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## "Heritage to Horizons": The History of the 1977 International Women's Year Conference in South Carolina

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“HERITAGE TO HORIZONS”:  
THE HISTORY OF THE 1977 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S YEAR CONFERENCE  
IN SOUTH CAROLINA

By

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Bachelor of Arts  
St. Catherine University, 2011

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## ABSTRACT

In 1977, 800 South Carolinians came together in the state's capital of Columbia for a meeting called "South Carolina Woman: Heritage to Horizons." It was one of fifty-six state and territorial meetings held as part of the United States' celebration of International Women's Year (IWY.) These meetings culminated in the National Women's Conference held later that year in Houston, Texas. IWY was a federally-funded initiative to enable American women to discuss their concerns and make recommendations for national policy. It was an outgrowth of a United Nations program to advance the status of women worldwide by encouraging each nation to give women the opportunity to make their voices heard. At the state meetings held in South Carolina and elsewhere, individuals voted on core recommendations and elected delegates to represent the state at the national conference where a National Plan of Action would be adopted to advise Congress and the president on future policy. The meetings proved to be important locations where feminists and social conservatives with drastically different views about what that policy should be competed for influence. Though state meetings followed the same national guidelines and discussed similar issues, each meeting reflected the needs and interests of women in that state. This paper traces the history of the IWY in South Carolina, focusing on the state meeting from its initial planning stages through the meeting that took place June 10 and 11 and culminating in the participation of South Carolina delegates at the national conference. It examines the interactions between South Carolina feminists, including the IWY State Coordinating Committee, and the conservative forces that

opposed the women's rights movement and objected to federal sponsorship of the IWY program. Though in some states social conservatives were able to compete successfully with feminists in the voting on delegates and recommendations and in some cases takeover over the meeting, this was not the case in South Carolina. However, the threat from these individuals opposed to changes in gender and race relations was significant enough that the South Carolina Coordinating Committee and other feminists felt it necessary to plan carefully and take preventive action during and after the meeting in order for feminists and a feminist message to be sent to the Houston conference. As a result, all but one of the delegates elected were supporters of the women's movement and the recommendations adopted – including most of those suggested by national IWY leaders -- were feminist in nature. This case study of the “Heritage to Horizons” conference in South Carolina contributes to the growing body of scholarship about International Women's Year, an event of great national significance that played out differently in each state and territory. Previously states studied have mostly been those where takeovers took place, leaving a lack of understanding about states where social conservative's opposition did not completely alter the proceedings and outcome of the state meeting. As a result, by studying South Carolina, a greater understanding of what allowed, or in some cases, prevented, social conservatives from having an effect on the IWY can be achieved. This helps us understand the larger meanings of the IWY in a nation dealing with the changes of the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, it reveals much about the feminist and social conservatives in South Carolina in the 1970s.

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## INTRODUCTION

### National to Local: International Women's Year 1977

Tensions were high as the final business session of the South Carolina's International Women's Year (IWY) meeting stretched beyond the scheduled time. For two days, the state meeting brought together women and men from different backgrounds and beliefs to discuss ways to improve women's rights. Social conservatives, feeling frustrated and angry that they were unable to express their points of view during the meeting, lobbied to extend the final session. These 130 men and women felt they had been treated unfairly, with organizers limiting discussion and "railroading" through issues they opposed. But to feminist attendees and organizers, the South Carolina IWY meeting was an exercise in what Emily Richmond termed as "democracy in action."<sup>1</sup>

South Carolina's meeting was one of fifty-six held nationally in 1977 as part of the federal IWY. State meetings, organized by state coordinating committees and open to all state residents, followed federal guidelines to discuss recommendations and vote on delegates to send to the National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas. There a National Plan of Action would be formed to influence national policy.<sup>2</sup> South Carolina's meeting entitled "The South Carolina Woman: Heritage to Horizons" celebrated the

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<sup>1</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, Box 7, Folder 30-31, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, 110-115.

<sup>2</sup> National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year (NCOIWY), *The Spirit of Houston: An Official Report to the President, the Congress and the People of the United States*, (Washington, DC: NCOIWY, 1978), 10-12.



history of women in the state, but it also discussed initiatives to improve women's lives. Given that South Carolinians were deeply divided in their views about the past and future, bringing a diverse body together for those purposes led inevitably to controversy. Many whites and blacks who had supported equal rights and full participation in society for African-Americans during the civil rights movement were now supporting women's rights. However, many of those who had opposed the civil rights movement were now opposed to many of the goals of the feminist movement. At the time, the women's movement aggravated tensions with initiatives to improve the status of women of all races, including the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a constitutional amendment guaranteeing equality between the sexes that was debated in the states between 1972 and 1982. Conflict was not unique to South Carolina as social conservatives nationwide opposed the IWY. In some state meetings, social conservatives were able to gain control of the meetings, allowing their views to be the predominant views or their delegates to be elected. These "takeovers" did not occur solely in one region, but took place nationwide throughout the summer of 1977.

In South Carolina, social conservatives made their traditional views about race and gender apparent at the state IWY meeting, but these men and women did not take over the meeting as they did in other states. However, this threat was strong enough that members of South Carolina's IWY Coordinating Committee and other pro-ERA women felt the need to take preventive measures before, during and after the meeting. By doing so, these South Carolina feminists were able to assure the achievement of IWY goals through the successful passage of most IWY core recommendations and the election of a diverse group of delegates in favor of the recommendations.

South Carolina's IWY (SCIWY) Coordinating Committee did so by adhering to national guidelines to ensure participation from women of different backgrounds. In addition, they created a program that celebrated the state's past and dealt with moderate issues women of the state were interested in, including the decision to not discuss several core IWY recommendations. Most importantly, during the meeting, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee and other feminists utilized parliamentary procedure to counter tactics utilized by social conservatives to delay the proceedings, while some pro-ERA women created a feminist slate to assure women supportive of women's rights were elected as delegates. Furthermore, the committee and feminists responded in the press to conservative threats, comments and actions throughout the IWY's proceedings, from planning in the spring of 1977 to the National Women's Conference in November.

From February to July of 1977, IWY meetings took place in U.S. states and territories to prepare for the final National Women's Conference held November 18-21 in Houston, Texas. Though a national program, IWY came about as a result of a United Nations initiative to celebrate women's contributions and promote their status around the world. Declaring 1975 to be International Women's Year, the United Nations sponsored a IWY conference in Mexico. There a World Plan of Action was adopted to improve women's lives. The United Nations later extended the initiative and declared 1975-1985 to be the "Decade of Women." Prior to the Mexico conference, President Gerald Ford appointed a National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year (National Commission) to coordinate U.S. participation and also recommend ways the nation could improve women's lives and promote gender equality. This commission of thirty men and women, led by Jill Ruckelhaus, researched women's conditions for over a

year and published their results and recommendations in the 1976 report '*To Form a More Perfect Union'...Justice for American Women (To Form a More Perfect Union.)*<sup>3</sup>

Inspired by the Mexico Conference, Congresswoman Bella Abzug of New York proposed Public Law 94.167 calling for state IWY meetings and a final National Women's Conference. It was adopted in late 1975 with five million in federal appropriations to fund the conference. In March 1977, President Jimmy Carter expanded the commission to include forty-two members and appointed Abzug as presiding officer. Commission members under the Ford and Carter Administrations were women and men from both political parties who were involved in various social and political organizations. To the dismay of social conservatives, National Commission appointees were supporters of the women's movement. These individuals objected strongly to some of Carter's appointments, particularly to Jean O'Leary, a former nun and co-chair of the National Gay Rights Task Force; Gloria Steinem, editor of Ms. magazine; and Eleanor Smeal, president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), women they saw as much more radical than previous appointees.<sup>4</sup>

The National Commission coordinated the state meetings and planned the final National Women's Year Conference. To organize the state and territorial IWY meetings, the National Commission selected the members of the state committees, including state chairs who were confirmed, or in some cases replaced by, other committee members. Taking place in the spring and summer of 1977, these state meetings were to be occasions

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<sup>3</sup> NCOIWY, *The Spirit of Houston: An Official Report to the President, the Congress and the People of the United States*, (Washington, DC: NCOIWY, 1978), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Carter Names International Women's Year Commission, March 1977, Press Release, Publicity Releases, Box 2, Folder 9, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC.

for women and men to come together and discuss sixteen core recommendations based on *To Form A More Perfect Union*, in a series of sessions called workshops. These recommendations were: Arts and Humanities, Battered Women, Child Care, Credit, Education, Elective and Appointive Office, Employment, Equal Rights Amendment, Health, Homemakers, International Interdependence, Media, Offenders, Older Women, Rape and Reproductive Freedom. States would vote on these core recommendations and other resolutions coming out of workshops and elect delegates to attend the National Women's Conference to vote on the National Plan of Action. Though the National Commission issued detailed guidelines and required careful reporting, much of the planning of state meetings was done at the state level, and state coordinating committees had a good deal of discretion, including selecting the theme, sessions and entertainment.<sup>5</sup>

The IWY program was the result of over a decade of work by the "Second Wave" of American feminists who sought to focus attention on women's status and rights and promote reforms to improve women's lives. The IWY reflected strong federal support for feminist goals and signaled to the women's movement that the United States government and the nation as a whole were responding to women's demands for equal rights.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, IWY guidelines required participants at state meetings and delegates to the national conference to include women from of all races, ethnicities, religions, occupations and economic backgrounds, reflecting their proportion in the state and U.S. populations. By trying to be representative of the nation's women, the IWY hoped to involve women other than the mostly white and middle-class women involved in the women's

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<sup>5</sup> NCOIWY, *The Spirit of Houston*, 99.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 71-73.

movement at the time. Thus, the IWY not only promoted women's rights but also the rights of other groups traditionally underrepresented.<sup>7</sup>

However, government support for women's equality ignited significant opposition from socially conservative men and women who were against certain women's issues, including the ERA and abortion rights. Occasionally referring to themselves as anti-ERA or anti-IWY, these individuals denounced federal support of the IWY program as promoting one side of a national debate. Many of these individuals were conservative also regarding other social changes, including the recent civil rights movement.<sup>8</sup>

For these men and women the women's movement was yet another federal intervention in social customs and a threat to traditional family life. They defended their views by proclaiming women's innate differences from men using sociological and religious reasoning. Socially conservative women perceived feminists and the IWY as a threat to their protected status as wives and mothers, while men saw them as undermining patriarchal authority. Social conservatives also opposed the IWY due to its United Nations roots and promotion of international organization and cooperation, which they believed limited the freedom of Americans.<sup>9</sup> To voice their opposition to the women's movement, these individuals created new groups, such the Eagle Forum and STOP-ERA, but were also connected to older, more established conservative organizations including

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<sup>7</sup> Appendix, Public Law 94-167, Caroline Bird, *What Women Want: From the Official Report to the President, the Congress and the People of the United States*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 183.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 79-80.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 79-80.

<sup>9</sup> Because these men and women worked together for multiple conservative beliefs, rather than for one issue such as anti-ERA, I will be using the term social conservatives.

the John Birch Society (JBS) and Women for Constitutional Government (WCG). In some states, IWY critics even included the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).<sup>10</sup>

These groups organized to contest feminist control of the IWY state meetings. Though some denounced the IWY in the press and boycotted the meetings, many sought to “takeover” the state meetings using tactics designed to outnumber and outmaneuver feminists. Organizers of the state and national IWY expected some opposition but were surprised by its strength, not just in the more conservative rural states or in the South, but nationwide. In some states, social conservatives gained enough power to reject core recommendations. Instead they adopted their own resolutions for federal action or elected predominately conservative delegates to the National Women’s Conference. In total, twenty states were unable to pass all core recommendations and eight others were unable to pass any, indicating the impact social conservatives had on these meetings. Though South Carolina’s conference was among those unable to pass all sixteen core recommendations, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee and other feminists in the state mostly maintained control of the meeting.<sup>11</sup>

Though IWY was a key moment for the women’s movement and the nation as a whole, it has only recently been studied in depth by historians. Previously, descriptions of the IWY were included as part of surveys on second-wave feminism. Only recent scholars of the women’s and modern conservative movements have treated the IWY

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<sup>10</sup> Marjorie J. Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, edited by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, 71-89, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 82.

<sup>11</sup> NCOIWY, *The Spirit of Houston*, 80-83, 114-115.

Like South Carolina, some of the twenty, including Georgia, similarly were not takeovers, whereas in others such as Nebraska and Nevada, social conservatives gained significant power over organizers and feminists.

more seriously as an independent area of study. One of the first to study the IWY was Marjorie Spruill in her essay, "Gender and America's Right Turn," in which she argued the IWY played an important role in the rightward shift in American political culture by uniting discrete movements together in support of or in opposition to feminism. This essay helped launch individual state studies, primarily in states where social conservative takeovers occurred.<sup>12</sup> Spruill's later essay on Mississippi's state meeting emphasized the meeting's political impact on liberals and conservatives in the state. In a 2007 article, Neil Young studied the church-directed organization of Mormon women in Utah and Nevada to form a majority at each state's conference. In a 2012 article Erin Kempker studied the infrastructure that allowed conservatives to gain control by looking at the role of conservative organizations in Indiana, including the John Birch Society and the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>13</sup> Mary Berkery's recent study of state meetings looks at four state proceedings and their unique outcomes to highlight the differences and similarities between the IWY state meetings as well as their implications for the women's movement at the state and national level. Berkery first discusses North Carolina and Vermont which

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<sup>12</sup> Marjorie, J. Spruill, "The Mississippi 'Takeover': Feminists, Antifeminists, and the International Women's Year Conference of 1977," in *Mississippi Women: Their Stories, Their Lives*, Volume Two, edited by Elizabeth Anne Payne, Martha Swain, and Marjorie Julian Spruill, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>13</sup> The following works have focused on the IWY: Mary Berkery, "The New Suffragists of 1977 and the Challenge of Coalition Building at Missouri's International Women's Year," *Missouri Historical Review* 107, no. (October 2012):1-22; Erin M. Kempker, "Battling Big Sister Government: Hoosier Women and the Politics of International Women's Year," *Journal of Women's History* 24 no. 2 (2012):114-170; Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005); Robin Morris, "Kathryn Dunaway's ERA Battle," in *Entering the Fray: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the New South*, edited by Jonathan D. Wells and Sheila Phipps (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2009): 173-176. *Sisters of '77*. DVD. Directed by Cynthia Salzman Mondell and Allen Mondell. Arlington, VA: PBS, 2005. Marjorie, J. Spruill, "The Mississippi 'Takeover': Feminists, Antifeminists, and the International Women's Year Conference of 1977," in *Mississippi Women: Their Stories, Their Lives*, Volume Two, edited by Elizabeth Anne Payne, Martha Swain, and Marjorie Julian Spruill (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), and Neil Young, "The ERA is a Moral Issue: The Mormon Church, LDS Women and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment." *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007):623-644.

voted mostly in favor of IWY recommendations, though the Vermont meeting did not discuss the IWY core recommendations as it was not yet a national requirement. Berkery then looks at two states: Missouri, where socially conservative delegates were elected but mostly feminist resolutions were passed, and Washington, where conservative resolutions were passed but feminist delegates elected. In addition to these more traditional studies, the Washington Women's History Consortium has created a website of digital documents and oral histories, along with an interpretation about the state's IWY.<sup>14</sup>

Each state study contributes to a more in-depth understanding of the IWY due to the significance of state meetings to the federal initiative. However most states studied have been those where takeovers took place, leaving a lack of understanding about states where social conservative's opposition did not completely alter the proceedings and outcome of the state meeting. This study of South Carolina describes and analyzes the history of the IWY in a state where feminists prevailed despite efforts from social conservatives. As a result, by studying South Carolina, a greater understanding of what allowed, or in some cases prevented, social conservatives from having an effect on the IWY on both the state and national level can be achieved. By writing about the actions taken by social conservatives to oppose the IWY, this study also contributes to studies about the growing New Right movement in the 1970s that opposed changes in race, gender and the government's role in American life. This especially contributes to studies on the women of the New Right and the importance of their opposition to feminism.

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Berkery, 2013, "*We are a Multitude*": *The 1977 International Women's Year State Meetings and the Transformation of the Modern Feminist Movement*, PhD Dissertation, Binghamton University State University of New York, 2; Washington Women's History Consortium, "Collections: International Women's Year," last modified 2013, <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/research/whc/milestones/late20thcentury/>, accessed July 1, 2012.



