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## **Mothers, Morals, and Godly Motivations: Conservative Women's Activism from Anticommunism to the New Christian Right**

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MOTHERS, MORALS, AND GODLY MOTIVATIONS: CONSERVATIVE WOMEN'S  
ACTIVISM FROM ANTICOMMUNISM TO THE NEW CHRISTIAN RIGHT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Department of History

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By

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## INTRODUCTION

The modern conservative movement cannot be understood without investigating women's activism. Women's political participation sustained the transformation of the Republican party from an emphasis on economic issues to a focus on social issues, especially throughout the mid-late twentieth century. One key point of transformation was in the 1950's, when Communism posed a very serious danger. Conservatives claimed that in Communist countries, women gave their children to government funded programs and went to work.<sup>1</sup> This policy took women away from their assigned roles as wives and mothers. Another important turning point was in the 1960's, when the United States saw sweeping social movements which challenged conservative values. Second Wave Feminism, in the minds of conservatives, threatened to take mothers away from their children by encouraging women to go to work. The Civil Rights Movement brought what was viewed as social upheaval, and disrupted mainstream white society, inside which many conservatives comfortably lived. In the 1970's, conservatives saw the Equal Rights Amendment as damaging to motherhood, the family, and children. *Roe v. Wade* was portrayed as promoting abortion, which took away the opportunity for motherhood. Through these years, women played active roles in how conservatism developed through the shifts. In their action, women created their own agency inside of conservative frameworks.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade Against Communism*, (Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2008), 16

Republicans before the 1930's got elected through issues such as economic success and preserving the capitalist system. The Great Depression destroyed the image of success of Republican economic policies. In the 1930's, citizens facing hardship turned to the more progressive ideas of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democrats. As liberal social changes and movements gained influence through the middle of the century, Republicans and conservatives felt a sense of urgency to get back into political prominence. When conservative focus shifted to issues regarding family life and social values, conservative women became essential figures. Because women were at the heart of family life, they had the space and opportunity to engage politically. Women thus provided the spark for a renewed conservative momentum in American politics.

While conservative women were vehemently opposed to feminism, the results of their activism may not have been so different from feminist goals. The feminist movement had the goal of women gaining more social and political equality through challenging systems such as patriarchy, capitalism and heterosexuality, but greater self-autonomy was a goal of the feminist movement as well.<sup>2</sup> Feminism to many was about women having greater agency to make choices for themselves, without being dictated by patriarchal standards or expectations. However strongly opposed they were, conservative women created varied avenues for women's empowerment and agency through their specific conservative political ideologies. Issues such as childcare, marriage, work, and sexuality came up in both the feminist movement and conservative women's activism, and they often responded to each other.

The first part of this research is focused on how the shifts in American conservatism relied on women. In the United States in the twentieth century, women's socially assigned roles

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<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women's Rights and Family Values that Polarized American Politics*. (New York, New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2017), 21

were housewives and mothers. When feminism swept America and entered cultural conversations in the 1960's, many conservatives felt that motherhood itself as at stake. If motherhood crumbled, the family would lose stability, thus destroying the national image of America created by many conservatives. Women utilized their assigned roles as wives and mothers to help make the potential threat to the American family urgent. However, active political participation from women should have been a conservative anomaly: if women were deeply involved in politics, who would raise their children? Conservative values relied on the established system of patriarchy and gender roles. As right-wing women acted, they purposefully reinforced patriarchal standards and expectations. Their critique was against the feminist challenge to a male-centered status quo. Conservative women waged a war on whatever threatened their view of family, motherhood, or status as a wife.

The second focus of this research is how conservative women actively developed conservative political ideologies and simultaneously created their own type of agency. In their activism, conservative women frequently went beyond their roles as wives and mothers, although those roles were essential to the development of their self-autonomy. Some conservative men used women as symbolic representation for the moral importance of their conservative causes.<sup>3</sup> But, conservative women used that symbolism to create their own space within the movement. Within their grassroots work, conservative women expanded the ways that women interacted with the American political sphere. Conservative women did not align with the women's liberation movement, but the expansion of women's political involvement through conservatism shows that feminism was not the only avenue for broadening women's opportunities. From here, a second question in this research develops: if conservative women rejected feminism, what

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<sup>3</sup> Michelle M. Nickerson, "The "Conservative Sex:" Women and the Building of a Movement," in *Mothers of Conservatism.*, 136-168, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 138

motivated them to conservative political participation? One answer might be the ability to justify their family, identity, or values. In these actions, conservative women rearticulated the status women held inside of conservatism.

The two focuses that make up this research rely on first investigating how conservative women developed conservative ideologies, and second, what their activism created beyond anti-feminist narratives. Women conservatives expanded political engagement while defining a specific agency for themselves that relied on patriarchal standards. Without researching this complexity, scholars would miss a critical and unique opportunity to analyze American women's history. Conservative women were absolutely *essential* to the development of the movement, yet there has not been completely comprehensive research around their participation and its effects in American politics.

Scholars of conservatism generally agree that there was a shift to a focus on social issues that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. Marjorie Spruill, a scholar of women's activism more generally, makes the claim that in the analysis of American conservatism, the importance of women's roles is often left unexamined.<sup>4</sup> Another scholar, Michelle Nickerson, argues that conservative women capitalized on "cultural assumptions about women and motherhood," and invested themselves as spokeswomen for families and their local communities, while they "forced their priorities onto the larger agenda of the movement."<sup>5</sup> I desire to add to this conversation that while investigating conservative women's activism, there should be a focus on how these women defined and created their own personal agency within conservative frameworks. I want to further argue that elements such as gender, class, and racial dynamics are essential to acknowledge in the analysis of women in conservatism.

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<sup>4</sup> Marjorie Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, (New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, 2017), 2

<sup>5</sup> Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1



In this thesis, I draw on books, pamphlets, newsletters, educational materials, and speeches written by conservative women to explore this topic. This thesis focuses on three specific case studies using these materials. The first centers the Minute Women, which was an organization of anticommunist women. The second case study focuses on Phyllis Schlafly, and the third focuses on Beverly LaHaye. The first chapter is designed to provide context for the shift to social issues grounded in domesticity and gender roles, while analyzing the Minute Women's claims. The goal of the second and third chapters is to understand Schlafly and LaHaye's arguments that they used to activate women as political agents, and how they provided conservative women with newly shaped agency inside of the movement.

The first chapter will focus on the Minute Women, an organization founded in 1949 by Suzanne Stevenson. This organization argued that women were valuable to the anticommunist battle because communism threatened the family directly. The stability of the "American family" was used by anticommunists as an indication of moral strength – a strength that women were uniquely able to preserve. This thesis begins with the Minute Women because they demonstrate very clearly how and why women, through their focus on family, became central to the development of conservative ideology. Anticommunist women's work shows a clear connection between women's political activism and the shift to social issues that occurred in the conservative movement. This chapter will argue that the Minute Women helped unify the broader conservative movement through their anticommunism.

Developing from anticommunist activism, women's conservative activism in the 1960's and 70's used the focus on family to challenge American feminists. Activist Phyllis Schlafly took this challenge head-on. The second chapter of this thesis will examine Schlafly's claims in the 1970's. Phyllis Schlafly pushed her own narrative of women's position in American society.

For Schlafly, women did not need an amendment to the Constitution, because women already held the superior status. Schlafly used legal arguments to attack feminism and legislation such as the Equal Rights Amendment. Chapter two will argue that Schlafly presented distinct arguments for women's empowerment in her claims, while defending a specific national identity.

The third chapter will focus on the movement of conservative evangelicals that made up the New Christian Right. This ultra-Christian movement that started in the late 1970's and continued into the 1980's was centered in Christian obligation. As a case study for this leg of conservative activism, I focus on Beverly LaHaye. LaHaye entered the political sphere later than Schlafly, and while both women shared similar views, their activism was different. LaHaye offered a specific notion of agency by arguing that while submission was God's design for women, submission itself was an informed choice. LaHaye's group the Concerned Women for America was extremely popular and helped her get her messages across. This chapter will argue that LaHaye subverted the notion of submission and claimed that submission was a choice made with agency.

Conservative women became the underlying agents of conservative causes, and their influence still affects American politics in the present day. The activism of The Minute Women, Phyllis Schlafly and Beverly LaHaye helped push the conservative movement further to the right. They gave renewed energy to the conservative cause, with their femininity serving as moral justification. The urgency of fighting against communism became the urgency of keeping ideas deemed too radical outside of school curriculums, fighting for unborn fetuses, or saving motherhood from the Equal Rights Amendment. While understanding the trajectory of the conservative movement is important, I am specifically interested in investigating the women themselves and how they used the movement to further their personal goals. Further, it is

essential to focus on the unique arguments they presented for women's agency inside of conservative ideology. This investigation reveals the nuances of women's work inside of conservative causes and shows how these women rearticulated women's place inside of American conservatism.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### *The Minute Women: Anticommunist Women, Domesticity and Conservative Unity*

Investigating anticommunism in the 1950's illustrates how deeply tied the anticommunist movement was to domesticity and gender roles. But before anticommunism took over political platforms, the conservative political movement focused on economic liberty. The early focus on economic liberty came at a time when many conservatives were frustrated by policies put in place by the New Deal, which was the policy set by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to remedy the Great Depression of the 1930's. Eventually the anticommunism of the 1950's morphed into a focus opposing the progressive social and cultural issues of the era. But, this evolution would not have been possible without anticommunist women. This shift to a focus on social issues within the conservative movement is widely recognized, but the role that conservative women played in the movement is not. Anticommunist women used their roles as wives and mothers to place urgency on domesticity and the socially expected roles that solidified the American family.

This chapter will focus on the anticommunist Minute Women, to analyze the connection between their activism and modern conservatism. Looking at anticommunist women's activism in the middle of the twentieth century reveals that anticommunism helped create a foundation of family and motherhood within the conservative movement. Conservative women's political involvement has in many cases taken the shape of work in school systems or religious groups. However, the conservative movement of the 1950's was not unified. Women involved in

anticommunism argued that the protection of the American family from communist evils was where they as women had a unique ability to lead. The way that those women centered the family helped unify the rest of the conservative movement in anticommunist values.

