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Carryn Leto
Regis University

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UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT

The Converged Experiences of the “Woman Hater” and the “Chosen Feminist”: Thematic Analysis of the Political Experiences of Gloria Steinem and Phyllis Schlafly in the 1970s

Carryn Leto

Regis University: Undergraduate Senior Thesis

Introduction

2016, ST. Louis

At a presidential rally for the endorsement of Donald Trump, a 92 year old Phyllis Schlafly was aided across the podium by two gentlemen. As she sorted through her papers she began:

*I think he has the courage and the energy...in order to bring some changes, to do what the grassroots want him to do because this is a grassroots uprising. We've been following the losers for so long...now we've got a guy who is going to lead us to victory... This year we have the candidate who really will give us a choice not an echo.*¹

Those who are unfamiliar with Phyllis Schlafly may see this as an attempt by the Republican Party to receive votes from the evangelical religious groups for the 2016 presidential nominee Donald Trump. But those who know the political history of Phyllis Schlafly, can see this as a glimmer into the past and mistake it for the 40 year old Schlafly standing on stage endorsing Barry Goldwater for the 1964 Presidential election. In 1964 she made the claim, “At certain climatic times in history there is such a thing as the irreplaceable man, in 1964 Barry Goldwater is the irreplaceable man. Only he has the knowledge...only he has the strength and leadership...only he can give us true and lasting peace without surrender.”² The grassroot uprising and the conservative ideals she stood behind in both 1964 and 2016 are equally as clear in her fight against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the 1970s. The question is how did this woman from St. Louis become a politically relevant voice in 1964 and sustain that relevancy to the end of her lifetime? What has made the Conservative movement continue to see Schlafly as a champion of their platform?

2021, NPR Interview

5 years later, during an NPR interview, Gloria Steinem is brought on as a guest to discuss the overturning of Roe v. Wade, the constitutional right to an abortion. She explains in the interview, “I guess I was not surprised by this present dilemma because controlling reproduction has always been the first step in any hierarchical or

¹Schlafly, Phyllis. “Phyllis Schlafly Endorses Donald Trump.”, St. Louis, MO, 2016. Phyllis Schlafly Eagle Forum, 2:45 min.

²Schlafly, Phyllis. Endorsement for Barry Goldwater, 1964. Phyllis Schlafly Eagle Forum, 23min.

authoritarian government. Those who are authoritarian or hierarchical in their outlook in this...still patriarchal time look to control the one thing they don't have, as the first effort in creating hierarchy." ³ Just as we saw the young Phyllis Schlafly uttering the same words in 2016 as she did in 1964, the young feminist activist, Steinem, that took center stage in the movement in the 1970s, comes through in this interview. As one of the leading voices in fighting for the passing of Roe v. Wade back in 1973, it is clear that the issues of abortion and Equal Rights for Women are far from over. Just as thought provoking in 1971 as she was in 2021, she delivered a roaring commencement address to the Smith Graduating class of '71, *The Politics of Women*, in which she argued:

*Perhaps we will have a chance for a third kind of period. After all we have had five thousand years of a kind of superiority of women, we have had five thousand years of patriarchy and racism, perhaps we have a chance for five thousand years of humanism. And perhaps, if we really live this revolution everyday, historians will look back at this time and say that for the first time the human animal stopped dividing itself up according to visible difference, according to race, according to sex, and started to look for the real, and the human potential inside.*⁴

To this day, as of early 2023, not only do abortion rights continue to be a topic of debate, but so does the achievement of political and legal equality for women; as seen by the continued reintroduction of the Equal Rights Amendment every year since 1982. Steinem's successes in the protection of abortion rights in 1973, could have been a starting point for the so-called "five thousand years of humanism" but the fact of the matter is that these debates are as alive as they were in 1971. It can be figured that the same address could be made at Smith College today, with minor tweaks, and have the same impact. Those who wish to join today's debates on equality between sexes can use the foundations established by Phyllis Schlafly and Gloria Steinem in the 1970s to inform the debates that exist today.

These women present two examples of what it was to be a politically and socially significant woman in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the process shattering the stereotypes accredited to women at the time. Clearly containing many politically contrasting ideals, both women did come from childhoods that were informed by strong female influences that valued educational opportunities for women, thus allowing for their independent conceptualization of what it meant to be a strong woman. Though painted as an enemy to all women because of her opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, by all definitions Phyllis Schlafly should be revered for her strength against the patriarchy and viewed as a feminist. And Gloria Steinem, who openly accepted the identity of a feminist, consistently contradicted the image of feminists that had persisted throughout the 1960s. No matter the criticism that surrounds both of these women, it is clear by their continued relevance in the 21st century that these women challenged the boundaries in which feminism was imagined for generations of politically active women. This paper will investigate the clear differences that set these women apart during their political activism in the 1970s, but will look past their differences to understand how their experiences converged. Both women were forced to navigate within the patriarchy that dominated politics, subsequently setting clear standards for the politics of respectability. When women, in this case Steinem and Schlafly, did not conform to what was deemed respectable and accepted by society

³Steinem, Gloria, and Mary Louise Kelly. *Activist Gloria Steinem Reflects on Abortion Rights as They Hang in the Balance*, 2021. NPR.

⁴Steinem, Gloria. *The Politics of Women: Smith Commencement Address Speech*, 1971. Smith College, 16-17.

then the dominant group would resort to marginalization, defamation, and the use of violent language or personal attacks to force these women to conform.

Schlaflly's Political Determination

The demanding, collected, and albeit intimidating persona that Phyllis Schlaflly carried on the talk shows that she attended in the 1970s is a testament to her education and pursuit of a political career immediately out of college. Schlaflly grew up in a Great Depression household that valued education for Phyllis and her sister Odile. Her mother and grandmother taught them the importance of being educated women, but equally as important, emphasizing the importance of cultural refinement and family.⁵ Though the Great Depression limited the educational opportunities for many, especially women, Phyllis' mom, Dadie, took a job outside the home to ensure that her daughters received a Sacred Heart education. This form of education required a large tuition, in return for a private, Catholic, classical education, that greatly emphasized the teaching of Latin, French, and Christian doctrine.⁶ This education laid the groundwork for her most effective tools in the successes of her political career: her typewriter and demanding voice. She began earning praise for her writing abilities as early as the sixth grade.⁷ Throughout her education she was often referred to as meticulous, ambitious, well-liked by peers, and constantly striving to be the best student in the class.⁸ But equally as important to the rigorous classroom education she received was emphasis upon home economics and best methods to running a household. This allowed Phyllis to be able to conceptualize the duality of being a stay-at-home mother. An identity that was not one of subjugation or discrimination, but one that involved an equal partnership within the family structure. Clear distinct roles between the partners, but not one held above the other.⁹

Though Schlaflly's Conservative political beliefs will not be developed until later in her college career, her father, Bruce, was known to speak at the dinner table with his daughters and wife about political ideology and world events. During the Depression, and after Bruce lost his job in 1930, the dinner conversations revolved around their devotion to the Republican Party and general distrust of FDR and the New Deal.¹⁰ He was also an avid reader, known to frequently quote Shakespeare.¹¹ Her younger sister, Odile, explained, "I would say that my father's politics had an enormous effect on Phyllis, because she admired and respected him very much. Phyllis wasn't very verbose, ever. She would just take it all in. She would always take things in, just listen very quietly to him— and remember."¹² The development of her ability to sit patiently, listening and digesting the arguments of her opponents during debates later in her career, can be attested to her ability to do so at the dinner table at a young age. While many other children would tune out the grown up talk at the table, Phyllis was known to soak it all in and come to develop her own political stances later in her educational career.

⁵Critchlow, Donald. *Phyllis Schlaflly and Grassroots Conservatism*, Princeton University Press, 2005,19.

⁶Felsenthal, Carol. *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority*. First. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, INC., 1981, 15.

⁷Ibid., 39.

⁸Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlaflly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 22.

⁹Falsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority*, 51.

¹⁰Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlaflly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 21.

