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*At Least It Was a Fruit Pie:  
The Rise and Fall of Anita Bryant*

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*“They said I created an atmosphere of hate. . .that was hogwash. That is not who I am.”  
—Anita Bryant*

“Because of my love for Almighty God, because of my love for His Word, because of my love for my country, because of my love for my children, I took a stand—one that was not popular.”<sup>1</sup> These words open the first chapter of the autobiography of the one of the most polarizing figures in the history of American politics: the infamous orange juice spokeswoman-turned-hero of the Christian right, Anita Bryant. Bryant, a devout Christian, broke onto the scene of American politics rather suddenly in 1977, when she made national headlines for speaking out against a human rights ordinance that had been passed in her native Dade County, Florida. The ordinance, which Bryant believed would give “special privileges” to homosexuals by increasing their access to housing, public accommodation and employment, held that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was unlawful.<sup>2</sup> Fearing that the anti-discrimination policy would allow openly homosexual individuals to teach—even in religious schools, Bryant and her allies took action against the ordinance and, in a widely publicized and lengthy campaign, fought to have it repealed.

Despite an enormous backlash from the members and supporters of the gay and lesbian community, Bryant rallied enough support to achieve her goal. This victory energized the Christian right; under Bryant’s leadership, opponents of the burgeoning gay and lesbian rights movement were able to achieve similar victories in repealing anti-discrimination laws that had been enacted during the 1970s in cities across the country. Though the success of the conservative crusade Bryant originated was not universal, the influence she exerted (by invigorating a movement to stem the momentum of one of the key civil rights campaigns of the 1970s) within the social and political landscape of America would leave a lasting impression. Bryant’s religious upbringing and unwavering dedication to Christian theology and morality as central tenants of American life and society motivated the wholesome beauty queen to accomplish what she did in the gritty world of politics. Like many influential conservative women in American history, Bryant achieved her ends by galvanizing the Christian right with an appeal to the rhetoric of Christian motherhood, a powerful strategy she invoked to much avail.

Although she has generally been dismissed by progressives as mean-spirited and hypocritical, Anita Bryant was, beneath the dainty exterior, a shrewd and savvy political agent who catalyzed the anti-gay movement during the culture wars of the 1970s. Bryant is a crucial

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<sup>1</sup> Bryant, Anita. *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation's Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality*. (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1977), 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

part of a long and enduring tradition of what former Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin would later term “pit-bulls with lipstick.” By framing herself as a quintessentially American wife and mother who just wanted the best for her children, she conflated Christianity with conservatism and conservatism with patriotism in a way that appealed to a large number of American voters. She exploited conservatives’ fears of social change by advocating a return to Christian values, which framed “militant homosexuality” as a threat to the nation’s families. Using this rhetoric, she cultivated a reputation as a protective, conservative mother who had the best interest of her children and of the nation in mind—a reputation that had truly been a lifetime in the making.

Born at her grandparents’ house in Barnsdall, Oklahoma on March 25, 1940, Anita Jane Bryant learned to do two things from the earliest age: sing and pray. At the ripe age of two, she began singing in her local Baptist Church in Velma-Alma, Oklahoma, and never stopped. Her childhood was marked with tragedy. When Anita was an infant, her father divorced her mother and joined the Army, leaving Anita’s mother with six children to support. But it was during this time that Bryant developed an unwavering sense of faith and a passion for music from her maternal grandfather, with whom she lived as a child. She declared publicly her faith and was baptized at the age of eight and subsequently channeled her deep spiritual conviction into her music.<sup>3</sup> As a child, Bryant sang throughout the state of Oklahoma at local fairs and events, often taking part in radio and television broadcasts. When Arthur Godfrey’s famous talent show came to Oklahoma City, Bryant was invited to audition. Against the wishes of her deeply religious father, she auditioned and went on to win first place. Bryant cultivated a wholesome image and released her first minor hit, “Sinful to Flirt,” when she was sixteen.<sup>4</sup>

At eighteen, Bryant entered the “Miss Tulsa” beauty pageant, and walked away with the title. After graduating from high school, she competed in the Miss Oklahoma pageant, which she won in 1958. The next year, she entered the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, where she was named second-runner up and co-winner of the Miss Congeniality title. Subsequently, Bryant signed a record deal with Carlton Records and released several hit singles, including “Till There Was You” (1959), “In My Little Corner of the World” (1960), and her biggest hit, “Paper Roses” (1960), which was later covered by Marie Osmond.<sup>5</sup> This spawned a successful music career, with Bryant releasing several records under the Columbia label and touring with the Billy Graham Crusade and Bob Hope’s USO entertainment tours to Vietnam. She also performed at both the Republican and Democratic presidential conventions in 1968, sang the national anthem at Super Bowl III in 1968, and famously performed “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” at President Lyndon Johnson’s funeral in 1973.<sup>6</sup>