This paper utilizes unique primary sources resulting from the efforts of several scholars to collect information about the IWY. The IWY Oral History Project, a national, NEH-funded initiative directed by South Carolina historian Constance Ashton Myers, utilized a team of oral historians to conduct over three hundred interviews with participants at the National Women's Conference, including delegates from South Carolina. Myers also recorded oral histories at the South Carolina state meeting, providing a unique resource capturing the immediate reactions of attendees.<sup>15</sup> This paper additionally benefited from the efforts of University of South Carolina history professor Marjorie Spruill to create the South Carolina Women's Rights Collection.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the official papers of the SCIWY Committee, published and unpublished, were extensively used along with items from the personal papers of several participants.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> These oral history interviews were donated to the National Archives and preserved on the original cassette tapes. The South Caroliniana Library also has copies of these cassette tapes and has been digitizing the tapes to preserve them. Grants obtained by Dr. Marjorie Spruill have enabled the transcription of these tapes by graduate students, including the author of this thesis. When complete the transcripts will be available to researchers.

<sup>16</sup> Much of the material was collected by participants in undergraduate seminars on preserving the history of the state's women's movement and of its opposition. Students collected primary sources about women's rights in the state, including interviews with IWY participants. Many of these have been transcribed and donated to USC's South Carolina Political Collections (SCPC) as the South Carolina Women's Rights Collection (SCWRC.) Several women interviewed by the class, including Candy Waites and Nancy Moore, later donated their papers to SCPC where other resources, such as the state League of Women Voters and conservative senator L. Marion Gressette's papers, are also located.

<sup>17</sup> These official papers are located at Winthrop College, a former women's college which has an outstanding collection of materials related to women's history. Additional documents were taken from the *Women and Social Movements in the United States 1600-2000*, an online collection of primary and secondary sources on women's history. This online collection was edited by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin and includes many documents related to the IWY.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Past and Present: The History of the Women's Movement

The South Carolina IWY meeting is a part of the history of the modern women's rights movement which began in the 1960s. Women at this time benefited from legislation, including the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, prohibiting discrimination in employment based on sex. When the government failed to enforce this legislation, feminists, including many members of state commissions on the status of women, established a new organization to press for enforcement and for full equality for women. The National Organization for Women (NOW), founded in 1966, quickly became the best-known organization of the modern feminist movement. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s other women's organizations were established, including more radical groups or ones based on a common race or sexuality, indicating the diversity of women working towards equal rights.

NOW took the lead in reviving interest in the ERA which had laid dormant in Congress since it was proposed in the 1920s. In response to the many ways women's inequality was enshrined in law, feminists proposed the ERA be passed, thereby eliminating the need to work on a law-by-law or state-by-state effort for women's equality. As a result of efforts by feminist, the ERA was passed with bipartisan support in the House and the Senate in 1972. When submitted to the states that same year, the ERA was so popular that six states ratified it in two days, all with unanimous votes. The quick

passage and ratification in twenty-nine other states, for a total of thirty-five, seemed to indicate national approval of women's equal rights being achieved through the ERA.<sup>18</sup>

This support ignited opposition from socially conservative men and women nationwide. These individuals opposed the ERA, fearing the loss of women's special role as a homemaker and other negative results, such as women being drafted for war or unisex bathrooms. Most notable of these groups was STOP-ERA (Stop Taking Our Privileges), founded by Phyllis Schlafly in 1972. Opponents helped prevent the ERA's ratification in several states, including Florida and Illinois, and led some states, such as Idaho and Tennessee, to rescind earlier ratification. The ERA was stopped three states short of ratification.<sup>19</sup>

South Carolina did not ratify the ERA, despite the organized efforts of feminists throughout the state. When the amendment was initially up for ratification in 1972, two weeks after being passed in Congress, many thought that South Carolina would ratify it given the ERA's support and ratification nationwide. It even had the support of both senators, Democratic Ernest "Fritz" Hollings and Republican Strom Thurmond. The state House of Representatives passed it by voice vote, but the bill was blocked in the State Senate where L. Marion Gressette, a segregationist and opponent of women's rights, controlled the Judiciary Committee. This initial defeat led to the January 1973 formation of the South Carolina Coalition for the ERA (SCERA), the first of several coalition organizations to work for the ERA's passage in the state. Organizations involved in these coalitions were the League of Women Voters, the state's chapter of NOW, the NAACP

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<sup>18</sup> Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women From 1960 to Present*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 84.

<sup>19</sup> Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 217, 248-251.

and many women's organizations. In 1973, the ERA was again introduced but tabled in the house while the State Senate adjourned when the bill was in committee.<sup>20</sup>

These defeats led pro-ERA coalitions to implement educational programs to combat misinformation and fears as well as increase efforts to gain more lobbying power in the General Assembly. This approach was a moderate, "ladylike" campaign that focused on what the ERA would not do to alter southern womanhood, in order to have more mass appeal in a conservative southern state.<sup>21</sup> However, resistance to the ERA in South Carolina grew as did opposition nationwide. When the ERA was again up for ratification in the State Senate in 1975, organized opponents launched an all-out attack. To coordinate their efforts, in March of 1975 ERA opponents organized a state chapter of STOP-ERA. Though individuals and groups in the state were already opposing the amendment by writing editorials in the local paper or speaking out in public, formal organization though allowed them to present a more united front with better coordinated efforts to defeat the ERA.<sup>22</sup>

The two groups came head-to-head in the press and at the statehouse as the legislature approached a vote. South Carolina STOP-ERA launched an aggressive campaign warning of harmful effects of the ERA and also lobbied directly to the General Assembly. The pro-ERA coalition responded to these accusations by attempting to

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<sup>20</sup> Margaret O'Shea, "ERA Amendment Alive and Kicking," December 9, 1973, ERA, Primary Source Documents, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Laura Foxworth. *From Soft-Sell to Hardball: The Evolution of the Pro-Equal Rights Amendment Campaign in South Carolina, 1972-1982*, Masters' Thesis, (University of South Carolina, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2011), 2-5, 14-15, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 19-21.

<sup>22</sup> STOP-ERA Organizational Meeting, March 2, 1975, Theresa Hicks, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

correct elements of the campaign that they felt were “scare tactics.”<sup>23</sup> Though ERA proponents gained support, there was still significant resistance in the Gressette-controlled legislatures. By the end of March of 1975, the ERA was again tabled after the vote was taken while thirty percent of representatives were at lunch. This debate over the ERA in 1975 intensified conflict between feminists and social conservatives, as well as promoted better organization of both sides, setting the stage for later conflict in 1977. The 1975 defeat also led the pro-ERA women to abandon their “soft-sell” tactics and launch a more aggressive campaign.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Rob Wood, “ERA Opponents Push Efforts With Pamphlet,” *The State*, March 6, 1975, ERA, Primary Source Documents, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>24</sup> Irene Neuffer, Letter to the Editor, *Abbeville Press and Banner*, March 14, 1975, Irene Neuffer, Primary Source Documents, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; STOP-ERA Organizational Meeting, March 2, 1975.; Foxworth, *From Soft-Sell to Hardball*, 29-31.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SCIWY Coordinating Committee: Planning for South Carolina's Women

South Carolina's IWY meeting took place June 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> at the Carolina Inn in Columbia, South Carolina. As in most other states, planning began in early spring for the state meetings to be held in May, June, and July (with the exception of Vermont whose state meeting took place in February). Like other organizers, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee followed federal IWY guidelines to assure diversity of attendees and delegates, as well as seeing that voting procedures and financial regulations were adhered to. These guidelines were very important especially as each state received a significant amount of money, a portion of the five million in federal appropriations for the IWY based on state population. IWY organizers knew that the use of funds would be highly scrutinized by opponents and proponents alike and misuse was illegal.

Dr. Marianna Davis was appointed and later confirmed as the head of the SCIWY Coordinating Committee in early 1977. An African-American woman and a highly regarded professor at Benedict College, Davis had long worked for civil rights, but she had not been active in the women's movement and the invitation to head the state committee came as a surprise. Though initially hesitant, Davis accepted the invitation after learning she was recommended by poet Maya Angelou and civil rights advocate Dr. Gloria Brown. To assist Davis in her leadership role, County Councilwoman Candy

Waites, a member of League of Women Voters and later a state representative, was chosen as vice-chair.<sup>25</sup>

Twenty-five women from throughout South Carolina served with Davis and Waites, along with three staff members hired to perform administrative duties at the committee's office located in Columbia's Five Points district. Similar to Davis and Waites, committee members were often active, liberal-to-moderate women selected by the National Commission. Some were employed but others did not hold jobs outside of the home. All were in organizations such as NOW, LWV, and NAACP, not only because these women were socially active, but also because the National Commission selected representatives from organizations that worked to advance women's issues. Members also came from both major political parties, and, with one exception, all of these women supported the ERA. Many committee members were from urban areas such as Columbia and Greenville, while only one woman came from a small rural town. Besides trying to include individuals from different regions of South Carolina, the committee also selected white women, African-American women, and one woman originally from India to represent the state's racial diversity. South Carolina's committee of women from different backgrounds was similar to others selected by the National Commission to fulfill guidelines requiring the representation of the state's diversity.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Athanasakos to Mary Ann Breakfield, January 21, 1977, General Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 1, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC; Marianna Davis, interview and transcription by Kate Shropshire, March 24, 2010, Spring 2010, Interviews by Students, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 7; Candy Waites, Class Visit, March 29, 2010, transcription by Ashton Parrish, Spring 2010, Class Visits, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>26</sup> "South Carolina IWY Coordinating Committee," International Women's Year, 1977, Topical, Box 8, Folder 1, L. Marion Gressette Papers, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Gigi Moses, "ERA Threatens Women's Conference." *Greenville Piedmont*, June 10, 1977, Research Relating to Criticism and Defense of IWY, Box 3, Folder 14, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference,

Additionally, the conference was to include members of the general public reflective of state and national demographics, but with an emphasis on “low-income women, members of diverse racial, ethnic and religious groups and women of all ages.”<sup>27</sup> These national guidelines required that both attendees at the state meeting as well as delegates to the national conference come from diverse backgrounds. This reflected IWY goals to learn about the status of all American women to form policy, especially those from traditionally marginalized races, classes and economic backgrounds.<sup>28</sup>

To follow national requirements for state meetings to involve women from diverse backgrounds, state IWY committees established outreach as directed by the National Commission. Aggressive outreach encouraged a broad, diverse group of attendees without using quotas for certain racial, ethnic, class or age groups. To further ensure that state delegations reflected the state and national diversity, it was suggested nominating committees, who created the list of potential delegates, work with the state’s outreach committee to identify potential delegates. As a result of these national guidelines, South Carolina crafted a well-coordinated outreach campaign.<sup>29</sup>

In South Carolina, outreach chair Marguerite Howie and the outreach subcommittee reached out to individuals throughout the state. Howie initially sent letters

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1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC; Irene Neuffer, “IWY Representatives Not Representative,” Letter to the Editor, *The State*, May 28, 1977, IWY, General, Programs, ERA South Carolina, Equal Rights Amendment, League of Women Voters Columbia/Richland County, Box 6, Folder 27, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC. Linda Colvard Dorian and Bill Wallace to State Coordinating Committee, Position Paper on Reconciling the “Diversity of Representation” and “Open to the Public Provision,” Provisions in Public Law 94-167, Outreach Committee Memoranda and Related Materials, Box 2, Folder 6, South Carolina International Women’s Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> Appendix, Public Law 94-167, 183.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Colvard Dorian and Wallace to State Coordinating Committee, Position Paper, 1-2.



requesting 187 groups in fifty-five communities across the state to help the subcommittee identify and encourage individuals to attend the state meeting. Included in these groups were the American Banking Association, American Association of University Women, anti-ERA groups, Parents Without Partners and Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliaries, most of whom were sent an estimated 7,000 to 7,600 mailings. Though this effort reached out to diverse groups in terms of class, race, occupations and religion, organizations that attracted conservative women, with the exception of anti-ERA groups, were noticeably absent, including Daughters of the American Revolution, Farm Bureau Women, United Daughters of the Confederacy and Right to Life. This is because the national guidelines did not require participants come from a variety of ideological backgrounds. However, unlike some states, South Carolina's outreach subcommittee sent mailings encouraging conservative women in anti-ERA groups to attend the state meeting. This is significant as it shows the SCIWY Coordinating Committee going beyond what was required by national guidelines in order to ensure that South Carolina women from different beliefs, as well as backgrounds, attended the state meeting.<sup>30</sup>

To attract a broader group of women, the outreach subcommittee hosted cluster meetings between May 11 -14 and May 16 - 21 in thirteen large population centers

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<sup>30</sup> IWY Form Letter from Marguerite Howie, General, International Women's Year, 1975-1978, ERA, League of Women of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 31, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Fran Zupan, "About 1, 200 Women Expected At Conference," *The Columbia Record*, May 25, 1977, International Women's Year, Clippings, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 33, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 18; Revised Guidelines to Coordinate a Statewide, Outreach Program, Outreach Committee Memoranda and Related Materials, Box 2, Folder 6, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, 1; Associated Press, "ERA Opponents Advise IWY 'Have No Fear,'" *Greenville Piedmont*, June 9, 1977, Research Relating to Criticism and Defense of IWY, Box 3, Folder 14, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC.

throughout the state, including, among others, Aiken, Charleston, and Orangeburg. These cluster meetings were planned and attended by outreach subcommittee members with the help of locals. These local meetings were meant to build excitement and encourage attendance as well as reach women who might not be able to attend the state meeting.<sup>31</sup>

Altogether, outreach efforts disseminated knowledge about the IWY meeting and extended an invitation to an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 urban women, 1,000 to 2,000 rural women, 2,000 to 2,300 low-income women, 800 to 1,000 teenagers and 400 to 500 women of retirement age or older. The number of attendees at cluster meetings was hard for organizers to determine, but it is estimated they reached 400 to 500 women, including 114 college students, of which 21 were men. Besides informing large groups of women about the meeting, there was an effort to advertise and promote participation in local and statewide newspapers, which was important as the meeting was to be an open forum.<sup>32</sup>

The SCIWY Coordinating Committee encouraged the attendance of women representing certain marginalized groups by providing support for those in need. As in all the states, part of the federal IWY funding given to South Carolina provided financial aid to low-income women wishing to attend the meeting. In South Carolina, this funding totaled \$2,250 in travel funds which would allow approximately 150 lower-income women to attend the state meeting. This funding would have been important to less affluent women, including many African-American women and those from rural areas, who would otherwise not be able to go due to the travel and lodging costs associated with

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<sup>31</sup> Outreach Program, Outreach Committee Memoranda and Related Materials, Box 2, Folder 6, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University. Rock Hill, SC, 2.

<sup>32</sup> South Carolina IWY Coordinating Committee Outreach Report, May 28, 1977; Zupan, "About 1,200 Women Expected At Conference."

attendance. For those requesting aid there was no need to even pay the otherwise required five-dollar registration fee for lunch and activities at the meeting.<sup>33</sup>

South Carolina and other states additionally helped women attend the state IWY meeting by providing childcare. The National Commission encouraged this by providing funding for such services and by disseminating the budget and plans for childcare utilized by Vermont's meeting. South Carolina appropriated \$2,000 to provide childcare services on Saturday, the second day of the meeting, when workshops were held and the state delegation elected. Childcare cost one dollar for mothers not receiving financial assistance which made it attainable for all women needing childcare.<sup>34</sup>

The SCIWY Coordinating Committee was granted \$41,000 of the five million federal appropriations. Due to laws prohibiting government funding from influencing politics, these appropriations could not be used to advocate for legislation. The need to adhere to federal government regulations and increased scrutiny by those opposed to government support of the IWY required the SCIWY Coordinating Committee to account for all money spent and make sure any deviation from the budget was approved in

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<sup>33</sup> NCOIWY, *The Spirit of Houston*, 99; National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year: Approved Grant Budget, International Women's Year, 1977, L. Marion Gressette Papers, Box 8, Folder 1, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 1-5; South Carolina IWY Registration Form, International Women's Year, General, Programs, League of Women Voters Columbia/ Richland County, Box 6, Folder 26, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>34</sup> To Chair and Program Chair of Coordinating Committee, Agenda Level No. 14, "Subject: Arranging for Child Care at State Meetings," March 9, 1977, Outreach Program, Outreach Committee Memoranda and Related Materials, Box 2, Folder 6, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, 1; National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, Approved Grant Budget, International Women's Year, 1977, L. Marion Gressette Papers, Topical, Box 8, Folder 1, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 1-5; South Carolina IWY Registration Form, International Women's Year, General.

advance. SCIWY committee member and Democratic Party organizer Martha Marr served as the financial officer.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, women on SCIWY Coordinating Committee also followed policies designed by the National Commission to ensure democracy. There were specific requirements for voting: an individual must be a South Carolina resident sixteen years of age or older and registered at the state meeting, thus ensuring against the possibility that unregistered individuals or residents of other states could influence the vote. To vote, attendees had to first show proof of identity before being given nontransferable voting cards that could not be used by proxies. Additionally, voting machines were monitored by men and women of different backgrounds and political beliefs in order to prevent tampering with the ballots or intimidation of voters. Though voting for delegates was only one part of the meeting, it was a critical one as the state delegates would be representing South Carolina at the National Women's Conference.<sup>36</sup>

State organizers were not required to consider all of the sixteen core recommendations sent to them by the National Commission, however, and unlike their counterparts in most states, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee chose not to present them all. Instead, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee took pains to craft a moderate program for the meeting, which would not create controversy, but instead promote

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<sup>35</sup> National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year: Approved Grant Budget, 1-5. A portion of this money was to pay for such items as salaries, communications and supplies, along for speakers and workshop leaders at the conference. Additionally, \$10,424 was to go directly toward travel for the state meeting and \$6,688 for travel to the national conference.

