This thesis titled
Ballots Against the Backlash: Second-Wave Feminism, the Conservative Revolt Against
it, and the 1992 Election

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Abstract

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Ballots Against the Backlash: Second-Wave Feminism, the Conservative Revolt Against it, and the 1992 Election

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The election of 1992 was heralded by the media as “The Year of the Woman” because of the unprecedented number of women elected to national office. This thesis explores how this election was the product of a longer backlash against the victories of second-wave feminism. The women who ran for office in 1992, and voters who elected them, were encouraged to do so in order to protect feminist legislation that was being threatened. While 1992 was an important moment in the trajectory of post-war feminism, the electoral momentum would not continue in the following elections. The epilogue compares 1992 to the election of 2012, when a record number of women were again elected to office as a response to conservative backlash against women’s rights.
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Introduction

“To be a woman in America at the close of the 20th century—what good fortune. That’s what we keep hearing anyway.”¹ According to journalist Susan Faludi, in her 1991 book *Backlash*, women were told that the fight for their equality had been won and that they now had all the same opportunities as men. At the same time, women were being told that the price of equality was happiness. News stories abounded about women suffering from career burnout, infertility epidemics and even shortages of available men. The media pointed to only one culprit for all this alleged misery: feminism. In her book, Faludi took a step back from the media’s messaging and pointed out the flaw in all this reporting. As of 1991, women were much more likely than men to live in poverty, to make a lower salary, and to receive no health benefits. Additionally, Faludi pointed out that women made up an extremely small proportion of partners in top law firms, CEOs, and, most importantly, politicians.

Faludi faulted the media with perpetuating the undeclared war against women, and noted that women were represented poorly in movies, television, and fashion. However, she argued that the politics of the New Right created the war on women. Faludi quoted conservative commentator Paul Weyrich, who said, “at last the lie of feminism is being understood. Women are discovering they can’t have it all. They are discovering if they have careers, their children will suffer, [and] their family life will be destroyed.”² While the New Right was not ultimately successful in creating national policies that

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² Ibid, 230.
counteracted second-wave feminism, they were extremely successful in giving the women’s movement a negative connotation. Proof of this success was that women of the 1980s and 1990s were hesitant to speak out about their struggles, and any complaints about sexism were preceded with the disclaimer “I’m not a feminist but…” A review of Faludi’s book in *Newsweek* pointed out that only dated stereotypes of feminism remained in the 1990s, declaring, “Ask anyone under 40 what a feminist is—even a feminist—and you’re likely to hear about hairy legs and bra burning.”

Shortly after Faludi’s book was released in the fall of 1991, Anita Hill’s testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee shocked television viewers and radio listeners. Women in particular were unnerved watching Hill testify about the embarrassing experience of being sexually harassed by her boss. To make matters worse, Hill, an African American woman, was interrogated by the Senate Judiciary Committee, a body made up entirely of white men. In the wake of Hill’s testimony, qualified women around the country decided that maybe they should run for office. If women were more represented in national politics, they reasoned, maybe the Clarence Thomas hearings would have had a different outcome.

During the 1992 election cycle, an unprecedented number of women ran for national office and won. A record number of women also turned out to vote that year. The election year of 1992 came to be known as “The Year of the Woman” and the media raved about how far women had come, implying that second-wave feminism had obviously won. According to the hype, these new women elected to Congress signified

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that women really were equal to men and that it was only a matter of time before they reached parity in government.

“The Year of the Woman” would prove to be a hollow catchphrase that actually ignored the reality of women’s underrepresentation in government. Though the catchphrase was created by feminist groups to promote women candidates, the media soon latched onto the “The Year of the Woman.” In their struggle to understand where all these female politicians were coming from, the media either declared women to be the country’s political saviors, or pronounced that the year must be some kind of fluke. The media coverage also ignored that 1992 was not a random event, but rather a reaction against the much larger backlash that was taking place against second-wave feminism.

Most of the existing literature about “The Year of the Woman” was written shortly after the 1992 election by political scientists. These essays tend to analyze one specific campaign, or one aspect of the election such as the media coverage, or the activity of political action committees. Political scientists looked at media representations and voter data in an attempt to understand why a particular female candidate won or lost. This type of research focused on just one aspect of the 1992 election, rather than trying to draw conclusions about the election as a whole. By looking at 1992 in a vacuum, these analyses cannot put “The Year of the Woman” into a broader historical context. Additionally, since many essays were written in the immediate aftermath of the election, the authors did not know whether or not the electoral trends of 1992 would continue.

Implicit to works about women running for office are the traditional explanations of why women do not have a larger presence in national government. Women’s concerns
about balancing work and family commitments are always central to this discussion. Cultural norms still require women to have a primary duty to their family, particularly if they have young children. In addition to concerns about balancing a time-consuming career with a family, women are much less likely than men to feel as though they are qualified to run for office, and much less likely to be recruited to run. The standard narrative also describes how women do not run for office because of the harsh media scrutiny they are likely to receive, and the inherent sexism they will face. While all of these factors do contribute to the lack of women holding national office, essays about 1992 as a breakthrough year wrongly assume that because more women were elected in one election, these barriers had been overcome. Only when “The Year of the Woman” is viewed in the larger context of the backlash against feminism, can sexism be understood as a longstanding pattern.

This study attempts to provide the historical context for “The Year of the Woman” that earlier examinations have not. Chapter one will cover the history of second-wave feminism, and discuss the movement’s largest victories. Chapter two discusses the fears that conservatives had that feminists might disrupt the existing power structure and disturb the traditional family. It will cover the development of the backlash against the women’s movement, and the attempts to scale back feminist policies. Chapter three will explain the “Year of the Woman,” and put it into the context of this longer history. While Anita Hill’s experience was the spark that helped create “The Year of the Woman,” it was only one event in the longer story of post-war feminism.

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The election of 1992 was an important moment not just because it saw an increased number of women elected, but because women worked together to fight back against an anti-feminist backlash. In 1992, women formed a powerful voting bloc that elected many female candidates to Congress. The majority of these candidates wanted to advance the feminist policies that had stalled due to the anti-feminist backlash. But, in addition to looking at the election as part of a larger history, it is also important to examine why 1992 was not an outright victory for women. While the electoral successes were important, the momentum was short lived and conservative Republicans would take back both houses of Congress in 1994.

The so-called “Year of the Woman” was a perfect example of the point Susan Faludi made in her book *Backlash*. The media pointed to the election of 1992 as evidence that women were equal to men and that feminism had been rendered unnecessary. However, after the election of 1992, the number of women relative to men in the U.S. Congress remained low. Moreover, the short lived nature of the political momentum proved that feminism still had a role to play and that a women’s movement was still necessary for women to gain real equality.
Chapter 1: “Who’d be Against Equal Rights for Women?”-The Victories of Second Wave Feminism

It is indisputable that second-wave feminism changed the lives of American women. The movement succeeded in gaining wide grassroots support and made millions of women question societal constructions of gender previously taken for granted. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the women’s movement successfully pushed lawmakers to create new anti-discrimination policies in the areas of employment and education. Women also gained greater access to contraception and the right to a legal abortion, which gave them more control over their reproductive lives. Most importantly, second-wave feminism proved that sex inequality was a problem within American society, and proposed an alternative vision that empowered women.

In the decades following World War II, Americans sought security from the conflicts of the past and the sense of insecurity that the Cold War brought to the present. For many people, this refuge came in the form of the “nuclear family,” with one man, one woman and their children, living in a single family home. The couple usually married young. In 1953, the average age of first marriage amongst women was 20, and the country’s birth rate was soaring. According to historian Elaine Tyler May, “the family seemed to be one place where people could control their destinies and perhaps even shape the future…the home represented a source of meaning and security in a world run amok.” May’s book *Homeward Bound* connects the international politics of containing communism with the containment of female sexuality within the home. She notes, “The

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sexual containment ideology was rooted in widely accepted gender roles that defined men as breadwinners and women as mothers. Many believed that a violation of these roles would cause sexual and familial chaos and weaken the country’s moral fiber.⁶

An emphasis on female domesticity can be seen in periodicals and advertisements from the Cold War era. Women’s magazines in particular advanced the notion of family “togetherness.” This idea first appeared in *McCall’s* magazine and touted the family and the home as the center of American life. Togetherness mandated that families spend every moment in the home together and that doing so gave the home an almost spiritual significance. While both husband and wife were important to a sense of family togetherness, a gendered division of labor was essential within the family. According to *McCall’s*, “for the sake of every member of the family, the family needs a head. This means Father, not Mother…Children of both sexes need to learn, recognize and respect the abilities and functions of each sex.”⁷ Women’s magazines pushed “togetherness” as a way to make wives feel more valued in the home and less bored with the monotony of a domestic routine. However, the high expectations of this family time made women who already felt unfulfilled feel even more pressure to be happy within their limited roles.

While the content, suburban housewife was considered the ideal, this was not the reality for many women in America. A wife who stayed at home full-time was a status symbol for middle class, generally white, men who made enough money to support a family on one income. It was very common in working class and minority families for women to work outside of the home in order to bring in additional money. By the 1960s,

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⁶ Ibid, 103.
an increasing number of women also wanted to work outside of the home in order to feel a sense of accomplishment and escape the monotony of domestic chores. Throughout the 1950s, the number of women employed outside of the home grew continuously, and by 1960, 30% of married women worked outside of the home and 39% of women with school aged children were also employed.\(^8\)

Women who were employed outside of the home, for economic necessity or by choice, had significantly fewer career opportunities than their male counterparts. Help wanted ads were gender specific, and the available jobs for women were limited to clerical positions and traditionally female professions such as nursing or teaching young children. In 1965, *The New York Times* classifieds under “Help Wanted-Male” sought applicants for positions as executive chefs, engineers, and architects. The “Help Wanted-Female” advertisements called for a “Restaurant-Hostess: Experienced, alert and attractive,” or a “Secretary: to executive of advertising agency, interesting position for bright, attractive woman with excellent typing skills.”\(^9\) Few opportunities existed for women to advance beyond these menial, low paying positions. It was also widely accepted that a woman made less than a man for doing the same job, and female employees had no protection from sexual harassment, which was prevalent in the workplace.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the plight of working women was not on the national agenda. Noticing that a problem existed, labor organizations and a few women in

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Washington set out to change this. One of these women was Esther Peterson, who served as the Assistant Secretary of Labor and later led President Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women. Peterson recalled, “When I arrived at the Labor Department in 1961, it seemed clear to me that the government needed to offer women more than mere tokens of recognition, as in creating a single distaff ambassador or undersecretary. Rather, we needed to call attention to the problem of the status of women in general.”\textsuperscript{10} The few women in Congress agreed with Peterson and began to use their positions of power in an attempt to ease the burdens facing women in the workplace.

This was not an easy task, as during the early 1960s, women made up only 2% of the U.S. Senate and 4% of the U.S. House of Representatives. These women struggled to be taken seriously by male colleagues, which made passing legislation designed to help women exceedingly difficult. Congresswoman Patsy Mink (D-HI) recalled the stress of being a woman in Congress during the 1960s: “I always felt that we were serving a dual role in Congress, representing our own districts and, at the same time, having to voice the concerns of the total population of women in the entire country. It was a heavy burden…\textsuperscript{11} The efforts of these women would eventually pay off with the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, and the addition of the word “sex” into Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The declaration of purpose attached to the Equal Pay Act of 1963 stated, “…wage differentials based on sex: depress wages and living standards for employees necessary for their health and efficiency; [and] prevents the maximum utilization of the available

labor resources.” The bill intended to fix these problems by ensuring that women and men were paid equally for equal work. The main sponsor of the Equal Pay Act was Congresswoman Edith Green (D-OR). Green enlisted several prominent women, including Eleanor Roosevelt, to testify on behalf of the bill. Though the bill would gain enough male support to pass, the final version contained fifteen exemptions. The exemptions left open loopholes that prevented equal pay for any woman working as a professional, executive or administrative worker. The Act also contained an exemption for women working in education, which left female teachers and faculty unprotected from pay discrimination. Green recalled making these concessions in order to pass the bill, and remembered a male colleague asking her incredulously if she, “…would really pay a woman administrative assistant in her office as much as a male administrative assistant?” Most of these loopholes would remain in the Act for almost a decade, rendering the law useless to many women receiving unfair pay.