¹¹Falsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority*, 21.

¹²Ibid., 22.

From Dinner Table to Redefining the Republican Party

Schlaflly looked to begin her college education at Maryville College, an affiliate Catholic University to the Religious of the Sacred Heart. However, not finding it stimulating enough she transferred to Washington University and eventually attended Rutgers, an affiliate school to Harvard, to pursue a law degree.¹³ Upon graduation she took off to Washington D.C. right after VJ day, getting a job at the American Enterprise Association. This group was evidence of the emergence of a modern conservatism after WW2 which introduced Phyllis to ideological opposition to the New Deal and to the development of modern conservatism.¹⁴ Her introduction to these postwar political movements helped pave her way to entering the local political scene in the early 1950s. Prior to her run for Congress, her attention to detail and forceful speaking abilities was already being noted within the Conservative ring. At a time, while working for the St. Louis Union Trust Company, she was assigned to give lectures to various women's groups on the importance of estate planning and financial investment. It was reported that not only were her lectures educational and direct, but also comforting.¹⁵ She emphasized the importance of supplying financial information to women to ensure that they were contributors within the household even if they choose a life of being a homemaker. This continues to emphasize Schlaflly's understanding of the role of the wife in the family dynamic.

It is important to take note of an important change in her life that occurred in 1949, her marriage to Fred Schlaflly. At the time of their meeting Fred was a successful lawyer at a leading law firm in Alton, Illinois, having graduated from Georgetown for his bachelors and Harvard with a law degree.¹⁶ Unsurprising, Fred was also politically conservative, as well as Roman Catholic. Though it can be discerned from his avid letter writing throughout his life, which includes exchanges with many key Republican politicians, such as Richard Nixon, he belonged more to the Old Right than Phyllis did. However, his ideals were set in promotion of private enterprise, absolute opposition to communism, distrust of centralized government, and the importance of individual rights, which were beliefs shared by Phyllis as well.¹⁷ Just as Schlaflly's father belonged to the Old Right that despised FDR and his New Deal, Fred belonged to the same group that collectively despised socialism and internationalism, which they believed FDR embodied.¹⁸

Upon marriage, she made a lifestyle change that was cohesive with her personal set of values and politics; she became a homemaker. Though she remained an active volunteer in community activities, such as the Illinois Federation of Republican Women and the Daughters of the American Revolution, the home remained her primary focus. The so-called "perfect" home life that she possessed, included a big home, prominent husband, financially well-off, and on the road to having 6 healthy children, only strengthened her conservative values.¹⁹ Though presented to the nation as this super-mom who was capable of sustaining an active political career all while being able to make it home for dinner every night, it is not quite so simple. It is important to note that though Schlaflly was a mother to six, she was able to be so career oriented because she had the ability to have hired help who assisted in the cooking and the cleaning. This

¹³Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlaflly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 22.

¹⁴Ibid.,25.

¹⁵Ibid.,30.

¹⁶Ibid., 32.

¹⁷Ibid.,35.

¹⁸Ibid.,34

¹⁹Ibid., 33.

does not diminish her as a mother but rather gives more context to who she truly represented through her politics. Though a defender of the stay-at-home mom, she truly is a defender of the affluent stay-at-home who has the ability to work outside of the household because of her privileged financial situation. She did not promote the position of the mothers who did not have access to educational opportunities and were given no alternative to being a stay at home mom.

Despite stepping into the role of homemaker, Fred continued to assist in furthering his wife's political education; which involved, "brainstorming sessions that go from early in the morning until late at night", culminating into the creation of a "happy intellectual partnership", according to Phyllis.²⁰ She was able to receive the intellectual stimulation amidst the gratification that she received from being a successful mother. In an interview Phyllis explained being a homemaker as "not a perch for lounging around downing bonbons and receiving insipid callers. Women are special because they bear and raise children, make breakfast, keep the hearth burning, scrub the bathroom floor, nurse a sick child through the night- and perhaps, work a full-time job."²¹ She did not view motherhood and the home as a prison but rather a position of privilege that only women could excel at. Her relationship with Fred and with her identity as a homemaker allowed her to stay politically influential, beginning officially in the early 1950s.

In 1951, Fred Schlafly was approached by the Madison County Republican Central Committee Chairman who hoped that he would run in the Republican primary for Congress in Illinois. However, Fred refused and they turned to Phyllis to take on the mission.²² In 1952, Phyllis won the nomination as the Republican candidate for the 21st Congressional District in Illinois and quickly gained national attention. The image of a small-town Illinois housewife challenging the male-dominated system spread throughout the country. Her campaign was framed in the media as the pursuit of the "average housewife", "Alton housewife", or "powder-puff candidate", who was facing off against tough male opponents.²³ She made it clear throughout her campaign that she was not pursuing a congressional seat to specifically fight against the patriarchy but rather, she saw women as being moral superiors to men who had a specific role in politics, to supply a virtuous and clean government.²⁴ Though her position of being a stay-at-home mom running for Congress gained the media attention, it was sustained through her avid debating skills. Media stories began highlighting her intelligence, emphasizing how she was quick witted, well-spoken, and a sharp debater.²⁵ It also came to the public's attention that she ran with no campaign manager or staff. She personally wrote, typed, and distributed all of her speeches and press releases, as well as arranging all speaking engagements, while making it very clear that she always return home for dinner.²⁶ Though a fresh face to the political scene, this form of campaigning stayed with her during her entire political career. When speaking on her STOP ERA campaign strategies in the 1970s she discussed that she did not "have any paid STOP ERA staff, a public-relations agent, a press secretary, or a professional fund-raiser... The only reason somebody would work against ERA is because she

²⁰Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*,32.

²¹Falsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority*, 27.

²²Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 37.

²³Ibid., 48.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 49.

²⁶Ibid.

really believed in what she was doing”.²⁷

Continuing through her congressional bid, Phyllis continued to astound the American public through her techniques. She hoped to usher in a new age of the Republican party, where the powers of the big government would be limited and the American public would get rid of “political leaders who have adopted the immoral doctrines of expediency and the end-justifies-the-means philosophy”.²⁸ A majority of her political agenda throughout the 1950s and 60s revolved around a hard anti-communist stance. She can be accredited with her ability to make accessible the ideas and literature of anti-communist authors to Grassroots Conservatives. In 1957, she published *A Reading list for Americans* which included a bibliographical guide to anti-communist literature which included a diverse array of literature to educate Americans on the specifics of Communism.²⁹ During this congressional run, she also introduced many of her opinions on US military intervention in the Korean War; which would reappear during the Vietnam war as well. Within her speeches she deemed the Korean war as “Truman’s unconstitutional War” but heavily expressed the idea that since America was in the war, then they needed to strengthen the military and increase defense spending to come out of it victorious. The intensification of the war that she called for, was an opinion that was similarly expressed by General MacArthur prior to being removed from command by Truman.³⁰ She expressed the worry that the proxy wars waged on the periphery was part of the Soviet Union’s strategy to drain the USA’s resources. As well as claiming that the wars were used by liberals to expand government influence and reduce the individual rights of Americans.³¹ These are two themes that would influence her writings throughout the remainder of the Cold War.

When debating or giving speeches, she was always straight to the point and blunt about political issues, especially the Korean War and the role of the UN during the early 50s. However, because of her extreme preparedness and knowledge on the topics being debated, Schlafly was forced to find the balance between not going too far with aggressive attacks against Democratic failures without being seen as a know-it-all attempting to embarrass her opponents.³² This does not mean that she ever took it easy on her opponents. Her democratic opponent to the Illinois congressional seat, Melvin Price, initially refused to debate Schlafly in public but frequently got roped into such events. When placed on the same stage as one another their differences were greatly emphasized. Her mastery of facts, self-assuredness, and sense of slight self-righteousness openly frustrated her opponents on stage.³³ Though seemingly doctrinaire, intolerant, and self-righteous to her opponents, her supporters eagerly gravitated towards her, hopeful of the vigor, intelligence, and youthfulness that Schlafly could bring to the party. Even opposing party newspapers highlighted her abilities, including the East St. Louis Journal, which stated that Phyllis had “conducted the most vigorous campaign any opponent Mr. Price ever has faced, awakening him to the evils of being a rubber stamp for the Democratic party leadership. In salute to Mrs. Schlafly, we thank her for that.”³⁴

Though not surprising, Schlafly lost the election in a landslide but she had solidified

²⁷Falsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority*, 260.