In a new industrialized America, the conservative movement of the twentieth century emphasized protecting private property and economic gains. One of the most influential conservatives in the mid-twentieth century was Senator Robert A. Taft (R-OH) who worked in the Senate from 1939-1953. Taft supported property protection, economic freedom, and little government intervention. David Farber in *The Rise and Fall of Modern Conservatism*, argued that Robert Taft was most moved by “protection of economic liberty” and in his politics, pushed what became key points for modern conservatism: prioritizing the property-preserving intent of the Constitution, and frustration with big-government involved social policies that conservatives deemed too close to socialism.<sup>6</sup> Conservatives like Taft favored the open-ended right to pursue economic prosperity, but in a way that did not have heavy government involvement.

The conservative movement that Taft worked to develop set a place for those for whom American capitalism worked best: moderately wealthy white Americans. Taft benefitted from this policy, as he came from a wealthy family. Protecting economic liberty and property was the most important aspect of his policy.<sup>7</sup> After the Second World War, the majority of Americans wanted stability. Taft shaped rhetoric that placed leftist liberalism and pro-labor rights politics at the receiving end of public conservative criticism. Even as anticommunism was taking over America after the war, Taft’s conservative ideals stayed with many Americans. While conservative anticommunist women built on some of Taft’s views like small-government

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<sup>6</sup> David Farber, “Robert Taft: The Gray Men of Modern Conservatism and the Rights of Property” in *The Rise and Fall of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 17

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

involvement and capitalist gains, they deepened the movement by placing all emphasis on the family.

The threat of communism and the fear brought on by the Cold War was intense for many Americans. The fear of communism spreading domestically kept many folks on edge. Historian Richard Fried stated that “Americans developed an obsession with domestic communism that outran the actual threat and gnawed at the tissues of civil liberties.”<sup>8</sup> While there was actual growth in the Communist Party in the United States, there was a specific kind of right-wing anticommunism that was a “rejection of ‘collectivism’ in all its forms, including federal regulations, the welfare state, and liberal political culture.”<sup>9</sup> Most Americans after the tumultuous years of the Great Depression and the Second World War desired a stable life that was often romanticized as a family that met traditional gender roles.<sup>10</sup> A working father and stay at home housewife was the goal. Fortunately, the increase in consumerism backed by a somewhat stable economy made the ideal nuclear family possible for families that were able to make it into the middle class.<sup>11</sup> This middle class ideal was often used as a symbol against communism. Family values was used to emphasize the dangerous potentials of communism, and what could perhaps be destroyed if America lost out to communists.

Anticommunism became a way to emphasize the importance of the American nuclear family. The idealization of the family (made up of a father, mother, and children) was used to make the threat of communism urgent. In this ideal, anticommunist women became the idealized mothers that provided the spiritual, moral center of the family. Communism was portrayed as

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<sup>8</sup> Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3

<sup>9</sup> Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 35

<sup>10</sup> David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern Conservatism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 4

<sup>11</sup> Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace*, (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2008)

destructive to families, which was dangerous for America.<sup>12</sup> Thus, for women involved in the anticommunist movement, their political action was the perfect way to demonstrate themselves fulfilling the roles of wife and mother. This countered the rhetoric of communist destruction and kept women at the moral center of family life. Their involvement also resulted in more women becoming politically active in order to fight communism.

One of the well-known networks of anticommunist women was The Minute Women of the U.S.A Inc. This group was founded by Suzanne Stevenson, originally Suzanne Silvercruys, in 1949.<sup>13</sup> Stevenson was from Belgium, and she gained popularity in America in her writing about the horrors of war.<sup>14</sup> Stevenson is most known for founding the Minute Women. The Minute Women pushed the narrative that communism is inherently immoral and destructive – as it has been painted generally throughout American history.<sup>15</sup> The Minute Women helped inscribe the notion that anything perceived as “liberal” could be labeled as communist. Stevenson perpetuated the organization’s values – such as free enterprise, constitutional government, and patriotic education – by insisting on individual activism.<sup>16</sup> Stevenson instructed representatives to ignore communications that were signed as part of the Minute Women. Instead, Stevenson insisted that the women acted as individuals.<sup>17</sup> This meant that their writing was far more likely to have an impact, as those in congress might have felt more pressure to read individual letters rather than letters from an organization.

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<sup>12</sup> Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2008), 16

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 40

<sup>14</sup> “Relief Plea Made By Belgian Woman” in *The Montreal Gazette* pg. 7, Jun. 10, 1940.

[https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=\\_KMtAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=oJgFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2413%2C1547328](https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=_KMtAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=oJgFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2413%2C1547328)

<sup>15</sup> Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace*, (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2008), 16

<sup>16</sup> Ralph S. O’Leary, “Minute Women: Daughters of Vigilantism” in *The Nation*, Jan. 9, 1954. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Minute Women File, p. 291, Columbia University Library.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 291

Although The Minute Women went beyond their roles as mothers, gender was an essential component that anticommunist women used to make their arguments, as their claims most often rested on idealized gender roles. The imagery they produced and projected was very powerful. Historian Mary C. Brennan wrote: “Draping their work in maternalistic rhetoric and housewifely images, women activists reassured their male colleagues that they wanted nothing more than the end of communism; they posed no threat to the power structure. In many ways, they became storm troopers for patriarchal dominance.”<sup>18</sup> The vigilance of anticommunist women was extremely effective in mobilizing women. Conservative women in the anticommunist movement, who were predominantly white and middle class, could maintain housewife ideals and act against communism as a way to simultaneously glorify and protect the American family. Women activists wrote elected officials, organized groups and sent out newsletters to create a social network of anticommunist women ready to defend their country and their families.

The Minute Women’s activism took the form of writing officials and using their newsletter to reach and educate thousands of American women. In one of the Minute Women’s newsletters written by a woman named Dorothy B. Frankston in 1952, the first paragraph emphasized that although “women’s efforts in the “Get Out the Vote” campaign paid big dividends,” they could not rest; they had to “redouble” their efforts.<sup>19</sup> The same newsletter contained a small square with the words “Our Pens Are Our Weapons, Let’s Use Them” above the mailing address for Senators and Representatives in Washington, D.C. The efforts from the Minute Women were successful because they connected with other women across the country

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<sup>18</sup> Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2008), 9

<sup>19</sup> 13. Dorothy B. Frankston. “December Newsletter.” *Minute Women of the U.S.A Inc.* Dec., 1952.  
<https://wichita.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15942coll11/id/1351/>



who were deeply concerned about the safety of their families and the nation under the dangers of communism.

The Minute Women and other anticommunist women set up the family as fundamental to the stability of American society, which later became key to other conservative values. One area the Minute Women focused on was the American education system, and its impact on children. Richard Fried argued that the paranoia of communism had built on “deep springs of anti-intellectualism.”<sup>20</sup> There was an emphasis on conformity of thought, and as a result, schools dealt with anticommunist attack. Because of the importance of motherhood, women actively pushed back against school curriculum perceived as dangerous for their children. The Minute Women argued that the Constitutional Government of the United States had been damaged or broken with the influence of socialism and communism, which directly impacted their families. Their emphasis on schools was centered in their December 1952 newsletter: “If we are to return to Constitutional Government, if we are to rid our schools of subversive textbooks designed to indoctrinate our children with socialism, if we are to restore the basic rights and freedoms that made America the greatest country on earth... the time to act is now.”<sup>21</sup> Taking action in their local school districts was an attempt to protect their children from communism and fulfill their assigned roles as devout, caring mothers.

An important action step the Minute Women gave their readers was to stop purchasing goods imported from communist countries. They tied this to the Christmas holiday. The Minute Women estimated that Americans would spend \$50,000,000 on imported goods from communist countries, including that “Christmas tree ornaments alone will account for \$4,000,000 of this

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<sup>20</sup> Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 29

<sup>21</sup> 13. Dorothy B. Frankston. “December Newsletter.” *Minute Women of the U.S.A Inc.* Dec., 1952.

amount.”<sup>22</sup> The newsletter cited the U.S Department of Commerce and Bureau of Customs records. The Minute Women linked buying power directly into the role of housewife. Given the increased level of consumerism in the 1950’s, their insistence on housewives was not surprising. They emphasized that “housewives can stop this sort of thing if they will just read the labels and refuse to buy products from Communist countries... Until Congress passes a law prohibiting the import of such articles it is up to you individual Americans. Will you be a sucker for a bargain?”<sup>23</sup> The Minute Women were very aware that American women had power in American consumerism. The Minute Women placed the responsibility of refusing to buy communist goods directly on the shoulders of American housewives, which placed a special power on conservative anticommunist women. These women thus empowered each other to act and recognized the specific power that women of the time period held as housewives.

Anticommunist women like the Minute Women brought unity to the conservative movement. Some conservatives emphasized little government involvement and free trade, while others just wanted to push Christian values forward, even if that meant involving the federal government. While there were various disagreements among conservatives, anticommunism was one thing they could all agree on. Anticommunist women were able to use grassroots activism to make a statement against communism and rally conservatives around the values of morality and family that communism threatened to destroy. In their newsletter, the Minute Women used a quote from the American Legion to emphasize the unity needed to defeat communism: “Now that the election is over, it is our fervent hope that Americans will stop arguing with Americans over Communism and start fighting Communism.”<sup>24</sup> Anticommunist women desired to protect

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<sup>22</sup> 13. Dorothy B. Frankston. “December Newsletter.” *Minute Women of the U.S.A Inc.* Dec., 1952.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

their family and their idealized America, was powerful in drawing the broader conservative movement together.

Part of the success of anticommunism came from portraying the families in communist countries as unstable or unhappy, which was used very successfully to frighten American citizens into action.<sup>25</sup> American women were essential to this comparison. A film that presented the image that families in communist countries were unhappy was *Red Nightmare*. It was presented as a major motion picture in 1962, but originally, *Red Nightmare* was presented as a U.S. Army training film in 1957.<sup>26</sup> In the movie, a husband came home to his children and his wife, who was preparing dinner. The film shows a picturesque illustration of domestic bliss. The narrator of the film, played by Jack Webb, spoke about how at the end of the day the husband went to bed “in comfort, without worries or problems.”<sup>27</sup> The narrator then said that the husband, Jerry, was given a “red nightmare” while he slept. Jerry woke up the next day and found that the “freedoms that he complacently accepted” disappeared under the communist rule that magically imposed itself on his hometown. Under this communist rule, Jerry found his family – his children and his wife – very cold, unloving and harsh.<sup>28</sup> While there is much more embedded in the film, it highlights how women, their expected warmth and nurturing manner, was used as justification for how dangerous communism was and why America needed to be protected.

