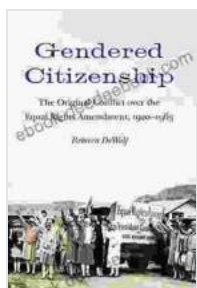


# The Original Conflict Over The Equal Rights Amendment: A Historical Perspective (1920-1963)

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution that seeks to guarantee equal rights for all citizens regardless of sex. The amendment has been a subject of intense debate and controversy since it was first introduced in 1920. In this article, we will explore the historical origins of the ERA, examining the key figures, arguments, and events that shaped its development from 1920 to 1963.



## Gendered Citizenship: The Original Conflict over the Equal Rights Amendment, 1920–1963 by Rebecca DeWolf

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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## The Origins of the ERA

The ERA has its roots in the women's suffrage movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Suffragists argued that women deserved the

same political rights as men, including the right to vote. After a decades-long campaign, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1920, granting women the right to vote.

However, many women's rights activists believed that the 19th Amendment did not go far enough. They argued that women faced discrimination in many other areas of life, including employment, education, and family law. In 1923, Alice Paul, a prominent suffragist, founded the National Woman's Party (NWP) with the goal of securing a constitutional amendment that would guarantee equal rights for women.

### **The National Woman's Party and the Proposed ERA**

The NWP drafted the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923. The amendment stated that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." Paul and her supporters believed that the ERA would provide a powerful legal basis for challenging discrimination against women in all areas of life.

### **Opposition to the ERA**

The NWP's proposal for an ERA quickly drew opposition from a variety of groups. Many traditionalists argued that the ERA would undermine the traditional roles of men and women in society. They feared that women would lose their rights to alimony and child support, and that fathers would lose their authority over their children.

Business groups also opposed the ERA, arguing that it would increase their costs and reduce their ability to compete in the global economy. They feared that the ERA would require them to pay women equal wages for equal work and provide them with equal opportunities for advancement.

## **The Phyllis Schlafly Era**

In the 1960s, the opposition to the ERA was led by Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative activist and author. Schlafly argued that the ERA was a "radical feminist" plot to destroy the traditional family. She claimed that the ERA would allow women to avoid military service, would give them the right to abortion, and would lead to the breakdown of society.

Schlafly's message resonated with many Americans, particularly those who were concerned about the social changes that were taking place during the 1960s. She founded the Eagle Forum, a conservative women's group that became a powerful force in opposing the ERA.

## **The ERA in Congress**

The ERA was first introduced in Congress in 1923, but it faced strong opposition from the beginning. The amendment was defeated multiple times over the years, despite the efforts of its supporters.

In 1972, Congress finally passed the ERA, and it was sent to the states for ratification. The amendment needed to be ratified by 38 states in order to become part of the Constitution.

## **The Failed Ratification Effort**

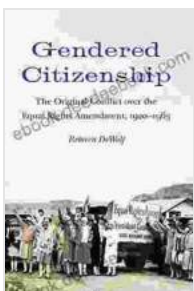
The ratification process for the ERA was a long and difficult one. By 1979, 35 states had ratified the amendment, but it still needed three more states to become part of the Constitution. However, the anti-ERA movement, led by Schlafly and her supporters, was able to prevent the amendment from being ratified in the remaining states.

In 1982, the deadline for ratification passed, and the ERA failed to become part of the Constitution. The original conflict over the ERA had come to an end, but the debate over women's rights and equality continues to this day.

The original conflict over the Equal Rights Amendment from 1920 to 1963 was a complex and multifaceted issue. The amendment was supported by many women's rights activists who believed that it would guarantee equal rights for women in all areas of life. However, the amendment also faced strong opposition from traditionalists, business groups, and conservative activists who feared that it would undermine traditional values and the traditional roles of men and women in society. The ERA was ultimately defeated, but the debate over women's rights and equality continues to this day.

## References

\* Equal Rights Amendment (Encyclopedia Britannica) \* The Equal Rights Amendment (History.com) \* Equal Rights Amendment Timeline (National Women's History Museum)



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