²⁸Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 50.

²⁹Ibid., 39.

³⁰Ibid., 54.

³¹Ibid., 55.

³²Ibid., 55.

³³Ibid., 58.

³⁴The Country Campaign, East St. Louis Journal, November 2, 1962.

a position of relevance within Republican party political circles. Through her avid debating and public speaking skills she emerged as the most sought after female speaker in the Illinois Republican circles.³⁵ The skills that she introduced and strengthened in her 20s are what allowed her to remain relevant during the late 1950s and 1960s, as the Republican Party went through serious reconstruction and why she was so influential in the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment. She knew how to address an audience, how to get her voice out there; even with poorly funded campaigns, and was tireless in her fight for what she believed in.

”Why Rely on a Man When I can Rely on Myself?”

Just as Schlafly’s education and political development can be tied back to her mother’s push for educational opportunities for women and her father’s political talk at the dining room table, Steinem was deeply impacted by the relationship that she had with her parents. Gloria was born to Leo and Ruth Steinem on March 25, 1934, nine years after her sister Susanne was born.³⁶ Her mother Ruth had an outstanding impact on Gloria’s future career as she too was college educated and pursued a career in journalism. Ruth initially majored in math but came to get her M.A. in History to become a teacher, which according to her mother Marie, was the only profession for a woman to go into.³⁷ In a deal struck with her mother, Ruth promised to try teaching for a year and if she did not enjoy it then she would be able to pursue a career in journalism. She evidently did not come to love teaching but instead came to work as a reporter for the Toledo News Bee, or later referred to as The Toledo Blade, coming to realize her love of journalism, one that would be blessed upon her daughter in the future. The importance of women being able to support themselves and not rely on a husband, was a virtue that began with Marie, Gloria’s maternal grandmother, and was steadily passed through the family landing on Gloria. Equally as important, Gloria’s paternal Grandmother Pauline paved the way for Gloria’s future activism work as she worked for the Women’s Suffrage Movement in the 1920s. She impressively had the opportunity to address Congress on the topic of women’s suffrage, was the first woman elected to the Toledo board of education, and was one of two American delegates invited to the International Council on Women in Switzerland in 1908.³⁸ Gloria was blessed with role models that executed their lives outside of the social expectations for women allowing them to acquire independence, self-sufficiency, and opportunities to pursue their educations, all qualities that Gloria championed as well.

Gloria’s hyper self-sufficiency would have been applauded by her grandmother Marie who repeatedly encouraged her daughters to stay single, make a living, and support themselves, a life that Gloria championed on the national stage. However, not only did she learn valuable lessons about the opportunities for women she also learned equally as valuable lessons about men, from her father Leo. Throughout her childhood Leo never held a steady job and was constantly pursuing a new scheme to make money that usually never panned out. He was also constantly away from home, on the road, always sending money home to his wife and two daughters, but ultimately being unable to settle down as he craved inconsistency and excitement. The unreliability and unpredictability that her father created of her childhood encouraged her to always live

³⁵Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 61.

³⁶Heilbrun, Carolyn. *The Education of a Woman: The Life of Gloria Steinem*. The Dial Press, 1995, 15.

³⁷Ibid.,6.

³⁸Ibid.,8.

in the present and go with the flow. This is also one of the main reasons why she pursued free, fun, and exciting men that mirrored her father.³⁹ Steinem also credits her ability to choose a financially unstable career because of her father, “it helped me personally, in the sense of learning to live with insecurity. I do not know that I would have had the courage to become a freelance writer with no guaranteed source of income if it had not been for my being brought up that way.”⁴⁰ Her relationship with her mother Ruth, also created a certainty and refusal for Gloria that she would not be chained down in a household, as she was forced to care for her ailing mother throughout her childhood. Ruth began experiencing panic attacks in 1929 which were treated with chloral hydrate, a drug that caused dependency, hallucinations, and visions. From this point on, Ruth was in and out of treatment and mental health institutions to “treat” her anxiety and depression, and upon the divorce of her parents in 1944 the responsibility of caring for Ruth fell on Gloria and Susanne.⁴¹ Gloria reflects on her mother explaining, “For many years, I . . . never imagined my mother any way other than. . . someone to be worried about and cared for; an invalid who lay in bed with eyes closed and lips moving in occasional response to the voices only she could hear.”⁴²

On top of this, as Gloria also explains the importance of the daughter-father relationship for developing young women, “some young women. . . It also comes from her childhood, because she has got the message from her father that if she is no subordinate in a certain way, she’ll pay the price of not being loved, and that’s deep. I did not have that. My father was a very loving person, and he certainly let me be my own self, so I was lucky.”⁴³ Growing up in the 1940s, most young women were not brought up by family members who allowed them to question the social expectations for women, but Gloria was continually taught the importance of self-reliance, educating oneself, and always fighting for your beliefs and opportunities.

Finding her Feminist Voice

As the Second Wave Feminist movement struggled to find a cohesive, unifying voice for the movement in the late 1960s, Gloria Steinem was working to fortify her own Feminist awakening. While Friedan was founding the National Organization for Women in 1966 (NOW) and the organization of the more radical women’s movement was coalescing Steinem was busy actively supporting Cesar Chavez and his establishment of the National Farm Workers Association.⁴⁴ Though remaining relatively quiet on Feminist issues up until this point Steinem found her voice speaking for the Civil Rights Movement, the Farmworkers movement, and the movement to end the Vietnam War.⁴⁵ As of 1969, as a writer for the New York magazine, Stienem was finally allowed by her editors to begin writing about political issues but at any point if she seemed to be integrating any Feminist stances into her writing, no matter how mild, she would be taken aside by her fellow reporters, all men, and told to “not on any account to let her-

³⁹Duncan, Lauren. *Gloria Steinem: The Childhood Foundations of a Feminist*. Journal of Personality 91, no. 1 (May 12, 2022): 198.

⁴⁰Steinem, Gloria. (2007, September 28). [Interview by E. C. White; Transcript of video recording]. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, 26.

⁴¹Duncan, Lauren. “Gloria Steinem: The Childhood Foundations of a Feminist.”, 201.

⁴²Steinem, Gloria. *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983, 30.

⁴³Steinem, Gloria. (2007, September 28). [Interview by E. C. White; Transcript of video recording], 76.

⁴⁴Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 162.

⁴⁵Ibid., 163-164.

self be identified with those crazies.”.⁴⁶ This would be the world that Steinem would step into, one in which the media supported the portrayal of the current Feminist movements as overly emotional, crazy, and full of anger.

It has been agreed upon by most scholars that Steinem’s Feminist awakening can be attributed to her attendance of a speakout in 1969 on the topic of abortion hosted by the Redstockings’, a radical feminist group. This event involved 12 women explaining their experiences of having had an abortion to an audience of 300 plus people.⁴⁷ And in that audience was Gloria Steinem. The experiences of those women brought her back to 1957 as a 22 year old waitress trying to get by in London begging a doctor to perform an abortion for a pregnancy that would disrupt her fellowship opportunity in India.⁴⁸ She explains this as the “the great blinding lightbulb” moment in her Feminist awakening. Further explaining, “it is truly amazing how long we can go on accepting myths that oppose our own lives, assuming instead that we are the odd exceptions. But once the light began to dawn, I couldn’t understand why I hadn’t figured out any of this before.”.⁴⁹ Having felt alone, and ashamed of her abortion experience for years, Steinem was emboldened by the courage that it took for those women to speak out. Consciousness raising is a continuous process⁵⁰, though the abortion speakout was a peak moment in her personal journey to Feminist understanding, the years that she had spent speaking out for the rights of African Americans, Hispanic farm laborers, and soldiers in Vietnam paved the way for this development.

