

178. Phyllis Schlafly, "The Fraud of the Equal Rights Amendment" (1972)

Source: Phyllis Schlafly: "The Fraud of the Equal Rights Amendment," The Phyllis Schlafly Report, Vol. 5, February 1972. Reprinted with permission of Phyllis Schlafly.

One of the first major conservative victories of the 1970s was the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a proposed change in the Constitution that would have affirmed that "equality of rights under the law" could not be abridged because of sex. This seemingly uncontroversial measure passed Congress in 1972 with little opposition. It soon aroused unexpected protest from those who claimed it would discredit the role of wife and homemaker.

To its supporters, the amendment offered a guarantee of women's right to participate fully in public life. Its foes insisted that women should remain within the divinely appointed roles of wife and mother. They claimed it would subject women to the military draft and let men "off the hook" by denying their responsibility to provide for their wives and children. Phyllis Schlafly, a veteran of anticommunist politics of the 1950s, led the campaign against the ERA. Polls consistently showed that a majority of Americans, male and female, favored the measure. But thanks to the mobilization of conservative women, the amendment failed to achieve ratification by the required thirty-eight states.

IN THE LAST couple of years, a noisy movement has sprung up agitating for "women's rights." Suddenly, everywhere we are afflicted with aggressive females on television talk shows yapping about how mistreated American women are, suggesting that marriage has put us in some kind of "slavery," that housework is menial and degrading, and—perish the thought—that women are discriminated against. New "women's liberation" organizations are popping up, agitating and demonstrating, serving demands on public officials, getting wide

press coverage always, and purporting to speak for some 100,000,000 American women.

It's time to set the record straight. The claim that American women are downtrodden and unfairly treated is the fraud of the century. The truth is that American women never had it so good. Why should we lower ourselves to "equal rights" when we already have the status of special privilege?

The proposed Equal Rights Amendment states: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." So what's wrong with that? Well, here are a few examples of what's wrong with it.

This Amendment will absolutely and positively make women subject to the draft. Why any woman would support such a ridiculous and un-American proposal as this is beyond comprehension. Why any Congressman who had any regard for his wife, sister, or daughter would support such a proposition is just as hard to understand. Foxholes are bad enough for men, but they certainly are *not* the place for women—and we should reject any proposal which would put them there in the name of "equal rights." . . .

Another bad effect of the Equal Rights Amendment is that it will abolish a woman's right to child support and alimony, and substitute what the women's libbers think is a more "equal" policy, that "such decisions should be within the discretion of the Court and should be made on the economic situation and need of the parties in the case."

Under present American laws, the man is *always* required to support his wife and each child he caused to be brought into the world. Why should women abandon these good laws—by trading them for something so nebulous and uncertain as the "discretion of the Court"?

The law now requires a husband to support his wife as best as his financial situation permits, but a wife is not required to support her husband (unless he is about to become a public charge). A husband cannot demand that his wife go to work to help pay for family

expenses. He has the duty of financial support under our laws and customs. Why should we abandon these mandatory wife-support and child-support laws so that a wife would have an "equal" obligation to take a job?

By law and custom in America, in case of divorce, the mother always is given custody of her children unless there is overwhelming evidence of mistreatment, neglect or bad character. This is our special privilege because of the high rank that is placed on motherhood in our society. Do women really want to give up this special privilege and lower themselves to "equal rights," so that the mother gets one child and the father gets the other? I think not. . . .

WHAT "WOMEN'S LIB" REALLY MEANS

Many women are under the mistaken impression that "women's lib" means more job employment opportunities for women, equal pay for equal work, appointments of women to high positions, admitting more women to medical schools, and other desirable objectives which all women favor. We all support these purposes, as well as any necessary legislation which would bring them about.

But all this is only a sweet syrup which covers the deadly poison masquerading as "women's lib." The women's libbers are radicals who are waging a total assault on the family, on marriage, and on children.

Questions

1. Why does Schlafly believe that the Equal Rights Amendment will actually harm women?
 2. How does Schlafly's picture of the status of American women differ from that of the Redstockings Manifesto?
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