

UC Santa Barbara
Volume 5, Issue 1 (Spring 2025)

Title

Shifting Narratives: Abortion, Newspapers, and Socio-Political Change in California in 1967-1973

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Journal

The UC Santa Barbara Undergraduate Journal of History, 5(1)

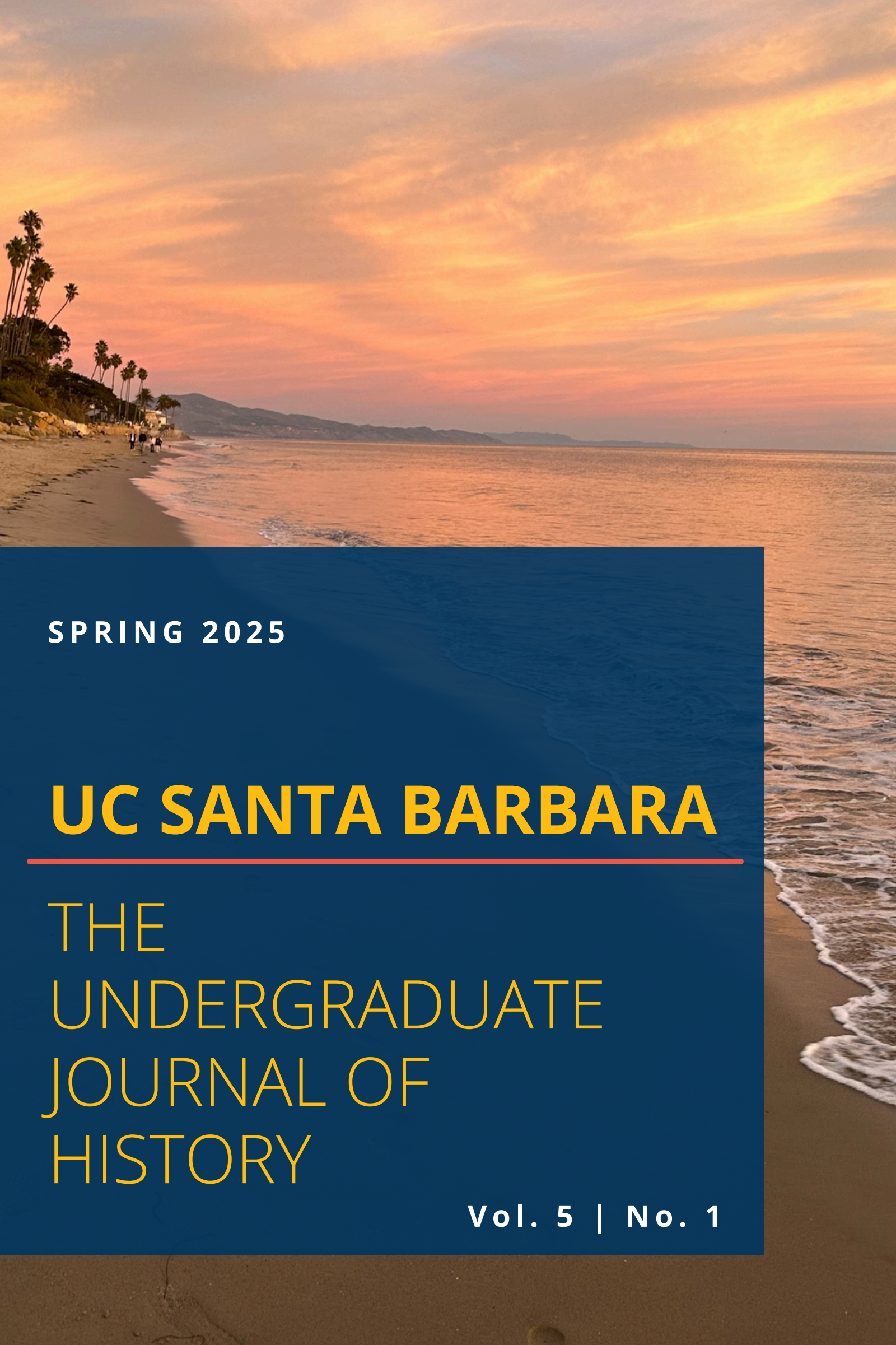
Author

Martinez, Taylee

Publication Date

2025-04-01

Peer reviewed



SPRING 2025

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE
UNDERGRADUATE
JOURNAL OF
HISTORY