As Gloria solidified her Feminist ideals, the woman by her side that encouraged and inspired her was Dorothy Pitman Hughes, a pioneering Black Feminist. Upon meeting in June of 1969, the two women came to be synonymous with the Feminist platform as they spoke on the matter, together, from 1970 on.⁵¹ However, 1970’s Steinem clearly needed the growth and development to become the voice that the movement so desperately needed. When initially invited to speak on Feminist topics as early as 1969, Steinem reported being too fearful to accept alone but would only accept if she was able to speak alongside Pitman. In one of Steinem’s first major speaking engagements at the Women’s National Democratic Club, on the subject of “After Civil Rights— Women’s Liberation”, she reported how terrified she was, almost to the point of canceling at the last second.⁵² Steinem began her political activism through the journalistic form and it would clearly take some time to develop the confidence needed to be the face of a national movement.

Just as Schlafly gained national media attention from her debates against Melvin Price in her run for Congress in 1950, Gloria had a moment in 1971 in which we see a dramatic change in her public speaking skills when she was invited to give the Commencement address at Smith college. The message that she gave the graduating class of ‘71 is referred to as “The Politics of Women”, and to the horror of the Smith Administration was not the version they approved.⁵³ It seems that Steinem had fully decided through her Feminist awakening that the Women’s Liberation movement was deserving of her voice. The speech addressed topics ranging from the illegality of abortion, politics of religion, volunteerism, unpaid domestic labor in the home, the

⁴⁶Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 180.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Steinem, Gloria. *Activist Gloria Steinem reflects on abortion rights as they hang in the balance*, December 9, 2021.

⁴⁹Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 171.

⁵⁰Ibid, 166.

⁵¹Ibid, 180.

⁵²Ibid.,183

⁵³Ibid., 198.

masculine mystique, the myths of women inferiority, and the list goes on. The speech is a call to the fight for the Smith graduates to say, “No more” to second class citizenship. As she so gracefully and directly expresses with the following:

*The truth is as women realized in abolitionist times and as I think there is a great effort to keep us from realizing today white women have more common cause with other second class groups in this society than they do politically with white men. We have more to gain by making those kinds of coalitions except of course with those white men whom we welcome who are willing to give up their white skin and their male privilege. If we are to change this society in the deepest kind of way, then all of us who have been marked by looking different for whatever reason. . . must stand up together and say, “No more.”*⁵⁴

This speech marks the Liberal shift in the Second Wave Feminist Movement that was encouraged by speakers like Gloria Steinem. She offered a perspective that linked the suffering of African Americans and women, with a clear understanding of the connection between these two groups’ fights for equality throughout history. She does make it clear that she does not “mean to compare the suffering” because throughout history “black people lose their lives and women lose their identity”, focusing instead on the similarity in the methods used to oppress the two groups.⁵⁵ This awareness contrasted starkly with the homogeneity of the Feminist movement prior to the 1970s under Betty Friedan. Though applauded by the graduating class for speaking honestly, reactions from staff and parents ranged from horror to disgust from her use of “crude” language and claimed “taking advantage of a captive audience and forcing them to listen to such filthy drivel”.⁵⁶ Though unsure about being a leading voice for the Feminist movement, this moment marks the moment in which she chose the path of becoming a valued voice in this debate on equal rights. Emboldened by the presence of her own graduating class and the generation of young women in front of her, she used this commencement address as an opportunity to address her own personal Feminist Consciousness awareness and assist in that process for the women in the crowd. Though painted as overly emotional by critics, this marks an important moment in which the Second Wave Feminist movement gained the voice of Gloria Steinem.

Politics of the 1960s and 1970s

The Liberal Social Movements

Now that a better understanding of the backgrounds and politics of Steinem and Schlafly have been presented it is equally as important to understand the political climate of their time. As this research is focused on the late 1960s through the mid to late 1970s, it is important to understand that this period is defined by key societal, political, and cultural upheavals that have startling impacts to this day. At this point, the United States is in the midst of the Vietnam war, and the subsequent Anti-War movement that was specifically relevant within younger generations. On top of this, these women entered the political sphere at the end of the decade-long fight for equality for African Americans, with the Civil Rights Movement. Though not as well-known to American history, this was also a moment for Migrant workers with the creation of the United Farm Workers of America movement, as well as the Gay Liberation Movement. The expansion in political activism marks a moment in history in which marginalized

⁵⁴Steinem, Gloria. *The Politics of Women: Smith Commencement Address*, 7.

⁵⁵Ibid., 6.

⁵⁶Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 197.

groups in the United States took advantage of the expanded concepts of freedom and equality.

For the purpose of this argument, the focus will be upon the fight for equality by American women, with the coalescing of the Second Wave Feminist Movement. The First Feminist Movement took place in the late 19th century and early 20th century with the focus on the concept of suffrage for all women, which was achieved through the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1919. The Second Wave was heavily influenced into formation by the publication of the *Feminist Mystique* written by the Feminist writer and activist Betty Friedan in 1963. The main goal of which was to challenge the assumption that women are completely fulfilled by their housework, marriage, and sexual lives, leaving no desire for education or careers outside the household. Friedan explains:

*In almost every professional field... women are still treated as second-class citizens. It would be a great service to tell girls who plan to work in society to expect this subtle, uncomfortable discrimination-tell them not to be quiet, and hope it all goes away, but fight it. A girl should not expect special privileges because of her sex, but neither should she "adjust" to prejudice and discrimination.*⁵⁷

The hope for the movement was to expand equality and access for women in areas of employment, marriage laws, education, and overall protection under the law. Betty Friedan with this publication, as well as the creation of the National Organization for Women (NOW), set the stage for debates on equality between the sexes to come the forefront of national awareness and attention, allowing for the voices of Gloria Steinem and Phyllis Schlafly to have a platform to stand upon in the early 1970s.

Rise of the Right

The 1960s marked an important shift and polarization in American politics that had been unseen since the 1890s. As discussed briefly in the introduction, Phyllis Schlafly publicly voiced support for ultra-conservative Barry Goldwater for the Republican nominee for 1964 Presidential election, as seen in her book, *A Choice Not an Echo*. Her book encouraged the Republican party to change their nomination from moderate Nelson Rockefeller to Goldwater, as she highlighted actions by several Republican political leaders, including Rockefeller, for putting figurehead candidates in charge that could be easily manipulated.⁵⁸ However, when Goldwater faced a crushing defeat, Schlafly became a scapegoat for the failure and she quickly became marginalized and blacklisted by the Republican party. Prior to the election, Schlafly was the clear choice for the next president of the National Federation of Republican Women (NFRW), but instead the organization went with Southern Californian Gladys O'Donnell, deeming Schlafly too conservative and radical.⁵⁹ As we will see with many of the counterattacks by the Feminist movement against Schlafly, the more moderate Republican party members that opposed Schlafly's conservatism resorted to personal attacks. During her run for NFRW President, she was labeled by her opponents as a "brainy snob who ought to stay home with her husband and six children"⁶⁰ and that her aspirations as president were neglectful to the welfare of her children. Not based on any real reasons

⁵⁷Friedan, Betty. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. Modern Classics. London, England: Penguin Classics.

⁵⁸Erwin, Elizabeth. *Evangelical Equality: The Feminism of Phyllis Schlafly*. Lehigh Preserve, April 27, 2012, 10.

⁵⁹Ibid., 11.

⁶⁰Erwin, Elizabeth, *Evangelical Equality*, 13.

for opposition, the turn to shallow personal attacks represents the attempts by the Republican party to marginalize Schlafly. Despite the marginalization attempts, Schlafly was not deterred and allied herself with the women who supported her failed bid for the NFRW and other religious and conservative organizations, culminating into the creation of the Eagle Forum, a conservative political group.

