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"Not Tea and Crumpets": The 1976 Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women and the Formation of a New Women's Platform, 1972-1982

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“Not Tea and Crumpets”: The 1976 Louisiana Governor’s Conference on Women and the
Formation of a New Women’s Platform, 1972-1982

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History
Public History

by

Vickie LaCoste

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Dedication

For my husband, whose love, encouragement, and enduring sacrifice is a gift I wish to emulate.

And for my mother, whose path in life was extremely limited by inequality but she raised daughters who believed the future would give them much more, and it did.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my family, friends, and professors who encouraged me in the completion of this work. To begin, I want to thank my committee chair, Dr. Mary Niall Mitchell whose ongoing assistance gave me the initiative to continue to “dig deep” and advance the historical significance of my topic. I would also like to thank Dr. Janet Allured of McNeese State University for generously meeting with me to discuss my topic and for writing the remarkable history of the Louisiana women’s movement. In addition, I want to thank Dr. James Mokhiber and Dr. Charles Chamberlain for serving on my committee and providing important guidance in the completion of this work.

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Abstract

The success of three Louisiana feminists in the 1970s, Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, and Pat Evans stemmed from their professional expertise in labor rights, education, and politics, respectively. By joining and maintaining memberships in a variety of social, civic, and activists groups, these feminist leaders via the 1976 Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women created a unique network that allowed for the formation of a new women's platform. This conference advanced women's rights, established a working platform for reform, and helped usher in second-wave feminism in Louisiana. Using conference booklets, archived video and audio interviews, and newspaper articles, this thesis argues that when women came together in their professional positions to advocate for women's rights, the results were clearly positive.

Key Words: second-wave feminism, women's platform, Louisiana feminism, Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, Pat Evans, 1976 Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women, women's rights.

Introduction: The Best is Yet to Come

June 5th was a busy day at the Old State Capital building in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Feminists from around the state came together to evaluate the major issues facing women in the Deep South. Some primary topics include political representation, rehabilitation efforts inside the criminal justice system, support for women and infant health care, elimination of gender pay gaps, increased quality day care facilities for working women, safe housing for single income mothers, and an increase in the number of women appointed to corporate foundations and educational bodies. Most readers acknowledge that the above list includes important community issues that need to be addressed today. But the date of this meeting might surprise some readers: June 5, 1976.

To tackle these issues, women from across Louisiana came together to attend the 1976 Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women (LGCW).¹ Conference goals included development of a relevant women's agenda in Louisiana. While this women's conference crafted a practical outline for change, the state of Louisiana saw both successes and failures concerning women's rights in subsequent decades. Some of the successes of the 1970s and 80s include licensed day care centers, the creation of battered women's shelters, the removal of discriminatory credit practices against women, and a state office for women's services. Before the 1976 conference, Louisiana women were already working to change outdated laws, notably, the 1974 addition of the "Equal Rights Clause" into Louisiana's State Constitution.

¹ The 1976 Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women will be further referred to as the LGCW within this document.

Legislators formulated this clause to specifically reduce state-level discrimination against women.² In 1980, women successfully lobbied for the removal of the “Head and Master” Clause in Louisiana’s State Law, a law that had granted all rights of possessions and children to the man during both marriage and divorce.³

Unfortunately, many shortcomings persist, evident in the fact that our state has some of the same gender inequality in 2019 as it did during the 1970s. For example, even though women’s population in the state of Louisiana stands at 51.1%⁴ they comprise only 14.6% of state legislators.⁵ At the recent NOLA 4 Women Summit held on December 1, 2018, one of the main concerns was the lack of support offered to women upon exiting Louisiana’s criminal justice system. In addition, we find significant housing shortages exist for citizens of New Orleans. A 2017 article in the *New Orleans Tribune* reports, “New Orleans’ has 47 affordable rental units for every 100 low income residents.”⁶ The affect of this deficit on women is extraordinarily clear when examining the current research on U.S. housing. A 2016 study by the National Council for

²Janet Allured, “Women’s Rights Movement,” 64 Parishes, <https://64parishes.org/entry/womens-rights-movement> (accessed January 2, 2019).

³ Nina Nichols Pugh, “The Evolving Role of Women in the Louisiana Law: Recent Legislative and Judicial Changes”, 42 La. L. Rev. (1982), <https://digitalcommons.law.lsu.edu/lalrev/vol42/iss5/8> (accessed January 5, 2019).

⁴ World Population Review, Louisiana Population, 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/states/louisiana-population/> (accessed February 3, 2019).

⁵ National Conference of State Legislatures, “Women in State Legislatures for 2018,” <http://www.ncsl.org/legislators-staff/legislators/womens-legislative-network/women-in-state-legislatures-for-2018.aspx> (accessed February 11, 2019).

⁶ Anitra D. Brown, “New Orleans Affordable Housing Crisis: How Did we get Here?,” *The New Orleans Tribune*, 2017, <http://www.theneworleanstribune.com/main/new-orleans-affordable-housing-crisis/> (accessed February 11, 2019).

Research on Women indicates that it is females who head 83% of households that participate in low-income housing programs within the United States.⁷ It is obvious that there are many issues that still need to be addressed today. Studying the past accomplishments of the women's movement in Louisiana allows us the ability to assess the roadblocks faced by these women and underscore the successful methods used to legislate and lobby for change.

The success of three Louisiana feminists in the 1970s, Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, and Pat Evans stemmed from their professional expertise in labor rights, education, and politics, respectively. By joining and maintaining memberships in a variety of social, civic, and activists groups, these feminist leaders via the 1976 Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women created a unique network that allowed for the formation of a new women's platform. This conference advanced women's rights, established a working platform for reform, and helped usher in second-wave feminism in Louisiana. The 1976 LGCW was organized to help increase women's rights in Louisiana and subsequently underpinned future conferences such as the International Women's Year Conference held the following year in 1977.

⁷ Gail Quets, "A Gender Lens on Affordable Housing," National Council for Research on Women, 2016, (https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/gender_lens_on_affordable_housing_by_regender_final-1.pdf (accessed April 23, 2019)).

The 1970s are considered critical years for the furtherance of women's rights. Professional women from various fields stepped up to fight for changes regarding how women were treated within Louisiana. Across the country in the 1970s a surge in women's activism began and included groups such as, the National Organization for Women (NOW), The National Women's Political Caucus, ERA United, the National Committee on Household Employment, The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the National Welfare Rights Organization, and The Urban League. Through these local bodies, these various activist groups discussed some of the major issues of inequality that Louisiana women faced during this period.

The innovative feminist platform of the 1970s was further advanced when influential women within the state worked in newly available positions such as organized labor, educational administration, and government. Women then used these new professional positions, along with their memberships in civic organizations to aid in promoting the feminist agenda. Memberships often overlapped with women joining and representing many different activists groups. This overlap promoted networking and the sharing of ideas and strategies among numerous diverse groups and organizations. Hence they attacked inequality at various professional and civic levels. When women came together in their professional positions to advocate for women's rights, the results were clearly positive.

Exploring the goals, tactics, and strategies of some of the leading Louisiana women activists who participated in the 1976 LGCW reveals the positive changes they affected. The new women's platform created in the 1970s achieved success because they understood the need for true and enduring equality to permeate society at every level.

Many women who were involved in the fight for gender equality were also at the forefront of the fight for African American civil rights that took place throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Having successfully fought to change laws that gave freedom to citizens of all colors, women utilized this momentum to maximize their fight for gender equality. According to historian Shannon Frystak, "Louisiana women challenged traditional notions of women's work as they sought to improve conditions for blacks in their communities. Indeed, in Louisiana, women's participation was vital to the success of the civil rights movement not only in the state, but also in the movement writ large."⁸ As women in the 1970s began to achieve improved professional opportunities they used their previous experience fighting for civil rights as an advantage in the struggle for women's equality.

When new job opportunities began to open in the 1970s these professional women used their careers to further the rights of marginalized females. Fran Bussie, for instance, a longtime activist in both her church and Louisiana's Mental Health Agency, took the job of Community Service Officer in the AFL-CIO. Bussie used this position as a lobbyist for Louisiana's labor unions and advocated for women's rights. Clarence Marie Collier, who worked her way up as an educational administrator and System Vice-President at Southern University, used her career and affiliation with the NAACP to push federal courts to retain African American teacher positions. (Of which 80% were comprised of women.⁹)

⁸ Shannon Frystak, "Louisiana Women in the Civil Rights Movement." In <https://64parishes.org> *Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, edited by David Johnson. Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 2010-. Article published January 27, 2014. <https://64parishes.org/entry/louisiana-women-in-the-civil-rights-movement>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, January, 1993, 29, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf>, (accessed February 8, 2019).

And then in 1972, in her capacity as the director of the newly established Bureau on the Status of Women, Pat Evans worked for almost two decades to increase opportunities and protection for women in Louisiana. Using this manifold approach, these women began their fight for equality from multiple professional and civic angles. A powerful and efficacious effect occurred when these approaches merged. When women effectively fought on multiple fronts, their combined efforts produced success. The effective scaffolding built through professional and social constructs in the 1970s furthered the cause of women's rights. This paper will examine how the careers of the above-mentioned three women successfully fought for women's rights and helped bring increased equality to the state of Louisiana. Evaluating the strategies and processes used by these women activists can provide a road map for activism in both the present and the future.

While equal rights made gains in Louisiana during the 1970s, today it is clear in the wake of events such as the "Me Too" Movement that the fight for women's equality is still a major issue that deserves to be at the forefront of efforts at reform. The following pages will explore how Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, and Pat Evans used their professional working positions to both challenge and dismantle common inequities effecting Louisiana women. Through their professional platforms, coalition building, and advanced activism, these three women brought tangible changes to the state of Louisiana. All three came together to play significant roles in the 1976 LGCW.

By exploring the historical accomplishments of these three women and the newly-created women's platform of the 1970s, we can chart a course for today's successful female activists and look ahead to how society can become more involved in achieving the goal of women's equality. According to a recent study by the United Nations, the more women gain equality, the more society as a whole, is successful and productive.¹⁰

¹⁰ The United Nations, "Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls," <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>, (accessed February 11, 2019).

Historical Scholarship On Second-Wave Feminism in the South

Contrary to numerous scholarly books and research completed on the origins of second-wave feminism, the movement did not exist in an East Coast/West Coast bubble. Southern feminists waged their own war for equality, just without the fanfare that circulated near major U.S. news outlets. According to historian Janet Allured:

Southern feminists disseminated their ideas primarily through mimeographed memos and manifestos that they distributed among themselves and elsewhere in the country. Yet the earliest feminist publications, produced in the North and the West, contained almost nothing from the South, even though southern women generated influential critiques of racial and gender hierarchies.¹¹

It is clear that the advent of second-wave feminism in the United States took on differing regional approaches. In this section I will chronologically review some of the major works on the history of second-wave feminism and include overlooked writings on the Southern feminist view.