A year later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law. This controversial piece of legislation focused largely on race relations, but also contained a provision to aid women dealing with employment discrimination. The House Judiciary Committee was assigned to work on Title VII of the bill, which prohibited employers from discriminating based on race, creed, or national origin. Congresswoman and lawyer Martha Griffiths (D-MI) experienced sexism throughout her career. She saw this portion of the bill as an opportunity to increase employment opportunities for both African Americans and women as disadvantaged groups. According to Griffiths, “…I made up my mind that if

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such a bill were going to pass, it was going to carry a prohibition against discrimination on the basis of sex, and that both black and white women were going to take one modest step forward together.”¹⁴ The injection of the word “sex” into Title VII was controversial among many, including Edith Green, who worried that this provision would prevent African Americans from gaining the equal employment opportunities they desperately needed.

Griffiths asked segregationist Howard Smith (D-VA) to present the bill on the floor, knowing that his support would generate votes from other southern congressmen. After Smith offered the bill with the inclusion of the word “sex,” the House floor erupted in laughter. Griffiths stood to give her arguments, and immediately pointed out to her colleagues, “I presume that if there had been any necessity to point out that women were a second-class sex, the laughter would have proved it.”¹⁵ There was no further laughter as Griffiths presented the bill, citing case after case that bolstered her argument. While Smith may have proposed adding the word “sex” to the bill as a joke, the addition remained in Title VII because of the lobbying efforts of Congresswomen like Griffiths, and the National Women’s Party (NWP). According to feminist scholar Jo Freeman, “[The NWP’s] systematic lobbying educated many Congresspeople about sex discrimination and built up a network of relationships with those who were sympathetic to the NWP's concerns.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid,196.
¹⁵ Ibid,197.
Like the Equal Pay Act, Title VII had many loopholes. It excluded many women who worked in administrative professions and in education. To enforce equality in employment, Title VII created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The agency was first launched in 1965, with only one woman appointed to the Commission. The organization was determined to focus on racial discrimination, and largely ignored the numerous complaints received from female employees about sex discrimination. It became clear, shortly after its creation, that the EEOC would not take gender discrimination in the workplace seriously. The agency was not alone in ignoring sex discrimination, as many people still considered the idea of a gender neutral workplace to be comical. In 1965, a *New York Times* editorial writer joked that if Title VII were to be enforced, “…how do you rule if a man applies for a job as a ‘bunny’ in a Playboy club?” The same editorialist also quipped, “The Rockettes may become bi-sexual, and a pity too.”

While Congresswomen fought for new women’s rights legislation, Betty Friedan published a book that brought women’s inequality to the attention of a mainstream audience. Friedan was a journalist who had written for labor publications early in her career and later began writing for women’s magazines such as *McCall’s* and *Good Housekeeping*. As she interviewed women for various articles, Friedan became familiar with the kind of dissatisfaction that was plaguing women across the country. This “problem that has no name” was felt by suburban housewives who subscribed to ideas of traditional femininity. These women had usually gotten married and had several children at a young age. They were able to purchase all of the latest consumer goods, and went to

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great lengths to maintain a flawless home and personal appearance. Despite this material comfort, many of these women felt deeply unfulfilled. One woman who had gotten married at nineteen explained to Friedan, “I love the kids and Bob and my home. There’s no problem you can even put a name to. But I’m desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality. I’m a server of food and a putter-on of pants and a bed maker…But who am I?”

Friedan credited the unhappiness of housewives to the media, which she believed created an image of womanhood that was feminine and childlike. The media taught women that their worlds should revolve around sex, the home and babies. She accused advertisers of wanting to keep women in the home so that they would have a captive audience to eagerly buy the latest household appliances. Friedan also believed that Freudian theories in the field of psychiatry kept women submissive, noting, “How can an educated American woman, who is not herself an analyst, presume to question a Freudian truth?” Friedan was especially skeptical about the Freudian notion of “penis envy.” This idea implied that women wanted to be like men, but were physically inadequate. Similarly, Freud believed that anatomy was destiny, and that women would always be defined first by their reproductive function.

_The Feminine Mystique_ also criticized “sex directed educators,” meaning colleges and universities that encouraged women to conform to traditional notions of womanhood. Friedan discussed how university coursework for female students focused largely on preparation for a life of domesticity. She argued that women were not being intellectually

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18 Friedan, _The Feminine Mystique_, 21.
19 Ibid, 104.
challenged in college and were unprepared for life outside of their duties as a wife and mother.  

The overarching argument of *The Feminine Mystique* was that women could only be fulfilled if they were able to have personal growth outside of the home. Friedan discussed how it was important for women to find jobs or hobbies that would require them to make a “lifelong commitment to an art or science, to politics or a profession.”

When *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963, it sold 1.3 million copies within two years. The book appealed specifically to middle-class, white housewives and put into words the discontent that many women felt, but had not known how to express. Historian Stephanie Coontz has pointed out that women felt alone, depressed, and even crazy before they read *The Feminine Mystique*. Once they read Friedan’s book, they began to recognize symptoms of the “problem that has no name” within their own lives. One woman recalled that the book, “…left me breathless. I suddenly realized that what I thought might be wrong with me was, in fact, right with me!”

While *The Feminine Mystique* is viewed by many historians as a primary catalyst for second-wave feminism, a dialogue about the role of women already existed before the publication of Friedan’s book. Anthropologist Ashley Montagu had published his popular book, *The Natural Superiority of Women*, in 1953. The book questioned Freudian notions of penis envy, and offered evidence that women were actually superior to men when dealing with stressful situations. Additionally, even women’s magazines like *Ladies*…

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*Home Journal* published articles throughout the 1950s that encouraged women to take leadership roles within their communities.\(^4\)

*The Feminine Mystique* was also critiqued for its narrow focus on white, middle-class women. In a 1963 letter to Betty Friedan, women’s historian Gerda Lerner pointed out, “working women, especially Negro women, labor not only under the disadvantage imposed by the feminine mystique, but under the more pressing disadvantage of economic discrimination.”\(^5\) Lerner asserted that the “problem that has no name” was a complication that arose out of affluence, when women had the financial ability to stay at home. Lower class women were required to work outside of the home, and therefore would not relate to the problems Friedan described. Stephanie Coontz’s study of *The Feminine Mystique* and its impact emphasizes this point as well. Coontz notes that Friedan failed to mention African American women, who frequently balanced work and family. Black women also would not have related to Friedan’s work because they usually prioritized the struggle for racial equality over equality between the sexes. According to Coontz, “Many black women considered the struggle for racial equality more urgent than the struggle for male-female equality. They might resent the anti-female prejudices they encountered within the black community, but they did not feel the same sense of relative depravation as white women.”\(^6\)

Betty Friedan claimed that before she began researching *The Feminine Mystique*, she never considered the problems women faced in their domestic roles. In the book,

\(^6\) Ibid, 127.
Friedan stated that through a series of interviews with women at Smith College she began to identify “the problem that has no name.” Historian Daniel Horowitz, however, argues that as a labor journalist in the 1950s, Friedan wrote many articles about the status of lower class and working women. Horowitz believes that Friedan downplayed her earlier radical positions and specifically targeted a white, middle-class audience in order to reach the widest possible readership. Friedan thus believed that a focus on white middle-class women would be the most effective way to achieve results for feminist causes. This strategy also influenced the way that Friedan hoped feminists would organize to create change.

While researching her next book, Friedan was put in contact with civil rights lawyer Pauli Murray, former EEOC commissioner Aileen Hernandez, and other female activists. After discussing the problems women faced in the workforce, they decided to create a national organization to fight for women’s equality in employment. The other women were concerned with Friedan taking a leadership role in their project because, “they feared her avowed feminist position and flamboyant, combative personal style.” Friedan persuaded the other activists that her celebrity status would aid the movement, and in 1966, the group founded the National Organization for Women (NOW).

NOW’s membership consisted mostly of the middle-class, white women whose problems The Feminine Mystique had articulated. The group’s main goal was to affect public policy in order to eliminate discrimination toward women, particularly in the workplace. Historian Sara Evans notes that while NOW did have a large membership, the

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27 Horowitz, Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique, 5.
28 Susan Oliver, Betty Friedan: The Personal is Political (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 93.
organization “did not provoke a massive grass-roots feminist movement” because its mission appealed to such a specific demographic. NOW was also open to admitting male members, as Friedan felt that this would make the organization appear less radical and therefore garner more support from a mainstream audience.

In the organization’s founding document, the “NOW Bill of Rights,” broad goals such as passage of an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, equal access to education, and paid maternity leave for working women were established. In order to deal with sexism in the workplace, NOW demanded that the EEOC enforce Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The Bill of Rights also called for the end of laws limiting women’s access to birth control and abortion. Finally, there was also a focus on helping women in poverty obtain job training and child care. Throughout the late 1960s, NOW was involved in picketing, public speaking and writing in hopes of affecting political change. Friedan remained a prominent, though controversial, representative for the group. Evans argues that NOW was effective as a lobbying organization concerned with the public equality of women, but “they were not prepared to question the mainstream itself, nor to carry their critique into the operation of sex roles in every aspect of life.”

Around the time that NOW was being formed, a younger generation of women also became involved in the fight for equality between the sexes. These college aged women came to recognize the problems of discrimination through their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and New Left organizations. Many of these organizations

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were male dominated, and few women held leadership roles. To express their views on
gender discrimination, in 1965 white Civil Rights activists Mary King and Casey Hayden
wrote a position paper about their experiences as women within SNCC (Student Non-
Violent Coordinating Committee). The paper described how both black and white women
in SNCC were referred to as “girls,” relegated to clerical positions, and denied access to
leadership roles within the movement. In response to King and Hayden’s paper, women
involved in SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) also scheduled a discussion about
the “woman question” at an organization conference in 1965.32

As New Left groups began to radicalize and splinter off, many women gravitated
towards organizations that focused specifically on women’s issues. These younger
feminists promoted an exercise called consciousness-raising, in which women talked to
one another about how they were oppressed by men in their day-to-day lives. This
exercise became a great recruiting tool for women’s groups because it had wide appeal,
and was easy to organize. The women bonded quickly after sharing details of their
personal lives, and felt compelled to join the larger movement. According to Sara Evans,
“The focus on the personal experience of oppression, moreover, led to the creation of
small groups within which women could share with mutual trust the intimate details of
their lives...[T]he qualities of intimacy, support and virtual structurelessness made the
small group a brilliant tool for spreading the movement.”33

These younger, more radical feminists called their branch of the movement
Women’s Liberation, and declared as their slogan, “The Personal is Political.” These

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32 Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of the Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and
33 Ibid, 215.
activists sought to create equality in personal relationships and wanted to challenge long established institutions that they considered to be patriarchal. This meant challenging the cultural assumptions that women should always be wives and mothers, as well as assumptions of heterosexuality. Since women’s liberationists felt men oppressed them in their daily lives, they did not want male members in their organizations. They also resisted having an organized hierarchy within their groups, as they viewed hierarchy to be a traditionally male system that promoted domination. The grassroots women’s liberation would eventually pressure the women of NOW into becoming more open-minded and accepting of other feminist visions.