<sup>36</sup> "Women's Conference Planned," *The State*, June 8, 1977, IWY, General, Programs, ERA South Carolina, Equal Rights Amendment, League of Women Voters Columbia/ Richland County, Box 6, Folder 26, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Spruill, "The Mississippi 'Takeover'," 5; "Organizers Defend IWY Plans," *The Columbia Record*, June 9, 1977, International Women's Year, Clippings, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 33, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

consensus. The SCIWY Coordinating Committee customized the state's agenda to avoid dedicating workshops to issues too contentious to be discussed, as well as others they felt women in the state were not interested in. This was done to encourage attendance at the meeting by discussing issues relevant to all South Carolina women, while also avoiding issues considered too polarizing or those that could make some individuals not want to attend. As a result, the committee eliminated the divisive issue of the ERA from the state conference agenda as a workshop, though they included it as a resolution in the Equal Employment Opportunity Law workshop. To advertise their decision, Chair Marianna Davis and Vice-Chair Candy Waites spoke to the press. For Davis, avoiding discussion of the ERA was a choice to not "raise an issue that's controversial and which will result in emotional reactions."<sup>37</sup> This suggests a desire by Davis to prevent conservative opposition in a workshop they would likely disrupt. In addition, by not having a workshop dedicated to the ERA, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee distanced themselves from charges of lobbying, and instead indicated that many women's issues would be discussed at the state meeting.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to not dedicating a workshop to the ERA, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee chose to not have a workshop, or even a resolution, dedicated to reproductive freedom as they felt women in the state were not interested in the topics of abortion, birth control, and teenage pregnancy. This was a striking choice as South Carolina feminists

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<sup>37</sup> "ERA Not on the Agenda: Organizers Defend IWY Plans," *The Columbia Record*, June 8, 1977, Clippings, International Women's Year, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 33, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>38</sup> "ERA Not on the Agenda: Organizers Defend IWY Plans;" Mary Breakfield to Program Committee (Vivian Ray, Lucille Whipper, Marilyn Neidig, Neelima Jain), March 3, 1977, General Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 1, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC; Linda C. Owens, "Women to Gather for IWY Meeting," *The State*, June 10, 2012, Clippings, International Women's Year, Candy Waites Papers, Box 6, Folder 34, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

worked for reproductive rights, including access to birth control and abortions. However, not all feminists agreed on issues related to reproductive freedom, particularly that of abortion. As a result, the choice to eliminate reproductive issues may be due to a desire to prevent disagreements among feminists, and encourage their support of more moderate feminist issues. In addition, South Carolina had an active anti-abortion organizations that would have certainly been opposed to state recommendations in favor of abortion or possibly even birth control.<sup>39</sup>

As a result, the SCIWY meeting's workshops discussed the core recommendations organizers perceived as more critical and less controversial in their twelve workshops, such as the status of the homemaker and equal opportunity employment laws. Additionally, in two instances, the committee combined several recommendations into one workshop: "Creative Women: Arts and Media" discussed Arts and Media recommendations and "Battered Woman and the Rape Victim" which combined the core recommendations of rape, battered women and offenders. Though this final alteration to the core recommendations was due to a lack of time and resources for the full sixteen workshops, it provides an important example of the state customizing its meeting to best provide for the interests and needs of attendees.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mary Breakfield to Program Committee (Ray, et al), March 3, 1977.

<sup>40</sup> SCIWY Coordinating Committee, "The Coordinating Committee of SCIWY Welcomes You to International Women's Year," IWY Conference Pamphlet, 1977, IWY, General, Programs, ERA South Carolina, Equal Rights Amendment, League of Women Voters Columbia/ Richland County, Box 6, Folder 26, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; NCOIWY, *The Spirit of Houston*, 99.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Men and Women United: Organizing to Prevent Change

Despite national tensions over the IWY, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee believed they would not encounter difficulties from social conservatives who opposed the meeting. When the committee began organizing the state meeting, they were told to anticipate and plan for disruptions, a suggestion they did not take seriously until several weeks leading up to the meeting. Marianna Davis reported in the press that, though the committee prepared for opposition, they initially did not expect trouble because “South Carolina is in the middle of the Bible Belt.”<sup>41</sup> Though Davis did not explain her reasons for this thinking in the press or later interviews, it is possible that she, and other committee members, might have underestimated opposition due social conservatives’ previous lack of interest in other women’s conferences held in the state. Even though the SCIWY Committee members knew many of the recommendations were issues conservatives disagreed with, it is possible they also thought by avoiding some of the most controversial topics, that they would be able to prevent disruption. As the SCIWY Coordinating Committee realized, not only were social conservatives in South Carolina fearful of the IWY, they were ready to fight for what they felt was their state’s heritage, not the one the IWY promoted, characterized by gender equality and racial diversity.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Owens, “Women to Gather for IWY Meeting.”

<sup>42</sup> Marjorie Spruill’s study of the IWY in Mississippi reveals that organizers in several states felt the IWY would be treated by conservatives as just another women’s conference which they typically ignored. These

While the SCIWY Coordinating Committee planned the state meeting, social conservatives were organizing to oppose the IWY. Female IWY opponents were often involved in community organizations which tended to have religious or politically conservative ties. These women were already working against the women's movement in such organizations as STOP-ERA; others were involved in political groups that opposed federal government involvement in state or personal matters. One of these was WCG, a organization in southern states dedicated to "free enterprise, Christian faith, racial self respect and national sovereignty," whose president at the time was South Carolina native George Ann Pennebaker. To coordinate opposition to these changes, conservative women were organized by leaders including Theresa Hicks, Zilla Hinton, Irene Neuffer, George Ann Pennebaker and Norma Russell.<sup>43</sup>

Typical of these social conservative women was Greenville native and member of WCG Edith Edwards, who felt women were "rising" to new positions too rapidly and that ideologies were "taking precedence over the basic Christian philosophy on which America was founded."<sup>44</sup> Instead of wanting women's equality with men, socially conservative women like Edwards believed that feminism devalued women's traditional God-given role as a housewife and would force unnatural changes, such as men doing housework or women being drafted for war. As a result, socially conservative women in South Carolina felt initiatives to improve women's condition, particularly the ERA, ran

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organizers underestimated actions by Phyllis Schlafly and other conservative leaders to encourage attendance to the IWY. See more in Spruill, "The Mississippi 'Takeover': Feminists, Antifeminists, and the International Women's Year Conference of 1977, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Moses, "ERA Threatens Women's Conference;" Elizabeth Gillespie MacRae, "White Womanhood, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Massive Resistance," in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed., Clive Webb, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 181.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Elaine Edwards by Elaine Paul, June 1977, SCIWY, Constance Ashton Myers IWY Oral Histories, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 2.



contrary to the opinion of most individuals in the state, making the IWY a waste of taxpayer's money. It is important to note though that these conservative women did not oppose all feminist goals, such as equal credit. For instance, Edith Edwards was also "thrilled that women have advanced to where they are" and was in favor of new opportunities for women.<sup>45</sup>

Male opponents to the IWY in South Carolina similarly defended traditional gender roles but also often emphasized that the ERA and IWY were a violation of states' rights. Phil Pless, a graduate of Bob Jones University, not only believed the ERA was unnecessary due to the existing laws that protected women's rights, but also that President Carter "should not pressure the states in the south and other states to force passage of the Equal Rights Amendment."<sup>46</sup> These men were involved in and otherwise supported STOP-ERA and similar groups, but they were often a part of other conservative political organizations. Similar to their female counterparts, these male conservatives did not oppose all feminist goals. For example, Pless believed that, even if dressed provocatively, women have the "right to be protected by the law against the crime of rape."<sup>47</sup>

The extreme conservative group, the John Birch Society (JBS) was active in South Carolina and had members present at the state meeting. JBS members argued that the United Nations and the civil rights movement were part of an attempted communist takeover of the United States and eventually would lead to a dictatorial world

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Edith Edwards by Elaine Paul, June 1977, 2; Collins, 217-220; George Ann Pennebaker, Letter to the Editor, "Verified Expectations," June 16, 1977, Newspaper Clippings, Box 5, Folder 21, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Phil Pless by Rachael Myers, June 11, 1977, SCIWY, Ashton Myers IWY Oral Histories, Unprocessed Collection, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

government. As a result, they worked to preserve states' rights and opposed federal and international institutions. Yet, because of the JBS's secrecy in protecting its member lists from outside eyes, little is known about who may have been active in South Carolina. One known member of South Carolina's JBS was John Perna, who according to his 2013 LinkedIn Profile, was the leader of the Columbia Chapter of the JBS from 1978 to 2010 and likely involved in the organization by 1977. Perna attended the South Carolina IWY meeting as part of a group of men and a few women. Among them was David Wagner, a Greenville dentist, who acknowledged his JBS affiliation when discussing his plans to attend the meeting in the press. Some South Carolina feminists believed that Oliver "Runt" Willis, president of the Democratic Caucus of Forest Acres, had ties to the JBS in addition to a close relationship with conservative state senator L. Marion Gressette. The fact that Gressette's papers contain a great deal of information about IWY sent to the senator from Willis confirms this connection.<sup>48</sup> Similar to conservative women, these men united against the IWY conference as they felt it was an unconstitutional way for the government to promote women's rights.<sup>49</sup>

Efforts to oppose IWY began in the months leading up to the state meeting. On the national level, STOP-ERA went to court in *Mulqueeny v. IWY* (1977) and claimed

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<sup>48</sup> Feminists such as Eunice "Tootsie" Holland have suggested that Oliver "Runt" Willis often passed information to L. Marion Gressette and that Willis' actions were sometimes directed by Gressette. Though this relationship cannot be proven, the fact that Gressette's official papers contain many documents from Willis suggests the two worked together to oppose the IWY. One document in particular directs Willis to pass information along to Gressette.

<sup>49</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, Box 7, Folder 30-31, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, 50; Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 1; Rick Pearlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of American Consensus* (New York: Nation Books, 2009), 115-117; Barbara Stone, "The John Birch Society: A Profile," *The Journal of Politics* 36, no. 1 (Feb. 1974), 187; John Perna, *LinkedIn Public Profile*, [www.linkedin.com/pub/john-perna/4/4aa/827](http://www.linkedin.com/pub/john-perna/4/4aa/827), accessed December 1, 2012; IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 50; Moses, "ERA Threatens Women's Conference;" Waites, *Class Visit*, 23-24.

that the IWY was violating federal lobbying laws and the Federal Advisory Committee Act. Judge Sprecher of the Seventh Circuit Court dismissed the complaint due to the plaintiff's not providing compelling evidence and also ruled that there was no standing for a judicial forum to hear complaints against the IWY but instead individuals should use the political process.<sup>50</sup>

In South Carolina, many individuals and groups used the political process to oppose the IWY. One of the first significant efforts was a letter by Oliver Willis sent to all of the state's elected representatives in Congress. Willis expressed his concerns about the IWY, accusing IWY funding of establishing the organization ERAmerica in the state, violating federal laws and the will of South Carolina women who he claimed were mostly opposed to the ERA. Willis made it clear he opposed the IWY, but since he was unable to prevent the state meeting from taking place, Willis suggested that Norma Russell, Theresa Hicks, Zilla Hinton, George Ann Pennebaker or Janet Weidman be given spots on the SCIWY Coordinating Committee so that the "anti-ERA" women's point of view might be better heard.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to using the political process, those against the IWY also worked to make their conservative views known by using the press to question the legitimacy of the IWY and the SCIWY Coordinating Committee. Neuffer wrote that not only was the state committee pro-ERA, but it was overwhelmingly regionally biased toward urban areas,

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<sup>50</sup> Linda Colvard Dorien to National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, "Memo, Subject: Court Decision in *Mulqueeny vs. IWY*," March 1, 1977, General Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 2, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, 1-2.

The federal advisory committee act required fair and balanced meetings, as well as committees, at the state and federal level.

<sup>51</sup> Oliver "Runt" Willis to Representative Floyd Spence, March 28, 1977. Research Relating to Criticism and Defense of IWY, Box 3, Folder 14, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, 1-2.

with few women from the Lowcountry or Pee Dee regions. To Neuffer, “a state committee of IWY should be properly representative of this preference for home rule” rather than something seemingly federally imposed which she demonstrated by claiming more than 65 percent of South Carolinians opposed the ERA.<sup>52</sup> Neuffer’s use of the term “home rule” seems to be carefully selected to invoke states’ rights by utilizing this emotion-laden terminology formerly used to refer to restoration of whites southerners to political power at end of Reconstruction to express the feelings of South Carolina citizens towards increasing federal government intervention. Often these opinions were expressed by leaders of STOP-ERA and similar organizations, but their supporters, such as Mrs. Reginald E. Gregory, also expressed similar thoughts in the press.<sup>53</sup>

Those against the IWY gained additional strength when the South Carolina IWY Citizen’s Review Committee was created in late May of 1977. According to member Zilla Hinton, the committee was set up to monitor the IWY Coordinating Committee to ensure that, as an initiative receiving federal funding, it “carries out its responsibilities according to law and the regulations governing the committee.”<sup>54</sup> Group members felt this to be necessary after earlier state meetings reported “gross procedural irregularities and a one-sided presentation of women’s rights,” according to the organization’s press

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<sup>52</sup> Irene Neuffer, “IWY Representatives Not Representative,” Letter to the Editor, *The State*, May 28, 1977, *International Women’s Year, General, Programs, League of Women Voters Columbia/ Richland County*, Box 6, Folder 26, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>53</sup> Irene Neuffer, “IWY Representatives Not Representative;” Letter Mrs. Reginald E. Gregory, Letter to the Editor, “Deck Stacked on IWY Meeting,” *Greenville News*, 1977, Research Relating to Criticism and Defense of IWY, Box 3, Folder 14, South Carolina International Women’s Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC.

<sup>54</sup> “Review Board Formed to Monitor IWY Committee,” *The Columbia Record*, May 26, 1977, IWY, General, Programs, ERA South Carolina, Equal Rights Amendment, League of Women Voters Columbia/ Richland County, Box 6, Folder 26, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

release.<sup>55</sup> Though the exact number of women and men involved in South Carolina's IWY Citizens Review Committee is unknown, Hinton described it as representing "the thinking of most women in South Carolina."<sup>56</sup> Women involved in the organization included members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Christians Concerned About Government, STOP-ERA and WCG, along with the Eagle Forum. With similar organizations set up in other states, the IWY Citizens Review Committee was a mechanism for social conservatives to monitor state meetings. This national effort was coordinated by Rosemary Thomson who was appointed national chairman by Schlafly.<sup>57</sup>

As the state meeting approached, socially conservative women became more aggressive. On May 18, 1977, approximately twenty anti-ERA women entered the IWY office supposedly to find out more information about the meeting. These women then proceeded to open drawers, rifle through files and generally disturb the office's operation. After they left, individuals noticed several items seemed to be missing, leading some to accuse these women of stealing lists of members of organizations and some letters. Feminists not on the SCIWY Coordinating Committee, such as the president of Columbia's chapter of NOW, Malissa Burnette, outright accused anti-ERA women of intimidation and disruption in the press.<sup>58</sup> To the SCIWY Coordinating Committee this

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<sup>55</sup> "Review Board Formed to Monitor IWY Committee."

<sup>56</sup> Gigi Moses, "Protests Open IWY Conference," *Greenville Piedmont*, June 10, 1977, Research Relating to Criticism and Defense of IWY, Box 3, Folder 14, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC.

<sup>57</sup> "IWY Review Group Set," *The State*, May 27, 1977, IWY, General, Programs, ERA South Carolina, Equal Rights Amendment, League of Women Voters Columbia/Richland County, Box 6, Folder 26, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Gigi Moses, "Protests Open IWY Conference;" Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 107.

