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RESEARCH ARTICLE

"Is Humanism Molesting Your Child?" Lottie Beth Hobbs, the Death of the ERA, and the Birth of the Religious Right

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Abstract

This article tells the story of Lottie Beth Hobbs, one of the most important figures of the anti-ERA movement – and therefore a founding mother of the Religious Right. Although opposition of fundamentalist women to the ERA increasingly has been recognized in the founding of the Religious Right, Hobbs's role remains underexplored. Relying on a moral and political framework indebted to her lifelong commitment to the Churches of Christ, Hobbs spearheaded a rhetorical and ideological shift that first united disparate conservative causes under a "pro-family" banner, then focused their attention on the threat of a tentacular secular humanism. By focusing on Hobbs's career, this article bridges two scholarly foci on modern American conservatism, one highlighting anti-ERA organizing in the 1970s and the other focused on "family values" activism during the Reagan administration.

Keyword: evangelicalism; fundamentalism; feminism; ERA; secular humanism; religious right

"Mommy," the newspaper advertisement reads, "when I grow up, can I be a lesbian?"

This startling headline accompanies a photo of a young girl, maybe five or six years old, with straight blonde hair, wearing a floppy garden hat and holding a bouquet. Underneath, bold text warns, "If you think this idea is shocking … read what the IWY is proposing for your children." Proposals likely to be endorsed by the upcoming International Women's Year conference in Houston, the ad warns, "will dramatically and permanently change the American way of life." Three of the next four paragraphs detail the threat of gay and lesbian equality – parental rights, marriage, and employment in schools – with the last paragraph listing the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, and federally funded daycare. To resist such radical, destabilizing possibilities and "to demonstrate to the President and to the Congress your disapproval of these proposals,"

readers should attend the Pro-Family Rally in Houston, which had been organized to counterprogram the National Women's Conference across town.[1]

The advertisement was published in the *Houston Chronicle* on November 17, 1977, two days before the dueling women-led rallies. Feminists decried it as a "low blow," yet it accurately captured a shift in the focus of anti-feminist, pro-family organizers – away from the Equal Rights Amendment, by then stumbling to its ultimate demise, and toward more emotionally charged issues, such as homosexuality and abortion.[2] Part of this redirection, although not part of the advertisement, included a new boogeyman, bigger even than the ERA: secular humanism, a many-tentacled monster threatening the heart of the American moral order.

The Pro-Family Coalition organizing the Pro-Family Rally and placing the homophobic *Houston Chronicle* ad was led by Lottie Beth Hobbs, a Fort Worth, Texas, church secretary turned best-selling author, national speaker, and formidable organizer against the ERA. But even as she worked with Phyllis Schlafly to stop the ERA's momentum in 1974 and 1975, Hobbs blazed a new trail, broadening her organization's focus and anticipating the rise of "family values" conservatism and its battle with secular humanism. This article tells her story, and in so doing builds on a recent turn in scholarship of the Religious Right that focuses on the anti-ERA movement as a core part of its formation. Hobbs remains an obscure figure in that movement, often overshadowed by Schlafly, yet as a member of the Churches of Christ, Hobbs led thousands of fundamentalist women to expand and radicalize the antifeminist movement and, even before the death of the ERA, push it toward focusing on the family and the many threats they believed it faced from secular humanism – homosexuality primary among them. Looking at Hobbs's life and career, therefore, helps bridge two stories often told distinctly: the grassroots anti-ERA movement of the 1970s and the pro-family Religious Right of the 1980s.

To tell Hobbs's story, this study focuses particularly on paper, highlighting three key documents from her career as a right-wing activist. In 1974, as co-founder of the memorably named Women Who Want to Be Women, she wrote and published the notorious anti-ERA "pink sheet" distributed nationwide. In 1977, speaking at the Pro-Family Rally she had organized, Hobbs's backdrop included hundreds of thousands of sheets of paper: signed petitions from women opposing not just the ERA but also homosexuality and abortion. And in 1980, her organization, now called the Pro-Family Forum, published an infamous pamphlet titled, "Is Humanism Molesting Your Child?" These documents chart Hobbs's shift from opposing the ERA to confronting secular humanism, from defending traditionalist women to protecting the family, years before James Dobson, Francis Schaeffer, or Jerry Falwell became household names. And they uniquely reflect Hobbs's background as a woman in the patriarchally organized Churches of Christ, which led her to be particularly sensitive to threats she perceived to the strict moral order she inherited and defended.

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized the importance of the anti-ERA movement for the birth and growth of the Religious Right. Historians have highlighted the role of suburban woman in resisting the liberation movements of the 1960s and laying the groundwork for the success of male-led religiopolitical groups in the 1980 presidential campaign and the rise of "family values" politics in the 1980s and 1990s.[3] The role of the

[1]Reprinted in J.K., "Roar on the Right," *Off Our Backs* 8:1 (January 1978), 3. Ellipses in original.

[2]As quoted by Elisabeth Elliot, *Love Has a Price Tag* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant, 1979), 103.

[3]Early studies include Samuel S. Hill and Dennis E. Owen, *The New Religious Political Right in America* (Nashville, T.N.: Abingdon, 1982), and Burton Yale Pines, *Back to Basics: The Traditionalist Movement That Is Sweeping Grass-Roots America* (New York: William Morrow, 1982). Although Donald G. Mathews and

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ultimately successful anti-ERA movement in activating these suburban women is now well attested, as is Phyllis Schlafly's role in leading it.[4] To the extent Hobbs has been discussed, it has tended to be in the context of publishing the pink sheet and organizing the Pro-Family Rally, after which she fades from the story.[5]

Yet Hobbs's role in organizing the grassroots movement that eventually became the foundation for the Religious Right goes beyond these moments. As Ruth Murray Brown first described, Hobbs and numerous fundamentalist women like her led state and national organizations, wrote letters, signed petitions, knocked on doors, planned rallies, recorded cassette tapes, printed pamphlets, and distributed innumerable pieces of literature across the country in the mid-1970s. They not only defeated the ERA but also consolidated previously fragmented conservative religious movements focused on other political priorities, including ending legalized abortion, opposing gay rights, and barring sex education and evolution from public schools.[6] This new "pro-family" movement owed its existence to fundamentalist understandings of the American moral order based on a literalist biblical hermeneutic embraced by Hobbs and her followers. Thus, the story of Lottie Beth Hobbs is the story of the anti-ERA movement, which, in turn, is the origin story of the Religious Right in the United States.

Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), provided an important early revision to this history, for a fuller picture of antifeminist activism as the catalyst for the conservative revolution, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), about the role of suburban housewives in Orange County during the late 1960s. Subsequent studies include: Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Stacie Taranto, *Kitchen Table Politics: Conservative Women and Family Values in New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Emily Suzanne Johnson, *This Is Our Message: Women's Leadership in the New Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Robin M. Morris, *Goldwater Girls to Reagan Women: Gender, Georgia, and the Growth of the New Right* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2022). Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), highlights the importance of White supremacy and anticommunism in the conservative turn of suburban housewives in the 1950s and 1960s.

[4]Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), remains the standard biography. Schlafly, but not Hobbs, plays a prominent role in standard histories of the Religious Right, including William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway, 1996); Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); J. Mark Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: University of Georgia Press: 2011); Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Kristin Kobes du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

[5]The most thorough exploration of Hobbs's role in the anti-ERA movement is Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* (New York: Prometheus, 2002). Hobbs also plays a prominent role in Marjorie J. Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle over Women's Rights and Family Values That Polarized American Politics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), focusing particularly on the dueling women's rallies of 1977. Hobbs and the WWWW also receive recognition in Nancy E. Baker, "Focus on the Family: Twentieth-Century Conservative Texas Women and the Lone Star Right," in *The Texas Right: The Radical Roots of Lone Star Conservatism*, ed. David O'Donald Cullen and Kyle G. Wilkison (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 141–143, and Lauren N. Lewis, "'The Most Damnable Thing': Women Who Want to Be Women and the Fight to Rescind the Equal Rights Amendment in Texas," M.A. thesis (Sam Houston State University, 2020).

[6]Brown, *Christian America*, 123, most explicitly makes this connection.