In 1979, Sara Evans became one of the first historians to give southern women a voice in the feminist movement. In her book, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left* she shifts the historical discussion from primarily Northern feminism to white Southern religious women and Southern black women activists who were members of various civil rights groups, such as the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Evans argues that these women came together to take up the cause of civil rights and in turn became leaders in the second-wave feminist movement. The women involved in these various Southern activist movements in the 1960s saw the need for women to stand up and advocate for feminist causes. Feminist involvement began when women in these activist groups played subservient

¹¹ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism: The Long Women's Rights Movement in Louisiana, 1950-1997* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2016), 13.

roles as compared with men, who led the fight and dominated the discourse. Evans describes a meeting of Southern women on the need for female activism writing: “In New Orleans women who had been active primarily in SNCC and SSOC were more reluctant at first. They wondered aloud whether they were really oppressed when compared to black oppression, ‘which we know all to well and vividly.’ ”¹² It did not take long for these women to realize the on-going struggle for women’s equality and the need to address this issue within the South. While in her book Evans moves the discussion away from the Southern woman’s fight for equality, her discussion and acknowledgment of Southern women entering the fight for women’s liberation is considered a critical step in acknowledging the participation of Southern women in national feminist activism.

The role of Louisiana women in the early fight for equality is the subject of historian Carmen Lindig’s work. In 1986, Lindig wrote the groundbreaking book, *The Path from the Parlor: Louisiana Women 1879-1920*. Lindig fills a historical void by writing the narratives of early Louisiana women and how they worked to lay the foundation for second-wave feminism. Using their positions in both civic and social organizations, women in Louisiana shined the spotlight on the need for women’s rights while standing up for the poor and desolate that did not have a voice in society.

¹² Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 204.

Discussing this pioneering era in Louisiana, Lindig states: “Louisiana women, following the lead of their Northern sisters, had dared to speak out in public, and the reception by the constitutional group and the favorable response of the leading newspapers was a prophetic gauge of the future acceptance of a more public role for women.”¹³ Through the determination of early Louisiana women such as Caroline Merrick, Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, Elizabeth Bisland, and many others, Louisiana proved to be an influential area for women’s reform efforts during the first-wave of feminism.

In the same year that Carmen Lindig wrote her book on Louisiana women, Historian Jane J. Mansbridge chronicled the struggle for the Equal Rights Amendment in her book titled: *Why We Lost the ERA*. Mansbridge argues that one of the main concerns of opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment was the fear that gender roles could profoundly change. Proponents of the amendment believed this change to be positive and those that opposed the ERA thought that it would erode their existing status already achieved within their historic roles. According to Mansbridge:

The groups that fought for the ERA and the groups that fought against it, however, had a stake in believing that the ERA *would* produce these kinds of changes. With both the proponents and the opponents exaggerating the likely effects of the ERA, legislators in wavering states became convinced that the ERA might, in fact, produce important substantive changes—and necessary votes were lost.¹⁴

Mansbridge does not address the specific role of southern women in the struggle for the ERA but instead focuses on class divergence, religion, rural versus urban populations, and regional support for and against the amendment. Ultimately the fight for the ERA was lost, but the

¹³ Carmen Lindig, *The Path from the Parlor: Louisiana Women 1879-1920* (Lafayette, LA: The Center for Louisiana Studies University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1986), 45.

¹⁴ Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1-2.

author recognized that the ERA debate helped to promote continued discussions of women's issues and made many people see the important need for states to mandate changes for greater gender equality (with the author noting that this seemed to be even more prominent in the states that did not ratify the amendment—one example being Louisiana.¹⁵) Indeed, when we examine the activism by women in Louisiana, we see how the 1976 LGCW endorsed the passage of the ERA and demonstrated the overall need for gender equality within the state.

Second-wave feminism of the 1980s and 90s sparked many scholars to evaluate first-wave feminism in order to understand the accomplishments of early women reformers. In 1987 historian Nancy F. Cott evaluated the Feminist Movement of the early 1900s and assessed how first-wave feminism laid the groundwork for second-wave feminism. In her chapter titled: “The Birth of Feminism” Cott declares, “What distinguished the Feminism of the 1910s was its very multifaceted constitution, the fact that its several strands were all loudly voiced and mutually recognized as part of the same phenomenon of female avant-garde self-assertion.”¹⁶ Cott argues that none of the women's issues brought out during the early 1900s—full citizenship, equal work, equal pay, sexual independence—were brand new, but the loud proclamations and crossing of boundaries a small number of educated feminists asserted during this period set the stage for the enormous women's movement that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁷ Cott reasoned that the, “unfulfilled agenda” of the 1910s-1930s is what made the second-wave

¹⁵ Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA*, 88.

¹⁶ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 49.

¹⁷ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 49.

feminist movement possible.¹⁸ This is confirmed when one examines the need for the Women's Conference that occurred in Louisiana in 1976. Activist women from Louisiana such as Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, and Pat Evans were still addressing many of the same issues raised in the early 1900s. This includes the fundamental issues of equal pay, equal employment, and basic human freedoms under the law. Cott's historical research demonstrates that feminists of the early twentieth-century addressed the problems of gender equality with no significant results, thus setting the stage for the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. But unlike with first-wave feminism, the success of second-wave feminism in Louisiana was grounded in the multi-pronged approach of women who used their professional careers, along with their civic memberships to successfully accelerate the level of equality for women in Louisiana in the 1970s and 80s.

Other authors have argued that second-wave feminism is forever entwined was the struggle to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. In 1990, Professors Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart co-authored the book, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation*. This book highlights the state fight in North Carolina as a case study into the politics of the ERA. Recognizing the intricacies of the reasons behind the failure of the ERA, the authors argue the most critical issue in the campaign was gender. " 'Gender' is the way in which humans have fabricated the social meaning of sex in spinning their culture into webs of meaning. Although the ERA could not have effected a cultural revolution, it nonetheless came to represent widespread subversion of gender roles."¹⁹ Mathews and De Hart make the notable

¹⁸ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 282.

¹⁹ Donald G Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 222.

comparison that, “The politics of gender was stained with racism.” A power struggle took place in this period for the basic civil rights of African Americans and the dominant “white male” political players did not want to relinquish control. According to Matthews and De Hart, these same political figures saw the Equal Rights Amendment as yet another avenue for their influence to be diminished and that is one of the many reasons the amendment did not pass, though the decade long fight for the ERA became a rallying cry for women and encouraged many to enter into the political arena in order for their female voice to make a real difference.²⁰ In addition, the fight for the ERA acted as a spotlight revealing the true inequality of women and permitted successful discourse concerning these inequalities to be debated in state legislatures across the nation.

In 1993, historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall wrote the historical biography of southern feminist Jessie Daniel Ames. Ames began her activism as a suffragist in 1916. After seeing the rampant inequities faced by members of the black community, Ames founded the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching in 1929. Hall argues that, “the racism that caused white men to lynch black men cannot be understood apart from the sexism that informed their policing of white women and exploitation of black women.”²¹ The sexist idea that white women had to be protected from the inevitable sexual attack of black men is what fueled the white rationalization of lynching. Exposing this toxic narrative is what Ames and the Antilynching Association set out to accomplish. “The ‘false chivalry’ of lynching cast women as Christ-like symbols of racial purity and regional identity and translated every sign of black

²⁰ Donald G Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA*, 224.

²¹ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign Against Lynching* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1993), xx.

self-assertion into a metaphor for rape—black over white, a world turned upside down.”²² From 1929 until 1942, Ames led one of the leading Southern campaigns against lynching and helped to bring the issue into the forefront of American politics. She sought to expose how white racial fears were grounded in baseless rhetoric that cast white women as helpless pawns and black women as wanton sexual beings. By exposing and fighting against these attitudes and behaviors, Ames rallied to stop this injustice and reveal both the depth and strength that females possess. From a woman’s right to vote, to African American civil rights, Ames helped to lay the foundation for future Southern feminists to take the lead, expose injustice, and bring about real world change.

As one of the South’s major cities, New Orleans was central to core feminist activism. Historian Pamela Tyler’s, *Silk Stockings & Ballot Boxes: Women & Politics in New Orleans, 1920-1963*, declares that white upper and middle class women in New Orleans unconsciously used their influence to affect both politics and feminism in the South. Discussing the topic Tyler states:

Given the upper-class status of many female activists and their reluctance to repudiate the external forms of a deeply ingrained patriarchal ethos, it was perhaps all but inevitable that their activities would be ignored or misread by posterity. [New Orleans women] while never rhetorically questioning male dominance in public life, by their very actions they eroded it. Without particularly supportive fathers or husbands, these women created larger roles for themselves and other women, independent roles, permanent public roles.²³

Tyler believes that upper-class white women in New Orleans, active in political and social reform clubs made a significant difference in bettering the lives of women in the city, but at the

²² Jacquelyn Down Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry*, xxi.

²³ Pamela Tyler, *Silk Stockings & Ballot Boxes: Women & Politics in New Orleans, 1920-1963* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 4.

same time these women did not make feminism their priority. The history of New Orleans' women from 1930-1960 displays what Tyler calls a "bridge" to the period of second-wave feminism that soon appeared in the 1960s and 70s. Many of the women involved in these political and social clubs in New Orleans and Baton Rouge attended and became leaders of the LGCW in 1976.

The dawn of the 21st century opened the door for further examination of the long fought revolution for women's rights and the dawn of second-wave feminism. In the year 2000, historian Ruth Rosen chronicled this extensive journey in her book, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*. This book became her passion after realizing how little her college students knew about the origins and accomplishments of the modern day Women's Movement. Beginning her study with the 1950s, she discusses the major dissatisfaction among women during this period and their longing to be a part of the working world.²⁴ In the chapter titled, "The Proliferation of Feminism," Rosen describes the controversy at the Houston International Women's Conference, "Sensing an early battle in what would later be called the culture wars, the media had predicted that a 'cat fight' would break out between the representatives to the National Women's Conference and the fifteen thousand right-wing women who had announced a rival gathering across town."²⁵ Thankfully, actual fighting between these groups never materialized. Rosen describes the overall conference as a, "historic moment for American women."

²⁴ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking Press, 2000), 7.

²⁵ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 293.

Mobilizing women at the state level is what made the success of the national conference possible. The 1976 LGCW and the professional women who planned and implemented it were fundamental catalysts for the new women's platform and advanced the success of both the Louisiana International Women's Year Conference in Baton Rouge and the nationwide International Women's Year Conference that took place in Houston, Texas in 1977.

Moving further into the new millennium we find the Mississippi Women's History Project came together with the history department of the University of Mississippi and edited a compilation of individual biographies from both black and white women of the South titled, *Mississippi Women: Their Histories, Their Lives*. This collection of essays includes southern women who are both known and unknown by mainstream historical literature. Each essay shares remarkable stories of leadership and change. One important story discusses civil rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer. Speaking about Hamer and other African American women activists, the author, Linda Reed states, "In her own way, each of these women tells us that the goal of attaining freedom and equality for African American women and the quest for democracy for all citizens are entwined."²⁶ Expanding our knowledge of the important women involved in Southern reform helps us to see the larger picture of the fight for equality for all citizens, no matter their race or gender and reveals how Southern women fit into the larger fight for civil rights that occurred nationally throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.

The success of the women's platform in the 1970s was partially due to the network of social and civic groups to which many activists were members. These ties allowed women to meet fellow activists and advocate for change on various social and professional levels.

²⁶ Martha H. Swain, Elizabeth Ann Payne, and Marjorie Julian Spruill. *Mississippi Women: Their Histories, Their Lives* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 249.