<sup>58</sup> Burnette, though not on the SCIWY Coordinating Committee, was president of the Columbia Chapter of NOW and heavily involved in the Pro-ERA movement. She was later Chief of Staff for the first female Lieutenant Ferdinand B. Nancy Stevenson (1979-1982).

signaled possible attempts by social conservatives to cause trouble at the IWY meeting. Still, state committee members attempted to reserve their judgment in the press, instead reporting that items had gone missing from the IWY office but not accusing any particular group of taking the items. For committee members, this incident was very clearly linked to anti-ERA conservatives, but to appear as an impartial organization, the committee had to reserve judgment, especially without any concrete evidence.<sup>59</sup>

At first, these anti-ERA women did not acknowledge involvement in this event at IWY state offices. Hinton went so far as to deny awareness of anything taking place. Eventually Hinton admitted she was at the office but only “picked up a copy [of the national delegate form] off of the floor beneath the copy machine” and that the allegations were otherwise “completely false,” even “slanderous.”<sup>60</sup> Instead, Hinton blamed the confusion on the IWY office staff who “should have had the intelligence to take proper action” in response to the influx of visitors. With anti-ERA and pro-ERA women accusing each other, tensions over the conference increased despite the committee’s attempts to remain neutral. Instead, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee tried to again defuse the situation by having spokeswoman and financial officer, Martha Marr, claim both groups were overreacting. Marr finally admitted the incident was possibly connected to anti-ERA women but tried not to make any direct accusation. Instead, Marr alternatively described the event as not a “ransacking” but acknowledged some items were taken after a large number of women, who more than likely were a

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<sup>59</sup> “Women’s Conference: ERA Confrontation Feared,” *The Columbia Record*, June 8, 1977, International Women’s Year, Clippings, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 33, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>60</sup> Linda C. Owens, “ERA Foes Accused of Interfering With Women’s Meeting,” *The State*, June 9, 1977, International Women’s Year, Clippings, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 33, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

group, arrived at the IWY office at the same time.<sup>61</sup> Marr described these women as “freely given information,” but that “some things they didn’t ask for were missing later.”<sup>62</sup> Besides exemplifying increasing tensions, this provided an opportunity for the SCIWY Coordinating Committee to reiterate in the press their elimination of the ERA as a workshop topic and to invite all women to the meeting to discuss a variety of issues to show they did not favor any one side of the ERA debate. This was an effort to adhere to federal guidelines requiring that the meeting be open to the public by making sure that all of the public felt welcome, including conservatives who felt increasingly excluded.<sup>63</sup>

As the date of the conference approached, women against the IWY became bolder in their attempts to obtain information about the state meeting. Though the SCIWY outreach subcommittee distributed materials to anti-ERA groups, conservatives felt as though they were not given enough information, particularly about the meetings planning. On May 28, 1977, Hinton and other opponents were excluded from a nominating subcommittee meeting after they tried to record a discussion by the subcommittee about the individuals nominated as delegates. These women were first asked to turn off their tape recorder but refused to do so. The nominating subcommittee then consulted a lawyer who advised them to again order the devices be turned off, but Hinton and other women continued to record the meeting. Seeing no other way to avoid being recorded, after a lunch break, the subcommittee went to a member’s hotel room at the Carolina Inn. Hinton and her group tried to enter this room only to be physically blocked by subcommittee member Neelima Jain of Pickens. After being prevented from

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<sup>61</sup> Owens, “ERA Foes Accused of Interfering with Women’s Meeting.”

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

entering the room of a supposedly public meeting, Hinton went to the press accusing the committee, as a public body, of violating the law by meeting privately and excluding citizens. Taking place less than two weeks before the meeting, this occurrence signified the increasing tensions between the committee and pro-ERA individuals and social conservatives. More importantly, this indicates an occasion where the SCIWY's nominating subcommittee's actions may well have been illegal as the IWY was to be a public forum. This was not achieved by a private meeting in a hotel room from where another group of women was actually barred to prevent perceived interferences.<sup>64</sup>

In response to attempts to record the meeting, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee increased protection by not allowing tape recordings at any meetings or events. According to Vice-Chair Candy Waites, this was because they were "aware of the misinterpretations that can happen with tape recordings."<sup>65</sup> However, while this may have protected the SCIWY Coordinating Committee, it also went against IWY guidelines by making the meetings less of a public forum in cutting down accessibility by preventing even recordings for the sake of posterity or for use by reporters. It is also important to note that Waites believed recordings would allow information to be misinterpreted, an interesting claim as tapes would record speakers verbatim, though perhaps she worried sound bites would be taken out of context. To defend this decision, Waites invoked the Freedom of Information Act whose provisions allowed committees to meet in closed sessions when individuals are discussed; thus, the nature of the meeting discussing nominated delegates would have fit under this classification. The SCIWY Coordinating

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<sup>64</sup> Associated Press, "Women's Year Committee Bans Recorder," *The State*, May 29, 1977, IWY, Clippings, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 33, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



Committee also defended their decision on the basis that, as individuals, they had a right to not be tape recorded, despite their public position. These justifications were an attempt to provide a legal reasoning for an action seemingly against IWY regulations.

To prevent what they felt they were increasingly evident threats to the state meeting by social conservatives, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee arranged for police protection. Off-duty Columbia police officers would attend the meeting to both protect attendees and maintain order. This need for extra security was explained by Davis as being a direct result of the incidents at IWY offices which suggested attempts to interfere with the meeting.<sup>66</sup> For SCIWY Coordinating Committee members, the police were there to encourage an open forum by preventing disorder, but for social conservatives, the police were there seemingly to intimidate them to vote for IWY core recommendations and prevent them from speaking their point of view.<sup>67</sup>

To the social conservatives, these actions by SCIWY Coordinating Committee members only confirmed their view that the IWY was not an open forum. However, this made them feel more rather than less determined to attend the meeting. In a *Greenville Piedmont* article, JBS member David Wagner expressed concerns that the IWY unfairly favored feminists and “does not represent a grassroots movement in South Carolina” due to not being appointed by South Carolina citizens or elective officials.<sup>68</sup> Wagner was especially alarmed because of the unequal representation of conservatives at Georgia’s meeting, described as a “liberal, socialist, big government type of thing,” which he felt

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<sup>66</sup> “Organizers Defend IWY Plans,” *The Columbia Record*.

<sup>67</sup> Associated Press, “Women’s Year Committee Bans Recorder;” Theresa Hicks, Letter to the Editor, “ERA Not the Issue: Delegates A Surprise.” *The State*, June 12, 1977, L. Marion Gressette, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>68</sup> Moses, “ERA Threatens Women’s Conference.”

would also be the case in South Carolina.<sup>69</sup> George Ann Pennebaker acknowledged that “the IWY committee is geographically and possibly racially cross-sectioned well,” but that it was not ideologically representative. Pennebaker is correct in her assessment because requirements aimed for the committee to be representative of the state’s diversity, but there was no requirement it represent different ideological beliefs.<sup>70</sup>

To express their opinions, Pennebaker and Wagner planned to attend the state meeting. For Pennebaker, this meant representing South Carolina women who “believe in strong homes, family relationships being structured on morality and Biblical basis” but were not included in the meeting.<sup>71</sup> These feelings and fears by social conservative leaders indicate the increasing resolve by these individuals to express their view.

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<sup>69</sup> Moses, “ERA Threatens Women’s Conference.”

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Heritage: Celebrating South Carolina Women

Later described by feminist Diane Moseley as a “wild meeting,” South Carolina’s IWY meeting took place June 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, as ideological conflicts between social conservatives and feminists regarding the state’s heritage and horizons were fully on display.<sup>72</sup> For these two days, approximately 800 individuals gathered at the Carolina Inn in Columbia, a number lower than the 1,000 to 1,200 expected. This lower number perhaps suggests a lack of interest from individuals in the state despite significant outreach and controversy leading up to the meeting. Those in attendance included women from different races, ethnicities and economic backgrounds, including 123 women who were able to attend due to receiving financial assistance. Most women in attendance were activists involved in organizations such as NOW, Church Women United and the NAACP, as well as both political parties. Though most participants supported the IWY, a reported 130 were social conservatives opposed it and its core recommendations.<sup>73</sup> In addition to conservative men, several prominent men with progressive social and political views attended the meeting, including James Clyburn, state human affairs commissioner, and Richard “Dick” Riley, a gubernatorial candidate at that time. While

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<sup>72</sup> Diane Moseley, Class Visit, March 22, 2010, transcription by Shannon Brandon, Class Visits, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 16.

<sup>73</sup> The attendance of 130 social conservatives is the most commonly reported number from both the state IWY report and news articles written by both feminists and conservatives. One source by George Ann Pennebaker suggested there were as many as 200 social conservatives, though that is not corroborated by any other source.

being interviewed for the IWY Oral History project, Ann Petrie, a student at the University of South Carolina, observed that while the “scope” of attendees ranged from homemakers to professionals, black and white, liberals to conservatives, those attending “all have one basic concern: where are we going as women in South Carolina?”<sup>74</sup>

As the state meeting’s theme, heritage and horizons suggested, the first day of the meeting celebrated South Carolina women of the past, present and future. Similar to other states, South Carolina celebrated women’s history in order to fulfill IWY guidelines to recognize women’s contributions. This first day was later described in the state meeting’s report as the coming together of women long divided by race, politics and culture in South Carolina “to share their history of struggles and hopes for a better future.”<sup>75</sup> However, for socially conservative attendees, this day honoring the state’s women’s history, so intertwined with both issues of race and gender, ran contrary to their version of history that revered many white men and few women but certainly not civil rights activists or feminists.<sup>76</sup>

To celebrate women, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee planned exhibits, panels, performances and presentations to engage a diverse audience. Throughout the conference, the committee had an exhibition space featuring art by female artists in South Carolina and portraits of notable South Carolina women with labels discussing their contributions. Women featured in this gallery included African-American educator and civil rights leader Mary McLeod Bethune and Mary Boykin Chesnut, a plantation

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Ann Petrie by Elaine Paul, June 1977, SCIWY, Constance Ashton Myers IWY Oral Histories, Unprocessed Collection, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Columbia, SC, 2; Marianna Davis, interview and transcription by Kate Shropshire, 8; Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 1-3.

<sup>75</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 6.

<sup>76</sup> NCOIWY, *The Spirit of Houston*, 110; Appendix, Public Law 94-167, Caroline Bird, *What Women Want*, 183-184.

mistress and slaveholder and wife of a Confederate leader. This variety of individuals honored the state's complex racial history while also highlighting women's accomplishments. Additionally, the meeting featured a panel with speakers who discussed the concerns of African-American women, American Indian women and women from other countries living in the state. Though all races were honored and issues affecting them discussed throughout the meeting, there seemed to be a focus on racial and ethnic groups who were previously marginalized but whose history and status were just as significant to South Carolina as that of white women. This certainly would have been welcome to women from the minority groups at the meeting, along with other South Carolina women who supported racial equality. Yet focus on these groups would have made white conservative men and women feel as though proceedings were "overly geared to black women," as indicated in the minority report of the state meeting later written by conservatives.<sup>77</sup>

The conference also featured live performances celebrating feminism in South Carolina's past and present. Attendees went to *Preposterous and Unthinkable*, a play by women at the University of South Carolina at Spartanburg that depicted the debate over the Nineteenth Amendment. This play emphasized that the fears of anti-suffragists were unfounded in the 1920s, similar to the fears of ERA opponents in the 1970s. Though this play discussed one of women's major achievements, it did so in a way that supported the

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<sup>77</sup> SCIWY Coordinating Committee, "The Coordinating Committee of SCIWY Welcomes You to International Women's Year," IWY Conference Pamphlet, 1977, IWY, General, Programs, ERA South Carolina, Equal Rights Amendment, League of Women Voters Columbia/ Richland County, Box 6, Folder 26, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 6; Norma C Russell, Oliver E. Willis, Shirley Holcombe, and George Ann Pennebaker "Objections and Exceptions to the State Meeting of the South Carolina International Women's Year Committee," 1977, International Women's Year, 1977, Topical, Box 8, Folder 1, L. Marion Gressette Papers, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 2.

ERA while belittling the opinions of those against it through the parallels made to the anti-suffrage movement. Attendees also enjoyed the Greenville Feminist Theatre's presentation of skits and songs about women's "herstory" which depicted historical and current events in a manner that focused on women's rights and status. This ranged from a parody of beauty pageants to a rendition of antislavery and women's rights leader Sojourner Truth's "*Ain't I a Woman*" speech. Though these productions may have initially seemed merely entertaining, they were important mediums utilized to make clear the IWY's support of racial progress and women's rights. For social conservatives, these performances would have been offensive for favoring certain beliefs about race and gender. Social conservatives perhaps even viewed them as an attempt by the IWY to write its own history as "herstory" due to these beliefs.<sup>78</sup>

The conference also honored the accomplishments of South Carolina women "breaking barriers."<sup>79</sup> This featured presentations of South Carolina women's accomplishments in medicine, education, politics and art, including nationally known female abolitionists Sarah and Angelina Grimke and African-American tennis star Althea Gibson. But it also depicted women famous for their accomplishments in the state, including Sarah Campbell Adams, the first female medical doctor in South Carolina, and Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, the founder of the historically black Voorhees College. Some of these women were present, including civil rights activist Modjeska Monteith Simkins and Wil Lou Grey, an adult education pioneer, both of whom were honored with standing

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<sup>78</sup> Nancy Moore, *Preposterous and Unthinkable*, Nancy Moore, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 1; Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 12-13. The University of South Carolina at Spartanburg became the University of South Carolina Upstate in 2004.

<sup>79</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 7.

ovations. The celebration of women's accomplishments ended with Alice Gallman sharing her personal story as the granddaughter of a slave who, though not formally educated until the age of forty, became a nurse and later a supervisor at the South Carolina State Hospital. Though the women honored featured those from all backgrounds, a large number were African-American women who had not only broken gender barriers, but also racial barriers erected and defended by white conservatives.<sup>80</sup>

Participants were given the opportunity to share and celebrate their own experience breaking barriers. The committee encouraged this by setting up booths where women could write about their experiences and share them with others by receiving tags stating "I broke a barrier, talk with me."<sup>81</sup> This activity helped capture the experiences of a spectrum of attendees by encouraging the involvement of all women in attendance. For instance, Gladys Heart of Greenville, was proud of being the first female delegate to the Episcopal Church's Diocesan Convention of Upper South Carolina. Orangeburg native, Dr. Doris S. Cantey, had been the first black doctorate of higher education in student personnel administration. Other ways women broke barriers were extremely personal. Rebecca Lee of Green Pond was the first woman in her in-law's family to have a college degree, an honor she fought for after being told that she was "out of place."<sup>82</sup> Even ERA opponent Norma Russell could not help but participate, writing that she was the first female representative from Lexington County elected to the state legislature. To Alice Ruffner, a social conservative from Maudlin, this first day of commemoration, which

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<sup>80</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 8-10.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-6.

<sup>82</sup> Rebecca A. Lee, "I Broke a Barrier Sheet," June 10, 2013, Biographical Information and Resource People For Conventions, Box 4, Folder 17, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC.

failed to open with either a prayer or the Pledge of Allegiance, merely “lulled” women “into an uncomfortable complacency.”<sup>83</sup> Still, the sheer variety of these women’s stories indicates this meeting was able to fulfill national guidelines to honor women’s accomplishments. This success was later celebrated in the National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year report, *The Spirit of Houston*, as an example of the achievements of IWY goals.<sup>84</sup>

This first day included more than celebrations, however. At night a business meeting was held that laid the groundwork for the workshops and final business meeting the next day. At this meeting, voting procedures were explained and adopted. They also discussed the nominations made by the official nominating subcommittee and around 150 names were added from the floor. That produced a total slate of 172 nominations from which the twenty-seven state delegates would be elected to represent South Carolina at the National Women’s Conference. This drastic increase in the number of nominees was due to attendees nominating women of various backgrounds and political beliefs. Overall, this meeting went smoothly, but social conservatives did use the session to question the SCIWY’s adherence to national guidelines.<sup>85</sup>

After the announcement of nominees for delegates, pro-ERA women acted to influence the voting taking place the next day. This involved a short caucus already planned Friday night for ERA coordinators in League of Women Voters President Joy Sovde’s room. Here pro-ERA women discussed the SCIWY’s nominating committee’s

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<sup>83</sup> Mrs. James Ruffner, Letter to the Editor, “Feminist Podium,” *Maudlin Tribune*, June 1977, Research Relating to Criticism and Defense of IWY, Box 3, Folder 14, South Carolina International Women’s Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC.

<sup>84</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 110.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12, 21.



slate. As later recalled by Eunice “Tootsie” Holland in a 2010 interview, several of these women feared “nobody is going to vote for these people because none of us have ever heard of them before.”<sup>86</sup> Rather than being a short meeting, these women worked until three o’clock in the morning to create their own list of nominees that not only “have and will continue to support, actively, rights and opportunities for minorities and women” but also were, in their view, sufficiently well known to be elected.<sup>87</sup> The group also attempted to meet national guidelines requiring women representative of the state’s diversity in terms of age, race, ethnicity and class. The handout pro-ERA women created was entitled “Women for Women” and featured the names and brief biographies of twenty-four women, along with their numbers on the ballot. Once completed, these women went to the ERA office in Columbia to make photocopies of this slate to pass out at the meeting the next morning.<sup>88</sup>

Similar to a political convention, campaigning for certain delegates was legal. However, socially conservative nominees felt this action to influence the vote was inappropriate and unfair. A report by Theresa Hicks describes these pro-ERA women as a “splinter group,” who worked behind the scenes to influence delegate selection.<sup>89</sup> According to Hicks, these women wore “Women for Women” signs and distributed

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<sup>86</sup> Keller Bumgardner Barron and Eunice Tootsie Holland, Class Visit, September 18, 2007, Transcription By Alexandra Class Visits, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 18.