Conservative groups that sprung up in the late 1960s and early 1970s aimed at addressing the concerns of the “Silent Majority”, a term used by Richard Nixon during his presidency, who had been silenced by the “vocal minority”.⁶¹ Their concerns consist of disappointment with the liberal welfare state established under LBJ, and the cultural movements that were threatening the pro-family foundations of the country, especially the Liberal Feminist movement.⁶² Schlafly and other conservative leaders can be accredited with playing a significant role in shifting the GOP towards the right, culminating in the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. But throughout the 1970s, Schlafly offered a space for the so-called “Silent Majority” to voice their concerns over the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, feminism, prayer in school, and homosexual rights.⁶³ These movements also encouraged a Christian-republican sensibility which focuses on the foundations and successes of the republic residing on the divine law of God. Therefore strengthening the idea that if there is corruption and moral weakness, the republic will be subsequently weak as well.⁶⁴ These ideas helped coalesce an interconnectedness between women from different faiths, including Protestants, Roman Catholics, Mormons, and Jews, that were focused on traditional societal values.⁶⁵ The Rise of the New Right, founded in conservatism, held detrimental impacts on the Feminist movement’s moment in the National media spotlight as it gave a place for Americans to voice their concerns on agenda items, like the Equal Rights Amendment.

Schlafly and Steinem’s Politics Converge

Both Gloria Steinem and Phyllis Schlafly were important political and social actors in the 1960s but it was not until the reintroduction of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the early 1970s that their voices came to reverberate throughout the country. Originally proposed in 1923, the ERA was unanimously endorsed by the National Woman’s Party at the Seneca Falls convention. Immediately following the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment the first wave Feminist group sought to end legal discrimination on the basis of sex in the areas of divorce, property, and employment with the passing of the ERA.⁶⁶ The official introduction of the ERA to Congress occurred on December 13, 1923 by Representative Daniel Read Anthony, Susan B. Anthony’s nephew and simply read:

*Article XX: Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.*⁶⁷

Many fail to understand how long the ERA has been up for debate but after its

⁶¹Nixon, Richard. Nixon’s “Silent Majority” Speech, 1969.

⁶²Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 15.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid, 17.

⁶⁵Ibid,19.

⁶⁶Ibid.,215.

⁶⁷“Proposing an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution,” December 13, 1923. National Archives Catalog.

introduction in 1923 it was reintroduced in Congress year after year, with specific emphasis in 1946, 1950, 1953, culminating into the debates seen in the 1970s. On all of these occasions there has always been strong support for achieving equal rights for women but the push back stems from the ambiguity of the language used in the amendment and the inability for anyone to give a cohesive understanding of what changes would actually occur from its passing.⁶⁸ There has been major debate on what “equal” is and what “appropriate legislation” entails. During the 1950 and ’53 debates, Senator Hayden introduced the idea of developing a dual legal system in which men and women would be protected differently under the law. He argued that women should be guaranteed the benefits of citizenship without the subsequent duties, like jury duty or being subject to the draft.⁶⁹ Unable to be passed by the House at this time, the ERA did not reappear on the national stage until 1970, a politically fervent time that fueled the debates that surrounded it. The newly organized National Organization for Women (NOW) championed by Betty Friedan voted to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment in 1967. The early political successes of the ERA at this time can be accredited to Representative Martha Griffiths who was successful in getting the amendment approved by the House in 1970, passing 352 to 15.⁷⁰ The ERA initially failed to be passed by the Senate but after being reapproved by the House in 1971 it passed through the senate in 1972 84 to 8. The suggested changes to the amendment to protect the traditional rights of women were denied by the Senate and the final wording of the amendment were as follows:

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

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

Section 3: This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification ⁷¹

However, the final step to ratifying the amendment relied on the ability for the women’s movement to achieve the 3/4 ratification by the states in 7 years. Within the first year of the passage, 30 of the required 38 states ratified the amendment making it seem that ratification would be a sure thing before the 7 year mark.⁷² What the women’s movement did not factor in was that a stay at home mom in Illinois, would have the power to defeat the amendment at such a late stage in the process. And that woman was none other than Phyllis Schlafly and her developed STOP ERA campaign. When first coming to speak out against the ERA in February of 1972, Schlafly came to represent the anti-feminist voice in the fight over the ERA in the following decade. Because of the seemingly cohesive unity on the ERA, the true changes that would be induced by the amendment were not raised. That is a gap that Schlafly attempted to fill. The debates for the next decade ranged from abortion, alimony, divorce, the draft, and the attack upon “the institution of the family”.⁷³

Schlafly’s voice was not the only one to appear. In May of 1970, Gloria Steinem

⁶⁸Brown, Barbara, Thomas Emerson, Gail Falk, and Ann Freedman. “The Equal Rights Amendment: A Constitutional Basis for Equal Rights for Women.” The Yale Law Journal Company 80 (April 1971), 886.

⁶⁹Ibid, 887.

⁷⁰Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 216.

⁷¹“Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of the United States Relative to Equal Rights for Men and Women,” January 18, 1972. National Archives Catalog.

⁷²Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 215.

⁷³Schlafly, Phyllis. “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” The Phyllis Schlafly Report. February 1972. Eagle Forum, 1.

stood in front of the United States Senate and presented her case for the passing of the ERA. She makes it clear from the beginning that though she has endured blatant discrimination based on her sex, that in reality she is lucky as a freelance writer in comparison to women who are wage-earners or housewives.⁷⁴ After addressing her own personal privilege, she approaches the topic by addressing the main myths and misconceptions that are used by opponents of the ERA to defame it. These include claims such as: women are biologically inferior to men, women already have social and legal equality, women have great economic power, and that children need full-time mothers. In her attempt to refute these claims she cites specific evidence, especially in the instance of economic inequality. Steinem explains that “the favorite male-chauvinist statistic” is the fact that 51 percent of shareholders in the United States are women, when in actuality the number of shares that these women hold are so low that they only amass to 18 percent of total shares owned. Further explaining, “the constantly repeated myth of our economic power seems less testimony to our real power than to the resentment of what little power we do have.”⁷⁵

It is important to note that she is addressing many of the key arguments that would be used and circulated by Phyllis Schlafly with the development of the STOP-ERA campaign. STOP standing for Stop Taking Our Privilege, was the rallying cry of the grassroots Conservative movement under Schlafly. As highlighted in her first feature of the Phyllis Schlafly Report, she made the definite claim, “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.”⁷⁶, a privileged position that was in danger in her opinion. Again, it is important to note that she is representing the perspective of a stay-at-home mom who would have the financial ability to hire help. In contrast, Steinem represents the belief that the “difference between two races or two sexes is much smaller than the differences to be found within each group”.⁷⁷ Therefore, not only would the passing of the ERA achieve Women’s Liberation but also Men’s Liberation, as it will save men from being forced to be the sole breadwinners and from the laws and customs that “decree that a man must carry his share by physical protection and financial support” because “women must bear the physical consequences of the sex act”, as explained by Schlafly.⁷⁸ The societal expectation placed on men to provide and care for his wife and family in all financial aspects, is just as confining as requiring women to take care of all domestic duties, in the opinion of Steinem. Another key argument used by Schlafly early in her political career, as well as through the ERA debates, was the concept that women are moral superiors to men, meaning they should have different expectations and laws governing their role in society and politics. Steinem outright refutes this in her address to Congress:

*Women are not more moral than men. We are only uncorrupted by power. But we do not want to intimidate men, to join this country as it is and I think our very participation will change it. Perhaps women elected leaders... will not be so likely to dominate... anybody who looks different from us. After all, we don't have our masculinity to prove.*⁷⁹

She is not calling for the protection of a privileged position for women, like Schlafly, or the outright dismantling of society and hatred of all men, but for the opportunity

⁷⁴Steinem, Gloria. *Testimony Before Senate Hearings on the Equal Amendment*, 1970. University of Maryland, 1.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁶Schlafly, Phyllis. “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?”, *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, 1.

⁷⁷Steinem, Gloria. *Testimony Before Senate Hearings on the Equal Amendment*, 4.