Journalist turned activist Gloria Steinem would become a prominent spokeswoman for Women’s Liberation, although she was a latecomer to the movement. Steinem’s popularity was due in large part to the fact that she was not only intelligent and articulate, but also conventionally attractive. Her photogenic presence made her a more popular spokeswoman than many of the older feminists who founded the NOW branch of the movement. Through her constant public appearances, Steinem unintentionally proved that women could be both militant feminists and also sexually appealing to men. She wrote many high profile articles about women’s liberation, including one for *Time* entitled, “What would it be like if Women Win.” In this article, Steinem set out a vision of a “women’s lib utopia” in which women had not just political equality, but equality in their personal relationships as well. Regarding marriage, Steinem said, “[W]omen’s lib is not trying to destroy the American family. A look at the statistics on divorce…shows the
destruction that has already been done.”34 She also pointed out the need for more women in political offices: “With women as half the country’s elected representatives, and a woman president once in a while, the country’s machismo problems would be greatly reduced. The old-fashioned idea that manhood depends on violence and victory is, after all, an important part of our troubles in the streets, and in Vietnam.”35 Steinem would remain a prominent spokeswoman for women’s liberation, and would later found the feminist magazine *Ms.*

NOW and Women’s Liberation offered only two visions of feminism in America. As the movement grew, many other factions developed, each with distinct policy goals. According to historian Benita Roth, “…there were more than two twinned social bases of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s; feminisms were articulated in diverse political communities.”36 Roth notes that many different strands of feminism were organized around racial/ethnic lines. Women of color had different experiences than white women, and approached feminism differently. Within racially organized movements, women were divided further by class differences and by issues that were most relevant in their communities. As social movements fought for members, women of color often had to choose either the fight for racial equality or gender equality. These divisions made cross-racial feminist coalitions difficult to create. This type of multi-racial organizing was most successful on the local level, when a specific issue needed to be solved. For example,

Roth cites the “Coalition for Women’s Safety” that developed in Boston in response to a rising crime rate as an instance of successful feminist organizing across racial lines.\textsuperscript{37}

These divisions would be a source of trouble for the overall momentum of the women’s movement by the mid-1970s. The feminist causes that would be the most successful would be those that could garner broad support from a range of women’s rights groups. Some of the more successful efforts of second-wave feminism would be increasing reproductive freedom and increasing women’s equality in regards to employment and education. The peak of cooperation between feminist groups came during the early 1970s, when politicians realized that the women’s movement was gaining momentum, and that this “special interest group” represented half of the population. Congresswoman Bella Abzug (D-NY) recalled, “We put sex discrimination provisions into everything. There was no opposition. Who’d be against equal rights for women?”\textsuperscript{38}

A major legislative victory for the women’s movement would come with the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972. Prior to this Act, women had to meet higher college admissions standards than men, and graduate programs only admitted a very small number of female applicants. Most colleges preferred to hire male professors, and even at the high school level, men were hired over women to fill higher

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, 221.
paying administrative jobs. The picture was even more dismal for women’s athletics programs, which frequently received as little as 2% of a university’s athletics budget.39

The story behind Title IX began in 1969, when University of Maryland doctoral student Bernice Sandler completed her degree. Since there were six openings in the department, Sandler interviewed for a job at Maryland. One interviewer there told her she would not be considered for any of the positions because she “came on too strong for a woman.” An angry Sandler began to research sex discrimination and found that within education, neither Title VII of the Civil Rights Act nor the Equal Pay Act protected women from discrimination. She did, however, find an executive order that prohibited federal contractors from discriminating based on sex. Because most universities had federal contracts, Sanders realized that universities, like Maryland, were not allowed to discriminate based on sex.

Sandler teamed up with the Women’s Equity Action Group (WEAL) to file a class action lawsuit against the offending colleges and universities. She also began to do research on sex discrimination in education across the country, and sent copies of her research to the media, as well as members of Congress. According to Sandler, “…Rep. Martha Griffiths (D-MI), who was on WEAL’s national advisory board, gave the first speech in Congress on discrimination against women in education, based in large measure on the information I gave her. She criticized the government for not enforcing its own regulations with regard to sex discrimination in universities and colleges.”40

40 Bernice R. Sandler, “Too Strong for a Woman: The Five Words that Created Title IX,” in Susan Ware, ed., *Title IX: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St.Martin’s, 2007), 35-42.
Congresswoman Edith Green (D-OR) was chair of the Subcommittee on Education and held committee hearings on the discrimination of women in education. As the bill neared a vote, Green told Sandler, “…it would be better if we did not lobby because there was no opposition to the bill, and the less that people knew about the bill, the better its chances were for passage.” Green was right; Title IX passed as part of a larger education bill in 1972 with little controversy surrounding it. It would be three more years before the bill would take effect, at which time the opposition realized how wide reaching Title IX actually was.

The text of Title IX reads, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” While the law closed the education loopholes found in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the Equal Pay Act, it would become most famous for revolutionizing women’s athletics programs. While written broadly, the law would ultimately mean that any university receiving federal funds had to provide equitable funding for male and female sports programs. When the law took effect in 1975, the biggest opposition came from the NCAA, which claimed that men’s sports would suffer because of the legislation. Despite controversy over initial enforcement, the incredible growth of women’s athletics programs was Title IX’s most visible legacy. In 1971, only 295,000 women competed in

41 Ibid, 41.
42 Ware, Title IX, 3.
high school sports, whereas in 2001, 2.8 million women were playing competitive sports in high schools.\footnote{Ibid, 1.}

In addition to increasing women’s equality in athletics, second-wave feminism also succeeded in increasing the availability of reproductive options for women. By the mid-1960s, women began to gain increased access to contraception, including the new oral birth control pill. The 1965 Supreme Court decision in \textit{Griswold v. Connecticut} overturned the last state law that banned the sale of contraceptives to married couples. The decision would prove to be an extremely important precedent when other issues involving reproductive freedom came before the Supreme Court. \textit{Griswold} established a right to privacy, and specifically placed this realm of privacy within the home and the sexual lives of Americans. According to Justice William O. Douglas’s majority opinion in \textit{Griswold}, “The foregoing cases suggest that specific guarantees in the Bill of Rights have penumbras, formed by emanations from those guarantees that help give them life and substance. Various guarantees create zones of privacy.”\footnote{William N. Eskridge Jr. and Nan D. Hunter, \textit{Sexuality, Gender and the Law} (New York: Foundation Press, 2011), 12.} In the eight years following \textit{Griswold}, the national debate shifted from birth control to the legality and morality of abortion.

By the 1960s, public health groups began to raise concerns about the estimated one million women per year who were having illegal, often unsafe abortions. Advocacy groups such as the Society for Humane Abortion formed to help women find a doctor who would perform the procedure, sometimes even advising women who could afford it to seek abortions in Japan, England or Sweden. One such woman was television host
Sherri Finkbine, who sought an abortion in Sweden after taking a sleeping medication that caused her fetus to become severely deformed. Finkbine’s decision to have an abortion was highly publicized and was even featured on the cover of *Life* magazine. The article described the difficult decision Finkbine made, considering the public opinion about abortions at the time: “She made her decision in spite of pressure, in spite of a deluge of letters and phone calls…she made it in a legal, moral and religious climate which questions one human’s right to take the life of another, even unborn.”

Finkbine’s story raised questions about what kinds of exceptions should be permissible under anti-abortion laws, and started a public debate about the moral consequences of the procedure.

The women’s movement lent its voice to the abortion debate, predominantly in favor of repealing anti-abortion laws. Most feminists believed that abortion gave women the ability to control their reproduction, which in turn gave them a better chance to compete economically with men. After attending an abortion “speak-out” held by the radical women’s group Redstockings, Gloria Steinem recalled, “For the first time, I understood that the abortion I had kept so shamefully quiet about for years was an experience I had probably shared with at least one out of four American women of every race and group.”

The abortion debate evolved from a grassroots issue to a political issue, and in the years leading up to *Roe v. Wade*, legal associations and state legislatures across the country debated possible reforms to existing anti-abortion laws. By the early 1970s, popular opinion had shifted toward legalizing abortion. In 1972, 57 percent of Americans and even 54 percent of Catholics believed that the abortion decision should be

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left to women. This was reflected by the seventy-five leading political, religious and medical groups that began to advocate the repeal of all abortion laws. These influential groups included the American Medical Association, the American Jewish Congress and the American Baptist Convention.47

Sarah Weddington, a young Texas lawyer who had undergone an illegal abortion herself, undertook extensive research on existing abortion laws. Weddington volunteered at a women’s organization during the late 1960s, where she ran a hotline that provided information on how to obtain a safe abortion. It was through this referral service that Weddington and her law partner Linda Coffee met Norma McCorvey. McCorvey, who would become known as “Jane Roe,” was pregnant and did not want to be. She had not completed high school and already had one child. McCorvey feared that if she had another, she would lose her job and become unable to support her family. Weddington and Coffee filed Roe’s case at the federal courthouse in Dallas, Texas, in 1970. In her memoir, Weddington recalls the day they filed Roe’s case: “It was a day when anything seemed possible. Women were insistently questioning restrictions and trying to change them. Abortion now symbolized the question of whether women would have decision-making power over the issues that most affected their lives.”48 Weddington and Coffee eventually appealed the case directly to the U.S. Supreme Court, and in 1971 the Court decided to hear the controversial case.

The final Supreme Court opinion on Roe v. Wade (1973) ruled 7-2 that women have the right to an abortion during the first trimester of pregnancy. The court’s decision

was based largely in the right to privacy, citing the precedent of *Griswold v. Connecticut*. Included in this right to privacy was a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate an existing pregnancy. According to Justice Harry Blackmun’s majority opinion, “The detriment that the state would impose upon the pregnant woman by denying this choice altogether is apparent…Maternity, or additional offspring, may force upon the woman a distressful life and future.”49 *Roe v. Wade* was a major legal victory for the women’s movement; however, the decision was far from the last word on abortion policy.

By the early 1970s, the women’s movement had made a visible impact on the national agenda. In addition to Title IX, and the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade*, feminists rallied behind the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The text of the proposed amendment read, “Equality of Rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on the account of sex,” and was designed to give women all encompassing legal equality with men. With this parity in place, women would then be able to work toward changing societal gender norms to conform to the ERA. According to the California Commission on the Status of Women, “[The ERA] is perhaps the culmination of ‘the women’s rights’ segment of the Movement, which works for normative changes in society through legal and institutional means, but goes beyond this, at least in theory to, to the ‘liberation’ issue, for in denying that sex is a valid legal classification of persons, it implicitly denies societal values based on biological

49 Eskridge and Hunter, *Sexuality, Gender and the Law*, 27.
Because of these far reaching implications, the ERA had wide support among various feminist groups. The Equal Rights Amendment was first proposed in 1923 by the National Women’s Party, and many in the women’s movement viewed the ERA as unfinished business from the era of first wave feminism. The amendment was bottled up in the House Judiciary Committee until 1970, when Congresswoman Martha Griffiths (D-MI) gathered the necessary support to discharge the proposed legislation from the committee. With Griffiths lobbying behind the cause, the ERA had passed in both the House and the Senate by 1972. In order to become part of the Constitution, the ERA then needed to be ratified in 38 states. By the end of 1972, 22 of the necessary 38 states had ratified the amendment. At the rate the ERA was being approved by the states, it seemed unthinkable that it would not become the next amendment to the Constitution.

While it looked like the ERA was going to be second-wave feminism’s greatest victory, the amendment came up just three states short when the congressionally imposed extended deadline for ratification passed in 1982. What feminists had not anticipated was that the ERA gave anti-feminist activists a clear issue to organize around. Because the proposed amendment was so broad, ERA proponents did not have clear answers about how the law would be interpreted in the future. This gave the opposition, led by Phyllis Schlafly and her STOP-ERA campaign, a chance to link the ERA to an unstable future. Schlafly successfully cast doubt on the proposed amendment by connecting it to

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controversial issues such as abortion and homosexuality. The defeat of the ERA represented a sea change for the women’s movement. While feminists seemed unstoppable at the beginning of the 1970s, by the end of the decade the movement had splintered. The differing goals of women’s movement participants allowed for anti-feminist groups to organize and gain momentum, and they were anything but splintered.

By the 1970s, feminism was a force in American politics that could no longer be ignored. Second Wave feminists ensured that legislation such as the Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act were being upheld to protect women in the workplace. Title IX gave women increased equality in education and athletics. The fight for reproductive rights and the Supreme Court’s decision in Roe v. Wade gave women the ability to control when and if they became mothers. These feminist victories laid the groundwork for a future generation of women that would have significantly more opportunity, and be less restricted by stereotypes of traditional womanhood. While the women’s movement created significant change, it was also controversial enough to generate a powerful backlash against it. Even with legal barriers against sexism in place, the far reaching social changes the women’s movement promoted struck many as too radical. The backlash against feminism, as epitomized by the defeat of the ERA, showed that cultural ideas about appropriate gender roles were slow to change. This backlash against second-wave feminism would become one of the defining features of a conservative shift in American politics that took place during the 1970s and 1980s.