As evidence by *Red Nightmare*, American wives were supposed to be warm, loving, and stabilizers of the family. Communism made women cold and disengaged from family life, which was the ultimate sin against a society that rested on an idealized version of women’s place in

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<sup>25</sup> Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2008), 16

<sup>26</sup> *Red Nightmare*, Directed by George Waggner (Armed Forces Information Film, 1962) Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5pIIPK1Cj4>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

family life, and femininity more generally. The argument that Americans, and particularly American women, were in some way above women in communist countries was argument used by the Minute Women, and by later conservative women activists as well. The Minute Women implied that they saw American values or freedoms as being lost, or in danger of disappearing as a result of potential communist threat. These freedoms and values defined the sense of national identity that anticommunist women assigned to America.

The Minute Women helped inscribe that anything perceived as a liberal change could be written off as communist, and therefore potentially destructive. Through their rhetoric, the Minute Women also helped establish the conservative movement as white-centered. In a 1963 Minute Women newsletter from West Virginia, they cited that the Ford Foundation gave a grant of \$269,000 to the African-American Institute for an educational exchange. The newsletter argued that “certainly, these particular Africans have nothing to give us by way of ‘culture,’ and we have all of the ‘Africans’ in this country now that we need.”<sup>29</sup> Anticommunism was used to uphold racism, as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s was often slandered with claims of communist associations.<sup>30</sup> Through their rhetoric, the Minute Women furthered the narrative that anything perceived as liberal, or anything that disrupted the dominant social order, could be labeled as communist and therefore threatening to the nation.

Anticommunist women’s political activism reinforced the patriarchal structures in dominant American society, and they themselves were active agents of anticommunism and conservative values. Mary C. Brennan stated that while these women were active agents, the men in the fight against communism “praised women’s actions but described the women themselves

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<sup>29</sup> Minute Women Newsletter, November-December 1963. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Minute Women File, p. 289, Columbia University Library

<sup>30</sup> “Eastland Labels Rights Drive ‘Red’; Sees a Hoax in Mississippi Disappearance of 3 Men” *The New York Times*, Jul. 23, 1964

as housewives or household managers or mothers.”<sup>31</sup> Anticommunist women shouldered both; their roles as mothers and wives were essential but also deeply connected to their anticommunist activism. There was a deep sentiment of determined action that was revealed in the Minute Women’s newsletters. Dorothy B. Frankston stated: “patriotic women can be a determining force in the future of America if they will but take the time to make their wishes known.”<sup>32</sup> The Minute Women encouraged other women to realize and use their power as wives, as mothers, and as women to help save the United States.

Anticommunist women such as the Minute Women, centered children and the family in their arguments for anticommunism. Their urgency to protect the nation from communist threat translated into the further development of the conservative movement. As discussed, anticommunist women emphasized the importance of family values, motherhood, and anticommunism was also used to justify overall conservative values grounded in racism and other bigoted ideas. All of those themes stayed with the development of conservatism into the 1960’s. Mary C. Brennan argued that “if, then, communism posed not just a political challenge but a social one as well, this expanded the area of women’s political involvement... women’s efforts helped expose the U.S electorate to the goals and rhetoric of the broader conservative movement.”<sup>33</sup> Anticommunism emphasized the essential role women played to the development of the conservative movement more generally. Anticommunist women’s activism showed a connection between their work and the development of an American conservatism based in the conservative response to social issues, and their values such as family, motherhood, and

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<sup>31</sup> Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace*, (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2008), 113

<sup>32</sup> 13. Dorothy B. Frankston. “December Newsletter.” *Minute Women of the U.S.A Inc.* Dec., 1952.

<sup>33</sup> Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace*, (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2008), 114

Christianity. This development is seen extremely clearly in the presidential candidacy of Barry Goldwater in 1964.

Anticommunism continued to be prevalent in conservative politics, but social issues were beginning to hold equal weight into the 1960's. Goldwater was partially able to gain so much popularity among conservative Republicans because liberal Republicans lost cohesiveness and failed to combat the rising conservative tides within the party.<sup>34</sup> Historian Nicol Rae argued that developments in conservatism relied on an emphasis on “style and ideology” in a way that beat out moderation and centrism. To the surprise of many moderates at the time, Barry Goldwater became the choice for the Republican candidacy for president in 1964. Many staunch anticommunist women, among them Phyllis Schlafly, saw promise in the way Goldwater took a strong anticommunist stance, and emulated the conservative values that they had been fighting to uphold and popularize. Goldwater said in a speech at the 1964 Republican National Convention when he was nominated for the presidency: “We must and we shall return to proven ways – not because they are old, but because they are true...”<sup>35</sup> Goldwater conservatism perpetuated the notion that nature dictated what was moral and right. Additionally, Ronald Reagan’s speech endorsing Goldwater became emblematic of the modern conservative movement.<sup>36</sup> Barry Goldwater’s success and popularity was a result of the shift within the Republican party.

Analyzing anticommunist women’s activism lays out the ideological frameworks for the development of conservatism throughout the rest of the twentieth century. “The religious right” or “pro-family movement” gradually replaced anticommunism, with Christianity as the core

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<sup>34</sup> Nicol C. Rae. *The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans : From 1952 to the Present*. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 215

<sup>35</sup> Barry Goldwater, Acceptance Speech (Republican National Convention, Cow Palace, CA), 1964 : <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/may98/goldwaterspeech.htm>

<sup>36</sup> Ronald Reagan, “A Time For Choosing,” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. Los Angeles, CA. (Oct. 27, 1964)

organizing principle of the American right.”<sup>37</sup> The Minute Women show that anticommunist women played prominent roles in unifying the conservative movement. The Minute Women further proved that anticommunist women were active agents in perpetuating conservative values, and the conservative cause itself. When the morality associated with anticommunism began to mesh into other social and cultural issues, the conservative movement found new revival in the important social issues of the upcoming decades. Conservative urgency was sustained by women, as the activism of Phyllis Schlafly will demonstrate. Investigating Schlafly will show how conservative women activists built on the foundation laid by anticommunist women, such as the Minute Women. What is also clear in Schlafly’s work is that she offered a distinct argument for women’s empowerment inside of conservative ideology.

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<sup>37</sup> Michelle M. Nickerson. “The “Conservative Sex:” Women and the Building of a Movement,” in *Mothers of Conservatism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 167

## CHAPTER TWO:

### *Phyllis Schlafly: The Privileged Status of Women and Idealized National Identity*

The emphasis on family values that was built by anticommunist activism only increased momentum through the 1960's. The outrage produced by women's changes in dress, the sexual revolution, and the anti-war movement, elicited a strong response from conservatives. In the face of these cultural shifts, the nation's conservatives turned to the preservation of their cultural values.<sup>38</sup> 1964 Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater was essential in solidifying the values of the conservative movement. Goldwater gained momentum in his candidacy by using the anxiety that conservatives felt as a result of the intense social shifts that came with the Civil Rights Movement, student unrest, and the Women's Liberation Movement. The social movements of the 1960's and later 1970's directly challenged the conservative status quo, which led to renewed, intense conservative activism that pushed traditional gender roles, used bigoted rhetoric to create panic, and constantly centered the importance of the nuclear American family.

For many white conservative women, the fight they joined when they entered the political sphere was a fight to maintain their status quo. Conservative women's activism was nuanced and complex, as conservative women also defined their sense of personal autonomy and identity through conservative frameworks. One woman who illustrated this dynamic clearly, was Phyllis Schlafly. The Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement created a sense of

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<sup>38</sup> Donald Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2



impending instability for conservative white Americans, and they desired to preserve the established power dynamics.<sup>39</sup> These attitudes from white conservatives reflected the shifts in the Republican party and its ideology as a result of the New Deal.<sup>40</sup> Helped along by anticommunism, the Republican party gained more support from suburban, middle-upper class white Americans. For conservative women specifically, there was an added element of defining themselves and creating autonomy through conservative values. Activist Phyllis Schlafly built on the ways that anticommunist women centered the American family in their work. Looking at Phyllis Schlafly more deeply offers distinct examples for how conservative women empowered themselves inside of the movement.

While the women's liberation movement was able to mobilize liberal women through rhetoric of equality, conservative women were able to mobilize women partially because they offered arguments for women's empowerment inside of the conservative cause. Schlafly empowered like-minded women by arguing the women held a special place in society as a result of motherhood. Schlafly believed women were in a privileged position, based on their "natural" roles as mothers. Schlafly in her speeches and appearances, created herself as the ideal mother and housewife. This image was essential to the furthering of her goals. Moreover, Schlafly embodied a "Conservative Womanhood" that relied on specific ideals of femininity, motherhood, and status. Through this embodiment, Schlafly gained national popularity and thousands of supporters. In many of her arguments, Schlafly also held the view that America was in a privileged status globally. Later in this chapter, I will show how Schlafly created a specific

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<sup>39</sup> Lisa McGirr. *Suburban Warriors : The Origins of the New American Right*. Politics and Society in Twentieth-century America. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 19

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

American national identity, which connected with her argument that women were already privileged in America.

Schlafly was born in 1924 and was raised Roman Catholic by devout Republican parents in St. Louis, MO, which at that time was a majority Democrat city. Her family was affected by the Great Depression, and from those hardships Schlafly recognized that some events resulted in a changing social and economic sphere where many women needed income and got jobs.<sup>41</sup> Schlafly's own mother worked to help support her family. However, Schlafly never lost her vigorous belief that women should be first and foremost, wives and mothers. Schlafly also worked various jobs both in college and after, one of them being at a munitions factory where she test-fired guns. Apparently at her wedding to John Schlafly, Phyllis said she did not promise to obey, only to cherish.<sup>42</sup> Both Phyllis and Fred were very politically engaged, although Phyllis had a passion for political activism. Later in her career, she began speeches with, "I want to thank my husband, Fred, for letting me come here."<sup>43</sup> Throughout all of her rhetoric, Schlafly was very aware of how to create her image as a housewife in order to help her further her agenda.<sup>44</sup> Schlafly went on to graduate from law school in 1978.