⁷⁸Schlafly, Phyllis. “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, 1.

⁷⁹Steinem, Gloria. *Testimony Before Senate Hearings on the Equal Amendment*, 5.

to exercise the power of choice for both sexes.

Role of Media in the Fight for the ERA

Though Schlafly and Steinem both came to utilize and understand the importance of television as a source of spreading their ideas and debating others on topics, such as the ERA, in the 1960s and 1970s, access to television and national media coverage was not equal. One of the biggest differences between the STOP ERA movement and the Second Wave Feminist movement was their focus on local level politics vs. national level politics. Phyllis Schlafly's STOP ERA movement was oriented around using methods outside of mass media forums. Described as a grassroots movement, Schlafly and her followers were focused on getting the word out to the everyday individuals, particularly women, in their communities. This resulted in political campaigning methods that included monthly distribution of newsletters that were personally written and typed by Schlafly herself, known as the *Phyllis Schlafly Report*. This also included home calls and letters asking for support against the ERA. Copies of her report circulated churches across the country and were highlighted on local television shows and radio stations.⁸⁰ As mentioned above, Schlafly had limited funding so she looked to a loyal group of women to assist in getting her word out, with little to no compensation. She did not look to ally herself with major political players but instead women who had pull at the local level.⁸¹ The first published *Phyllis Schlafly Report* debating the ERA was published in 1972, named "What's Wrong With the 'Equal Rights' for Women?". This newsletter marks her first public attack upon the ERA, and was later adapted into speeches for the STOP ERA campaign. Her writing style mirrors the same public speaking and debate techniques that she first championed in her 1950 congressional run; quick witted, straight to the point, and knowledgeable on the topic. In the following quote she highlights the Second Wave Feminist Movements access to national media coverage:

*In the last couple of years, a noisy movement has sprung up agitating for "women's rights." Suddenly, everywhere we are afflicted with aggressive females on television talk shows yapping about how mistreated American women are, suggesting that marriage has put us in some kind of "slavery," that housework is menial and degrading, and – perish the thought – that women are discriminated against. New "women's liberation" organizations are popping up, agitating and demonstrating, serving demands on public officials, getting wide press coverage always, and purporting to speak for some 100,000,000 American women.*⁸²

Schlafly is making the argument that the Women's Liberation movement is taking advantage of their national media coverage access and claiming that this is how all women feel. Whereas Schlafly, as she is more focused on local coverage and grassroots techniques, is attempting to be the voice of the people, the women who are the supposed slaves to the household. Though the New Right did use typical forms of media outlets, they worked to build non broadcast channels of media distribution including publishing houses, religious bookstores, direct mail, and newsletters.⁸³

Another important factor to consider is that the Women's Liberation movement

⁸⁰Erwin, Elizabeth. "Evangelical Equality: The Feminism of Phyllis Schlafly.", 22.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Schlafly, Phyllis. "What's Wrong With 'Equal Rights' for Women?" The Phyllis Schlafly Report, 2.

⁸³Bradley, Patricia. *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975*. The University Press of Mississippi, 2003, 261.

found most of its support in larger cities, such as New York City, which gave them access to large broadcasting companies. Robin Morgan, a key radical feminist member of the American Women's movement in the 1960s, highlights the reality of mass media distorting information due to media ownership patterns but continued to express the importance of mainstream media forums to distribute the feminist message.⁸⁴ This heavily influenced the tactics used by the movement which were heavily focused on getting the new, though controversial, ideas out to women everywhere and the best way to do so was through national broadcast methods. Further complicating the issue, the Women's Liberation Movement, in particular NOW President Betty Friedan, looked to mass media as the cause of creating unrealistic standards for women but fully understanding its ability to distribute information nationally and taking advantage of that. Friedan never tired of bringing to attention the artificial ways in which magazines constructed women, which ultimately forced women to conform to an image that makes them deny their minds.⁸⁵ Ellen Willis, writer for the *Village Voice* and the *New Yorker*, explains, "Publicity was not simply a vehicle for the movement; it was at the very center of what the movement needed to accomplish. And our efforts were very successful, despite the fact that the media (by no means always) distorted or were hostile to what we had to say".⁸⁶ Prior to the work of the STOP-ERA campaign it became common to hear the ERA being talked about positively on talk shows, news channels, and women's magazines. It was rare to hear any opposition to the ERA in mainstream media, whereas it was more prevalent to hear speculation on the possible outcomes from passing the legislation than ever questioning the Amendment as a whole.⁸⁷

Though gaining their moment in the national media spotlight, thanks to political support from the Carter Administration on the ERA⁸⁸, the spotlight also shined a light on the limitations of the movement. Most detrimental to the Women's movement and the passing of the ERA was the fragmentation because of a lack of consensus on agenda items and media goals, and inability to assign a cohesive leader.⁸⁹ The key agenda items that varied between the more radical Feminist groups vs. the Feminists who made up the "liberal takeover" of the movement, involved opinions on abortion laws, laws involving homosexual individuals, and the ERA. In the specific case of the ERA, most radical groups saw the ERA as unimportant because of its inability to incite revolutionary change for women in society.⁹⁰ Because of this fragmentation it was near to impossible to create a leader of the movement that could accurately represent the group as a whole. Though Friedan was often highlighted by mass media, by the end of her term as the NOW president she was surrounded by criticism by radicals, her own organization, and lesbians in and out of activist circles.⁹¹ The movement understood the limitations of having Friedan as a spokesperson, as she was often involved in controversial situations and gained negative publicity.⁹² In particular, she was caught up in several situations in which she attacked the character of lesbians in the movement, more radical members, and opposing leaders, like Phyllis Schlafly. By 1972, Friedan's power in the movement had almost completely faded and she

⁸⁴Ibid.,49.

⁸⁵Ibid.,17.

⁸⁶Bradley, Patricia. *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism*, 49.

⁸⁷Erwin, "Evangelical Equality", 27.

⁸⁸Ibid.,23.

⁸⁹Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism*, 4.

⁹⁰Ibid.,109.

⁹¹Ibid.,104.

⁹²Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism*,144.

even began to be booed at rallies in which she was scheduled to speak. Aware of her fading power, in an article published she claimed that the Feminist movement was at risk of being taken over by “man-haters, lesbians, pseudoradical infantilists and infiltrations”.⁹³

The waning power of Friedan can be attributed to the national media grasping onto a new face of the Feminist movement, Gloria Steinem. As described by many radical Feminists, Steinem reflected the “liberal takeover” of the Feminist agenda.⁹⁴ Though Steinem frequently agreed with her positions, Friedan criticized her for being a late arrival to the scene of the Women’s Liberation Movement. But the National Media did not care when Steinem entered the scene but quickly anointed her as the face of the movement. She was the media’s agreement to an acceptable feminist, as she was “feminine” in their eyes⁹⁵, which contrasted starkly with the portrayal of radical feminists as angry and emotional.⁹⁶ Though this was not an accurate representation of the array of voices that made up the movement, it is what was portrayed in the media. The images that made it into the newspapers and other media outlets were of stringy haired, braless women, with angry signs, assigned with captions like “angry-looking young women militants”⁹⁷ (San Francisco Examiner), “Militant women, thirsting for equal rights yesterday”⁹⁸ (The Boston Evening Globe), or “a small band of braless bubbleheads”⁹⁹ (Senator Jennings Randolph).