Historian Katrina Keane discusses these networks in her 2009 dissertation, *Second-Wave Feminism in the American South, 1965-1980*. Keane outlines the major influences of Southern women in regard to the fight for equal rights. Her main topics include economic equality and justice, women's health and rape crisis centers, reproductive rights, and prominent lesbian organizations that were all established within the South. The author contends that women in the South made great contributions to second-wave feminism but through unconventional methods.

Keane states:

The origins of second-wave feminism in the South were similarly diverse. Building on long standing networks and organizations such as the YWCA, the League of Women Voters, and their churches, Southern women found both the organizational structures and the language they needed to contest discrimination in their own lives.²⁷

Keane argues that many Southern women did not want to take on the traditional definition of a “feminist” but in many unrecognized avenues such as their churches and local social organizations they were fighting for increased equality within the South. The research in this paper takes a deeper look into this topic and argues that professional women of the 1970s who were prominent members within these social and civic activist groups effectively used their professional careers to expand these networks and successfully advocate for progressive change in Louisiana.

²⁷ Katrina Keane, “Second-Wave Feminism in the American South, 1965-1980.”(PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2009), 8.

When we understand these differences and broaden the definition of “feminism” we see more clearly the influence of the Southern region on second-wave feminism. The concern for the rights of Louisiana women is obvious when we contemplate the large number of women who registered for the LGCW (held in 1976 with over 1,500 attendees.)²⁸ Professional women, including Clarence Marie Collier, Pat Evans, and Fran Bussie were the primary representatives at this women’s conference.

The fight for African American civil rights influenced feminist leaders of 1970s. The successful advances for racial equality that were achieved in the 1960s became the catalyst for Southern black and white feminist activists to organize for change. Historian Stephanie Gilmore adds to the diversified women’s movement in her book titled, *Groundswell: Grassroots Feminist Activism in Postwar America*. In her book she highlights what the feminist movement looked like from the ground up. Evaluating the local and regional chapters of the National Organization of Women, (NOW) Gilmore delves into the modes by which women came together to fight inequalities. Explaining her perspective on Southern regional feminism, Gilmore states:

In the 1960s and 1970s feminists of all racial backgrounds confronted a host of stereotypes about racialized Southern womanhoods and about feminism. Rather than choose between “womanhood” and “feminism,” Southern feminist blended the concepts, talking and marching publicly about issues that “ladies” should not discuss such as rape, domestic violence, and pornography. They also continued to fight racism, even in organizations often separated in terms of race, making the cause of feminism and anti-racism inextricably linked.²⁹

²⁸ “Governor’s Conference Tops 1,200 Pre-Registrations Quota.” *State-Times Advocate*, May 25, 1976.

²⁹ Stephanie Gilmore, *Groundswell: Grassroots Feminist Activism in Postwar America*, (New York: Rutledge, 2013), 16.

By evaluating the NOW organizations on a regional and community level, Gilmore is able to compare and contrast the various threads that each group has in common. While geographical regions and areas have varying interests, NOW organizations across the country fought to solve issues such as rape, equal employment, domestic violence, childcare, sex-segregated want-ads, and on the job sexual harassment. The way they fought may have been different, but every group came together in order to better the lives of women in their particular area. In conclusion Gilmore states, “Exploring their divergent strategies and goals—the dynamics of feminism in action—reveals the importance of understanding how local context shapes and is shaped by feminist activism.”³⁰ The research in this paper builds on the approaches of Keane and Gilmore by evaluating some of Louisiana’s professional women who strategically used their prominent career positions to develop a successful Louisiana women’s platform that combined with their civic memberships brought unprecedented improvements for women throughout the state of Louisiana.

As scholars evaluate the overall historical significance of the women’s movement, recent academics have expanded on Louisiana’s efforts and accomplishments regarding women’s equality. A 2014 dissertation by Louisiana State University’s Yvonne Brown concentrates on Louisiana women against the ERA in the 1970s. In this dissertation, Brown examines the reasons behind the female anti-ERA movement. Why did a group of women in Louisiana feel so strongly against the ERA that they mobilized a force that indeed defeated it? Brown’s research concludes that anti-ERA women held their own religious and social beliefs concerning gender and many felt that the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment would somehow belittle their current standing within the family, forcing them to ultimately compete for men’s employment

³⁰ Stephanie Gilmore, *Groundswell*, 131.

positions.³¹ A vast majority of the women who formed the anti-ERA movement did not work outside the home, remaining financially dependent on their husbands. Additional reasons that these women opposed the ERA included the belief that their present role and protection under the law would change if the ERA did pass. According to Brown, “The battle over the ERA left a lasting legacy in Louisiana...The 1970s were filled with social, political, and cultural change. Although Louisiana did not ratify the amendment, the fight for the ERA indirectly led to changes in legal and social status for Louisiana women.”³² This change included the controversial 150 years old “Head and Master Clause” which gave men all rights over property and children. As previously discussed at the beginning of this paper the 1976 LGCW highlighted this unfair practice. Women at this conference demanded this law be changed and people within the state (both male and female and for and against the ERA) rallied together for its’ demise.³³ While ultimately Louisiana state legislators did not pass the Equal Rights Amendment, the women who attended the important LGCW did shine a light on many of the unequal practices within the state.

The most recent scholarship written on Louisiana women and second-wave feminism is by historian Janet Allured. In 2016 Allured set out to describe the evolution of a movement that helped redefine women’s roles in the South in her book titled, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism: The Long Women’s Rights Movement in Louisiana, 1950-1997*.

³¹ Yvonne Brown, “*Kill That Snake*”: *Anti-ERA Women and the Battle Over the Equal Rights Amendment in Louisiana, 1972-1982*, (PhD diss., 636. Louisiana State University, 2014), https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/636.

³² Yvonne Brown, “*Kill That Snake*”: *Anti-ERA Women and the Battle Over the Equal Rights Amendment in Louisiana, 1972-1982*, (PhD diss., 636. Louisiana State University, 2014), https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/636.

³³ Nina Nichols Pugh, “The Evolving Role of Women in the Louisiana Law: Recent Legislative and Judicial Changes”, 42 La. L. Rev. (1982), <https://digitalcommons.law.lsu.edu/lalrev/vol42/iss5/8>.

The introduction explains the reason Louisiana and the Southern region are often overlooked with regard to second-wave feminism:

One reason that Louisiana had not received the credit it deserves for nurturing modern feminism is that the grassroots women's liberation movement spread outside the region, its origins often became unrecognizable. This transformation of the movement created misconceptions about Louisiana (and the South more generally) as homogenously conservative and staunchly antifeminist. Yet many nonsouthern activists derived their feminist consciousness from southern women.³⁴

Allured explores the many facets that make the women's movement in Louisiana unique and clearly indicates that the South helped to bring second-wave feminism to the forefront. Specific feminist distinctions that affected the Southern region include: religion, Southern "decorum," union organizations, civil and social justice reform groups, and direct activism by both white and African American women's groups. Allured is clear that feminists in the South did not act like their Northern counterparts. The strong male-dominated political arena of the South forced women to "glove their defiance in respectability."³⁵ Despite these obvious restraints, women in the South worked tenaciously to achieve equal rights under the law. Feminists in Louisiana fought to change the narrative that women and minorities were not equal to the white patriarchy that existed in both society and government. Forward-thinking women achieved these goals through their personal political activism and the establishment of counter-institutions that continued the long fight for equality that occurred in the South.

³⁴ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 5.

³⁵ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 6.

This section reviewed some of the important historical monographs on second-wave feminism with an emphasis on the South. The analysis reveals not a single block of time changed the cultural perceptions of females in the workplace or society, but the ongoing incremental efforts of women activists who worked to ensure that future women experienced the changes brought about by their involvement.

Clarence Marie Collier, Fran Bussie, and Pat Evans, did not suddenly change the existing protocol for Louisiana women, but they helped lay the needed groundwork for real social and governmental change. The research in this paper indicates that the newly developed professional career roles for women in the 1970s made a significant impact on the continuance of equality for women. Professional women of this era saw the important opportunities that their new careers offered and used them to open doors for increased freedoms for women. When these professional women came together and meshed their already existing civic influences, the impact was both obvious and significant. These women used their professional careers in organized labor, education, and state government along side their vast array of coalitions and organizations to come together and provide the needed outline for change. The 1976 LGCW helped to spell out the goals and reform efforts needed in Louisiana, and gave activists groups the necessary information to continue in their fight for equality. Women like Pat Evans, Fran Bussie, and Clarence M. Collier revealed the path forward for future women's activism and set the stage for the continued fight for equal rights in Louisiana.

Louisiana Women Fight For Change

In 1983, the executive director of the Baton Rouge Chapter of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Roberta Madden, led a project to document and produce a pamphlet on the memories of twenty-six Louisiana women. These women stood at the forefront of the struggle for human rights, not just for women, but all citizens of the state. The document is titled, "Remembering the Struggle: Oral Histories and Photographs of Baton Rouge Women who Worked for Human Rights." The pamphlet was funded by a grant from the Louisiana Committee for Humanities, a state branch of the National Endowment of the Humanities. Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, and Pat Evans are all featured in this booklet and their engaging stories display their significant roles in advocating for human rights in Louisiana. One member of the 1983 booklet project team, Anne C. Loveland, a Louisiana State University professor of history, asks in the booklet's introduction:

Why did these women engage in the struggle for Human Rights? The interviews are especially helpful in answering this question because they reveal the personal, individual dimension of the collective struggle...In these women we see the sort of conversion experience so common among reformers---the sudden awakening to a problem or abuse and the need to remedy it.³⁶

Thanks, in part, to the global "Me Too" Movement, today's society is awake to the revelation that massive sexual harassment and abuse is still being propagated against women and girls in 2019. Just like the enormous response to the unfair treatment of women today, the women of the 1970s saw the huge need for tremendous reform and determined to step up and challenge the way Louisiana politics and society restricted even the most basic rights of women. The new women's platform embraced many new goals. Some included: school sports programs for girls,

³⁶ *Remembering the Struggle: Oral Histories and Photographs of Baton Rouge Women Who worked for Human Rights*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Baton Rouge Area YWCA, 1983).

women's access to health and education, educating society regarding sexual assault and battery against women, access to equal financial assistance and loans for women, equal protection regarding community property laws, and the guarantee of equal job opportunities without arcane gender restrictions. State and federal laws remedied some of these problems, but many of these issues persist. Issues to be addressed include sexual assault against women and girls, equal job opportunities, and gender pay gaps. A close look at the women of the 1970s reveals the strategies of professional and group activists. Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, and Pat Evans each aided in changing both Louisiana laws and society's views on women's equality.

Legislators and citizens alike considered the AFL-CIO a powerful union force in Louisiana and Fran Bussie (as the Community Service Officer) was a major player within this organization.³⁷ As the Community Service Officer it was Bussie's job to lobby the state legislature on behalf of the labor unions within Louisiana. Political groups and state candidates understood that the support of the AFL-CIO would bring considerable votes their way.³⁸ Helping to improve women's equality, Bussie used her union connections to forge important coalitions with state legislators, African American community and political organizations, and many pro-feminists activists groups.

³⁷ Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequences Since 1945* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), 182-183.

³⁸ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism: The Long Women's Rights Movement in Louisiana, 1950-1997* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2016), 226.

