

Breaking Barriers in History

NATIONAL
HISTORY DAY
2020



Excavating for a storm sewer at
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.



Tackling the Theme:

“BREAKING BARRIERS IN HISTORY”

National History Day 2020

The 2020 theme for National History Day, “Breaking Barriers in History,” can be applied to topics in almost any historical setting you can imagine. When choosing a topic for the contest make sure that it interests you! National History Day demands significant time and effort from its competitors, and it will be much easier if you are excited about your project.

Although the concept of breaking barriers may seem straightforward, you will want to begin by thinking broadly about what it means. There are several different ways to conceive of barriers within your History Day project. Physical barriers, either manmade or natural, might consist of walls, mountains, or even oceans. How might going over, around, or even removing these barriers shape a group of people? Ideological barriers might divide people just as effectively, but they are less visible. Historically, people with disabilities

often lived lives on the edges of society because they were considered unable or unfit to fully participate. How did the passage of Americans with Disabilities Act assist in breaking this ideological barrier? Barriers might also be theoretical. National or state boundaries are redrawn consistently. What are the consequences of these changes?

When choosing a topic, start big: think about what time period or area interests you the most. Consider what barriers might be confronted or broken in this context. Once you have chosen a period or area, narrow your topic further. Is there a specific event that you have always wanted to learn more about? Is there a historical group or figure that was crucial to the process of breaking this barrier?

For example, 2020 represents the thirtieth anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you are interested in this topic work on narrowing your focus further. Did your community have any examples of activism for or against the ADA? Which conditions are covered under the legislation and which are not? How might the ADA have changed American attitudes towards disabilities? Make sure you identify key figures and the methods they used to break the barriers they confronted.

Once you’ve selected a topic, you need to create a working thesis or main idea for your project. Use the **thesis development worksheet** to craft a thesis statement. Following our Americans with Disabilities Act example, a sample thesis would be: The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act created more opportunities for people in the United States by demanding reasonable accommodations and establishing accessibility requirements which broke both physical and intellectual barriers which previously restricted them.

Once you choose a topic, and you have begun to work on your thesis, the next step is to establish a creative connection to this year’s theme. It can help if you think about your topic from multiple perspectives. Can two groups that oppose each other both be breaking barriers? Do what we consider to be barriers change at different points in time? Could the imposition of barriers have positive consequences? What continuing challenges are associated with your topic?

Check out our website, <https://www.okhistory.org/historycenter/historyday>, for more resources to help with your project!



Breaking Barriers in History Project: Thinking Like a Historian While Researching Your National History Day

What exactly IS history?

History is, at its most basic level, the study of people and events that happened in the past. Individuals who study and write about the past are known as historians. Historians act much like detectives because they search for clues to answer questions. Historians rely on collections of evidence, or sources, from a variety of places to learn the specific circumstances surrounding an event. They often focus on the who, what, when, where, and why related to particular events when they ask questions about the past. It is important that you are an informed historical detective while researching your National History Day: “Breaking Barriers in History” project. Historians use several types of evidence, but most are broken down into two categories: primary and secondary.

What are primary sources?

Primary sources are documents or artifacts which come from the specific period a historian is studying. If one is studying the Equal Rights Amendment for their National History Day: “Breaking Barriers in History” project, buttons worn in support of or in opposition to the amendment would be considered primary sources because they are physical artifacts from the period. It is important to recognize the perspective primary sources are created from in order to

better understand why they were created and what point of view they might be trying to capture. There are several types of primary sources; let’s take a look at a few examples.

Written Documents:

Most of the research done by historians is based on written documents. One reason historians rely on this type of evidence is because it is the easiest to verify, or check to make sure the content is true and accurate. Examples of written documents include letters, diaries, newspaper articles, and government documents. When researching written documents for your National History Day: “Breaking Barriers in History” project, make sure your documents are from reliable sources.

Artifacts:

Artifacts are objects from the past. They can be almost anything, including: weapons, clothing, eating utensils, or tools. By examining how an object was made, what it was used for, where it was found, and who it belonged to, an artifact can tell us a great deal about who created it and where. For example, if one is studying the Works Progress Administration in Oklahoma for their National History Day: Breaking Barriers in History projects, buildings and infrastructure constructed through the program can be found across the state.



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Images/Videos:

Historians can also use photographs, paintings, and prints in their research. Images can come from newspapers, photos, books, tapestries, murals, or other types of art made during a specific period of time. Videos, such as news reports, can also be used when available.