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Understanding Hobbs's placement within the Religious Right also requires understanding her context within the Churches of Christ. Hobbs was well known in that movement for her books and seminars for women, but the tradition itself is little discussed compared to the White evangelical denominations that came to dominate family values politics. Churches of Christ broke from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the late 1800s and are most predominant in the South, especially Tennessee and Texas. In keeping with their nineteenth century restorationist roots, Churches of Christ generally eschew instrumental music in worship, reject denominational structures, and enforce traditionalist gender norms that prohibit women from teaching men or speaking publicly in church.[7] They also reject several of the distinctive doctrines that tend to define evangelicalism, and leaders within Churches of Christ have tended to refuse the "evangelical" label and treat with suspicion evangelical efforts to engage with American politics.[8] Yet their relative isolation from the broader culture has led Churches of Christ to establish effective internal communication networks – both from the top down and between congregations and their parishioners – with which Hobbs and other women in the movement magnified their anti-ERA and pro-family messages and organized political action across the South and Midwest.[9]

Although Schlafly, a Catholic, was the undisputed leader and public face of the anti-ERA movement, fundamentalist groups like the Churches of Christ made up a disproportionate share of its members. Hobbs thus leveraged her connections within Churches of Christ to build a national movement of people for whom political engagement rarely left the parlor or the voting booth – and in so doing midwifed the birth of one of modern America's most significant religiopolitical movements.[10]

I. The Life and Career of Lottie Beth Hobbs

A native of Abilene, Texas, Lottie Beth Hobbs was born in 1921 to a rancher father and schoolteacher mother and grew up in Depression-era West Texas. She graduated from the Churches of Christ-affiliated Abilene Christian College in 1943, and immediately after, Hobbs worked for General Dynamics, joining millions of women employed in defense plants during World War II.[11] At war's end, she became secretary of Polytechnic Church of Christ in Fort Worth, a large church with a bare-bones staff – a preacher, a secretary,

[7]Thomas H. Olbricht, "Churches of Christ," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), eds. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnavant, and D. Newell Williams, 212–220, hereafter referred to as *ESCM*. See also Kathy J. Pulley, "Women in Ministry: Twentieth Century: Churches of Christ," *ESCM*, 779–780.

[8]Robert D. Cornwall, "Evangelical," in *ESCM*, 314–15.

[9]Churches of Christ were not consistently opposed to using these networks for political activism. See, for example, Paul A. Anthony, "'Drenched with Evolution': Reuel Lemmons and Churches of Christ in the Texas Textbook Controversy of 1964," *Restoration Quarterly* 59:4 (2017), 213–223.

[10]For this article, I accept the Churches of Christ as a fundamentalist group, following the contemporary description of reporters and other observers of the anti-ERA movement. However, the scope and definition of Protestant fundamentalism remain in question, as does the fit of Churches of Christ within that category. On the definitional question, see Michael S. Hamilton, "The Interdenominational Evangelicalism of D.L. Moody and the Problem of Fundamentalism," in *American Evangelicalism: George Marsden and the State of American Religious History*, ed. Darren Dochuk, Thomas S. Kidd, and Kurt W. Peterson (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014). On the relationship between Churches of Christ and other fundamentalists, see C.J. Dull, "Fundamentalism," in *ESCM*, 346.

[11]"Lottie Beth Hobbs," obituary, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (7 June 2016), A15.

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and a custodian – that soon became the third-largest Church of Christ in the country.[12] Fort Worth was a rapidly growing Southern suburb; its population more than doubled between 1940 and 1960. It thus experienced many of the same demographic pressures and resulting opportunities for conservative growth and activism as other Bible and Sun Belt suburbs on which scholars have focused.[13]

With such a small staff and a rapidly growing congregation, Polytechnic's leadership asked Hobbs to teach a women's Bible class. She agreed, making her own study guides when she could not find any to use.[14] Hobbs had a knack for public speaking; her classes drew as many as 175 women each Sunday, and in the 1950s, her success at teaching opened new pathways for her career. She went on the road, giving presentations to women's groups across Texas and eventually the country. In 1956, for example, she returned to her alma mater to co-teach a class on "Personal Work for Women" at ACC's annual lectureship.[15] Later, she traveled to Gadsden, Alabama, for a series on "the varied works of women in the church."[16] Likewise, she began writing for publications distributed mainly within Churches of Christ, including the magazine *Christian Woman*, where in an advertisement the unmarried Hobbs was one of only two women listed with their first names, instead of with the names of their husbands.[17] From there, she began converting her classes into books. By 1960, they were in circulation among women's "study clubs" throughout Texas.[18]

Among these books, *Daughters of Eve* especially revealed the importance Hobbs placed on gender roles in preserving American society. In it, she upholds a religious form of what Rebecca DeWolf has described as conservative maternalism, in which women must "partake in the public sphere to protect the home from what could be perceived as subversive influences such as communism, socialism, and feminism."[19] Thus, Hobbs wrote, "A nation can sustain a moral strength no greater than the homes which constitute it, and the home usually rises no higher than the ideals of the woman in it." She encouraged her readers to learn not only from the positive examples of holy women, but also from the "women who carried their families and others down the rocky and evil path to bitter destruction."[20] Hobbs cited the wicked Queen Jezebel from 1 Kings as "everything a woman should not be," an example that "nothing is more vicious than a devilish woman." Indeed,

[12]Noble Patterson, "Leroy Brownlow: 1914–2002," *Firm Foundation* 118:7 (July 2003), http://www.therestorationmovement.com/_states/texas/brownlow.htm.

[13]McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 13, finds commonalities between Fort Worth and Orange County. See also Morris, *Goldwater Girls*, 5–6, on the importance of suburban Atlanta.

[14]John Hobbs, telephone interview, 29 November 2021.

[15]"Fifty Classes Scheduled for ACC Anniversary Lectureship," *Christian Chronicle* (4 January 1956), 1.

[16]"News in Brief," *Christian Chronicle* (16 December 1958), 6. Newspaper articles from this period also find her speaking in Odessa; at Lubbock's Broadway Church of Christ; at the Fort Worth Christian College lectureship; at ACC's annual teaching workshop; and at a homecoming celebration for Hermitage Church of Christ in Tennessee. See "Broadway Breaks Record," *Christian Chronicle* (4 June 1965), 1; "Here and There on the High Plains," *Christian Chronicle* (5 November 1965), 2; "Fort Worth Christian College Lectureship," advertisement, *Christian Chronicle* (4 March 1966), 7; "Workshop Teachers Chosen," *Christian Chronicle* (17 June 1966), 3; "The Church of Christ at Hermitage," advertisement, *The Tennesseean* (18 October 1969), 5.

[17]"Working for Him," advertisement, *Christian Chronicle* (21 January 1958), 4.

[18]"Study Clubs Begin Season," *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal* (21 September 1960), 31.

[19]Rebecca DeWolf, *Gendered Citizenship: The Original Conflict Over the Equal Rights Amendment, 1920–1963* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 76–77.

[20]Lottie Beth Hobbs, *Daughters of Eve: Strength for Today … From Women of Yesterday* (Fort Worth, Texas: Harvest, 1963), 3–4.

Jezebel was proof that "God never planned for women to dominate and rule, and compliance with this divine principle would avert many pitfalls."[21]

Likewise, Hobbs lamented how "atheism, skepticism, and modernism have permeated our society," leading to increased unbelief "in the infallibility of God's word." To stand against this unbelieving majority "takes real courage, real manhood and womanhood." For Hobbs, national greatness depended not simply on opposing communism or affirming traditional gender roles – but on women embracing a literalist interpretation of the Bible, teaching it in their homes, and fighting for it in the public sphere. "Ours is no time for the mouse-hearted," she wrote. "A nation cannot long survive if her people lose their conviction, courage, and moral stamina."[22] For Hobbs, the maternalist view that women should defend the domestic sphere was based on the literalist hermeneutic embraced by Churches of Christ since their founding, and to turn away from this patriarchal order was to invite national destruction.[23]

With the American social order depending so heavily on maintaining what Hobbs saw as biblically defined gender roles – informed by her context as a White member of Churches of Christ in the Southern suburbs – it is no surprise that she began speaking out politically, embracing what Michelle Nickerson calls "housewife populism," and that her audience frequently included people beyond the Churches of Christ.[24] In 1960, Hobbs was among more than 100 "Democrats for Nixon-Lodge" to sign a newspaper advertisement endorsing the Republican presidential candidate.[25] Shortly after, Hobbs wrote a letter to her local newspaper rejecting unilateral disarmament in the nuclear arms race, indicating a heightened concern about communism and the Soviet Union, and by 1961 she had spread that concern through her speaking schedule, discussing "Combating *(sic)* Communism" at a Fort Worth meeting of the Associated Women for Christian Education.[26] After ending 1960 as a "Democrat for Nixon," Hobbs's political transformation – foreshadowing Southern trends over the next two decades – was complete by the end of 1961, when a brief notice announced her as the upcoming speaker for the Rolling Hills Republican Club.[27]

Hobbs's departure from the Democrats aligned with her increased focus on communism. Weeks after she spoke to the local Republicans at the end of 1961, Hobbs presented to the Jefferson Junior High School PTA in Grand Prairie, Texas, on "the evils of Communism and … how symptoms of Communism can be reconciled." According to the local newspaper, Hobbs "became interested in this subject several years ago," and had "done considerable research into the philosophy and theory of Communism."[28] In 1963, at the height of tension between the United States, Cuba, and the Soviet Union, Hobbs spoke in Lubbock on the subject, "Should Christians Oppose Communism?"[29] In a foreshadowing of her later activism, Hobbs did not limit her appearances to theological allies. In addition to ostensibly secular groups like the PTA, she spoke on "You and

[21]Ibid., 135–138.