Vol. 5 | No. 1

© **The UCSB Undergraduate Journal of History**
3236 Humanities and Social Sciences Building
The Department of History, Division of Humanities and Fine Arts
The University of California, Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara, California
93106-9410

Website

<https://undergradjournal.history.ucsb.edu/>

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Shifting Narratives: Abortion, Newspapers, and Socio-Political Change in California in 1967-1973

*Taylee Martinez*¹

Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of the 1960s and 1970s, amid societal and political turbulence, abortion emerged as a focal point at the nexus of morality, legality, and personal autonomy. California during this era experienced a convergence of socio-political movements, including civil rights activism and countercultural shifts, which profoundly influenced perspectives on reproductive rights. Legislative shifts, epitomized by the enactment of the Therapeutic Abortion Act of 1967, mirrored evolving societal attitudes toward abortion, while landmark court cases like *People v. Belous* (1969) further shaped the discourse surrounding abortion rights in the state. This era also witnessed extensive media coverage of abortion policy, prompting inquiries into bias and framing within newspaper reporting. Given the media's power to influence public discourse, examining how newspapers represented abortion during this transformative period provides critical insight into the broader socio-political landscape.

This research addresses several pivotal questions regarding newspaper coverage of abortion in California from 1967 to 1973. It explores how newspapers framed discussions around abortion, including the language and imagery commonly employed. It examines how legislative changes, such as the Therapeutic Abortion Act of 1967, influenced newspaper coverage and public discourse. The study also investigates the impact of key court cases, notably *Roe v. Wade* (1973), on newspaper narratives and public perceptions regarding abortion rights. It assesses the extent to which newspaper coverage influenced public opinion on abortion, as evidenced by editorial decisions, reader responses, and shifts in discourse over time. Furthermore, it delves into how religious perspectives were portrayed in newspapers and how religious groups' viewpoints influenced coverage of abortion issues. These questions aim to shed light on the complex interplay between legislation, news, public opinion, and ethical considerations in the context of abortion coverage during this critical period.

Although it is revealed that the newspapers currently conclude that public opinion was varied, this diversity of perspectives was shaped by the ways in which abortion was framed in media coverage. While newspapers provided a platform for a range of voices, their editorial choices—including

¹ Taylee Martinez is a soon-to-be graduate from University of California, Santa Barbara with a Bachelor of Arts in History of Public Policy and Law, and is deeply involved with Planned Parenthood, which inspired the focus of this paper.

language, tone, and selection of sources—played a role in reinforcing or challenging prevailing societal attitudes. This research examines how local contexts and political climates influenced the portrayal of abortion in California newspapers and how these representations contributed to shaping public discourse. By focusing on California rather than a national perspective, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of how regional media coverage reflected and influenced shifting attitudes toward reproductive rights during this period.

In addressing the primary sources essential to investigating the research questions, this study will primarily rely on newspapers and other primary sources directly reporting on abortion-related matters. These sources include coverage of significant abortion court cases, such as *Roe v. Wade* and *People v. Belous*, as well as opinion editorials, reports on criminal cases concerning abortion, and news updates on abortion issues. The newspapers sourced for this research are obtained from the California Digital Newspaper Collection. This collection, curated by the Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research (CBSR) at the University of California, Riverside, funded by the State of California, provides a rich repository of historical newspapers spanning the 1960s and 1970s.

I will begin by providing historical context, detailing the era's socio-political climate and shaping attitudes toward reproductive rights. Next, I will outline the evolution of abortion policy, focusing on key legislative milestones and court cases that advanced reproductive rights. Following this, I will analyze newspaper coverage from 1967 to 1969, exploring how the framing of abortion in news reports contributed to variations in public opinion. I will examine the nuances of newspaper coverage, including language, imagery, and potential biases that reflect and influence societal perspectives. Subsequently, I will compare this with newspaper coverage from 1970 to 1973, identifying any shifts in framing and narrative construction. Additionally, the paper will reflect on the ethical responsibilities of journalists when reporting on controversial issues, acknowledging the potential consequences of biased coverage on public perception and policy outcomes. Through these analyses, I aim to demonstrate that while public opinion on abortion was varied, the way newspapers represented abortion played a crucial role in shaping the terms of the debate and influencing societal attitudes.