In 1960, Bryant married Miami disc jockey Bob Green, with whom she had four children. During the first decade of her marriage, she virtually disappeared from the pop charts where she was well known and instead engaged a new audience by recording several Christian albums. Bryant also became a successful product spokeswoman, appearing in TV, billboard, and magazine ad campaigns for companies including Coca-Cola, Kraft Foods, Holiday Inn, and

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<sup>3</sup> “Anita Bryant Biography,” Anita Bryant Ministries International, accessed May 1, 2012, <http://www.anitabmi.org/3.html>

<sup>4</sup> “Anita Bryant,” NNBD: Tracking the Entire World, accessed April 26, 2012, <http://www.nnbd.com/people/177/000024105/>

<sup>5</sup> “Anita Bryant,” NNBD: Tracking the Entire World.

<sup>6</sup> “Bryant, Anita (b. 1940),” GLBTQ: The World’s Largest Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Culture, accessed April 28, 2012, [http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/bryant\\_anita.html](http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/bryant_anita.html).

Tupperware.<sup>7</sup> She is best remembered for her work with the Florida Citrus Commission, which featured Bryant in a series of nationally televised commercials. As a result of this successful ad campaign, Bryant became famous for her upbeat jingle, angelic poise, and the popular tagline “a breakfast without orange juice is like a day without sunshine.”<sup>8</sup> By the early 1970s, Anita Bryant’s name had become synonymous with orange juice, and Bryant herself had cultivated a well-established image: that of a wholesome Christian mother whose devotion to God and family was unparalleled.

Throughout the 1970s, Bryant’s reputation as a conservative Christian mother expanded when she began to write Christian-themed books, including *Raising God’s Children*, a selection of tips for Christian parents and a cookbook titled *Bless This Food: An Inspiring Personal Guide to Christian Family Togetherness through Home, Family, Faith and Love*. A fervent supporter of the growing Christian Right, Bryant’s popularity extended as the decade unfolded. In the late 1970s, she won the “Most Admired Woman in America” poll in *Good Housekeeping* magazine for three consecutive years.<sup>9</sup>

It was in 1977 though, that Anita Bryant began the battle for which she will always be remembered—her crusade against gay rights. A devout Christian since childhood and proud product of conservative Oklahoma, it is no surprise that Bryant adopted strong traditionalist values. By the mid-1970s, Bryant had become deeply concerned about the social and political direction in which America was heading. It seemed to some conservatives that liberal ideology was spreading like wildfire as a result of the various rights-based movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which included civil rights and feminism. As the perceived threat of neo-liberal policy change grew more and more imminent Bryant became increasingly fearful for her country. For her, the departure from conservative, Christian values perpetuated by the culture wars of the 1970s marked an entrance into dangerous territory.

In January 1977, after Bryant got wind of a proposed amendment to the Dade County Code that would prohibit discrimination in the areas of housing, public accommodation and employment against persons based on their affectional or sexual preferences, she felt she had no choice but to take action. Citing divine inspiration as her reason for contesting the proposed ordinance, Bryant reflected on her beliefs in her memoir, explaining, “For several years, I...had been praying that God would revive America, our community, and our families.” She maintained that she felt compelled to act as a mother who cared about her husband and four children. But for Bryant, it also “got down to the nitty-gritty when God said, ‘And how about you?’ God drew a circle, figuratively speaking. I stepped inside, and He put a flame in my heart.”<sup>10</sup>

After discussing the matter with her husband and pastor, Bryant felt it was her responsibility to God, to her children and to her community to do whatever she could to ensure that the ordinance was not adopted. Invoking the rhetoric of Christian motherhood, Bryant further justified her entrance into the political sphere by framing the issue as one she simply could not ignore. She explained:

The thought of known homosexuals teaching my children especially in a religious school bothered me. It kept coming to mind. I was into God’s Word more deeply than ever before. All of a sudden I began to see that God doesn’t tolerate a lot of

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<sup>7</sup> “Bryant, Anita (b. 1940),” GLBTQ.