Chapter 2: “Women’s Libbers DO NOT Speak For Us!”-The Backlash against Feminism

In November 1977, twenty thousand women from across the country flocked to Houston, Texas, for the National Women’s Conference. A torch was carried by female runners from Seneca Falls, New York, to Houston to symbolize the start of the meeting, which the New York Times declared to be, “A Kaleidoscope of American Womanhood.” The Conference was federally funded, and the goal was to create an agenda for women’s rights which would then be passed on to President Carter. The delegates at the Conference represented a diverse cross section of women, but their political viewpoints were generally left-leaning. About 80 percent of conference delegates supported an Equal Rights Amendment, abortion rights, and lesbian rights. At the close of the four-day meeting, the women in attendance felt positive about what they had accomplished. Despite disagreements, the women successfully created an agenda for the future of the movement. NOW president to-be Eleanor Smeal recalled, “The overwhelming sentiment was that the conference was a smashing success. We were on a high, and the momentum was with us.” While the conference was a significant milestone for second-wave feminism, it did not tell the whole story. Across town, another conference with an entirely different vision of American womanhood took place.

In the Houston AstroArena, fifteen thousand people gathered for a three-hour pro-family rally. The participants were mostly white and from southern or western states.

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Many in attendance brought their young children to the rally, and they held signs with slogans denouncing the ERA and homosexuality. The pro-family rally in Houston was one of many organized attempts to discredit the National Women’s Conference, and feminism more generally. Conservative organizer Phyllis Schlafly acted as a spokeswoman for the rally, and proclaimed that the National Women’s Conference was, in her words, “A front for radicals and lesbians.” She claimed that the pro-family rally represented a majority of Americans and declared, “The Women’s Lib movement has sealed its own doom by deliberately hanging around its own neck the albatross of abortion, lesbianism, pornography and federal control.” Schlafly and other conservative Americans rebelled against the feminists’ vision for the future, and fought to retain traditional gender roles. These anti-feminists were upset about the policy victories feminism won in the early 1970s, and wished to discredit and even roll back these policies. By 1977, feminism was splintering and losing political support, while the backlash against it was growing.

The moment the women’s movement began to gain national media attention, a backlash against it began. In the media, feminism usually got the same treatment as New Left activists. As a general rule, anti-Vietnam War demonstrations were characterized as both radical, and insignificant. Those involved in these movements were generally painted as passionate activists, but also as social deviants. The media at the time was male dominated and the coverage of feminist activism revealed confusion and a condescending attitude towards the women’s movement.

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56 Ibid, 262.
In 1968, a group of radical, young feminists protested the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City. The demonstration was staged to protest traditional notions of beauty and femininity that the pageant reinforced. The protesters likened beauty pageant contestants to animals being judged at a county fair, and threw beauty products such as bras, girdles, curlers and false eyelashes into a “freedom trashcan.” Due to Atlantic City fire codes, none of the items in the “freedom trashcan” were ever set on fire. However, the media forever linked the women’s liberation movement with the image of young radicals burning their bras in protest. The repeated use of the term “bra burners” represented both the media’s misunderstanding of Women’s Liberation and their desire to paint the activists as radicals.57 The Miss America demonstration was one of the first times that women’s liberation received national attention and was witnessed by a mainstream audience. According to feminist media critic Susan Douglas, “… what most people didn’t know until the Miss America demonstration—was that there were young women in the country furious not just about the [Vietnam] war and racism but also about the way they, as women, were treated.”58

In a New York Times article about the Miss America protest, the demonstrations were described in detail. All of the women’s claims of sexism and injustice were discussed in quotation marks to give the impression that these injustices were only claims and not facts. The reporter pointed out that the protesters seemed most concerned with their activities when cameramen arrived, implying that the women really just wanted

attention and were not actually fighting for social change. The article also noted that the spectators who witnessed the protest were unsympathetic and thought the women participating were “vulgar.” The reporter even devoted a whole paragraph to a counter protest made up of only three people.  

While the women’s movement was growing exponentially during the late 1960s and early 1970s, media coverage downplayed the activism. In 1970, NOW sponsored the Women’s Strike for Equality. The strike was organized to celebrate the 50th anniversary of women’s suffrage, and focused on achieving equality for women in the workplace. The twenty thousand women who participated went on strike and protested in major cities across the country. A Newsweek article about Women’s Strike for Equality commented on what the magazine felt was an underwhelming turnout, noting, “The one thing further that the demonstrations needed to be really impressive was a really impressive number of demonstrators.” Additionally, the article featured interviews with male bystanders, including one man who could not understand “…why these women [didn’t] get married?” An ABC News segment on the strike famously ended with a quote from a West Virginia senator, who quipped that the women’s movement was really just “a small band of bra-less bubbleheads.”

When dealing with female activists, the media also tended to focus more attention on the women’s outward appearances. In the words of Douglas, “Feminists were cast as unfeminine, unappealing women who were denouncing the unimportance of the male

61 Ibid.
62 Douglas, Where the Girls Are, 163.
gaze, yet who secretly coveted the gaze for themselves by protesting in public. These poor girls, it was suggested, sought to get through political flamboyance what they were unable to get through physical attractiveness." Feminists who were older or not conventionally attractive often found themselves as the butt of these jokes.

Congresswoman and feminist Bella Abzug (D-NY) was regularly trounced by the press because of her appearance. One particularly savage article from the right wing *National Review* used such terms as “mammoth, strange, sluggish, gross, and shameless” to describe Abzug, in addition to making several more unflattering comments about her weight and perceived masculinity. The image the media created that all feminists were undesirable led to the popularity of Gloria Steinem, who unintentionally became the face of women’s liberation because of her conventional beauty.

Another favorite media trope when covering the women’s movement was the notion of the “catfight.” The media used the catfight narrative to make feminists seem like an unorganized group of women who were constantly bickering amongst themselves. If these women were depicted as constantly fighting with each other, they represented no real threat as a force for change. While male opposition to feminism was largely ignored, women who did not identify as feminists were often pitted against members of the women’s movement. Anti-feminist women were often portrayed as “refined” when juxtaposed with radical feminists who gave reporters sensational sound bites about marriage and motherhood, such as Gloria Steinem’s quips that “marriage is like

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prostitution,” and that “If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament.” The “catfight” narrative also turned political activism into something with a sexual connotation. In this way, the fight for equal rights became a sexualized show to be enjoyed by men.

The media’s treatment of the women’s movement turned “feminism” into a negative term. By constantly resorting to imagery of “man-haters” or “bra-burners,” media depictions succeeded in turning a complex movement into a one dimensional stereotype. In some cases the media’s treatment of feminism angered female viewers enough that it actually encouraged them to participate in the movement. However, many moderate or apathetic women steered clear of the women’s movement because of its radical connotations. These negative portrayals of feminism would encourage and aid in the growth of a grassroots anti-feminist movement.

The media’s “catfight” trope also obscured the fact that the battle between feminists and anti-feminists was politically significant. On the legislative level, the ERA was a major focal point of this divide. While the proposed amendment was approved in thirty states almost immediately, the campaign for ratification later stalled and the amendment failed. This was in large part because of Phyllis Schlafly’s ability to organize an anti-ERA campaign and mobilize other women to join her in a crusade against the values of feminism. Schlafly’s organizations STOP ERA and Eagle Forum were behind a formidable lobbying effort that urged state legislators not to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. According to Schlafly, the amendment, “…would mean government funded

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abortions, homosexual schoolteachers, women forced into military combat and men refusing to support their wives.”

Phyllis Schlafly had made a name for herself in conservative circles as a prominent organizer, author and speaker. In 1964, Schlafly published a book entitled *A Choice Not an Echo*, which endorsed Barry Goldwater as the true conservative candidate for president. The book criticized the Johnson administration for not being tough enough on the communist threat and then declared that in every presidential election since 1936, the Republican nominee was not chosen by the voters, but rather by what Schlafly called ‘kingmakers.” These were prominent politicians who were moderate, east coast Republicans who agreed with many of Johnson’s policies. These “kingmakers” used their considerable influence to nominate a weak Republican candidate who would not jeopardize the liberal establishment. Schlafly urged voters to nominate Goldwater instead and railed against the “left wing propaganda” that was smearing his campaign. *A Choice not an Echo* was credited with helping Goldwater defeat Nelson Rockefeller in the California primary, and sold 3.5 million copies in the 6 months leading up to the 1964 presidential election.

In addition to being a lawyer, organizer and a successful author, Schlafly had six children. Though many of Schlafly’s achievements would not have been possible without feminism, she did not identify with the women’s movement. According to historian Bruce Schulman, “Superficially, Schlafly seemed like an odd candidate to lead women

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against feminism…In 1970s terms, she appeared as the model of a liberated woman.”

Yet, Schlafly believed that feminism threatened the family, which in her opinion was “…the basic unit of society, which is ingrained in the laws and customs of our Judeo-Christian civilization [and] is the single greatest achievement in the history of women’s rights.” She claimed that the traditional family “assures a woman the most precious and important right of all—the right to keep her own baby and to be supported and protected in the enjoyment of watching her baby grow and develop.”

Schlafly ran for Congress twice and lost both times, but she still made her opinions known through her conservative newsletter *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*. After the ERA was sent to the states for ratification, Schlafly published an anti-ERA article in the newsletter, entitled “What’s Wrong with ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” The article opposed feminism’s attempt to break up the American family and argued that women benefitted from the “Christian tradition of chivalry,” in which men protected their wives and children. After the article was published, Schlafly received positive feedback and support from across the country. She realized she had found an issue that could rally widespread grassroots support and began to organize. By 1973, STOP ERA organizations existed in 26 states. The organization attracted members of conservative Republican networks, but also appealed to young women who had never been politically active before. To these women, being a stay-at-home mother was a special privilege that the Equal Rights Amendment threatened. Just to emphasize how feminine and maternal they

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were, women involved in STOP ERA wore demure dresses at public appearances and
even took baked goods to legislators, bearing notes with the plea, “My heart and hand
went into this dough/ for the sake of the family please vote no.”

Throughout the 1970s, Phyllis Schlafly was always represented by the media as
the antithesis of a feminist. Her 20,000 member organization was significantly smaller
than NOW, which boasted 220,000 members by the end of the 1970s. Despite this
disparity, Schlafly was constantly used as a poised, well-groomed foil to the sometimes
loud and allegedly obnoxious radical feminists. According to Susan Douglas, “This was
what debates about feminism got reduced to in the mass media: a catfight between two
women [B]y the mid-1970s Gloria Steinem and Phyllis Schlafly personified the stark and
supposedly mutually exclusive choices before [American women].”

In a series of
debates with Phyllis Schlafly, feminist leaders spoke about the ERA in terms of how the
courts “might” interpret the amendment. Schlafly, however, discussed all the terrible
things the ERA would do with certainty. Feminists often became aggravated during these
debates and made attacks on Schlafly’s character. Betty Friedan famously declared
Schlafly “…a traitor to her sex,” and pronounced that she would like to “burn [Schlafly]
at the stake.” This anger made Schlafly look composed and sensible, while making
feminists look like extremists. While the Equal Rights Amendment ultimately came down
to the votes of state legislators, who were mostly male, the media boiled the process
down to a fight amongst women. The message this sent was that women could not agree

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72 Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 226.
on the validity of the ERA; therefore, the amendment must be too controversial or radical to be necessary.

Schlafly’s well organized supporters used a state by state strategy. They lobbied state legislatures directly, focusing only on the Equal Rights Amendment. They portrayed politicians who supported the ERA as elitists who were out of touch with the average family, and described feminists only in demeaning terms. By 1977, with the exception of Illinois, all of the states that had not ratified the ERA were in the south or the mountain west. Feminists did not have a strong presence in these conservative states, and the proposed amendment had little chance of ratification in those areas. Additionally, five states that had previously ratified the amendment rescinded their approval, mainly to avoid the controversy associated with the ERA. The legality of rescinded ratification was uncertain at the time, but it was significant that the anti-ERA movement was powerful enough to make state legislatures reconsider. In large part because of Schlafly’s effective mobilization of grassroots support, the Equal Rights Amendment would go down in defeat in 1982, just three states short of ratification.

In addition to the ERA, anti-feminists gained grassroots support in their fight against abortion rights. In fact, the two controversial issues often went hand in hand. A cornerstone of Schlafly’s position was the idea that the ERA would promote abortion. She feared that through women’s autonomy to terminate a pregnancy, they would not only be destroying unborn life but also the traditional family. In one anti-ERA editorial entitled “Women’s libbers DO NOT speak for us,” Schlafly described how, “Women’s libbers are promoting free sex instead of the ‘slavery’ of marriage. They are promoting
Federal ‘day-care centers’ for babies instead of homes. They are promoting abortions instead of families.”