Historical Context and Socio-Political Climate

The 1960s and 70s in California were marked by profound social and political upheaval, as the state became a focal point for various socio-political movements that reverberated across the nation. Civil rights activism, countercultural rebellion, and advocacy for individual rights flourished within California's diverse and dynamic landscape. During this era, California emerged as a civil rights leader

for the nation.² These movements not only challenged established norms and institutions but also reshaped societal attitudes toward issues of personal autonomy and individual rights.

“California 1960,” a comprehensive study of California city elections, illuminates how the state’s increasing influence in national politics accelerated partisan attitudes and behaviors during this era. With California emerging as a stronghold for leading presidential candidates and boasting a Congressional delegation set to become the largest in the nation by 1970, the state’s political significance intensified external pressures and exacerbated partisan debates.³ This heightened political climate, particularly regarding legislative districting, created California’s pivotal role in shaping national political trends and the evolving landscape of American political discourse. The study reveals how California’s political dynamics not only reflected but amplified the broader national shifts towards more pronounced partisan divisions. As California’s prominence grew, so did its ability to sway national policies and elections, illustrating the state’s critical impact on the overall political framework of the United States. The escalating partisanship within California served as both a microcosm and a catalyst for the increasingly polarized nature of American politics during this period, highlighting the interconnectedness of state and national political developments.

Moreover, California’s economic prowess during the 1960s became increasingly evident through its pioneering role in several industries. World War II increased the speed of a new economy, with the demand for raw materials increasing and technological and scientific inventions speeding up. The war and post-war era allowed for growth in some of California’s biggest industries, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and service industries.⁴ Simultaneously, California’s innovations in the financial sector had far-reaching implications, particularly concerning reproductive rights. Bank of America’s 1958 experiment in Fresno laid the foundation for the modern credit card industry, leading to the creation of BankAmericard, later known as Visa Inc.⁵ This innovation revolutionized consumer finance while also facilitating access to reproductive healthcare services. By providing individuals with greater financial autonomy and flexibility, credit cards enabled them to overcome barriers to accessing abortion and contraception services, empowering them to make informed decisions about their reproductive health.

² Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978*, (Oxford University Press: 2010), p. 5.

³ Eugene C. Lee, “California 1960,” In *The Politics of Nonpartisanship: A Study of California City Elections*, (University of California Press, 1960), p. 11.

⁴ Gerald D. Nash, “Stages of California’s Economic Growth, 1870-1970: An Interpretation,” *California Historical Quarterly* 51:4 (1972): pp. 315–30.

⁵ Joseph Nocera, “The Day the Credit Card was Born,” *The Washington Post*, [November 4, 1994](#).

Furthermore, in 1966, California banks collaborated to form the Interbank Card Association, laying the groundwork for MasterCard, another major player in the credit card industry.⁶ The creation of credit cards both democratized access to financial services and played a significant role in shaping attitudes toward reproductive rights. Thus, California's advancements in the financial sectors during the 1960s increased its status as an economic powerhouse and also had profound implications for reproductive rights, reflecting the interconnectedness of economic empowerment and bodily autonomy. However, it is important to note that, despite these economic strides, women were still legally barred from opening a bank account or obtaining a credit card in their name without a male co-signer until the passage of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act in 1974. This underscores the limitations of financial progress in truly granting women full autonomy. While California's innovations provided some pathways to economic independence, these gains remained constrained by systemic legal barriers that continued to restrict women's financial and bodily self-determination.

