public discussion of women increasingly set “tradition” at odds with “liberation.” Certainly, the

151 Mary Anne Sedey to Chris [probably Guerrero], 1973, NOW Records (WHMC SL0175), folder 9; “Laura’s” last name unfortunately never appears in the records.
influence of women’s liberation and consciousness-raising was expanding into women’s rights groups at that time.

In 1971, for example, the Eureka High School’s current events class requested a CSW member as a guest speaker for their current events class. What they actually sought was not a speech about rights and equality, nor statistics on employment discrimination. At the behest of the students in the class, what Eureka wanted was a moderator for a discussion about women’s liberation. Eureka is just outside St. Louis, home of CSW member and St. Louis Post-Dispatch writer Clarissa S. Davidson, who obliged their request.153 Among other things, this visit emphasizes the ways in which the women’s rights movement is impossible to keep separate from the women’s liberation movement.

Whether in formally-organized groups or informal conversations, the practice of consciousness-raising helped to create solidarity among women and commitment to women’s issues. The decentralized and democratic nature of the practice helped encourage a flowering of activity at the local level. Jacqui Ceballos, encouraging creative local activism from NOW’s national office, attempted to spark the St. Louis chapter in 1972 by saying “There is no end to what we can do to raise consciousness, raise money, get new members, and mobilize women more effectively to change the balance of power and make feminism/humanism a reality.”154 Activists were increasingly recognizing the links between liberationist consciousness-raising and liberal feminist lobbying.

Already by 1974, NOW members in St. Louis were engaging in organized consciousness-raising; their group met twice monthly. Member Pat Adair included her own commentary on raised consciousness and coverture in a chapter newsletter that fall.

153 Meeting minutes, Jan 26, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
154 Jacqui Ceballos, NOW Eastern Regional Director to local chapters, Apr 20, 1972, NOW Records (WHMC C0781), folder 61.
Following some medical treatment, she received – naturally – a bill for services. She was mildly irritated at the fact the bills were addressed to her husband instead of to her, so she phoned the doctor’s office to complain. After being stonewalled on several consecutive attempts, her irritation was no longer mild. As she noted in the newsletter, “If anyone bills my spouse [again] for services rendered to me, I’m sending my check and note of explanation to his (or her) spouse, at the home address.”

Liberationist influences appeared in the most unexpected of places and encouraged a dramatic expansion in the scope of organizational goals. CSW secretary Anita Leigh attended a session on women’s liberation at the 1970 American Bar Association meeting in St. Louis. Women who participated in local-activism groups often benefited from the liberationist trend toward direct democratic participation to develop leadership experience they otherwise might not have had the chance to receive. For example, “St. Louis CORE’s practice of frequent officer elections,” notes historian Kenneth Jolly, “illustrates the group’s community orientation and its commitment to developing organizational and leadership skills among all of its members.” Women who had developed such skills carried them into feminist organizations, as they carried their expanding independent consciousness of themselves as women. But the proliferation of leaders, while empowering, sometimes frustrated attempts to create a coherent movement for women.

The dramatic widening of goals led as often to friction and dissension as to unity and solidarity. Even during 1970s attempts to clarify the goals and direction of a

---

156 Meeting minutes, Sep 18, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
157 Jolly, 21-22.
women’s movement, there was consistent strife and lack of focus in state NOW, as there was in the national. In a darkly funny resignation letter, two members of NOW’s Missouri State Council justified their departure in early 1978. Their explanation? “Our backgrounds being in management and administration, we are quite frankly amazed that the Council so consistently refuses to recognize the necessity of defining goals and strategies.” One recurring problem with such vagueness was that opponents of feminism were often able to characterize – or mischaracterize – at will. This control of the debate was a major reason that antifeminists were able to mobilize traditional sentiment for themselves. Recognizing that trend, feminist groups tried various strategies to get their own messages before the public.

Already at the birth of the Missouri CSW, members had begun expressing concern about the lack of publicity their efforts were receiving. No publicity meant no additional support; also, an essentially informative body would be useless without a means of sharing its findings. Since the commission had no operating budget, it was reliant on gubernatorial goodwill to fund both its studies and the printing of its reports.

To help explore potential means of disseminating information, the CSW created a committee on “Publicity and Public Relations” at the end of 1965. After the commission finally received a budget in the early 1970s, much of it went to printing and distributing reports and to holding educational conferences.

These practices dovetailed neatly with the CSW’s role as a coordinating organization and information clearinghouse. State CSWs often kept in contact with each other, sharing information and strategies. For example, a letter from Karen Pope and Sally Neville, Communications Coordinators, to State Officers, Chapter Representatives, Committee Chairs, 1978, NOW Records (WHMC SL0175), folder 87; the date is imprecise, but the resignations were to take effect Feb 15.

Meeting minutes, April 20, 1964, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
Meeting minutes, October 27, 1965, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
other in order to share ideas for activity and local successes. For example, Anita Leigh noted in March of 1970 an exchange of contacts and newsletters with Iowa, Kansas, California, and Wisconsin.¹⁶¹

In the spring of 1970, many state commissions – Missouri’s included – agreed to form an official Interstate Association of Commissions on the Status of Women (IACSW) to more effectively coordinate action and information-sharing. Alberta Meyer, a strong proponent of such action, was elected to the IACSW board.¹⁶² Once on the board, she lost no time in lobbying for a national convention, hoping that it would be held in Missouri and offer a publicity boost to feminist activity. At the same time, she promoted the possibility to her commission members. With the active support and encouragement of the Missouri Tourism Commission, the Missouri CSW built an attractive package and brought the first IACSW convention to Missouri across three days in the summer of 1971.¹⁶³ Considering the east-west weighting of Commission activity, it is no surprise that St. Louis was chosen as the host city. Meyer was reelected to the IACSW board at the conference, which was very successful in bringing publicity within Missouri and was followed by a spike in donations.¹⁶⁴

Intrastate activism often also helped create loose, democratic networks. In September of 1971, the CSW hosted a number of representatives from Missouri women’s groups (LWV, AAUW, BPW, and several others) at a luncheon. Courting their support for a coalition, Meyer asked for their support on several goals she felt were common to

¹⁶¹ Meeting minutes, Mar 6, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
¹⁶² Meeting minutes, Mar 6, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
¹⁶⁴ Meeting minutes, Jul 15, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
women’s groups throughout the state. Those same representatives returned the following month, with the addition of representatives from NOW. Nevertheless, even members aiming at common goals remained committed to locally-controlled, small-scale initiatives. The decentralized activism of the expanding women’s movement was thus evident in Missouri as well. For example, by 1972, Betty McCaskill of the CSW was a city councilwoman in Columbia. She also worked with the University of Missouri (MU) local status of women organization and was tied in to the MU women’s center.

In another instance of the loose community women’s network, a newsletter from the Columbia WPC the following year noted an upcoming seminar on rape. Rather than being held at WPC headquarters, or in a member’s home, it was to be hosted by the local Episcopal church and cosponsored by several women’s organizations. The WPC in Columbia also engaged in its own version of feminist literary criticism. A typical chapter newsletter for 1974 included an extensive number of one-paragraph book reviews, often with feminist commentary. Rather than being taken from a national publication, the reviews were composed each month by one or two women in the local group.

The vibrant activity of the Columbia WPC highlights the geographic disparities in Missouri feminism. The CSW was based in the state capital at Jefferson City, and many of its more active members came from Columbia or the St. Louis metro area. CSW members discussed in September 1969 the possibility of an advisory commission in St. Charles (a fast-growing city just west of St. Louis). If successful, such a commission

165 Meeting minutes, Sep 10, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
166 Meeting minutes, Sep 10, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
167 Meeting minutes, Aug 18, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
169 Columbia WPC newsletter, June 1974, WPC Papers (WHMC C3550), folder 32.
could become a model for state-local interaction.\textsuperscript{170} Early the following year, the St. Charles County Advisory Commission was established, with tentative plans drawn up for one in St. Louis itself as well.\textsuperscript{171} There was a conspicuous absence of Kansas City in this discussion, as well as others involving women’s groups. A consistent regional pattern that emerges in these records is that the metropolitan area of St. Louis and the university town of Columbia tended to contribute the lion’s share of activists to the women’s movement. That imbalance occasionally prompted CSW members to seek buy-in from the western part of the state, as in the 1970 suggestion to hold one of the CSW’s quarterly meetings in Kansas City.\textsuperscript{172} Those attempts to spread CSW work around the state continued on and off for years. The 1974 state conference was held at tiny Cottey College. An all-woman two-year liberal arts school, Cottey was and is situated in the city of Nevada, perhaps a hundred miles south of the Kansas City area. Nevada’s location was chosen at least partly because of the lackluster support the CSW had received from that rural western portion of the state.\textsuperscript{173}

Women from Kansas City, Springfield, and other parts of Missouri were consistently underrepresented in Missouri women’s groups across the board, though NOW and NWPC chapters were eventually established in Kansas City. The CSW members seemed to take this imbalance in stride, reflecting it in their own rosters. They did not, however, offer any explicit theories to explain it, seeming to take it for granted. A serious legislative weakness was one result of the geographic imbalance. With feminist support concentrated in St. Louis and in the middle of the state, an enormous proportion

\textsuperscript{170} Meeting minutes, Sep 19, 1969, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.
\textsuperscript{171} Meeting minutes, Mar 6, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
\textsuperscript{172} Meeting minutes, Jun 6, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
\textsuperscript{173} Meeting minutes, Oct 12, 1973, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
of state legislative districts experienced little or no local feminist pressure – an imbalance
of great significance in the 1970s debates over Missouri’s ratification of the Equal Rights
Amendment. The slow response of Missouri at large to federal gender equality initiatives
is visible in the implementation of Title IX. Even as late as 2003, the state university’s
large football program helped it fail the primary test of compliance, that sports
opportunities be proportionate to the male/female ratio in the student population. MU
avoided federal sanctions by a back-door route, claiming that its programs “fully and
effectively” accommodated women’s interest because the university offered the major
sports programs that appeared in Missouri high school athletic competition.174

The links across women’s groups continued to be essential, and indeed became
perhaps more important with the rise of activism around the ERA. In a letter from the
NOW legislative office in Washington, D.C., national coordinator Ann Scott emphasized
those links with regard to state-level action. Scott noted that the state legislative
coordinator would be “cooperating with the state BPW and (soon) LWV to get the ERA
ratified.”175 Later that summer, a letter from the CSW’s Alberta Meyer to Mary Anne
Sedey of NOW proposed cross-contact with two other women: “Ellen Walters of LWV
and Margaret Fagin of AAUW.”176 Leadership in this decentralized women’s network
interacted fluidly, and the connections were essential in determining the direction of
feminist activism in the state.

The last of the prominent activists for ERA in Missouri to rise from leadership in
this network was Harriett Woods. A Pro-ERA Democrat, Woods moved up from city

174 Susan Ware, Title IX: A Brief History With Documents, (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 6, 29.
175 Ann Scott to regional directors, Mar 9, 1972, NOW Records (WHMC C0781), folder 61.
176 Alberta [presumably Meyer] to Mary Anne [presumably Sedey], Jul 5 1972, NOW Records (WHMC
C0781), folder 61.
politics upon her 1976 election to the Missouri Senate from University City. Despite her feminist activism, she also felt constrained to show the voters that she had the proper permission to move out of the house, domestically speaking. One of her campaign flyers announced, “The youngest of my three sons is now away at college and husband Jim has offered moral support; therefore I feel free to spend the necessary time in Jefferson City.” Clearly, the ideology of traditional domesticity retained power in feminist circles. Indeed, that particular flyer made no mention at all of her feminist positions.

Woods also supported tax reform, as well as additional funding for educational programs and for the elderly, all issues with a long history of organized women’s activism. As the next chapter will show in more detail, both those issues and the more explicitly feminist ones Woods backed earned significant attention from Missouri’s feminist groups.

Missouri feminism, therefore, offers a general parallel to the national timeline, with a few reservations. There was a geographic imbalance, which led to an uncertain and shaky support from the state legislature in Jefferson City. The work of the women’s movement was decentralized, and informal links played key roles in moving that work forward – much as with the national movement. The dual nature of “traditional” and “feminist” understandings of gender was highlighted in Missouri; sometimes the two reinforced each other, sometimes they conflicted.

Having asserted these generalities, we move to an analysis that asks: to what extent were there two varieties of feminist activism practiced in Missouri? That is, how much of feminism was inspired by traditional women’s concerns, and how much by a

177 Harriett Woods state Senate campaign flyer, 1976, WPC Papers (WHMC C3550), folder 28.
178 O’Connor, 6.
growing liberation movement? Once those particulars have been established, I will show how the two types of rhetoric were deployed in the fight over ratification of the ERA in Missouri.
Especially in the 1960s, many women’s rights activists were motivated more by a generalized sense of injustice than by a specific policy platform. But by the mid-1970s, groups like NOW and the NWPC were increasingly developing explicit statements of goals, policy demands, and legislative agendas. The next two chapters will expand analysis of those aims. To reduce the sometimes bewildering array of issues to a more manageable level of complexity, it will be helpful to think of this activism as falling into one of two categories. The first set comprises issues that tie back to the mainstream middle-class women’s issues of the first half of the century. Supporters were often successful in selling consumer protection, women’s education, and other feminist issues to the public as reinforcements of traditional womanhood. Growing out of those roots, this strain came to connect to explicitly liberal feminist, rights-based challenges to structural inequality, issues like jury service, equal credit access, and equal pay. The second set, handled in Chapter Four, are the more expansive, liberation-influenced issues. Like other delineations in the women’s movement, these categories overlap, but they are conceptually useful, especially since many women’s organizations expanded over time from the first area into the second. The evidence shows clearly that Missouri women’s groups found their initial impetus and strongest public support in the links between feminism and traditionalism.
Full-time homemakers occupied an uncertain position in reference to feminist activism, and to public views of the traditional woman. On the one hand, most feminists held that women’s domestic work deserved the respect and compensation that public paid work received. On the other hand, feminist work on behalf of equal pay and working women seemed to some to be undermining a domestic ideal. The government position on at-home motherhood was similarly ambivalent, as can be seen in the changes in welfare policy toward single workers. Government welfare assistance to the poor generally fell under the Aid to Dependent Children program. As revised during the 1950s, the program claimed as a goal the strengthening of family life. Earlier conceptions of family life had held that single mothers should be supported to allow them to stay home and fulfill their domestic responsibilities. But divorced or never-married women increasingly outnumbered widows in the program, and African-American women increasingly outnumbered white. Both developments, according to historian Jennifer Mittelstadt, helped encourage government officials across the liberal-conservative spectrum to define an ideal of strong family life that included a mother working to support the family, rather than staying at home to nurture one. That tension over the definition of woman’s proper place appeared within the women’s movement in places like the Missouri Commission on the Status of Women, which early on established committees for Women in the Home and Community, Women at Work, and Women as Citizens.

On the original list of work committees, Women as Citizens was chaired by a Mrs. Donald Niederlander. But in the official file, a handwritten edit on that list has crossed out Niederlander and replaced her with Anita Leigh – no date, no explanation.\(^\text{180}\) On such an ad-hoc commission of volunteers, one member supplanting another is not in itself especially surprising. But the surrounding details make this particular replacement intriguing. Mrs. Robert Leigh (as she signed the minutes) was already secretary-treasurer of the CSW. What would have caused her to take on an additional committee chairmanship? Examining the records of the next meeting, three months later, may offer some clues.

In the summer of 1964, three months after its creation, Women in the Home and Community reported out to the commission as a whole. This committee announced that it intended its focus to be more on homemakers than on women in their public roles – more on “home” than on “community,” as it were. This announcement occasioned some debate in the larger group over the proper purpose and activist orientation of the commission. Does the CSW exist to make it easier to be a wife and mother? Or to make it easier not to have to be one? To share one member’s opinion, as recorded in the minutes, “Mrs. Niederlander suggested the Commission should stress the dignity and value of the age-old concept of women in the home, the importance of children, husband, and mother in her role.” There follows a tantalizing reference to an extended discussion. The laconic minutes do not describe its contents, but its contentiousness is attested by the fact that Chairman Blanche Dow was forced to cut the conversation off to leave room for the other

\(^{180}\) Meeting minutes, April 20, 1964, Missouri Commission on the Status of Women, Papers, 1963-1974 (C3903), folder 1, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
committee reports.\textsuperscript{181} Presumably, without interference from the chair, the argument would have lasted the rest of the day.