<sup>87</sup> Women for Women, International Women’s Year, General, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 30, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>88</sup> Nancy Moore, “Dear ERA Coordinator,” June 7, 1977, International Women’s Year, General, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 33, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Keller Bumgardner Barron and Eunice Tootsie Holland, Class Visit, September 18, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Theresa Hicks, Letter to the Editor, “ERA Not the Issue: Delegates A Surprise.” *The State*, June 12, 1977, L. Marion Gressette, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

copies of their slate to go on “a free trip to Houston.”<sup>90</sup> Though Hicks does not come out and directly complain that these actions were illegal, the way she portrays them seems to imply lobbying or at least underhanded tactics.

While pro-ERA women campaigned for a certain list of delegates, there is no indication that social conservatives coordinated their voting in any way as they did in other states, such as Georgia. It is known that social conservatives actively worked against Modjeska Simkins’ election as a delegate by handing out what Simkins referred to as a “communist smash sheet.”<sup>91</sup> This pink sheet, dated July 13, 1965, was originally put together by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) which maintained a file on Simkins throughout the 1950s and 1960s. These sheets primarily contained details about Simkins’ alleged communist activities through her affiliation with groups and initiatives to promote civil rights and peace which were believed to be communist fronts. Examples of these include: Civil Rights Congress, Southern Negro Youth Congress, Committee for Peaceful Alternatives to the Atlantic Pact and American Peace Crusade. In addition, it listed actions considered communist, such as being a part of a committee to defend W.E.B. DuBois for his activities to promote peace. During this time Simpkins was not an American Communist Party member, but she was a friend and supporter of communist leaders as well as involved with organizations and initiatives or beliefs considered communist by HUAC. In the 1950s and even 1960s, anticommunists felt guilt by association was sufficient proof of being a communist.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Theresa Hicks, Letter to the Editor, “ERA Not the Issue: Delegates A Surprise.”

<sup>91</sup> Modjeska Monteith Simkins, Interview by Constance Ashton Myers, 18-21 November 1977, Constance Aston Myers Oral History Collection, South Caroliniana, Columbia, SC, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Morris, “Kathryn Dunaway’s ERA Battle,” 173-176; “Information From the Files of the Committee on Un-American Activities U.S. House of Representatives. Subject: Modjeska Simkins,” July 13, 1964,

For social conservatives in the 1970s, in particular the JBS, communism was still a threat and, in their view, associated with the civil rights movement and movements for peace. As Simkins was African-American, as well as heavily involved in both of these movements, she was perceived as more of a threat than other African-American women nominated for state delegates but who were only involved in the civil rights movement, such as Davis. For Simkins, though, these accusations were just an effort “to quiet me and to make me shut my mouth about things that they didn’t want discussed.”<sup>93</sup> In the 1950s, this association with communism would have surely prevented her election as a delegate. However in 1977, despite attempts to brand her as a communist, Simkins’ election as a delegate was not prevented; in fact, she ended up receiving the second highest vote. This indicates that in South Carolina, as well as nationwide, individuals were less likely believed to be communist merely for their association with the civil rights and peace movements.

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International Women’s Year, General, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 31, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 1; Ellen Schrecker *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company 1998), 276; Barbara Woods, “Modjeska Simkins and South Carolina Conference of the NAACP, 1939-1957,” in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*,” edited by Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, Bloomington, (Indiana: Indiana University Press 1990), 115.

<sup>93</sup> Modjeska Monteith Simkins, Interview by Constance Ashton Myers, 12.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Horizons: A More Equal Union for Women

While conflict between the SCIWY Coordinating Committee and other feminists with social conservatives was not especially evident the first day of the state meeting, it dominated the second day and interrupted the meeting's planned proceedings. Throughout the second day, disagreements between these groups were evident in workshops and caused significant debate in the final business meeting. Though social conservatives were able to express their point of view, actions by both SCIWY Coordinating Committee members and other pro-ERA women ensured that the meeting's outcome would be favorable to women supportive of equal rights.

When attendees arrived the second day they encountered new participants registering at the last minute. Though attendees were encouraged to register in advance, South Carolina allowed registration the second day. In some states, conservatives registered at the last minute in order to surprise state IWY committees who anticipated a certain number of attendees and thus prevent feminist groups from countering by increasing their numbers. This occurred in several states, such as at Missouri's state meeting one week earlier where only 400 people pre-registered but 500 conservative men and women registered the second day.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 13; Mary Berkery, *We are a Multitude": The 1977 International Women's Year State Meeting and the Transformation of the Modern Feminist Movement*, 195.

In South Carolina, there were some individuals that registered to attend only the meeting's second day, as indicated in the state report. However, most attendees appeared to have registered in advance and the long lines the second day were primarily attributed to voting. In fact, rather than surprise organizers and feminists with their attendance at state meetings, South Carolina social conservatives made their intent to attend the state meeting known. In the weeks leading up to the meeting, conservative leaders Hinton, Neuffer, Pennebaker and Wagner mentioned in the press their intent to attend the state meeting and encouraged other conservative to do so. It was actually advantageous for attendees in South Carolina to register in advance, or to at least attend both days of the meeting, as the nominations for delegates occurred during the business meeting the first day, providing social conservatives an opportunity to nominate those with similar views. Thus, though it is entirely possible that some social conservatives only attended the meeting's second day, it did not appear to be part of a stealth strategy.<sup>95</sup>

As voting lines lengthened throughout the morning, some attendees were unable to attend the first workshop sessions. This was significant as these moderator-led sessions were to discuss core recommendations and other resolutions voted on that day taken from *To Form a More Perfect Union*. Attendees were free to attend one workshop in each session for a total of two. In South Carolina, the twelve workshops offered discussed one or more of the suggested core recommendations, with no workshops dedicated solely to the ERA and Reproductive Freedom. South Carolina's workshops were "Legal Status of

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<sup>95</sup> Associated Press, "ERA Opponents Advise IWY 'Have No Fear,'" *Greenville Piedmont*, June 9, 1977, Research Relating to Criticism and Defense of IWY, Box 3, Folder 14, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC; Neuffer, "IWY Representatives Not Representative;" Moses, "ERA Threatens Women's Conference." June 10, 1977.

the Homemaker: Married, Divorced, Single, Widowed,” “Creative Woman: Arts and Media,” “The Battered Woman and the Rape Victim,” “The Woman in Non-Traditional Roles,” “The Older Woman,” “International Interdependence,” “Equal Employment Opportunity Law,” “The Sex Barrier in Education,” “Credit and Money Management,” “Child Care,” “Mental Health and Counseling” and “Attaining the Positions of Influence and Leadership.” Though several workshops were controversial, the fact that they all came from nationally created recommendations made it so that South Carolina conservatives felt they were a federally imposed feminist agenda.<sup>96</sup>

Despite attempts to avoid controversial issues, South Carolina IWY participants with different views on women’s rights and what should be done in the future engaged in heated debates in workshops about the core recommendations. In some of these workshops, debate was minimal, allowing the proposed resolutions to pass. For instance, in the workshop “Legal Status of the Homemaker: Married, Divorced, Single, Widowed” attendees disagreed over whether a homemaker should be covered individually under Social Security or be covered only through her husband who was employed. Workshop participants were primarily concerned if two payments into Social Security would be required per household to support the homemaker’s benefits, thereby reducing a family’s income. Yet, though attendees expressed concerns over the resolution, in the end, it was passed by the workshop.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 15-16; SCIWY Coordinating Committee, “The Coordinating Committee of SCIWY Welcomes You to International Women’s Year,” IWY Conference Pamphlet; Norma C. Russell, Oliver E. Willis, Shirley Holcombe, and George Ann Pennebaker, “Objections and Exceptions to the State Meeting of the South Carolina International Women’s Year Committee,” 1977, International Women’s Year, 1977, Topical, Box 8, Folder 1, L. Marion Gressette Papers, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>97</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 23-24.

In the workshop on “The Woman in Non-Traditional Roles,” the only opposition came from one individual during a debate about enforcement of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 to guarantee equal athletic opportunities for women. During this proposed resolution, this man stated that “weakness” prevented women from participation.<sup>98</sup> Rather than mounting any type of opposition, his statement was quickly overruled as mostly female participants defended the resolution by explaining how a woman was given the decision to participate in sports as well as emphasizing the valuable skills sports taught women. By doing so, these women helped prevent actions that could have prevented this resolution’s passage.<sup>99</sup>

However, controversy in the “International Interdependence” workshop between social conservatives and other attendees caused such disruption that it prevented the workshop from passing any resolutions. For this session, the meeting welcomed Mary Rainford, the executive director of Jamaica’s Young Women’s Christian Association, to lead discussion on women’s condition in underdeveloped nations. But rather than a productive conversation, this session quickly became a tense debate. Instead of responding with empathy as Rainford described international women’s conditions, four or five men and a few women instead suggested the proposed resolution allowing underdeveloped countries a fair share of their natural resources to help these women would wrongfully interfere with the United States’ free enterprise. This cohort went on to claim the United Nations was leading to a “dictatorial world government” as it tried to promote international economic fairness.<sup>100</sup> Throughout the workshop, this group

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<sup>98</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 41.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-41.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

hindered debate by attempting to pass an anti-United Nations resolution. Eventually they forced the workshop to run out of its allotted time without passing any of the proposed resolutions. Though it is unknown who these men and women were, they were possibly affiliated with the ultra-conservative JBS who opposed the United Nations.<sup>101</sup>

These JBS members were described by attendee Elaine Lavender as going workshop to workshop, “causing whatever mischief they could.”<sup>102</sup> They caused the most problems for state organizers and attendees in the workshop on child care. During the session, workshop leaders emphasized that, despite recent state legislation regulating the conditions of day-care centers, there was still a lack of available daycare statewide, even for middle-class families able to pay. The proposed solution was a national act enabling the federal government to provide child and family services for families of all income levels. At the mention of this, John Perna stood up and delivered a written statement. He stated that free enterprise offered the “most options,” and proposed that the federal government should not interfere with child care.<sup>103</sup>

Perna’s resolution prompted more opposition from a number of social conservatives who attempted to dominate debate and pass Perna’s resolution. In response, childcare workshop leader Charlotte Pfeifer tried to adhere to national IWY guidelines by allowing all attendees the opportunity to speak. The Perna-led group used this opportunity to take control of the debate. As feminist workshop organizers proposed motions favoring government involvement in childcare, these antifeminists manipulated

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<sup>101</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 45.

<sup>102</sup> Elaine Lavender, “Birchers Invade the IWY Conference: A Personal Report,” *Osceola*, June 24, 1977, International Women’s Year, Clippings, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 33, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>103</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 60.



and ended discussion about anything leading to more government involvement. The group also voted against a proposal to establish parenthood education programs in schools at the local and state level. Even though this program was not run by the federal government, Perna's group exclaimed, "The government is the greatest danger in our society."<sup>104</sup> Through this active opposition, this faction was able to prevent the workshop session from passing any resolutions during the hour and twenty minutes it met.<sup>105</sup>

In the IWY report, this group, which they dubbed "anti-child faction," was also blamed for preventing others in attendance from voicing their opinions.<sup>106</sup> Despite this, workshop leaders were credited with preparing for trouble by making thorough and easy-to-understand opening statements so that information could at least be presented, even if all resolutions were not discussed. As a result, attendees were still able to learn more about initiatives to improve childcare.<sup>107</sup>

Described as a "southern church meeting" because of the speeches along with picnic-style box lunches, South Carolina's lunch featuring keynote addresses took place the second day of the meeting.<sup>108</sup> In selecting speakers for the event, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee chose U.S. Representative Lindy Boggs of Louisiana, a moderate southern politician with views unlikely to be found offensive. Representative Boggs' speech discussed what she viewed as the objectives of IWY and described the legislative initiatives she sponsored, including revisions to Social Security to be more favorable to housewives, equal credit and aid for battered wives. These were moderate

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<sup>104</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 60.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

feminist goals that more socially conservative men and women sometimes supported. Additionally, discussing these relatively moderate issues that affected many women helped avoid more controversial issues, mainly the ERA. It is also possible that, as a southerner, Boggs was also a strategic choice due to being attuned to southern sensibilities about the regions racial heritage and ongoing tensions while still advocating for all women's rights.<sup>109</sup>

Similar to Boggs, the two other keynote speakers also presented relatively moderate views. Philadelphia city councilwoman Ethel Allen's speech addressed the need for women's political assertiveness and offered women advice to work together to assure success of moral, human and civil rights. She was followed by Carin Ann Clauss, the first female solicitor in the U.S. Department of Labor. Clauss ended lunch with her discussion of the status of female-headed families who lived in poverty. The fact that the state IWY planners selected three speakers that they believed would not arouse controversy is significant as some states had invited speakers many considered to be radical feminists, such as Gloria Steinman and Bella Abzug.<sup>110</sup>

Following lunch, the IWY conference held its final business session where action was taken on the state's recommendations and the election of delegates for the national conference was announced. At this session, resolutions discussed in workshops were debated and voted on to form the state recommendations. These recommendations would then be reported to the state legislature as suggestions for state legislation, and would be represented at the National Women's Conference. Though all states had similar debates over the state recommendations, the IWY did not require these recommendations be sent

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<sup>109</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 2-3.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

to state legislatures. This made the results of the session in South Carolina even more important to IWY participants. As a result, to assure that this key business session was run effectively, it was presided over by Chair Marianna Davis and Betha Fortune, a parliamentarian chosen to advise Davis on Robert's Rules of Order procedures.<sup>111</sup>

During this final business meeting, feminist attendees along with members of the SCIWY Coordinating Committee quickly ended debate and utilized other parliamentary procedures in order to prevent social conservatives from extending debate to table IWY resolutions or pass ones proposed by social conservatives. These tactics became evident early in the meeting as discussion began over the resolution proposing Social Security for homemakers. Though JBS member David Wagner tried to initiate debate, Penny King quickly called the resolution to vote. Displeased with the resolution, Shirley Holcombe accused Davis of accepting a motion without recognizing King. In response, Davis tried to prevent trouble by clarifying that individuals could be recognized by coming to one of two microphones or making a statement along the lines of "I move," thus making King's action allowable.<sup>112</sup> This answer did not satisfy social conservatives Nancy Hawk and John Perna who accused Davis of misconduct. In response to these criticisms, Davis decided to take a vote on whether to table the motion, but the majority of attendees were in favor of voting on the resolution which then passed. As a result, conservative attempts to extend debate early on were thwarted by careful parliamentary maneuvering by SCIWY Coordinating Committee members and other feminist attendees who were in the majority and outvoted them.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 14-15.

<sup>112</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 47.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-50.

This back and forth between the two groups continued throughout this key session; even issues which did not generate much controversy in the workshops were discussed.<sup>114</sup> Dr. Davis and feminist attendees consistently tried to counteract social conservatives' questions and complaints about procedures and the recommendations. These ranged from whether an effort to find out the status of divorced women was an invasion of privacy to accusations about whether state programs solely for women were a wrongful use of taxpayer funds. The often quick call to a vote by feminists led participant Georgia Hinnant to complain that individuals were already standing in line to speak at the designated microphones before the resolution was even read."<sup>115</sup>

At that point the most controversial resolution came up. Though feminist had promised to not discuss the ERA in its own workshop, it was brought up as the final of seven resolutions stemming from the Equal Employment Opportunity Law workshop. After workshop leader Delores Johnson introduced the ERA resolution, Lucy Knowles of Columbia quickly called it to a vote. John Perna immediately objected to ending debate and accused the IWY of lobbying for the ERA. Kathy Bonk responded to this accusation by reminding fellow attendees that the IWY was cleared of all lobbying charges in *Mulqueeny v. IWY* (1977). Then Gay Sa'adah again attempted to end discussion and call a vote. Though Bob Slimp opposed this measure, the resolution was voted on and passed without any debate. Thus, South Carolina passed the ERA due to clever parliamentary maneuvering by feminists, while at other state meetings, such as in Washington state, conservative opposition prevented its passage. However the ERA's passage was still controversial as it did not allow participants to discuss it in an open forum except in the

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<sup>114</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 52.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65, 69, 74, 83, and 90.

workshop that only a portion of the 800 attendees were able to go to due to other concurrent workshops.<sup>116</sup>

This behavior by feminist, pro-ERA women appeared hypocritical to social conservatives in attendance who were unable to express their point of view. While feminists cheered the passage of the ERA, JBS men became upset to the point of shouting and swearing, leading a female participant to ask that they sit down, a request that was denied with the statement “Cram it up your ass.”<sup>117</sup> This led Elaine Lavender, a feminist and reporter, to ask Davis whether someone making vulgar and threatening comments could be removed from the meeting. After Davis answered in the affirmative, Lavender accused the man who uttered this offensive statement. Davis reprimanded this man; however, she did not remove him from the meeting.<sup>118</sup>

Debate intensified after attendees witnessed feminists’ use of parliamentary procedures to pass the ERA motion. Some participants, even feminists such as Katie Acosta, began to be upset with the quick calls to question, feeling that attendees were “missing an educational opportunity,” even if organizers avoided “sticky situations.”<sup>119</sup> Still, despite conservatives opposing most resolutions, David Wagner agreed that Title IX should be enforced and “as a former Ohio State football player that I’m kind of sorry sometimes that it didn’t come along a long time ago.”<sup>120</sup> This statement is a good reminder that despite disagreeing on many issues, social conservatives and feminists still agreed at times, indicating the complex realities of the two groups’ beliefs.