Oral Histories:

Oral histories are interviews that a historian conducts with a person who experienced an event in the past. These interviews can be recorded in multiple formats, including audio, video, and even as a written transcript. Oral histories differ from media interviews primarily because they are usually conducted years, if not decades, after an event. This generally occurs when an event becomes recognized as an important historical event long after the period it originally occurred in. While doing research for your National History Day: Breaking Barriers in History project, you can go to the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Library to find oral histories that have been recorded or written down for use as a primary source.

What are secondary sources?

Secondary sources are sources made after an event happened, generally by individuals who do not have personal experience with the event. Secondary sources are based on the analysis and interpretation of primary sources. Secondary sources are a great place to start when beginning the research for your National History Day: Breaking Barriers in History project because they provide context, or someone else's interpretation or explanation of an event.

History books and encyclopedias are excellent secondary sources to begin your research with because they offer concise summaries of the events and people you are looking to learn more about, and often include a list of relevant primary sources. Documentaries are also valuable secondary sources because they can provide a broad understanding of a subject in a short period of time. Examining the primary sources used by your chosen secondary sources is an excellent way to build an understanding of what types of research materials might be available to you and prove most useful in completing your project.

Breaking Barriers in History: Thinking Like a Historian While Researching Your National History Day Project

HOW DO WE KNOW IF EVIDENCE IS RELIABLE?

Historians rely on a wide range of source materials to make their arguments, but they must also check their sources to make sure the information they provide is accurate. There are several steps a historian can take to prove the source they are using is accurate.

First, a historian must look at the evidence objectively; this means without judgement. The perspective of the historian will probably differ from the creator of the source material, but the historian must remain neutral in order to accurately understand and interpret the people and events of the period they have chosen to focus on. When researching for your National History Day: Breaking Barriers in History project, you will need to be aware of the biases present in your sources so you do not present a biased final project. Work on recognizing the different perspectives and opinions present in your documents so your interpretation can work around them.

Second, historians should always work to place their source materials in the relevant historical context. You can use several questions to check the authenticity of a source. If it is written, who wrote it? What is the author's perspective? Why did they write the document? When and where was it written? Is it a reliable source? Why or why not? What historical events occurred around the writing of the document that may have affected its content?

Similar questions must be asked about a source if it is an artifact. Who made it? What was it used for? Where and when was it made? What is the maker's perspective? (This question is particularly useful when examining images.) What may have been happening in the world to prompt the creator to make this artifact?

Historians then have to look at other artifacts from the time and compare them. Are there other documents or artifacts that share a similar story? Are there other documents or artifacts that disagree? If there are many to look at, which ones are more reliable and why?

Finally, once the historian has verified the reliability of the source, they must look at it closely to determine the significance of the object or documents. Please use these research tips, as well as the many resources available to you on the Oklahoma National History Day website; <http://www.okhistory.org/historycenter/historyday>.

BREAKING BARRIERS:

30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act in Oklahoma

The first draft of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) came to the House of Representatives and Senate in 1988. The act was a product of the National Council on Disability which first suggested the legislation in 1986. Both mental and physical disabilities fell under those covered by the ADA, and as a result the act established a broad ban against discrimination based on disability

The ADA included five sections, which included protections covering issues from employment to access to public accommodations:

- **Title I (Employment protections for individuals with disabilities)**
 - Rules against firing or refusal to hire based on disability.
 - Separation of individual with disabilities from other employees made illegal.
 - Illegal to harass workers based on their disability.
- **Title II (Public entities no longer allowed to discriminate against people with disabilities)**
 - Public entities include school districts, cities, states, buses and trains, and public housing.
- **Title III (Equal access to public accommodations)**
 - Public accommodations include hotels, pools, playgrounds, restaurants, daycares, and museums as well as similar spaces.
- **Title IV (Telecommunications)**
 - Telephone and internet companies had to offer services for customers with disabilities that met their needs.
- **Title V (Miscellaneous)**
 - Protection against retaliation for those who reported broken ADA rules.

in much the same way that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 guarded against discrimination based on race, religion, sex, and national origin. The definition of disability under the ADA expanded in 2008 with the ADA Amendments Act in an attempt to provide further protections to those with disabilities that may not have been covered under the original legislation.