[22]Ibid., 151.

[23]Pulley, "Women in Ministry," 779.

[24]Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, 172.

[25]"We Believe," advertisement, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (4 November 1960), 4.

[26]Lottie Beth Hobbs, "A Fine Editorial," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (22 November 1960), 4; "Miss Hobbs to Speak," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (14 October 1961), 5.

[27]"GOP Meeting Scheduled," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (11 December 1961), 15.

[28]"Evils of Communism Is Jefferson P-TA Topic," *The News Texan* (28 December 1961), 2.

[29]"9th Anniversary Meeting at Vandelia Village Church of Christ," advertisement, *Westerner World* (23 February 1963), 6.

Communism" at the First Christian Church in Fort Worth, part of the mainline Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) from which Churches of Christ had split decades earlier; highlighting the threat of communism transcended old theological disputes.[30] This political turn mirrored larger concerns within Churches of Christ and among conservative Christians generally, including Schlafly herself. Furthermore, it tapped into a decades-old tendency to view communism as a subversive threat to divinely ordained patriarchal gender roles, as Leslie Dorrough Smith and Carl Weinberg have described.[31] For these eventual leaders of the anti-ERA and pro-family movements, anticommunism was their first taste of political activism.

By the mid-1960s, Hobbs had become so popular that at age 44, she retired from her secretarial job to concentrate full time on publishing and speaking.[32] Through the rest of the decade, she received prominent billing while speaking at church revivals and college campuses across the South, almost invariably the only woman to be pictured on event advertisements – or even listed with her own first name.[33] The connections she continued to make, the networks she formed, and the independent career she had created allowed Hobbs to respond forcefully when confronted with what she saw as the disturbing implications of the Equal Rights Amendment.

II. Women Who Want to Be Women and the Pink Sheet

Hobbs told her anti-ERA origin story numerous times in subsequent years. It started in 1974 with, fittingly enough, a piece of paper – a leaflet condemning the ERA, which by then had been approved by thirty of the thirty-eight states needed to become the 27th amendment to the Constitution. After speaking to a group of women, Hobbs came across the leaflet, and what she read troubled her. As Hobbs discussed the pamphlet with other women in the room, one asked, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" Determining to learn more about the people behind the ERA, she checked out books on feminism from the library, and was so horrified by what she learned about the movement, she hid the materials under her bed so her nieces and nephews would not find them. "As I was digging more and more into it and found out the basis of it," she recalled years later, "I knew it was much bigger than just ERA. ERA was just one of the arms of the whole thing."[34] Hobbs quickly identified "the whole thing" behind the ERA as secular humanism – making an early leap that would prove consequential for the nascent Religious Right.[35]

[30]"Women's Fellowship Will Meet Tuesday," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (17 March 1963), 60. On the fraught relationship between the Churches and Disciples of Christ, see D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2013), 76–93.

[31]Leslie Dorrough Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 42–43; Carl R. Weinberg, *Red Dynamite: Creationism, Culture Wars, and Anticommunism in America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2021), 40–43.

[32]Hobbs, interview.

[33]"Broadway Church of Christ Opens Ira North Revival This Morning," *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal* (25 April 1965), 75; "One Thousand!!" advertisement, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (28 August 1965), 4; "57 Non-Abilene Residents Will Teach Workshop," *Abilene Reporter-News* (19 June 1966), 39; "Speakers for ACC Youth Week Set," *Abilene Reporter-News* (19 July 1966), 13; "The Church of Christ at Hermitage."

[34]Brown, *Christian America*, 65.

[35]Brown Trail Archive, "Lottie Beth Hobbs: The Darkness of Secular Humanism," Brown Trail Church of Christ (1998), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7D6V8y-4o8, 9:42.

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First, however, Hobbs co-founded the Women Who Want to Be Women (WWWW) in 1974. "From what we could understand, the feminists weren't proud to be women," Hobbs said later. "They put down women and wanted to be equal with men. We wanted to emphasize that we had a different philosophy, that we were proud of being women."[36] At its outset, Hobbs used a combination of practical, religious, and social arguments, many of them pioneered by Schlafly – alternately claiming the ERA would result in forced coed barracks, that it violated God's designated roles for the sexes, that the organizations advancing the ERA supported homosexuality and abortion, and that current social norms benefited women by requiring men to provide for them. Even so, the women signaled that the ERA was not their only focus. "We have a lot of immorality to work on," co-founder Becky Tilotta told an Abilene news conference, "such as pornography and abortion."[37] Hobbs took over the organization in 1975 and led it for thirteen years. As it attracted increasing numbers of men, it changed names to The Association of the W's and finally in 1977 the Pro-Family Forum.[38]

Although WWWW quickly began working with the better funded and better organized Schlafly, in its early days the group relied primarily on the informal networks of women scattered throughout Texas who shared news via paper, telephone, cassette tape, and monthly meetings. In Kermit, Texas, for example, the semiweekly *Winkler County News* first reported in October 1974 that a group of "concerned women" had met to discuss the ERA and listen to a taped speech on the subject Hobbs had recently given.[39] A week later, another group listened to Hobbs's tape: the Women's Missionary Council of the First Assembly of God, another sign that Hobbs – despite her roots in Churches of Christ, whose leaders typically expressed antipathy for Pentecostal doctrines – was willing to cross denominational lines in service of a greater goal. Hobbs "is contacting women across Texas to express their opposition to the proposed amendment," the newspaper reported. "She urged every woman who loves God's law for home, marriage, family and decency to vote against the amendment."[40] A week later, two more groups reported meeting about the ERA and listening to Hobbs's tape: the Ladies Council, meeting at the First Christian Church, and the local chapter of the non-academic sorority Beta Sigma Phi, where "Mrs. Paul Hollinshead," a Methodist, presented the tape.[41] Finally, two weeks later, the paper reported that Hobbs herself would speak on the ERA at nearby Odessa College in November.[42] In total, 44 women – all of them married – attended the four meetings over two weeks in October 1974, with no overlap in attendance. Presumably, some of them drove the hour to Odessa to see Hobbs speak in person the next month. Whether any were inspired to further activism is not recorded – but it seems possible, if not likely.

Kermit, Texas, was not an outlier in the way Hobbs's message spread through groups of women in late 1974 and early 1975. Just as she had a decade earlier, Hobbs spoke to

[36]Brown, *Christian America*, 65.

[37]Marsha Comstock, "Women's Group Fighting Legal Equality of Sexes," *Abilene Reporter-News* (24 July 1974), 12.

[38]Brown, *Christian America*, 66.

[39]"Women to Discuss Amendment," *Winkler County News* (14 October 1974), 2. Kermit is ten miles south of the New Mexico border, sixty miles west of Midland. The 1980 Census counted 8,015 residents.

[40]"Council Hears Taped Message," *Winkler County News* (17 October 1974), 1B.

[41]"Mrs. Dawson Is Chapter Sweetheart," *Winkler County News* (24 October 1974), 2B; "Ladies Council Meets Tuesday," *Winkler County News* (24 October 1974), 3B.

[42]"Author to Speak at Odessa College," *Winkler County News* (7 November 1974), 1B.

women – and some men – across Texas before expanding her reach to the rest of the country. She and Tilotta held the news conference in Abilene, and Hobbs debated ERA supporters and lectured in Irving, held the rally in Odessa, spoke at a Baptist church in Cleburne, protested a sexuality conference in Fort Worth, and lectured to the Concerned Citizens for Feminine Freedom in the Paris High School auditorium in East Texas.[43] Then, in 1976, she allied with conservative Catholic women to hold an anti-ERA workshop in Kansas, told a Missouri audience the ERA was "a dose of strychnine," and shared the stage with anti-ERA politicians at Louisiana State University Shreveport.[44] When viewed through the public documentation of Hobbs's frenetic schedule, the anti-ERA movement appears not as a top-down organization directed solely by Phyllis Schlafly, but rather as a groundswell of conservative women in small towns across the South, West, and Midwest activated by a Sunday school teacher and inspirational author who used pre-established social and religious networks to spread her messages.