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<sup>116</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 7; Lavender, “Birchers Invade the IWY Conference: A Personal Report.”

<sup>117</sup> Lavender, “Birchers Invade the IWY Conference: A Personal Report.”

<sup>118</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 15; IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 78.

<sup>119</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 78.

<sup>120</sup> Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 82.

A resolution that caused little controversy in workshops, but significant debate in the final meeting, was one ensuring equal opportunity in education. Social conservatives were especially worried about eliminating same-sex education in the state, including at Converse College, but particularly at the all-male military college, The Citadel. Later Payne, in debating the question of equality in education, stated that “there is—some discrimination that is necessary and helpful. All discrimination is not necessarily bad.”<sup>121</sup> This statement, receiving laughter and applause, was later described in a memo from Nancy Moore to Dr. Sansbury of the University of South Carolina-Spartanburg as being one of many conservative attacks on “an audience a third black;” this suggests that rather than using words such as co-educational, the word integration was utilized to target black participants.<sup>122</sup> When discussing schools, David Wagner also wanted to assure that private institutions would not have to adhere to laws regarding equality due to not receiving federal funding. These remarks were particularly meaningful in a state where private, all-white schools were established to allow segregated education to continue after federally mandated integration in 1970. As a result, these statements indicate some of social conservatives’ fears that the IWY would further upset their preferred racial order of a segregated, white-dominated society.<sup>123</sup>

Besides using parliamentary procedures to quickly vote on resolutions, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee and feminists utilized it to avoid two already controversial issues. Because the International Interdependence workshop failed to

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<sup>121</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 97.

<sup>122</sup> Nancy Moore to Dr. Sansbury, Confidential Memo, Undated, General, Programs, ERA South Carolina, Equal Rights Amendment, League of Women Voters Columbia/ Richland County, Box 6, Folder 27, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>123</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 97, 101-102, 104.

approve any resolution, no resolutions were brought up by for discussion in the final business meeting. Social conservatives disagreed with this analysis of the workshop and instead proposed that their resolution opposing the United Nations. be discussed, a motion which was quickly dismissed by feminists and Davis. Social conservatives were able to bring up their resolution opposing government-supported childcare, which they proposed in the Child Care workshop. However, this resolution was quickly tabled in the final business meeting after Kathie Carter moved to do so “because it is not worthy of this body’s consideration.”<sup>124</sup> Though both instances circumvented difficulties posed by social conservatives, they again prevented an open forum.<sup>125</sup>

As the end of the meeting approached, time began to run out due to the number of resolutions discussed and the debate which lengthened the session beyond the scheduled time of two and a half to three hours. Despite this, and fear by some women about the availability of on-site day-care providers, social conservatives lobbied to extend the meeting by an hour to allow time for resolutions to be proposed. Norma Russell brought up this resolution on the basis that, if individuals were not given time to introduce motions, then “all people in this conference area are not being treated equally.”<sup>126</sup> When participants first voted on this motion there was a tie that Davis refused to break, thus leading to the motion’s failure according to parliamentary procedures and enabling Davis to not have to make a decision in favor of one particular side.<sup>127</sup>

Social conservatives refused to give up and instead challenged the results, leading to another vote in which the resolution clearly failed. Suspecting more challenges,

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<sup>124</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 123.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 94, 122.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 110.

attendee Emily Richmond addressed conservative women from the floor stating that “you had the chance to speak, you let several men speak for you or just voted not to cut off the debate,” but that they still “have been a participant in democracy in action.”<sup>128</sup> Russell tried to respond to these accusations by explaining that her motion “was solely to prevent the criticism that is surely going to come.”<sup>129</sup> David Wagner went one step further and accused Davis of breaking an earlier promise assuring that there would be time to bring up additional resolutions. Though Wagner admitted Davis was a “pretty fair engineer in running this railroad train, it was still a railroad train.”<sup>130</sup> In the end, social conservatives made some progress when a new motion passed to extend the session for thirty minutes to make up for time lost due to the debate over the time. Though the session’s time was extended, it was not enough to allow conservatives to propose resolutions.<sup>131</sup>

Although South Carolina passed most of the core recommendations, it was one of eleven states that failed to act on some. South Carolina did not pass resolutions or even discuss information related to sexuality or reproductive rights, particularly the issue of abortion. South Carolina also failed to act on recommendations mandating government-supported child care nor did it pass anything related to international women’s issues due to controversy in each of these topics’ respective workshops. Finally, the SCIWY did not pass recommendations to set up later IWY conferences and initiatives.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 114-115.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-116.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>132</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 11; NCOIWY, *The Spirit of Houston*, 11-13; Dr. Marianna Davis to Congressional Delegation Hearing, “A Statement on the National Women’s Conference Held in Houston, Texas.” January 23, 1978, International Women’s Year, 1975-1978, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 31, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.



However, sixty recommendations were passed to help form state policy on women. These came out of the resolutions discussed in the workshops based upon the sixteen, more general, core recommendations and specific proposals from *To Form a More Perfect Union*. Overall, these moderate recommendations were intended to help all South Carolina women, though some provided for education and other opportunities for marginalized groups. While South Carolina's meeting passed sixty recommendations, fourteen were recommended to the state legislature. These fourteen dealt with changes in tax and divorce laws, four laws to better prosecute sexual assault, three guaranteeing equal employment opportunities, consumer education initiatives, more women serving in the judiciary, the ERA's passage and legislation to prevent discrimination. In addition, it was suggested the South Carolina Commission for Women be funded to support further initiatives to improve women's lives and status in the state. Though these fourteen recommendations from the South Carolina Coordinating Committee were relatively moderate, many would not have initially been passed in the state meeting without parliamentary maneuvering due to opposition from social conservatives.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> SCIWY Coordinating Committee, "Fourteen Recommendations Adopted by the South Carolina IWY State Meeting for Action by the South Carolina Legislature," International Women's Year, 1975-1978, ERA, League of Women of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 31, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; "South Carolina IWY Delegation Prepares for Houston." November 14, 1977, Press Release, Nov. 1977-1978, International Women's Year, Box 2, Folder 12, South Carolina Coalition for the ERA, SCPC (SCPC), University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, 5.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Increasing Opposition: The Months Leading Up to Houston

South Carolina's twenty-two delegates and five alternates elected to attend the National Women's Conference were also announced in this final session after the results from the morning election were tabulated. Twenty of the twenty-two delegates and one elected alternate were on the pro-ERA group's "Women for Women" list; the only exceptions were Marianna Davis and Norma Russell. Only ten of these women elected and one alternate, Georgia Ann Pennebaker, were on the original slate created by the SCIWY Coordinating Committee. Though the individuals selected as delegates might have been elected on their own merit, this correlation suggests pro-ERA women made an impact through their "Women for Women" list. For the SCIWY Coordinating Committee, these delegates from different backgrounds indicated the fulfillment of IWY guidelines to be representative of the state's diversity. For these feminists, this election of women in favor of women's rights, particularly the ERA, must have been a victory over opponents. But for social conservatives, the state meeting was only the beginning of their efforts to oppose the IWY on both the state and national level.<sup>134</sup>

Social conservatives managed to elect one delegate, Norma Russell, along with three of the five alternates. To them, this suggested a significant number of attendees

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<sup>134</sup> Women for Women, International Women's Year; Reynolds and Jones, *South Carolina IWY Committee Final Report of the State Meeting*, iv; The Slate of the SCIWY Committee, Marion Gressette Collection, International Women's Year, 1977, Topical, Box 8, Folder 1, L. Marion Gressette Papers, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

supported their beliefs and indicated that the delegates chosen were not truly representative of the state's women. As a result, Russell and alternate delegates Oliver "Runt" Willis, George Ann Pennebaker and Shirley Holcombe drew up a minority report on the meeting. This report, *Objections and Exceptions to the Final Report of the State Meeting of the South Carolina International Women's Year Committee*, contained their complaints about the SCIWY Coordinating Committee and the proceedings of the state meeting, from planning to the final business meeting. Possibly other conservative attendees helped write the minority report; John Perna asked whether a minority report was allowed before the meeting concluded. Once completed, this report was submitted directly to the National Commission in order to represent the views of the 130 or so conservative attendees at the state meeting.<sup>135</sup>

The report claimed the SCIWY discriminated against them in the official state report by accusing them of trying to "discredit the IWY," rather than simply being a grassroots group not agreeing with "the pre-packaged workshops, discussions, and resolutions."<sup>136</sup> As pro-ERA factions were not described this way, social conservatives believed the official report, too, was biased towards pro-ERA women and "not representative of the majority of South Carolinians."<sup>137</sup>

Authors of the minority report also accused the meeting of being "overly geared to black women, with little or no reference to other ethnic backgrounds in regards to both

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<sup>135</sup> IWY State Meeting Minutes, State Conference Records, 127; Russell, Willis, Holcombe, and Pennebaker, "Objections and Exceptions to the State Meeting of the South Carolina International Women's Year Committee," 1.

<sup>136</sup> Russell, Willis, Holcombe, and Pennebaker, "Objections and Exceptions to the State Meeting of the South Carolina International Women's Year Committee," 1.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

national and state accomplishments.”<sup>138</sup> This accusation is significant as it reveals how ongoing racial tension in South Carolina influenced conservatives’ understanding of the meeting, which, in this instance, seemed to value the past of black women more than that of white women. In the press, conservatives accused the IWY of having secret meetings for black women and also expressed fears of minority women being used as puppets to support core recommendations due to some receiving funding to attend the meeting. Thus, the guidelines requiring that all women’s pasts be celebrated and that attendees be representative of the state’s diverse population, which in South Carolina meant a large number of African-Americans women, aggravated racial tensions and action from individuals who were often as conservative on race as they were on gender.<sup>139</sup>

Some social conservatives attending the South Carolina IWY were affiliated with organizations known for their conservative views on race. George Ann Pennebaker was the national president of WCG, an organization originally founded in Mississippi after the integration of the University of Mississippi in 1962. WCG was a part of the South’s massive resistance to desegregation and civil rights. While dedicated to “racial self-respect” and states’ rights, it also opposed the United Nations and other international involvement such as foreign aid.<sup>140</sup> As a result of these arguments and the associations of white conservative attendees, the South Carolina IWY meeting was not solely a vehicle for these individuals to protest changes in women’s status that took place throughout the 1960s and 1970s, but also for the racial changes that also occurred during this time. This

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<sup>138</sup> Russell, Willis, Holcombe, and Pennebaker, “Objections and Exceptions to the State Meeting of the South Carolina International Women’s Year Committee,” 2.

<sup>139</sup> Gregory, Letter to the Editor, “Deck Stacked on IWY Meeting;” Norma Russell, Press Release, SCIWY, June 17, 1977, L. Marion Gressette, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>140</sup> McRae, “White Womanhood, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Massive Resistance,” 181, 196.

is supported by more overt racism seen in Mississippi and Alabama which led to all-white delegations from states with large African-American populations, not to mention Mississippi's delegate Dallas Higgins being the wife of George Higgins, the Grand Dragon of the United Klans of America.<sup>141</sup>

Disagreements between feminists and social conservatives continued in the press where the two sides presented conflicting reports of the state IWY meeting. In *The State* newspaper, Linda C. Owens described workshops where “the anti-ERA faction teamed up, cutting off debate and limiting discussion to successfully railroad resolutions through,” as well as other tactics used to delay debate in the final business meeting.<sup>142</sup> Owens additionally mentioned materials she viewed at the meeting that were owned by the South Carolina Citizen's Review Committee. These items included resolutions for certain workshops and instructions on how to delay action and debate which stated “if the libs' introduce a resolution opposed by the group, move to table,” as well as provided information about parliamentary procedures.<sup>143</sup> These items that Owens saw provide evidence that South Carolina social conservatives coordinated their actions to oppose the IWY at the state meeting as members of the South Carolina Citizen's Review Committee, rather than as individuals acting independently. For Owens though, this information about a coordinated opposition helps justify why South Carolina feminist attendees “returned these tactics during the afternoon business sessions.”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Spruill, “The Mississippi ‘Takeover,’” 18.

<sup>142</sup> Linda C. Owens, “Women's Year Conference Supports ERA.” *The State*, June 6, 1977, IWY, General, Programs, ERA South Carolina, Equal Rights Amendment, League of Women Voters Columbia/ Richland County, Box 6, Folder 26, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

In response to Owens, Theresa Hicks wrote a letter to the editor; in this five-page letter, Hicks attempted to correct the reporter “so uninformed that she would be critical of anti-ERA forces.”<sup>145</sup> Hicks did this by questioning Owens as an impartial journalist along with the information that she reported. Instead, Hicks claimed the tactics Owens attributed to the anti-ERA forces were really those of the pro-ERA group, with alternative resolutions being needed for these anti-ERA individuals to express their views. Hicks further questioned why Owens did not discuss how she, Hicks, was threatened with arrest by a police officer who intended to prevent her from voting in the homemakers’ workshop after speakers tried to convince her to support the displaced homemaker’s bill. To Hicks, Owens’ reporting only proved that pro-ERA women were upset that not everyone agreed with them, and that while “many pro-ERA persons lost their sense of humor long ago...some have lost their sense of truth,” alluding to Owens.<sup>146</sup>

Hicks even attacked Owens’ ethics to come “into a private meeting room and view material without permission,” materials which Hicks stated she would have been open about and which are mostly available in Phyllis Schlafly’s newsletters.<sup>147</sup> This is an interesting statement as it indicates the South Carolina Citizen’s Review Committee had a private room to organize in at the state meeting. More importantly, this reveals that the South Carolina Citizen’s Review Committee was connected to the national IWY Citizen’s Review Committee. This suggests that actions by the South Carolina Citizen’s Review Committee were coordinated by the IWY Citizen’s Review Committee who distributed instructional materials about opposing the IWY. Thus, though South Carolina

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<sup>145</sup> Hicks, Letter to the Editor, “ERA Not the Issue: Delegates A Surprise,” 1.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

social conservatives were mostly defeated, they used similar tactics as in other states where they were more successful electing delegates and opposing IWY resolutions.<sup>148</sup>

But Hicks was not easily satisfied; she targeted the entire IWY conference. In addition to information included in the minority report, Hicks accused the conference of illegal proceedings by allowing pro-ERA women to enter the room during voting, while opponents were barred. From these actions, Hicks determined the ERA was not the real issue but rather the continuation of the IWY as not all recommendations in *To Form a More Perfect Union* could be discussed in one meeting. Instead, she believed the IWY's plan was "to use the services of all existing agencies and create new ones" to support its activities through illegal government funding with the ERA merely serving as a mandate to do so.<sup>149</sup> Frustrated with the meeting, Hicks sarcastically suggested the ERA should be passed and new bureaucracies created to show the public "how much equality is going to cost."<sup>150</sup> These letters by Owens and Hicks only begin to demonstrate the increasingly polarizing debate in the months leading up to the National Women's Conference.

A similar clash between a feminist and a social conservative occurred in the *Greenville News*. George Ann Pennebaker wrote a letter to the editor about her impressions of the meeting as "wanting to hear only those radical-lib ideas contained in pre-conceived resolutions from headquarters."<sup>151</sup> Though critical of the meeting, Pennebaker praised herself and 200 other "patriots" for still attending, choosing "to be stifled in a meeting room on a beautiful weekend" at their own expense, while the

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<sup>148</sup> Hicks, Letter to the Editor, "ERA Not the Issue: Delegates A Surprise," 5.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>151</sup> Pennebaker, Letter to the Editor, "Verified Expectations."

conference supported 500 people to come, even busing in college students.<sup>152</sup> In an impassioned plea, Pennebaker concluded her letter with the hopes that the women not present, along with their husbands and fathers, “will participate in preventing what could be dire consequences for home, family, community and state as well as businesses, schools and other institutions,” due to the individual becoming a “ward of the state.”<sup>153</sup> Pennebaker’s letter aggravated Anne Davis who refuted it a letter to the editor where she praised the “fairness and the intelligence” with which the meeting was conducted.<sup>154</sup> Davis was alarmed at Pennebaker’s accusations that the organizers paid for 500 people to attend, especially as she and many attendees had paid their own registration fees. Davis clarified that funding was available to anyone in need, and people in Pennebaker’s contingent could have applied. This debate in South Carolina’s Upstate provides further proof of social conservatives’ attitudes towards the IWY and their need to work against it, along with the attempts of feminists to counteract these actions.<sup>155</sup>

Representative Norma Russell compiled accusations against the IWY committee and feminists in a formal complaint. This complaint was announced at a June 17, 1977 IWY press conference held to discuss the state meeting’s outcome. Russell’s secretary attended the meeting to read the statement but was denied permission. Instead, Davis read the complaint to the press after the IWY Coordinating Committee held their scheduled press conferences. Though Russell’s press release contained grievances already published in the press, it was especially significant as it was by the sole socially conservative

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<sup>152</sup> Pennebaker, Letter to the Editor, “Verified Expectations.”