This broader dynamic between economic and personal autonomy also influenced California's political landscape, as the state's expansive population, thriving economy, and cultural leadership made it a crucial player in national politics. Its influence was evident in presidential elections, such as the 1960 contest in which California narrowly favored Vice President Richard Nixon over Senator John F. Kennedy, highlighting its political significance. The state's growing representation in Congress further strengthened its role in shaping national policy debates, while Nixon's victories in California in 1968 and 1972 reinforced its importance in the broader political landscape. Furthermore, California's political environment during the 1960s and 70s was characterized by a spirit of activism and grassroots mobilization, with citizens actively engaging in political advocacy and organizing around various social and environmental issues. This culture of activism helped drive significant policy changes at both the state and national levels, including landmark legislation on civil rights, environmental protection, and healthcare reform. Known for being an environmental policy trendsetter, California often implemented state standards that initially surpassed federal regulations, which were later adopted more widely across the country. The state's progressive values and commitment to social justice were reflected in its policymaking, with California often leading the way in enacting reforms that set precedents for other states to follow.⁷ This pioneering spirit in policy reform helped create California's prominent role as a catalyst for broader national change.

California's influence during the 1960s and 70s extended far beyond its borders, shaping national discourse and policymaking in profound ways. From its pivotal role in advancing civil rights and social justice to its innovations in industry and finance, California played a central role in driving

⁶ Jackie Lam, "History of Credit Cards: When Were Credit Cards Invented?," *SoFi*, (13 March 2024).

⁷ Tracy E. Perkins, "Introduction," in *Evolution of a Movement: Four Decades of California Environmental Justice Activism* (University of California Press, 2022), p. 17

social, political, and economic change during this transformative period in American history. By understanding the interconnectedness of California's political, social, and economic dynamics, we gain valuable insights into the forces that shaped the nation's trajectory during this pivotal era. This historical context, influenced by California's growing political influence and the concurrent civil rights movement, provides a crucial foundation for understanding how these factors intersected with attitudes toward reproductive rights. As California became a hub for national political discussions and activism, the state's shifting socio-political landscape played a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and policy outcomes regarding issues of personal autonomy and individual rights, including reproductive rights.

Evolution of Abortion Policy

Within the dynamic socio-political landscape of 1960s and 70s California, the evolution of abortion policy became a key part of the broader discourse on reproductive rights and personal autonomy. Amid civil rights movements and growing advocacy for individual liberties, organizations like the Association for the Study of Abortion (ASA) played a crucial role in shaping policy. Founded in 1964, the ASA sought to advance abortion reform by electing physician Robert Hall as its leader, believing "the future of the organization can best be served by a physician in the role of chairman". In 1968, it introduced U.S. physicians to the vacuum suction machine, a safer alternative to the more invasive surgical method of dilation and curettage.⁸ These efforts, alongside shifting public attitudes and legal challenges, helped drive California's gradual liberalization of abortion laws.

Starting in the nineteenth century, around 1880, all states, including California, enforced strict anti-abortion laws, permitting the procedure solely to safeguard the mother's life.⁹ During this era, the state enacted bans to safeguard the lives of pregnant women and girls, considering the mortality rates associated with abortions as a primary concern.¹⁰ The first half of the twentieth century saw little legislative change; criminal abortion statutes remained on the books but were often loosely enforced.¹¹ This period of relative inaction set the stage for future legal battles and growing public debate around reproductive rights.

Furthermore, this legal landscape spurred underground abortion networks and clandestine medical practices, showcasing the contentious evolution of reproductive rights in the state. As

⁸ Joffe, Weitz, and Stacey, "Uneasy Allies: Pro-choice Physicians, Feminist Health Activists and the Struggle for Abortion Rights," p. 779.

⁹ Angela Hume, *Deep Care*, (AK Press, 2023), p. 8.

¹⁰ Samuel Buell, "Criminal Abortion Revisited," *New York University Law Review*, (January 1991). p. 1782.