<sup>8</sup> “Anita Bryant,” NNBD: Tracking the Entire World.

<sup>9</sup> “Anita Bryant Biography.”

<sup>10</sup> Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story*, 13.

things that people say they are willing to tolerate ‘in love.’ I couldn’t say no to God when His word is so plain.<sup>11</sup>

Though this argument would later become a compelling one to members of the Christian Right inspired by Bryant’s dedication to biblical morality, it was initially ineffective. When Bryant first wrote to the Dade County Board of Commissioners (in a personal letter to each of the nine metro commissioners) expressing her apprehension that, “if this ordinance amendment is allowed to become law . . . you would be discriminating against my children’s right to grow up in a healthy, decent community that we’re proud to be a part of,” her concern went unnoticed.<sup>12</sup> When the ordinance passed several weeks later, Bryant was devastated. From her grief and disappointment, though, was born a kind of fierce anger few would have expected to emerge from such a seemingly wholesome and sweet Christian woman—an anger that shocked even Bryant herself.

At a protest in Miami shortly after the ordinance was passed, Bryant took the stage and, painting herself as the all-loving and moral Christian mother, decried the homosexual community, asserting “what these people really want, hidden behind obscure legal phrases, is the legal right to propose to our children that there is an acceptable alternate way of life.”<sup>13</sup> Declaring war on the anti-discrimination legislation which she believed would bring about the absolute moral corruption of an already too liberal society, Bryant mobilized against the Dade County ordinance, vowing, “I will lead such a crusade to stop it as this country has not seen before.”<sup>14</sup> And, much to the surprise of the entire nation, she did.

In response to the passage of the anti-discrimination ordinance that she so strongly opposed, Bryant wasted no time in rallying support for her cause. Along with her husband Bob, she founded and became the face of *Save Our Children*, a political coalition whose goal was to defeat the Dade County ordinance by petition and referendum.<sup>15</sup> For the next few months, Bryant worked tirelessly to garner enough support to repeal the ordinance. She networked extensively—lecturing at local venues, holding prayer meetings and staying up until midnight every night for weeks making calls and contacts. Bryant’s determination soon paid off, and she was asked to appear on several local Christian radio and cable television shows. Her campaign gained traction from these public appearances, and Bryant attracted national attention after appearing on the popular national Christian talk shows *The PTL Club* and *The 700 Club*.<sup>16</sup>

These appearances elicited a growing number of negative responses from proponents of gay rights, as they helped Bryant to become a celebrity spokesperson for conservative Christians in Dade County and around the country. The press had a field day when the United States Weather Bureau announced later in the year that the first hurricane of the season would be named Anita; though Bryant did not appreciate this kind of media attention and insisted that the names for the hurricane season in Florida had been selected nearly ten years earlier, there is no denying that her political clout was growing. When she and her supporters took the polls by storm in June of 1977, their decision made a lasting, hurricane-strength impact.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Dudley Clendinen, “Anita Bryant, B. 1940, Singer and Crusader,” *St. Petersburg Times*, November 28, 1999, accessed April 26, 2012, [http://www.sptimes.com/News/112899/news\\_pf/Floridian/Anita\\_Bryant\\_b\\_1940\\_.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/News/112899/news_pf/Floridian/Anita_Bryant_b_1940_.shtml).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 74-75.

With all of the publicity and support Bryant had garnered as a result of the *Save Our Children* campaign, the members of the Metro Dade County Commission (including Bryant's former friend but now political rival, Ruth Shack, who originally sponsored the anti-discrimination act) were forced to acknowledge her. Bryant was given thirty days to organize her campaign and collect petitions in support of her cause.<sup>18</sup> In less than a month, Bryant and her supporters gathered an astounding sixty-six thousand signatures. The Commission was left with two options: repeal the ordinance, or put it to a public vote, letting the members of the Dade County community decide. Despite strong reservations from several Commission members including Shack, who said "it breaks my heart that we are sending people to the polls to decide whether or not we will discriminate against a segment of the community," a referendum was held on June 7, 1977. When the results were tallied, it appeared that Bryant's hard work and dedication had paid off: the repeal passed with seventy-percent of the vote.<sup>19</sup>