By September of that year, Home and Community had explicitly named its priorities as threefold: “(1) Enhancing the power and prestige of ‘the housewife,’ (2) Developing the role of the volunteer, and (3) Re-emphasizing the importance of the mother and wife in view of the growing generation.”\textsuperscript{182} Despite the explicit focus on the public role of the volunteer, and an active insistence that better education and leadership training for volunteers should be emphasized, these priorities do seem compatible with Niederlander’s position. Nevertheless, by the fall of 1965, after the appointment of a new commission by Governor Hearnes, her name had disappeared from the membership roll of the CSW.\textsuperscript{183} A domestic ideology helped drive and inform feminism in Missouri, but it was difficult to reconcile with equal-rights activism.

Even in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, clear evidence remained that the newer influence of liberal feminist priorities still coexisted with female exceptionalism or biological essentialism in women’s organizations. At the 1968 state Missouri Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (MACWC) convention, the state president noted a special urgency to the group’s family-oriented work, “keeping in mind the alarming conditions of children with the Home much responsible,” and the convention acclaimed a resolution from member Julis Davis that noted “our programs are directed to improving conditions involving Mother, Home and Child.”\textsuperscript{184} The influence of domestic ideology appeared in

\textsuperscript{181} Meeting minutes, July 13, 1964, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
\textsuperscript{182} Meeting minutes, September 21, 1964, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
\textsuperscript{183} Meeting minutes, October 27, 1965, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
\textsuperscript{184} MACWC President Maiten’s recommendations, 1968 state convention records, Missouri Association Of Colored Women’s Clubs, Records, 1932-1986 (C3801), folder 1, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
many different kinds of groups, not just ones with a strong traditional base like MACWC or the League of Women Voters. Susan Davis’s Chicago newsletter cited a statement from the new National Women’s Political Caucus in 1971:

We believe that women have a deeper and more tenacious interest in certain kinds of programs that have vital national significance: child care, non-violence and peace preservation, and measures to protect the specific rights of women such as repeal of abortion laws, dissemination of birth control information, guaranteed annual income ($6500), and equal employment and education opportunities.\(^{185}\)

Grounded in convictions about women’s special nature, this statement links traditional women’s concerns to liberal feminist goals, a tie stressed perhaps more heavily in Missouri than at the national level.

Despite active work in creating and maintaining a network of new women’s groups, the Missouri CSW built in many ways on a traditional base of nonpartisan women’s activism and civic housekeeping, the sort of activity that had characterized League of Women Voters activity. The commission members reaffirmed in 1966 that they had no desire officially to affiliate themselves with any outside organization – though they would be happy to work with any on particular common goals.\(^{186}\) Similarly, the 1974 state WPC convention resolved to refuse partisan or other group affiliation – i.e., hold WPC independence as a bipartisan political group.\(^{187}\) That position conformed to the NWPC line, but the state group’s reiteration of this position bespeaks a desire to reinforce in the public mind WPC separation from unpopular feminist groups. One of the

---

\(^{185}\) *The Spokeswoman: an independent monthly newsletter for all women* (2:2), Aug 1, 1971, Metro St. Louis NOW (National Organization For Women) Records, 1971-1979 (SL0175), folder 10, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO; after adjusting for inflation, the guaranteed income advocated would come to $33,416.50 in 2008 dollars, according to the Austin Genealogical Society’s CPI calculator, <www.austintxgensoc.org/calculatedcpi.php>, accessed Apr 28, 2009.

\(^{186}\) Meeting minutes, March 19, 1966, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 2.

Missouri dynamics illustrated here is the attempt to include all interested parties while alienating none. In a state where legislators widely assumed support for traditional gender roles, the political climate could act as a brake on feminist activity, helping to limit the WPC and CSW mandates even as some members strained to expand them. When some members of the WPC would have pushed it into a closer alliance with the Democratic Party, hope for a Republican feminism continued to hold the nonpartisan focus. Another dynamic here evident is the competing drives to create a national movement and to retain local autonomy. These countervailing democratic and bureaucratic forces were consistent features of the women’s movement at all levels.

Drawing again from models of women’s activism developed early in the century, many women’s groups in the 1960s advocated on behalf of the consumer. The ideology of domesticity and the cultural links between women and consumer protection seem to have no proper place in a liberal rights or a radical liberation discourse. Nevertheless, both were very influential across the women’s movement, and decidedly so in Missouri. At the CSW’s March 1969 open meeting on consumer affairs, members gathered from a large number of Missouri women’s organizations illustrate two points. First, that a broad-based variety of women felt consumption to be a women’s issue. Second, that informal networking was crucial to the development of feminist activism. Representatives from long-established groups such as the Missouri Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Missouri Division of the AAUW, the Missouri chapter of the LWV, and the YWCA of Metropolitan St. Louis met and rubbed shoulders with those from newer groups such as the Kansas City Women’s Chamber of Commerce, the Missouri Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, and Church Women United. Such contacts were
crucial in shifting many of the more traditional women’s organizations toward a liberal feminist orientation. These also crossed paths with business organizations such as the Missouri Retailers Association, the Missouri Chamber of Commerce, and the Missouri Press Association, as well as with private citizen and consumer groups like the state Association of Consumers, the AFL-CIO’s labor council, the NAACP, and the Home Economics Association. ¹⁸⁸

1969 was a banner year for promoting women’s involvement in consumer issues. The state MACWC convention that year included among its six optional workshops one on “status of women” and another on “consumer protection.” ¹⁸⁹ In its political sense, the former topic was fairly new to MACWC, but its connection to traditional concerns like consumer advocacy was evident in other women’s groups as well. The CSW planned a series of regional “Consumer Forums,” events designed to disseminate product safety and quality information to the public. By late 1969, the commission had sponsored forums in Springfield, Joplin, and St. Louis. In terms of Missouri’s geography, those programs covered the eastern and southwestern segments of the state. Plans were in the works to hold forums in northwest and in southeast Missouri as well. ¹⁹⁰ Yet another was planned the following year for Columbia, in the center of the state. ¹⁹¹ As a woman’s issue, consumer protection got an extraordinarily high level of support across widely disparate regions of Missouri.

Citizens, of course, could not properly be informed consumers unless they had the income to spend on wise choices. Still rooted in traditional models, antipoverty work in

¹⁸⁸ Consumer affairs meeting agenda, Mar 21, 1969, CSW Papers (C3903), folder 3.
¹⁸⁹ Marcia Hammons, chairman, MACWC committee on legislation, memo re: convention workshop topics, Jun 1, 1969, MACWC Records (WHMC C3801), folder 2.
¹⁹⁰ Meeting minutes, Sep 19, 1969, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.
¹⁹¹ Meeting minutes, Mar 6, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
Missouri overlapped the concerns of women’s groups, civil rights organizations, and local governments. St. Louis mayor Alfonso J. Cervantes published a regular column in the late 1960s in the *St. Louis Magazine*, and in separate issues of late 1967 and early 1968, he addressed the combination of poverty and race. He quoted statistics from the high-employment summer season that showed “21,000 unemployed. This is 4 per cent of the labor force. But,” he cautioned, “that does not tell the story of the slums. There a special survey showed that the unemployment rate is three to four times greater.” As any of his readers would have been aware, that was also the area of greatest concentration of African-Americans, many recent arrivals as part of the Second World War’s Great Migration out of the rural south. Cervantes continued on the pressing needs revealed by the survey, “More startlingly, it showed that nearly 40 per cent of the people were underemployed, that is, did not have sufficient work to enable them to make a decent living.” Recognizing the systemic forces driving this geography of poverty, Cervantes noted the following spring “The tens of thousands of people…that surged into Saint Louis from the South…were trapped into living in our slums. They will be in our slums until we meet the two-pointed needs of jobs and housing.”192 Civil rights groups noted this connection, and most had increased their antipoverty focus by the mid-1960s.

This strong connection between women’s activism and civil rights work helped enhance the importance of antipoverty and antidiscrimination goals in the women’s movement. Kenneth Jolly’s investigation of civil rights activity in St. Louis has shown clearly the influence of women in the movement. “From [Margaret] Dagen’s example,” he comments, “it becomes clear that women played a key role not only in the day-to-day

confrontations or sit-ins, but were instrumental in developing working relationships with store owners to negotiate desegregation.”\textsuperscript{193} Despite 1950s successes in public schools and in downtown lunch counters, resistance to racial integration, for example, had by no means disappeared in St. Louis. An unsigned letter to the editor of \textit{St. Louis Magazine} in the fall of 1968 complained bitterly that the publication was “another left wing sheet promoting gun control, and in favor of integration – even nigger kids for fashion models.”\textsuperscript{194} In public activism against such attitudes, women began to argue for greater female participation in public life. Members of an oppressed group themselves, female policymakers would be sensitive to the needs of the poor and underrepresented in society. In this way, traditional women’s activism became a stepping stone to demands for equal rights and equal representation.

By late 1964, the CSW’s Citizens committee was building a list of potential female appointees with which to lobby the governor.\textsuperscript{195} This task became a common one for the CSW, and indeed, the governor’s office came to expect such a list and to rely upon it in future years. To further that task, the committee began to collect information on the number of women appointed, elected, registered to vote, and actually voting. These latter pieces of data were difficult to find because of the lack of any consistent record-keeping or data-collection practices in most electoral districts, though groups like the League of Women Voters had been interested in such issues for years. The records might have been easier to find had Missouri stuck with its original 1920 woman suffrage

\textsuperscript{194} Letter to the editor, \textit{St. Louis Magazine}, VI:5 (Nov 1968), 2.
\textsuperscript{195} Meeting minutes, September 21, 1964, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
Women of the Heartland

plan, which had called for separate pink ballots, but it was thrown out as a violation of the secret ballot rule.\textsuperscript{196}

Within a few years, both houses of Missouri’s General Assembly came to recognize the CSW as a source for information on the impact of proposed legislation. Six different times in the 1968-69 legislative session, Alberta Meyer testified by request at committee hearings. Topics of the legislation included salary and hours, the nature of jury service, and legal abortion, among others.\textsuperscript{197} The governor’s office also came to view the CSW as a source of information. Executive officials regularly requested suggestions for qualified female appointees to various offices. Notably, that activity continued regardless of which party held Missouri’s reins; the 1972 transition from the Democrat Hearnes to the Republican Bond made little difference. For example, governor’s assistant Dave Broeker attended the Commission’s meeting in October of 1973 specifically for the purpose of discussing a list of appointee possibilities.\textsuperscript{198} One of the transformations represented by the CSW, then, is the evolution of women’s activity from a grounding in domesticity, hesitantly entering the public sphere, to a grounding in legal equality, demanding access to that public arena. In other words, women’s organizations based in traditional activism were inventing modern liberal feminism.

Being the first institutions of this modern wave of feminism, the CSWs themselves sometimes floundered to find a particular direction for their activity. Much of the discussion in the first meeting of the Missouri CSW in April of 1964 centered on that decision: where to focus the energies of the group. In the end, the commissioners chose to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{197} Meeting minutes, Mar 21, 1969, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{198} Meeting minutes, Oct 12, 1973, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
\end{itemize}
create four work committees, allowing each of the fifteen members to join the group that suited her best: Home and Community, Education, Women as Citizens, and Women at Work. By September, five months into their existence, the committees had nailed down some concrete information and devised plans for going forward.199

That same summer, the president’s CSW hosted thirty-four state delegations at a “National Conference of State Commissions on Status of Women.” The date of the conference, 11 June, was chosen to celebrate the Equal Pay Act, signed by John F. Kennedy and set for implementation that same day. Missouri CSW vice chair Sara Feder traveled to Washington, D.C. as Missouri’s delegate. While there, Feder participated in a roundtable discussion of common problems being experienced by state CSWs nationwide. This sort of discussion was a precursor to the more personal consciousness-raising sessions that became popular in women’s liberation groups a few years later. The topics Feder discussed emphasize the hybrid position held by these commissions. On the one hand, as agents of male-dominated state government, they were institutions dedicated to reinforcing tradition and continuing the type of activism that had characterized women’s politics since before the suffrage campaign. Topics such as “institutions which served women as well as families” or “raising of standards for volunteers” suggest this inclination. On the other hand, these women were activist and revolutionary in their search for different kinds of inequality and their attempts to eradicate it. Discussion of “inadequacies in day care…and other welfare services” and of inequities in the “higher governmental offices” seems to intimate a new direction, and there was much potentially explosive fodder for women’s liberation in the exploration of “protective, labor &

199 Meeting minutes, April 20, 1964, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
property laws” and “public and private employment.” Whatever shapes women’s organizations ultimately took, whatever goals they ultimately adopted, they were all indebted to the role of the CSWs in data collection and in putting women as such on the public agenda.

Women on the Missouri CSW, as might be expected from previous activity like Meyer’s in the BPW, did investigate labor laws. Equal pay and hiring practices were key areas of interest. The commission was also concerned about maximum hours restrictions on women, one example of the protective legislation held over from the Progressive era. The last area of labor law the CSW initially intended to address was the establishment of a minimum wage. This choice is indicative of a remaining broad-based concern with poverty – rather than an exclusive focus on women-only issues. In addition to the law itself, the commission dedicated itself to investigate actual employment policies and practices in government and the public sector as well as in privately-held businesses.

The CSW delegated to its Women at Work committee the task of investigating the related questions of protective legislation and overtime. The former were laws that limited the number of hours and types of occupations women could hold; from the latter, women were generally excluded on the grounds of domestic ideals or gender essentialism. Feminists reasoned that if the laws were necessary to protect workers, then they should be extended to men; if they only restricted women’s ability to compete, then they should be removed. A 1969 story in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* noted Meyer’s support for equal pay instead of protective legislation – which, “Miss Meyer points out, sometimes has the effect of ‘protecting’ a woman from obtaining certain jobs or receiving

---

200 Meeting minutes, Jul 13, 1964, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
201 Meeting minutes, December 11, 1965, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
202 Meeting minutes, September 21, 1964, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
overtime pay.” The story also quoted her as against the social basis of protective legislation: “If the limit on the number of hours a woman should work is being set because it is thought she should go home – and put in a full day’s work there – then, I think the same holds true for men.”203 In an attempt to collect information in all of these areas, the committee succeeded over the next two years in creating an advisory board of outside volunteers, including not only interested activist women, but also representatives from government and from private industry. The final group comprised representatives from several departments at the University of Missouri-Columbia, from labor organizations like the AFL-CIO and the ILGWU, and from business groups such as the Associated Industries of Missouri, among others. 204

In conjunction with this advisory body, the committee concluded by the beginning of 1966 that Missouri stood in need of a number of pro-equality actions. First, too many working women and too many employers were unaware of rights mandated under recent legislation such as Title VII, which protected against workplace discrimination. The problem was exacerbated by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s decision to focus on race-based discrimination, ignoring enforcement of gender-based complaints. The CSW concluded that publicity campaigns and employer-education programs should be mounted around those rights. It is worthy of note and indicative of the broad rhetorical support for gender equality in these years that business groups like the Associated Industries of Missouri were not only accepting but actively supportive of such recommendations. Second, because the combination of limited work experience and

203 Clarissa Start, “Miss Meyer Battles for Women’s Rights,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch (St. Louis, MO), July 8, 1969, Missouri Commission on the Status of Women, Records (SUNP 6059), correspondence folder, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
204 Meeting minutes, February 5, 1966, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
active employment discrimination left many women in marginal jobs, the committee suggested that the CSW should promote job training programs as well as a substantial minimum wage law. Third and finally, the committee encouraged support for an initiative of the Missouri Commission on Human Rights (CHR). The CHR had proposed a study of the potential impact on Missouri law and Missouri society of a shift from protective legislation to an equality mandate. In a period before even the minimal computerization of the Missouri laws that occurred in the 1970s, such a study promised to be a massive and expensive undertaking. Debates on the precise forms of legal equality would continue to resonate for years and come to a head in the debate over the Equal Rights Amendment during the 1970s.

