AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT
POLITICAL SCIENCE 317
MICRO-ESSAY #7

Write a 750-word essay on the following topic. Your essay is due in CLA 251 by 4 PM on FRIDAY April 9. Please include a title (not on a separate page) and a word count, single space, and use both sides of a single sheet of paper. Be sure to define any key terms, and don’t forget to use the claim-objection-rejoinder format!

What killed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), an ascriptive opposition or its egalitarian activists? Use the case study of the failure of ERA in Illinois as evidence to support your answer.

Mansbridge argues that leading “feminist constitutional lawyers” (76) promoting an egalitarian reading of the ERA and that this reading undermined the ability of the National Organization for Women (NOW) to defend the Amendment to moderate voters. This was just one, albeit pivotal, instance of how NOW struggled to control their political message. The problem was endemic to a movement filled with egalitarian activists and ideological volunteers. Egalitarian purism and the “participatory decentralization” (122) it fosters could thus very well be said to have killed the ERA.

But Mansbridge also argues that “the Amendment would have been ratified by 1975 or 1976 had it not been for Phyllis Schlafly’s” deft leadership of STOP ERA (110). Schlafly made sure that homemakers knew how the ERA would further erode the traditional hierarchical marriage based on “common-law contract” (108). Thus our debate question: which factor, the ascriptive cult of domesticity or egalitarian decentralization, made more of a difference in Illinois?