Following this victory, Anita Bryant used her newfound celebrity status within the sphere of conservative politics to expand her influence. She became the face of the national anti-gay rights movement, and traveled the country giving speeches on her beliefs and experiences and supporting political measures that would either repeal anti-discrimination policy or codify discrimination based on sexual orientation into local and national legislation. Feeling confident after her victory in Dade County, Bryant promised, in a national advertisement, that she would "seek help and change for homosexuals, whose sick and sad values belie the word 'gay' which they pathetically use to cover their unhappy lives."<sup>20</sup> She asserted that because "gayness is learned, it can be unlearned," and repeated frequently her belief that homosexuality [was] the gravest of sins, and the perverse gay lifestyle [was] the most imminent threat from which parents must protect their children.<sup>21</sup> The remarkable visibility of Bryant and her hateful messages about gays and lesbians in popular culture as well as in political forums blunted the momentum of the gay liberation movement. Before Bryant's campaign, communities throughout the United States had begun to add LGBT protections to their human rights ordinances. However, after her grassroots campaign, many communities shied away from deliberating policies that would expand civil rights to gays and lesbians, which came to be regarded as too controversial. In the process, homophobia was reaffirmed, normalized, and institutionalized.

Despite the enormous influence of her campaign, Bryant's motivation for entering and remaining in the political sphere remained constant: she wanted to protect her children from the threat of militant homosexuality. While this rhetorical tactic, a common one among conservative women activists, won her many supporters from among the Christian Right and allowed her to achieve political success, it also spawned one of the most extreme political backlashes of the twentieth century—a backlash from which Bryant would never truly recover.

Immediately following Bryant's appearance on *The 700 Club* on February 24, 1977, hate mail began pouring into Bryant's thirty-three room Florida mansion. Though she was certainly offended by much of the correspondence, including the picture of two nude men engaging in a homosexual act and the letter that accompanied it (which Bryant described as "the most hideous thing I have ever seen . . . just filth") she received, Bryant tried not to let the growing backlash

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<sup>18</sup> Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story*, 85.

<sup>19</sup> "Days Without Sunshine: Anita Bryant's Anti-Gay Crusade," Stonewall National Museum, accessed April 26, 2012, <http://www.stonewallnationalmuseum.org/anita/panel8.html>.

<sup>20</sup> "Anita Bryant," NNBD: Tracking the Entire World.

<sup>21</sup> Green, Bob, and Anita Bryant, *At Any Cost* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1978), 144.

against her campaign influence her or her supporters.<sup>22</sup> What she did not realize however, was that the backlash she had inspired did not arise just in response to *Save Our Children*—it arose in response to *her* specifically. Following her unapologetic public call for legal discrimination against homosexuals in the workplace and beyond, supporters of the gay community rallied together in uncharted numbers for first time since the Stonewall riots of 1969, with a single goal in mind: bring down Anita Bryant.

Bryant was successful in every career she had undertaken, including politics. She was ambitious, strategic and determined. But she was no match for the unprecedented numbers of gay and lesbian activists who targeted her in the wake of her Dade County victory. These activists picketed, signed petitions, and protested against Bryant whenever she attended a public event, frequently condemning her with signs featuring fruit-themed puns (“Anita is the pits”) or harsh comparisons (“Adolf Hitler: God is on our side, Anita Bryant: God is on our side”).<sup>23</sup> They organized a community-wide boycott of Florida orange juice, and at a news conference in Des Moines, Iowa on October 14, 1977, gay activist Tom Higgins famously shoved a banana cream pie into Bryant’s face. She responded by saying “Well, at least it’s a fruit pie,” before breaking into tears and praying for God to forgive Higgins for his wrongdoings.<sup>24</sup>

The pie incident is widely regarded as the beginning of the end for Bryant; as a result of the backlash from the gay community, her life—not just her political campaign—began a downward spiral. Her contract with the Florida Citrus Commission lapsed, her record and book sales sharply declined and she was forced to sell her mansion and move back to Oklahoma. It was her 1980 divorce from Bob Green though that truly left Bryant reeling. She was, as a result of it, shunned by almost everyone in America, by those who despised her for her anti-gay politics and by her former supporters who denounced divorce as a sin. Though just three short years before she had everything—wealth, a happy home, a successful career and the support and admiration of virtually the entire Religious Right—by the time the smoke had cleared from her controversial campaign against gay rights, Bryant was left with nothing.