In her early speeches she showed the American public that a feminist could be calm, collected, and avoid conflict. It is interesting to note that the identity of the American Feminist was not one Steinem reached for but was forced into by the National Media. In the early 70s, “Steinem tried to avoid being identified as feminism’s spokeswoman, but the media knew news when they saw it, particularly if it looked like her.”¹⁰⁰ Though stepping into the role as spokesperson for the movement, she never attempted to gain political power within the movement. In a 1972 television broadcast on NBC News, “Meet the Press”, Steinem was asked if she would ever run for politics and she replied that she looks forward to working for strong women in politics but feels more comfortable with a typewriter.¹⁰¹ Aware that the media was using her as the acceptable Feminist she often attempted to shift the focus away from herself back to the movement. When asked to pose on the cover of Newsweek’s feature story, “The New Woman” in August of 1971, she refused and the newspaper was forced to secretly photograph her at a public event for their front cover.¹⁰²

The issue of fragmentation was not one that was experienced by the STOP-ERA movement. National media did not need to assign a leader or a face of the organization because there was one singular, obvious choice: Schlafly. Because of her labeled “radical” conservative ideals and her support of the failed Goldwater campaign she was marginalized by the Republican party in the early 1970s, further limiting her access to national media coverage.¹⁰³ Rather than being deterred, she focused on local support from women who were not major political players but had pull at the local level, as

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 187.

⁹⁶Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism*, 159.

⁹⁷Ibid.,117.

⁹⁸Ibid.,116.

⁹⁹Ibid.,119.

¹⁰⁰Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 186.

¹⁰¹“Gloria Steinem Meet the Press ERA.” Meet the Press. NBC, September 10, 1972, 18min.

¹⁰²Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 191.

¹⁰³Erwin, “Evangelical Equality”, 10.

well as other religious and conservative organizations.¹⁰⁴ She relied on individuals who were involved in the movement because they truly believed the passing of the ERA would negatively impact their lives. The extremely well organized movement had a cohesive and decisive leader at its helm. Her position was further solidified by the media attention she gained from public attacks from her opponents which opened the door to the national media platform that she had limited access to prior. Because of the belief that the ERA would effortlessly be ratified by the states, the pro-ERA developed an “air of invincibility” which urged them to offer opportunities to debate the legislation on live television. This was the moment in which the debate skills she championed as early as 1951 in her run for Congress, would come full circle. The plan by the Feminist movement to bring Schlafly into the spotlight backfired immediately when they were met by Schlafly’s fine tuned debating skills that often left her opponents frustrated.¹⁰⁵ As of 1975 she began to frequent television talk shows, even coming to do weekly television commentaries on CBS Morning News from 1974-1975. This officially awarded her an “air of legitimacy” on the national stage that she did not possess before, while subsequently pushing people to finally question the validity of the ERA and the image of Schlafly that the Feminist Movement had bolstered.¹⁰⁶ The spotlight that the Feminist Movement had attained on a national level was fading fast, despite the work of Steinem, and was being taken over by Schlafly and the STOP-ERA movement.

There is no need to wonder about Schlafly’s ability to be a unifying voice, as she naturally achieved this position within the Conservative Grassroots movement and through her establishment of the STOP ERA movement. Many even accredited the rise of the Right in the 1970s and the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 to her work at the grassroots level. From the beginning of her political career in 1950 she proved herself to be a fervent opponent that was willing to defend her way of life against anyone who stood in her way. The overzealous nature of the Feminist movement in their belief that the ERA would easily be ratified by the 38 required states was no match to Schlafly’s work at the local level to access the everyday citizens that would be impacted the most by the passing of the ERA. Her voice, whether in written and spoken form, became the STOP ERA movement. Though she was assisted by her closely anointed campaigning group, there was no one who rose to such prominence in speaking out about the ERA that would come close to the level of Phyllis Schlafly. Her preparedness, forceful nature, determination, and well-presented calmness that appeared in all of her writings and speeches was grasped onto by the media as she offered a strikingly different image of what it meant to be a politically succinct woman in the 1970s. Though consistently remembered by the Second Wave Feminist movement as the enemy to women, Phyllis Schlafly took to the stage in 1970 to protect the way of life of those she saw to be most harmed by the passing of the ERA; the stay at home mothers. She consistently pushed the notion of family values in which marriages are strengthened, children are raised, and mothers keep their wits to have the chance to develop emotional, social, and financial independence.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴Ibid, 22.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.,27.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.,28.

¹⁰⁷Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism*, 255.

Discussion and Conclusion: Convergence of Experiences

The Politics of Respectability

It would be easy to simply view Schlafly and Steinem's politics and their life experiences as having little to no overlap. Though they would disagree on everything from politics, to social expectations, to family values, etc., there is one clear overlap between the two women: their overall experiences as politically active women in the 1970s navigating and maneuvering in the political sphere that was male dominated and controlled. Painted as the "traitor to all women" and the "acceptable Feminist", their experiences are more greatly intertwined than, even they, would ever care to admit. To best understand their convergence, it is important to understand the concept referred to as the politics of respectability. Respectability politics refers to expectations and requirements placed by the dominant culture on those who are attempting to create social change. Not only is this influential within the Second Wave Feminist movement and the Rise of the Right, but was equally as influential within the other Cultural movements that dominated the 1950s and 1960s, i.e. Gay Liberation Movement, United Farm Workers Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement. The standards set increasingly demanding expectations upon minority groups, whether based on race, gender, or sexual orientations, that restricted the power and the opportunities for these groups in fighting for equality. Within the United States respectability politics has had a careful hold upon gender politics, being especially influential during the suffrage movement during the First Wave Feminist movement.¹⁰⁸ The expectations placed upon these women caused opposing viewpoints on how to best enter the political arena that subsequently caused fragmentations and the development of opposing women's groups. Respectability politics remained just as relevant and influential within the Second Wave Feminist movement as it did during the early 1900s, coming to define the political and social activism experiences of women into the 1970s. This is where the experiences of Phyllis Schlafly and Gloria Steinem converge. Though Schlafly was not part of the Second Wave Feminist group and would deny consistently that she was ever held back because of her gender, her political opportunities were just as heavily influenced by respectability politics as Steinem's were.

As discussed previously, in the 1950s and early 1960s, as shown by Schlafly's run for Illinois Congress, she became a well-known political speaker on topics such as anti-Communism, Nuclear War, the Korean War, and the failures of both political parties, as highlighted in *A Choice Not an Echo*. However, her endorsement of the Conservative presidential nominee, Barry Goldwater for the 1964 election caused a split within the Republican Party with the Old right followers on one side and the New Right more Conservative movement on the other.¹⁰⁹ To the disappointment of the Conservative movement Barry Goldwater lost the election of 1964 to LBJ in a landslide. Because of Schlafly's public endorsement of Goldwater in her book *A Choice Not an Echo*, she was subsequently used as a scapegoat for the party's failures in the 1964 election. As seen with her political activism with the STOP-ERA campaign, the results of the 1964 presidential campaign lead to the marginalization of Schlafly within the Republican Party forcing her to navigate solely with grassroots political techniques. The national platform that she had developed from her 1952 Congressional run and endorsement of Goldwater was a thing of a past. Moving forward her voice was not looked to on topics

¹⁰⁸Nunez-Franklin, Brianna. "Democracy Limited: The Politics of Respectability." National Park Service, Democracy Limited: The Suffrage "Prison Special" Tour of 1919, n.d.

¹⁰⁹Erwin, *Evangelical Equality*, 10.

such as anti-Communism and Nuclear War but she became a spokesperson solely upon gender politics, as seen with her work against the ERA. As politics of respectability had caused different conceptualizations of what it meant to be politically active within the Feminist movement, it equally shook up the Republican party during the 1960s. There were two distinct forms of politically active women that emerged in the Republican party; party women and clubwomen. Party women refers to women who achieved political positions of power within the party that challenged the discrimination, but this does not mean that they referred to themselves as Feminists.¹¹⁰ These women chose to navigate within and challenge the existing system instead of branching off. But in contrast, the Republican clubwomen refers to a group of women who upheld the belief that the differences between men and women created a need for different political realms that each could navigate separately. They expressed the belief that women were especially prepared to offer moral guidance within political issues, something that men could not supply on the same level.¹¹¹ At the beginning of Schlafly's career, prior to her marginalization, she would fit into the category of party women. She worked to navigate within the existing system, refusing to admit that she faced any sort of discrimination because of her sex. However, the marginalization of Schlafly by the Republican party forced her to shift into more of a clubwoman within the party as she took to the development of her own Grassroots Conservative Movement. It is important to understand that just as politics of respectability caused divides and fragmentations within both the First and the Second Wave Feminist Movements, it was equally as divisive within the Republican Party as women worked to navigate within the expectations.