The proposed study finally got off the ground five years after its proposal. Prudence Fink, a senior at Washington University Law School in St. Louis, agreed in late 1971 to undertake a research project for the CSW on Missouri statutes. The goal was to find whether there were significant sex distinctions written into Missouri law. By the summer of 1972, the CSW was also planning four more studies. “Sex Discrimination in Public Schools” intended to find to what extent girls and boys experienced different educations and was intended to complement Fink’s study of the law. “Women Offenders in Missouri Prisons” revealed the continuing tension between equality and women’s uniqueness that characterized many activities of the women’s movement. Should women offenders be treated differently than and kept separately from men offenders? By researching conditions for women offenders, the study forced commission members to grapple with this question. “Analysis of Women Candidates for Office in 1972” aimed to

205 Meeting minutes, February 5, 1966, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
206 Meeting minutes, Nov 5, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
publicize women’s political activity, but also to identify which female candidates might support feminist goals, emphasizing again the tensions between feminist and antifeminist tendencies in Missouri. Finally, “Survivors’ Rights, Retirement and Pension” was sparked by the many letters from women – often lifelong homemakers – whose husbands were deceased and whose meager death benefits were insufficient to support the surviving spouse. As these women had no Social Security or pensions of their own to fall back on, they added to the increasingly feminized character of poverty in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{207}

Emphasizing a different kind of political activity, the CSW’s original Women at Work committee tried also to collect information about women’s work in partisan politics. By the end of 1965, this committee had begun to probe discrimination under the law. It looked briefly at the rules for jury service. It began also to examine property rights and the rules for marriage and divorce,\textsuperscript{208} which often favored the husband or acted implicitly to cover a wife’s identity. Large-scale studies at the time, however, were hampered by the absence of funding, not remedied for more than five years.

In January of 1968, the Missouri CSW created a list of “Suggested Areas for Commission Attention,” for reference and distribution to commission members. As might be expected, it included traditional concerns like services for supporting homemakers. It also mentioned areas of broad liberal feminist agreement, such as equality in education, fair employment, and participation in electoral, appointive, and partisan politics.\textsuperscript{209} Employment discrimination had been the impetus for NOW’s recent formation, and political participation was the issue that created NWPC a short three years later.

\textsuperscript{207} Meeting minutes, Aug 18, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
\textsuperscript{208} Meeting minutes, December 11, 1965, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
\textsuperscript{209} “Suggested Areas for Commission Attention,” January, 1968, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 2.
Still seeking a broad consensus to support CSW activity, Alberta Meyer organized in 1969 an “opinionaire” to give a broad range of women’s organizations in the state, to try to figure out where the CSW should focus. More precisely, as she put it, she sent this survey out “in an effort to ascertain priority areas of attention for Commission action. The results indicate Counseling of Young Girls, Legal Rights of Women, Discrimination in Employment as important areas no matter what age group or type of organization reported.” Counseling and expanding definitions of equality in education indicate the broadening understanding of women’s rights that characterized the women’s movement in the late 1960s.

Old issues continued to surface, such as enforcement of the Equal Pay Act and of prohibitions on job discrimination. One problem with gaining redress under the law was lack of government interest in enforcement. For many employment discrimination activists, racial injustice was a more significant problem, overshadowing gender issues. Answering President Kennedy’s call for national action on Civil Rights (albeit posthumously), Congress had passed the watershed Civil Rights Act of 1964. Though technically included within its protections, women’s discrimination complaints were generally overlooked by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Missouri’s law placed state enforcement in the hands of the governor’s Human Rights Commission, a state of affairs no better at addressing the inequality. For instance, in the first four years after implementation of the Equal Pay Act, there were a total of only sixteen complaints filed in Missouri. The Missouri CSW noted that the burden of proof in such complaints was placed upon the victim, usually without investigative assistance from the state.

Furthermore, there was essentially no chance of punitive redress. A woman who made a

---

210 Meeting minutes, Sep 19, 1969, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.
complaint, even with thorough documentation, could rarely expect anything better than a raise that brought her to parity. This lack of a credible deterrent vitiated the incentive for self-policing among employers, while the low hope of success hardly encouraged women to challenge their status.211

Having planned and prepared for years, the Missouri CSW finally succeeded in 1970 in printing a pamphlet on the legal rights of women in Missouri. Though a variety of organizations had called for it, the research and the printing had been held up by a lack of funds in the CSW coffers. The 1970 press run of 5000 copies ran to nearly five hundred dollars.212 Even without a publicity machine, the commission was already receiving requests for the booklet by the beginning of 1971, and there was some discussion of getting copies distributed across the state to “libraries, schools, beauty shops.” But the pamphlet printing had already dipped into petty cash reserves, despite recent donations from several private sources and from the Business and Professional Women’s clubs. Once again, the scope of commission activity was severely curtailed by the absence of legislative appropriations.213 Nevertheless, the pamphlet helped raise awareness of commission activity. More publicity, in turn, led to more requests for CSW work and greater support for an appropriation, and the CSW gained momentum. After hosting the convention of the Interstate Association of Commissions on the Status of Women, Missouri’s commission was flooded by requests for the pamphlet on women’s legal rights.214

211 Meeting minutes, March 8, 1968, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 2.
212 Alberta Meyer to all Missouri CSW members, late 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
213 Meeting minutes, Jan 26, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
214 Meeting minutes, Jul 15, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
Perhaps because of the increased visibility, lobbying for an appropriation finally succeeded in the 1971-72 legislative session. In February, the CSW minutes report that the funding request had passed the Missouri House, and by May, $10,000 had been appropriated for commission use. While not quite so large as the initial request, this number is enormous compared to the shoestring budget on which the commission had been operating. The cumulative record of donations since the establishment of the CSW showed an income under $4500 – less than half the new appropriation. In the flush of this new wealth, the commission voted a $200 honorarium to Prudence Fink, whose extensive analysis for the CSW of sex-exclusive legal language had just been completed.215

More of the money went into initiating the long-awaited studies on women’s jury service.216 Initially, jury service may seem an odd and minor area to draw the focus of such a group, though American Revolution philosopher Judith Sargent Murray had already begun questioning women’s exclusion from juries almost two centuries earlier. The Supreme Court had confirmed as early as 1879 that states could not bar black jurors, under the Fourteenth Amendment; however, in the same decision, the court explicitly permitted the barring of women. As historian Linda Kerber put it in her analysis of women’s jury service, “women were understood to be favored by the culture, and exemption from jury service was understood to be one manifestation of that privilege.”217 By the 1920s, the LWV was pushing for equal involvement of women in jury service, but the court continued to disagree. The same year Kennedy established the first CSW, Justice John Marshall Harlan’s decision on the Hoyt v. Florida case declared women to

215 Meeting minutes, Feb 18 and May 19, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
216 Alberta J. Meyer to Geoffrey McCarron, August 14, 1974, CSW Records (WHMC SUNP 6059), correspondence folder.
be central to home and family life, and therefore, they could be excluded across the board from jury service to free them for potential domestic responsibilities. The state’s attorney in Hoyt had described women as needing to be at home “cooking our dinners.” Clearly, the “our” in his statement meant his and those of the male Supreme Court, which Kerber notes as the reason why “the argument in Hoyt kept drifting away from Gwendolyn Hoyt’s right to a jury drawn from an authentic cross section of her community and toward the ‘right’ of women to be excused from jury service so that they could be free to cook ‘our’ dinners.” Legal researcher Pauli Murray, working for the president’s CSW, wrote a searing indictment of the decision in her analysis of the Fourteenth Amendment’s application to sex inequities.218

Missouri was one of many states that permitted (some said encouraged) the excusal of women from service on the grounds of gender. The actual state Bill of Rights language is, “No citizen shall be disqualified from jury service because of sex, but the court shall excuse any woman who requests exemption therefrom before being sworn as a juror.” The Missouri courts upheld the provision in 1972. Three years later, in Taylor v. Louisiana, the Supreme Court overturned Hoyt and outlawed blanket exemptions. The Missouri courts in 1977 tried to say that allowing women to decline did not violate the Court’s proscription, but the Supreme Court struck that down on appeal.219 For many,

218 Ibid, 139-45, 181, 192, 218; George Georgieff was attorney presenting the case for Florida, and the quote about him is found on 218.
219 Missouri Constitution, Article I, Bill of Rights, Section 22(b), <http://www.moga.mo.gov/const/A01022b.HTM>, accessed February 24, 2009. The provision actually remains in the Constitution, though the courts ultimately struck it down, as noted in the excerpt below from the General Assembly’s website:

(1972) This section was upheld against the charge that it violated defendant's rights to an impartial jury drawn from a fair cross-section of the community and denied him due process of law as guaranteed by the Fifth, Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution of the United States. State v. Wright (Mo.), 476 S.W.2d 581.
jury service became a symbol of the broad debates over the rights and responsibilities of full and equal citizenship. The discussion of the ERA and the broadening understanding of “rights” brought those long-running debates to greater prominence.

Attempting to mobilize public support for these issues, women’s organizations found that publicity continued to be a concern. Media coverage of women’s advancement, as Ruth Rosen has noted, often took the form of “first woman” stories, highlighting the initial appearance of a token female in a previously male profession. Though they provided the illusion of progress, such stories did little to address the underlying trends in gender equality. In an attempt to create a larger pool of information about women’s employment, the Missouri BPW organized a survey of self-employed women in 1971. The results of the survey were collated and then discussed at the September meeting of the CSW. The commission was responsible in 1972 for compiling and disseminating a list of female lawyers and CPAs for the Bar Association and the general public. To highlight these trends, activist groups began conducting their own research and staging their own publicity events.

Cleo Scheer of the Missouri Commission on Human Rights sat in as a guest at the November 1971 meeting of the Missouri CSW. She reported on the discrimination complaints received by her commission. At that time, the complaints were approximately

(1977) Allowing women to decline jury duty does not deny equal protection, and the supplementary statute is constitutional. State v. Duren (Mo.), 556 S.W.2d 11.

(1977) Allowing women to decline jury duty upheld. Taylor v. Louisiana discussed and distinguished. State v. Lee (Mo.), 556 S.W.2d 25; State v. Minor (Mo.), 556 S.W.2d 35; State v. Davis (Mo.), 556 S.W.2d 45.

(1979) Missouri statute authorizing women to request automatic exemption from jury service violated "fair cross section" requirement of sixth amendment as applied to the states by the fourteenth amendment to the United States Constitution. Duren v. Missouri, 99 S.Ct. 664.


221 Meeting minutes, Sep 10, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.

222 Meeting minutes, May 19, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
90% race-based, with only 10% or so based on sex.\textsuperscript{223} However, many activists believed the imbalance to be caused at least partly by lack of faith in the system by potential complainants, and by dismissal of sex-based concerns by the officials responsible for registering complaints. Several years later, finding the St. Louis County government slow in responding to complaints of employment discrimination against women, NOW took two-pronged action. Speaking to the actual legal issue, the organization instituted a class-action suit against the county government. And addressing mass opinion, they initiated a campaign to publicize instances of employment discrimination in the county’s system.\textsuperscript{224}

Representative Sue Shear, with her colleague Wayne Goode (D-Normandy), took action on Missouri’s sex-exclusive legal language. In 1973, building on Fink’s study for the CSW, they arranged for volunteer law students from Washington University in St. Louis to engage in a more comprehensive review of Missouri law, with a view toward revising for inclusive language where necessary. Support for the project was provided by the League of Women voters, further evidence of the importance of preexisting women’s groups in the formation of new networks.\textsuperscript{225}

As part of a similar research initiative, Ellen Shear Roper of the University of Missouri law school in Columbia agreed to investigate credit discrimination for the CSW. By the time she finished the project and came to report to the commission in the fall of 1973, she had graduated and been hired in the Missouri office of the Attorney General. Her research indicated that credit accounts for married women generally were put in the husband’s name, regardless of who had applied or used the account, or how much each

\textsuperscript{223} Meeting minutes, Nov 5, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
\textsuperscript{224} \textit{Nothing Less}, Sep 1975 and Mar 1976, Metro St. Louis NOW (National Organization For Women) Addenda, 1977-1980 (SL0708), folder 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO.
partner contributed to the payments. Because women therefore were rarely able to build up an individual credit history, they were often unable to qualify for loans or credit accounts in their own right. Divorced women in particular were heavily affected by this imbalance. Finding and attacking such legal inequities was the hallmark of the so-called “rights” wing of the women’s movement, both nationally and in Missouri. As they came to find, however, legal and social inequality were rarely separable.

One instance of the overlap was the field of education. There are several ways to measure the educational achievement of women: number of years of schooling, highest degree attained, total number enrolled, dropout rates. By 1971, girls were graduating high school at higher rates than boys, but still entering college at lower rates. Nevertheless, those women who did enter college were statistically more likely to graduate four years later. Moving from undergraduate to graduate degrees was much more likely for men than for women. The inequality in all of these measures was clear but shrinking during the 1960s. The importance of educational equality is visible, among other places, in the job market. Unemployment rates are consistently lower among the better educated, even leaving out the impact of higher education on job quality, and women tended to be unemployed more often than men in the 1960s. The unequal access to economic and political power drove early legal action from NOW and NWPC, but it quickly became evident that female governors, company executives, and college presidents would not appear without underlying societal change.

In 1960, the total number of male college students in the US was 2.3 million – female, 1.2 million. Ten years later, the numbers were much larger, though still

significantly imbalanced: 4.4 million and 3.0 million, respectively. Despite the huge discrepancy, the rate of change is revealing. Speaking simply, women’s enrollment had more than doubled, while men’s had less than doubled. As women’s groups continued to direct attention to women’s education through action like Title IX in 1972, this trend continued, resulting in parity by about 1979. Since that time, women have consistently outnumbered men in the college population. Nevertheless, a higher percentage of men continued to complete four years or more of college than did women, and black women and black men recorded less success in all of these categories than did their white counterparts.228 Such disparities have impact on civic life. For example, poorly-educated women were much less likely to vote in the 1968 election than were their well-educated counterparts.229

Rather than measuring the simple number of people enrolled, another way to ascertain educational inequity is measuring how many degrees were awarded. Here women actually performed better than their numbers in the general college population would suggest. In the 1960-61 academic year, men received only half again as many bachelor’s degrees as did women, despite having double the number of students. Upper-level diplomas, however, still went heavily to men: master’s degrees – more than twice as many; doctoral degrees – over nine times as many men as women. Ten years later, men got only a quarter more bachelor’s, fifty percent more master’s, and only six times as many doctorates. Improvement continued, with bachelor’s degrees going to nearly

229 Ferriss, 179-80.
identical numbers of men and women in 1980-81, master’s degrees to a bare majority of women, and doctoral degrees only going to two men for every woman recipient.230

Many observers traced disparities in higher education to deficiencies in basic skills, or in the early years of education. The CSW committee on Women in Education settled on two priorities early in its first year: “(1) Training of functionally illiterate and (2) Working to encourage the necessary 1/3 matching state funds to continue the manpower education program…”231 Interestingly, neither of these seems explicitly to address gender inequality in education. Teaching literacy would help some women, as would job training, but these could be classed as general social welfare, antipoverty, or education programs. These issues do fall neatly into line with the sort of traditional activity that had for years characterized the middle-class women’s clubs, and nonpartisan organizations like the League of Women Voters or the National Consumers League. Job training, for example, was a continued focus of the St. Louis CORE, as in a 1968 program for jobless youth they called Help Me to Help Myself.232 Much of the early focus of the Missouri CSW can be traced back to the members’ previous experience in such organizations.

In a more explicitly feminist vein, this committee also set up a questionnaire for colleges statewide, asking for information about scholarships for “mature women,” evidence of hiring discrimination, gender statistics in the faculty ranks, etc.233 A year later, the committee announced its focus as “Continuing Education for the Mature Woman.” This topic fit neatly with the earlier investigations: education for adults,

231 Meeting minutes, April 20, 1964, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
232 Jolly, 55.
233 Meeting minutes, September 21, 1964, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
training for jobs, help for older or divorced women newly in a position of self-support.