If these networks are easily overlooked for their informality, their rural setting, or the fact that women led them, they are also overlooked for their materiality, the reliance especially on paper and cassette tapes to spread the ideas and reproduce the speeches on which scholars have tended to focus. This materiality is exemplified by the pink sheet – a notorious and widely distributed pink paper written and printed by Hobbs, who self-funded the first 10,000 copies. Numerous women joined the anti-ERA movement after reading the pink sheet, which eventually spread nationwide through churches, hair salons, businesses, and social gatherings, as well as reprints in local newspapers, including in Kermit.[45] Along with being eye-catching, the pink sheet was scathing in its condemnation of the ERA – but not always accurate or nuanced in its arguments, relying instead on triggering sharp emotions in its readers. The left-leaning *Texas Observer* described it as "an effectively dishonest piece of propaganda."[46] Even among her allies, Hobbs's work raised eyebrows: "I wouldn't have done it," said Ann Patterson, an Episcopalian who coordinated successful anti-ERA efforts in Oklahoma, "and Phyllis wouldn't have done it. But it fascinates me that this did happen, because in order to get lots of people involved, you have to use emotional appeals."[47]

Whether the ends justified the means, the means were undeniably effective. The pink sheet, so colored because of pink's stereotypical association with femininity, features two clip-art illustrations of women talking on the phone, one at each top corner.[48] Between them atop the page, initially in script but eventually in bold display type, is the headline: "Ladies! Have You Heard?" Opening the page's argument are

[43]Comstock, "Women's Group"; "Tonight: Liberated Women … Are You Sure?" advertisement, *The Odessa American* (11 November 1974), 4; "Lecture Scheduled Monday," *The Paris News* (26 January 1975), 20; "ERA Debate: Cheers, Applause, Snickers," *Irving Daily News* (25 February 1975), 1; "Cleburne Session," photograph, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (22 March 1975), 1; Zenna Seastrunk, "Anti-ERA Foresees 'Unisex Society,'" *Irving Daily News* (27 March 1975), 3; "8 Groups Protest Sexuality Session," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (16 September 1975), 4.

[44]"E.R.A.! A Wolf in Sheeps Clothing!" advertisement, *The Parsons Sun* (19 January 1976), 2; "ERA Event Speaker Is Announced," *The Times* (27 February 1976), 5; "Anti-ERA Group to Attend Hearing," *Garden City Telegram* (9 March 1976), 3; Ben Farrar, "Author Compares ERA to 'Poison,'" *Springfield News-Leader* (17 July 1976), 12.

[45]"Ladies! Have You Heard?" advertisement, *Winkler County News* (3 October 1974), 8. On the pink sheet in Georgia, see Morris, *Goldwater Girls*, 103.

[46]Kaye Northcutt, "The Ladies Mobilize: Fighting the ERA," *Texas Observer* (15 November 1974), 3.

[47]Brown, *Christian America*, 41.

[48]Ibid.

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several all-caps questions: "Do you know who is planning your future for you? Are you sure they are planning what you really want? If not, it's time to wake up and speak up! The hour is late!"[49] Following this introduction, Hobbs asks readers several questions, also in all-caps. Some questions are straightforward – "What is the Equal Rights Amendment?" – but some are more provocative, such as: "Do you want to lose your right not to work?," "Do you want to lose your right to privacy?," and "Do you want your husband to sleep in barracks with women?" After each question, Hobbs provides the context for the question, usually by showing how the ERA "strikes at the very foundation of family life."

After reprinting the text of the ERA, the pink sheet responds, "Simple, isn't it? BUT HAVE YOU LOOKED AT THE HOOK INSIDE THE BAIT?" From there, it unleashes a parade of horribles: loss of a right to stay home and raise children; gay marriage and adoption; elimination of separate-sex bathrooms, prisons, hospital rooms, and college dormitories; and, most alarming, "Your husband will be sharing sleeping quarters, restrooms, showers, and/or foxholes with women." Schlafly in her newsletters had mainly repeated decades-old protectionist objections to the ERA focused on conserving special legal and social privileges for women in return for their acceptance of domesticity.[50] While many of the pink sheet's paragraphs copied those arguments, it added the specter of unisex bathrooms, coed showers in colleges, and churches punished for refusing to ordain women – implications, regardless of their likelihood, that spoke to the fears of fundamentalists within Churches of Christ resisting challenges to a patriarchal gender hierarchy they saw as essential to social order.[51]

The strident tone of the pink sheet and its fear-based appeals proved impossible to resist. In subsequent years, WWWW and other anti-ERA groups found two topics especially energizing: abortion and homosexuality, particularly the latter. Burton Pines recounts how Jo Ann Gasper, an anti-ERA leader in Virginia, had supported the ERA but was "shocked" by "the prominent role lesbians were playing in the official feminist movement."[52] Schlafly lieutenant Rosemary Thomson opens her account of the anti-ERA movement with how she and other conservative delegates to the National Women's Conference "watched in numb silence as lesbians streamed into the galleries." Listing pro-gay sentiments on some of the attendees' signs, Thomson continues: "Others were too obscene to repeat."[53] This sense of fear and disgust inspired by overtly religious convictions increasingly overwhelmed arguments that had been forged in the previous battles over the ERA about the proper role of the federal government and the

[49]Reprints of the pink sheet can be found in Brown, *Christian America*, 40, and from the Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/women-who-want-to-be-women-association-of-the-ws. The text is also reprinted in Judith N. McArthur and Harold L. Smith, *Texas Through Women's Eyes: The Twentieth-Century Experience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 246–250.

[50]DeWolf, *Gendered Citizenship*, 4–5. Phyllis Schlafly, "What's Wrong With 'Equal Rights' for Women?" *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* 5:7 (February 1972), 2–3, http://www.eagleforum.org/publications/psr/feb1972.html; "The Right to Be a Woman," *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* 6:4 (November 1972), http://www.eagleforum.org/publications/psr/nov1972.html. Cf. Lottie Beth Hobbs, "Liberated? … Are You Sure?" *The Clifton Record* (31 October 1974), 11; Comstock, "Women's Group"; and Ron Acree, "ERA–It's Enough to Scare a Guy," *The Chickasha Star* (12 December 1974), 7.

[51]Brown, *Christian America*, 42.

[52]Pines, *Back to Basics*, 155.

[53]Rosemary Thomson, *The Price of LIBerty* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, 1978), 9.

effectiveness of existing anti-discrimination laws.[54] Just as Hobbs was motivated by reading feminist literature so disturbing to her that she felt compelled to hide it under her bed despite living alone, so other women were compelled to join her movement by her descriptions of lesbian marriage and adoption.

One of those women, Beverly Findley, also a Church of Christ member, organized the Oklahoma chapter of WWWW. As she built up that organization in the state, she did so mainly by relying on the same phone lists and informal contacts that sustained other, more apolitical efforts within Churches of Christ. She spoke several times a week to local congregations within the movement, advertising by word of mouth because of the churches' general aversion to overt political activism. "I just notified the people I worshipped with," she said. "They are the people who think the way I do, and I knew that they would be likely to feel the same as I did."[55] As she told the Oklahoma University student newspaper, "People who believe at all in the word of God will be opposed to the ERA."[56]

For her part, Schlafly understood the value Hobbs, Findley, and other Churches of Christ women provided for the anti-ERA movement. Initially comprising mainly conservative Catholics and Jews, Schlafly's movement could easily have provoked distrust and rejection from fundamentalists in small towns like Kermit or Paris, but just as Hobbs put aside the theological convictions of her congregation to work with women from Pentecostal and other backgrounds, so Schlafly allowed Hobbs to take the lead among her compatriots. "Little by little," Schlafly recalled, "we were bringing in the Protestant groups and by 1976 we just had a tremendous array of the different Protestant groups, all of them."[57] In 1975, when Schlafly organized the Eagle Forum, she named three women from Churches of Christ to the inaugural board of directors, including Hobbs.[58]

Because of Hobbs, Findley, and other Churches of Christ "foot soldiers," as Marjorie Spruill describes them, the tradition – despite being relatively small compared to other Protestant denominations – carried outsize influence in the anti-ERA movement.[59] In his sampling of anti-ERA protestors at the Texas Legislature's 1975 hearings to consider rescinding that state's ratification, Kent Tedin found not only that they "were middle-aged, well groomed, and dressed in pink for symbolic reasons," but that nearly 60 percent of them were members of Churches of Christ, with 9 percent Baptist and 9 percent Methodist, despite those latter two denominations comprising a far larger percentage of the state's religious adherents.[60] Working in concert with Schlafly and other anti-ERA groups, WWWW distributed pamphlets, organized rallies, and lobbied politicians.

In Texas, the result was stark. In the early 1970s, Texas had been an overwhelmingly pro-ERA state. The Legislature passed – and 80 percent of voters approved – the Texas Equal Legal Rights Amendment in 1971, and after Congress sent the nearly identical federal version to the states in March 1972, Texas was among the first to ratify it,

[54]The closest ERA opponents came to such emotionally charged arguments appears to be in 1950, when Sen. Estes Kefauver argued the ERA would lead to unisex bathrooms. See DeWolf, *Gendered Citizenship*, 195.

[55]Brown, *Christian America*, 36–38

[56]Robyn McHeffey, "ERA 'Violates God's Teachings,'" *The Oklahoma Daily* (1 September 1976), 10.

[57]Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, 88.

[58]Brown, *Christian America*, 78.

[59]Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, 86.