Bryant was, to some extent, able to put the pieces of her life back together, but she would never achieve the success or popularity she once had. In the twenty years after her divorce, Bryant tried unsuccessfully to revive her music career, opening several theater and stage companies where she was featured as the starring act. All failed dismally; in 2001 she declared bankruptcy, owing several million dollars to creditors.<sup>25</sup> Since 1980, Bryant has done her best to remain out of the limelight. She married her second husband, Charlie Hobson Dry, in 1990 and currently teaches Sunday school in Oklahoma. Her son, Robert Green Jr., suggests, “she is certainly more willing now to live and let live, I guess. She’s about 70, and she’s still amazingly energetic, and she would be putting a lot more energy into fighting gay rights if she still felt as strongly.”<sup>26</sup> But Bryant stands by her convictions; when asked in a recent interview about her

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<sup>22</sup> Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story*, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Williams, “Responding to ‘The Response,’” *Dallas Voice*, August 4, 2011, accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.dallasvoice.com/responding-the-response-1085251.html>.

<sup>24</sup> “Anita Bryant: Sunny Side of Life,” NewsOK: Powered by *The Oklahoman*, accessed May 1, 2012, <http://ndepth.newsok.com/anita-bryant>.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas C. Tobin, “Bankruptcy, Ill Will Plague Bryant,” *St. Petersburg Times*, April 28, 2002, accessed May 1, 2012, [http://www.sptimes.com/2002/04/28/State/Bankruptcy\\_ill\\_will\\_.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2002/04/28/State/Bankruptcy_ill_will_.shtml).

<sup>26</sup> Kate Sosin, “Talking with the Son of Bob Green and Anita Bryant,” *Windy City Times*, March 07, 2012, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Talking-with-the-son-of-Bob-Green-and-Anita-Bryant/36564.html>

controversial history and her stance against homosexuality, she responded, “I did the right thing . . . I’ve never regretted what I did.”<sup>27</sup>

That is, perhaps, the most remarkable and fascinating thing about Anita Bryant. She truly regrets nothing. Despite the enormous personal and political backlash she faced as a result of her stance on gay rights, she never changed her mind, or even pretended to. This is particularly striking given the fact that her entire reason for pursuing the fight against homosexuality was framed in service of her children. The doctrine of Christian motherhood which, according to Bryant, declares that a woman’s first and foremost responsibility is to her family defined her political ideology and dominated the discourse she used to frame her arguments and garner support in favor of repealing anti-discriminatory legislation.

She made it clear, by stating time and time again, that her campaign was never about demonizing homosexuals, but rather about protecting her children from them (“I don’t hate the homosexuals . . . but as a mother, I must protect my children from their evil influence”).<sup>28</sup> But by doing so, she exposed her children to a world of hatred and violence. Bryant reported that she and her family endured daily death threats, bomb threats and received hate mail with human feces and voodoo dolls regularly.<sup>29</sup> If her sole purpose in entering the political arena was to help repeal a law she thought would endanger her children, how could she fail to comprehend that her battle against gay rights was not saving her children, but in fact, subjecting them to perhaps a more direct kind of danger?

The answer, according to some within the GLBTQ community, is that she cannot be. Referring to the self-authored biography on Bryant’s own website, Anita Bryant Ministries International, a Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Queer encyclopedia entry about Bryant reads:

Not only is it riddled with inaccuracies and misrepresentations, but the biography also contains numerous misspellings and grammatical errors, unintentionally reminding the reader of Bryant’s lack of education. It self-pityingly presents her as a victim. . . . Tellingly, in the biography Bryant never acknowledges the damage she did to others or the suffering they experienced as a result of her crusade. (For example, at the height of her anti-gay campaign, a young man, Robert Hillsborough, was murdered in San Francisco by four gay bashers, who shouted, “This one’s for Anita!”) She is focused exclusively on the injustices she believes she has suffered as a result of her Christian beliefs.<sup>30</sup>

The author of this passage may have a clear bias against Bryant, but the entry is worth considering. Anita Bryant shocked an entire nation with her refusal to adapt her opinion, or to, as the entry asserts, acknowledge the damage she did to others. Though she may have, in her attempt to “protect” her children from homosexual influence, actually put them in harm’s way, she would likely never acknowledge that. This is not necessarily because she is ignorant or, as the entry suggests, uneducated, but because she simply did not interpret the situation that way.

Bryant, throughout her life and especially during her brief but influential time in the political sphere, saw what she wanted to see; this may have been one of the reasons she was

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<sup>27</sup> “Anita Bryant: Sunny Side of Life.”

<sup>28</sup> “Anita Bryant,” NNBD: Tracking the Entire World.