Signaling a change toward a more broad-based feminist critique of inequality, the meeting minutes note that “The Committee is especially interested in the psychological aspects of attitudes of women toward women and their role as well as attitudes of men toward women. …it is aware of the need for changes in attitude if real progress is to be made.” To some extent, as had happened with women in the national CSW, these women were expanding the scope of their operations from formal institutional equality to a broader critique of unequal society. What had begun as impartial investigation revealed surprising inequality and slowly gave way to interested activism.

The CSW’s recognition that changing societal attitudes would be essential in changing women’s status encouraged the commission to expand the scope of its activity. It reinforced the need for a women’s network and pushed the CSW to make more contacts with the field of education. In the summer of 1970, the CSW held a discussion with representatives from the state’s Division of Employment Security and the state Department of Education regarding career paths and guidance counseling for young women. In the minutes, Leigh noted that “subtle discrimination is practiced when girls are reminded of marriage and motherhood instead of letting girls set their own priorities.” The conversation suggested that in the future, “counselors could set the educational tone and prevent the ‘screening out’ of girls from vocational fields for which they show an aptitude but which may not be classified as ‘women’s work.’” This conversation is one of many incidents illustrating the CSW’s growing focus on nuanced social pressures and the widespread gendering of society as limits on women’s equality.

---

234 Meeting minutes, December 11, 1965, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
In a series of subtle, incremental, natural-seeming shifts, the CSW’s work on education moved from general literacy to remedying inequality to questioning gender norms. Another way to describe it would be to say that in a remarkably rapid time span, the CSW had jumped from “traditional activism” into “women’s rights” and straight into “women’s liberation.” The next chapter will explore those latter and more contentious efforts, which met with varying success.
Having come to recognize inequality in many aspects of society, activists became steadily more receptive to sweeping changes. They saw injustice supported by broad societal assumptions, so they worked to reform education in support of women. They attacked poverty, not least because the structural causes of it fell most heavily on women. They increasingly demanded day care, to alleviate unequal domestic responsibilities. And women’s health, birth control, and abortion became more contentious at the same time that Missouri women’s group leaders consciously downplayed them to minimize traditionalist backlash in the state. The impetus for Missouri feminists’ adoption of liberation came in a variety of forms. This chapter aims not only to determine how the shifts were accomplished, but also how far they went.

In the arena of education, even if admission and graduation numbers were gender-equal, feminists found that social pressures could still limit the kinds of study women might undertake, or the values that informed it. Across the 1970s and 1980s, the National Center for Education Statistics published a study on “Life Values of High School Seniors” over time. The study asked a cohort of 1972 seniors a set of yes or no questions, then asked them again two years and four years later. The same process was followed with a cohort of 1982 seniors. The study found that the number of respondents valuing steady work and work success rose, and that the gender gap in responses narrowed over
the ten years between the cohorts. 1960s pressures on women to subordinate employment to other values likely explain some of the initial gap. Also, women who did receive professional degrees were concentrated in certain kinds of work.

Therefore, another way to look at the status of women in education is to examine which degrees they earned. The Census Bureau released a list of 27 different fields of study in which bachelor’s degrees were awarded in 1971. Nine of those were majority female – that is, by sheer numerical dominance, these are the only fields with strong claim to being “women’s work.” The most female-dominated were Home Economics (97.3) and Library and Archival Sciences (92.0): homemakers and librarians. Health Sciences (77.1) launched careers in medicine, Foreign Languages (74.6) provided a base for intercultural study, and Education (74.5) certified elementary and secondary teachers. Agriculture and Natural Resources, Engineering, and Military Sciences were the least female of fields (4.2, 0.8, and 0.3, respectively). Fields dominated by women often had a connection to caring or nurturing, the same characteristics that early-century women had used to justify civic activism before gaining the right to vote.

The same attitudes determined the overwhelming dominance of women in volunteer organizations, which became a key topic discussed at NOW’s fifth national conference, in Los Angeles. The conference expressed its sense that “Women’s traditional roles within the home – nurturer, healer, helper, buffer, supporter – have been extended to encompass all community ills,” but did not concede that women’s proper role was therefore to offer unpaid labor to society. Indeed, they insisted that

---

237 Taeuber, 310; numbers in parentheses represent percent of degrees in the said field that were awarded to women; for those who simply must know the other four majority-women fields, they were Letters (65.5), Public Affairs (60.2), Visual and Performing Arts (59.7), and Area and Ethnic Studies (52.4).
“Humanitarianism for some on the backs of others ends by being exploitation,” and pointed out that women volunteering had no chance to earn money that might benefit themselves – a situation of implicit “economic exploitation.” They were anxious to develop volunteerism in a way that would enhance women’s power, and to distinguish between acceptable “change-directed” and exploitative “service-directed” volunteer work. The latter, they held, perpetuated low levels of funding for social services and tended to keep middle-class women out of the work force, “and therefore divides middle-class from poor and working women.”

Volunteers still formed the backbone of support for both traditionalist and feminist organizations. Not operating for profit, nor often with government funding, both types of organizations paid their workers in ideological satisfaction, to paraphrase Jane Mansbridge. As she also comments, that type of remuneration tended to attract only the most committed and principled workers, occasionally leading to dogmatic excesses that worked at cross-purposes to the goals of the larger movement.

As women continued to develop a consciousness of themselves and their organizations apart from men, some rejected “women’s work” for a broader range of interests. Others demanded credit in their own names, or the right to have children outside the confines of marriage. Many began with a quiet rebellion against patriarchy. In 1964, at the establishment of the Missouri CSW, the minutes included a roster of women.

238 “Resolution on Volunteerism,” NOW 5th national conference, Sep 4-6, 1971, Metro St. Louis NOW (National Organization For Women) Records, 1971-1979 (SL0175), folder 110, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO.
listed by their husband’s names – the CSW secretary, for example, signed the minutes as “Mrs. Robert Leigh.”240 In a simple shift over the next few years, Anita Leigh was typing a roster that used women’s first names, rather than their husbands’, and signing her own name to the minutes.241 There was no official vote on the matter, nor conversation about the change during the recorded meetings, just an unheralded decision to emphasize women’s independent identities.

The required distinction between the single “Miss” and the married “Mrs.” began to jar many women during the 1960s when contrasted with the universal male “Mr.” In the most widely publicized example of rebellion against this double standard, Gloria Steinem released in 1971 the first issue of her magazine Ms. Among other items, the first regular issue included Judy Syfers’s bitingly funny “Why I Want a Wife.”242 Syfers detailed devastatingly all the comforts a good wife and mother provided to husband and children, and concluded that no one of any sense would wish to be without one. A growing sense that marriage could perpetrate and perpetuate inequality helped legitimize a growing singles culture and a rising divorce rate.

The increasing number of unmarried women correlated with an increasing number of children born to those women. The birth rate to unmarried women doubled during the 1960s.243 Expectations about child care were changing in the 1950s as well. Prompted by manuals like Benjamin Spock’s Commonsense Book of Baby and Child Care, parents and

---

240 Meeting minutes, Apr 20, 1964, Missouri Commission on the Status of Women, Papers, 1963-1974 (C3903), folder 1, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
241 Meeting minutes, Aug 9, 1968, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3. This shift was occasionally evident earlier, when Leigh was unable to make a given meeting, and it also perhaps reflects the influence of her younger assistant, Marie Woods, who helped with notes and with typing of minutes.
243 Taeuber, 43.
advertisements were leaning further toward the value of affection and time-intensive connection with children. In some ways, these expectations increased the burden on the primary care provider in the family – frequently the mother. But to some extent, that extra burden was offset by the trend to smaller families. Particularly among younger women, by the end of the 1960s, there was a clearly evident trend toward fewer children. Abbott Ferriss in 1971 attributed this drop at least in part to improved birth control technology, and he expected increasing availability of legal abortion to further enhance the trend. One caveat is worth making here: as Ferriss put it, “The contrast is striking between the decline in the legitimate birth rate and the continuing increase in illegitimate fertility, due chiefly to the illegitimate birth rates of the 15-19 year olds.”

Teen pregnancies were becoming less likely to lead to marriage, and unwed teen mothers became a red flag waved by antifeminists. To rally traditionalist sentiment, it could be argued that feminism undermined families and opposed motherhood.

Reality was of course more complicated, and most feminists argued for increasing support of motherhood, even as they decried the secondary status accorded wives and mothers. In the winter of 1965, the Missouri CSW’s Home and Community committee expressed its sense that it was important to assist mothers both at home and at work. The committee recognized that many mothers were indeed employed outside the home, and lamenting a lost past or morally disapproving the situation would not improve conditions in either the home or the community. The report called for expanded child-care services, more effort for the education of homemakers, and greater family planning as part of an

---

increased government commitment to social welfare. As in the other committees, the women of this one seem to have undergone an incremental but remarkably rapid shift, a broadening of activity to include not only traditional women’s concerns but also many previously unstudied areas of society. One interpretation would be that the more radical minority simply drove traditionalists like Niederlander out of the CSW, but the otherwise stable membership lists make that explanation unlikely. It is not hard to imagine, however, that disaffected women like her would form a solid base for later-coalescing opposition to a feminist program and the ratification of the ERA.

In February of 1966, the CSW’s Home and Community committee expanded its goals, calling for early and continuing sex education programs; more government-supported birth-control as well as day-care programs; widespread government employment of “professional homemakers” to provide child and elderly care; and a study of the 140 state-licensed day care facilities to improve consistency and capacity for provision of care. The child care issue was popular enough in the larger CSW that it established the next month a Subcommittee on Day-Care Centers, chaired by Sara Feder. Missouri law had required licensing of day-care centers since 1957, and the subcommittee’s study resulted in a recommendation that action be taken to encourage an increase over the existing total. Again plumping for these goals at a meeting later that year, the committee noted rather bombastically that “Scientific sex education for parents and children is certainly better than illegitimacy, disgrace, and spiraling venereal disease,” and that “Birth control is better than starvation and war. If every child were a ‘wanted child,’ cruelty, delinquency, and rebellion would be immeasurably

245 Meeting minutes, December 11, 1965, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
246 Meeting minutes, February 5, 1966, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 1.
247 Meeting minutes, March 19, 1966, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 2.
diminished." It is significant that these goals were created without pressure from national groups such as NOW – which had not yet been established. However, they did lay the groundwork for connection to those organizations, many of which were built by women who had CSW experience, either nationally or locally.

Rather than national organizations pushing issues on local chapters, initially at least, the grass roots were more likely to push back up. Uncertain at first which issues properly deserved their attention, the members of national NOW organized “task forces” to allow women to focus on issues of particular concern to them. The Library Task Force, for instance, sifted holdings to see whether libraries had pro-woman literature available. One project mentioned in a letter from the task force chair was a template for a “letter of inquiry about extent of library’s collection on women as well as a proposed bibliography and an offer to assist” that could be directed at public and high school libraries.

Missouri’s WPC was similarly involved in a multitude of various feminist issues. The Columbia WPC newsletter for December of 1973 described the topics to be discussed at the upcoming state board meeting. Proposed committees included “ERA, Day Care, Minimum Wage, Social Welfare, Affirmative Action” among others.

However, the NWPC was a more hierarchical organization than was NOW, and this orderliness could lead to a greater clarity of goals. The NWPC convention in June of 1975 approved several predictable resolutions, including one in favor of the ERA and one supporting antidiscrimination laws. But the resolutions also supported anti-rape legislation, the United Farm Workers boycott, and greater government funding of child

---

248 Meeting minutes, March 19, 1966, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 2.
care.\textsuperscript{251} NWPC held that these goals represent the connection of interlocking systems of oppression. Be that as it may, their widely spread goals – like NOW’s – sometimes interfered with an organized campaign of promotion.

In an attempt to narrow its focus, NWPC aimed to aid the campaigns of feminist women in the 1976 elections. Calling the project “Win With Women,” NWPC pushed its local chapters to investigate candidates and publicize their positions. In the national newsletter for November of 1975, Kansas City and St. Louis were both mentioned in a short list of local WPCs holding major fundraisers for the campaign.\textsuperscript{252} Their Legislative Program from 1976 included the early feminist goals of equal education and employment, and nondiscrimination in credit. The program sought government support for family planning, abortion, and child care, as well as an expansion in the safety net of public health insurance and social security.\textsuperscript{253}

In the early 1970s, NOW’s national task forces expanded to include many liberation-inspired topics, as in the establishment of an Image of Women task force to examine advertisements, entertainment media, toys, and other public sources of women’s ideal image. At the end of 1972, coordinator Anne Hall put out a report on a national investigation that had included over 800 toys and games. The general conclusion was that “all they can dream up are more things for dolls to do or more realistic housekeeping or beauty salon equipment.” Even where there were no overt images of women in domestic

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{251} NWPC newsletter, Sep 1975, WPC Papers (WHMC C3550), folder 8.  
\textsuperscript{252} NWPC newsletter, Nov 1975, WPC Papers (WHMC C3550), folder 8.  
\textsuperscript{253} NWPC Legislative Program, 1976, WPC Papers (WHMC C3550), folder 7.}
roles, the “absence of female figures…[in other roles is a] serious sin of omission…. They give our daughters no worthy female figures to identify with or to emulate.”254

The toy study classified playthings according to feminist values. Such categories as “Recommended Toys” and “Good Toys But…” were overshadowed by the over-full section on “Objectionable Toys and Games.” Three or four examples will make the point.

“The Bride Game,” from Selchow and Righter (makers, incidentally, of Scrabble and Parcheesi), was described succinctly as “1st girl to complete her wedding arrangements wins.” Arguably, this game could be played by boys, a mistake rectified in the title of Selchow and Righter’s “What Shall I Wear? A Fashion Game For Girls.” Predictably, this game contained “clothes for all sorts of activities except work – dinner, prom, beauty pageant, picnic, sailboat, etc.” More directly related to NOW’s “rights” aim of reducing employment discrimination were games such as Playskool’s “When I Grow Up” puzzle. The set included twenty-one males in varying occupations. The three women included were “teacher, dancer, and violinist.” A similar but simpler puzzle from Fisher-Price was called “Occupations.” The five males were “policeman, fireman, hard hat worker, astronaut and cowboy.” The three females were “mother with two children, ballet dancer, and nurse.”255 Liberal rights organizations at both the national and state levels increasingly recognized that to implement real improvement in such areas as income disparity between men and women, it was essential to change attitudes at the grass roots.

Attempting to disseminate that sort of change, CSW member Betty Mitchell was responsible for organizing status of women workshops in St. Louis and Kansas City in

254 Anne C. Hall, coordinator, Image of Women National Task Force, to NOW officers, NTF coordinators, and chapter presidents, Dec 4, 1972, NOW Records (WHMC SL0175), folder 105.
255 Anne C. Hall, coordinator, Image of Women National Task Force, to NOW officers, NTF coordinators, and chapter presidents, Dec 4, 1972, NOW Records (WHMC SL0175), folder 105.
1973. The particular twist to these public-education workshops was that they would be
designed “with special emphasis on problems of the black women and low income.”256
Such programs would dovetail with several commission goals. First, they would provide
publicity for CSW activity in the state’s two largest centers of population (and of voters).
Second, they would attempt to address the problem of poverty, which was not only a
social problem traditionally addressed by women’s organizations, but was also a social
condition becoming increasingly feminized in the 1970s. NOW also considered the fight
against poverty to be a women’s issue, broadly considered, lobbying Congress and
President Nixon on the matter. Arlie Scott, NOW national board member, sent a letter to
local chapters asking for pressure on Nixon to get him to support minimum wage
legislation. In particular, Scott found pressure appropriate, “[s]ince 1973 is NOW’s action
year against poverty….”257 Broad-spectrum liberation required an assault on many issues
ancillary to strictly-defined legal equality.