[60]Kent L. Tedin, "Religious Preference and Pro/Anti Activism on the Equal Rights Amendment Issue," *Pacific Sociological Review* 21:1 (January 1978), 59–60. According to Brown, *Christian America*, 69, members of Churches of Christ made up just 2.5 percent of Texas' population at the time.

capping a special session with a 133–9 vote in the House and a unanimous voice vote in the Senate.[61] In 1975, however, the Legislature held hearings to rescind its ratification with raucous protests within and outside the State Capitol. The "belated, often hysterical opposition," in the eyes of the *Texas Observer*, had a "fundamentalist theme," and the periodical blamed WWWW and the pink sheet, which was "popping up all over the place." Indeed, the *Observer* noted, the primary objections were not those of anti-ERA women from previous generations repeated by Schlafly, but rather the arguments based on fears of moral decline pioneered by Hobbs: "The great sizzling issue of the anti-ERA movement is unisex bathrooms." Or, as one anonymous legislator put it, "There's just enough sex in this to titillate the fundamentalists."[62] Lurking behind the panic over unisex bathrooms, as Mathews and DeHart show, was the sublimated fear of race mixing – not only would White women be forced to share bathrooms with White men, but even more alarming, with Black men as well.[63]

Frustrated by the rise of anti-ERA activism in the state, Texas feminists mobilized a response that included a "blue sheet" responding point-by-point to Hobbs's claims.[64] One legislator sought a legal opinion of the pink sheet's arguments from the state's attorney general, who rejected them as untrue. Even so, rumors swirled that state offices and schools were abolishing separate-sex bathrooms, leading legislators to investigate their veracity.[65] Within months of WWWW's formation, the state's PTA membership passed a resolution supporting rescission over the objections of its board, likewise citing the possibility of unisex bathrooms.[66] And when news broke that cosmetic giant Mary Kay was distributing the pink sheet through its mailing list, the National Organization of Women threatened a boycott, forcing company founder Mary Kay Ash to disavow any position on the amendment.[67] Even so, "Feminists are losing ground on Texas soil," the *Observer* fretted after the rescission hearing, which included concessions by supporters that women might be drafted and same-sex marriage could be legalized under the amendment. In one incident, outspoken feminist legislator Billie Carr, spying a group of WWWW protestors in the halls of the State Capitol, pointedly used the men's room in front of them, then joked, "Well, that's what it's all about, isn't it?"[68]

III. The Pro-Family Rally and the Birth of the Religious Right

Ultimately unable to rescind Texas ratification of the ERA yet successfully stalling the amendment's progress elsewhere – just one state ratified the amendment in 1975 and

[61]McArthur and Smith, *Texas Through Women's Eyes*, 213. Legislative Reference Library of Texas, http://www.lrl.texas.gov/legis/billsearch/amendmentDetails.cfm?amendmentID=331&legSession=62-0&billTypedetail=SJR&billNumberDetail=16. William Wayne Kilgarin and Banks Tarver, "The Equal Rights Amendment: Government Action and Individual Liberty," *Texas Law Review* 68 (1990), 1548.

[62]Northcutt, "The Ladies Mobilize," 1.

[63]Mathews and De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA*, 165. On the shift from White supremacy to gender essentialism in upholding traditional Southern hierarchies, see also Self, *All in the Family*, 317; Dowland, *Family Values*, 19; and Miller, *Goldwater Girls*, 6.

[64]McArthur and Smith, *Texas through Women's Eyes*, 251–254.

[65]Northcutt, "The Ladies Mobilize," 4.

[66]David Powell, "Political Intelligence," *Texas Observer* (29 November 1974), 12.

[67]"Political Intelligence: Mary Kay and the ERA," *Texas Observer* (28 March 1975), 8.

[68]Kaye Northcott and John Ferguson, "The Legislature Adrift," *Texas Observer* (9 May 1975), 5. Rescission ultimately died in committee.

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none in 1976 – Hobbs retooled the WWWW, "broadening its scope" to "all issues that include the family." In a June 1975 meeting, Hobbs listed federally funded childcare, "pornography and immorality in the media," and school textbooks as primary concerns.[69] Two months later, more than 200 attendees heard Hobbs describe "a creeping moral decay" that required a focus on "all areas affecting women and their families."[70] In interviews and speeches, Hobbs also began raising the specter of secular humanism, linking it to her anti-ERA fight and her coalescing pro-family focus. Secular humanists, she claimed, "reject the idea that God gave a blueprint for women to live by," and embraced a philosophy that was inherently incompatible with "the basic belief in God and the Bible."[71] In Colorado, she told more than 300 women at Lakewood Church of Christ of "dangerous trends that involve textbooks" exposing their children to "humanist philosophies."[72] Hobbs thus described a dualistic world in which a biblical perspective embracing strictly defined, "complementary" gender roles was opposed by a shadowy "-ism" leading the country to moral perdition.[73] This shift from focusing specifically on the ERA to gathering seemingly disparate issues under the umbrella of supporting the family and opposing secular humanism makes Hobbs a pivotal figure in the pro-family movement that would birth the Religious Right by decade's end.[74]

As the renamed Association of the W's met in November 1975 for the first time under its new charter as a national organization, Hobbs decried the evidences of moral decay all around her: not only the ERA, but also legalized abortion, the spread of pornography, secular humanism embedded in school textbooks – and the recently United Nations-proclaimed International Year of the Woman.[75] Thus feminists and antifeminists alike turned their attention to the November 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston, the climax of a process begun with the UN declaration. With a $5 million federal allotment, NWC organizers selected delegates from all fifty states to attend the conference and craft an agenda focusing on greater equality for women.[76] Unable to stop the conference or subvert it through the election of a critical mass of conservative delegates, the leaders of the antifeminist forces who had so successfully halted the momentum of the ERA struggled to plan a response to this new threat. Hobbs suggested organizing a

[69]Nene Foxhall, "Faction Broadens Attack," *Dallas Morning News* (3 July 1975), 3C.

[70]Nene Foxhall, "W's Probe Moral Decay," *Dallas Morning News* (29 August 1975), 2C.

[71]Sue Grauen, "'Blueprint to Live By'," *Fort Worth Press* (25 September 1975).

[72]"Several Hundred Hear Hobbs," *Rocky Mountain Christian* (November 1975), 8.

[73]For example, Ann Baker, "… Or a Leap Back?," *Dallas Morning News* (21 January 1977).

[74]On the importance of family to fundamentalism and the rise of the Religious Right, see Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993); Bendroth, "Fundamentalism and the Family: Gender, Culture, and the American Pro-Family Movement," *Journal of Women's History* 10:4 (Winter 1999), 35–54; Leo P. Ribuffo, "Family Policy Past as Prologue: Jimmy Carter, the White House Conference on Families, and the Mobilization of the New Christian Right," *Review of Policy Research* 23:2 (March 2006), 311–338; Seth Dowland, "Family Values and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda" *Church History* 75:3 (September 2009), 606–631; and Anneke Stasson, "The Politicization of Family Life: How Headship Became Essential to Evangelical Identity in the Late Twentieth Century," *Religion and American Culture* 24:1 (Winter 2014), 100–138. These sources date the rise of family values rhetoric to the late 1970s, several years after Hobbs began publicly making this shift.

[75]Sharon Cobler, "Anti-ERA Movement Goes National," *Dallas Morning News* (27 November 1975), C1.

[76]Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, 205–234.

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counter-rally. Although Schlafly's advisors opposed it, Schlafly ultimately agreed, warning Hobbs that "the burden will fall on your women in Texas."[77]

Indeed, it did. As Marjorie Spruill has documented, Hobbs coordinated speakers, arranged accommodations, booked the Astro Arena venue, and traveled the country, drawing once again on her experience as an in-demand speaker to drum up interest, encouraging congregations and individuals alike to charter buses, drive cars, or book flights to Houston.[78] "Hobbs had the determination to do the hard work and to motivate others to do likewise," Schlafly later wrote.[79] Thomson acknowledged her own skepticism before the event: "Many of us were 'doubting Thomases,' to say the least," she wrote. "How will [Christian women] ever go all the way to Texas?"[80] Hobbs, however, was bullish. With two decades of experience writing for and speaking to fundamentalist women, she had a better sense than Schlafly of the extent to which they would defend their families against the threats Hobbs had identified. "The momentum building in various parts of the nation is incredible, encouraging and thrilling," she wrote to Thomson. "To see all the mail pouring in – resolutions from every state – is one of the most amazing and thrilling sights you can imagine!"[81]

Those petitions became a material indication of the event's significance within the pro-family movement. Hobbs co-wrote a four-part resolution distributed nationwide. A signer could return it by mail or bring it with her to the conference, and Hobbs promised to deliver the signed petitions to President Jimmy Carter and members of Congress. The petitions' first resolution demanded a Human Life Amendment be added to the Constitution, the second affirmed that "pre-school child development programs shall be controlled by the private sector," the third opposed ratification of the ERA, and the fourth argued that "homosexuality, lesbianism, or prostitution" should not be "taught, glorified, or otherwise promoted as acceptable" by law, adoption, or public schools.[82] The resolutions represent a tangible merging of the anti-ERA movement with nascent opposition to abortion and reaction against advances made by the gay liberation movement.[83]

Indeed, frustration with newly inaugurated President Carter's failure to forthrightly condemn homosexuality and abortion was fomenting rebellion among the conservative religious grassroots that had embraced the first election of a self-described evangelical Christian. As the gay liberation movement grew in visibility during the 1970s, the homophobic backlash among antifeminist groups also increased. In a co-written September 1977 open letter to Carter, Hobbs linked the ERA with homosexuality, "both of which strike at the moral fiber of our nation." She lamented that "all manner of radicals and perverts" had joined the feminist movement: "The women libbers, radical feminists, the pro-abortionists and the homosexuals don't speak for us. We want you to hear the real American women who want the government to leave our lives and our families alone."[84]

[77]Thomson, *Price of LIBerty*, 138. See also Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 245.

