

WOMEN OF THE HEARTLAND:  
TRADITION AND EVOLUTION IN THE MISSOURI WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a local study of the women's movement in Missouri. The primary topic is organized feminist activity, though it shows also feminist/antifeminist interactions. Missouri early established an official Commission on the Status of Women, offering detailed records. NOW and NWPC also established chapters early on in Missouri, allowing comparison with the national-level movement. Finally, Missouri's legislature deadlocked on ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, a story helping clarify feminist/antifeminist differences in the state.

Most national feminist groups broadened their goals to include the social liberation of women. In Missouri, this process was often less thorough. Faced with strong traditionalism, Missouri feminists downplayed sexual orientation and regularly attempted to divorce abortion from their ERA lobbying. The ratification failure was caused by the same factors. Though Missouri feminism followed the same initial trajectory as national feminism, their paths diverged somewhat due to internal dissension within women's groups, negative public opinion in the state population, or constraints imposed on activism by the state legislature.