In that same year, the MACWC state convention included a presentation on “Our
Women’s Thrust Toward Economic Equality.” Such organizations continued to see
poverty and job training as issues that combined woman-specific concerns with broader
societal issues – that nevertheless were women’s concerns. For example, the same
convention held sessions on the social problems of mental handicaps and special
education, on fighting recidivism among Missouri’s offenders, and on the “Clubwoman’s
Role in Maintaining Peace.”258

257 Arlie Scott, NOW national board member and August 26th coordinator, to national officers and local
258 MACWC state convention program, Jun 21-23, 1973, Missouri Association Of Colored Women’s
Clubs, Records, 1932-1986 (C3801), folder 5, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
MACWC’s activism on poverty highlights a third area in which the CSW workshops would address commission goals: they would help address an increasingly-discussed problem of feminist organizations being dominated by white women’s issues. By reaching out in the two significant centers of African-American population in the state, the CSW could hope to build support within a constituency theretofore underrepresented in the women’s movement. New CSW member Saphronia Renfro stated optimistically in the fall of 1973 her feeling that recently “there had been a breakthrough in the involvement of black women” in women’s issues.259

It is difficult to assess whether black women felt the same way. Many white-dominated groups were making tentative attempts at outreach during this period, some of them painfully awkward and many with little initial understanding of the target population, but also with growing success. Sarah Christiansen, in her research into the changing image of Scouting in the same period, has documented attempts by national Girl Scout leaders to include more urban, more poor, and more African-American children in their programs.260 The National Black Feminist Organization was also founded in 1973.

One example of the conjunction between black women’s and white women’s activism was the cooperative effort of representatives Sue Shear and DeVerne Calloway. They proposed a bill to support “displaced homemakers,” a term generally used to describe wives and mothers who were forced late in life to become self-supporting.261 Though the bill ultimately failed, the problems of these displaced homemakers continued

to receive attention. Shear especially became noted for her ongoing efforts to protect victims of domestic violence and to expand health care and maternity leave coverage. Feminists such as Shear were able to adapt the traditionalist rhetoric of motherhood to support such programs. At the same time, true to her CSW and NWPC roots, Shear worked to expand the presence of women in public life during her twenty-six-year service in the Missouri House. During her terminal illness in 1998, she was pleased to see another woman elected to fill the seat she was finally vacating. The University of Missouri at St. Louis named its Institute for Women in Public Life in Shear’s honor that year.\(^{262}\) Shear’s is a dramatic example, but many feminists similarly adapted traditionalist rhetoric to their uses on issues like public day care.

The Missouri CSW’s list of topics to examine at the start of 1968 contained some items (like day care and support for the federal Aid to Dependent Children program that provided welfare checks) that could be advocated in terms of traditional women’s concerns. Considering the increasingly liberationist bent of the national movement, the state omissions may be more significant. The Missouri list does not include any sort of national health care programs. It does not mention sex education, despite the fact that the Home and Community committee had spoken strongly in favor of that issue as recently as the year before. And in a similar vein, the list does not include any reference to birth control – not as an organized program, not as a practice, not as in any way a women’s issue. Perhaps it is self-evident, but there was no comment on sexual orientation either.\(^{263}\) Among other things, this list suggests strong hesitation about backing issues threatening


\(^{263}\) “Suggested Areas for Commission Attention,” January, 1968, CSW Papers (C3903), folder 2.
popular traditionalist models of femininity. Some of the more liberationist ideals of the national women’s movement only gradually filtered into Missouri.

Day care continued to be a sort of bridge issue for the CSW. To help formulate policy, the commission brought speaker Pauline Adams to a 1970 meeting. Adams worked for the state’s Division of Welfare as a “Day Care Consultant,” and addressed the commission on the state of existing care as well as the need, in her view, for more funding. Her description of the characteristics of a good program was summarized approvingly in the minutes by Marie Woods:

Quality day care programs should (1) strengthen the family…; (2) give the parent an opportunity to increase the family income; (3) give the children an…enriched environment; (4) give the children good care and protection, and (5) allow the mother to be on the job more regularly.264

Points 1, 3, and 4 address women as mothers; 2 and 5 address them as workers. Day care thus becomes a vehicle for bolstering family life and promoting workplace equality.

In a contemporary event that further shows the ties between feminism and motherhood, many NOW members participated in a pro-woman march in St. Louis during the summer of 1970. Photos in the collection of the St. Louis NOW chapter show many women marching while pushing children in strollers, which complicates the stereotypical picture of family-free working feminists. One marcher’s sign, illustrating the impact of both Betty Friedan and the pro-choice movement, claimed that “One Cannot CHOOSE To Be A Housewife Unless One Has A Choice!!” Another marcher, wearing bell-bottomed corduroys and looking directly into the camera, reflected a little of what Philip Rieff called the “triumph of the therapeutic” in her sign: it announced simply

---

264 Meeting minutes, Sep 18, 1970, Missouri Commission on the Status of Women, Papers, 1963-1974 (WHMC C3903), folder 4, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO; Marie Woods, of Columbia, served as volunteer assistant and note-taker to Secretary Leigh after 1969.
that “I Am A Strong Creative Intelligent Courageous Human Being.” The simplest was
the centuries-old astrological symbol for Venus (a large circle atop a simple cross – also
used to represent women), containing inside its ring an equal sign. All three of these
signs reflect activists’ demand that women be accorded greater control of their own lives,
including their own families.

The St. Louis NOW organized a rally and parade in the summer of 1973. Their
press release on the parade noted that several state representatives from St. Louis would
attend, including Sue Shear and DeVerne Calloway. In line with feminist support for
motherhood and activism, event organizers had arranged free child care at nearby Christ
Church. The release also cited an impressive list of organizational endorsements. In
addition to the expected feminist groups (St. Louis and St. Charles NOW, St. Louis
WPC), the list also included older women’s organizations (St. Louis and Missouri LWV,
St. Louis YWCA, BPW) and local groups without specific ties to the women’s movement
(Teamsters, United Auto Workers, the teachers’ union, the American Civil Liberties
Union, and the Lawyers Guild). The rally was intended to build support for feminist goals
and to raise awareness of the movement.

Attempts by women to take greater control of their own lives led to a renewed
interest in women’s health. One example of ordinary women’s attempts to become more
involved in their own medical care is the publication of a widely-sold handbook. In 1973,
the Boston Women’s Health Collective published the manual *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. It
celebrated women’s right to the control of their own bodies. Issues like menstruation,

265 Protest march photos, Aug 21, 1970, NOW Records (WHMC SL0175), folder 113; Rieff reference is to
Philip Rieff, *The Triumph Of The Therapeutic: Uses Of Faith After Freud* (Chicago and London:
pregnancy, hysterectomy, and other particularly female health issues became points of political contention. It was in this context that many women came to consider legalized abortion a precondition for full emancipation from the unequal demands of society.\footnote{267}

That year’s \textit{Roe v. Wade} decision fueled the debate, but also stoked antifeminist fears that feminism aimed to destroy the family.

Attempts to decriminalize medical abortions had been made repeatedly at both national and state levels for decades. By 1969, there was strong sentiment on the Missouri CSW favoring not just birth control, but relaxation of abortion restrictions as well. Pearl Matthews was the CSW member tasked that year with investigating abortion law. She came back to the commission with a position strongly in favor of liberalizing those laws. The ensuing group discussion was summarized thus:

\begin{quote}
Since an effort has been made in the past two sessions of the Missouri General Assembly to liberalize the Missouri law, and since this question is one of basic human right [sic] where women are concerned it was felt the Commission should take a stand on this subject in our annual report.\footnote{268}
\end{quote}

This discussion further reveals a broadening conception of human rights, of the sort that also characterized the civil rights movement. But in its firm support of abortion rights, the statement also does suggest that the commission was less wedded to traditionalist politics than was the Missouri legislature. If accurate, such an interpretation would help explain why it was so difficult to gain a legislative appropriation for the commission, since lawmakers did not hold the same priorities as commission members. It would also shed light on why new faces only rarely appeared on the committee in its first years, and why so many of the commission members held other roles as well. This small core of

\footnote{267}{Rosen, 176.}
\footnote{268}{Meeting minutes, Sep 19, 1969, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3.}
statewide feminist activists was trying to start a movement in a rather unfavorable environment, and not initially finding many other participants.

Emphasis on abortion was often downplayed in Missouri, due to a feminist conviction that the general public rejected pro-choice goals. The focus on abortion helped to polarize debate about women’s issues. Women’s attitudes toward employment, fertility, and family life in many cases essentially determined their position toward and participation in the women’s movement.269 At the November 1970 meeting of the CSW, Sue Shear shared with her fellows that she had been contacted by a Mrs. Rodebusch of the Planned Parenthood Association of St. Louis. The Association intended to propose a bill to the General Assembly liberalizing the Missouri abortion statute, and sought CSW support. A commission well aware of its tenuous hold on public support was leery of such connections, and “Mrs. Shear was instructed to refer Mrs. Rodebusch to the Commission’s position on abortion legislation as recommended in the second annual report.”270 That instruction was intended to keep the Commission from being seen as part of a pro-abortion lobby in Missouri.

However, the issue did not disappear there. Through back channels, the St. Louis media got wind of the proposed connection – without the rejection. In January, the Post-Dispatch ran a story sourced from the Committee for Legal Abortion in Missouri, in which the paper claimed that the CSW itself was seeking a sponsor for an abortion bill in Missouri. Flooded immediately with angry communications from around the state, Meyer sent a protest letter to Rodebusch and to the author of the newspaper story. Meyer received letters from private citizens, including a petition-style letter with multiple

270 Meeting minutes, Nov 18, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
signatures from St. Louis protesting *any* CSW activism on abortion. She took a phone call from the Missouri Catholic Conference protesting the alleged commission action. She even commented at the next CSW meeting that “the Governor and Mrs. Hearnes were also receiving much mail.”

Noting that the CSW did not publicly press for abortion liberalization is not the same thing as asserting that its members did not support such change. Certainly, the commission’s annual reports had since 1969 recommended change, even though these were often poorly publicized. And both Pearl Matthews and Sue Shear occasionally pressed the commission for more vocal action on the subject.

Access to abortion was early a key goal for women’s liberation groups, and it became increasingly so for rights organizations like NOW. Judicial decisions like 1973’s *Roe vs. Wade* were celebrated as victories in this context. A typical NWPC newsletter from early 1976 carried a great deal of nonpartisan abortion-related news. In 1974, the state convention of the WPC had addressed the abortion issue in its discussion of the recent *Roe* decision. The convention resolved to fight against modifications to the decision. The state legislature was less favorable. In 1975, Missouri’s General Assembly petitioned Congress for a Constitutional amendment banning abortion. In 1972, General Assembly incumbent Mary Gant of Kansas City had been elected to the Missouri Senate as its first-ever female member. Gant supported equal pay legislation but opposed both liberalized abortion and the ERA. The legislature passed several

---

271 Meeting minutes, Jan 26, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
272 Meeting minutes, Sep 19, 1969, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 3; meeting minutes, Feb 18, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6; CSW annual reports, Missouri Commission on the Status of Women, Records (SUNP 6059), reports folder, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
274 Columbia WPC newsletter, Jun 1974, WPC Papers (WHMC C3550), folder 32.
275 O’Connor, 5.
abortion-restricting laws in the 1970s, though most were overturned by state or federal courts. Feminist representative Judith O’Connor of Bridgeton sponsored one such overturned law. It would have required parental consent for any minor’s abortion, as well as mandating that clinics give anatomical descriptions and other information to women considering abortion.\(^{276}\) If urban women like O’Connor and Gant opposed abortion even while voting for other feminist legislation, it is no wonder that the largely male, largely rural General Assembly found abortion a perilous issue.

National NOW often made implicit links between abortion rights and the ERA, partly because it was usually viewed as the lead organization on both issues. Feminist lawyers in some states tried to use state ERA laws to force medical-abortion funding. National president Ellie Smeal convinced the national lobby not to take that strategy, but coverage of the state-level activity seeped into the national conversation nevertheless. It is also true that Smeal did little to convince legislators that ERA could not be connected to abortion rights, allowing opponents to make the connection explicit.\(^{277}\) But if Missouri legislators rejected abortion out of hand, reasoned feminist, linking it to other issues would simply kill those as well. State NOW officers went decidedly further than national in trying to divorce the two issues. This leadership was already backing off the abortion issue by the summer of 1974. At that time, the state council decided to ask chapters to subordinate abortion to ERA, and “to use separate people on the E.R.A. and abortion issues so as not to link the two issues in any way.”\(^{278}\) Two years later, at the NOW state conference, the resolutions adopted included ERA, criminal justice, child care, and a

\(^{276}\) O’Connor, 8.
\(^{277}\) Mansbridge, 122-127.
\(^{278}\) Missouri NOW state council meeting minutes, June 8, 1974, Missouri National Organization For Women, Records, 1967-1982 (C0781), folder 38, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
commission on human rights, among others. But the full list did not mention abortion or reproductive freedom. By the mid-1970s, then, the influence of women’s liberation had broadened significantly the activities of Missouri feminists. Nonetheless, traditional sentiment in the state kept that broadening from matching the more expansive national movement.

The Equal Rights Amendment increasingly took pride of place as the primary goal of women’s activist groups. Jacqui Ceballos was NOW’s national coordinator for what was originally called the “Women’s Strike for Justice and Equality,” and eventually became known simply as the “August 26th Demonstrations.” Initially held in 1969, the event commemorated the ratification of the suffrage amendment and attempted to publicize ongoing efforts toward the expansion of women’s rights. In an informational circular in 1972, Ceballos noted that the intent that year was to focus on “ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment[,] repeal of all abortion laws throughout the nation[,] and nationwide efforts to elect women running for political office.” Handwritten comments on the page to Sarah Wernick Lockeretz of St. Louis included suggestions that Lockeretz “send out a press release on your plans – ! Call a press conference to announce your events – .” Ceballos here implicitly acknowledged the need for the Missouri women’s movement to take control of its own publicity.

By 1973, NOW’s August 26th demonstrations were indeed gaining local press coverage. The small-time West County Journal ran a preparatory story on the event highlighting Mary Anne Sedey, “chairperson of the ERA Task Force” and ERA Missouri

---

279 Missouri state NOW conference minutes, 1976, NOW Records (WHMC C0781), folder 38.
280 Jacqui [Ceballos] to Sarah Wernick Lockeretz, spring or summer 1972, NOW Records (WHMC SL0175), folder 10.
Women of the Heartland

state coordinator for NOW. The story commented that Sedey would participate in a parade downtown on that Saturday, along with the ERA’s Congressional sponsor, Martha Griffiths (D-MI). Griffiths served on the powerful Ways and Means committee, and was instrumental in extending Title VII protections to women. Though her law degree and constituency came from Michigan, she grew up in Missouri and earned her B.A. at the University of Missouri-Columbia, which since 2005 has been home to the Griffiths Leadership Society for Women.

Already by the end of 1970, the CSW included in their third annual report a recommendation expressing support for a federal equal rights amendment. The report also repeated earlier recommendations regarding jury service and equal pay, and added one espousing a state minimum wage law. At a 1971 coalition-building luncheon hosted by the CSW, Alberta Meyer proposed to her guests three goals that might help structure collaborative action. The first, reflecting almost a decade of activism, was to “strengthen and make enforceable the state’s equal pay law.” The second, showing the effects of recent human rights language as well as recent shifts toward hiring and promotion discrimination, aimed to add “sex” as a nondiscrimination category to the state’s Fair Employment Practices law – which was administered by Missouri’s Human Rights Commission. Meyer’s third goal was to support the passage of ERA or of equivalent state laws. She received active support from the AAUW and the BPW, but the Missouri Federation of Women’s Clubs and Church Women United were more ambivalent. Tied more closely to traditional forms of women’s activism, these groups’

283 Meeting minutes, Sep 18, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
representatives merely promised to present the proposal to their members but gave no significant endorsement. The League of Women Voters representative essentially rejected participation, being fairly certain that the goals fell outside her organization’s mandate. That position is consistent with the image of LWV as supportive of traditional women’s roles. However, that position underwent some change over the 1960s and ’70s. As a follow-up to Meyer’s proposal of common goals, the Missouri LWV leadership wrote to her early the next year to report that they were putting the social “status of women on their study list for the first time.”