[78]Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, 240.

[79]Phyllis Schlafly, "Pro-Family Rally Attracts 20,000," *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* 11:5 (December 1977), 2, http://www.eagleforum.org/publications/psr/dec1977.html.

[80]Thomson, *Price of LIBerty*, 138.

[81]Ibid., 141–142. See also Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, 236–241.

[82]Thomson, *Price of LIBerty*, 140–141.

[83]It also enshrined opposition to federally funded childcare, which Richard Nixon vetoed in 1971; another attempt stalled in the U.S. House in 1975. Ribuffo, "Family Policy Past as Prologue," 318.

[84]Lottie Beth Hobbs, Karen Dukewits, and Donna Carlson, letter to Jimmy Carter (15 September 1977). Dukewits (sometimes spelled Dukewitz) was a fellow Association of the W's member who testified against the ERA before the Republican Party's 1976 platform committee alongside three other "W's." See "1976 Republican National Convention: Temporary Committee on Resolutions (Platform)," 20, http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0205/1672790.pdf. She also served as a conservative delegate from

As the National Women's Conference and its pro-family counterprotest loomed, Hobbs again was at the forefront of a shift in rhetoric, embracing homophobia to contrast the feminist movement and the Carter presidency with nostalgic images of the White nuclear family reinforced by fundamentalist readings of the Bible – as the controversial *Houston Chronicle* advertisement made clear. This emphasis flowed naturally from the rhetoric Hobbs and her fellow organizers employed in creating and naming the Women Who Want to Be Women. Those who advocated for the ERA seemed to reject the inherent femininity of their gender; they "were women-who-refused-to-be-women," unacceptably masculine.[85] If feminists were not lesbians themselves, they were certainly too close for comfort.

When November 19, 1977, dawned, the Astro Arena parking lot filled with charter buses from across the country – Mormons from Utah, Baptists from the Deep South, Churches of Christ from Texas, Methodists and other Protestants from the Midwest, and Sun Belt conservatives from California converged on Houston. At least 11,000 people filled the 12,000-capacity arena.[86] Streaming from charter buses, the crowds – mostly women, mostly White, and mostly middle aged, although families with young children and groups of teenagers also attended – waved and smiled to camera crews, burnishing signs that ranged from the geographic, such as "Utah Is Here!," to the homophobic: "ERA = 90% Gay." One attendee holding a Confederate flag walked alongside another with a sign reading, "I.W.Y. = U.F.O. Un-Feminine Objects."[87]

After an opening prayer that asked God for deliverance from "unreasonable men and women who would make license out of those wonderful liberties paid for by our forefathers," Lottie Beth Hobbs strode to the microphone, addressing the counter-rally she had suggested and organized in front of tables covered with stacks of paper – the signed and returned petitions from hundreds of thousands of people, most of them women. "What we are witnessing in Houston today is not the battle of the sexes. It's not even the battle between women," she said, marrying her initial anti-ERA activism with her increasing emphasis on combatting secular humanism. "What we are witnessing is the battle of philosophies." Hobbs accused the feminists across town of conspiring to "remove those [divinely placed] safeguards and plunge us into social and moral

Missouri to the National Women's Conference: "Anti-Abortion Bloc Wins Women's Delegate Race," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (6 June 1977), 1, 4. Carlson was an Arizona state legislator and a state coordinator for Schlafly's STOP ERA group: Rod Gramer, "Arizona Legislator Blasts White House Stand on ERA," *The Idaho Statesman* (8 May 1977), 16A.

[85]Mathews and De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA*, 167.

[86]Astro Arena officials initially estimated the crowd at 11,000, but the *New York Times* quoted the event's head of security claiming 15,000 had been admitted to the arena with "several thousand turned away." Rally organizers eventually settled on claiming 20,000 attendees, similar to the reported attendance at the National Women's Conference. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* noted these claims but reported that few people were found outside the Astro Arena. Jim Barlow, "Conference's foes pack arena, attack ERA and its supporters," *Houston Chronicle* (20 November 1977), 18; Kaye Northcott, "The Ladies," *Texas Monthly* (January 1978), http://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/the-good-old-girls; Judy Klemesrud, "Equal Rights and Abortion Are Opposed by 15,000 at Rally," *The New York Times* (20 November 1977), 32; Carol Ashkinaze, "God Stronger than Carter, Stop-ERA Leader Declares," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (20 November 1977), 58; "IWY: Your Tax Dollars at Work – Read About It and Weep," *Battle Line* (January 1978), 7.

[87]Phyllis Schlafly Eagles, "Pro-Family Rally: God, Family, Country" (19 November 1977), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SpNa6BiSNFI, 3:45.

destruction."[88] Later, Schlafly delivered a fiery speech to enormous applause, pointing out that while their rally had begun with prayer, the feminist event had merely conducted a moment of silence "for fear they would offend many of their members who were present. I'm very proud that they excluded me from that convention, and I'm here where we are not ashamed and not afraid to ask God's blessing on this crowd assembled here today." Schlafly continued, "The American people and American women do not want ERA, they do not want abortion, they do not want lesbian privileges."[89] To emphasize the importance of biblically based notions of gender, the former missionary Elisabeth Elliot, whose gender-essentialist bestseller *Let Me Be a Woman* had been published the year before, told the rally that "egalitarianism" was "a dehumanizing distortion. Let me be a woman."[90] Elliot later defended the homophobic *Houston Chronicle* ad, writing in 1979 that "it was a true and sobering reflection of what could happen in the kind of world the IWY seeks to create, a murky wasteland, a hideous anarchy where God-given distinctions are obfuscated or even reversed."[91]

This emphasis on homosexuality and abortion – and their threat to the divinely ordained social order – as the primary consequences of the ERA echoed throughout the day. Nellie Gray, president of National Right to Life, was a speaker, as was Texas State Rep. Clay Smothers, who had sponsored a bill that would have barred gay rights groups from state college campuses. Smothers, who was Black, had nevertheless been a Democratic delegate for George Wallace in 1972, and his speech was overtly homophobic and echoed White supremacist arguments.[92] "I have enough civil rights to choke a hungry goat, so it's not civil rights I desire in 1977," he said. "Mr. Carter, I ask for peace. I ask for victory over the perverts in this country." Smothers received raucous cheers for his comments, which included: "Mr. Carter's got to stand up as I'm standing here today, and say, 'I don't want to be re-elected if I have to support the murders of unborn babies. I don't want to be president if I have to support homosexual activity.'"[93] Hobbs's Pro-Family Rally provided an early warning that religious conservatives, activated by the anti-ERA movement and now motivated by fears about homosexuality and abortion, were turning against the nation's first evangelical president.[94]

In the end, the rally exceeded all expectations. Cars, trucks, and buses had brought women from the farthest corners of the country, geographically and culturally. A group of 39 people came from tiny Nazareth, Texas – representing more than 10 percent of the Panhandle town's population.[95] From Indiana, one rallygoer exulted over "a fantastic day" before decrying the "Evil Rights Amendment" that would flout the God-created "vast difference between all men and women."[96] At least two dozen women traveled the nearly 1,500 miles to Houston from Davis County, Utah, north of Salt Lake City; some of them arrived via private plane flown by one of the attendees. In the end, Evelyn Owens wrote upon her return, although media coverage of the event seemed positive,

[88]Ibid., 11:27.
[89]Ibid., 31:40, 36:58.
[90]"Feminists called 'perverts' at counter rally," *The Press Democrat* (20 November 1977), 8.
[91]Elliot, *Love Has a Price Tag*, 102–103.
[92]Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, 258–259.
[93]Phyllis Schlafly Eagles, "Pro-Family Rally," 24:39.
[94]Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 152–155.
[95]"Notes from Nazareth," *Tulia Herald* (24 November 1977), 7.
[96]Sarah M. Harvey, "Pro-Family Throngs in Houston Fight 'Evil Rights Amendment'," *The Republic* (28 November 1977), 5.