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Anne H. Davis, Letter to the Editor, “Different Observations,” *Greenville News*, June 17, 1977, Newspaper Clippings, Box 5, Folder 21, South Carolina International Women’s Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.



delegate. Russell included the common complaints, such as Columbia Police intimidating participants.<sup>156</sup> Additionally, Russell believed conference recommendations did not represent the grass-roots groups but instead were “railroaded through” with no thought to the cost, making the government “a sugar daddy from cradle to the grave,” echoing previous complaints by other social conservatives, such as Hicks.<sup>157</sup> Russell also felt that the poor and minority women given funding to attend the conference were “exploited by the well-heeled leaders” of the meeting.<sup>158</sup> Finally, Russell announced her intent to launch a hearing in the General Assembly on the state’s IWY where she would testify and even alluded to a congressional investigation. Thus, Russell’s official statement both announced social conservatives’ complaints about the IWY as well as their plans to act on what they felt was unfair and illegal.<sup>159</sup>

For SCIWY Coordinating Committee members, these complaints seemed unreasonable. Davis spoke out against the charges of lobbying, clarifying that members of South Carolina’s General Assembly would only be sent a report with no additional action by the IWY. In response to Russell’s complaints about the resolutions, Davis went so far as to suggest that “if Mrs. Russell feels she can’t live with the resolutions...perhaps she wants to reconsider (being a delegate).”<sup>160</sup> Waites also responded to Russell’s complaints, explaining the choice to have Columbia police at the conference was “so that

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<sup>156</sup> Jan Strucker, “ERA Lobbying Charged, Denied.” *The Columbia Record*, June 17, 1977, IWY, General, Programs, ERA South Carolina, Equal Rights Amendment, League of Women Voters Columbia/ Richland County, Box 6, Folder 26, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>157</sup> Norma Russell, Press Release, SCIWY, June 17, 1977.

<sup>158</sup> Linda C. Owens, “Norma Russell Charges IWY Committee Violated Law,” *The State*, June 18, 1977, International Women’s Year, Clippings, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 33, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Russell, Press Release, SCIWY, June 17, 1977.

<sup>159</sup> Owens, “Norma Russell Charges IWY Committee Violated Law; Strucker, “ERA Lobbying Charged, Denied.”

<sup>160</sup> Owens, “Norma Russell Charges IWY Committee Violated Law.”

everyone could be heard” and after the National Commission told them to anticipate disruptions, especially after Georgia’s conference on May 6<sup>th</sup> where there was evidence of a coordinated effort by conservatives.<sup>161</sup> Russell’s complaints and the committee’s response were especially significant as each served the state in an official capacity.

While conflict between social conservatives and feminists continued in South Carolina, opposition to the IWY became stronger and more influential nationwide. A week before South Carolina’s meeting, social conservatives at Missouri’s meeting elected socially conservative delegates and threw out some IWY core recommendations.<sup>162</sup> Similar actions happened in other states where conservative opponents gained enough power to vote against IWY core recommendations or elected conservative delegates; in some states they did both. States which defeated all resolutions were Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, Oklahoma and Utah; in Washington there was mostly no action.<sup>163</sup> South Carolina, along with Texas, Virginia, Connecticut, Illinois, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada and New Jersey passed most, but not all, resolutions, and for some of these states, such as Missouri and Illinois, a mostly socially conservative anti-ERA slate of delegates was chosen.<sup>164</sup> Though a significant number of states adopted all recommendations, some of these, such as Minnesota and North Carolina, still had displays of opposition from social conservatives. Together, this indicates that opposition to the IWY was not in one geographic region, though they were generally clustered in the South, Midwest and West more so than the traditionally liberal

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<sup>161</sup> Morris, “Kathryn Dunaway’s ERA Battle,” 173-176.

<sup>162</sup> Spruill, *Gender and America’s Right Turn*, 81.

<sup>163</sup> NCOIWY, *The Spirit of Houston*, 114-115.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

Northeast. An overview of the outcome of the state meetings' votes on core IWY recommendations can be viewed in the chart below (Figure 1.1).

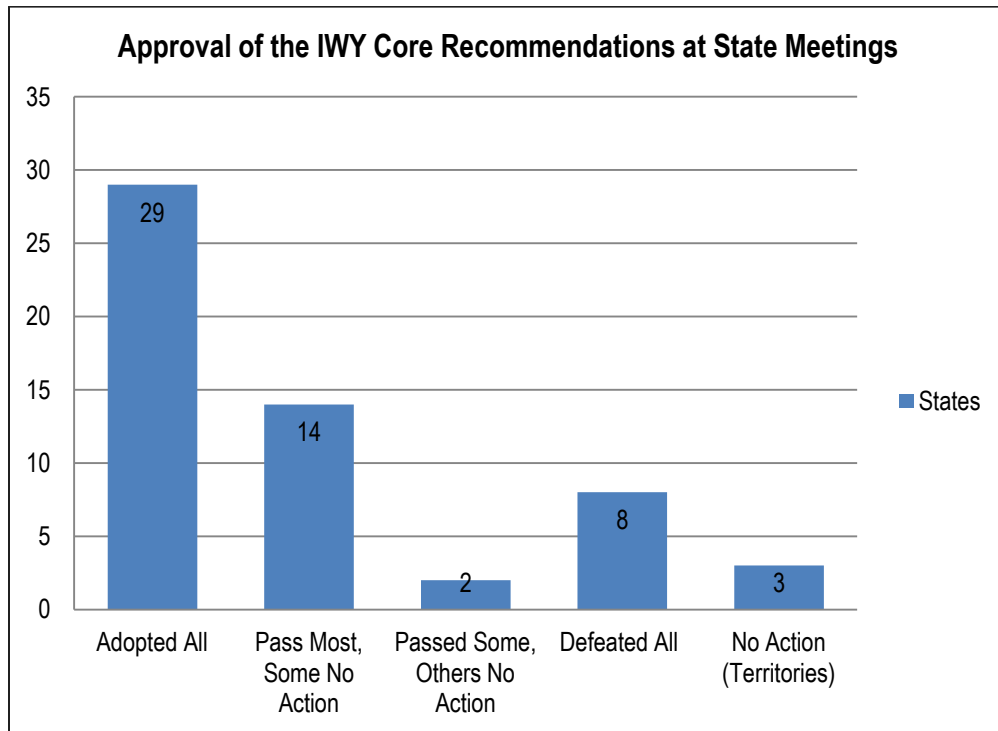


Figure 6.1 A graph depicting the passage of the core recommendations.

Similar to social conservatives nationwide, those in South Carolina employed tactics such as extending debate, introducing resolutions and speaking out in the press to voice their opposition to the IWY. This well-coordinated effort was due in part to information distributed nationwide by Phyllis Schlafly and the IWY Citizen's Review Committee that provided instructions about parliamentary procedures and encouraged attendance at IWY meetings. Though South Carolina social conservatives used these

materials and employ these tactics, South Carolina's state meeting managed to pass most core recommendations and elect delegates mostly favorable to women's rights.<sup>165</sup>

As indicated by social conservatives' actions in South Carolina, this certainly was not from lack of trying but perhaps may have something to do with the early June date of the state meeting. States selecting the largest numbers of conservative delegates had meetings mostly in late June and especially in July. This is because social conservatives grew in strength throughout the summer as they became better organized. Social conservatives in these later states were able to witness earlier actions by feminists and social conservatives at IWY meetings, and thus were able to better plan their own efforts by seeing others' successes and failures. These earlier state meetings allowed conservatives attending later ones see what tactics would allow them to successfully takeover the meeting. This would have included the way social conservatives often surprised and overwhelmed unprepared feminist organizers by having a large number of individuals attend the state meeting, often without pre-registering. Later dates also indicate that more time enabled better coordinated efforts to encourage the attendance of social conservatives at state meetings with such actions as busing in large groups of church women. Though conservatives coordinated attendance at these earlier meetings, they were not fully organized, nor did they know what actions were most effective.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Theresa Hicks, Letter to the Editor, "ERA Not the Issue: Delegates A Surprise;" Eagle Forum, May 1977, Nancy Moore, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, South Carolina Special Collections, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC. Morris, "Kathryn Dunaway's ERA Battle," 173-174.

<sup>166</sup> National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, Update 6, "A Capsulized Look at the State Meetings, February 26-July 10, 1977," Press Release, Publicity Releases, Box 2, Folder 9, South Carolina International Women's Year Conference, 1976-2003, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC; Interview with Kathleen Flanagan by Amelia Fry, November 1977, 4.

In South Carolina, an estimated 130 social conservatives attended of the 800 individuals at the state meeting. Though this was around one-sixth of attendees, it was far lower than states where social conservatives had more success opposing core recommendations and electing delegates. For example, at Utah's July meeting, 12,000 conservative Mormon women made up the majority of the 14,000 in attendance. In other states with July meetings, including Indiana, Mississippi and Oklahoma, social conservatives did not pre-register and only attended one day of the meeting. Thus states where social conservative opposition was most successful was not necessarily due to location or political leaning, but the timing of the meeting which allowed better coordinated action and attendance at state meetings. As a result, IWY opponents in South Carolina were unable to have much of an impact due to its early June date and resulting low number of attendees who mostly pre-registered.<sup>167</sup>

The congressional investigation alluded to by Russell also came to fruition during the summer of 1977. Talk of this hearing began early, indicated by a message that Annette Pagels of the Bob Jones University-affiliated radio station WMUU in Greenville sent to Runt Willis on June 22<sup>nd</sup> before it was passed on to L. Marion Gressette. This message reported that U.S. House representatives, Minority Whip Robert Michel of Illinois and George Mahon of Texas, proposed investigation of the IWY. Then, on July 1, 1977, Senator Jesse Helms publicly condemned the IWY as an inappropriate use of public funds after contact with socially conservative IWY opponents, including the IWY

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<sup>167</sup> Mary Berkery, 2013, "*We are a Multitude*," 8, 195; Marjorie Spruill, "The Mississippi 'Takeover,'" 14; Interview with Kathleen Flanagan by Amelia Fry, November 1977, IWY, Constance Ashton Myers IWY Oral Histories, Unprocessed Collection, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Columbia, SC, 3-5; Kempker, "Battling Big Sister Government: Hoosier Women and the Politics of International Women's Year," 150-151.

Citizens Review Committee, and initial opposition to IWY legislation. To Helms, feminist action at state meetings, federal government resolutions and a lack of representation suppressed social conservatives' participation, which necessitated an official investigation. Later that month, Helms released a statement alleging irregularities in the state IWY reports and suggested an audit of the National Commission.<sup>168</sup>

Though Helms tried to conduct a congressional investigation, he was unable to as he lacked support from Democrats. Instead Helms worked with the IWY Citizens Review Committee to hold ad hoc IWY hearings on September 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. At these hearings in the Senate Office Building's caucus room, Helms and other members of Congress would listen to testimony about the state IWY meetings. Individuals involved in conservative groups nationwide were encouraged by their respective organizations and the IWY Citizens Review Committee, to participate. It was hoped that at least one representative from each of the state and U.S. territorial meetings would attend. Testimony from each witness consisted of a five-minute presentation, a written statement and supplemental documents, such as materials from the meeting, to illustrate their points. Helms hoped this testimony would provide evidence to justify official congressional hearings on the IWY and prove the IWY violated the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972. As this was a citizens' hearing, public funds were not available to support witnesses' travel.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Interview with Kathleen Flanagan by Amelia Fry, November 1977, 4; Annette Pagels to Runt Willis, June 22, 1977, L. Marion Gressette, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Nellie Gray Action Memo to ProLife, ProFamily, STOP-ERA and Allied Participants at State IWY Meetings, William Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 182; March For Life, August 10, 1977, Delores Melfi to Jesse Helms, August 15, 1977, Marion Gressette Collection, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 4-5; Spruill, "The Mississippi 'Takeover'," 21.

<sup>169</sup> March For Life, August 10, 1977, Delores Melfi to Jesse Helms 4; Nellie Gray Action Memo to ProLife, ProFamily, STOP-ERA and Allied Participants at State IWY Meetings, 5; Shirley Huneycutt, "Resident

In South Carolina, several social conservatives submitted letters to Helms about the perceived wrongful actions at the state IWY meeting to continue their opposition to the meeting and feminists' actions by being considered as possible witnesses. One of these individuals was Dolores Melfi of Summerville who indicated she was prepared to speak about many issues: limited participation, irregular voting procedures and attitudes of sarcasm and rudeness, to name a few. As a member of South Carolina Citizens for Life, Melfi targeted the IWY's pro-choice resolution which she felt was wrong to promote with federal funding, even likening it to genocide. Correspondence between Melfi and Hinton revealed as members of South Carolina Citizen's Review Committee, Hinton helped Melfi by looking over her statement, while Willis explained the hearings to Melfi. Aided by these other social conservatives, Melfi was willing to speak on behalf of any group who wished to be represented in Washington D.C., though she specifically spoke for South Carolina Citizens for Life.<sup>170</sup>

Other social conservatives, Theresa Hicks, John Perna, Karen Peterson and Cora Rupper, also submitted materials to Helms for consideration. These critiques of the SCIWY Coordinating Committee and the state meeting became increasingly severe when prepared for national politicians. Hicks submitted a letter detailing the laws violated by the committee, from the meeting's secretive planning to the funding of all delegates' travel cost to the national conference, rather than basing it on need. Perna focused on his experience in the International Interdependence and Child Care workshops, especially the

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Testifies In Washington: Appears Before Senate Panel," *Summerville Journal-Scene*, September 28, 1977, International Women's Year, 1977, Topical, Box 8, Folder 1, L. Marion Gressette Papers, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>170</sup> Dolores Melfi to Jesse Helms, re SCIWY, 15 August 1977, Theresa Hicks Papers, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 1-2.

tabling of his resolution. The most critical was Rupper who accused the SCIWY Coordinating Committee of wrongfully blaming anti-ERA women for stealing from the IWY office. Rupper instead explained they were just trying to get invitations after the committee “tried to limit us to a very small amount, 25 to be exact, saying that was all we could have until we saw that they had boxes of them.”<sup>171</sup> Besides claiming a lack of information, Rupper’s letter, written in all capitals, alleged further misconduct: nontransferable voter badges used by multiple people and Waites bringing an out-of-state resident in to vote. Rupper even denounced the committee for putting a bar at a voting premise, an illegal action, though the bar was in a hotel hours after the election concluded. This did not stop Rupper from being offended that these individuals who felt they needed federal funding “could well afford these drinks at \$2.”<sup>172</sup> Though these social conservatives provided detailed complaints, only Melfi testified, possibly due to the lack of time available for them to speak or inadequate funding for travel.

In September, Melfi traveled to Washington D.C. to testify at the ad hoc IWY hearings. Helms opened the meeting by discussing the letters he received from women nationwide complaining of “rigged sessions, hand-picked committees, stacked registration and little or no publicity to women at large” which led him to initiate the hearings.<sup>173</sup> Sixty-one individuals testified at the proceedings, representing forty-one states, a number lower than the desired fifty-six representatives. National Commission members were invited to attend, but those who did chose not to participate. They later told the press that they were invited the last minute and given too little time to speak, plus

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<sup>171</sup> Cora S. Ruppert, Delores Melfi to Jesse Helms, August 15, 1977, Marion Gressette Collection, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 7.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Huneycutt, “Resident Testifies In Washington: Appears Before Senate Panel.”



they considered the hearing illegitimate. The hearings lasted most of the two scheduled days, and for Melfi, “very definitely proved that women were discriminating against women.”<sup>174</sup> As planned, Melfi’s testimony focused on how the IWY’s stance on abortion did not represent the view of most American women, an interesting comment given the decision by the SCIWY Coordinating Committee to not discuss abortion. Though the issue of reproductive freedom was never brought up at the South Carolina state meeting, as a member of South Carolina Citizens for Life, Melfi focused on the national recommendations she found most offensive, and failed mention how South Carolina’s Coordinating Committee avoided reproductive issues to create a more moderate platform.