While an active dialogue about abortion rights existed before *Roe v. Wade*, the controversy exploded after the Supreme Court’s decision was announced. Many in the legal community believed that *Roe* had been incorrectly decided. Lawyers expressed outrage that the ruling was far too sweeping and had over extended the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Two Supreme Court justices dissented in the case, Justices Byron White and William Rehnquist. White’s dissent made it clear that he found no basis in the Constitution for the right to an abortion. He also implied that women were not capable of making such an important decision. White wrote in his dissent that “the Court’s majority had turned women’s ‘whim or caprice’ into a constitutional principle.” Abiding by the principle of judicial review, he noted his belief that state legislatures should be handling abortion policy, not the courts. Rehnquist’s dissent stated that abortion was not a private act and that the state had a rational interest in saving the lives of unborn children. The justices’ opinions mirrored the concerns of many conservative Americans, who believed that the legalization of abortion did not place enough importance on the rights of the unborn child.

Overshadowing dissent from the legal community was the outrage expressed by religious groups. The Catholic Church led the charge against *Roe v. Wade*, and

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evangelical Christian groups followed closely behind. Legal scholars N.E.H. Hull and Peter Hoffer have noted that the decision “...infuriated a lightly sleeping giant, and that giant, [The Christian Evangelical movement], rose up in wrath in the 1970s.”

While the decision in *Roe* was supposed to take the political element out of abortion policy, it instantly had the opposite effect.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, evangelical churches across the country grew rapidly. Historian Robert O. Self credits this growth to the belief of devout Christians that the government was acting as an “intrusive secular state.” In 1962, the Supreme Court ruled in *Engel v. Vitale* that prayer in public schools violated the divide between church and state. Then in 1970, the IRS denied tax exemptions to religious schools that they believed practiced racial discrimination. To many Christians, these decisions represented a severe violation of religious freedom. Evangelical leaders were able to capitalize on this injustice and gain followers through the creative use of television. So-called “televangelists” such as Jerry Falwell, James Robison and Pat Robertson were able to reach a wide audience with their messages of moral decay and complaints about government intrusion. Pat Robertson explained in a 1986 interview that, “The Supreme Court has trampled our schools, religious liberties, and our method of government in an egregious fashion.”

Messages like these rallied Christian followers with dramatic language and created a sense of urgency for their war against the secularization of American society, and more specifically, against feminism.

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Evangelicals and political conservatives viewed *Roe v. Wade* as an egregious instance of government intrusion and an example of the moral decay of society. Anti-abortion groups adopted the titles “pro-life” and “pro-family.” These titles were effective rhetorical tools that implied those on the other side of the argument were anti-life and anti-family. Using the term “life” also helped bolster the moral argument of anti-abortion crusaders. If a fetus was considered a person, then it deserved rights and abortion amounted to murder. The pro-life movement took their “life” rhetoric to the extreme, regularly describing proponents of abortion rights as “baby killers.” Jerry Falwell even told his congregation that “abortion had annihilated more children than the Pharaoh murdered in Egypt, than Herod slaughtered when seeking the Christ child, than the Nazis slaughtered of the Jews in World War II.”

Pro-life arguments focused on fetal rights, but also on the ways in which abortion could lead to female promiscuity and sexual freedom. These arguments centered on the idea that the threat of unwanted pregnancies prevented women from having sex. Abortion would hypothetically remove this deterrent. According to historian Robert Self, “Among religious right-to-life advocates, sex, pregnancy and childbirth were organically connected through motherhood to the divinely sanctioned nuclear family. To allow women’s individual conscience to take precedent over those relationships was to invite moral chaos.” While feminists felt that women’s reproductive autonomy was crucial to their equality with men, anti-feminists felt that female sexuality outside of the nuclear family was innately harmful to society.

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79 Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell*, 347.
Forces against *Roe v. Wade* pushed for a “human life amendment” to the Constitution that would outlaw abortions. While many of these amendments were proposed, none would make it out of the Senate sub-committee on constitutional amendments. A more successful strategy to limit abortion was the push to do away with all public funding to hospitals, clinics, or programs that provided the procedure. By the late 1970s, right-to-life groups focused all of their energy on creating these abortion funding restrictions at the state level. During the 1976 legislative cycle, conservative congressman Henry Hyde placed an amendment on the Department of Health, Education and Welfare appropriations bill that banned all federal funding for abortions. With the only exception being in cases of rape or incest, the bill was signed into law by President Carter in 1977. Carter announced that as a born-again Christian he personally opposed abortion, but in an attempt to pacify his party’s feminist supporters, Carter also declared that he would not attempt to overturn the decision made in *Roe*. This compromise angered critics on both sides of the issue. While they could not change the outcome of *Roe v. Wade*, abortion opponents saw the Hyde Amendment as a huge victory and claimed that the law stopped 500,000 abortions annually. Feminists felt that by eliminating federal funding for abortions, women who were most likely to need the procedure no longer had access to it.

With the exception of the Hyde Amendment, pro-life activists were most successful when creating abortion restrictions on the state level. As a result of anti-abortion lobbying, state legislatures established restrictions such as parental consent laws.
for minors, spousal consent laws for married women, and laws that required informed consent. Informed consent laws required women seeking an abortion to receive counseling on what the procedure entails, and in some cases hear controversial ideas about the morality of abortion. Other restrictions included limiting when in the pregnancy a woman could have an abortion, and what types of facilities could be licensed to perform the procedure. These restrictions would be challenged in court repeatedly, beginning in 1976 when the Supreme Court heard *Planned Parenthood v. Danforth*. In this decision, the court would strike down Missouri’s spousal and parental consent laws. However, battles over restrictions were far from finished.\(^\text{84}\)

*Roe v. Wade* and the subsequent battle over the morality of abortion brought many newcomers into politics. By the mid 1970s, pro-life advocates found a home within the socially conservative wing of the Republican Party. According to historian Dominic Sandbrook, “[the anti-abortion movement] had a profound impact on American conservatism. First it provided a rallying point for traditionalists of all denominations…Beyond that, it became a symbol for the apparent disintegration of sexual order and the collapse of the American family.”\(^\text{85}\) The abortion debate was, and remains, one of the largest battlegrounds of the backlash against second-wave feminism.

Following the National Women’s Conference of 1977, a group of prominent feminists presented a report on the meeting to President Carter and Congress. Carter formed a National Advisory Council for women, led by Congresswomen Bella Abzug (D-NY), to address the issues in the report. The women on the Council felt that President

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\(^{84}\) Hull and Hoffer, *Roe v. Wade*, 195.

\(^{85}\) Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell*, 347.
Carter rarely took them seriously, and the Council members cancelled their first meeting in protest because the president only allotted them 15 minutes. Later, the Council released criticism of Carter’s budget plan due to its cutbacks for social welfare programs and large military allotments. Shortly thereafter, Carter accused Abzug of “sapping their joint strength,” and abruptly fired her from the position as Council chairwoman. \(^{86}\) Over half of the Council quit in protest. Gloria Steinem explained Abzug’s firing as “…Carter’s staff telling him that he looked weak and that he should do something to look strong and macho. Bella was sacrificed to that need for better PR.”\(^{87}\) President Carter said in a press conference that he fired Abzug because the Council was not well organized.

The feud between Jimmy Carter and Bella Abzug appeared to be President Carter’s attempt to distance himself from the women’s movement. Carter was concerned about associating with what he perceived to be radical elements of the Democratic Party, such as feminists. He became aware that he would likely be running against Ronald Reagan, a social conservative, in the 1980 election and strategically tried to appeal to moderates. He was aware that feminists would choose his campaign over Reagan’s, and without a more Progressive Democrat in the race, they would have no other candidate to support. While Carter still supported the ERA, his pro-life beliefs and the firing of Abzug led many in the women’s movement to doubt his support for their cause.

The anti-feminists however, would find an even stronger political ally in Ronald Reagan. Reagan’s presidential campaign in 1980 brought together anti-Communists, economic conservatives, social conservatives and evangelicals into a political force


\(^{87}\) Levine and Thom, *Bella Abzug*, 221.
known as the New Right. This group excelled at using direct mail to build coalitions and to fundraise. During the 1980 campaign, Reagan personally met with leaders of pro-life organizations such as the National Right to Life Committee and televangelists such as Jerry Falwell to ensure that his campaign had the support of these groups. At the 1980 Republican National Convention, the party did not endorse the ERA for the first time since 1940. The party platform also included support for a constitutional amendment against abortion, stating, “…we affirm our support of a constitutional amendment against abortion to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children. We also support the congressional efforts to restrict the use of taxpayers’ dollars for abortion.”

Once in office, the Reagan administration made it clear that they sought to overturn Roe v. Wade, and Reagan even announced that he would seek to appoint justices to federal courts who held anti-abortion positions. Reagan’s rhetoric stood firmly with pro-family conservatives on issues like abortion. However, when it came to policy making, Reagan moved much slower than the religious right would have liked. For example, when Reagan had an opportunity to appoint a justice to the Supreme Court, he appointed Sandra Day O’Connor, who as an Arizona state senator had voted to repeal the state’s anti-abortion laws. Perhaps due to pro-life conservatives’ frustration over slow moving policy creation, the grassroots abortion debate started to become violent in the 1980s. Pro-life supporters began to bomb abortion clinics and harass those trying to enter the clinics.

88 Critchlow, Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism, 265.
89 Hull and Hoffer, Roe v. Wade, 195.
The Reagan administration also did not consider the enforcement of Title IX to be a priority. From the time the law went into effect in 1975, Title IX served more as a threat of lost funds to schools that practiced sex discrimination. The Department of Education did little to enforce the law actively. The Reagan administration promoted the decrease of government regulation, so the lack of enforcement of Title IX continued through the early 1980s. In 1984, the Supreme Court heard the case *Grove City v. Bell*, which directly challenged Title IX. The decision ruled that Title IX only applied in departments directly receiving federal funding, such as university financial aid departments. Since athletics departments did not receive federal funds, Title IX could no longer hold universities accountable for funding women’s athletics programs. As a result, the growth in the number of women involved in sports stalled during the 1980s. It was not until 1988, when Congress overrode the veto of President Reagan to pass the Civil Rights Restoration Act, that Title IX’s coverage of sex discrimination in athletics was restored.\footnote{Ware, *Title IX*, 14.}

It was during the 1980s that controversial issues such as abortion and school prayer became more important as tools for winning elections, and less important as actual policy. According to Self, “…[conservatives] cared somewhat less about shepherding a counterrevolution in government policy on gender, sexuality, and family than about taking advantage of voters’ anxiety about moral decline for partisan political advantage.”\footnote{Self, *All in the Family*, 368.} This trend would further radicalize the religious right. During this decade, feminists and liberal members of Congress worked hard to defend critical government programs such as Title X funding for sex education. While liberal legislators were fairly
successful at defending feminism on the national level, anti-feminist forces made incremental gains on the state level by promoting anti-gay and anti-abortion legislation in more conservative parts of the country.

In an attempt to offer a different vision of leadership, Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale selected Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro (D-NY) as his vice presidential running mate in 1984. While her nomination offered a glimmer of hope for women aspiring to high elective office, Ferraro faced harsh treatment from the media throughout the campaign. When Ferraro first heard that she was to be vetted as Walter Mondale’s running mate, she felt that her record would stand for itself and that her tough 1978 congressional campaign had prepared her for the media storm that would follow. In her memoir, she noted, “We had nothing to hide. And having survived the dirty tactics of my right-wing opponent in my 1978 congressional race, I knew we could take the heat.”

Most of the scrutiny that Ferraro faced as a vice presidential candidate was made significantly more difficult by her gender. Ferraro felt unsure of how to relate publicly to her male running mate, and there was no precedent for her to follow. In her memoir she recalled worrying that even small gestures, such as a hug between the two, might be misconstrued by the media. Her family’s finances were also investigated thoroughly, and because her husband was Italian American reporters repeatedly commented on her family’s possible affiliations with organized crime. Walter Cronkite told viewers that “a lady named Farenthold wants to be vice president,” and many major networks went to commercial during Ferraro’s televised speeches. Members of the media frequently used

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93 Braden, Women Politicians and the Media, 106.
adjectives such as “feisty,” “charming” and even “bitchy” to describe Ferraro. From the very beginning of her candidacy, it was clear that the media refused to take a female candidate for vice president seriously.