"The best coverage will come through personal contact with any of the 30,000 *(sic)* who attended."[97]

This seems to be what happened. Women returned from the Pro-Family Rally and delivered reports to their hometown churches and social groups, after which the groups wrote letters to Congress opposing a proposed deadline extension for ERA ratification.[98] Schlafly did her part, covering the dueling events in her nationally distributed newsletter. She was effusive, calling Hobbs the "indispensable leader" of the rally: "Lottie Beth Hobbs and her associates in the Pro-Family Rally Coalition made the impossible come true. … I am happy to have been proved wrong – and proud to have been invited to participate in their remarkable success."[99]

After celebrating the rally in her own newsletter – "Indescribable! Fantastic! Incredible!" – Hobbs herself did not rest.[100] By January 1978, she had organized a series of rallies across the South as she escorted her followers' petitions rejecting homosexuality, abortion, universal childcare, and the ERA to the nation's capital.[101] The rallies kicked off in Fort Worth, where 1,000 people heard "fiery orations" in front of a massive backdrop reading "Blessed Is the Nation Whose God Is the Lord," an excerpt from Psalm 33:12. Along with Hobbs, the Fort Worth rally included at least two speakers from the Houston event: Smothers and U.S. Rep. Robert Dornan, a firebrand California Republican. The next morning, the petitions – now estimated at 500,000 – began their journey to the nation's capital, aboard a truck adorned with signs reading "Pro-Life" and "To the President and Congress."[102] The petitions, escorted by a caravan of pro-family activists, were the focus of "whistle-stop" rallies in Shreveport, La.; Jackson, Miss.; Montgomery, Ala.; Atlanta; and cities in North Carolina and Virginia before arriving in Washington, D.C.[103] At the rallies, Hobbs accused feminists of being "anti-Christian" because of the implications of the ERA, abortion, and homosexuality for the family.[104] The rally in Alabama – for which the state's House of Representatives recessed to allow members to attend, and which featured remarks from Gov. George Wallace – came days after the legislature there rejected ratification of the ERA[105]; South Carolina and Virginia did the same in the days following Hobbs's rallies in those states. "I can't say for sure whether we helped by being there," Hobbs said, "but I don't think it hurt."[106]

Once in Washington, Hobbs and about 200 other members of her caravan presented their petitions to Carter and met with members of Congress over lunch. About 400 pro-family activists and forty congresspeople packed a room in the Rayburn Building as Hobbs and Indiana State Sen. Joan Gubbins, who led the conservative faction at the National Women's Conference, condemned that event as run by "Socialists and Marxists"

[97]"Pro-Family Rally," *Davis News Journal* (1 December 1977), 26; Evelyn Owens, "Group Attends Pro-Family Rally," *The Herald-Journal* (6 December 1977), 9.

[98]"Organization of W's Group Hears Report," *Coleman Democrat-Voice* (6 December 1977).

[99]Schlafly, "Pro-Family Rally," 2.

[100]"WWWW Association of the W's" (November 1977), 1.

[101]Thomson, *Price of LIBerty*, 147.

[102]"Pro-Family Rally at Convention Center Draws 1,000 Persons," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (31 January 1978). 3.

[103]"Will the Real Women Stand Up?" *The Atlanta Constitution* (2 February 1978), 26.

[104]Nancy Weaver, "Pro-Family Activist Criticizes Feminist Philosophies," *Clarion-Ledger* (2 February 1978), 15.

[105]Linda Parham, "Protest Rally Enthusiastic," *The Montgomery Advertiser* (3 February 1978), 8.

[106]"Anti-ERA Forces Believe DC Trip Boosted Pro Family Movement," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (17 February 1978), 7.

who "would take us back to the time when homosexuality and loss of human life through abortion were widely practiced."[107] At a news conference afterward, the organizers displayed "offensive feminist materials" gathered from tables at the NWC. The activists also hung pictures taken at the NWC of women kissing. "We're against abortion, ERA, federal child care programs, and lesbianism," Hobbs told the assembled press, "and that's what women's lib is all about."[108] One attendee who caravanned from Mississippi to Washington wrote her hometown paper to describe the materials as "one of the most shocking collections I have ever seen in my life" and pledged to replicate the display in Jackson.[109] The women in charge of the nascent pro-family movement did not just harness materiality to strengthen and spread their own networks, but commandeered the material culture of their opponents to further bolster the conservative cause.[110]

The Pro-Family Rally, subsequent caravan, and Washington lunch and news conference were not only public relations victories, but organizing tools. Newspapers across the country carried reports from journalists, letters from rallygoers, and notices of further meetings, events, and opportunities for involvement.[111] As a *Washington Star* reporter put it, "What the conservatives have done essentially is to deflect the debate … into a hotly emotional debate over such aspects of the movement as abortion and homosexuality."[112] With the benefit of a few years' hindsight, Pines exulted, "The November weekend in Houston was a turning point in the contemporary American women's movement. The IWY conference, as it has turned out, was radical feminism's high-water mark. At the same time, the Astro-Arena counter-conference was a launching pad for a mass grassroots traditionalist campaign."[113]

IV. The War against "Secular Humanism"

Although less a "launching pad" than the culmination of three years' grassroots activism by women like Hobbs, the Pro-Family Rally, and caravan indeed marked a transition from anti-ERA activism to the broader focus on "pro-family issues" that Hobbs identified as early as 1975. While the first phase identified the ERA as an insidious force that threatened to destabilize the social order, this next phase identified an even larger conspiracy against traditional American hierarchies, of which even the ERA was only a part: secular humanism.

Although the fundamentalist panic over secular humanism burst into the wider public consciousness with Tim LaHaye's *The Battle for the Mind* in 1980,[114] its roots date to footnotes in a pair of 1960s Supreme Court decisions listing "secular humanism" among "religions in this country." By the end of the decade, conservatives in Orange County, California, identified it as the philosophical basis for sex education initiatives to which they

[107]Carol R. Richards, "Women's Conference Called Marxist," *The Courier-News* (9 February 1978), 21.

[108]Patricia O'Brien, "Anti-Feminist Women Take Petitions to D.C.," *Detroit Free Press* (9 February 9), 70.

[109]Mrs. Dudley J. Hughes, "N'Sider Gives 'Pro-Family' Report on Washington Meet," *The Northside Sun* (16 February 1978), 2.

[110]Pictures of offending signs and materials also were published in *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* 11:8 (March 1978), 3–4, http://www.eagleforum.org/publications/psr/mar1978.html.

[111]As an example, a parenthetical note after Hughes' letter to Mississippi from Washington (n. 109) urges those who agree with it to "clip it and send copies" to their congresspeople and legislators, showing how local newspapers helped spread the anti-ERA message.

[112]Jack W. Germond, "Feminists Put on the Defensive," *Washington Star* (20 November 1977), A3.

[113]Pines, *Back to Basics*, 161–162. See also Stasson, "Politicization of Family Life," 106–108.

[114]Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1980).

objected, and in 1972, a federal lawsuit aiming to introduce creationism in public schools cited evolution as a tenet of secular humanism.[115] By the mid-1970s, conservatives across the country had begun identifying humanism as the source of alarming changes to public-school curricula. In 1973, the American Humanist Association published *The Humanist Manifesto II*, and the next year – as Hobbs was organizing the Women Who Want to Be Women – another woman from Churches of Christ, Alice Moore, led a public-school boycott in West Virginia after the introduction of new curricula there.[116] As Hobbs later recounted, shortly after she began her anti-ERA activism, she received a copy of *Humanist Manifesto II* and saw that National Organization of Women founder Betty Friedan was among the signers.[117] "This is my answer," Hobbs recalled thinking. "This is what the women who propose to speak for the women of America believe."[118] Her refocus to secular humanism as the preeminent threat to the family proved timely – and influential among the men who would become mainstays of the Religious Right.

For example, televangelist James Robison's magazine, *Life's Answer*, linked the ERA with secular humanism in 1978 while pointing readers to the Association of the W's, "a group of Bible-believing ladies." The accompanying article described humanism as "the ideological premise behind the feminist movement" that contained "shades of Antichrist!" Its author: future Southern Baptist pastor, Arkansas governor, and presidential candidate Mike Huckabee.[119] Likewise, Hobbs was a speaker at the Religious Roundtable's 1980 National Affairs Briefing at which presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, who had recently appointed her to his Family Policy Advisory Board, famously declared that although the conservative Christians at the ostensibly nonpartisan event could not endorse him, he endorsed them.[120] As the Religious Right flowered into a plethora of organizations and advocacy groups after Reagan's election, R.J. Rushdoony's *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* included Hobbs's renamed Pro-Family Forum as one of its "tools of the Great Commission," a "select listing of our friends and allies."[121]

Displaying her knack for identifying emotionally resonant fundamentalist arguments and supercharging them with provocative rhetoric, Hobbs in 1980 published "Is Humanism Molesting Your Child?" – a question so inflammatory, it attracted the notice of *The New York Times* and numerous other media outlets, as did Hobbs's strident advocacy for monitoring textbooks and television programs to purge them of humanist influences. "Humanism is everywhere," she told the *Times* in a front-page article. "It is destructive to our nation, destructive to the family, destructive to the individual."[122] Even *The*

[115]Christopher P. Toumey, "Evolution and Secular Humanism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61:2 (Summer 1993), 275–287. McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 228.