It is clear that Steinem's political experiences were just as influenced as Schlafly's by the politics of respectability. Beginning initially with her journalistic career, the censoring of topics that Steinem was allowed to speak on was a method by her all male editorial staff to box her into what was deemed appropriate for a woman to speak on. It was not until 1969 that Steinem was allowed to write on any political matters. But the outright restriction placed on Steinem from writing on Feminist issues is evidence that no newspaper wanted to be affiliated with the Feminist movement in the 1960s, because it was not deemed respectable for a woman to affiliate herself with such a movement.

However, after the culmination of her own Feminist awakening and she began speaking publicly, the media expected an angry, radical Feminist to take the stage to speak about abortion laws and the ERA. And for those who were pleasantly surprised to find a composed, soft spoken woman take the stage to intelligently discuss progress for women, they latched onto her and placed her in the forefront of the Feminist movement. She is what was deemed to be a respectable, and ideal Feminist so her fate was sealed. She was quickly ushered onto the national stage with little to no say in the matter. Again, this identity, as the face of the Feminist movement, was not one that Steinem actively sought after, though she used the platform to bolster the agenda for women's progress this was not a spotlight that she stepped into effortlessly. It took years for her to become comfortable speaking on television, having her photograph taken, and giving speeches. But at every turn she shied away from taking organizational control within the movement. It is agreed upon that, "like Friedan, who remained a public feminist presence without organizational power, Steinem was a media spokeswoman for the second wave... was the most popular of all feminist

¹¹⁰Rymph, Catherine. *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage Through the Rise of the New Right*. University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 3.

¹¹¹Ibid.,6.

speakers.”¹¹² One could only begin to wonder if Gloria Steinem could have been the unifying voice the Women’s Movement needed if she was willing to take a political leadership role within the movement.

“If you can’t beat them. . .”

Another point of convergence between Steinem and Schlafly, were their experiences with those who opposed them resorting to personal attacks or threats of violence against the women when it was clear that they could not beat them any other way. But for those who used the Feminist stereotype to bolster their own political gains, the entrance of Gloria onto the scene destroyed their ability to pin all feminists as overzealous, angry women.¹¹³ Because of opposing media’s inability to pin Gloria down they quickly turned to ridiculing her on a personal level, especially targeting her looks and her sexual free-ness. Upon beginning to make her tour around the United States speaking on Feminism in the early 1970s, the talk show host, David Susskind once commented:

*I just wish Gloria would find a good chap and relax. . . What Gloria needs is a man. . . The whole thing is so boring—and ridiculous. Gloria comes on with that flat Ohio accent and goes on and on about women’s oppression— you feel like either kissing her or hitting her. I can’t decide which.*¹¹⁴

Using Gloria’s charming good looks as an opportunity to place doubt on her intelligence, is an example of the national media attempting to box Gloria into the patriarchal system that she was specifically fighting against. The radical feminist groups were deemed unfeminine, whereas Steinem’s femininity was used by her opponents as reason to doubt her reputation as a valued voice on political topics. On top of this it is important to note that David Susskind only saw two possible ways to respond to an intelligent woman speaking on political matters; oversexualization or violence. Though he most likely made the comment as a joke, the fact that he was able to make such a comment on live television is evidence that this was deemed as an acceptable response to a woman. Even by those who were not blatant opponents of hers, it was common for media outlets to continually comment on her appearance before making any such comment about her activism, skill as a public speaker, or her informative stance on a topic. Earlier in her career, Steinem was sent to the Democratic National Convention to cover the political event as a journalist. In a Washington Post column they highlighted Steinem’s presence there:

*Writer, Gloria Steinem, the mini-skirted pin-up girl of the intelligentsia, was being congratulated in the Sheraton-Blackstone today because Sen. McGovern’s staff picked up one of her quotes to use for a button that may become the collector’s item of this convention. It reads: ‘McGovern:He’s the REAL McCarthy. . . Miss Steinem was dressed for her intramural car hopping in a brief, clinging brown jersey mini, belted with a chain that ended in an ivory molar that looked like a tooth from a maneating lioness.’*¹¹⁵

The important moment in her journalistic career was severely overshadowed by the media’s confusing attention to detail, not to her writing ability, but to her clothing choices. Despite the media’s attempts to discredit Gloria as a political speaker and

¹¹²Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism*, 165.

¹¹³Ibid.,117.

¹¹⁴Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 193.

¹¹⁵Ibid.,114-115.

activist she remained the leading voice for the Feminist movement through the 1970s.

The frustrated representatives of the Feminist movement often turned to attacking and ridiculing Schlafly on a personal level during these debates, that further exacerbated the media's portrayal of the Feminist movement as aggressive and radical.¹¹⁶ In one such instance, Schlafly was invited onto an episode of the Firing Line hosted by William F. Buckley alongside representatives advocating for the ERA: Professor Brenda Eddy and Dr. Ann Scott (NOW member), who took to ridiculing Schlafly's views and appearance to undermine her arguments. This contrasted sharply to the image that Schlafly presented on stage, one that consisted of a smiling and personable demeanor.¹¹⁷ The frustration even culminated to a level in which Feminists began to publicly declare that Schlafly should be "hit", "smacked", "punched", and "burned at the stake", further delegitimizing the ERA and the Feminist movement and their supposed "non-violent" rhetoric. During a debate at Illinois State University in 1973, a clearly frustrated Friedan blurted out at Schlafly, "I'd like to burn you at the stake!"¹¹⁸. Even Betty Friedan, fell victim to resorting to violent threats when faced with Phyllis Schlafly.

Though most threats went unfilled, in 1977 Schlafly was hit in the face with a pie by activist Aron Kay, leaving visible face bruising that was cheered on by the press and feminists in leadership positions.¹¹⁹ But Schlafly's ability to portray her views in a controlled manner on live television, gained her official access to the national media platform she had been lacking. But as mentioned above, personal attacks were not something new to Schlafly in the 1970s. The more moderate Republican party members that opposed Schlafly's conservatism after the failures of the 1964 election, resorted to personal attacks. During her run for NFRW President, she was labeled by her opponents as a "brainy snob who ought to stay home with her husband and six children" and that her aspirations as president were neglectful to the welfare of her children.¹²⁰

No matter the political affiliation or background, when entering the political arena as a woman it was acceptable for opponents to resort to personal attacks; often aimed at defaming a woman based on her looks, intelligence, or lifestyle choice (i.e. being a bad and neglectful mother or not being a mother at all). And when those were unsuccessful there was always the ability to resort to violent language and threats against those women who stepped outside of what was proclaimed politically respectable. These methods were used to ensure that politically active women acted how they were expected as determined by the politics of respectability. The continued relevance of both Schlafly and Steinem in the 21st Century is proof that their actions in the 1970s challenged what it meant to be politically active women; ultimately redefining Feminism for future generations. However, it also reveals that to this day the actions of women who enter into the political sphere continue to be dictated by what is deemed respectable and unfortunately disrespectful language and violent rhetoric is frequently used in opposition to them. The continuation of treating women in politics in such a manner can be especially seen most recently with the 2016 presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton and the 2020 Vice President campaign of Kamala Harris. Both women continue to be attacked by media and opposing politicians, often taking aim at their credibility and intelligence. The opportunities for women in politics have expanded

¹¹⁶Erwin, *Evangelical Equality*, 28.

¹¹⁷Ibid, 29.

¹¹⁸Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 12.

¹¹⁹Erwin, *Evangelical Equality*, 29.

¹²⁰Ibid.,13.

and continue to expand but the rules established by respectability politics continue to have a strong hold over the way that women are treated in politics. By understanding the experiences of both Schlafly and Steinem we can better understand the broader barriers that have attempted to keep women out of politics for centuries.

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