

# WOMEN AND CIVIL RIGHTS



Rosa Parks

African American women played significant roles in the Civil Rights Movement. While many historians suggest that the Civil Rights Era began with the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision declaring segregation in public school unconstitutional, Rosa Parks refusing to give her bus seat to a white man in 1955 was a powerful early step in the Movement. In her own words, she said of that day, “I was not physically tired. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.”



View of crowd at 1963 March on Washington.



African American student Elizabeth Eckford outside Central High School.

A literal barrier breaker was Daisy Bates. In 1957, under death threats, damage to property, and verbal harassment by segregationists, she guided and counseled the first nine black students to attend Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. It took over three weeks and President Dwight Eisenhower ordering paratroopers to accompany the students to deescalate the anti-integration protests. Bates continued to meet with the “Little Rock Nine” before and after school to encourage them to keep going to school despite being tormented.

On August 28, 1963, 31 Carroll Countians joined the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom highlighted by Martin Luther King, Jr.’s *I Have A Dream speech*. Dorothy Elderdice, a well-known community leader, wrote a letter to the *Carroll County Times* editor describing the March. She wrote,

*“All agreed that this demonstration of democracy at work in the right of 200,000 to petition their government peaceably was a thrilling experience. The actual distance from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial is less than one mile but in the symbolic point of time the marchers traveled from the day of the Declaration of Independence to that of the Emancipation Proclamation.*

*Believing that one hundred years is long enough to wait for the final fulfillment of that pledge, with one voice the thousands lifted the cry which was a prayer of Freedom Now.”*

Also listed in Elderdice’s letter were the names of the Carroll County participants. Included on the list is John H. Lewis, Jr. and Jean Lewis, the current President of the NAACP, Carroll County branch.

Of the 31 local participants, the majority were women.



# A NEW ERA

In 1923, three years after the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment was passed, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was first introduced in Congress. From the very beginning, even among advocates, the ERA was controversial. The National Women's Party, led by Alice Paul, advocated for gender equality, while social feminists advocated for a protectionist policy for women, focused on issues such as maximum labor hours and prohibitions on working at night.

After years of dormancy, the ERA reemerged into prominence in the 1960s. Proponents argued that women's path to gender equality was hampered by limited childcare options, gender discrimination, and other concerns. In 1964, women reformers successfully added gender equality to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII. The Act, as first proposed, had legislated the end of race discrimination in employment, but did not address gender.

In 1972, Congress passed the ERA. But, to become law, the ERA still required state ratification. Supporters thought the amendment would quickly be ratified, but instead, strong opposition emerged. Phyllis Schlafly, an anti-ERA advocate, argued that the ERA would undermine traditional female roles and privileges, such as the financial support of their husbands.



Phyllis Schlafly

Elderdice, a well-known community leader, led a walk-a-thon in support of the ERA. A group of 23 ERA supporters walked back and forth on Main Street in Westminster. The walk-a-thon also served as a commemoration of the 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, which gave women the right to vote.

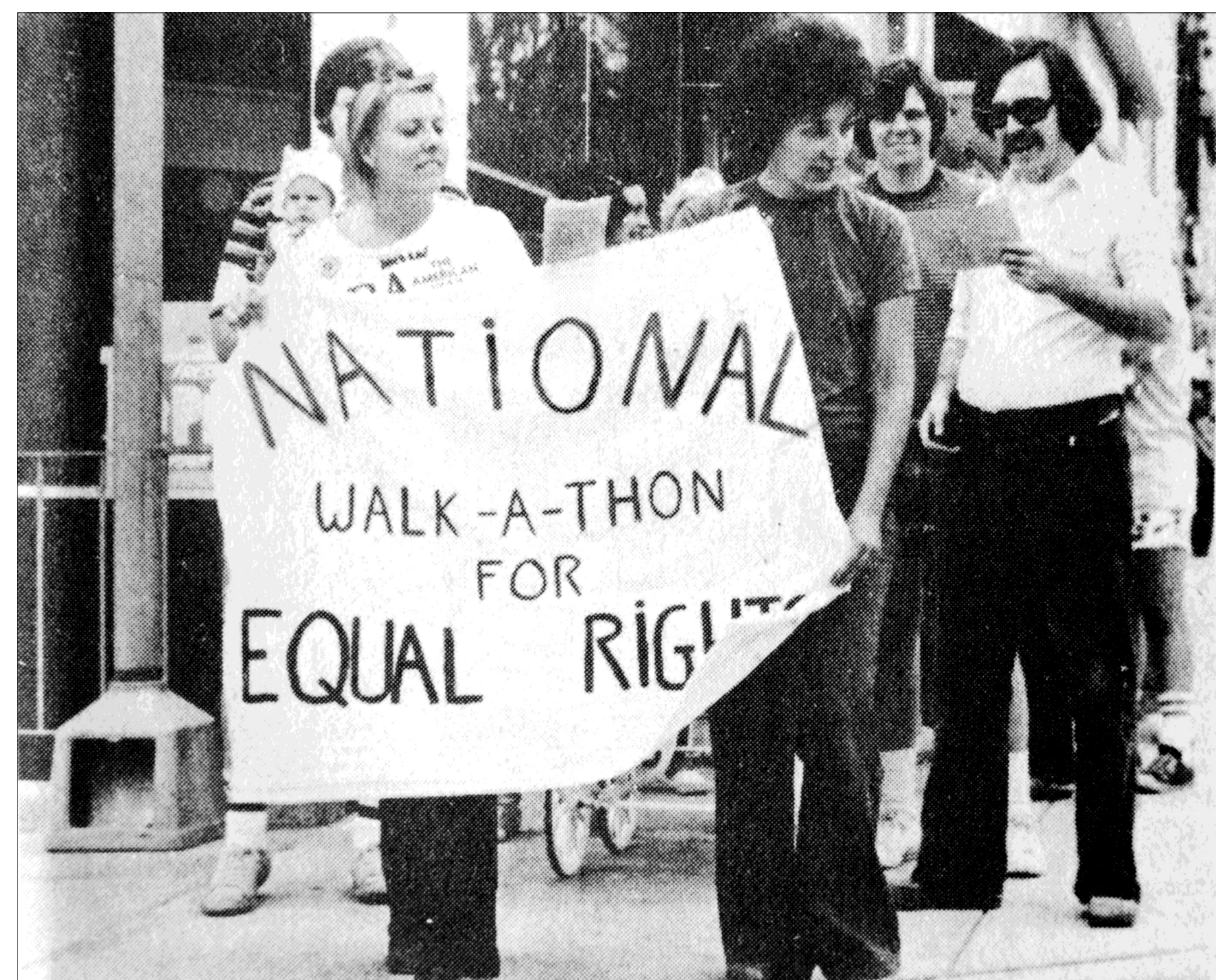
During the walk-a-thon, opponents of the ERA outnumbered the proponents and argued with advocates as they marched up and down Main Street.

Despite an extension, the ERA was not ratified. Only 35 of the required 38 states ratified the ERA by the 1982 extended deadline. Maryland passed the ERA in 1972. In 2020, Virginia became the 38<sup>th</sup> state to ratify the ERA. However, four states have since rescinded their ratification. The passage of the ERA remains uncertain.

The controversy of the Equal Rights Amendment touched Carroll County. In 1977, at age 85, Dorothy



Alice Paul



"ERA supporters march in Westminster," *The Times*, 29 August 1977