The questions directed at Ferraro during interviews revolved around her gender and the fact that a woman had never held this particular position before. Interviewers repeatedly stereotyped women as weaker than men on issues regarding military and defense. When interviewed on *Meet the Press*, Ferraro was asked if she was “strong enough to push the button.” 94 By the summer of 1984, it seemed unlikely that the Mondale and Ferraro ticket would end up in the White House, and in November the Democratic ticket suffered a landslide loss to Ronald Reagan. Ferraro’s candidacy signaled that a woman could someday be elected to one of the nation’s highest offices, but it also proved that the process would not be easy and would not be a fair fight. When reminiscing about the campaign in her memoir, Ferraro remembered thinking, “what a pain this gender thing is going to be.” 95

In addition to Ferraro’s ill-fated vice presidential candidacy, women were not gaining much ground in Congress. Throughout the 1980s, the number of women in the Senate varied from 0-2, and women never made up more than 7% of the House of Representatives. The relative lack of women in Congress would become glaringly obvious during the Senate Judiciary’s Confirmation Hearings of Clarence Thomas.

In 1991, President Bush nominated Clarence Thomas to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court. Thomas would be only the second African American man nominated to

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94 Ibid, 110.
the Court and was known for his conservative viewpoints. During Thomas’s confirmation
hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, a law professor at the University of
Oklahoma named Anita Hill was called to testify. Hill had formerly worked under
Clarence Thomas at the EEOC and claimed that during her time on the job, Thomas had
repeatedly sexually harassed her by asking her on dates and referencing pornographic
material in front of her.

Hill was interrogated by the members of the all white, male Senate Judiciary
Committee. The line of questioning they used made it clear that these men had little
understanding of sexual harassment and little empathy for Hill’s position. Senator Arlen
Specter (R-PA) was particularly impatient with Hill. He demanded to know if Thomas
had ever actually asked Anita Hill to have sex or look at pornographic material, to which
she replied he had not. Specter implied that the mere mention of these things in the
workplace was not enough to constitute sexual harassment. After questioning Hill, he told
reporters that he felt her “credibility ha[d] been completely demolished.”96 Thomas
denied all accusations and called the hearings “…a travesty and a national disgrace. From
my standpoint as a black American it is a high tech lynching.”97 In the end, Thomas’s
nomination was confirmed by a 52-48 vote in the Senate. To many women watching the
confirmation hearings, Anita Hill’s harassment in the workplace was familiar. Her
interrogation by white men in power and the lack of women on the Senate Judiciary
Committee were troubling. Hill’s testimony would spark outrage amongst female viewers

96 C-Span interview with Arlen Specter, October 12, 1991
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHQOVFa5H2I [accessed March 20, 2013]
97 PBS NewsHour, “Supreme Court moments in history,” 1991
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lEEDD2vxaE [accessed March 20, 2013]
and have a direct impact on the 1992 election cycle. The widespread anger amongst women revealed that the backlash against feminism had gone too far.

Beginning in the late 1970s, American politics took a noticeable shift to the right. The backlash against feminism played a major role in this transition, and feminism would be branded with a lasting, negative connotation. The political shift was rooted in the grassroots reaction against feminism, legalized abortion, and the ERA. Conservative intellectuals and politicians combined forces with grassroots antifeminists like Phyllis Schlafly and evangelical leaders to push back against the victories of feminism. The equality of the sexes was central to the policies of second-wave feminism, and the protection of traditional gender roles was central to the backlash against it. Anti-feminists’ fierce rhetoric gave them the ability to shape the national debate around issues of gender, family and women’s roles in society. These ideas about gender were a vital part of the larger culture wars that began in the 1960s and continue to influence American politics in the present.

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98 Critchlow, Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism, 226.
Chapter 3: “1992: The Year of the Woman?”

Just days after the nation witnessed Anita Hill’s televised testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, the National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC) took out a full page ad in the *New York Times* with a headline that asked, “What If? What if 14 women, instead of 14 men, had sat on the Senate Judiciary Committee during the confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas?” The ad featured a rendering of Clarence Thomas testifying before a panel of women, and intended to capitalize on the anger women felt when they saw Anita Hill being interrogated by a panel of men. The ad went on to say, “The behavior and performance of the United States Senate during the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings demonstrate a stark truth: women are tragically under-represented politically. As long as men make up 98% of the U.S. Senate and 93% of the U.S. House of Representatives, women’s voices can be ignored, their experiences and concerns trivialized.” The caption below encouraged readers to donate to the campaigns of female candidates running for national office. The ad was hugely successful and raised money for female candidates from both parties. NWPC president, Harriett Woods, used this momentum and traveled to New York to sell magazine editors on articles that called 1992, “The Year of the Woman.”

Many women felt that Anita Hill’s interrogation at the Clarence Thomas hearings was the last straw in the backlash against feminism. The hearings acted as a catalyst that encouraged women to become more politically active during the 1992 election, and the

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treatment Hill faced was a symbol that the backlash had gone too far. Qualified women working in lower levels of elected office were motivated to run for higher office so that women would be better represented in government. These female candidates, most of whom had grown up during the women’s movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, ran on platforms that defended feminist policies they felt had been under attack throughout the previous decade.

Pro-woman PACs coined the term “Year of the Woman,” and the catchy phrase and underdog narrative stuck with the media. Reporters tended to explain the “Year of the Woman” using a few different narratives. The first type of coverage questioned what the overall impact of more women in office might be. In June 1992, the cover story of Life Magazine was entitled “If Women Ran America.” The picture accompanying the article inverted the Senate gender ratio and featured 98 women and 2 men posing as senators. In the article, the congressional delegate from Washington, D.C., Eleanor Holmes Norton, commented on what she believed women would bring to positions of power: “We have not had it…We know what it is to be the victims of power and therefore we are perhaps less inclined to misuse it.”

A Seattle Times article debated how the increased number of women running for national office would change the nature of campaigning. It asked, “Can a man come out swinging against a woman without looking like a bully?” The article went on to note that women were still not taken as seriously as their male counterparts and that the rhetoric had changed from, “She can’t win,” to “Will she be effective?” While women could now raise enough money to run a successful campaign, many people wondered if they could really be successful.

legislators.102 The same Seattle Times journalists later pointed out that by running for office, women were moving away from their traditional roles. The article noted, “Women, traditionally seen as guardians of hearth, home and morality, have been cast as the ‘new guardians of the nation’s economic welfare.’”103

Some in the media seemed eager to convince readers that electing more women would be the obvious solution to many of the government’s problems. A Newsweek story from May 1992 discussed how the upcoming election could be a banner year for women because, “Voters of both sexes seem all too ready to believe that the men in charge have lost touch with what’s ‘real’.” In the story, Ann Stone, founder of Republicans for Choice, noted that “The Year of the Woman” reflected “a housekeeping theory of government: men make the mess, and [women] clean it up.”104 In June 1992, a New York Times article raved about the record number of women who had won California primary elections. The article interviewed NWPC President Harriett Woods, who declared, “This is no longer some isolated emotional triumph of women backed by women. This is a whole state changing its mind at once. This represents a watershed shift in public attitudes.”105 NOW President Patricia Ireland agreed, saying, “This is the year of the woman. Men have had the first 200 years. Folks are looking for change, and women are seen as the agents of change.”106

102 Maria Williams and Carol Ostrom, “Has Gender Changed Campaign Rules?—Men Fear being seen as Sexist, Bullies as Women Compete in Tough Political Fray,” The Seattle Times, September 17, 1992.
Despite the fascination with “The Year of the Woman,” journalists struggled to explain the sudden surge of women running for office. Many explanations emerged for what *The New York Times* referred to as “voters’ newfound receptivity to [female politicians].”¹⁰⁷ Often, articles gave vague explanations for why the national mood had magically shifted to favor female politicians. *Newsweek* noted with no further explanation that, “Long excluded from national power, women now stand to benefit from voter outrage over politics as usual.”¹⁰⁸

Some articles rationalized that gender had somehow allowed women to win by default. A *Seattle Times* article the day after the election noted, “The key to winning public office was a feminine name….gender is the only explanation for electing two low-rated unknowns to Superior Court judgeships.”¹⁰⁹ Additionally, Pennsylvania Democrat Lynn Yeakel ran in 1992 to challenge incumbent Arlen Specter, who, as part of the Senate Judiciary Committee, had been particularly harsh toward Anita Hill. The Democratic Party chairman of Pennsylvania endorsed Specter and mocked Yeakel, saying, “Here, I’ve got breasts, vote for me!”¹¹⁰ Likewise, a *Washington Post* article compared “The Year of the Woman” to the movie *Tootsie*, where a man desperate to get an acting job dressed in drag. According to the article, men running for office in 1992 felt

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the same desperation as the character Tootsie. If only they could be women, then winning this election would be easy.\(^{111}\)

This type of coverage detached the election from actual political events, and attributed “The Year of the Woman,” to some type of coincidence, ignoring that 1992 was the result of a wider backlash against women. Senator Bob Dole (R-KS) even went so far as to deny the trend existed. He claimed, “…talk of a women’s breakthrough was a piece of liberal media hype.”\(^{112}\)

Some felt that the media’s use of the “Year of the Woman” label belittled female candidates. These critics complained that the term made it seem like women were contenders for office because of their gender and not their qualifications. Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) pointed out, “Calling 1992 the Year of the Woman makes it sound like The Year of the Caribou or the Year of the Asparagus. We’re not a fad, a fancy, or a year.”\(^{113}\) Backlash author Susan Faludi also noted her dissatisfaction with the media’s treatment of the election, commenting that “The Year of the Woman” sounded like, “…a death sentence. Like the doctor just walked in and said, ‘I’m sorry; you have a year to live.’”\(^{114}\)

Despite the media’s superficial “Year of the Woman” narrative, real electoral shifts occurred in 1992. As a result of the election, women gained 19 seats in the House of Representatives and 4 seats in the Senate. This would triple the number of women in

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\(^{112}\) Apple Jr, “Primary Victories Bring Year of the Woman Closer.”


the Senate, taking it from 2 to 6. It would bring the total number of women in the House of Representatives up to 47. California would become the first state to have two women serving in the U.S. Senate, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer. Additionally, a number of African American and Hispanic women were elected to Congress, including Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL), who became the first black woman elected to the Senate. The women elected mostly represented the Democratic Party, though three new Republican women were also elected in 1992.

The large number of women who ran for office in 1992 has been attributed to many factors. Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992 with 44 million votes and his popularity benefitted the Democratic women who ran. Additionally, many of the women who won in 1992 were able to run for seats where an incumbent had retired, or where redistricting had placed a male incumbent in a precarious position. Specifically, 52 members of the House retired that year, 13 sought a higher office and two had died before the election.¹¹⁵ These open seats gave women an opportunity to make their first run for office without having to challenge an established incumbent who had name recognition within their district.

Late in President George H.W. Bush’s term, an anti-incumbent mood was also prevalent among voters. Early in 1992, a banking scandal occurred in the House of Representatives and a lingering recession plagued the country. This caused voters to doubt whether incumbents in Congress were really working with their constituents’ interests in mind. Women were seen as perpetual outsiders in Washington, and they were able to use this lack of insider experience to their advantage. A prime example was the

¹¹⁵ Wilcox, *The Year of the Woman*, 5.
campaign of Senator Patty Murray (D-WA). Murray’s opponent criticized her for being a political outsider with little experience, but this motherly figure appealed to voters both as a Washington, D.C., outsider and an underdog. “Many people identified with me being an average wife and mother,” said Murray, “and they wanted to see if I could bring some down-to-earth, common sense to the United States Senate.”

The timing was also right for women seeking higher office because the Cold War had recently ended. The end of the superpower rivalry meant that the nation’s focus switched from international stability to domestic policy issues. The domestic problems in question included a prolonged economic recession, skyrocketing health care costs and the lack of effective ways to deal with the nation’s poor and homeless. Female candidates were perceived to be stronger than their male counterparts when dealing with these domestic issues. On the other hand, they were generally thought to be weaker on military issues and even viewed with suspicion during international conflicts, such as when Geraldine Ferraro was questioned about her ability to “push the button” during her 1984 vice presidential candidacy.