Frances Martinez Bussie was born in 1935 in the city of New Orleans. A self-described “activist” from an early age, she remembered her formative years as a fourth grade student, helping her school distribute “favors” to World War II veterans who were injured and convalescing in the local Army Hospital.³⁹ Bussie’s father was Mexican-American and she recalls seeing racial discrimination and bigotry early in her life. These experiences fueled her desire to affect change at the state and national level. At twenty-one Fran moved to Baton Rouge to attend Louisiana State University. She found a well-paying job and began working as a volunteer at her local church (First United Methodist Church of Baton Rouge).

By joining and participating in numerous civic and social groups Bussie began her long history of coalition building that would aid her in accomplishing significant goals for both women and labor unions in Louisiana. Bussie ran the homeless clothes closet, food pantry, and also joined the Board of the Baton Rouge Mental Health Association where she would eventually serve as director. Bussie’s volunteerism turned into a paid position, when she became the Community Service Officer for Louisiana’s organized labor group known as the AFL-CIO.⁴⁰ Fran Bussie’s position in the AFL-CIO was a tremendous asset to the women’s rights movement, beginning in the early 1970s.

³⁹ “Fran Bussie Oral Interview,” interview by Bob Courtney, Louisiana Digital Media Archives, January 18, 1994, http://ladigitalmedia.org/video_v2/asset-detail/OH-0009, (accessed January 5, 2019).

⁴⁰ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism: The Long Women’s Rights Movement in Louisiana, 1950-1997* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2016), 233.

Unlike many other Southern states, the labor movement held great power in Louisiana. A 1973 interview with then-Governor Edwin Edwards confirmed that the extremely active labor group in the state of Louisiana was a voting bloc that held great legislative influence.⁴¹

Fran Bussie used her position in the AFL-CIO to sway both legislators and union members to vote in favor of women's rights. She pressed for passage of the ERA, the revisions of matrimonial rights for women in Louisiana's Civil Code, bestowal of more civil rights to mental health patients, and aid for displaced homemakers.⁴² Bussie met her husband Victor Bussie (the leader of the AFL-CIO), while working as the Director of the Mental Health Agency in Baton Rouge. During her time as the Mental Health Director, the AFL-CIO offered to help restore an old house that the Mental Health Association bought to aid patients in need.⁴³ Fran and Victor both became active in the fight for the rights of the mentally ill and eventually married in 1972. After their marriage Victor Bussie appointed Fran Bussie to the position of AFL-CIO Community Service Officer, where she visited the Louisiana legislature and successfully lobbied for the needs of the labor industry. The following picture displays Fran Bussie dressed for her professional role as a labor lobbyist, kneeling in front of the AFL-CIO headquarters' sign.

⁴¹ Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequences Since 1945* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), 182-183.

⁴² "Fran Bussie Profile (1977)," interview by Beth George, *Louisiana The State We're In*, April 29, 1977, Louisiana Digital Media Archives, http://ladigitalmedia.org/video_v2/asset-detail/LSWI-0106-04_Profile.

⁴³ "Fran Bussie Oral Interview," interview by Bob Courtney, Louisiana Digital Media Archives, January 18, 1994, http://ladigitalmedia.org/video_v2/asset-detail/OH-0009, (accessed January 5, 2019).



Figure 1. Frances “Fran” Martinez Bussie, Community Service Officer and legislative lobbyist for the AFL-CIO poses in front of the Union Organization’s sign in 1983. Photographed by A. J. Meeks for the pamphlet titled: “Remembering the Struggle: Oral Histories and Photographs of Baton Rouge Women Who Worked for Human Rights,” page 10. Printed by the Baton Rouge Area YWCA.

During the early 1970s, the legislative fight for the Equal Rights Amendment began in full force. In 1973, Fran Bussie became a founding board member of ERA United. ERA United was a female lobbying group that worked with the Louisiana State Legislature to aid in the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Testifying in front of the Louisiana state legislature in 1974, Bussie expounded on the ERA and described its mission to: “ensure that under the law work done by women (would) be valued on the same basis as the same work done by men; and therefore, employers could not use women as a cheap source of labor.”⁴⁴ Bussie continued to

⁴⁴ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 233.

expand her coalition building for women's equality when she served on the Board of the Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women. She also chaired the 1976 LGCW and received an appointment by the International Women's Year Commission to be part of the Coordinate Committee for the IWY Conference held in Baton Rouge in 1977. In addition, Bussie held an elected position as a Louisiana delegate for the International Woman's Year National Convention held in Houston, Texas in 1977.

Fran Bussie had the exceptional ability to bring various organizations together to fight for social reform. She used her connections with each activist group to bring unity to the struggle for women's equality. Historian Janet Allured says of Fran Bussie's influence in the fight for women's rights, "As a member of many different organizations with commitments to social services, Fran Bussie was in a unique position to link the independent women's movement with other important constituencies."⁴⁵ Bussie's memberships included the National Labor for ERA, the Women's Equality Action League, the Louisiana Conference of Social Welfare, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), the Democratic Women's Organization of Baton Rouge, the YWCA, ERA United, and the Women's Political Caucus. Bussie's membership in each of these groups gave her a network of both social and political constituents that were working toward improving the lives of Louisiana women. Fran Bussie used her role as the AFL-CIO Community Service Officer to speak to legislators and members of Louisiana's unions regarding women's rights and the important need to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. Six conventions of the AFL-CIO voted unanimously to support the Equal Rights Amendment.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 235.

⁴⁶ "Equal Rights Amendment Debate (1979)," *Louisiana: The State We're In*, Louisiana Digital Media Archives, http://ladigitalmedia.org/video_v2/asset-detail/LSWI-0291-02_InDepth (accessed February 5, 2019).

Members of the various women's groups that surrounded Bussie knew that when the AFL-CIO endorsed a political candidate they could trust the candidate to be a proponent for equal rights. Because of the strength of organized labor within Louisiana, Bussie held great influence in each of the social and civic organizations in which she was a member.

When discussion in Louisiana first began concerning the ERA, Bussie did not necessarily feel that her professional role in advocating for Louisiana labor rights was connected to the ERA, but it soon became apparent that it was imperative for her to speak out. Bussie recorded her thoughts on her personal and professional fight for the ERA in the following oral interview:

I remember sitting in the back of the chambers and hearing the debate on the Equal Rights Amendment, And I said, 'Well, who could be against the Equal Rights Amendment? Who can be against this? This is the very same thing that we're trying to do for the mentally ill—protect their legal rights.' And I remember someone saying, 'Well aren't you going to get active in the battle for the Equal Rights Amendment?' and I said, 'They don't need me! No one is going to vote against this!' and I sat there, and I saw a woman get up and defeat the Equal Rights Amendment in the House after the ERA had passed the Senate. And I vowed at that time that I would never sit still again.⁴⁷

Yvonne Brown explains the reason for the 1972 Louisiana defeat of the ERA in her 2014 dissertation: "The Louisiana legislature was a male domain in 1972. Out of 105 legislators, only two were women. It is notable, therefore, that a large part of the credit for the ERA defeat in 1972 went to one of only two female legislators, Louise Johnson. With no legislative experience, newcomer Johnson allegedly persuaded dozens of male representatives to vote against the

⁴⁷ *Remembering the Struggle: Oral Histories and Photographs of Baton Rouge Women Who worked for Human Rights*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Baton Rouge Area YWCA, 1983), 11.

ERA.”⁴⁸ From that moment on, Fran Bussie worked to influence the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in Louisiana. When the group ERA United was formed in 1973 Bussie not only sat on the board, but she would eventually serve as its president.

While able to successfully persuade the many members of her civic and labor groups, Bussie also used her influence as the Community Service Officer for Louisiana’s AFL-CIO to put pressure on lawmakers to pass legislation that subsequently benefited women in Louisiana.

During a debate on the ERA in 1979, Bussie addressed the Louisiana State Legislature:

I would like to present this committee with a number of petitions that have been passed throughout the state...the people who will follow me and who will identify the organization to which they belong, these are the people of the state, these people represent organizations which are not just statewide but nationwide.⁴⁹

In a 1977 interview Bussie, she discussed the legislation for which she lobbied on behalf of both the labor industry and Louisiana citizens in general:

There will be some revisions in the mental health laws in Louisiana and hopefully they will be for the betterment and to extend even more civil rights to mental patients, and there will be a number of bills concerning reorganization of the Health and Resources Department and Special Education, there will be a complete new Special Education Act. ...And they’ll be matrimonial rights revisions in the Civil Code and hopefully there will be some legislation to enable illegitimate children to have inheritance rights from their mothers.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Yvonne Brown, *“Kill That Snake”: Anti-ERA Women and the Battle Over the Equal Rights Amendment in Louisiana, 1972-1982*, (PhD diss., 636. Louisiana State University, 2014), https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/636.

⁴⁹ “Equal Rights Amendment Debate (1979),” *Louisiana: The State We’re In*, Louisiana Digital Media Archives, http://ladigitalmedia.org/video_v2/asset-detail/LSWI-0291-02_InDepth (accessed February 5, 2019).

⁵⁰ “Fran Bussie Profile (1977),” interview by Beth George, *Louisiana The State We’re In*, April 29, 1977, Louisiana Digital Media Archives, http://ladigitalmedia.org/video_v2/asset-detail/LSWI-0106-04_Profile.

As Chairperson for the LGCW, Bussie highlighted the need for the state to pass the ERA. At the conference, the attendees met to organize an action agenda for needed reforms in Louisiana. During the formation of this agenda every section of the “Women’s Action Priorities and Agenda List” began with the statement, “Ratify the ERA.” Concerning the Governor’s Conference on Women, Bussie addressed her “Louisiana Sisters” with the following remarks:

The Conference was a ‘joyous’ yet sad occasion. ‘Joyous’ in the sense that we had come together not in spite of our diversity, but because of it—and this made us strong. ‘Sad’ because of the many women who could not be with us and feel this spirit of strength and dedication. Sad also because we had such a short time together and there is so much to be done.⁵¹

Fran Bussie is considered an exceptional leader in Louisiana’s fight for women’s equality. Her support and participation in the 1976 LGCW helped to set the stage for continued changes within Louisiana. Fran Bussie used every opportunity available and worked with numerous activist groups in order to help create a new women’s platform for equal rights in the 1970s and 80s. Together with other feminist leaders, Fran Bussie encouraged Louisiana women to engage in the battle against gender discrimination and helped to forge a path for all women to experience equality at both the state and federal level.

Despite the final failure of the ERA in 1982, Bussie discussed the continued fight for women’s rights and reminded the people of Louisiana that, “This sleeping giant is now better educated, more experienced, more political, and we are there.”⁵² Fran Bussie used her successful lobbying career in the labor arena to build a bridge to the prominent social and civic activists groups of the day. And while the ERA was not successfully passed, feminist activists

⁵¹ Phyllis Ellard Covington, *1976 Louisiana Governor’s Conference on Women*, Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, June 4-5, 1976.

⁵² “The Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment, (1982),” *Louisiana: The State We’re In*, Louisiana Digital Media Archives, http://ladigitalmedia.org/video_v2/asset-detail/LSWI-0538-04_ERA.

used the fight for the ERA as an effective leveraging tool to end unfair gender laws that existed in Louisiana. The continued promotion of the Equal Rights Amendment brought changes to state community property laws, eliminating the “Head and Master Clause” that had previously given men all community rights to both property and children. Activists fighting for the ERA brought this unfair practice to the attention of all Louisiana women. Representative Diana Bajoie of New Orleans noted in a chamber meeting in 1977 that women who were both for and against the ERA *supported* the state legislature ending the “Head and Master Clause.”⁵³ This new women’s platform fused civic, social, and professional agendas together in the fight for equality and in-turn invigorated the women’s rights movement.