The Missouri WPC backed an ERA from its inception. Reflecting their organization’s concern with electoral politics, the group encouraged women’s political involvement and investigated potential candidates for their stances on feminist issues. The newsletter of the St. Louis NOW chapter noted in August of 1974 a nonprofit training being offered “for women on public affairs,” probably underwritten by St. Louis WPC. Preparing for the 1976 elections and the national Win With Women campaign, the organization sent questionnaires out to both male and female candidates. Showing their ties to the goals of other feminist organizations, the Missouri group asked for positions on ERA, abortion, public-funded day-care centers, minimum wage, and equal pay regardless of sex. Naturally enough, WPC member Harriett Woods was one of the candidates who responded to that questionnaire. Woods stated that she was for ERA, Roe v. Wade, and state funding for the Missouri CSW – which last was again under attack in the legislature. She also supported “governmental financing of day-care centers

284 Meeting minutes, Sep 10, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
285 Meeting minutes, Feb 18, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
Women of the Heartland

on a pay-as-you-can basis” and affirmative action to get “equal representation of women in governmental positions.”

For its 1975 demonstration, NOW clearly made the connections between its organizational goals and passage of the ERA. A 1975 press release for the major newspaper and television outlets in the St. Louis metropolitan area on the August 26th demonstrations lists women’s goals as “full and equal citizenship rights in employment, health care, credit, [and] education…” These goals received added impetus in 1975 from the UN declaration of International Women’s Year.

In November of 1975, a broad coalition of women’s groups the official umbrella organization The Women’s Action Alliance signed off on a “U.S. National Women’s Agenda.” Signatory groups included front-line feminist groups such as NWPC, NOW, and the young NBFO. More established women’s groups added their names as well: AAUW, LWV, and the YWCA. Less prominent or less political organizations such as WEAL, the Center for the American Woman and Politics, La Leche, and 35 other groups also joined the pronouncement.

The agenda demanded “full equality under the law,” essentially an ERA or the enforcement equivalent, which would hopefully include a wide variety of effects. Specifically, the agenda demanded of government and society the enactment of a slightly unwieldy eleven goals. Three of them called in general terms for change in social

289 Press release, Aug 26, 1975, Metro St. Louis NOW (National Organization For Women) Records, 1971-1979 (SL0175), folder 11, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO. Handwritten notes on the release suggest that it went to KMOX-TV, KSD-TV, and the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, with an intention indicated to contact the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.
290 “U.S. National Women’s Agenda,” Nov 24, 1975, Women’s Political Caucus, Columbia, Missouri, Papers, 1971-1977 (C3550), folder 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO; the goals of the agenda are further discussed in the following three paragraphs.
attitudes: “Fair Treatment by and Equal Access to the Media and the Arts,” “Physical Safety,” and “Respect for the Individual.”

Several of the remaining goals fell under what Jack Donnelly calls the civil and political half of human rights. They might be thought of as the goals of formal equality, or liberal feminist goals. These included “Fair Representation and Participation in the Political Process,” “Equal Education and Training,” and “Fair and Humane Treatment in the Criminal Justice System.” During the Cold War, according to Donnelly, the Soviet bloc and many third-world nations “regularly disparaged most civil and political rights,” equating them with the individualistic excesses of the United States. On the other hand, the US government “disparaged most economic and social rights,” which covers a second group of the Women’s Action Alliance goals. Donnelly finds, as did most feminists by the mid-1970s, that separating the categories creates a misleading and ultimately false dichotomy. Human rights properly includes both in an interdependent whole.291

The second group of goals – leaving them separate for convenience, though recognizing that activists did not see them this way – included “Meaningful Work and Adequate Compensation,” “Equal Access to Economic Power,” and “Adequate Housing.” Following Thomas Sugrue, this set of goals reflects “the extension of citizenship to include positive rights.”292 I believe it is also fair to include in this category the demands for “Quality Child Care for All Children” and “Quality Health Care Services.” Donnelly further points out the absurdity of trying to separate these two kinds of rights by commenting that the rights to property championed as essential by Western defenders of the “civil/political” rights would logically fall under the social/economic

292 Sugrue, xvii. Cf. discussion of rights in Ch. 3, supra.
category. Again, the rights are indivisible.\textsuperscript{293} Agreeing with this conception, feminist
groups increasingly demanded the broader package of human rights, and an Equal Rights
Amendment to secure them in the US Constitution. That line of reasoning – only possible
\textit{after} the rights movement had expanded to accept liberationist arguments – drove
Missouri feminists to back both an ERA and a broad conception of its potential effects.

Of their campaign to get women into legislative office in the 1976 elections, the
NWPC newsletter commented that “A major thrust of ‘Win With Women ’76’ will be to
elect pro-ERA women to legislatures in states that either have not yet ratified the Equal
Rights Amendment or are faced with rescission attempts.”\textsuperscript{294} Harriett Woods was elected
to the Missouri Senate in 1976. A Democrat from University City, she supported tax
reform & money for education and elderly. But she is perhaps best known for her
involvement in the Women’s Political Caucus, and her staunch support for ratification of
the ERA.\textsuperscript{295}

Alberta Meyer of the Missouri CSW had supported the ERA even before its
passage in Congress. But revealing coverage in a Columbia newspaper story from 1970
noted her ambivalence, considering the possibility of woman-paid alimony and women in
the draft. On top of those concerns, Meyer warned of the intense difficulty of any
ratification attempt for such an amendment – a caution clearly warranted, in the event.\textsuperscript{296}

The Missouri women’s groups here investigated were trying to walk an impossible
tightrope, balancing traditional gender roles with legal equality and traditional values

\textsuperscript{293} Donnelly, 31.
\textsuperscript{294} NWPC newsletter, January-February 1976, WPC Papers (WHMC C3550), folder 8.
\textsuperscript{295} O’Connor, 6.
\textsuperscript{296} Maggie Gunn, “Status Leader Predicts Female Space Travel: Views Future of ‘Unlimited Horizons,’”
Columbia Missourian (Columbia, MO), May 2, 1970, CSW Records (WHMC SUNP 6059),
correspondence folder.
with radical change. The apparent contradictions made building support for a constitutional amendment incredibly difficult. It is to the ERA in particular and those difficulties, in the end insurmountable, that we now turn our attention.
Women’s political activity, in the century before suffrage, had come to be defined in Victorian terms as mostly nonpartisan, morally based, nurturing, and confined mostly to matters bearing on family and health. In the early 1900s, female activists with either party often partook of what some historians refer to as an “essentialist maternalist ideology.” In other words, women are natural mothers, and that mothering instinct creates a unique political style. Of course, the fact that women had no access to the vote also contributed to their active efforts across the nineteenth century to develop an alternative politics. But that kind of historical understanding of the woman-government interaction was generally overlooked in favor of “natural differences” explanations.

Biological essentialism was used not only to define a unique female political style and promote the involvement of women in politics, but also to defend tradition and oppose the franchise for women. In a split that laid many of the grounds for women’s division over feminism in the 1960s and ’70s, antisuffragists often fought the Nineteenth Amendment on the grounds that it would undermine the family and erode public morality.

As noted earlier, women entered into partisan electoral activity and the “housework of government,” coming in some cases to have a strong influence over

---

298 Many historians have addressed this division. Vide especially Susan E. Marshall, Splintered Sisterhood: Gender And Class In The Campaign Against Woman Suffrage, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).
electoral politics. For example, according to historian Donald Critchlow, Phyllis Schlafly’s 1964 book in support of Goldwater trumpeted a populist attack on Eastern elites that helped draw the South, West, and Midwest more closely into the conservative fold. “Her importance,” writes Critchlow, “rests in what her political activities tell us about the transformation of the Republican party from moderate/liberal to conservative.” It was the “women of the Right” who drove that shift in the 1960s and ’70s, motivated by what Critchlow calls the combination of “libertarianism and religious traditionalism,” and the need to hold true to an ideal of the country’s founding values. As he describes it, “at the root of the anti-communism, anti-feminism, and pro-family movements in post-World War II America remained a conviction that the nation must not stray from its religious foundations and values lest society collapse into anarchy.”

Schlafly’s conservative activism had propelled her into significant leadership positions within the Republican Party women’s auxiliary, from her adult home in Alton, Illinois, just across the river from St. Louis. In 1960, she became president of the Illinois Federation of Republican Women, one of the achievements that prompted the St. Louis Globe-Democrat to choose her for its Woman of Achievement Award. Her biographer relates that when her term ended two years later, “a delegation drove 300 miles from DuPage County to Alton to persuade Fred Schlafly to allow his wife to serve another term.” Her tenure saw membership in the group double, and her influence within the party reached a high point when her favored candidate, Barry Goldwater, received the Republican nomination for the presidency in 1964. She easily became vice-president that year of the National Federation of Republican Women (NFRW). The conservative

Goldwater’s resounding defeat at the hands of Lyndon Johnson led many Republicans to rethink the growing rightward movement within the party, and Schlafly faced stiff opposition in her 1966 bid for presidency of NFRW.\(^{300}\)

Elly Peterson of Michigan, one of the leaders in the fight to deny Schlafly the NFRW presidency, built a coalition of Republican women who feared takeover of the party by the right wing, symbolized by the John Birch society. The Federation Convention, moved to 1967 to reduce conflict with Congressional elections, ultimately rejected Schlafly in favor of the more moderate Gladys O’Donnell. Moving outside of formal partisan channels, Schlafly turned to her grassroots support base and began that summer to publish a monthly newsletter, the *Phyllis Schlafly Report*. Though a losing battle electorally, Schlafly’s fight in NFRW mobilized a large number of supporters who would become critical shock troops in her campaign against feminism several years later.\(^{301}\) The *Report* became a critical means of tying together a disparate following of conservatives; perhaps inspired by its success, Harriett Woods had established her own newsletter by the end of the 1970s.\(^{302}\)

Harriet Woods, in her autobiography, mentions the support of her husband for her political career. She describes her husband Jim as “a whiz at polishing shoes and doing his own laundry,” and calling himself good-naturedly “Mr. Harriett.” But she also remembers that while serving in the Missouri Senate, “I cooked all weekend so there would be dinners prepared for the three days I was gone.” Coupled with the Senate race

---
\(^{300}\) Critchlow, 137-8, 352.
\(^{301}\) Critchlow, Chapter 6. Peterson’s network is discussed on 143 ff., conflict between national officers and grassroots supporters particularly on 151ff., and Schlafly’s reaction to defeat 160-62.
advertisement mentioned earlier, this anecdote helps reveal the ambiguity of expectations even in an avowedly feminist household.\textsuperscript{303}

Based on its own experience and the example of other states, the Missouri CSW decided in the spring of 1968 to emphasize area subgroups. That is, they recognized that many women – especially in areas removed from the major urban centers – did not know about or feel involved in the work of the CSW. So by establishing more local groups that could act in the absence of the statewide commission, they hoped to get more women involved at the grassroots level.\textsuperscript{304} Decisions on later ERA ratification would largely hinge on the ability to mobilize ordinary voters, and hence state legislatures.

Certain women in the national Republican Party tended to feel that party leaders were ignoring the voices of ordinary women while making policy, while they relied on those women for critical grassroots political work. This faction, which included Phyllis Schlafly, invoked the “women’s crusade” rhetoric of the Progressive era to support a conservative red-baiting politics that opposed the centrist Dwight Eisenhower and supported candidates like Barry Goldwater. An opposing faction preferred to see women as party stalwarts, supporting the leadership in return for patronage and measured access to the corridors of power. Like other moderate leaders of the mid-century Republican party, these latter women actively supported the ERA. Many of them also backed reproductive rights, child care, and other programs directed at remedying gender inequality.\textsuperscript{305} The conflict between feminist and antifeminist forces helped reshape the

\textsuperscript{304} Meeting minutes, March 8, 1968, Missouri Commission on the Status of Women, Papers, 1963-1974 (C3903), folder 2, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
national Republican Party, especially as the ERA became a point of national contention after 1972.

The first time the ERA appeared in the minutes of the Missouri CSW was in the spring of 1970, during a discussion about proposed national legislation affecting women. The commission took no official position on it at that time, but they did agree later to tacitly approve the amendment, and to informally pressure members of Congress to support it. More definite action was postponed, pending the reporting out of the amendment from its committee.306

In September, a bare quorum of six CSW members resolved support for the Equal Rights Amendment. In a letter to the absent members, Meyer asked for action: “Please write to Senator Eagleton and Senator Symington and ask each to support the Equal Rights Amendment as it was passed by the House…. [ellipsis in original] without any amendments. Senator Eagleton is one of the co-sponsors of the Resolution in the Senate but Senator Symington has not committed himself publicly.”307 A year later, Sue Shear again urged CSW members to contact members of Congress urging support for ERA.308

This building momentum and apparent successes of the movement helped to stoke a conservative backlash, including the mobilization of activist women who opposed the ERA, abortion, and other high-profile goals of the women’s movement. Many of these activists, often seeing themselves as pro-woman defenders of family values, organized directly in opposition to groups like NOW and initiatives like the ERA. Representing a large coalition of conservative Republican women, Schlafly began to develop an

306 Meeting minutes, Mar 6 and Jun 6, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
307 Meeting minutes, Sep 18, 1970; and Alberta J. Meyer to Missouri CSW members absent from recent meeting, Sep 21, 1970, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 4.
308 Meeting minutes, Sep 10, 1971, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 5.
organized antifeminist position near the end of 1971, a turn which according to Critchlow “reflected a turn in grassroots conservatism to social issues that would no longer be linked to communism or defense.” She published in her newsletter, the Phyllis Schlafly Report, a manifesto titled “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ For Women” in February of 1972, only a month before final Congressional approval of the ERA. It looked like an unlikely cause, since the House and Senate votes were 354-23 and 84-8, respectively. Significantly (from a Middle America perspective), one of those 23 negative House votes was Leonor K. Sullivan, Democrat of Missouri. A strongly pro-labor representative, Sullivan was concerned about the impact of an ERA on the protective legislation that unions had lobbied to achieve.\footnote{Critchlow, 216-17.}

Stretching from nonpartisan groups like the League of Women Voters to political party organizing, Missouri’s history of traditional female activism was a strong one by the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century. Schlafly and similar leaders represented the rise of what is sometimes called “profamily” or “antifeminist” sentiment: an organized woman-based politics dedicated to preservation of what they saw as women’s traditional roles, and to defeat of measures such as the ERA. Such activity helped ensure that changes in Missouri women’s status moved at a measured pace, and that local opposition to abortion was mobilized to halt other feminist programs as well.