Like Melfi, women from other states condemned the IWY and its perceived bias at state meetings. A Helen Triester of Hawaii, a state delegate and committee member, accused the Hawaii IWY of lewd dance performances, featuring “sex acts of lesbians” used to shock church people into leaving as well as more general complaints related to procedure and lack of representation.<sup>175</sup> Other witnesses provided similar comments but also made issue or state-specific claims about participants’ actions and extreme views, such as witches heading a “Women and Spirituality” meeting in Virginia and most delegates being lesbians. In the end, while testimony at Helms’ meetings produced harmful media coverage for the IWY, it did not lead to an official congressional hearing and the IWY conference in Houston was unimpeded.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Huneycutt, “Resident Testifies In Washington: Appears Before Senate Panel.”

<sup>175</sup> Helen Triester Testimony to Senator Jesse Helms, 24 September, Marion Gressette Collection, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 11.

<sup>176</sup> Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism*, 184

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Houston: Crafting a National Plan For American Women

After a summer of debate at the state and national level, tensions were high as South Carolina's delegates arrived for the National Women's Conference, scheduled for November 18-21 in Houston's Albert Thomas Convention Center. In total, there were 2,005 delegates at the conference: 1,400 elected at state and territorial meetings, 186 alternates, 47 IWY commissioners and 370 delegates-at-large appointed by the national commission. These delegates-at-large represented certain women's organizations and population groups to balance the demographics of elected state delegates in order to be reflective of women in the United States. In addition to participants, more than 2,000 people came as official observers, invited guests and resource people who conducted workshops, gave lectures, ran exhibit booths and provided entertainment. There were also 3,000 volunteers. An additional 10,000 or so people came from around the country as observers, curious to witness the proceedings by obtaining non-delegate tickets.<sup>177</sup>

Included in these 2,005 delegates were South Carolina's twenty-two delegates and five alternates, all of whom received funding to provide for their travel expenses, despite it not being required for alternate delegates. In addition to elected delegates, the following delegates-at-large were chosen from the state based on Davis' suggestions: Neelima Jain, Almeta Delaine, Evelyn Disher, Josephine Isom, Maryneal Jones, Gladys

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<sup>177</sup> Bird, *What Women Want*, 59, 120.

Heath and Pontheolla Williams. With the exception of Disher and Heath, these individuals were a part of the slate created by the SCIWY Coordinating Committee to reflect state diversity, thus were already identified by Davis prior to the state meeting. These women and one man, with different backgrounds, not to mention political beliefs, represented South Carolina at the first federal conference on women.<sup>178</sup>

The first day brought press conferences and coalition meetings as delegates arrived at the conference hotel. Proceedings later began with remarks from National Commission members along with speeches from such women as Coretta Scott King and then-current first lady Rosalynn Carter. Delegates wore pins, held signs and sat according to state, with each representative often wearing some type of state identification, such as certain hats or handkerchiefs. Much of the conference focused on the creation of the National Plan of Action, but women were also able to attend meetings, lectures, entertainments and exhibits.

Voting on the National Plan of Action's twenty-six planks was riddled with conflict, with only one issue, equal credit, being passed unanimously by all delegates in attendance. Particularly divisive were the issues of abortion, the ERA and a resolution guaranteeing rights for lesbians, all of which generated significant debate and opposition. Though not a part of the South Carolina IWY's meeting, this sexual preference resolution was not a core recommendation but was discussed at the national conference only after being brought up in state meetings. These issues and others created controversy not only among conservatives and feminists, but also within the feminist movement which was

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<sup>178</sup> Marianna Davis to IWY State Delegates, September 8, 1977, International Women's Year, Clippings, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 31, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC. The Slate of the SC IWY Committee, Marion Gressette Collection, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

comprised of individuals from different backgrounds who did not always entirely agree on all issues related to women's rights.<sup>179</sup>

The National Plan of Action that was passed supported lesbian rights, reproductive freedom and the ERA, along with twenty-three other recommendations. With the exception of Norma Russell, South Carolina delegates voted in favor of the twenty-six recommendations. As delegates, these women voted not as individuals but to represent those who elected them. For Modjeska Simkins, this meant to be a "people's advocate, not a black advocate and not a woman's advocate."<sup>180</sup> Thus, while South Carolina women did not take action on child abuse, insurance issues, reproductive freedom, sexual preference, and additional IWY conferences, they took action on these issues in Houston.<sup>181</sup>

During the days South Carolina's delegates attended the National Women's Conference they developed what Keller Bumgardner Barron called "a sense of camaraderie and a sense of purpose."<sup>182</sup> For most South Carolina delegates and others attending, the vote for the ERA was a high point of the conference. When the ERA proposition passed, Elaine Reed of Darlington was so excited she jumped up and down, waving her "ERA Yes" poster to get it up higher than the Utah delegation's anti-ERA signs, the socially conservative delegation they were seated next to with whom they had a

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<sup>179</sup> Bird, *What Women Want*, 68, 78-79, 80.

<sup>180</sup> Modjeska Monteith Simkins, Interview by Constance Ashton Myers, 14.

<sup>181</sup> Minutes of S.C. IWY Delegation Meeting, October 16, 1977, International Women's Year, Clippings, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 31, SCPC, University of South Carolina, 2-3. Merry Bateman, "Women's Conference Action Keeping Delegation Busy," November 21, 1977, IWY, General, Programs, ERA South Carolina, Equal Rights Amendment, League of Women Voters Columbia/ Richland County, Box 6, Folder 26, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Dr. Marianna Davis to Congressional Delegation Hearing, "A Statement on the National Women's Conference Held in Houston, Texas," 1-2.

<sup>182</sup> Bateman, "Women's Conference Action Keeping Delegation Busy."

“friendly rivalry.”<sup>183</sup> To Barron, this interaction with Utah’s delegation during the conference inspired hope after seeing women come to an “understanding for those believing in something totally different.”<sup>184</sup> Barron was heartened that Utah delegates voted for the minority plank, and some even voted in favor of the ERA.<sup>185</sup>

South Carolina delegates also witnessed conflict as social conservatives protested the ERA, lesbian rights and other issues. For instance, during the debate on abortion, Keller Bumgardner Barron recalled “there were people up there with huge signs - 6x8, huge signs of fetuses in various stages of development,” which she felt was cruel to other women who may have had an abortion or experienced still births.<sup>186</sup> This indicates how the National Women’s Conference both brought together women, but also divided them.

The conference was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for South Carolina’s delegates and built on their different life experiences. One of the youngest attendees was seventeen-year-old Kathy Duffy, then a senior and student council member at A.C. Flora High School in Columbia. Though coming from a socially conscious family, Duffy felt the conference was “sort of an awakening, you know, a point to push from.”<sup>187</sup> For Marianna Davis, being a part of the conference was especially meaningful as a southern black woman selected to chair her state’s delegation.<sup>188</sup> Yet, to Davis, the connections she made and women she met were also significant, particularly the SCIWY Coordinating

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<sup>183</sup> Bateman, “Women’s Conference Action Keeping Delegation Busy.”

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Bateman, “Women’s Conference Action Keeping Delegation Busy;” NCOIWY, *The Spirit of Houston*, 148 and 151.

<sup>186</sup> Keller Bumgardner Barron, Interview by Micki Blakeley, 2006-2007, transcription by Sheila M. Haney, Interviews by Others, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 11.

<sup>187</sup> Interview with Kathy Duffy by Constance Ashton Myers, November 1977, SCIWY, Constance Ashton Myers IWY Oral Histories, Unprocessed Collection, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Columbia, SC, 10.

<sup>188</sup> Bateman, “Women’s Conference Action Keeping Delegation Busy.”

Committee with whom she formed a “sisterhood.”<sup>189</sup> Though some of these women, like Davis and Duffy, were involved in organizations, for some this was the first and only gathering of this size they would attend. One of these women, Velma Garrett of Saluda, was grateful the IWY offered funding after she initially “wanted to come, but I gaved [sic] up the idea because I realized I couldn’t afford it.”<sup>190</sup> An unemployed millworker, Garrett was blackballed after organizing for labor and unable to receive welfare benefits, making attending the IWY an opportunity otherwise unattainable. Though these women came from different backgrounds, most were proud of their attendance at the conference and their work to improve women’s lives.<sup>191</sup>

While most South Carolina women traveled to Houston to attend the National Women’s Conference, some possibly joined the women and men gathered for the Pro-Family Coalition’s conference on November 20th across town at the Astro Arena. An estimated 15,000 to 20,000 women and men attended this conference. Some had come as delegates and alternate delegates to the National Women’s Conference. But some, such as the fifty busloads of women from Tennessee, drove to Texas just for the event.

The morning of the meeting, Schlafly held a press conference where she spoke out against the National Women’s Conference proceedings that, she said, made her ‘truly afraid for the future of democracy and freedom in this country.’<sup>192</sup> Representative Bob

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<sup>189</sup> Interview with Marianna Davis by Constance Ashton Myers, November 1977, IWY, Constance Ashton Myers IWY Oral Histories, Unprocessed Collection, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 18.

<sup>190</sup> Interview with Velma Garrett by Kathleen Hanna, November 1977, IWY, Constance Ashton Myers IWY Oral Histories, Unprocessed Collection, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 3.

<sup>191</sup> Bateman, “Women’s Conference Action Keeping Delegation Busy.”

<sup>192</sup> Morton Blackwell, “Abzug Activists Stalemated in Houston,” *Conservative Digest*, January 1978, Marion Gressette Collection, From Other Collections, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

Dornan of California condemned the IWY, saying that “we’ll tell the President his wife went to the wrong rally.”<sup>193</sup> For attendees at this conference, this was the opportunity to unite groups of women and men to work towards common goals, such as opposing abortion, protecting traditional marriage and protesting the ERA. As a result, it featured pro-family petitions to send to Congress and speakers such as Nellie Gray, the president of March for Life, and Elisabeth Elliot, a Christian author.<sup>194</sup>

It is unknown if any individuals from South Carolina went to Texas just to attend the Pro-Family conference, though it is possible given the coordinated activism by social conservatives at the state level. It is likely that the state’s alternate delegates, all social conservatives, attended as they were not present at most IWY sessions. Candy Waites reported that Shirley Holcombe, George Ann Pennebaker and Oliver “Runt” Willis were not seen by the other delegates during much of the conference. Willis later claimed he attended the conference Friday and most of Saturday but left for Columbia at four o’clock Saturday because he felt “I should not be subjected to people that I felt uncomfortable with.”<sup>195</sup> As for Pennebaker and Holcombe, it is unknown if they ever attended the National Women’s Conference as no evidence existed of them registering, although they had plane tickets and hotel room reservations.<sup>196</sup> For South Carolina delegates, this absence was an issue as an alternate was to vote in place of a delegate unable to attend a

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<sup>193</sup> Morton Blackwell, “Abzug Activists Stalemated in Houston.”

<sup>194</sup> Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade*, 247.

<sup>195</sup> Dottie Ashley, “Willis Planning Action Over Accusations,” *The Columbia Record*, November 23, 1977, International Women’s Year, Clippings, ERA, League of Women Voters of South Carolina, Box 25, Folder 33, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>196</sup> Marianna Davis to George A. Pennebaker, January 23, 1978, Nov. 1977-1978, International Women’s Year, Box 2, Folder 12, South Carolina Coalition for the ERA, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

session. This situation arose when Irene Rudnick had to miss a Monday vote and only one alternate, Dorothy Franklin, could be located to take her place.<sup>197</sup>

After the conference, Davis sent a letter to Pennebaker and Holcombe requesting they return the money they were given by the state IWY for plane tickets. Willis received a similar letter, though his was not worded as strongly due to his attendance at some of the conference. Though South Carolina's alternate delegates' activities while in Houston are unknown, it is possible that, like other social conservatives, they went to the Pro-Family conference.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Marianna Davis to George A. Pennebaker, January 23, 1978, Nov. 1977-1978, International Women's Year, Box 2, Folder 12, South Carolina Coalition for the ERA, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>198</sup> Marianna Davis to Oliver "Runt" Willis, January 23, 1978, Nov. 1977-1978, International Women's Year, Box 2, Folder 12, South Carolina Coalition for the ERA, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Marianna Davis to George A. Pennebaker, January 23, 1978.



## CONCLUSION

### 1977 to 2007: The IWY's Legacy in South Carolina

After the conference, delegates returned to South Carolina to report on the meeting. South Carolina feminist attendees summarized the National Plan of Action in the press and expressed the hope that President Carter would implement them. In the local press, feminists expressed hope that national and state legislators would follow these recommendations to improve women's lives and ratify the ERA. Besides focusing on the results of the conference, women spoke of their positive experiences and pride of being part of such a history-making event.<sup>199</sup>

The ratification of the ERA came to a vote in South Carolina's General Assembly in early 1978, again highlighting the divisions between feminists and social conservatives in the state. However, tensions were perhaps heightened by the state and national IWY recommending its ratification and the increasingly aggressive tactics used by pro-ERA women. As hearings on the ERA commenced in early February, both sides packed the statehouse to voice their opinions to almost evenly split State Senate. Despite efforts by pro-ERA forces, the ERA was again tabled in the Senate with a vote of 23 to 18. Pro-ERA women were disappointed as three senators they thought would vote to recall the bill from committee instead tabled the bill and another did not vote. STOP-ERA women

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<sup>199</sup> Marianna Davis to Members of the IWY State Coordinating Committee and Elected Delegates to the National Women's Conference, Memo: Update on IWY Activities, January 20, 1977, Nov. 1977-1978, International Women's Year, Box 2, Folder 12, South Carolina Coalition for the ERA, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

were jubilant over this outcome and held a celebratory rally on Valentine's Day with Phyllis Schlafly as a speaker.<sup>200</sup>

Though the ERA and rest of the IWY's state and national promises were not all achieved in South Carolina or nationwide, the IWY has been considered a watershed event. This is because the IWY not only dealt with issues of gender, but also with race, class and even, at the national level, sexuality, all of which were undergoing change as a result of social movements in the 1960s and 1970s. During these decades, women's lives in South Carolina improved immensely, and minority women gained new opportunities as racial barriers began to disintegrate. These transformations invigorated conservatives in South Carolina and nationwide who were fearful of them.

The IWY created an environment for feminists and social conservatives to discuss issues they disagreed on. As a result, the IWY allowed feminists to involve more individuals in support of equal rights but also provided social conservatives an opportunity to become better organized to oppose changes of the 1960s and 1970s, contributing to an increase in the strength of the New Right nationwide.

Unlike states where social conservatives took over the state meeting, in South Carolina social conservatives made their views about changes in race and gender apparent at the state IWY meeting but did not successfully elect a majority of delegates or prevent approval of most core recommendations. However, the threat from social

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<sup>200</sup> Bateman, "Women's Conference Action Keeping Delegation Busy;" Fred McNeese, "Senate Debates ERA Today," *The State*, February 7, 1978, ERA, Primary Source Documents, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; "NAACP In SC Plans ERA Support Efforts," *The State*, January 24, 1978, ERA, Primary Source Documents, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Mary Whittle, "We're Disappointed, But We'll Be Back," *The State*, February 8, 1978, ERA, Primary Source Documents, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; "Stop-ERA Forces Celebrate," *The State*, February 15, 1978, ERA, Primary Source Documents, SCWRC, SCPC, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

conservatives was significant enough that members of the SCIWY Coordinating Committee and other feminists felt the need to prevent their opposition throughout IWY. By doing so, these South Carolina feminists ensured the endorsement of feminist goals that IWY leaders had hoped to achieve in order to improve women's lives both in the state and nation. The SCIWY Coordinating Committee was able to do so by following national IWY guidelines to ensure the meeting would be a gathering of diverse individuals united to celebrate women's past and discuss their future. During the conference, the SCIWY Coordinating Committee and other feminists together utilized parliamentary procedures to prevent conservatives from opposing core recommendations or passing their own proposals, while some pro-ERA women ensured mostly feminist delegates were elected by creating the "Women for Women" slate. Though social conservatives also voiced their opinions against the IWY in the press and in other activities, South Carolina feminist women were able to respond to these actions and prevent them from disrupting the meeting.

In November 2007, for the thirtieth anniversary of the state IWY meetings and of the National Women's Conference, a history class at University of South Carolina organized a symposium and celebration to commemorate IWY and to honor, as well as learn from, the participants. South Carolina veterans of the IWY met to share their stories with each other, with scholars and with the future generation of university students. Besides allowing women to tell their stories, this gathering helped launch a multi-year effort to document the women's rights movement and the debates it inspired through interviews and the documents from which this paper directly benefits. This effort will help future generations to understand the work these women did to advance women's

rights. Though the impact of the women's movement is evident in South Carolina, the failure of certain goals of endorsed during the IWY, like those of equal pay and government-sponsored childcare, continue to hinder women's progression to equality.

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