Although Schlafly painted herself as simply a housewife, she was anything but. In 1952, when Fred declined to run for Congress, Phyllis stepped in and won the Republican primary, although she lost the election. In her candidacy, Schlafly stressed the importance of conservative values domestically, and a strong anticommunist stance in foreign policy. She was direct,

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<sup>41</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 34

<sup>42</sup> Douglas Martin, "Phyllis Schlafly, 'First Lady' of a Political March to the right, Dies at 92," *New York Times*, September 5, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/06/obituaries/phyllis-schlafly-conservative-leader-and-foe-of-era-dies-at-92.html>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Donald Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 49

persistent, and clear about her beliefs.<sup>45</sup> In her 1952 run, Schlafly “expected to lose the election, so she saw the campaign as a way of serving for the party.”<sup>46</sup> Historian Donald Critchlow argued that Phyllis Schlafly’s activism “reflected an ideological commitment derived from her faith as a conservative anticommunist.”<sup>47</sup> Further, Schlafly’s loyalty and deep faith in Catholicism translated into her faith in the Republican party. Schlafly’s strong Catholic beliefs were essential to her anticommunism, as “anticommunism was for many American Catholics the bond between their piety and their patriotism...”<sup>48</sup> As the years passed, Schlafly’s focus shifted from anticommunism to social issues, which led her to anti-ERA activism.

Schlafly is very well known for her creation of *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* in 1967, which influenced her later organization, the Eagle Forum, created in 1972. Eagle Forum became instrumental in Schlafly’s anti-ERA and pro-life campaigns. *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, read by 30,000 people, was a monthly newsletter that informed women subscribers about politics and other issues.<sup>49</sup> Her newsletters, the Eagle Forum, and radio and television appearances were a way of expanding her messages and attracting more supporters in her cause. According to a *New York Times* article written when Schlafly passed away, she originally did not think much of the ERA.<sup>50</sup> But, after reading up on the amendment in 1971, Schlafly decided it needed to be stopped. She saw the potential power of conservative women united behind this cause and became the spokesperson for the “STOP-ERA” movement, vehemently opposing its passage.

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<sup>45</sup> Donald Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 58

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

<sup>48</sup> Richard Gid Powers, "American Catholics and Catholic Americans: The Rise and Fall of Catholic Anticommunism." in *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 4 (2004), 31

<sup>49</sup> Donald Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4

<sup>50</sup> Douglas Martin, “Phyllis Schlafly, ‘First Lady’ of a Political March to the right, Dies at 92,” *New York Times*, September 5, 2016

Schlafly's anti-ERA activism was intimately linked with her belief in the importance of the nuclear family and a strict adherence to Christian faith.

At the core of her anti-ERA activism, Schlafly argued that American women were the most privileged group both nationally and globally, partially as a result of Christian tradition that gave honor to Mary.<sup>51</sup> In her group STOP-ERA, "STOP" stood for "Stop Taking Our Privileges." Schlafly stated that "of all the classes of people who ever lived, the American woman is the most privileged. We have the most rights and rewards, and the fewest duties. Our unique status is the result of a fortunate combination of circumstances."<sup>52</sup> This claim that women in America were actually already in a privileged position provided conservative women with an option that opposed feminism. Schlafly helped other women develop a sense of empowerment and autonomy through her conservative ideologies. The statement that women were a privileged group gave women a different lens through which to view their status in society. Instead of a lower status where women were discriminated against, Schlafly invented a privileged status that expanded the way conservative women viewed themselves.

In her mind, the American woman was privileged because of the widespread social expectation of the husband to provide for his family. "Women's rights" meant the "the right to keep her own baby and to be supported and protected in the enjoyment of watching her baby grow and develop."<sup>53</sup> Schlafly believed being a mother was a right endowed to women by God, rather than an optional choice women were free to make on their own. The ERA threatened the right of women to stay at home with children because to Schlafly, the language of equality made

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<sup>51</sup> Phyllis Schlafly "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women?" (Archives of Women's Political Communication, Iowa State University, January 01, 1972), 1  
<https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2016/02/02/whats-wrong-with-equal-rights-for-women-1972/>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1

motherhood more of a choice and less of a right. Schlafly also argued that the ERA threatened mothers' rights directly: "it will abolish a woman's right to child support and alimony, and substitute what the women's libbers think is a more "equal" policy..."<sup>54</sup> To counter feminist arguments, having babies was not the fault of "the establishment" but that "it's simply the way God made us."<sup>55</sup> While Schlafly did not say explicitly that every woman *had* to be a mother, she was very clear that the right to be a mother belonged to every woman.

Although in the Republican party of the 1960's politicians focused on addressing businessmen, workers, and farmers, many conservative housewives saw politicians' messages as being addressed to them as well. From there, women created their own space in the movement. This space put conservative women in a much more visible location. This visibility has been interpreted by scholar Michelle Nickerson as a "cult of wholesomeness that introduced nuclear family-style urban domesticity into political performance."<sup>56</sup> The importance of this act in the urban setting was to counter what conservatives felt was an increase in violence after the Civil Rights Movement, where "urban" became associated with "black." Conservative politicians played into these racist fears by preaching law and order. Even though Barry Goldwater pushed for smaller government, in his campaign he also argued for the government to have more power in the criminal justice system.<sup>57</sup> Conservative women getting involved added a moral justification that preserved the comfort of white society. The "performance" of women active in conservative politics was women literally acting out the social ideals they desired to protect.

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<sup>54</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women?" (Archives of Women's Political Communication, Iowa State University, January 01, 1972), 3

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

<sup>56</sup> Michelle M. Nickerson, "The "Conservative Sex:" Women and the Building of a Movement," in *Mothers of Conservatism.*, 136-168, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 138

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 163

In her speeches, Schlafly sent the message repeatedly that the “women’s libbers do not speak for the majority of American women.”<sup>58</sup> By stating that women’s liberation did not speak for all women, Schlafly gave herself and her followers power in defining “womanhood” away from the liberal views on gender sweeping the period. Building off already present conservative rhetoric, Schlafly gave voice to conservative women who felt like their values and families were in danger as a result of the women’s liberation movement. “These women libbers do, indeed, intend to “break the barriers” of the Ten Commandments and the sanctity of the family.”<sup>59</sup> Her messages appealed to women who identified deeply with the roles of wife and mother. In her fight to preserve women as the privileged class, Schlafly in many ways aided conservative women in finding their own type of agency to mobilize for causes they cared deeply about -- just as women’s liberationists found agency to act for their own causes.

Schlafly’s first book, *A Choice Not an Echo*, was essential to her development inside of Republican party politics. *A Choice Not an Echo* functioned as critique of centrist and liberal Republicans, while also acting as a nod to Barry Goldwater for his 1964 campaign. Goldwater shared similar feelings about New Deal failures, his frustration with government expansion, and took on the sentiments of many conservatives and even moderates who were dissatisfied with American politics and government.<sup>60</sup> Schlafly wrote, “Goldwater has the magic quality of leadership that is based on independence of thought and courage.”<sup>61</sup> Consequently, the Goldwater candidacy for the 1964 election has been thought of as the turning point for the modern conservative movement, as many conservatives saw the Republican party as too

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<sup>58</sup> Phyllis Schlafly “What’s Wrong with ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” (Archives of Women’s Political Communication, Iowa State University, January 01, 1972), 4

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>60</sup> Rick Perlstein, *Before The Storm*, (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2009), 20

<sup>61</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *A Choice not an Echo*, (Alton, Illinois: Pere Marquette Press, 1964), 79

moderate. In this way, Schlafly and *A Choice Not an Echo* did their part to push Republicans towards a more conservative candidate and party position.

There seemed to be a shift in Phyllis Schlafly between the years she wrote *A Choice Not an Echo* and her later book *The Power of the Positive Woman*. In her earlier work, she was mainly preoccupied with party politics, national defense and anticommunism. In the copy of *A Choice Not an Echo* from Pere Marquette Press, there is small writing on the top left of one of the last few pages that says: “politics is everybody’s business!”<sup>62</sup> Schlafly’s eager and powerful momentum to organize conservative women certainly proved that politics could play a role in everyone’s lives, even if they benefitted from established political structures. Her enthusiasm for political involvement continued as her focus shifted to conservative social issues and anti-feminist activism. Schlafly’s ideologies could arguably be viewed as contributing to a specific brand of agency that conservative women gained through Schlafly herself.

Schlafly’s values used to rally conservative women against the ERA were abundant in her 1977 book *The Power of the Positive Woman* -- released two years before the 1979 ratification deadline set for the ERA. Throughout *The Power of the Positive woman*, Schlafly crafted a narrative that women did not need feminism to succeed or find power – that they already had those traits within them, if they were a “Positive Woman.” She argued, “The Positive Woman understands that men and women are different, and that those very differences provide the key for her success as a person and fulfillment as a woman... The woman’s liberationist on the other hand, is imprisoned by her own negative view of herself and of her place in the world around her.”<sup>63</sup> Schlafly believed that what women *really* must do is have a positive attitude – because, all women have their moments “of sorrow and suffering, of unfulfilled desires and bitter

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<sup>62</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *A Choice not an Echo*, (Alton, IL: Pere Marquette Press, 1964), 126

<sup>63</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 11

defeats....” but, “to the Positive Woman, her particular set of problems is not a conspiracy against her, but a challenge to her character and her capabilities.”<sup>64</sup> A positive attitude was all that was needed for a woman to realize her capabilities and succeed. The ideology behind *The Power of the Positive Woman*, was another way Schlafly empowered women through conservative ideologies and traditional values.

As in previous decades, women often took political action if issues affected their personal lives or their identities.<sup>65</sup> Historian June Benowitz argues that Republican women were motivated to political action based on anticommunism or “their desire to maintain or reignite traditional values.”<sup>66</sup> Schlafly met both of those criteria. Analyzing Schlafly as she was situated in historical context leads to two main themes of discourse. One part is her traditional conservative values that are seen clearly in *The Power of the Positive Woman*. These values were inextricably linked with her fight against the ERA, and in her arguments against abortion rights. A second part of this discourse is how Schlafly related to the conservative shift in the Republican party. In her work, she made clear how issues of family, morality, Christianity, and women’s roles were linked together. As these issues were deeply intertwined for Schlafly, so too they became increasingly intertwined with Republican party politics and platforms. Even as there were many women actively involved in the conservative movement, the insistence on women’s traditional roles as wives and mothers stayed at the center of conservative ideology.