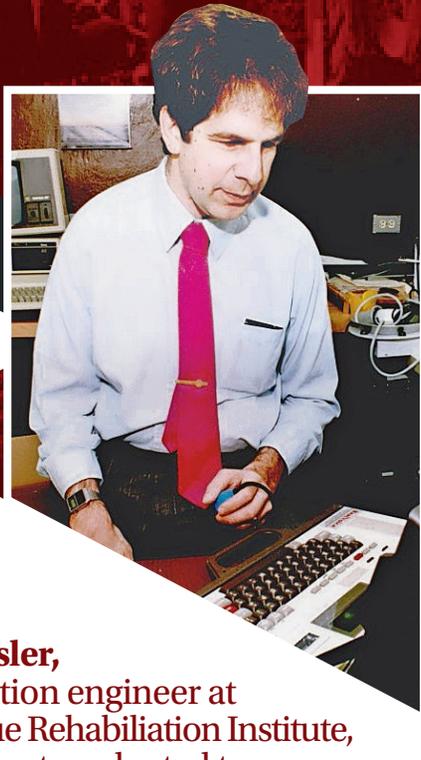


**“National Council
on Disability,
Sandra Swift Parrino of
New York, the council’s chairwoman.”**

[Photograph 2012.201.B1006.0625], photograph, November 6, 1991; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc574974/>; accessed November 6, 2019), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

BREAKING BARRIERS:

30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act in Oklahoma



**“Mark Bresler,
a rehabilitation engineer at
O’Donoghue Rehabilitation Institute,
tests a computer adapted to
help disabled workers.”**

Argo, Jim. [Photograph 2012.201.
B0105.0109], photograph, March 2, 1993;
([https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/
metadc241711/](https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc241711/); accessed November 6,
2019), The Gateway to Oklahoma History,
<https://gateway.okhistory.org>;
crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

Within Oklahoma, the Americans with Disabilities Act received important support. Both of Oklahoma’s Senators Boren and Nickles voted in support of the bill when it passed out of the Senate. The act received backing from not only politicians in the state but also major community organizations such as the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. The ADA made sure all Oklahomans received equal access to employment and public spaces regardless of whether or not they had a disability.

The passage of the ADA did not always lead to immediate changes. Oklahoma cities took different amounts of time to fully update their buildings and services to ensure equal access to all. City officials explained the delays by describing how expensive required updates were and the large number of buildings and other spaces that needed to be improved. In Sapulpa, for example, the city did not meet all ADA guidelines by 1995; five years after the legislation became law. This slow pattern of accommodation occurred across the state, especially where business owners and local governments did not realize they did not meet the conditions of the law. Even with some of the major changes outlined in the ADA, some disability activists in Oklahoma argued that the new law did not go far enough. People with disabilities still faced problems actually getting to work, even if their jobs were protected under the ADA. The passage of the ADA not only ensured rights for people with disabilities in Oklahoma, but it brought the discussion of disabilities into the public eye and served as a starting point for further support of Oklahomans with disabilities.

Understanding the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act, both nationally and in Oklahoma, represents an opportunity to better recognize the wide variety of individual experiences in the state, particularly when they have been limited. What types of barriers did the ADA break? How did the limitations and amendments attached to the ADA affect its ability to completely break these barriers? How might the ADA have changed attitudes towards people with disabilities?

For more information, visit: <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=OK099>
and <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=WO002>

Cited:

Douglas D. Doe and George E. Johnson, Jr., “Oklahoma Department of Human Services,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org>
Linda D. Wilson, “Women’s Club Movement”
The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, <https://www.okhistory.org>

During Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency, the Federal Government wanted to limit the effects of the Great Depression without making the public dependent on government handouts. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) became one of the major tools to combat the challenges of extremely high unemployment after its creation in 1935. One of the major goals of the WPA was to encourage the development of local communities and build skills within its workforce. Oklahoma represented one of the states where the WPA was at its most effective. Between 1935 and 1937, 119,000 of the 166,000 Oklahomans certified for WPA jobs worked within the program. The state WPA recruited farmers into drought relief work programs to limit the damage of the effects of the Dust Bowl on local farming and they represented over half of the WPA workers in the state. When the program began participants earned 18 cents an hour. This rate of pay was lower than private industry so that WPA workers only stayed in the program until they could find some other type of work.

By 1937, the WPA spent \$59 million in Oklahoma, with almost seventy percent of that total going directly into the hands of workers. WPA administrators divided the state into nine regions with their own goals and local employees. Projects undertaken by the WPA shared funding from both federal and local governments, which insured that locals had a say in what workers built. The WPA in Oklahoma focused on construction, with projects including new school buildings, improved drainage systems, dams and reservoirs, and community buildings. Project leaders used local materials as much as possible, which ensured money spent on materials went back into local communities as well. Although the WPA largely employed men, it also set up sewing rooms for women and trained them in jobs and skills considered appropriate for them at the time, including librarianship, housekeeping, and cooking. Beyond general construction and training in the state, the WPA also had a number of special projects. Most notably, WPA workers assisted in an archaeological excavation at Spiro Mounds and worked to preserve Sequoyah's cabin. The WPA also helped workers earn their high school diplomas through correspondence courses and on-site classes in the work camps.



