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Kate Kelly's Ordinary Equality: The Fearless Women and Queer People Who Shaped the U.S. Constitution and the Equal Rights Amendment

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Kelly, Kate, art by Nicole LaRue. *Ordinary Equality: The Fearless Women and Queer People Who Shaped the U.S. Constitution and the Equal Rights Amendment*. Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2022. 231p. \$27.99.

*Reviewed by B. Austin Waters**

¶29 *Ordinary Equality: The Fearless Women and Queer People Who Shaped the U.S. Constitution and the Equal Rights Amendment*, written by Kate Kelly and illustrated by Nicole LaRue, is exactly what it seems to be. Rather than taking a macro approach to the text and history of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), *Ordinary Equality* tells that history through the lens of the people who were essential to its formulation. Starting from just after the United States declared its independence and running through 2018, *Ordinary Equality* feels more biopic than historical treatise.

¶30 The ERA was originally introduced in Congress in 1923, then reintroduced in every Congress until it was finally passed in 1972, before being sent to the states for ratification. It has had a difficult history since then, facing much opposition and failing to achieve the necessary ratifications by the 1982 deadline. The ERA was figuratively dead in the water until it was revived by a handful of supporters, led by Nevada state Senator Pat Spearman, who introduced a bill to ratify the amendment in 2015. With new ratifications in Nevada, Illinois, and Virginia, followed by the first hearing held by Congress about the ERA in 36 years, *Ordinary Equality* is especially timely.

¶31 Kelly begins with a quick overview of the ERA and her relationship with the proposed amendment. Her distinct style is clear not just in this introduction, but in the text as a whole; she states early on, “I am not a historian; I’m a storyteller” (p.xx). Her clear narrative voice makes the entirety of the book feel genuine, much like having a conversation with a friend: a friend with a JD who happens to be a bit of an expert on the ERA. Her candor feels novel for a historical book, and she is upfront about her goals: to bring attention to the women and queer people left out of historical accounts and to strengthen awareness of the ERA as new moves are made to ratify it across the country.

¶32 Focusing on individuals allows Kelly to highlight important figures in the history of the ERA. She includes some well-known women such as first lady Abigail Adams, co-founder of the NAACP Mary Church Terrell, and the first woman of color in Congress, Patsy Takemoto Mink. She also includes some lesser-known figures such as Phillis Wheatley, the first African American author to publish a book of poetry, and Pauli Murray, a lawyer, activist, and professor. The book is well-researched with an easy to navigate collection of endnotes. There are 12 in-depth chapters about the personal history of specific people and their work toward women’s rights and the ERA. The chapters include short interludes about figures related to either the previous chapter or their work for (and sometimes against) the ERA. Every chapter is paired with the eye-catching work of artist Nicole LaRue, whose stylized typography leads to a dynamic layout not usually seen in a standard historical text.

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¶33 The book concludes with a positive and sometimes critical look at the struggle for equal rights since the founding of the United States. Rather than offering a recitation of the accomplishments of only White women, Kelly takes care to give a nuanced look at some famous women's rights leaders whose work furthered the cause of equal rights but purposefully left out non-White and queer women in the process. Kelly does an excellent job of reflecting the myriad of voices and work leading toward equality.

¶34 Overall, the book is a fun and interesting read. Although some of the figures depicted in *Ordinary Equality* will be familiar, many may be unknown to readers. Regardless, there is something new to be learned about all of them. Kelly's background in podcasting shines throughout the text in the way she depicts the story of each person's life, and in her easy transitions from subject to subject. Although it feels like a light read, it is engaging and never feels patronizing. It does what it sets out to do, directing a spotlight on the people who have done the work to get us to where we are today.

¶35 *Ordinary Equality* would be a great summer read for a law student or professional, an easy first step into this area of the law for an undergraduate, or an entry point for someone interested in the history of equal rights, women's history in America, or the ERA.