Schlafly, as conservative women had before her, argued that the nuclear family was the basic unit of American society. Bearing children was a central part of womanhood, and an essential part of the American family. Schlafly believed that “caring for a baby serves the natural

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<sup>64</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 10

<sup>65</sup> June M. Benowitz. *Challenge and Change: Right-Wing Women, Grassroots Activism, and the Baby Boom Generation*. (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2015), 4

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7



maternal need of a woman...”<sup>67</sup> This idea that women are innately equipped for motherhood simply because of their sex was not new for the time period. Neither, was Schlafly’s view that American women were a privileged group. In *The Power of the Positive Woman*, Schlafly cited Alexis de Tocqueville, in his work *Democracy in America* from the 1830’s. To emphasize her point that men and women are fundamentally different with different roles, Schlafly quoted de Tocqueville’s writing: “The Americans have applied to the sexes the great principle of political economy... by carefully dividing the duties of man from those of woman... If I were asked... to what the singular prosperity and growing strength of that people ought to be mainly attributed, I should reply: to the superiority of their women.”<sup>68</sup> Although seen in de Tocqueville’s writing, Schlafly’s argument that women held superior status was unique in that it provided a type of empowerment that held specific significance in the context of her antifeminist activism.

Schlafly used legal cases to defend her anti-ERA stance. Schlafly, claimed that in states with English common law, wives have “dower right in her husband’s real estate” and that women “fare even better in the states which follow the Spanish and French community-property laws,” where “a wife’s work in the home is just as valuable as a husband’s work at his job.”<sup>69</sup> Women’s superior status was linked to their positions in the American family. If women were removed from the position of mother, the family would lose status. For conservatives, the ERA also became synonymous with many potential consequences they feared. Schlafly argued the ERA could potentially lead to more abortions.<sup>70</sup> Abortion became a massive rallying point for conservatives, especially with *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. The ERA also became entangled with issues

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<sup>67</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman*, (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 17

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 28

<sup>69</sup> Phyllis Schlafly “What’s Wrong with ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” (Archives of Women’s Political Communication, Iowa State University, January 01, 1972), 2

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

such as school prayer and school textbooks. Schlafly claimed that the ERA would leave a door open to legalize gay marriage and push an “anti-family lifestyle” in schools.<sup>71</sup> All of those feared outcomes have a common thread: in the minds of conservatives, if those outcomes became reality, the status of the American family would be destroyed.

In *The Power of the Positive Woman*, Schlafly quoted a woman named Rose Totino, who grew up in poverty and was the daughter of Italian immigrants. In relationship to the ERA, Totino said, “why should women go from superiority to equality?”<sup>72</sup> The realities for lower class families was not something Schlafly often discussed. When she did bring up issues of poverty, they most often looked similar to where Schlafly described Totino as an example of a “positive woman” who worked through financial instability in order to build a life. This example bolstered Schlafly’s claim that if a woman is a “positive woman,” she did not need women’s liberation. A fundamental part of Schlafly’s ideology was that the middle-upper class lives where women could stay home and be a mother was normal and something to be strived for. Without the idealized norm of stay-at-home motherhood, many of Schlafly’s arguments would fall apart, as they relied heavily on the stereotypical gender roles that became a nod to class status. Class privileges were considered not only ordinary, but encouraged and defended. Schlafly’s insistence on traditional gender roles was deeply connected to a specific version of femininity, which was always in relationship to motherhood.

In *The Power of the Positive Woman*, Schlafly stated, “The women’s liberation movement has positioned itself in total opposition to the entire concept of “roles,” but in doing so, they are opposing Mother Nature herself.”<sup>73</sup> In Schlafly’s view, deviation from traditionally

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<sup>71</sup> “AIDs out of the Closet... ERA Out of the Closet,” 1983. M1085, Box 1, File 7, Eagle Forum Publications, p. 1-2, Stanford University Special Collections

<sup>72</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman*, (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 30

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 71

conservative roles and norms threatened the privileged status of American women. Schlafly argued that the fall of Rome was the fault of the Roman matron, which she used to hint at the potential “fall” of the American family. She wrote, “The liberated Roman matron, who is most similar to the present-day feminist, helped bring about the fall of Rome through her unnatural emulation of masculine qualities, which resulted in the large-scale breakdown of the family and ultimately of the empire.”<sup>74</sup> Women who deviated from conservative gender roles thus embodied the “liberated Roman matron” who destroyed the Roman Empire. On the opposite end of destruction, was Mary, mother of Christ. For Schlafly, Mary represented true motherhood and her plight gave all women their privileged position. In a 1972 speech Schlafly stated: “The honor and respect paid to Mary, the Mother of Christ, resulted in all women, in effect, being put on a pedestal.”<sup>75</sup> Women, by being “liberated” as the Roman matron, lost their position on that pedestal, thus losing their privileged status, and potentially bringing America down with them.

Schlafly justified an idealized American national identity through the privileged status of women. In some of Schlafly’s arguments she linked motherhood and housewife status to American capitalism, which in her mindset, placed America higher on a global level. Schlafly stated that “the real liberator in America is the free enterprise system.”<sup>76</sup> Schlafly argued that as a result of scientific advancement and women’s capitalist consumption, housewifery had become less of a hardship because of inventions like electricity and modern appliances. Schlafly thanked not her predecessors, but American capitalism and figures of scientific invention. She said, “The great heroes of women’s liberation are not the straggly haired women on television talk shows

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<sup>74</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman*, (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 20

<sup>75</sup> Phyllis Schlafly “What’s Wrong with ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” (Archives of Women’s Political Communication, Iowa State University, January 01, 1972), 1

<sup>76</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman*, (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 31

and picket lines, but Thomas Edison, who brought the miracle of electricity to our homes.”<sup>77</sup>

Schlafly made blanket assumptions that the women she addressed were financially well-off, and these assumptions helped her idealize America as a country.

Additionally, Schlafly particularly hated the idea of government funded childcare, which stayed with her throughout her activist career. This belief was also influenced by her class status. She accused the ERA of prompting “Federal ‘day-care centers’ for babies, instead of homes.”<sup>78</sup> Schlafly’s views on federally funded childcare further upheld her view that American women were privileged globally. In a later *Phyllis Schlafly Report* from 1989, Schlafly argued that a “liberal” childcare program would (among other things) “create a federal baby-sitting bureaucracy” that increased taxes, and “penalize families that take care of their children out of love...”<sup>79</sup> Schlafly also claimed that this “liberal” childcare plan would “lead to a society modeled on Sweden where most children are cared for in government institutions.”<sup>80</sup> Schlafly repeatedly placed America on a global pedestal, held up by women and motherhood.

Schlafly centered America’s global status in capitalism and democracy. Schlafly said, “In the United States, women have long since been liberated from the slavery of standing in line for daily food and necessities,”<sup>81</sup> as opposed to the Soviet Union where women were forced to ship children to government day-care programs while they “do the heavy, dirty work American women do not do... while men are still the bosses.”<sup>82</sup> In the Soviet Union, women were robbed of being full-time mothers because of Communism, and therefore in Schlafly’s mind, the

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<sup>77</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman*, (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 31

<sup>78</sup> Phyllis Schlafly “What’s Wrong with ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” (Archives of Women’s Political Communication, Iowa State University, January 01, 1972), 4

<sup>79</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, “The Challenge of Childcare Costs” in *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, Vol. 22, No. 7, Section 1. Feb. 1989, 1

<https://www.phyllisschlafly.com/category/the-phyllis-schlafly-report/>

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

<sup>81</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman*, (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 31

<sup>82</sup> Marjorie Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, (New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, 2017), 80

American woman was the privileged class on a global level. Her views came at a time when many Americans used the status of women to uplift the nation's status globally, especially in the context of anticommunism. Schlafly used the status of women in communist nations, whether based in fact or not, to justify an idealized national identity that defined America in relationship to conservative values. If Schlafly recognized that her life was not accessible to everyone in America, she might have had to admit that there could be faults in her personal politics and her concept of national identity.

Schlafly's belief in a natural order dictated almost all of her beliefs. If discrimination occurred, it too was part of the natural order. She wrote "Most women and men believe they are underpaid and that their real worth is underrecognized. Unfair discrimination exists in every walk of life. No law ever enjoys perfect enforcement."<sup>83</sup> This dismissive attitude was also applied to racial politics. Schlafly justified the privileged position of American women through prejudiced narratives. She said that American women are "especially fortunate" to live in a "Judeo-Christian society," as opposed to "some African and Indian societies," where "the men strut around wearing feathers and beads and hunting and fishing, while the women do all the tiresome, manual drudgery."<sup>84</sup> Schlafly's language perpetuated notions of savagery and white superiority used to colonize and exploit non-Western cultures and peoples. This language justified the American national identity that Schlafly created in order to help her further her conservative causes. Moreover, as class privilege was an assumed part of her idealized national identity, whiteness was also assumed in that vision.

Phyllis Schlafly, in her fight against the Equal Rights Amendment, reinscribed and perpetuated the values that she saw as essential to her way of life. The argument that can be seen

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<sup>83</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman*, (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 35

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 33

at the core of all of Schlafly's activism, is that women are a privileged class in America. This claim offered a different type of empowerment that was not engaged with the feminist movement. The idea of social change in the name of equality, meant women being taken off a pedestal. Schlafly held a privileged status, and the assumption of class and racial privilege was a main component of her activism. Her large platform, Eagle Forum, still pushes conservative ideology today. Schlafly gained a public avenue to defend her identity, while she rallied conservative women to political participation. Conservative women gained a specific type of agency and empowerment through Schlafly's ideologies.

Schlafly took the increased focus on social issues in the 1960's and 70's and crafted claims that subverted feminist arguments of the time. In claiming that women were a privileged group, Schlafly changed the feminist narrative to serve her own purposes. She also highlighted a new avenue for conservative women to claim agency. Schlafly helped instill gender roles, Christian values, and class status in conservative ideology. While Christianity was close to Schlafly and it often informed her work, the New Christian Right that developed later in the 1970's and especially in the 1980's was built on Christian obligation. The New Christian Right pushed a specific evangelical narrative into American conservatism. Evangelical Beverly LaHaye, as the next chapter will discuss, argued that it was her Christian duty to get involved with politics. LaHaye connected with women who were unsure if the political sphere was open to them by claiming that they were essential to protecting the America that God desired. Similar to Schlafly, LaHaye created a distinct sense of autonomy inside of conservative ideologies.