Photograph of laborers excavating for a storm sewer in an Oklahoma City neighborhood. The project is funded by the Works Progress Administration.

WPA PROJECT IN OKLAHOMA

City, photograph, 1933~; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc231409/>; accessed November 6, 2019), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

BREAKING BARRIERS:

85th Anniversary of the Works Progress Administration in Oklahoma



“Miss Anita Wilcox works progress administration”

Oklahoma Publishing Company. [Photograph 2012.201.B1383.0534], photograph, February 18, 1936; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc751418/>; accessed November 6, 2019), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

Although most WPA participants in Oklahoma did construction or farm labor, the Federal One initiative hired artists and professionals in a variety of fields. The Oklahoma Federal Music Project employed over two hundred performers who taught across the state and participated in small town orchestras, an African-American dance band, and the Oklahoma City and Tulsa symphonies. Twenty-eight artists worked within the Oklahoma Federal Art Project which played an important role in developing the Oklahoma Art Center and painted public murals across the state. The Oklahoma Federal Theater Project focused heavily on teaching since it maintained relatively few participants and often gave advice to local theaters. The theater project avoided the dramas promoted by the national WPA office and instead performed historical plays and comedies which proved very popular with the largely unemployed audiences. Writers in the state participated in the Oklahoma Federal Writers' Program which produced *The WPA Guide to 1930s Oklahoma* and set up a records survey that processed public documents and newspapers from across the state. This insured their preservation for future generations.

The WPA played a vital role in supporting Oklahomans from all walks of life during the Great Depression.

Oklahomans worked both to survive and improve their local communities, as farmworkers, writers, and almost everything in between. Many of the projects that WPA workers completed in the state can still be visited today. What types of barriers might the Works Progress Administration have broken? Did the WPA create new barriers in the state? This might include physical barriers, social barriers, or even another type of barrier entirely. How important might it be to consider barriers to participation in the program?

For more information, visit: <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=WO022>, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=FE001>, and <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=NA014>

Cited:

Tally D. Fugate, "National Youth Administration," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org>

William H. Mullins, "Works Progress Administration," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org>

Sally Bradstreet Soelle, "Federal Art Project," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org>

BREAKING BARRIERS:

85th

ANNIVERSARY

of the Works Progress
Administration in Oklahoma



"Site of the first building in Oklahoma county is pointed out by Miss Mary Jo Turner, research worker, who is gathering material for the historical volume of the works progress administration."

Kaho, C. J. [Photograph 2012.201. B0979.0836], photograph, January 2, 1936; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1298708/>; accessed November 6, 2019), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society

BREAKING BARRIERS:

Equal Rights Amendment in Oklahoma



“Nell Sylvester, formerly of London, England and now a resident of Oklahoma City, doesn’t let cool temperatures chill her support for the Equal Rights Amendment.”

[Photograph 2012.201.B1225.0217], photograph, 1981; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc528302/>; accessed November 6, 2019), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

Shortly after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, which guaranteed women the right to vote, the National Woman’s Party, led by Alice Paul, created a constitutional amendment which would outlaw discrimination based on sex/gender. It took almost five decades, but Congress passed this Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) on March 22, 1972, and sent it to the states for ratification. The amendment contained three short sections which stated: “Equality under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.” To become part of the U.S. Constitution, amendments require approval from three-fourths of the state legislatures. This process proved much more controversial than supporters of the ERA expected.

Congress originally gave the ERA had a seven-year timeframe for approval. By 1975 the amendment already had thirty-four of the thirty-eight necessary state ratifications. Yet, after this early period of success, only one more state approved the amendment: Indiana in 1977. ERA supporters gained an extension to the 1979 deadline which let them continue to pursue approval of the amendment in state legislatures until June 30, 1982. Needing only three more state approvals, national and local women’s organizations focused on Oklahoma and few other key states, as Oklahoma had a supportive governor and congressional leadership.

During the final push for approval Oklahoma became a battleground state where both pro-ERA and anti-ERA groups attempted to seal the fate of the amendment. However, the ERA enjoyed early success in the state. State Representative Hannah Atkins brought the amendment to Oklahoma in 1972 and travelled across the state giving speeches to build support for it. Atkins outlined all the Oklahoma laws that affected men and women differently and worked alongside grassroots activists such as Wanda Jo Peltier to promote the ERA and the equality and protections it would give men and women.