In July, Phyllis Schlafly and a number of supporters (many of whom were veterans of the lost fight to get Schlafly the NFRW presidency) set up a national single-issue group called STOP ERA, for Stop Taking Our Privileges. The decision not to link ERA to other conservative issues allowed Schlafly to tap a deep well of support, and to build strength in many of the states which had not yet ratified. Support for the
amendment was provided by a loose coalition of groups, the most prominent of them being NOW and the umbrella organization ERAmerica. The attempt to pass ERA through the use of such a broad coalition meant that often the constituent groups were working at cross-purposes. BPW members who sought business contacts or LWV members who promoted nonpartisan consensus were less than eager to engage in edgy public battles with state legislators. NOW rallies and parades, which often tended to link ERA with the battles for abortion and gay rights, not only created some public backlash but also led to dissension within the pro-ERA forces.310

The ERA, of course, would not enter the constitution until approved by three-fourths of the state legislatures – thirty-eight states, to be precise. And regardless of whether public support has broken the 50% simple-majority barrier, the 75% supermajority requires either massive consensus or massive apathy. As Jane Mansbridge’s analysis of post-World War II public opinion data has shown, although a clear majority favored its passage, “the ERA generated intense, tenacious, and politically organized opposition. No amendment that inspired such opposition has passed for over half a century.”311 Thirty states ratified within the first year, but Missouri’s General Assembly was not among those voting in favor. Mary Gant (D-KC), who moved from the House to become the first woman in the Missouri Senate in 1972, supported equal pay legislation but opposed both loosened abortion restrictions and the ERA.312 This opposition to ERA lined Gant up against Sue Shear, a fellow Democrat and 1972 addition

311 Mansbridge, 31.
to the General Assembly.\textsuperscript{313} Shear sponsored ERA on its first go-round in Missouri, when it failed 70-81 to pass the Missouri House.\textsuperscript{314}

Another national flashpoint of feminist concern was Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972. This portion of the law prohibited sex discrimination in any federally assisted educational programs, which ultimately meant public schools, college admissions, faculty hiring, and high-profile athletic programs. Claims that the law would bring social chaos, meaning the arrival of unfeminine football players and unisex high school locker rooms, were lurid and mostly unfounded, though the law did have significant impact on funding for women’s athletic programs. But the controversy mirrored the larger fight over the proposed Equal Rights Amendment.\textsuperscript{315} St. Louis NOW was interested enough in Title IX to note in a 1974 newsletter an update on proposed implementation by the federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.\textsuperscript{316}

The immediate outcry that had followed Missouri CSW’s tentative support for abortion rights back in 1971 signaled a strong statewide opposition that continued through the decade and brought significant leverage to bear on later attempts to ratify the ERA. Conservatives worried that even though the amendment’s statement of equality seemed an innocuous affirmation of generally held belief, it would in the end give too much rein to the Supreme Court to reinterpret custom and invade state prerogatives. School integration, church-state separation, Miranda rights, and other Warren court decisions fanned the flames of this fear. The interpretation of an implicit right to privacy

\textsuperscript{314} O’Connor, 5.
\textsuperscript{315} Woods, 52.
\textsuperscript{316} \& \textit{Nothing Less}, Sep 1974, NOW Records (WHMC SL0708), folder 7.
that fueled the *Roe v. Wade* decision made conservative activists all the more determined not to allow ERA to pass. Even before *Roe*, some pro-abortion activists had filed suit claiming that similar state laws protected rights to abortion. Such actions made it easier for opponents like Schlafly to argue that “activist courts” could twist the ERA even if it wasn’t intended for such things. As Jane Mansbridge describes it, “by calling the ERA a ‘Pandora’s Box’ the opponents used imagery that captured the way many state legislators already felt about the First, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments.” Similar links could be made with homosexuality, the draft, public education, and a host of other hot-button issues.\(^\text{317}\)

The theologically and socially conservative Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, based at Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis, was one of many traditionalist denominations to oppose the ERA for its abortion implications. Seminary professor Otto Hintze worked to create a mass mailing campaign in Missouri and Illinois. Through his efforts, Lutherans throughout both states received anti-ERA messages.\(^\text{318}\)

When Harriett Woods campaigned for the Missouri Senate in 1976, she outlined her key issue as “opposition to ‘the throwaway society,’ a discarding of neighborhoods, the environment, and older people.” But her opponent outlined the issues of the race as “the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion,” and Woods found herself often waging the campaign on those grounds. She recalled in her autobiography that “‘God is Pro-Life’ signs were going up on every parish lawn; priests denounced me from the pulpit; church bulletins identified me as a baby killer; leaflets with gruesome pictures blanketed cars in church parking lots.” Woods would face similar difficulties in her losing campaign six

\(^{317}\) Critchlow, 225; Mansbridge, 28.

\(^{318}\) Critchlow, 382.
years later for the U.S. Senate against incumbent Republican John Danforth. But the Missouri emphasis on the traditional family helped Woods as well. She garnered much support as mother of Peter Woods, who quarterbacked the Missouri Tigers football team at the University of Missouri-Columbia.  

ERA ratification faced more opposition than that based simply on the abortion issue. At a May 1972 CSW meeting, members discussed ERA ratification efforts, particularly relevant since ratification in Missouri had just failed in its first attempt. In a discussion that reveals the importance of feminist networks statewide, they reported championing ERA at recent meetings of the Missouri BPW, the Missouri Federation of Women’s Clubs, and Missouri NOW. The CSW decided to sponsor a meeting of pro-ERA groups statewide to coordinate efforts.  

By summer, frustration was evident, as was the disconnect between CSW members and some of the less-activist areas of the state. As the minutes for the August meeting describe it, Margaret Rone “discussed briefly some of the problems she was encountering in talking with individuals and groups in Southeast Missouri about the work of women and the Commission. She indicated the Equal Rights Amendment was not understood by too many women in that area.” Known locally as the Bootheel for the shape of the odd southward jut of the state border in that area, the region was and remains largely rural. Culturally and politically, it has historically had less in common with the urbanized St. Louis area to the north than it does with the surrounding sections of Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, and southern Illinois. Trying to arrange a 1973 speaking

---

319 Woods, 63-5; the story of her struggle to be nominated for the U.S. Senate and the campaign against Danforth in 1982 is found in Chapter 7.
320 Meeting minutes, May 19, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
321 Meeting minutes, Aug 18, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
engagement at Cape Girardeau in that area, Rone was “specifically asked not to talk on the equal Rights Amendment.”

Recognizing the potential power of the commission’s well-developed network of women’s organizations, Meyer initiated in early 1972 plans for a clearinghouse meeting of all pro-ERA groups statewide, hosted by the University of Missouri at St. Louis. Among other results, the Missouri League of Women Voters agreed in the summer of 1972 to organize and disseminate a candidate questionnaire regarding the ERA, to be returned in time for the fall elections. More traditionalist than many women’s organizations in the 1960s, the LWV in Missouri by the early 1970s was much more directly involved in feminist activism.

Pearl Matthews, Clara Surber, and Sue Shear of the CSW all reported pushing ERA ratification in their roles with outside organizations. Shear, now a Missouri representative, planned to co-sponsor the ratification with Speaker Richard Rabbitt. However, at the CSW meeting in November of 1972, “Miss Surber…warned that opposition to it comes from women, more than men.” Support from the western half of the state continued to lag, prompting the CSW to plan its spring state conference to be held at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. State government support was surprisingly strong (with the exception of the Senate). Republican Governor-Elect Bond even announced his intention to attend a pro-ERA rally that month.

STOP ERA lobbied state legislators using newly mobilized grassroots women. Mothers with babies visiting senators, housewives handing out cookies at state capitol,

---

323 Meeting minutes, May 19, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
324 Meeting minutes, Aug 18, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
325 Meeting minutes, Nov 10, 1972, CSW Papers (WHMC C3903), folder 6.
activists traveling to one after another women’s Bible study group, all were tactics used to whip up opposition. One demonstration in Illinois included the sign “Send the Libbers to Siberia. We’ll Stay Home and Keep the Beds Warm.” The general approach, as Critchlow describes it, was that “opponents portrayed the ERA as elitist, an amendment promoted by leftist feminists out of touch with and hostile to stay-at-home mothers.”

Attempting to combat that image, groups like NOW staged massive publicity and advertising campaigns. For example, to try to build public support for the ratification of ERA, the St. Louis NOW hosted a parade and rally on 25 August, 1973. The event was timed to coincide with NOW’s ongoing annual “August 26 Demonstrations,” commemorating ratification of the suffrage amendment.

In July of 1973, the US Commission on Civil Rights released a pamphlet explaining the ERA. The commission claimed that “Ratification of the ERA is an important and appropriate means of alleviating sex discrimination – just as the adoption of the 13th and 14th Amendments was vital to the cause of racial equality.” Polls suggest that most Americans would have agreed, but key state legislators did not. In an issue so divisive, the fact that a federally-funded commission was making such claims public seemed to the antifeminists evidence that taxpayer money was forcing unpalatable changes back onto those very taxpayers. Chairman Meyer noted in June of 1973 that “the Commission was [censured] by certain Legislators for having paid for the printing of the leaflet giving facts concerning the Amendment.” Perhaps because of the General Assembly’s dim view of that activism, the CSW’s appropriation was cut to $2500 in the

---

326 Critchlow, 224, 236.
328 Women’s Political Caucus, Columbia, Missouri, Papers, 1971-1977 (C3550), folder 36, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
1972-73 legislative session. Nevertheless, the commission’s annual report included a recommendation in favor of ratification.329

The reverberations of the “taxpayer-funded lobbying” issue echoed for some months. Early in February of the following year, the Phyllis Schlafly Report ran a special overview of the Missouri dispute and several similar ones around the nation. As Schlafly described it, the “outspoken chairman [Meyer] flung down the gauntlet at the Legislature, saying, ‘The commission’s role is to bring things like ERA and abortion reform to the attention of the people.’” A copy of the report, with marginalia in multiple handwritings, is preserved in the Commission’s records. Meyer herself appears to have underlined the foregoing section. Schlafly continued, “The Missouri Legislature, which soundly trounced ERA earlier in 1973, disagreed, and cut the SOW’s budget by 75 per cent.” One endearing trait of her newsletter was to regularly use “SOW” for the Status Of Women commissions, otherwise CSWs. A marginal note signed simply “HP” laments, “I called Mr. Snyder, to no avail. He said he’d vote vs. ERA & he’s Minority Leader! John Ryan, my Sen., now says he thinks he’ll vote vs. it!! This woman burns me up!!”330

Clearly in response to the Schlafly report, the Jefferson City Post Tribune ran a late-February editorial titled “Who Finances ERA.” The author complained that the US Commission on Civil Rights, the President’s Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and the state CSWs were using tax money to back ERA. In words that echoed Schlafly, the Post described Meyer’s testimony before the legislature: “Defending the printing and mailing of ERA literature, Miss Alberta J. Meyer, who heads the Missouri Commission

---

330 “Are You Financing Women’s Lib And ERA?” Phyllis Schlafly Report 7:7 (Feb 1974), Missouri Commission on the Status of Women, Records (WHMC SUNP 6059), correspondence folder, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
on the Status of Women, told the Missouri legislature it was, in her opinion, the role of the commission to take an active role in bringing ERA and abortion reform to the attention of the people.” In a letter dated two days later, Meyer protested the coverage. “Thank you for the publicity,” she began. “I was distressed, however, that your use of my name in the editorial was a steal from the Phyllis Schlafly report…” Citing the statute that had created the commission, she noted that it called for “studies and research on the legal status of women in Missouri and the equality of opportunity afforded them. In carrying out this prescribed purpose, it was found the Equal Rights Amendment is basic to the legal status of women, as well as men.” After commenting that the CSW’s studies of Missouri law had found clear evidence of sex discrimination, she continued, “many taxpayers, men and women, are not dissatisfied that a portion of their taxes are being used in an effort to correct this situation via legislation.” In a pointed jab at the paper’s own position, she closed by stating, “I am disappointed that your newspaper, which advocates that agencies do what they are supposed to do, chooses to side with those who do not hold that women are entitled to a constitutional guarantee of equal protection under the law in Missouri and the United States of America.”

On 29 November 1973, CSW chair Alberta J. Meyer sent a letter of resignation to Republican governor Kit Bond. After serving on the committee since its inception and chairing it for years, she felt she could no longer hold the responsibility and the burden of keeping the commission running. Clarissa Start of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch sent her regrets to Meyer mere days later. “Five women couldn’t do the job,” she said. “You are

entitled to a rest from all the work & responsibility but girl we’ll sure miss you.”

Meyer continued to be active as a private citizen and Highway Commission member, but was no longer directly involved in the CSW.

Despite opposition from the legislature, the commission continued to expand its focus, studying the numbers and proportion of women in elective office and those on prison and arrest rolls. Commission members examined discrimination in credit provision, in marriage and divorce laws, and in pension and retirement programs. Commenting from the outside looking in, Meyer noted that “Attention to the ‘woman question’ has strengthened within the past few years because of emphasis on the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.” Not to be behind the times, the commission undertook to study the potential impact of an ERA on Missouri law.

The increasing prominence of women’s issues was having marked effect on Missouri society in the early 1970s. In 1974, a record fifty-four women ran for statewide posts in Missouri. The WPC succeeded in helping to elect pro-ERA House candidates Dotty Doll, Della Hadley, & Doris Quinn – all three Democrats of Kansas City.

Reflecting its more traditionalist outlook, the Missouri Association of Colored Women’s Clubs had been leery of involvement in arguments about the ERA as late as 1973. In that year, the Constitution and Bylaws Committee recommended to the full body that “any controversial [sic] religious or political questions may be explained in our convention by proper authorities but not debated.” But by the spring executive board meeting a year and

333 Clarissa Start to Alberta J. Meyer, December 5, 1973, CSW Records (WHMC SUNP 6059), correspondence folder.
334 Alberta J. Meyer to Geoffrey McCarron, August 14, 1974, CSW Records (WHMC SUNP 6059), correspondence folder.
335 O’Connor, 5-6.
a half later, MACWC president Marcia Hammons was checking to be sure of financial support for the ERA campaign.336

The League of Women Voters had long roots in traditional women’s activism. Champions of good government, League members were generally volunteers whose closest connection to social revolution was reminiscence about suffrage activism a half-century before. A laudatory 1969 article in *St. Louis Magazine*, written by Avis Carlson, celebrated the fifty-year jubilee of the suffrage amendment. Though it did not, the article could have stretched back a few years to add a touch more detail to its nostalgic view of women’s activism. When Woodrow Wilson was renominated in 1916, the Democratic National Convention had been held in St. Louis. A “Golden Lane” of sashed suffrage activists posed in front of the building, in an attempt to pressure the Convention into adding a plank supporting the woman suffrage amendment. After 1920, the LWV in St. Louis had developed a reputation for nonpartisan and generally noncontroversial municipal housekeeping, evidenced by its uncertainty in responding to CSW chair Meyer’s proposal of common goals in 1971. “Since 1919,” commented Carlson, “scores of Saint Louis Area housewives have made what they call their ‘League Work’ into a real career, unpaid but deeply satisfying.” Satisfying it may have been, but the League nevertheless came to the conclusion that the work was in itself insufficient. Only four years after Carlson’s article, the St. Louis LWV decided to reprise some of the 1916 activism in the demonstrations for August 26th, 1973. 30 women in yellow represented in the parade the states that had ratified ERA. The other 20 states were symbolized by

336 “Recommendations of Constitution & Bylaws Committee,” handwritten draft, Sep 1973, Missouri Association Of Colored Women’s Clubs, Records, 1932-1986 (C3801), folder 5; and MACWC semiannual executive board meeting agenda, Apr 13, 1975, Missouri Association Of Colored Women’s Clubs, Records, 1932-1986 (C3801), folder 8, both at Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.
women in black – each dragging a ball and chain. All 50 wore the sashes that tied them to the old suffrage demonstrators. The League’s openly feminist activism would have been unthinkable a decade earlier, and it owed much to the consciousness-raising impact of the women’s liberation wing of the movement.

One of the many ways that liberation affected rights groups was in tactical style. Theatrical publicity stunts, early stock-in-trade of WITCH or the Redstockings, became more common for mainstream organizations. Aside from the LWV parading, another example of such guerrilla theater was the 1978 Jefferson City vigil organized by Missouri NOW in an attempt to pressure Missouri government to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. From the 12th of February until the end of the legislative session in the spring, the state NOW intended to station two people “beside Governor Teasdale’s house, one block from our state capitol.” Photos in the archive show black-robed women outside the governor’s mansion. They hold a banner with the NOW logo and the legend “Human Rights Begins at Home.” The connection of women’s rights and human rights has since then become a mainstay of United Nations and liberal non-governmental organization efforts on behalf of women. And despite this later connection to progressive politics, a certain level of rights for women had not been considered at all radical in US politics throughout the decades after 1920’s suffrage amendment.

Even before development of an organized women’s movement, both major parties had expressed platform approval of the ERA. Richard Nixon had tacitly supported

---

337 “Laurels For The League,” *St. Louis Magazine* VI:7 (Jan 1969); Sue Reichardt, St. Louis LWV, to Pat Krauska, St. Louis NOW coordinator for 25 Aug parade, 1973, Metro St. Louis NOW (National Organization For Women) Records, 1971-1979 (SL0175), folder 8, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO.
338 *Missouri NOW Times*, state newsletter, Mar 1978, NOW records (WHMC SL0175), folder 87.
ratification, and both of the Fords gave full endorsements, despite grassroots Republican
disapproval of this position. Betty Ford (and, later, Rosalynn Carter) actively lobbied
state governments in favor of ratification. Carter’s influence and personal phone call were
probably the deciding factors creating approval in the state of Indiana. Individual
candidates’ stances on the ERA became a crucial component of their campaigns in hard-
fought states. In the summer of 1974, preparing for the fall elections, the St. Louis NOW
assigned members to attend public appearances by political candidates around the area.
At the events, these representatives were to ask questions about “women’s rights and
their stand on the ERA.”