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### *Beverly LaHaye: The Evangelical Essentials and Women in the New Christian Right*

Beverly LaHaye, like her contemporary Phyllis Schlafly, was adamant about proving that feminists did not speak for all American women. While Schlafly's activism was connected to her relationship to Christianity as a Catholic, LaHaye's conservative activism was animated by her Protestant evangelical beliefs. Evangelicals traditionally took the Bible literally, and used it as justification for their involvement with politics.<sup>85</sup> LaHaye's political involvement and personal ideology were quite similar to Schlafly's, but the way they shaped their arguments was varied. Schlafly and LaHaye built on claims made by the Minute Women, and argued that women had a unique, active responsibility in protecting the American family. But where Schlafly believed that women were already a privileged class without need of federally granted equality, LaHaye argued that women's social status could be an informed choice made with autonomy, rather than a position dictated by patriarchal societal expectations. Through their varied arguments, both women offered an alternative to feminism that defined women's agency through a conservative lens. Investigating the varieties of Schlafly and LaHaye's activism shows that the conservative movement, and the women involved inside of it, cannot be viewed as a monolith.

Schlafly and LaHaye's messaging was intended to reach women who had not necessarily begun to view themselves as active political agents. However, LaHaye's activism took on the

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<sup>85</sup> Chelsea Griffis. "In the Beginning Was the Word": Evangelical Christian Women, the Equal Rights Amendment, and Competing Definitions of Womanhood." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 38, no. 2 (2017), 148

range of conservative values with revived emphasis on Christianity and theology. While both women were Christians who wanted to save the American family from a demise brought on by progressive changes, LaHaye got involved in politics because she believed that God literally gave her a sign to do so.<sup>86</sup> LaHaye and her husband Tim became key figures in the development of the New Christian Right, along with many other prominent evangelicals. They followed the trend of focusing on social issues and solidified conservative values in their relationship to Christian ideology, which also helped make their social and religious values deeply intertwined with American conservative politics.

One of the turning points for conservative women was the International Women's Year conference in November 1977, where the liberal resolutions passed at the conference "confirmed conservative fears."<sup>87</sup> While this meeting amplified the feminist agenda, many women who opposed feminism were also actively involved in their own conference. The Pro-Family Rally of 1977, led by Phyllis Schlafly was a significant event for conservative women, and a culmination of Schlafly's activism. In a crowd of 15,000 people there were posters and signs held up protesting the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexuality, and abortion.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the presence of a federally funded International Women's Year conference that pushed a feminist agenda horrified conservative women. The IWY conference endorsed the ERA and correlated feminism with gay and lesbian rights.<sup>89</sup> These tense conditions that had developed through the conservative women's response to the feminist movement had come to a new boiling point that resulted in the

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<sup>86</sup> Emily Suzanne Johnson, *This is Our Message: Women's Leadership in the New Christian Right*. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 73-74

<sup>87</sup> Anneke Stasson. "The Politicization of Family Life: How Headship Became Essential to Evangelical Identity in the Late Twentieth Century." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 24, no. 1 (2014), 106

<sup>88</sup> Judy Klemesrud. "Equal Rights Plan and Abortion Are Opposed by 15,000 at Rally." *New York Times* (New York, NY), Nov. 20, 1977. <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/11/20/archives/equal-rights-plan-and-abortion-are-opposed-by-15000-at-rally-like-a.html>

<sup>89</sup> Anneke Stasson. "The Politicization of Family Life: How Headship Became Essential to Evangelical Identity in the Late Twentieth Century." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 24, no. 1 (2014), 106



perfect conditions for Beverly LaHaye to begin her evangelical Christian activism in the late 1970's. In *Suburban Warriors*, historian Lisa McGirr stated that “a search for authenticity, the rejection of liberal rationality, a middle-class counterrevolution against 1960s ‘permissiveness,’ and a search for community created a cauldron mix that fueled the growth of evangelical Christianity.”<sup>90</sup> As conservative social values became further intertwined with conservative politics, the evangelical churches organized politically as well.

Beverly LaHaye's political career grew out of the evangelical lineages in southern California. She was born in 1929 during the Great Depression, and met her husband Tim after she started at the private evangelical institution Bob Jones University, in 1946. The couple stayed married for almost seventy years; separation occurred only at Tim's death. Together and separately they wrote numerous books, spoke to many audiences, and each involved the other in their political organizing.<sup>91</sup> For Tim part of his organizing was with the group called the Moral Majority. For Beverly, she began her work by organizing and speaking to ladies' groups at the church she and Tim attended. Later, in a conversation with Henry Brandt, a conservative self-help speaker, Beverly understood her shyness and introversion as selfish.<sup>92</sup> She went on to describe her political activism as a necessary component of her relationship to God, and encouraged other women to do the same. Scholar Emily Johnson argued that LaHaye followed the lineage that many conservative women had in justifying their political involvement: LaHaye put “emphasis on the husband's permission, the woman's initial reluctance, and God's firm insistence.”<sup>93</sup> LaHaye portrayed political activism as an essential part of her Christian identity.

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<sup>90</sup> Lisa McGirr. *Suburban Warriors : The Origins of the New American Right*. Politics and Society in Twentieth-century America. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 243

<sup>91</sup> Emily Suzanne Johnson, *This is Our Message*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 71

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 71

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 73

There was a widespread evangelical subculture already developing throughout the 1970's, and the LaHayes used this movement to their advantage. They used the lineage of conservative Christian activism to build their reputation. Emily Johnson has argued that “evangelical subcultures during this period promoted and fundamentally relied on the work of prominent women...”<sup>94</sup> Because conservative Christian beliefs insisted on fundamental differences between men and women, there was an opening for women to become more involved in Christian causes, and space for women to speak on women's issues themselves. Johnson has pointed out a complexity in conservative women's leadership: “the leading voices in this subculture – among them, those same women – sharply reinforced the boundaries of women's authority.”<sup>95</sup> While LaHaye and other conservative women preached a patriarchal way of viewing women's roles in society, they also worked to create a space for their own voices in the movement. This space was further created because women could not reach the same level of leadership positions as men. As a result, evangelical women's groups flourished. This is what LaHaye benefitted from.

Conditions for broader women's leadership was also partially made possible by the women's liberation movement. Even if conservative women were antifeminist, they still benefitted from some feminist ideas, even if the traces were small. The feminist movement infiltrated mainstream American society, as gender became part of a cultural conversation. This was especially influenced by the acceptance of feminist ideas at the federal level, especially in the White House, as there had been efforts in multiple administrations to aid in women's causes. Presidents such as Democrat John F. Kennedy and Republican Richard Nixon made efforts to

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<sup>94</sup> Emily Suzanne Johnson, *This is Our Message*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 72

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 72

increase the amount of women in high level federal positions.<sup>96,97</sup> Although on some level this may have been performative, it shows that feminist ideas permeated even the highest levels of American government, and they certainly permeated into everyday life as well. LaHaye's activism was in conversation with feminist ideals, and even though she undermined feminism and new ideas about gender roles, LaHaye's ideology was still gendered. Further, conservative women like LaHaye were perhaps able to occupy more space and take on more leadership in their movement as a result of this conversation.

In 1979, LaHaye founded Concerned Women for America (CWA). In its formation, LaHaye relied on messages of urgent and sudden political awakenings that were a result of the direct attack that feminism posed. In order to get other like-minded women involved, LaHaye “collapsed religious and political messages in order to advance a vision of conservative political activism as an essential component of Christian duty.”<sup>98</sup> LaHaye kept her Christian religion at the center of all of the CWA activist work, which was successful in gaining supporters and women who mobilized for the cause. The CWA published newsletters, organized local chapters various states, held prayer groups, set up teas and luncheons, and eventually in the mid-1980's LaHaye worked to establish the CWA's Educational and Legal Defense Foundation.<sup>99</sup> In 1984, the CWA organized the “535 Program” which trained women from the Washington, D.C area to act as volunteer lobbyists for CWA – each woman was assigned to one senator or representative, hence, the number 535. Like the Minute Women and Schlafly's activist groups, the CWA also emphasized writing to elected officials.

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<sup>96</sup> “United States President's Commission on the Status of Women Records.” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/USPCSW>

<sup>97</sup> “Advancing the Cause of Women.” Richard Nixon Foundation. <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/exhibit/advancing-women/>

<sup>98</sup> Emily Suzanne Johnson, *This is Our Message*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 77

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 83

The CWA relied on gender difference to argue against the Equal Rights Amendment. In 1979 the CWA's first newsletter and word-of mouth campaign "quickly spread word of the new organization."<sup>100</sup> In the list of their concerns and goals was the statement: "We are concerned about the impact changing roles of men and women are having on families in our society and the attempt to eliminate the natural distinction between men and women through legislation such as the Equal Rights Amendment."<sup>101</sup> CWA had similar claims to previous activists, and wrote that the ERA would "force women into the military and into combat," that the ERA would "raise the prospect of homosexuality being added to the list of constitutionally protected minorities," and further, that the ERA would "grant the federal government power over the laws that regulate property, marriage, and children."<sup>102</sup> Schlafly pushed similar claims against the ERA, but Schlafly argued that the fundamental differences between men and women resulted in a specific privileged status that would be lost with the passage of the ERA.