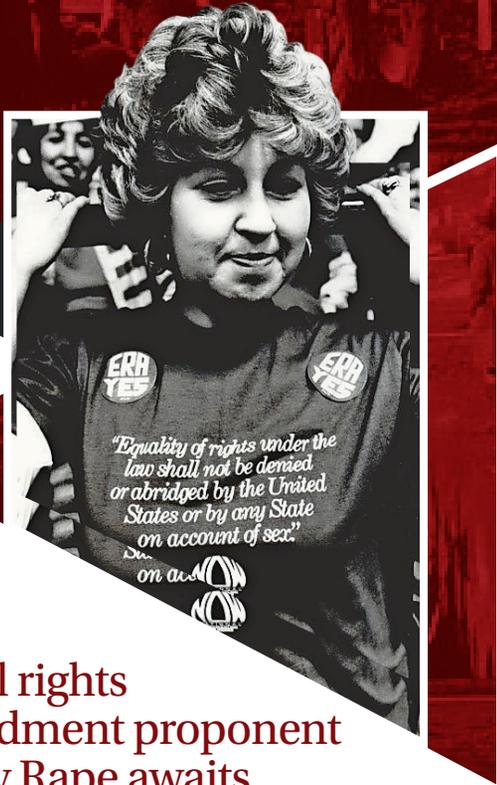


Equal Rights Amendment promotional buttons

(John Dunning Political Collection, OHS).

BREAKING BARRIERS:

Equal Rights Amendment in Oklahoma



“Equal rights Amendment proponent Shirley Rape awaits senate vote.”

Beckel, Jim. [Photograph 2012.201.B1076.0484], photograph, January 14, 1982; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc540003/>; accessed November 6, 2019), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

ERA supporters used specific examples of unequal treatment under the law to make their appeals for passage of the amendment. Nationally, women could not take out lines of credit without a co-signer, usually either a husband or father. This included things like credit cards and loans, which often forced women to rely on men for economic security. During this period, Oklahoma still had a “head of household” law on the books, which legally made wives the dependents of their husbands in the same way children were. This proved problematic for issues of inheritance; without a will that clearly left a husband’s property to his wife it would be divided equally between his wife and children. The forced division of property after a husband’s death hit farming couples particularly hard and had the potential to ruin the woman economically. ERA supporters targeted unequal treatments under the law such as these in an attempt to appeal to women from different backgrounds and establish widespread support.

By the early 1980s, as the deadline for approval of the ERA neared, activity in Oklahoma continued to increase. The Oklahoma Women’s Political Caucus under the presidency of Wanda Jo Peltier became the sixth largest chapter in the nation and worked together with several other groups to help pass the ERA in Oklahoma. On January 13, 1982, the state senate vetoed the ratification bill 27 to 21, and the state house of representatives never brought it to a vote. Oklahoma remains one of thirteen states, mostly in the South and West, which never approved the amendment. As a result, the ERA never became law.

Although the ERA failed to pass in Oklahoma, and nationally, the movement that supported it managed to break many barriers and created cracks in those it was unable to fully break. By the mid-1970s the number of female legislators, lobbyists, and activists increased dramatically and this increase often included women who began their political careers working for the passage of the ERA, including Oklahomans Wanda Jo Peltier and Cleta Deatherage Mitchell. What are some other barriers that ERA supporters identified and attempted to break during this period? Why is it important to consider even those barriers that weren’t successfully broken? How might anti-ERA activists have thought about these events and barriers differently?

For more information, visit: <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=EQ001> and <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entryname=CLETA%20DEATHERAGE%20MITCHELL>

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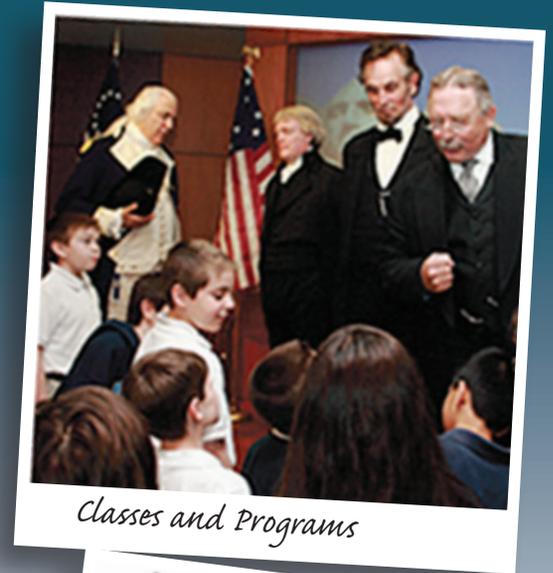
Sarah K. Tyson, “Equal Rights Amendment,”

The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, <https://www.okhistory.org>

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