Clarence Marie Collier, like Bussie, reached out through her network of civic groups, along with her professional career in education and advocated for both women and human rights, but she did so in the context of segregation’s legacies, which permeated all areas of her community. This included not just school systems designed exclusively for either black or white students, but professional teacher’s organizations that did not allow black teachers to be part of their white organizations. This action sent the discriminatory message that black educators were not worthy to be members of Louisiana’s professional educational system.

⁵³ “Head and Master Law, (1977),” *Louisiana The State We’re In*, Louisiana Digital Media Archives, http://ladigitalmedia.org/video_v2/asset-detail/LSWI-0111-02_Viewpoint

In opposition to the unequal treatment by the Louisiana white organization known as the “Louisiana Teacher’s Association,” African American teachers formed the “Louisiana Education Association” to fulfill the needs of black educators within Louisiana.⁵⁴ In 1955, less than a year after the *Brown vs. the Board of Education* decision (that federally mandated the desegregation of U.S. schools) Clarence M. Collier became the President of the Louisiana Education Association.

The experience and injustice of segregation left a lasting impression on Clarence M. Collier. African American children were only allowed to attend one school in the Baton Rouge area when she grew up. Collier walked a very far distance to arrive at school each day passing a nearby white school in the process. Discussing this experience Collier states:

I had to walk from McGrath Heights to Scott Elementary School, which was a great distance from my home. In order to get there I had to pass the Dufrocq Elementary School, which was an all white school at that particular time, bussing for us was unheard of during that period. I think the school I attended was a good school but I have to face the fact that by the time I got there I was very tired, and so were many other youngsters who had to walk such great distances to get to that school.⁵⁵

Born in St. Francisville, Louisiana, Clarence Marie Collier moved to the city of Baton Rouge at the age of two. The 1950s offered African Americans very limited employment prospects. One of the few professional opportunities available was found in education. Limited employment opportunities were especially true for women. According to historian Janet

⁵⁴ Eleanor Elaine Webb, "The Development of the Louisiana Teachers' Association From 1952-77." (1978), vii, (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1978, 3317), https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/3317.

⁵⁵ Clarence Marie Collier, interview by Emily DiStefano, January 11, 1983, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, <https://batonrougedigitalarchive.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15196coll3/id/24/rec/1> (accessed January 15, 2019).

Allured, “Most of the black women active in women’s rights efforts worked in the field of education because there were so few other professional opportunities for them.”⁵⁶ Clarence M. Collier graduated from Southern University where she studied science and education. She went on to teach in the Baton Rouge Public School System and would eventually serve as the school principal of Park Elementary School. In 1975, Collier took the position as System Vice-President of Student Affairs and Community Services at Southern University. Below she is pictured standing at her desk at Southern University in her professional capacity in higher education.



Figure 2. Clarence Marie Collier standing in front of her desk in 1983. Photographed by A.J. Meeks for the pamphlet titled: “Remembering the Struggle: Oral Histories and Photographs of Baton Rouge Women Who Worked for Human Rights,” page 12. Printed by the Baton Rouge Area YWCA.

⁵⁶ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 243.

Collier spent much of her time at the Louisiana Education Association organizing and training black educators who were continually denied in-service training by their white counterparts.⁵⁷ She was also an active force fighting to end segregation in both the elementary and secondary school systems in the 1950s. Once desegregation began in Louisiana in the 1960s, Collier worked with the NAACP to save and secure African American jobs in Louisiana's school system. As a means to fight desegregation, white educational leaders would often try and overpower the African American teachers who the white patriarchy tried to eliminate from Louisiana's educational ranks. Historian Adam Fairclough discussed this harsh process in his journal article; "The Cost of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration:"

When it finally took place, the wholesale merger of segregated school systems was a bruising process. Black teachers charged that white-controlled school boards unfairly targeted black teachers for dismissal.... In the event, teachers managed to halt many dismissals by suing school boards in federal court, with strong backing from the NEA and the NAACP.⁵⁸

Clarence Marie Collier worked at the forefront of Louisiana's fight for both male and female African American educators during the 1950s.

⁵⁷ *Remembering the Struggle: Oral Histories and Photographs of Baton Rouge Women Who worked for Human Rights*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Baton Rouge Area YWCA, 1983), 13.

⁵⁸ Adam Fairclough, "The Cost of Brown: Black Teachers and Integration," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, issue 1, (April, 2006): 8, Presented online in association with the History Cooperative. <http://www.historycooperative.org>
<https://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Adam%20Fairclough%20-%20The%20Costs%20of%20Brown.pdf>, (accessed February 15, 2019).

This fight mainly affected women, with the percentage of female teachers being more than 80% during the 1950s and 60s.⁵⁹ Collier used her professional educational involvement alongside her civic membership in the NAACP to combat the widespread inequalities found in Louisiana's school system.

As was the case with many other activists of the 1970s, Collier used a multi-pronged approach in joining the fight for civil rights and women's equality. After the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed, she helped organize the newly desegregated Baton Rouge Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and eventually became its president. When a displeased white member broke off and started a separate organization, Clarence Marie Collier and fellow member Earline Williams filed a lawsuit against the newly formed illegal club.⁶⁰ The lawsuit did not succeed but displayed the tenacity that Collier felt in her mission to work for equality. In another significant effort by Clarence Marie Collier and the YWCA of Baton Rouge, prominent members both black and white held what Collier called "dialogues" where black and white members visited each other's homes and began to get to know each other.⁶¹ Collier describes these visits as, "doing more to tear down racial barriers" in the city of Baton Rouge than any other activity.

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (January, 1993), 29, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf>, (accessed February 3, 2019).

⁶⁰ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 40.

⁶¹ Clarence Marie Collier, interview by Emily DiStefano, January 11, 1983, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, <https://batonrougedigitalarchive.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15196coll3/id/24/rec/1> (accessed January 15, 2019).

Collier used multifarious tactics and fought for equality on numerous fronts. She battled against racism in her professional education career as well as her civic community organizations. Holding a membership in the women's Baton Rouge YWCA, Collier stood at the forefront of integrating this institution and utilized this community resource as a way to battle discrimination. Discussing the fight for equality in the YWCA, Collier states, "We did pull out and organize the Baton Rouge area YWCA, and in my opinion that was one of the moving forces, one of the movers and shakers of this community."⁶² In the late 1960s, Collier aided by her leadership position as the President of the Baton Rouge YWCA helped plan a conference on the elimination of racism.⁶³ This conference was held at the historic black campus of Southern University. Over five hundred citizens attended this conference. A key player who Collier said, "worked very cooperatively" with her to plan the conference was labor activist Fran Bussie. Bussie aided Collier in securing funds, and together, Bussie and Collier discussed how to make the conference a success. Bussie recommended speakers who could participate in the conference and she helped Collier find many ways to obtain some of the needed service for free. Discussing working with Fran Bussie, Collier states, "...Fran recommended several of the speakers which we were able to get to participate in the conference and in many instances (we didn't have any money, you know) was instrumental in securing the necessary funds or getting the service free so that the

⁶² Clarence Marie Collier, interview by Emily DiStefano, January 11, 1983, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, <https://batonrougedigitalarchive.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15196coll3/id/24/rec/1> (accessed January 15, 2019).

⁶³ Clarence Marie Collier, interview by Emily DiStefano, January 11, 1983, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, <https://batonrougedigitalarchive.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15196coll3/id/24/rec/1> (accessed January 15, 2019).

conference could be a success. She worked very hard for it...”⁶⁴ Bussie used her network of civic and social groups to provide support for this conference. Collier and Bussie came together and aligned their networks to champion equality, for not just women, but for all Louisiana citizens.

The fight for civil rights provided the guiding beacon for Clarence M. Collier in the 1950s and 60s, when she realized that change came through organizing and the success of both federal and state court decisions. Discussing the need for African American teachers to be provided professional training in 1983, Collier said, “We can’t always wait for democracy to take hold.”⁶⁵ Collier understood that real change would begin with a fight. This fight extended to the women’s movement, when in 1974 Collier accepted an appointment by Governor Edwin Edwards to be a representative on the Commission for the LGCW.⁶⁶ In addition to this important responsibility, Collier was also chosen to Co-Chair the Louisiana International Women’s Year Conference. Clarence Marie Collier used her influence as a prominent African American educator to bolster the civil rights of women. Collier, Bussie, and Evans’ participation in this conference speaks of the significant role that professional women played in the success and organization of the new women’s platform.

⁶⁴ Clarence Marie Collier, interview by Emily DiStefano, January 11, 1983, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, <https://batonrougedigitalarchive.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15196coll3/id/24/rec/1> (accessed January 15, 2019).

⁶⁵ Clarence Marie Collier, interview by Emily DiStefano, January 11, 1983, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, <https://batonrougedigitalarchive.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15196coll3/id/24/rec/1> (accessed January 15, 2019).

⁶⁶ Clarence Marie Collier, interview by Emily DiStefano, January 11, 1983, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, <https://batonrougedigitalarchive.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15196coll3/id/24/rec/1> (accessed January 15, 2019).

African American women and their involvement as activists stemmed largely from their dual coalition between both the labor movement and their fight for civil rights. Concerning this topic historian Yvonne Brown states, “Most black women feminists in Louisiana came from the civil rights and labor movements. Their feminism extended from their work for racial equality and their personal struggles to realize their human potential. They believed in individual hard work and education.”⁶⁷ While Collier worked directly with schoolteachers providing in-service training, she also took the lead as the President of the LEA to provide the legal funding for the NAACP to fight and retain black educator positions. The civil rights advocacy work completed by Clarence Marie Collier had positive lasting effects for the women’s movement. Collier’s activism in the NAACP (along with many others) filtered down and aided the struggle for women’s equality. Historian Janet Allured discusses the support of the African American community for women’s rights:

The NAACP endorsed the ERA in 1973, and in 1974 the state field director, Harvey Britton publicly ‘urged all NAACP units in Louisiana to begin...securing support of their legislators on behalf of the proposed 26th Equal Rights Amendment.’ Thus, African Americans were on the feminist/labor side almost from the beginning of the fight for the ERA.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Yvonne Brown, “*Kill That Snake*”: *Anti-ERA Women and the Battle Over the Equal Rights Amendment in Louisiana, 1972-1982*, (PhD diss., 636. Louisiana State University, 2014), https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/636.

⁶⁸ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 237.

Collier held many prominent positions during her career, including the Vice-President of Student and Community Services at Southern University in Baton Rouge, (a prominent HBCU) President of the Louisiana Education Association, and the President of the Baton Rouge YWCA. Many black activists showed their support for the women's movement when Southern University's staff and students came together in 1976 and 1977 to help organize the LGCW and the International Women's Year conferences held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.⁶⁹

While Fran Bussie worked with organized labor and Clarence M. Collier worked within the educational system to fight injustice, another woman used her career within the state government to fight for women's equality. In 1977, a reporter for *The Courier* in New Orleans called Pat Evans, the only "state sanctioned feminist" in Louisiana who was working for women's rights.⁷⁰ Pat Evans found herself in the unique position to direct the Louisiana state agency known as the Louisiana Bureau on the Status of Women. This agency was exclusively designed to improve the status of women in Louisiana. As the chief representative for women in Louisiana, Evans considered various women's issues brought to her attention by both legislators and lobbyist such as Fran Bussie and included educational leaders such as Clarence M. Collier. Evans reached out to her network of civic, religious, and legislative supporters to accomplish goals for the betterment of women. In 1979, Pat Evans along with Senator Nat Kiefer convinced the Louisiana legislature to vote for a bill to create a shelter program for battered women. In addition, she worked to get a proposed marriage tax passed that provided the funding.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 188.