The arguments Schlafly and LaHaye used to counter feminist claims about women's social position were different. An essential distinction in LaHaye's argument regarding women's social positionality was that just because women's roles as listed in the Bible were different, they were not necessarily unequal. LaHaye posed submission to a husband as an act of worship when it is a "chosen, deliberate, voluntary response to a husband."<sup>103</sup> Chelsea Griffis in her article "In the Beginning was the Word: Evangelical Christian Women, the Equal Rights Amendment and Competing Definitions of Womanhood," argued that the CWA and Beverly LaHaye "used what they perceived as a literal interpretation of the Bible to support their view that God made the two

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<sup>100</sup> "Our History." *Concerned Women For America*, <https://concernedwomen.org/about/our-history/>

<sup>101</sup> List of CWA Concerns and Goals, Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 3, Columbia University Library

<sup>102</sup> CWA Newsletter, Aug. 1984. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 237 – p. 240, Columbia University Library

<sup>103</sup> Beverly LaHaye, *The Spirit-Controlled Woman*. (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1976), 71

sexes different, and therefore inherently politically unequal, though not inferior or socially unequal.”<sup>104</sup> The rhetoric of a wife’s submission to her husband as described in the Bible was used to say that women’s Christian roles were to submit to their husbands, but not necessarily to be inferior to them. LaHaye used this subversion of submission as a justification for why the ERA was not needed; because women could choose to submit to their husbands as an act of worship to God – an act done out of their own autonomy, not out of inequality or inferiority.<sup>105</sup>

LaHaye was able to stir women against the ERA in a similar way to Schlafly. She repeatedly labeled the ERA as an “anti-family bill,” that will “totally destroy the traditional American family.” Further, LaHaye emphasized that “unless we act quickly, it will gain the momentum needed for passage.”<sup>106</sup> In both Schlafly and LaHaye’s arguments, feminism and the changes that resulted from the women’s movement were signals of a significant moral decay occurring in the United States. For LaHaye, a woman who was devoted to Christianity could not also be a feminist. Only pro-family activists, grounded in traditional Christian American values, vigilant against sins such as homosexuality and abortion, could be the saviors of an America in drastic moral decline. LaHaye further argued against the ERA because it threatened to bring more government involvement into American life. She stated: “I am not against equal rights for women... What I am against however, is an amendment to the Constitution that is a cleverly designed tool to invite total government control over our lives.”<sup>107</sup>

LaHaye and Schlafly’s different approaches show that there is no single-sided history of women’s involvement in the conservative movement. Their different approaches may have

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<sup>104</sup> Chelsea Griffis. “In the Beginning Was the Word”: Evangelical Christian Women, the Equal Rights Amendment, and Competing Definitions of Womanhood.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 38, no. 2 (2017), 148

<sup>105</sup> Beverly LaHaye, *The Spirit-Controlled Woman*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1976), 71

<sup>106</sup> CWA Newsletter, Aug. 1984. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 237, Columbia University Library

<sup>107</sup> Beverly LaHaye, *Who But a Woman?* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 53

resulted from varied political upbringings. Even though LaHaye got involved in politics much later than Schlafly, Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America used similar tactics such as newsletters and writing representatives. But their different approaches to the ideology they used to mobilize women were partially the result of their varying networks. Where Schlafly had political knowledge and connections going back into the 1950's, LaHaye had a wide evangelical religious network. Schlafly was personally more invested in the political sphere than LaHaye initially was, but both women used Christianity in their political platforms. A key difference was that LaHaye's approach to conservative activism was motivated by clearly stated Christian duty, whereas Schlafly was not as explicit about Christian obligation in her sense of moral urgency. Both women connected morality to Christianity and associated shifting social values in America with moral decline, but Schlafly attempted to use far more legal justifications for her anti-ERA stance than LaHaye did. This distinction may have been a result of Schlafly's position as a Catholic.

Scholars have noted religion as a dividing line between LaHaye and Schlafly. LaHaye labeled the CWA as the first organization for "traditional Christian women."<sup>108</sup> This definition has been interpreted by scholars as representative of a division between Schlafly and LaHaye as a result of their specific Christian beliefs. There was a long standing tension between evangelicals and Catholics in the U.S, and since the 1950's anti-Catholic sentiments had been prevalent in American politics.<sup>109</sup> In their book, *The Act of Marriage*, the LaHayes blamed "Roman theologians" for their "negative Christian attitudes toward sexuality," and indicated that the Catholics did not celebrate marital sex, even though it was under God.<sup>110</sup> Schlafly implied

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<sup>108</sup> Emily Suzanne Johnson, *This is Our Message*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 87

<sup>109</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers. "Gender and Certainty" in *Age of Fractures*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 166

<sup>110</sup> Emily Suzanne Johnson, *This is Our Message* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 86

that the only appropriate form of sex was within a heterosexual marriage, but Beverly and Tim LaHaye argued, as do many evangelicals, that sex is foundational to a healthy, strong (also exclusively heterosexual) union. The LaHayes wrote numerous books about sex within marriage, and Tim often wrote about the importance of Beverly's input as a woman. Beverly's innate moral goodness as a woman meant that *The Act of Marriage* held a special type of moral dignity within evangelical conservative culture. Tim and Beverly wrote about sex in the same cannon of Marabel Morgan and her 1973 book *The Total Woman*.

Catholics and evangelicals also differed in how they viewed abortion. This translated into the arguments Schlafly and LaHaye made against abortion as well. For anti-abortion Catholics, especially in the 1970's, abortion was deeply tied to ideas of womanhood.<sup>111</sup> "They talked of women's need to accept their essential natures and bear with grace the burdens life imposed on them."<sup>112</sup> At the cost of bodily autonomy, Catholics believed that pregnancy and childbirth were essential to womanhood, and therefore abortion was unacceptable. However, for many Protestant evangelicals like LaHaye, abortion was much more an issue of women's sexuality.<sup>113</sup> Defining the acceptable parameters of sexuality was also what motivated CWA and other evangelical efforts to spread anti-gay, anti-sex education, and anti-porn messages in many of their newsletters, pamphlets and educational programs.<sup>114</sup>

Many scholars have also indicated that adherence to gender roles was central to evangelical political activism. Church historian Anneke Stasson argued that gender roles in evangelical rhetoric were amplified with the language of moral decline in America.

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<sup>111</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers. "Gender and Certainty" in *Age of Fractures*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 169

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 169

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 170

<sup>114</sup> CWA Newsletter, 1993. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 38, Columbia University Library

Evangelicals' insistence on gender roles was deeply "connected with their political opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and gay marriage. Fundamentalist and evangelical organizations like Concerned Women for America, Moral Majority, and Focus on the Family have used these political issues to mobilize evangelicals for political action. And as these issues have come to define evangelical political opinion, they have, in turn, strengthened evangelical commitment to male headship."<sup>115</sup> Women fulfilling their assigned gender role meant that the family was being led in a moral direction, while male leadership of the family kept the idealized American family intact. Stasson's article quoted Beverly LaHaye in her book *I Am a Woman by God's Design*: "the problems [in modern society] increase when a woman will not accept that she was created from and for man, with a specific purpose to fulfill."<sup>116</sup> Organizations such as Concerned Women for America and the Moral Majority, both groups in which the LaHayes were heavily involved, capitalized off of this revitalized emphasis on family values to mobilize conservative Americans.

Beverly LaHaye attempted to counter feminist ideas of gender roles that were pushed at the time. LaHaye argued that adherence to gender roles was a form of worship, uplifting God. In her book *The Spirit Controlled Woman*, LaHaye stated that "regardless of what the current trend towards "Women's Lib" advocates, anything which departs from God's design for women is not right. Submission does not mean that she is owned and operated by her husband but that he is the "head" or "manager"... This is a truly liberated woman. Submission is God's design for woman."<sup>117</sup> In direct opposition to ideas of women's liberation, LaHaye positioned women's gender roles as next to godliness. "...True submission is neither reluctant nor grudging, nor is it a

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<sup>115</sup> Anneke Stasson. "The Politicization of Family Life: How Headship Became Essential to Evangelical Identity in the Late Twentieth Century." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 24, no. 1 (2014), 102

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 110

<sup>117</sup> Beverly LaHaye, *The Spirit-Controlled Woman*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1976), 71



result of imposed authority; it is rather an act of worship to God when it is a chosen, deliberate, voluntary response to a husband.”<sup>118</sup> In her rhetoric, LaHaye subverts the notion that submission is passive. Through this subversion, LaHaye redefined women’s agency inside of conservative Christian frameworks.

LaHaye repeatedly emphasized that her group, the CWA, was created to promote “traditional Judeo-Christian values.”<sup>119</sup> LaHaye held very strong opinions about Christianity being involved in politics. “Yes, religion and politics do mix. America is a nation based on biblical principles. Christian values should dominate our government. The test of those values is the Bible. Politicians who do not use the Bible to guide their public and private lives do not belong in office.”<sup>120</sup> By placing Christian faith at the center of her work and arguing that Christianity should drive American politics, LaHaye favored a specific vision for the American political system. The conservative movement relied on the assumption of Christian-ness. An article in *Mirabella* pointed out that the crowd at the ninth annual Concerned Women for America convention was “overwhelmingly white, suburban, and female.”<sup>121</sup> LaHaye was successfully building on a movement that already centered on and benefitted mainstream white, Christian America.

LaHaye’s insistence on the specific rhetoric of “Judeo-Christian values” demonstrated how the language around race had changed over the century. Since being explicitly racist was no longer as acceptable in the mainstream political sphere as it had been previously, conservatives turned to terms such as promotion of “Judeo-Christian” culture or the perpetuation of “Western”

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<sup>118</sup> Beverly LaHaye, *The Spirit-Controlled Woman*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1976), 71

<sup>119</sup> CWA Newsletter, Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 1, Columbia University Library

<sup>120</sup> Beverly LaHaye, “Let Christian Values Dominate Our Politics,” *USA Today*, Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 242, Columbia University Library

<sup>121</sup> Edward Cone and Lisa Scheer, “Queen of the Right,” *Mirabella*, Feb. 1993. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 48, Columbia University Library

traditions, which upheld white supremacy without being couched in explicitly racist language. This coded rhetoric was a way to perpetuate subtle bigotry that was quiet enough for the right people to know who was included, while avoiding accusations of being explicitly exclusive.

In one of CWA's newsletters that protested President Clinton's acceptance of the gay community, LaHaye wrote "In the face of this unprecedented assault on America's traditional family values and Judeo-Christian heritage, I'm asking you to do three things today."<sup>122</sup> The emphasis on Judeo-Christian "heritage" was a way of letting other conservatives infer some of the underlying messages of the CWA without having to be blatant enough to harm the organization's reputation in the broader realm of American politics. LaHaye's emphasis on "Judeo-Christian heritage" also connects to her sense of national identity, as many of Schlafly's claims did. LaHaye and Schlafly defined the American national identity in terms of their conservative values.