[116]Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 117 and following. See also Williams, *God's Own Party*, 134–137.

[117]Text and signers are reprinted at www.americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto2.

[118]Brown Trail Archive, "Lottie Beth Hobbs," 11:32.

[119]Mike Huckabee, "You've Come a Long Way, Baby," *Life's Answer* (February–March 1978), 8–9.

[120]"Stop the RIPOFF of Your Rights! Cast a 'Know' Vote," advertisement, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (11 August 1980), 20. Reagan's speech can be found at http://youtu.be/lH1e0xxRRbk?t=763. On Hobbs's appointment, see Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 276.

[121]Archie P. Jones, "The Imperative of Christian Action: Getting Involved as a Biblical Duty," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 8:1 (Summer 1981), 161.

[122]Dena Kleiman, "Parents' Groups Purging Schools of 'Humanist' Books and Classes," *The New York Times* (17 May 1981), 1. The *Times* editorial board took a swipe at the Pro-Family Forum in "The Horrors of Secular Humanism" (19 May 1985), 20E. Hobbs is also quoted in "Origins: 'Creationists' Challenge Darwin," *The Journal Herald* (26 August 1980), 21; Jean E. Collins, "The Great Textbook Debate," *The Sacramento Bee* (16 November 1980), Sunday Woman 9; John Paul Newport Jr., "Humanism Debate Catches Humanities in

Humanist, while decrying the "witch hunt" fomented by "ultra-fundamentalist" groups like the Pro-Family Forum, nevertheless recognized Hobbs as a "pro-family powerhouse."[123]

Like the Pro-Family Rally ad, the cover of "Is Humanism Molesting Your Child?" relied on the simple imagery of a child – this time a boy, carrying a lunchbox and being led by the hand, presumably to school, which in the distance flies an American flag. The pamphlet, written by Frances Hill, defines humanism largely in negative terms: a denial of God, the claims of Jesus, "biblical inspiration," and moral absolutes. The connection with sexual chaos is clear, as secular humanism "believes in removal of distinctive roles of male and female" and "sexual freedom between consenting individuals regardless of age, including premarital sex, homosexuality, lesbianism, and incest." But humanism also advocates "the creation of a one-world socialistic government" and equal distribution of wealth, and its historical proponents included Lenin and Stalin, thus reiterating the decades-old fundamentalist link between gender essentialism and anticommunism. The pamphlet's emotional appeal – emphasized with statements such as, "Humanist psychologists and behavioral scientists successfully developed techniques which can GRADUALLY CHANGE YOUR CHILD'S CONSCIENCE, PERSONALITY, VALUES, AND BEHAVIOR" – successfully tapped into fears about families under siege from shadowy forces. In case the comparison wasn't clear, all-caps text in bold face urges at the bottom of the pamphlet's fourth page: **"LET'S PROTECT OUR FAMILIES FROM CHILD MOLESTERS!"** How should a parent do this? Target their schools' libraries and textbooks "for immoral, anti-family, and anti-American content," and elevate their concerns to their school boards if necessary.[124]

As with the pink sheet nearly a decade earlier, the claims are a mixture of hyperbole, extrapolation, and falsehoods.[125] Yet "Is Humanism Molesting Your Child?" achieved widespread distribution and notoriety. For example, in a 1980 report documenting the state's "incomplete commitment" to improving public health education, the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research noted fears of humanism fueling fundamentalist resistance to sex education and cited the Pro-Family Forum pamphlet.[126] By 1993, Chris Toumey found, the text "circulated widely, often verbatim, although usually without attribution."[127] The emphasis on secular humanism – a focus of Hobbs's since 1975 – was now mainstream, commonly cited in campaigns by more prominent "family values" groups throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[128]

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the Crossfire," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (24 May 1981), 55A; Anne Marie Biondo, "Speakers Square Off Over Censorship of Books," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (2 April 1982), 57; Jennifer Foote, "Foes of Censorship Urge Reading of Banned Books," *Hartford Courant* (15 September 1983), 16.

[123]David Bollier, "The Witch Hunt against Secular Humanism," *The Humanist* (September/October 1984), 15.

[124]Frances Hill, "Is Humanism Molesting Your Child?" (Pro-Family Forum, 1980), Citizens for Educational Freedom (CEF), bulk: 1979–1988, File Cabinet 2, Drawer 1, Folder 114, Freedom Center Subject Files, 2018-01-01, California State University Fullerton University Archives & Special Collections.

[125]Toumey, "Humanism and Evolution," 283–287, addresses the various characterizations of secular humanism in circulation during the 1980s.

[126]Susan M. Presti, *Health Education: Incomplete Commitment* (Raleigh: North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, 1980), 33–34.

[127]Toumey, "Humanism and Evolution," 283.

[128]On the development of "secular humanism" as a catalyst for fundamentalist targeting of public schools, see Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 203–207.

Meanwhile, the ERA shambled to its official demise in 1982; no additional states ratified it between Indiana in January 1977 and Nevada in 2017.[129] As its extended deadline expired, Phyllis Schlafly threw a celebration, at which she honored Hobbs and other women who had helped defeat the amendment. Led by new pro-family groups, such as Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America and James Dobson's Focus on the Family, attention turned to the issues that Hobbs and Schlafly had first connected to the ERA: abortion and homosexuality, now part of the great conspiracy of secular humanism.[130]

Hobbs's national profile receded during the 1980s, but she remained a prolific writer and speaker. She published a monthly newsletter, *The Family Educator*, into the 1990s. An issue from 1989 features dire warnings about liberation theology, psychology and psychiatry, "New Age" religion, the National Education Association, role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons, and of course feminism and the ERA.[131] As late as 1998, Hobbs – although she had begun reducing her speaking schedule – continued to warn of the dangers of secular humanism, calling it "of all the -isms, the most widespread, the most dangerous, the most destructive, already, in the past, the present, and the future."[132]

V. Conclusion

Writing in 1981, historians of religion Samuel Hill and Donald Owen asked, "Who had heard of a new religious/political conservative cause and crusade in America before 1979?"[133] As it turns out, the answer was hundreds of thousands of women. Motivated by a variety of concerns, they were unified first by opposition to the ERA then by fears of a tentacular secular humanism. This grassroots movement escaped the notice of mainstream political and religious leaders, not to mention many scholars of the day, but skillfully led by women such as Lottie Beth Hobbs, it transformed American politics.

Hobbs and Phyllis Schlafly died the same year, 2016. Schlafly's death came after a public endorsement of presidential nominee Donald Trump and the release of her co-written volume *The Conservative Case for Trump*.[134] Hobbs, battling Alzheimer's disease, did not make any public statements about the election. For fifty years, Hobbs toiled in Schlafly's shadow, yet Schlafly's success in defeating the ERA and galvanizing a conservative women's movement that helped elect men like Ronald Reagan and Trump could not have occurred without Hobbs and the thousands of women she recruited, supported, inspired, and organized.

Likewise, Hobbs's rhetorical ruthlessness – her creation of the "pro-family" umbrella to cover numerous previously disparate zones of activism, her embrace of homophobia to trigger sharp emotional reactions among her audience, and her pioneering focus on secular humanism as the dark conspiracy driving numerous threats to the American moral order, all of it filtered through the hermeneutical lenses she wore as a lifelong member of Churches of Christ – placed her at the forefront of "family values" politics.

[129]"Ratification Info by State" http://www.equalrightsamendment.org/era-ratification-map.

[130]See Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric*, on LaHaye's group specifically and Stasson, "Politicization of Family Life," 106–108, on the National Women's Conference as an inspiration for Dobson's ministry.

[131]*The Family Educator* 16:1 (January/February 1989).

[132]Brown Trail Archive, "Lottie Beth Hobbs," 4:50

[133]Hill and Owen, *The New Religious Political Right*, 5.

[134]Phyllis Schlafly, Ed Martin, and Brett M. Decker, *The Conservative Case for Trump* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2016).

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This crucial role, though not ignored, has nevertheless been overshadowed and undervalued, her prodigious output – pamphlets, phone lists, newsletters, weekly small-town newspapers – often swept, sometimes literally, into the dustbins of history. Nevertheless, as a bridge between the grassroots 1970s anti-ERA movement and the 1980s pro-family movement, Hobbs's career undergirded the rise and growth of the Religious Right.

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