In February of 1975, the President Pro-Tem of Missouri’s General Assembly
assured the WPC that he supported ERA. In a letter to Columbia WPC president Mary
Louise Bussabarger, he explained that he had introduced the ratification resolution
himself, and placed it in a favorable committee. Nevertheless, he cautioned Bussabarger
that he expected Republicans in the chamber to kill the measure. ERA passed the
Missouri House in 1975 by a vote of 82-75. However, it never really came close to
passing the Senate, being rejected by a vote of 14-20. With the House approval on
record, efforts in future years focused on Senate ratification.

Radical feminism could carry enormously negative connotations in the public
mind. Particularly when linked to anticapitalist analysis of US society, its mere mention
could create distaste among Americans otherwise ambivalent to the goals of mainstream
liberal feminism – not to mention create serious backlash from government officials like

---

340 Critchlow, 233-4 and 244.
343 O’Connor, 6.
J. Edgar Hoover. Often, all women’s movement activity was linked by implication to radical revolutionary groups. This association made it difficult for more moderate groups to gain legitimacy, and it could also be used by opposition groups to discredit women’s movement activity.

Beginning with a United Nations declaration of 1975 as International Women’s Year (IWY), the Ford and Carter administrations had supported planning for a national IWY Conference, ultimately arranged in Houston, Texas, in 1977. The planning commission received a Congressional appropriation of five million dollars, and went on to suggest resolutions favoring abortion, ERA, government-paid day care, sex education, and equal rights for homosexuals, among others. The Houston IWY Conference became a symbol for both sides in the ERA fight. The geographic imbalances in Missouri feminism came to the fore in the planning for this event. Of the Missouri delegates to the Houston conference, twenty-one were from St. Louis and its surrounding cities. From the Kansas City/Independence area, there were four.

Phyllis Schlafly’s group, along with Lottie Beth Hobbs of Women Who Want to Be Women, organized a counter-conference across town that they called the Pro-Family Rally. These antifeminists intended to point up the differences between themselves, representing ordinary American women, and the main conference, representing elitist establishment feminists. That dichotomy was reinforced when the IWY Conference passed a resolution approving homosexual rights. It also approved another on

reproductive freedom, which called for insurance-paid abortions, family planning and sex education programs for youth, and government funding for child care. Pro-family delegate Ann O’Donnell of Missouri offered an opposition speech, but it was insufficient to stop the resolution, which probably did more harm than good to its own cause in any case. As Schlafly phrased it afterward, the “Women’s Lib movement has sealed its own doom by deliberately hanging around its own neck the albatross of abortion, lesbianism, pornography, and Federal control.”

New Supreme Court rulings had by 1976 “made most of the statutes and official practices that the ERA would have eliminated in 1972 presumptively unconstitutional even in the absence of an ERA,” according to historian Jane Mansbridge. Therefore, she argues, women who continued to fight for it were working on principle more than for particular or immediate gains. They were less willing to compromise than they might have been with a specific tangible gain in mind, and arguments over ERA at that point often were marked by bitter refusal to give in on even comparatively minor points of interpretation. To outsiders, such stubborn insistence could be easily made to look obstinately selfish. By the end of the “me decade” of the 1970s, many Americans saw the women’s movement as responsible for an egotistical anti-family, anti-community shift in American thinking. In Ruth Rosen’s words, “the feminist…turned into a scapegoat for America’s irreversible decline into a nation of individual consumers.” Such a state of

---

346 Critchlow, 244-8. The quotation is from the *Phyllis Schlafly Report* from December of 1977, and can be found on pp. 247-48 of Critchlow.
affairs is ironic not least because scholars of the subject date the creation of consumerist America at least fifty years before the rise of second-wave feminism.  

The year of the Houston IWY conference, Indiana became the 35th state to ratify ERA. Though only 38 were needed for the required three-fourths majority, no other state was to approve the amendment. In the Missouri Senate, Jack Gant introduced yet another resolution to ratify. Solicitous of new Senator Harriett Woods, he invited her to co-sponsor, to build experience and résumé without actually having to take the lead on such a difficult bill. She agreed, but when Gant was appointed to the bench, leaving the Senate four weeks into the term, Woods was left with leadership of the resolution. Her relationship with the other female senator was rocky. In her autobiography, Woods doesn’t even name her, noting only that she was “an avowed antifeminist” who “didn’t offer any welcoming counsel.” Mary Gant (presumably no relation to Jack), that other woman senator, continued to argue that equality of women was already guaranteed under the Constitution – i.e., that ERA was superfluous. The final Missouri Senate vote reflected either the Gant view or a simple political calculus that showed reelection less threatened by a vote-down than by approval. The vote killed ERA 12-22, a decisive defeat in that body’s last-ever vote on ERA.

The St. Louis Globe-Democrat sponsored statewide opinion surveys on the ERA three different times in the middle and late 1970s. Judging by the results of these, there was a slight drop in public support for ERA by 1979. However, all three surveys reported

---


349 Woods, 68-73. The mention of the unnamed Gant is on p. 68.

350 O’Connor, 6.
between 54% and 60% of Missourians in favor of ratification. In this, Missouri public opinion was not tremendously different from that in other unratified states, which also showed a slight decline that often steepened after their state legislatures had voted to reject, rather than before.351

An oddity in the history of Constitutional amendments, Congress had given the ERA a ratification deadline. If not approved by three-fourths of the states by the spring of 1979, it would expire. In a last-ditch attempt to keep ERA alive, supporters convinced Congress to extend the deadline three more years, until June, 1982. For these final years, efforts by both sides were heavily concentrated in the few battleground states that had not approved but where margins were still close enough to make it seem possible. Missouri and Illinois were among these states, and though the votes were sometimes close, no new state ratified during the three-year extension. A critical feature in blocking ratification, Southern conservatism ran strong in Missouri and southern Illinois. They were thus linked to the many Southern states that also declined the amendment. Jane Mansbridge has argued that Illinois’s supermajority requirement for ratification gave even more influence to these “downstate” opponents. Another important factor was the sex imbalance in the legislatures. Within the states rejecting ERA, only 39% of male legislators supported it, whereas 79% of their female counterparts did so.352

The feminist emphasis on work for wages, rather than domestic volunteerism, hurt the campaign as well. Jane Mansbridge has noted the support of middle-class working women for the ERA (which helped lead to the 59¢ campaign tying Equal Pay to the ERA), and the opposition of middle-class homemaker women. Although polls do

351 Mansbridge, 203-04.
352 Mansbridge, 13-14, 150, 177; cf. the discussion of the time extension in Critchlow, 248.
show that over fifty percent of homemakers continued nationally to support ratification, the lion’s share of active anti-ERA work tended to come from this group, particularly from those homemakers affiliated with fundamentalist churches. Because proponents highlighted alleged positive effects on working women, those saw themselves as beneficiaries. This tactic left the door open for opponents to emphasize similarly hypothetical negative effects on homemaking women. One effect of this split was that large numbers of grassroots volunteer women were available for volunteer organizing and lobbying against the ERA. Donald Critchlow has emphasized the flip side, that pro-ERA organizations were spending enormous amounts of money on advertising and paid staff. He cites the 1976 elections in Missouri as an example in which ERAmerica set aside $180,000 to help elect candidates.\footnote{Critchlow, 231.}

National polling data from 1977 show that approximately 67% of Americans backed the ERA. Data from the same sample suggest that many of the same people held quite traditional views about women’s proper roles in society, feeling that mothers of preschool children could harm them by working, that women should be supported by their husbands (especially when jobs were scarce), and that a woman should advance her husband’s career before her own. Jane Mansbridge has exhaustively analyzed these data and noted the apparent paradox that “in almost every case a substantial majority of those who took traditional positions on women’s roles favored the ERA,” but her convincing interpretation is that “the explanation for these figures is quite simple: Americans can favor abstract rights even when they oppose substantive change.”\footnote{Mansbridge, 20-22.} As long as

\footnote{Mansbridge, 44, 90-91, 112; Critchlow, 231. Mansbridge’s analysis suggests that ERA would have done nothing for equal pay, at least in the short run, and a recognition of this fact made proponents’ arguments vague and more easily attacked.}
traditionalists did not feel that equal legal rights threatened significant change in social norms, support for ERA was not inconsistent. But in key battleground states like Missouri, linking rights to exactly that sort of change was the critical weapon in the antifeminist arsenal.

Many Missouri women came to view feminism in terms of a Manichaean duality. Women who opposed any feminist cause felt obliged to oppose all of them, as the abortion examples above demonstrate. In some cases, this reached ridiculous extremes, as in a 1981 incident involving Phyllis Schlafly; the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* story that followed was called “Mrs. Schlafly Says Women Evoke Sexual Harassment.” It became news because Schlafly had been not merely commenting to supporters, but was testifying before the US Senate’s subcommittee on Labor. Her statements included the following: “Virtuous women are seldom accosted by unwelcome sexual propositions or familiarities, obscene talk or profane language.” By setting herself opposed to all things feminist, Schlafly led herself into this patently absurd position. On the other hand, women who supported the ERA often felt compelled to promote unisex public toilets and the mandatory drafting of women for combat roles.

NOW continued to lobby legislators to the limit of the ERA ratification deadline. The St. Louis newsletter noted a pro-ERA march being held in Chicago in 1980. Perhaps recognizing the limitations of legislative lobbying with insufficient popular support, the St. Louis NOW increasingly tried to direct efforts to grassroots organizing. Its low success rate in this is shown by the consistently unimpressive membership numbers. Similar campaigns were undertaken elsewhere in the nation,

355 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “Mrs. Schlafly Says Women Evoke Sexual Harassment,” Apr 22, 1981.
although pro-ERA historians have generally agreed that NOW’s attempts to organize locally, at the county or legislative district level, were generally too late and slow to counteract the STOP ERA efforts begun earlier.

Rhetorically, the women’s movement was largely dead at the end of the 1970s. Following the close of the 1980 legislative session, State Coordinator Linda C. Woody sent a memo to the state’s NOW members informing them that yet again, the Missouri legislature had declined to ratify the ERA.\textsuperscript{358} Ronald Reagan’s New Right carried him to a presidential win over incumbent Jimmy Carter. At the Republican National Convention in 1980, the party decided not to endorse ERA for the first time since 1940. Activists also pushed new pro-family and anti-abortion planks into the party platform.\textsuperscript{359} The ERA ratification extension subsequently expired in 1982.

\textsuperscript{358} Linda C. Woody to all Missouri NOW members, 1980, NOW records (WHMC SL0708), folder 87.
\textsuperscript{359} Critchlow, 264.
Women’s clubs and civil rights activism fed directly into an early kind of feminism, which was slower to start and less combative in Missouri than at the national level. Within the state, developing feminism overlapped strongly with a traditionalist ideology that justified women’s roles with reference to people’s understandings of what those roles had historically been. This reliance on tradition was reinforced by the state’s uneven support for the women’s movement, which left pockets of feminism isolated and unable to build a coherent statewide movement that could bring strong pressure to bear on the legislature. The combination of these conditions helped make feminist leaders in the state’s CSW, NWPC, and NOW markedly more reluctant to press for abortion rights and other controversial women’s issues than were the national leaders.

Missouri’s legislature declined, in the end, to ratify the ERA, which had become by the mid-1970s the great national symbol of the women’s movement. Antifeminist rhetoric centered around links of the amendment to abortion, and ties between the amendment and a projected overthrow of traditional values. Whether exaggerated or not, these arguments resonated in Missouri, particularly in the more rural areas.

The social conditions that had created the national women’s movement existed in Missouri as well. The rise of activism paralleled national trends, though at a somewhat reduced and dilatory intensity. The culturally-rooted antifeminism that national ERA activists found so difficult to understand was strong and vital in Missouri. It forced feminism in the state to take on characteristics somewhat mellower than those that popular imagination ascribed to the women’s movement. The movement clearly
Women of the Heartland

experienced major successes by state or national standards, in no way vitiated by the failure of the ERA. That failure, however, does help illustrate the limits to popular support of feminism in Missouri. Internal dissension among feminist groups, negative public opinion that rallied around traditionalist sentiment, and constraints imposed by a state legislature sensitive to both of the first two factors helped create a women’s movement in Missouri less outspoken, less visible, and in the end less successful than its national counterpart.

Feminism in Missouri, though for the most part tracking the timeline of the national movement, carried distinctive characteristics that were due to particular local conditions that did not obtain at the national level. There was a geographic unevenness to feminist activism and presumably popular support in the state. That imbalance helped exacerbate a lack of confidence and support from the state legislature in Jefferson City. These lawmakers were never convinced that supporting the women’s movement would create more electoral good than harm, and they therefore supported it weakly at best. Partly because of this lack of support, and partly because of the consciously democratic ethos of the movement, the work of activist women was decentralized, and informal links played key roles in moving that work ahead. This part of the pattern conforms with that of the national women’s movement. The dual nature of feminine mythology – “traditional” and “feminist” understandings of gender – was especially highlighted in Missouri. At times, the two were used to reinforce one another. At other times, however, they conflicted, and the division between them is key to understanding the course of the feminist movement in the state, even more than in the nation at large.
Despite activities and rhetoric that matched in many cases those of the national women’s movement, the chronological course of activism in Missouri was clearly distinct. In government-sponsored groups like the CSWs, women investigated the same issues and promoted the same causes as national feminists but met with limited success. In nonpartisan groups like the NWPC, women lobbied for women’s issues on both sides of the aisle. As for the activist chapters of NOW, women early on were generally inclined to downplay the social and personal angles of leadership and to focus only on electoral politics. The marked differences between state and national activism have often been elided in the broader discussion of this topic, but they are crucial to creating a narrative that explains success or failure in the women’s movement at large. This thesis makes only a start at finding those differences and bringing them into focus. More work in Missouri as well as similar studies for other states remains necessary to round out the picture.
Appendix: Missouri Delegates to the National Women’s Conference in Houston, 1977

Angie Bennett, Springfield
Joan Brier, Columbia
Shirley Clough, Glendale
Mary Gale Doyle, St. Louis
Mae Duggan, St. Louis
Karen Dukewits, Independence
Frances Freck, Kansas City
Mary Gant, Kansas City
Joan Hart, Lebanon
Donna H. Hearne, St. Louis
Mary Fran Horgan, St. Louis
Peggy Keilholz, Jefferson City
Adele Kelman, Clayton
Patti Kemp, Jefferson City
Delphone McLaughlin, Des Peres
Odile Mecker, St. Louis
Elaine Middendorf, St. Louis
Judith O'Connor, Bridgeton
Ann O'Donnell, St. Louis
Frances Noonan, St. Louis
Eline Rodriguez, Arnold
Jacqueline Schlef, Dellwood
Lucille Selsor, Oakville
Clare Simon, Florissant
Ann Slaughter, St. Louis
Louise Grant Smith, Clayton
Mattie C. Smith, Kansas City
Mary Treis, St. Louis
Eleanor Wasson, Sedalia
Vi Wilson, Kirkland

ALTERNATES
Wilda R. Worley, O'Fallon
DeVerne Calloway, St. Louis
Joan Krauskopf, Columbia
Sue Shear, Clayton
Frankie M. Freeman, St. Louis

---

Bibliography

**Primary Sources**


League Of Women Voters Of St. Louis Records (SL0282), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO.

Metro St. Louis NOW (National Organization For Women) Addenda, 1977-1980 (SL0708), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO.

Metro St. Louis NOW (National Organization For Women) Records, 1971-1979 (SL0175), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO.

Metro St. Louis NOW (National Organization For Women) Records, 1971-1980 (SL0213), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis, MO.

Missouri Association Of Colored Women’s Clubs, Records, 1932-1986 (C3801), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.

Missouri Commission on the Status of Women, Records (SUNP 6059), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.

Missouri National Organization for Women, Records, 1967-1982 (C0781), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.

*Polk’s City Directory*. State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, MO.


Women’s Political Caucus, Columbia, Missouri, Papers, 1971-1977 (C3550), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.

**Newspapers/Magazines**

*Columbia Missourian*, Columbia, MO.

*The Greater St. Louis Magazine*, St. Louis, MO.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, St. Louis, MO.

West County Journal, St. Louis, MO.

Secondary Sources


----- “What’s in a Name? The Limits of ‘Social Feminism’; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women’s History.” *Journal of American History*, December 1989, 809-831.