A "Judeo-Christian heritage" was used to imply other prejudices as well – for example, LaHaye's impassioned homophobia. Because LaHaye, like other evangelicals, took the Bible literally, they interpreted passages such as Leviticus 18:22 to mean that homosexuality is condemnable – even though some argue that it is an ambiguous implication to begin with.<sup>123</sup> Homosexuality was also viewed as a dangerous deviation from the assigned gender roles that evangelicals viewed as essential to the functioning of America as a moral nation. Those who supported gay rights were thus not only morally wrong, but they offended the "Judeo-Christian heritage" by ignoring the Bible. Because of this, CWA argued that homosexuals should not be

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<sup>122</sup> CWA Newsletter, 1993. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 38, Columbia University Library

<sup>123</sup> Martin E. Marty, "Morality, Ethics, and the New Christian Right." *The Hastings Center Report* 11, no. 4 (1981), 17

able to teach children in schools or get married. CWA further portrayed homosexuals as “militant” activists who wanted to make conservatives “embrace their immoral way of life.”<sup>124</sup>

To further their arguments, both Schlafly and LaHaye capitalized on media. Schlafly gained many supporters through her appearances on popular television, and she had a short radio show called *Wake Up America* sponsored through the Daughters of the American Revolution.<sup>125</sup> Radio and television also drastically affected the development of the New Christian Right in the 1980’s. Since evangelicals believed mainstream media was against them, many evangelicals created their own media outlets to get their message out. The *Moral Majority Report* was a radio show that Tim LaHaye was involved with, that apparently “reached 840,000 homes.”<sup>126</sup> This strategic creation of specific media helped give political direction, amplify their message, and reach many Americans. LaHaye grew CWA to a level that she claimed reached 600,000 members in 1993.<sup>127</sup> The year before, the Washington Post reported that CWA had an annual budget of ten million dollars, which was more than the annual budget of the National Organization for Women (NOW).<sup>128</sup> The tactical media usages of the CWA, and evangelical political messaging in general, proved extremely successful. LaHaye’s pamphlets, newsletters, prayer groups, letter writing, 535 Program, legal defense fund, and educational programs helped her reach hundreds of thousands of Americans and her work generated productive grassroots organizing that deeply affected American politics.

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<sup>124</sup> CWA Newsletter, 1993. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 38, Columbia University Library

<sup>125</sup> Marjorie Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, (New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, 2017), 78

<sup>126</sup> Anneke Stasson. "The Politicization of Family Life: How Headship Became Essential to Evangelical Identity in the Late Twentieth Century." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 24, no. 1 (2014), 110

<sup>127</sup> CWA Newsletter, 1993. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 41, Columbia University Library

<sup>128</sup> Megan Rosenfeld, “Not NOW Dear,” *The Washington Post*, Sept. 26, 1992. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 43, Columbia University Library

Beverly LaHaye left a lasting impact on conservative politics and participated in the furthering of conservative ideology into American politics. Since the days of women's anticommunist activism, American conservatism had amplified the emphasis on nuclear family, and embedded the language of family in conservative values that perpetuated Christian dominance, patriarchy, and held mainstream white America at its core. LaHaye was active in perpetuating the shift in the conservative movement, and pushed the ideology further to the right of the American political spectrum. President Ronald Reagan said that Beverly LaHaye "is changing the face of American politics, and she deserves our thanks and congratulations... she's one of the powerhouses on the political scene today, and one of the reasons that the grass roots are more and more a conservative province."<sup>129</sup>

Schlafly and LaHaye defined women's autonomy within conservative causes, but each did so through varying avenues. Researching the approaches that LaHaye and Schlafly took with their activism demonstrates that American conservatism cannot be viewed through a single lens. LaHaye flipped the script and used submission as a form of active autonomy that helped her direct her life, her belief system, and guide others to do the same. This redefinition of agency inside of conservative frameworks connected with conservative women who were opposed to feminism as the only option for women's empowerment. LaHaye's argument that women's social position was not one of inferiority or discrimination illustrates how LaHaye created a sense of empowerment through conservative ideologies. Moreover, LaHaye offered justifications for women's agency inside of conservative causes in a way that evangelical men did not. LaHaye's organization, Concerned Women for America is still widely active and continues to push conservative ideas, support conservative candidates, and participate in popular conservative

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<sup>129</sup> CWA Newsletter, 1993. Group Research Inc MSS, Series I, Box 90, Concerned Women for America File, p. 43, Columbia University Library

media. Although LaHaye no longer heads the organization, her work still continues to have major influence in conservative politics today.

## CONCLUSION

While some may argue that in many ways the work of Phyllis Schlafly and Beverly LaHaye was a reaction to events such as Second Wave Feminism, the Equal Rights Amendment or *Roe v. Wade*, the activism from conservative women throughout the second half of the twentieth century was more than just an immediate backlash; it was a careful shaping of their own roles within conservative political ideologies. Women defined their own spaces in conservatism, as evidenced by the Minute Women who used their assigned roles as mothers to argue that they had a fundamental place in anticommunist activism – before the Equal Rights Amendment or the abortion debate. The focus on The Minute Women, Phyllis Schlafly and Beverly LaHaye, shows that women carved out their own spaces in the conservative movement and in doing so, they redefined their own agency inside of conservative ideology.

Schlafly and LaHaye each subverted feminist ideology in the process of defining themselves in conservatism. Conservative women did not align with the goals of women's liberation – and they certainly did not want to – but they also did not always align with how conservatism viewed women. Conservative women often went beyond simply being wives and mothers, even though men in the movement regulated women to idealized versions of those roles. Conservative women further expanded women's place in American politics, which may have perhaps met at least some feminist goals. Women conservatives created a wider variety of avenues for women's agency in the era. Including conservative women in historical discourse is

imperative because their inclusion allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of women's history.

The women in this research determined their own definitions of womanhood, femininity, morality, and domesticity. Each woman also determined how those themes related to each other in conservatism. Women such as LaHaye reinvented notions of equality and inferiority to serve her specific arguments and belief systems. Examining the intricacies of conservative women's approaches uncovers the need to understand conservative women's activism as more than a simply a backlash, more than just housewife populism. Conservative women should not be viewed as passive figures; they were extremely active, intentional political agents. The strategies these women used in order to craft their own type of autonomy within conservative frameworks were complex and layered.

The intense moral conviction that conservatism carried in the twentieth century has developed into new intensity today. Phyllis Schlafly's creation, the Eagle Forum, on their 2021 website conveys that "Eagle Forum stands for... Life, Family, Religion, and Border Security."<sup>130</sup> The connections to Schlafly's ideologies are clear: protection of the nuclear family, capitalist interests, and the Christian religion. Schlafly's messages are still present, but her work took on the influences of current conservatism. Women and the Equal Rights Amendment continue to be one of the topics that Eagle Forum is passionate about. In an article on their website about the ERA, Eagle Forum claims that the amendment is still "bad for women" and that the recent increased focus on including transgender and nonbinary people in conversations about the amendment means that "men identifying as women will be legally allowed to usurp women's

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<sup>130</sup> Eagle Forum, <https://eagleforum.org/> (2021). Accessed April 28, 2021.

rights.”<sup>131</sup> Additionally, Beverly LaHaye’s group, the Concerned Women for America, has a website that actively emphasizes conservative Christian values that are at times very far-right.<sup>132</sup> The CWA website has a similar section about “erasing women” through the “Equality Act” that moved through congress, which in the eyes of CWA, “overrules the truth about being created male and female.”<sup>133</sup> The current state of CWA reflects how older conservative conversations about gender have developed into the conservatism of today.

As conservatism has continued to develop, the coded language used in right-wing claims has continued to evolve. What conservatives in the 1970’s labeled “the protection of Judeo-Christian values” has moved to a renewed emphasis on the language of “patriotism”<sup>134</sup> – which has as much to do with white supremacy as it does with American exceptionalism. Likewise, ideas around gender have also evolved, as evidence by the current websites of Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America. This evolution is traceable. In the 1970’s, feminism was portrayed as threatening to motherhood. The later gay rights movement made conservatives uncomfortable, as homosexuality broke gender norms. Currently, there are conservatives in state legislatures trying to pass laws limiting the rights and autonomy of transgender children.<sup>135</sup> There continues to be an issue with viewing people who might identify differently as whole persons, who deserve to live full lives as themselves.

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<sup>131</sup> “The ERA ERAs Women!” Eagle Forum. (March 12, 2021). Accessed May 8, 2021. <https://eagleforum.org/publications/alerts/2021-archives/the-era-erases-women.html>

<sup>132</sup> Concerned Women for America, <https://concernedwomen.org> (2021). Accessed April 28, 2021.

<sup>133</sup> “Erasing Women.” Concerned Women for America. <https://concernedwomen.org/erasing-women/> (2021). Accessed May 8, 2021.

<sup>134</sup> Alana Wise, “Trump Announces ‘Patriotic Education’ Commission, A Largely Political Move.” *NPR*, Sept. 2020. Accessed April 22, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/17/914127266/trump-announces-patriotic-education-commission-a-largely-political-move>.

<sup>135</sup> “Anti-Trans Youth Sports Ban Passes in Florida House of Representatives.” *ACLU Florida*. April 14, 2021. Accessed April 22, 2021. <https://www.aclufl.org/en/press-releases/anti-trans-youth-sports-ban-bill-passes-florida-house-representatives>



Millions of Americans perpetuate and build on conservative rhetoric without fully realizing that they exist in a larger historical conversation. The issues America faces now, while they may be different, carry the same themes, and many of the same roots. The present moment looks strikingly similar to the past. It would serve researchers to investigate what approaches current conservative women are using, and how they have molded the strategies of past activists. My argument that The Minute Women, Schlafly, and LaHaye defined their own specific autonomy through conservatism invites other researchers to add that layer of complexity to discussions of American women's history. This layer of complexity should also be applied to the current moment. Do today's right-wing women still create agency through their participation in conservative ideologies? If so, what does their agency look like? How are current women conservatives defining their arguments? What do they gain from their participation in the present moment?

The traces of The Minute Women, Phyllis Schlafly and Beverly LaHaye are ever-present and influential. Scholar Michelle Nickerson argues that "it is far less useful for our understanding of conservatism to evaluate the true or false combination of political, social and economic forces shaping the consciousness of its adherents than examining how those subjects came to see the world as they actually saw it."<sup>136</sup> To further Nickerson's argument, examining how conservative women viewed their world and why forces us to confront the whole of American politics and the structures that make up the American political system. Confronting the realities of political structures is essential because as conservative ideologies are still taking shape, women continue to play active roles in their development.

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<sup>136</sup> Michelle M. Nickerson, "The "Conservative Sex: Women and the Building of a Movement," in *Mothers of Conservatism*, 136-168, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 2012), 170

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