⁷⁰ Martin Covert, "Evans: The Movement is Now a Lady" *The Courier*, September 29-October 5, 1977, 9.

⁷¹ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 139-140.

Pat Terrell Evans realized the struggles that women endured very early in life. At the age of four she watched her grandmother dress her boy cousin up in one of her dresses as a form of punishment. Evans recalls the event:

She had taken a little red flowered dress of mine and put it on him and tied the sash. And the message I got at the age of four was that the worst thing that could happen to him was to be a girl. I never bought that message. I was furious. I was so furious that I beat the hell out of him. And that was an indelible impression on me.... The struggle began when I was four years old on a porch in New Orleans on a street called Independence Street, and it never stopped for me...⁷²

Evans, born and raised in New Orleans, graduated from Southeastern Louisiana University in 1953. As a high school student Evans impressed the President of Southeastern Louisiana University, Gladney Jack Tinsley when she addressed the Louisiana State Legislature on the need for a new public state university. Pres. Tinsley offered Evans a full four-year scholarship to attend SLU.⁷³ Evans attended classes and wrote for the SLU college news bureau before completing her education degree in 1953. Pat Evans moved back to Baton Rouge after her college graduation where she began a commitment to women's activism that would continue for over two decades.

⁷² *Remembering the Struggle: Oral Histories and Photographs of Baton Rouge Women Who worked for Human Rights*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Baton Rouge Area YWCA, 1983), 14.

⁷³ Annabelle McGuire Armstrong, "Halcyon Days in Post War Hammond," *Southeastern Magazine*, 1995, <http://www2.southeastern.edu/NewsEvents/PublicInfoOffice/anabelle.htm>, (accessed January 4, 2019).

Pat Evans is considered a shrewd activist who used her political savvy to provide backing and support for many programs for Louisiana women. During her state government career she implemented and designed multiple programs for the state Office of Elderly Affairs, the Lieutenant Governor's office, and the State Department of Labor. Upon her death in 2013 Louisiana Senator, Mary Landrieu declared: "Since the early 1970s, she advocated for social justice, championed equal opportunity in employment, and fought for women across our state."⁷⁴

Prior to the formation of the successful women's platform created in the 1970s the federal government completed an exam on the plight of women. With the status of women being examined in Washington D.C., the Governor of Louisiana, John McKeithen, created the Commission on the Status of Women in 1964. After two years, the Commission produced a document titled, *Louisiana Women*. Historian Janet Allured writes of this report, "The report summarized data documenting the unequal status of women compared to men in Louisiana and made recommendations for change."⁷⁵ This document primarily focused on gender pay gaps and varying educational levels of women in the state. This report acted as a catalyst for the creation of the Commission on the Status of women.

⁷⁴ John Pope, "Pat Evans, Feminist and Political Activist, dies at 81," *NOLA.com*, May 3, 2013, https://www.nola.com/politics/2013/05/post_515.html (accessed December 10, 2018)

⁷⁵ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 51.

By 1972, Louisiana's new Democratic Governor, Edwin Edwards appointed Pat Evans as the Director of the Commission on the Status of Women. Pat Evans, directly involved her career with various civic groups fighting for women's rights, and helped to co-found Baton Rouge's National Organization for Women (NOW), formed in the late 1960s.⁷⁶ In 1972 the Louisiana Legislature voted to transfer the Women's Commission to the Louisiana Health and Human Resources Administration and changed the name to the Bureau on the Status of Women. Taking the helm as Director, Evans had big plans for the newly developed agency. Because of her vital career position, Evans had the unique situation to work within the state government to help build the new women's platform in Louisiana.

Working under the Governor of Louisiana gave Evans a tremendous advantage over other professional women. Evans championed many proposed rights and programs that aided women during the second-wave of feminism in Louisiana. As the Director of the Women's Bureau, Evans knew firsthand the importance of using political clout to get things done. When Evans devised support for the state battered women's shelter, she used her political acumen and garnered the support of the Archbishop of Louisiana's Catholic Church. She also probed newspaper statistics that revealed the number of women who were reported as victims of violence.⁷⁷ She then relayed this information to legislators and successfully lobbied the state government to provide the needed funds for the program.

⁷⁶ Barbara J. Love, *Feminist Who Changed America, 1963-1975* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 137.

⁷⁷ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 138.

Evans understood the importance of high-ranking state officials being involved in the promotion of women's rights. In 1975, she used her state government position to write and receive grant money from The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) so she could host a women's conference in Louisiana. In order to make this conference as newsworthy as possible she obtained the support of Governor Edwards and she titled the conference, The Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women."⁷⁸ In reference to the significant role that the LGCW played in the fight for women's equality, historian Yvonne Brown states:

The Louisiana Women's Bureau sponsored one of the most memorable events of the 1970s, the first Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women... Although conferences are not thought of as vehicles for radical change, they became a way for women to exchange ideas and to gain governmental and institutional recognition and legitimacy. As a testimony to its significance, the Women's Conference garnered great controversy. It was at this event that protesters held up signs proclaiming Governor Edwin Edwards a "scalawag," who promoted "carpetbag" women.⁷⁹

Involving the governor was a shrewd political maneuver by Pat Evans and made her one of the lead organizers of the new women's platform built in the 1970s.

⁷⁸ Associated Press, "Abandoning Low Profile: Women's Bureau Pushing Goals" *State Times Advocate*, March 7, 1975.

⁷⁹ Yvonne Brown, "*Kill That Snake*": *Anti-ERA Women and the Battle Over the Equal Rights Amendment in Louisiana, 1972-1982*, (PhD diss., 636. Louisiana State University, 2014), https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/636.

Group Claims Funds Misused For Conference for Women

Females Opposed to Equality (FOE) has charged the Louisiana Bureau on the Status of Woman and Gov. Edwards with betrayal and discrimination toward women of the state.

The charges are being made because the governor and LBSW are misusing public funds for the Governor's Conference for Women scheduled here Friday and Saturday, according to FOE's chairman Babs Minhinnette.

Ms. Minhinnette said in a press release that "the bevy of carpetbagger speakers

being flown into Louisiana at taxpayers' expense and under the auspices of our scalawag governor to address the conference reveals a definite bias in favor of 'women lib' viewpoints, including the ratification of ERA."

A request that a representative of FOE be permitted to address the conference was denied, she says, therefore imposing taxation without representation because the conference is being financed with public funds.

Figure 3. Females Opposed to Equality (FOE) claim that, "Carpetbag" speakers and "Scalawag" Governor misused funds, Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, June 2, 1976.

FOE Claims Assembly Right Violated

Members of Females Opposed to Equality (FOE) issued a statement Friday which said their First Amendment right to freedom of assembly was challenged and right to freedom of speech was violated at the opening session of the Governor's Conference on Women.

FOE chairwoman Babs Minhinnette said Maj. W.L. (Buck) Gunby of the Baton Rouge City Police Department ordered her and about 20

other members to leave the Chateau Capitol where the conference was in session.

FOE members were picketing the conference site in protest for the alleged use of public funds to finance the conference. Ms. Minhinnette had issued a statement earlier this week that a protest was planned.

Gunby told the FOE members they were on private property and the hotel manager did not want them

there, Ms. Minhinnette said. He issued a call for a paddy wagon, she said.

Ms. Minhinnette contended the constitutional rights of FOE members were violated and said she would file a complaint of civil rights violation with the FBI, the statement said.

Gunby "retreated somewhat" and allowed the group to enter the hotel without the picket signs, she said.



PROTESTING CONFERENCE — About two dozen men, women and children picketed the Governor's Conference on Women Friday morning being held at the Chateau Capitol. The picket signs expressed opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment

and the alleged use of public money to finance the conference. The conference was attended by Gov. Edwards and will continue through Saturday. (For story on conference, see Page 20A.)

— Photo by Charles Gerald

Figure 4. Females Opposed to Equality (FOE) picketing The 1976 Governor's Conference on Women, Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, June 5, 1976.



Figure 5. Patricia Terrell Evans sitting at her desk in 1983. Photographed by A.J. Meeks for the pamphlet titled: “Remembering the Struggle: Oral Histories and Photographs of Baton Rouge Women Who Worked for Human Rights,” page 14. Printed by the Baton Rouge Area YWCA.

It takes more than just commitment for an organization to accomplish needed goals. While financially self-sustaining women’s organizations existed in Louisiana, the state administered and funded the Women’s Bureau. With the budget in mind, an important reality dawned on Pat Evans when she took over the helm of the Women’s Bureau. In her own words, “Justice may be simple, but it’s not cheap.”⁸⁰ Pictured above, Evans sits at her desk at Louisiana’s Bureau on the Status of Women.

⁸⁰ Martin Covert, “Evans: The Movement is Now a Lady” *The Courier*, September 29-October 5, 1977.

Originally operating on a shoestring budget, in 1975 Evans personally publicized the heightened role of the Women's Bureau and pronounced she would ask the state to increase its budget by four times its original amount.⁸¹ Evans worked to increase the presence of the bureau and the legislature eventually approved a multi-million dollar budget.⁸² Evans is credited for many of the advances in the fight for women's equality. Some of the Bureau's accomplishments include: a pre-release program for women in prison, a rape crisis and family violence program, amendments to both rape and community property laws, a program to aid displaced homemakers, and a nontraditional training program for women.

Women in poverty particularly concerned Pat Evans and the Women's Bureau. Interviewed by the Louisiana television show, *Folks*, she elaborated on the issue: "This is a women's problem and is decidedly different than what we call the 'Male Pauper Model' ... Two things conspire to keep women poor (especially minority women) 1. (They) Bare and rear children. 2. (They have) very, very limited job opportunities."⁸³ In 1973 females led 45.4% of poor households in the United States.⁸⁴ As women were trying to provide for their families, poverty remained a significant problem. The "Feminization of Poverty" (the phenomena of male

⁸¹ Associated Press, "Abandoning Low Profile: Women's Bureau Pushing Goals," *State Times Advocate*, March 7, 1975.

⁸² Barbara J. Love, *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 137.

⁸³ "Political and Economic Power of Minority Women (1983)," *Folks*, Louisiana Digital Media Archives, January 30, 1983, http://ladigitalmedia.org/video_v2/asset-detail/LFOLK-210, (accessed January 10, 2019).

⁸⁴ Drew Desilver, "Who's Poor in America? 50 years into 'The War on Poverty,' a Data Portrait," Pew Research Center, January 14, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/13/whos-poor-in-america-50-years-into-the-war-on-poverty-a-data-portfolio/>, (accessed January 16, 2019).

poverty decreasing while female poverty rises) became a real issue in the 1970s. Pat Evans wanted the Women's Bureau to be the catalyst to increase job opportunities for women in Louisiana. Concerning the need for women's programs in the state of Louisiana, Evans declared in a 1975 interview with the *State Times Advocate*: "Women over 65 are the poorest segment of our population. Their national average income is less than 2,000 annually. Getting women into skilled labor jobs—such as pipefitting—might be one way to get them out of poverty."⁸⁵ Evans knew that if the state could work with various companies and organizations such as labor unions, they could secure more job opportunities and improve positions for the women of Louisiana.