The female candidates who ran in 1992 understood how these perceptions of feminine strengths could work to their advantage. Prior to the 1992 elections, women generally wanted to be perceived as having more “masculine” traits in order to be competitive Cold War era candidates. However, in 1992, women’s association with domesticity and running a household actually gave them an advantage. Patty Murray (D-WA) won her Senate seat in 1992 after campaigning as “just a mom in tennis shoes.” In an interview with *McCall’s*, Murray noted, “[Women] fight for personal issues. We’re

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the ones who get the call when our kids are sick. We’re the ones who balance our work lives with our family lives.”

Deborah Pryce (R-OH) used the same rhetoric in her campaign, appealing to fiscal conservatives and mothers alike when she said in regards to the national deficit, “I have a little girl, and I don’t want to pass that mortgage on to her.” Likewise, Tillie Fowler (R-FL) noted, “The number one thing is balancing the budget. Women who work, who are heads of single-parent homes, or are business owners understand how the deficit hurts.”

The favorable outlook for women running in 1992 was reflected in increased amounts of financial support. The money allowed women to compete with male candidates in a way that was unprecedented. Both the Democratic and Republican Party organizations realized that in 1992 female candidates had a good chance to win in hotly contested races. As a result of their efforts, money began to pour in to the campaigns of well qualified female candidates across the country. Political action committees also began to mobilize on both sides of the aisle. These groups solicited wealthy female donors who could support the campaigns of eligible women running for office. EMILY’s List, a PAC that supports pro-choice Democratic women, increased donations fourfold during the 1992 election cycle and claimed to have channeled around $6 million dollars to female candidates that year. Likewise, WISH List was formed in 1992 and contributed about $450,000 to Republican female candidates who supported abortion rights.

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117 “7 Women who could Change your Life,” McCall’s, August, 1994, 134.
119 Michael D’Antonio, “If I’d only known then what I know now…,” Redbook, September 1996, 97.
120 Wilcox, Year of the Woman, 11.
The abortion debate played a significant role in the 1992 election. In April of that year, the Supreme Court heard arguments in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Robert Casey*, the most significant challenge to *Roe v. Wade* to date. The justices on the bench in 1992 were significantly more conservative than they had been during the 1973 *Roe* decision, and pro-life groups were hopeful that *Roe* would be overturned. In the wake of this case, activists organized on both sides of the issue. On April 4, 1992, more than half a million people marched in Washington, D.C., in support of abortion rights. At the pro-choice rally, NOW President Patricia Ireland specifically mentioned the importance of the upcoming election to preserving abortion rights, declaring, “We are tired of begging these men in power for our rights, we’re going to replace them and we’re going to elect people who will.”[121] The protestors were met with resistance from pro-life groups who were also present at the march.

Legal scholars William Eskridge and Nan Hunter refer to *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* as “The Constitutional Compromise on Abortion.” In other words, the Court ultimately found that *Roe* was still valid but also that most abortion restrictions at the state level were legal. The Court upheld the validity of *Roe* because it still found abortion to be included within the right to privacy, as implied by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court noted that the right to a first trimester abortion, if necessary, had come to be relied upon by women who chose not to carry their pregnancies to term. According to the Supreme Court’s majority opinion in *Casey*, “An

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entire generation has come of age free to assume *Roe*’s concept of liberty in defining the capacity of women to act in society, and to make reproductive decisions.”

While these laws upheld the validity of *Roe*, they also gave validity to abortion restrictions, which gave pro-life activists hope. The Court found that restrictions such as waiting periods, parental consent, and informed consent were legal as long as they did not place an undue burden on the woman seeking the procedure. The restrictions would disproportionately affect low income women and women who lived in rural areas. To those who were pro-choice, the Court’s opinion that abortion restrictions were constitutional was a significant infringement upon a woman’s right to choose.

It became clear that candidates elected in 1992 had the opportunity to shape the abortion debate at a pivotal moment. The decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* provided even more incentive for female candidates to run on platforms that defended reproductive freedom. Abortion was an important issue for voters in the 1992 election, but it was rarely discussed in the media’s “Year of the Woman” narrative.

In Lynn Schenk’s 1992 campaign, abortion rights were an obvious theme. She set herself apart from pro-choice, male opponents by claiming that her pro-choice stance on abortion rights was not merely theoretical. Schenk described her abortion position as being “…not just an intellectual position for me, but [one that] involves my heart and soul. As a woman, I bring a different life experience to this issue.” Schenk was a lawyer who spent most of her career as the only woman in the office. In 1972, she was among a group of female lawyers who founded the Lawyers Club of San Diego. The women organized the group to support the ratification of the ERA and to prevent gender

122 Eskridge and Hunter, *Sexuality, Gender and the Law*, 181.
discrimination within the legal community. The Club also provided free legal services to poor and battered women throughout San Diego.\textsuperscript{123} Schenk carried these activist ideas with her to her 1992 campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives, where she frequently reminded voters that she had been working for women’s rights under the law for the past twenty years.\textsuperscript{124} Schenk won the election with 51% of the vote and was the first woman to serve San Diego in Congress.

Many other Democratic women who were elected in 1992 ran on platforms that supported a feminist agenda. Former New York City Councilwoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) was elected to Congress in 1992 from the state’s 14\textsuperscript{th} district. To win her seat, Maloney defeated veteran Congressman Bill Green (R-NY). Green was a progressive Republican, who agreed with Maloney on social issues such as abortion and gay rights. In fact, in 1991 Green voted against President Bush 69% of the time, more than any other Republican in Congress.\textsuperscript{125} Maloney used the election cycle’s anti-incumbent mood to her advantage, however, and tried to paint Green as a Bush-style Republican. “People are upset over the economy, and the Bush-Quayle-Green team got us there,” Maloney said. “Bill Green has voted lock, stock and barrel for economic measures that have harmed this city. He’s voted his party, not the city.”\textsuperscript{126} Maloney succeeded in winning 51% of the vote, which the media attributed to re-districting that added several new neighborhoods to the 14\textsuperscript{th} district. Shortly after being elected in 1992, Maloney scheduled a meeting with Feminist Majority President Eleanor Smeal where they discussed how they could “undo

\textsuperscript{123} Michael Smolens, “In the 49\textsuperscript{th}, candidates target the old way of doing business, Democrats try for edge by wooing women voters,” \textit{San Diego Union-Tribune}, March 15, 1992, B1.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
the damage of the 80s.” During the meeting, Maloney quipped, “So Elly, how are we going to pass the ERA?”

The three Republican women who were elected in 1992 were not in a position to defend reproductive freedom, although they were all pro-choice. The existence and success of political action committees like WISH List revealed a great divide with the Republican Party, which was becoming increasingly more conservative on abortion rights. While in Congress, these pro-choice women had to strike a balance between their moderate abortion positions and the more conservative views of the Republican Party leadership. For example, former state Republican Party Chairwoman Jennifer Dunn (R-WA) favored a woman’s right to choose, but believed that states should be allowed to create restrictions on the procedure. When Dunn worked for the statewide Republican Party, she supported a pro-life agenda, though her personal beliefs differed. In addition to working as state Republican Party chairwoman, Dunn had previously worked for the Reagan and Bush campaigns. Through these positions, Dunn secured a network of Republican donors and had earned enough recognition to get away with her moderate stance on abortion. She held many other traditionally conservative positions, and was for a capital-gains tax cut, school vouchers and a balanced-budget amendment. Dunn was forced to reiterate her pro-choice position several times during her 1992 campaign, when, as Democratic opponent George Tamblyn noted, the candidates were asked about

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abortion more than any other issue. Dunn defeated Tamblyn and Independent Bob Adams, carrying 60% of the vote in the historically Republican 8th district.

Similarly, after Deborah Pryce (R-OH) revealed her moderately pro-choice position during her 1992 campaign, a pro-life candidate named Linda Reidelbach entered the race as an independent. In a three-way debate during the campaign, Pryce said, “I will never back off from my belief that every woman in America must have the right to choose…That’s one position I will not change.” Pryce said that throughout her time in Congress she tried not to make abortion a big issue, and she kept her head down when the topic was discussed amongst more conservative members of her party.

All of these variables would come into play in 1992, but Anita Hill’s testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee was the spark that ultimately encouraged more women to run for office. The Washington Post noted that the Clarence Thomas hearings “...were a spectacle many women found inciting.” To female politicians and voters, Hill’s testimony was the last straw in the conservative backlash against the victories of second-wave feminism. Marjorie Margolies Mezvinsky (D-PA) cited the Clarence Thomas hearings as what pushed her to make a run for office. “I was shocked to anger,” she said. “As a Homo sapien without an X and a Y chromosome, I was not represented. They weren’t asking my questions.” Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL) agreed, saying, “To be honest, I couldn’t bring myself to watch the hearings full time. The whole thing was

131 Anderson and Binstein, “Busting the Male Bastion of the Hill,” B23.
an embarrassment.” After the hearings, fellow Illinois Democrats drafted Braun to run for Senate. In a *New York Times* / CBS poll taken after Anita Hill’s testimony, 4 in 10 women revealed that they had encountered unwanted sexual advances or remarks from men for whom they worked. The poll suggested that sexual harassment was prevalent in the workplace and proved that many women related to the ordeal Hill had been put through. The same poll noted that support for Clarence Thomas was much higher among men than among women.

Judging by the number of women elected that year, voters shared in the female candidates’ desires to refute the conservative shift in American politics. Since 1986, the number of women who voted in presidential elections had consistently exceeded the number of men who voted. By the 1992 election, the importance of the female voting bloc had been established, and a record 60 million women went to the polls. Statistically, female voters are more likely than men to support female candidates, and in 1992 this gave women running for office a leg up across the board.

In the aftermath of the 1992 election, the increased number of women in the legislative branch made their mark on policy. Once in Congress, women used different negotiating tactics than their male counterparts and brought different issues to the table to be discussed. Representative Jane Harman (D-CA) noted, “[In Congress there is] too much macho behavior, it’s the classic difference between women and men. Men are

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warriors and women are problem solvers.” Deborah Pryce (R-OH) agreed, explaining, “A bipartisan group of women would get together and hammer out an agenda in an hour. Women tend to be more efficient than men and are less interested in listening to their own voices.” From 1992 to 1996, 68 pieces of legislation were passed to help women, children and families. These bills included the Family and Medical leave Act of 1993 and the Violence against Women Act of 1994. Additionally, female legislators brought a unique perspective to the table. Anna Eshoo (D-CA) recalled, “I raised the issue of breast cancer and encouraged male members to talk to [their female family members] about mammogram coverage…they later changed the language of the bill to provide better coverage for women.”

Despite winning a record number of seats in the House and Senate in 1992, women remained extremely underrepresented in government both at the state and, especially, at the national level. With the special election of Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) in 1993, women still made up only 7% of the U.S. Senate. The 47 women in the House of Representatives still made up only 11% of the lower chamber. Women made up 51% of the population, but the fact that they held 7% of the Senate seats and 11% of the seats in the House was still hailed as a major breakthrough. While their numbers in office had never been higher, American women still remained dismally underrepresented in national government.

136 D’Antonio, “If I’d only known then what I know now…,” 98.  
138 D’Antonio, “If I’d only known then what I know now…,” 98.  
Despite the real outrage that female voters felt over conservative efforts to repeal the victories of feminism, the election of 1994 would not see increased numbers of women running for office. While female voters bought into the message of change in 1992, the slow moving pace of Congress seemed to discourage them from remaining as politically involved as they had been during “The Year of the Woman.” Patty Murray (D-WA) commented on this apathy in a 1994 interview with The New York Times, noting, “I see a lot of women stunned. They were excited [in 1992], and they won and they went home and didn’t realize that it could all be undone in two years.”

Lynn Schenk (D-CA) experienced this first hand, losing her seat in 1994 after only two years in the House. She attributed her defeat, as well as the defeat of other Democratic women, to the impossibly high expectations that the voters had for female candidates. Schenk noted that after 1992, “…there were enormous, I think unrealistic expectations that the women in Congress could somehow in 18 months turn around a mess that was created in 18 years. It was sort of the ‘Mom can fix it,’ attitude. And Mom needed just a little more time.”