<sup>29</sup> “Anita Bryant: Sunny Side of Life.”

<sup>30</sup> “Bryant, Anita (b. 1940),” GLBTQ: The World’s Largest Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Culture, accessed April 28, 2012, [http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/bryant\\_anita.html](http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/bryant_anita.html).

initially so successful. However, her refusal to acknowledge counterarguments and insistence upon relying solely on religious and moral beliefs rather than logical or legal evidence is likely what led to her downfall; furthermore, this may be the reason she is still so associated with bigotry, homophobia and ignorance nearly fifty years after her moment in the political spotlight.

Analyzing Bryant in this way reveals a great deal not only about her as a person, but about the larger political framework in which she worked. For example, Bryant's consistent refusal to admit being wrong or take responsibility for having hurt anyone is clearly a direct result of her religious upbringing and steadfast devotion to the Bible, which she was so committed to that she was unable to see beyond, even if it would have benefited her personally or politically. Even when churches, along with most of her former supporters, blacklisted her after her divorce, she never strayed from her unyielding devotion to her religion. Though this perhaps does not seem logical, it made sense to Bryant, who was likely inspired by religious doctrine regarding the ultimate example of a misunderstood figure persecuted for defending his beliefs (Jesus Christ). Likewise, her strong ties to and belief in moral conservatism, the essential component of which is a fundamental resistance to change, led her to develop a political strategy based on never compromising or backtracking.

Bryant's dual commitments to Christianity and conservatism enabled her to succeed but also destroyed her. Christianity and conservatism were so entrenched in Bryant's ideology, from childhood, that they were inextricably linked; her entire understanding of the world was based on them. This accounts for why, when she adopted the rhetoric of Christian motherhood as part of her campaign against gay rights, it was not a political tactic for her. Rather, it was an expression of her interpretation of the world. She truly believed, above all else, that it was her responsibility to protect her children from gay and lesbian individuals; her reasoning may not be valid or relatable, but it is consistent. This demonstrates how examining Bryant from a neutral but critical perspective can facilitate a greater understanding of the Christian Right, and specifically of Christian Motherhood.

Despite the widespread political success she enjoyed in mid-1977 with the repeal of the Dade County anti-discrimination ordinance, Bryant has been the subject of very little academic scholarship. This is, potentially, because a majority of Americans still think of her as ignorant, misguided, and hateful—someone not worthy of serious political analysis. However, widespread disdain for or genuine dislike of Anita Bryant should not preclude her as a subject of scholarly inquiry. She may have been bigoted, naïve, and ignorant; she may even have been delusional, or a liar as the entry on her in the GLBTQ online encyclopedia proposes. But none of these things should outweigh the fact that, in 1977, Anita Bryant organized a grassroots political movement and led it, against daunting odds, to victory. She was a champion of the Religious Right, an important faction of America's social and political history, and is worth more exploration. She led an often-surprising and eventful life, and she shaped the way a number of Americans thought about religion, politics and equality by spearheading a movement to prevent the expansion of civil rights to a defined segment of the population (thereby beginning a battle which is still being fought today). If nothing else, she galvanized the gay community and challenged supporters of gay rights in ways that inspired them to fight for equality with a kind of passion they did not before.

Anita Bryant sought to be the paragon of the Christian mother and was proud to represent the Religious Right in the way she did. Whatever we may think of her and however our opinions of her may change, one thing is for certain: her opinion of herself has never shifted, and

following the pattern of belief she has displayed all of her life, it is unlikely that it ever will. On her website, last updated in 2006, she had this to say about herself:

Anita Bryant was a phenomenon of the late seventies—an entertainer who was willing to stand up to the vilest and most scurrilous kind of public abuse for the sake of family, morality, simple decency and the Word of God. She suffered more than anyone will ever know. She paid a tremendous price. But her confidence always rested in God. The Tulsa, Oklahoma Tribune described her as a square gal out of Tulsa originally, “Who believes in such things as blueberry and apple pie, God, country and the difference between men and women.” Anita liked that she will always be remembered as a witness and defender of the Truth in the twentieth century. A real heroine.<sup>31</sup>

Studying primary resources like this one may be frustrating, but it can also be illuminating, and, if given adequate attention, will provide scholars with a more complete understanding not only of individual women like Anita Bryant, but of the larger political movements, like the Christian Right, of which they were an essential part.

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<sup>31</sup> “Anita Bryant Biography.”