In addition to securing the funds and organizing the LGCW, Evans served on the Coordinating Committee for the Louisiana International Women's Year Conference that was held in 1977. Pat Evans worked for many years to keep Louisiana's fight for women's equality at the forefront of the state's administration and legislature. Evans willingly stepped out and assisted any group that wanted to further the rights of women. In an interview with, *The Courier* in 1977, Evans emphasized the potential for growth in the state's women's movement, "in everything from NOW to the Junior League." According to Evans, the women's movement was, "not one giant monolithic force, it is a movement that is clustered, not splintered."⁸⁶

Pat Evans believed that women from every class, group, and race should see the benefit of women obtaining equal rights.

⁸⁵ Associated Press, "Abandoning Low Profile: Women's Bureau Pushing Goals," *State Times Advocate*, March 7, 1975.

⁸⁶ Martin Covert, "Evans: The Movement is Now a Lady" *The Courier*, September 29-October 5, 1977.

From upper class debutantes to radical feminist activists, the need to come together to expand the rights of women was more than palpable. Evans knew that in order to build a women's platform that lasted for future generations, women needed to together in both professional and civic groups to rally for women's rights and protection.

The collaborative efforts of the new women's platform, for instance, became evident in the early 1970s when the New Orleans Human Resource Committee formed a special rape taskforce.⁸⁷ This group included women from varying racial and economic entities. Women's organizations involved in the taskforce included the YWCA, the Junior League, various city universities, the New Orleans Women's Center, NOW, and the Ladies Auxiliary of the Chamber of Commerce. Together, these women met weekly to develop sustainable services for rape victims. Many of the legislative and societal advances for women's rights were created during this second-wave of feminism in Louisiana and Pat Evans along with Fran Bussie and Clarence Marie Collier were at the forefront pushing for these ideas and changes.

While the three women worked in completely different professional arenas, (labor, education, and government) each of them used their employment positions along with their memberships in both civic and social groups to fight for women's rights in Louisiana. Despite the fact that white and black women tended to do this work via segregated organizations, they worked in concert for women's equality. The primarily white organizations included the National Organization for Women (NOW), The League of Women's Voters, (LWV) and the YWCA, while the Louisiana Women's League of Good Government, (LLOGG) the Metropolitan Women's Voters' League, the United Fund, and Links Inc. had predominately African American memberships.

⁸⁷ Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism*, 113.

All of these civic groups, however, worked to further the rights of women in Louisiana. Members of these groups often worked independent of government and state entities in their fight for equality.

This research reveals that Bussie, Collier, and Evans skillfully used their professional careers along with their civic memberships to further the cause of women's rights and helped create a new women's platform in Louisiana. Maneuvering through the vast patriarchal systems of labor, education, and government could not have been easy, but produced positive outcomes for women's expanded rights and status under Louisiana law. As these women worked within their professional arenas advocating for women's rights, it became obvious that women from around the state needed to come together and organize. Second-wave feminism exploded globally in the 1970s and women in the state of Louisiana came together to bring increased equality to all women. The Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women, held in 1976, assembled not only leaders such as Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, and Pat Evans, but many important women's groups in the state. The Conference helped to pave the way for future women activists in the state and set out a new platform for second-wave feminists in Louisiana.

Louisiana Women Forge an Agenda

The 1960s and 70s became a prominent era for women’s rights globally and ushered in a new wave of feminism in both the United States and the State of Louisiana.

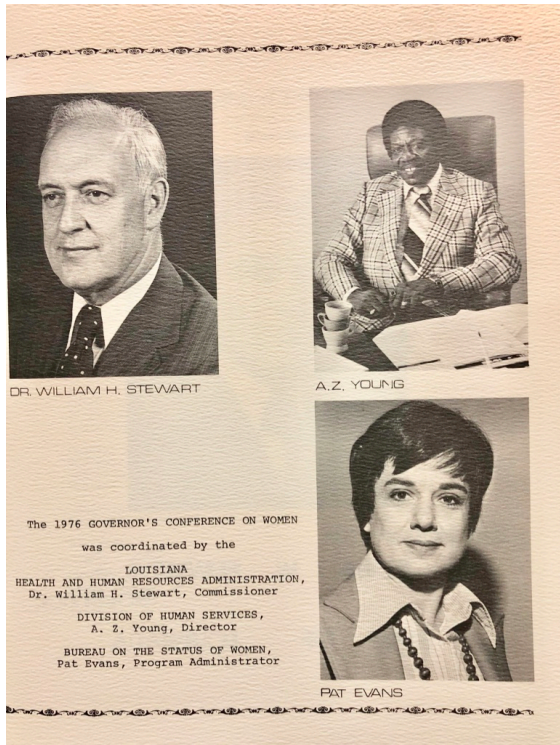


Figure 6: Pat Evans as the Program Administrator For the Louisiana Women’s Bureau, (Booklet Created by Phyllis Ellard Covington, 1976 *Louisiana Governor’s Conference on Women* Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, June 4-5, 1976. University of New Orleans Special Collection. Earl K. Long Library, New Orleans, Louisiana 70148.

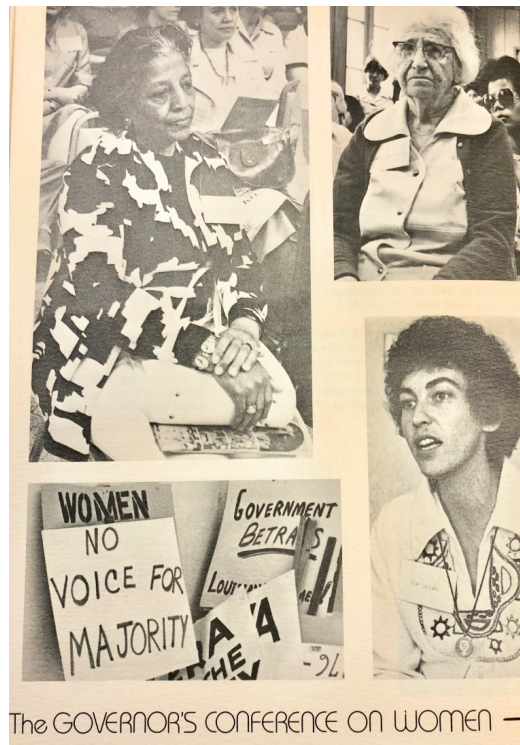


Figure 7: Pictured are various attendees at the LGCW. Young, old, black and white, they came together to forge the new “Action Agenda” that would be used to help further women’s rights in Louisiana.

In 1976 the Louisiana Women’s Bureau and Governor Edwin Edwards announced a two-day conference to evaluate the needs of Louisiana women. The above pictures from the conference report depict the varied ages and ethnicities of attendees. A federal grant secured by Pat Evans and the Bureau on the Status of Women funded the conference.

The *State-Times* newspaper of Baton Rouge announced the approaching conference on January 15, 1976. Concerning the impending conference Evans stated, “The fact the governor has called this conference says to me that the needs of Louisiana women have become a priority worthy of attention of those who make policy.”⁸⁸

Pat Evans employed an important political strategy by involving the Governor in the state women’s conference. In doing so, she demanded that other constituents take notice of women’s issues in Louisiana. Women across the state were encouraged by the Bureau on the Status of Women to host town meetings in order to express the needs and problems that existed within their local communities, needs that then could be conveyed at the state conference. Hence, the conference provided a stimulus for women from all economic, social, and racial groups to come together and discuss important issues,⁸⁹ as well as organize a women’s platform that brought real change to economic and state laws in Louisiana.

⁸⁸ “The World of Women: Governor Announces Two-Day Conference on Women’s Needs,” *State-Times*, January 15, 1976.

⁸⁹ Dr. Janet Allured discusses the grant requirement for the conference to represent all economic groups and racial ethnicities because they received federal funding. Janet Allured, *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism: The Long Women’s Rights Movement in Louisiana, 1950-1997* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2016), 188.

Showing excitement for the upcoming conference, New Orleans women called a meeting in the City Council chambers to address the particular needs of their city. At the meeting, community coordinator Mildred L. Reese underscored the link between local, state, national and global movements for women's reform declaring, "We believe that these state goals will parallel national goals as given by the U.S. National Women's Agenda, an outgrowth of the International Women's Year 1975."⁹⁰

Near the start of the LGCW, the *State-Times Advocate* announced the pre-registration quota of twelve hundred participants had been reached. The conference offered six workshops during the scheduled two-day event. The workshops included information on women and employment, family, health, law, the criminal justice system, and the political process. The *State-Times Advocate* included the conference goals:

To create a Louisiana Women's Agenda on the priority needs of the state's women; to urge the women's organizations of the state to take action to implement the agenda, to present to the governor and other public officials a copy of the agenda and to plan a program to inaugurate definite plans and a timetable to implement the goals of Louisiana women issued as a consensus at the conference.⁹¹

To further endorse and highlight the upcoming women's conference, Governor Edwards officially proclaimed Friday, June 4th and Saturday, June 5th as "Days of Women's Priorities."⁹² The local newspaper printed the governor's proclamation, intended to bolster both the interest and attendance of the event.

⁹⁰ "Area Women to Participate in Governor's Conference," *Times-Picayune*, April 8, 1976.

⁹¹ "The World of Women: Governor's Conference Tops 1,200 Pre-registration Quota," *State-Times Advocate*, May 25, 1976.

⁹² "State of Louisiana Executive Department Baton Rouge Proclamation," *State-Times Advocate*, May 29, 1976.

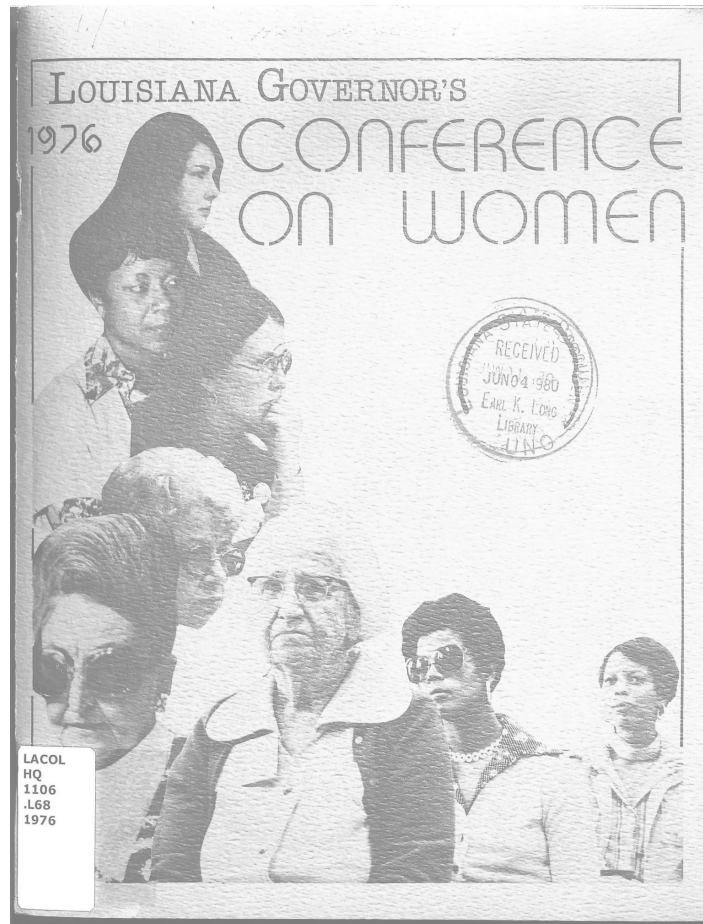


Figure 8. Front page of booklet cover from the LGCW. Created by Phyllis Ellard Covington, *1976 Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women*, Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, June 4-5, 1976, University of New Orleans Special Collection, Earl K. Long Library, New Orleans, Louisiana, 70148.