By 1994, the number of women elected two years earlier was widely considered to be a fluke, and Republicans capitalized on the change in momentum. A Policy Review article proclaimed the importance of 1994 to the Republican Party, exclaiming, “…1994 will be the most important year in American politics since the 1980 race between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan….If the Democratic Party maintains its overwhelming majority in both Houses of Congress in 1994, then the Reagan Revolution truly will be over and the federal government will likely grow in size and intrusiveness into American

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141 Ibid.
Using such dramatic rhetoric, the Republican Party took control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate in 1994 for the first time since the 1950s. Six of the Democratic women elected to the House in 1992 were defeated in 1994, all of them by more conservative Republicans, and five of them by men. The Republican Party’s control of both houses signified a continuation of anti-feminist, backlash policies.

The electoral shift that took place during 1994 was led by soon-to-be-Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-GA), who set out a Republican plan for government that he called “The Contract with America.” The contract, which Gingrich persuaded 367 Republican candidates to endorse, promised to make government smaller and less intrusive. The contract also pledged that a Republican Congress would “respect the values and share the faith of the American family.” While not explicitly mentioning the Republican Party’s stance on controversial issues like abortion, this language implied a shift toward the traditional family and away from feminist values. The Contract with America galvanized the Republican Party base, and larger numbers of white men, southerners and evangelical Christians came to the polls in 1994 than in 1992. Swing voters were drawn to the right by Clinton’s low approval ratings and the lack of change they perceived to have occurred in the previous two years.

Aiding in the Republican takeover of Congress was the decreased number of women who voted in 1994. Women still voted in higher numbers than men but they made

up a much smaller proportion of the electorate than they had in 1992.\textsuperscript{144} It speaks to the attention span of voters that while “The Year of the Woman” was a major selling point for candidates two years earlier, women’s issues were largely ignored in the rhetoric of 1994’s Republican landslide. While PACs in 1992 had been successful in creating a network of elite female donors, their efforts were not successful in creating lasting enthusiasm among average female voters. The excitement surrounding female candidates and the anger over Anita Hill’s testimony were short lived, and a long lasting grassroots movement was not sustained after “The Year of the Woman.” A culmination of factors made 1992 the perfect time for female candidates to make electoral gains, but the potential for a feminist revival was not realized.

The unrealistic expectations for the women elected in 1992 were largely due to the superficial media coverage of “The Year of the Woman.” Only months after the election Susan Faludi looked back on the ways in which the media co-opted “The Year of the Woman” and made it in to a sound bite with little real meaning. As an example, Faludi pointed to a radio announcer that segued from politics to a weight loss advertisement when he suggested, “speaking of the Year of the Woman, why not make this your year, ladies, to get rid of those extra pounds with the Nutri/System diet plan!”\textsuperscript{145} The problem with such a shallow treatment of the election was that it obscured the fact that major issues like abortion, equal pay and sexual harassment were at the root of the anger that many female voters felt in 1992.

\textsuperscript{144} “Gender Differences in Voter Turnout.” From \url{http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/voters/documents/genderdiff.pdf}
\textsuperscript{145} Faludi, “Looking beyond the slogans,” 31.
Instead, the superficial media portrayals of “The Year of the Woman” ignored the candidates’ core principles while at the same time, creating expectations for these candidates to achieve instant results. While “The Year of the Woman” was a term that the National Women’s Political Caucus and other pro-women PACs promoted to generate donors and enthusiasm, it ended up undermining feminist causes. Additionally, women’s PACs, and the candidates themselves, did not continue to organize and inspire women after the electoral victories occurred. They did not fully capitalize on the outrage women felt over Anita Hill’s testimony and years of conservative backlash against feminism.

The election of 1992 was a significant moment when a multitude of factors gave women in politics electoral momentum and gave women voters causes to rally behind. The unprecedented number of women elected to national office showed real progress for women in government, even if their numbers remained low overall. Though candidate Lynn Yeakel lost her Senate race against Arlen Specter (R-PA), she was quoted in The New York Times predicting, “…in history we’re going to see the Hill-Thomas hearings as being the turning point for American women in terms of really stepping forward, taking political power, using the vote, using our money to elect the candidates who represent our values and can stand up for our rights.”

Yeakel was right in identifying 1992 as a significant moment for women, but hindsight shows that it was not the turning point she expected it to be. The moment failed to live up to the potential it held to create real change. By 1994, “The Year of the Woman” was forgotten and a conservative majority was ushered into Congress. The election of more women to Congress was significant because it made women feel

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146 Berke, “With Outsiders In, Female Candidates Come Forward,” A18.
represented by their government. However, electoral victories in 1992 did not equal real advancement for feminist causes. Cultural ideas about feminism and notions about women in power were slow to change, even with some new faces in Congress.
Epilogue: “The Year of the Woman—20 years later”

The day after the 1992 election, an article in *The Seattle Times* celebrated how successful the “Year of the Woman” had been and how many seats in Congress had been won by women. Jane Danowitz of the Women’s Campaign Fund was interviewed for the piece and proudly declared, “We will never go back. We are never going back to having a white, all-male Senate Judiciary Committee ever again.”

Danowitz’s prediction was correct. In 1993, Senate newcomers Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL) were both appointed to the Judiciary Committee and at least one woman has been on the committee ever since. Although the Senate Judiciary Committee became inclusive of women, twenty years later a similarly male-dominated committee outraged women across the country yet again.

On February 12, 2012, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform held a hearing on a rule within President Obama’s Affordable Care Act which mandated that most insurance plans cover birth control. The exception to this rule was that religious employers did not have to provide employees with contraceptive coverage; rather, the employers’ insurance company had to provide the coverage. The first two panels at the hearing featured groups of five men, including an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi and a Roman Catholic bishop, who shared their “expertise” on birth control coverage. The Republicans in charge claimed the panel was held to discuss conflicts of religious freedom. However, women who saw the hearing were appalled that decisions about their

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147 “Congress-‘Ready or not, here we come’-to D.C.-Four new faces to join Mikulski in U.S. Senate; History made in House, too,” *The Seattle Times*, November 4, 1992.
access to birth control were being commented on entirely by men. Two women would be called to testify in a later panel, and both disagreed with the president’s policy.

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) demanded to know, “Where are the women?” Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) described seeing photos of the all-male panels as “…like stepping into a time machine and going back 50 years. It’s a picture that says a thousand words, and it’s one that most women thought was left behind when pictures only came in black and white.” Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) expressed her disappointment with the hearing as well, stating, “I’m saddened that here we are in 2012 and a House committee would hold a hearing on women’s health and deny women the ability to share their perspective.”

Twenty years after the “Year of the Woman,” issues involving women’s autonomy, such as access to contraception, are still controversial. As in 1992, most women in the Democratic Party remain dedicated to protecting feminist policies that date back to the 1960s and 1970s. Since the backlash against feminism helped shift political discourse to the right, progressive legislators have been on the defensive about the importance of women’s equality and the necessity of reproductive rights. The birth control hearing also made it obvious that twenty years after the election of 1992, women remain underrepresented in government.

Until 2012, there were no more large increases in the number of women elected to office. One challenge women continued to face was harsh treatment and sexism from

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the media. *The Washington Post* posited that qualified women might be reluctant to run after witnessing the way female candidates like Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin were criticized by the press in 2008. These women faced constant media scrutiny, as well as frequent sexist remarks about their looks and behavior. The article also mentioned then Speaker-of-the-House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), who was the target of 65 million dollars worth of Republican attack ads during the 2010 midterm elections, including one that portrayed her as a cackling witch.\(^{150}\)

In 2012, journalists described the backlash against feminism as a “War on Women.” This war was led by male Republicans who were extremely anti-choice. These men took this belief a step further by also fighting against organizations like Planned Parenthood that provide birth control and preventative care to low income women. One of the infamous moments of the 2012 election came in the Missouri Senate race, when candidate Todd Akin was asked about his position on abortion. Akin responded that he believed abortions should not be allowed under any circumstance. The reporter then asked Akin if he believed in abortion when the pregnancy was a result of rape. Akin replied, “First of all, from what I understand from doctors, [pregnancy from rape] is really rare. If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.”\(^{151}\) Akin’s comments appalled women across the country, and even others in the Republican Party tried to distance themselves from his campaign in the months leading up to the election.


While his comments were shocking, Akin was not alone in his disregard for reproductive rights. On October 23, 2012, Richard Mourdock, a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate in Indiana, participated in a debate with Democratic opponent Joe Donnelly. When asked about his belief that abortions should be illegal without exceptions, Mourdock opined, “…even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape that is something God intended to happen.”\textsuperscript{152} Akin and Mourdock not only displayed a lack of respect for abortion rights, but also disregarded the seriousness of the crime of rape. The comments demonstrated a complete lack of empathy for women, and Akin’s comments even indicated a lack of knowledge about how the female body functions.

Women fought back against these conservative politicians through political channels. PACs put all of their efforts into defeating these Republicans in the 2012 election. Between 2010 when Republicans took control of the House of Representatives and the 2012 election, political action committee EMILY’s List grew from 400,000 members to over one million members. The organization’s president, Stephanie Schriock, noted that the organization had never raised that much money in any previous election cycle. She attributed the increased donations to women’s desire to “…fight back against the GOP’s War on Women.”\textsuperscript{153} While EMILY’s List only supports pro-choice, Democratic women, the non-partisan Center for American Women in Politics also sought to elect more women in 2012. The Center created a workshop called the 2012 Project, which trained qualified women across the country who considered becoming first–time


candidates. The Center cited the low numbers of women currently in office as well as redistricting and the presidential election as reasons that 2012 was a monumental year for women candidates. ¹⁵⁴

After all the votes were counted, it appeared that the efforts of the PACs had been successful. Female candidates gained 12 seats in the House of the Representatives and 5 new women were elected to the Senate, bringing the total up to a historic 20 female Senators. Both Todd Akin and Richard Mourdock lost their Senate races. Akin lost to a pro-choice woman, Claire McCaskill (D-MO), who had trailed in the polls until Akin made his controversial remarks. The gender gap in voting behavior persisted, as more women than men came out to vote. Single women favored Democrat Barack Obama over Republican Mitt Romney by 38 points.

During the 2012 election, conservative Republicans espoused their extreme anti-feminist positions on issues such as access to birth control, abortion, and rape. Additionally, conservative Republicans hesitated to pass even non-controversial legislation to benefit women, such as bills designed to ensure equal pay. Women were angered by these politicians and voted a record number of women into higher office. The situation in 2012 mirrored the instance in 1991 when the men on the Senate Judiciary Committee showed a lack of empathy toward Anita Hill’s experiences, and women responded with 1992’s “Year of the Woman.” In both of these cases, women electing women was a form of retaliation against the anti-feminist backlash.

However, the victories of 1992 and 2012 did not fix sex inequality overnight. Barriers to equality still remain, particularly in the workplace, and the conservative backlash against feminism is still a powerful political force. Even after 2012, women still make up only a relatively small portion of Congress. Additionally, once in office, newly elected women have no seniority and frequently vote lock step with their party, despite their personal legislative goals. The fact that more women are voted into office does not mean that cultural ideas about women in power have changed.

Yet, after the 2012 election women’s position in Congress is becoming more significant. A recent article in *The New York Times* discussed how many of the women elected to the Senate in 1992 are now veterans who are running powerful committees. There are also hopeful signs that female legislators are more likely than men to cross party lines in order to pass a necessary bill. The article points to the four Republican women in the Senate who split with their party to vote for the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. Former Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME) even called the 20 women now in the Senate “a critical mass that could effect change together.”\(^\text{155}\)

Deborah Pryce (R-OH) mentioned that in addition to their willingness to cross party lines, women office holders were important because they “gave women faith in their government.” She pointed out that this was particularly important now that approval ratings of Congress are hitting all-time lows.\(^\text{156}\)

Recently, an article in *New York Magazine* considered the similarities between 1992 and 2012: “If women’s legislative gains are always a backlash to a backlash, how


\(^{156}\) Deborah Pryce, interview with author, February 22, 2013.
can we expect to move forward?” The article went on to say that, “Relying on voter outrage over extreme examples of sexism seems to all but guarantee that before we take one step forward, we have to take two steps back.” It is certainly disappointing that comments like those of Akin and Mourdock were still being made in 2012. However, for feminists, moving forward requires that the conservative, anti-feminist ideology behind those comments is attacked head-on. Female voters in 1992 and 2012 understood this, and when they took their anger into the voting booths, they were not merely reacting to sexism but defending the victories of second-wave feminism.

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