Forming the “Women’s Action Priorities Agenda” became one of the main goals of the conference.⁹³ This agenda outlines the most important reforms to promote equality for Louisiana women. Although women activists of the 1970s sought basic human rights—from economic independence to equal pay—these changes would bring *radical* improvements for women across the state.

⁹³ Phyllis Ellard Covington, *1976 Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women*, Louisiana Commission on the Status of Women, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, June 4-5, 1976.

The Action Agenda is broken into six sections. Included in every section of the Action Agenda is a call to ratify the Federal Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Major areas women at the conference wanted to address in the Action Agenda (See appendix A and B) include equal employment and new job opportunities. In addition, women wanted affordable housing and programs to help decrease child abuse. Also mentioned in the agenda are significant health concerns and the high rate of infant mortality in Louisiana. Women continued to formulate the Action Agenda with discussion on needed reforms in state laws for both equal credit opportunities and the existing unfair advantages given to men in divorce and custody laws. These important issues spilled over to the justice system where women called for the specific elimination of discrimination in all areas of the Louisiana Criminal Justice Department. Lastly, women at the conference understood that in order to see these changes occur for future generations, women needed to be elected and have a voice on every political level, including their local, state and federal representatives.

Despite the remarkable goals set forth at the LGCW, the conference did not go without detractors. Some women's groups within Louisiana opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, and thereby opposed the conference. In addition, conference attendees felt that the press purposely focused on the negative and propagated the idea that the conference was meaningless and without merit. Louisiana NOW, a chapter of the National Organization for Women, endeavored to convey the seriousness of the issues at hand at the LGCW, in an article titled, "Not Tea and Crumpets," these women pushed back against the idea that women's groups were mostly social and not political in nature saying: "With few exceptions there has been a virtual lack of media coverage of this historical event... We demand that the media acknowledge

the ‘newsworthiness’ of women’s issues.”⁹⁴ Another concern that plagued Louisiana women fighting for equality involved the neutral stance that Governor Edwards seemed to place on the issue of the ERA’s passage in Louisiana’s Legislature. Many women within the movement maintained the Governor only gave lip service to passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and suggested Edwards was more worried about political support than supporting real women’s issues.⁹⁵ The lack of strong support from Edwards for the ERA seemed clear in his opening statements at the Louisiana Governor’s Conference on Women: “I have many friends for ERA,” he declared, “and many against it and I stand by my friends.”⁹⁶

Despite these setbacks, the 1976 LGCW created a public and political space for women to come together and address unfair treatment based solely on their gender. By addressing these issues at the conference, activists helped construct a platform that would demand change. Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, and Pat Evans all helped to lead the Louisiana Governor’s Conference on Women. Their leadership in this conference was part of their multi-pronged approach to women’s activism. Subsequently, their combined participation (along with many others) paved the way for second-wave feminism to change the mindset of many Louisiana citizens and legislators. The LGCW also gave further legitimacy to subsequent women’s events including the Louisiana International Women’s Year Conference (IWY) held the following year in 1977. In addition to their participation in the LGCW, Bussie, Collier, and Evans all had major roles in the 1977 state level International Women’s Year Conference in Baton Rouge.

⁹⁴ “Not Tea and Crumpets, Says Women’s Coalition,” *Times-Picayune*, June 8, 1976.

⁹⁵ Donald C. Brown Jr., “ERA Leader Says Edwards Insincere,” *The Advocate*, June 23, 1974.

⁹⁶ Maury Landry, “Governor Edwards, Tish Sommers Talk at Women’s Conference,” *State-Times Advocate*, June 4, 1976.

Conclusion

Evaluating the evolution of women activists in the 1970s demonstrates that feminists such as Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, and Pat Evans meshed their professional careers with their civic commitments to press for reform. This strategy of combined professional and civic activism culminated in the Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women in 1976. When women from different economic, social, and ethnic groups sat down at the conference and developed the "Action Agenda" it provided a needed roadmap for future activism.

Discussing the importance of activists groups coming together at the Women's Conference Clarence Marie Collier notes, "At that time you really didn't have a number of organizations, you know, working cooperatively, but that was the beginning..."⁹⁷ These three women fought and opened doors for women within their professional institutions and civic organizations. The women's platform they helped create changed the discourse regarding the roles of women in Louisiana. These included demanding equal job opportunities for female workers, fighting and keeping existing education positions held by African American teachers, organizing battered women's shelters, and creating new job training programs for Louisiana women. The legacy of the women's platform created in the 1970s would have other lasting effects.

⁹⁷ Clarence Marie Collier, interview by Emily DiStefano, January 11, 1983, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, <https://batonrougedigitalarchive.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15196coll3/id/24/rec/1> (accessed January 15, 2019).

These significant contributions include, removal of the “Head and Master Clause” in 1980, the addition of the “Human Dignity Clause” into the state’s constitution, creation of a task force to identify sexism in Louisiana’s educational system, the establishment of various state women’s conferences and festivals, and increased support for women in the penal system.⁹⁸ According to historian Janet Allured, “As a result of their activism they transformed not just laws but also attitudes about ‘a women’s place’ in Louisiana society and culture.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Janet Allured, “Women’s Rights Movement,” 64 Parishes, <https://64parishes.org/entry/womens-rights-movement> (accessed January 2, 2019).

⁹⁹ Janet Allured, “Women’s Rights Movement,” 64 Parishes, <https://64parishes.org/entry/womens-rights-movement> (accessed January 2, 2019).

The message of “lean in” has been met with skepticism in 2019, with critics noting that the challenges facing women in the workplace are far more complex than the “lean in” philosophy suggests.¹⁰⁰ As a recent article in the *Washington Post* explains, “Research shows that pervasive issues—such as gender-based pay inequalities, the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities on women, and the number of U.S. companies offering paid leave remain largely unchanged.”¹⁰¹ But as Fran Bussie, Clarence Marie Collier, and Pat Evans’ experiences demonstrate, important strides can be made when professional women use their expertise in their chosen fields to promote feminist issues and press forward with the agenda that they so boldly set forth in 1976.

¹⁰⁰ Caitlin Gibson, “The End of leaning in: How Sheryl Sandberg’s message of Empowerment fully Unraveled,” *The Washington Post*, December 20, 2019.

¹⁰¹ Caitlin Gibson, “The End of leaning in: How Sheryl Sandberg’s message of Empowerment fully Unraveled,” *The Washington Post*, December 20, 2019.

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Appendix A

Women's A

EMPLOYMENT

WOMEN REQUIRE FULL ACCESS
TO ALL JOBS --TRADITIONAL & NON-TRADITIONAL

REPEAL: All existing laws regarding education grants, loans and other financial assistance which currently limit or deny working people these aids.

Admissions policies in institutions of higher learning, both written and implied, that prevent exclusion of women from certain professions by denying them educational preparation.

ENACT: Legislation to provide working women educational opportunity.

PROVIDE: More quality day-care centers.

Women's Centers in universities and colleges.

Qualified counselors for women in the schools.

Qualified counselors for women in all companies as part of the Affirmative Action Plan.

Training programs and vocational-technical schools in rural Louisiana.

Educational scholarships and other financial assistance for part-time and full-time students.

APPOINT: More women to corporate foundations and educational governing bodies.

RE-SEARCH: New work roles for the middle-aged and aging woman.

RATIFY: THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT.

ENACT: Equal Opportunity legislation for Displaced Homemakers.

AMEND: Housing codes & regulations which prohibit women with children from obtaining decent housing at reasonable cost.

ALLOCATE: Additional financing for the public school system.

PROVIDE: -Solutions & strategies to curb the housing shortage.
-A Federal Cabinet Post on the Concerns of Children.
-Programs to counteract child abuse.
-Educational courses on human relatedness and growth.
-Monitoring and changing of television programming.
-Research & identification of alternatives to retirement.

RATIFY THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT.

FAMILY SUPPORT: THE DIGNITY OF HOMEMAKING

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Appendix A: "Women's Action Priority Agenda" Side A-Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women, 1976.

Appendix B

ACTION AGENDA Priorities

HEALTH

RATIFY: THE E.R.A.

ENACT:
 Legislation for primary health care facilities and health maintenance organizations.

Legislation providing health education including sex education throughout the Louisiana school system to elementary aged children; such instruction shall be given by carefully trained persons.

DEVELOP & IMPLEMENT:
 Programs to reverse public health care statistics among Black women.

Programs to impact the maternal and infant mortality rates in Louisiana.

APPOINT:
 Women to decision-making positions in health education and health delivery programs and systems.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

RATIFY: THE E.R.A.

ELIMINATE:
 Discrimination against women at every level of the Criminal Justice System.

EQUALIZE:
 All programs at every level of the Criminal Justice System; programs available to men should be made available to women.

ALLOCATE:
 More resources to educational and vocational training for inmates; such training shall be relevant to labor market demands; such planning shall include input by residents.

SUPPORT:
 Decriminalization of victimless crimes, using diversionary programs and other social methods for aiding such offenders.

Decentralization of the Louisiana state correctional system, using community-based facilities and diversionary programs instead.

ENCOURAGE:
 Concern and public involvement in penal life.

RE-DIRECT:
 Pardon Board's emphasis toward rehabilitative growth and prognosis for successful re-entry into society.

LAW

WOMEN MUST HAVE VOICE IN THE MAKING, REVISING & REPEAL OF LAWS...

EQUALIZE: Representation on the Louisiana Law Institute.

CLARIFY: Louisiana's Equal Credit Opportunity Law.

PUBLICIZE: Alternatives to Louisiana's matrimonial regime laws.

SUPPORT: Wider public knowledge of inheritance laws, separation and divorce laws and child custody laws.

POLITICAL PROCESS

WOMEN REMEMBER VOTING

INCREASE:
 Election and appointment of women to public office.

RATIFY: E.R.A.

ENCOURAGE & SUPPORT:
 Involvement by women at every level of politics, including candidacy in local, state and national elections.

Appendix B: "Women's Action Priority Agenda" Side B-Louisiana Governor's Conference on Women, 1976.

Vita

The author was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. She obtained her Bachelor's of Arts degree in Social Studies Education from Southeastern Louisiana University in 2005. After teaching for over ten years and obtaining an add-on certification as a school librarian she entered the Master's in Public History Program at the University of New Orleans. Upon completion of her Master's degree she plans to pursue a Doctorate in Education. In her leisure time she enjoys spending time with her beloved husband, family, and friends.