¹¹ Buell, "Criminal Abortion Revisited," p. 1795.

historian Alicia Gutierrez-Romine explains, California's abortion statute remained "stagnant and unrepresentative of women's needs in the twentieth century," forcing women to seek alternatives outside the bounds of legal medicine.¹² This inflexibility led to the rise of cross-border abortions, as women traveled to Mexico, where illicit clinics thrived in response to American demand, particularly after 1953 when the number of American women seeking abortions in Mexican border cities surged.¹³ While abortion was illegal in both California and Mexico, the border became a site of reproductive choice for women with few other options, though at significant personal risk. Beyond legal consequences, women faced additional punishment through public exposure and societal shame, reinforcing gendered systems of control. As Michel Foucault describes, such forms of punishment acted as a "school" for disciplining not only those caught but also all "potentially guilty" women, ensuring widespread social deterrence.¹⁴ The growing number of these dangerous procedures, along with shifting attitudes toward reproductive healthcare, catalyzed the urgent need for legal reform.

One of the key milestones in this evolution was the enactment of the Therapeutic Abortion Act of 1967.¹⁵ Introduced by Craig Biddle, a Republican member of the California State Assembly representing the 74th district of California, which encompasses coastal central Orange County, this legislative landmark marked a significant departure from previous abortion policies in California.^{16,17} This act allows abortion to occur under a licensed physician if the mother's health, mental or physical, is at risk or if the pregnancy occurred from rape or incest.¹⁸ Its legalization of abortion under specific circumstances not only reflected evolving social norms but also paved the way for broader discussions surrounding reproductive rights and healthcare access. By acknowledging women's agency over their bodies, the Act not only challenged entrenched societal taboos but also catalyzed progressive reforms aimed at empowering women and ensuring their bodily autonomy.¹⁹ Its enactment signaled a pivotal moment in California's history, catalyzing progressive reforms that aimed to empower women and uphold their bodily autonomy, laying the groundwork for further advancements in abortion rights.

¹² Alicia Gutierrez-Romine, *From Back Alley to the Border* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020), p. 6.

¹³ Gutierrez-Romine, "From Back Alley to the Border."

¹⁴ Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, (University of California Press, 1997), p. 5.

¹⁵ "Michigan Legislature", "Michigan State Senate Committee on Abortion Law Reform", SR 185: *Information of California Therapeutic Abortion Act of 1967*, [\(December 1968\)](#).

¹⁶ "Michigan Legislature", "Michigan State Senate Committee on Abortion Law Reform", SR 185: *Information of California Therapeutic Abortion Act of 1967*, [\(December 1968\)](#)

¹⁷ W. Craig Biddle, "JoinCalifornia Election History for the State of California," [Link](#).

¹⁸ Brian Pendleton, "The California Therapeutic Abortion Act: An Analysis," *Hastings Law Journal* 19 (1967).

¹⁹ Pendleton, "The California Therapeutic Abortion Act."

Moreover, pivotal court cases such as *People v. Belous* (1969) significantly influenced the trajectory of abortion rights in California. This case, which challenged restrictive abortion laws, catalyzed the expansion of access to abortion services within the state. By challenging the legal barriers to reproductive choice, *People v. Belous* paved the way for greater autonomy and agency for individuals seeking abortion care in California. *People v. Belous* marked the first time a patient's constitutional right to abortion was upheld in the courts.²⁰ The decision brought forth varying perspectives on the issue: Attorney Zad Leavy discussed the legal quandaries faced by those with unintended pregnancies and criticized the existing ban while being cautious about full legalization; Dr. Robert Hood opposed legalization and questioned the medical reasons for abortions; and Dr. Leon Belous strongly advocated for legal abortion on demand, describing the abortion ban as an example of "man's inhumanity to women." Belous argued that women seeking abortions were treated with less sympathy than injured animals and recounted his extensive experience with women suffering from self-induced or unsafe abortions.²¹

Belous shared his hope that California's "antiquated, unrealistic, and barbaric" ban would be overturned, and five years later, his involvement in *People v. Belous* achieved just that.²² This case was a landmark in reproductive rights, as it drew national attention to the issue and inspired further legal challenges against restrictive abortion laws. The California Supreme Court's decision in favor of Dr. Belous in *People v. Belous* was a crucial step, effectively nullifying the state's abortion ban and recognizing a constitutional right to abortion. The court stated in the majority opinion that, "The fundamental right of the woman to choose whether to bear children follows from the Supreme Court's and this court's repeated acknowledgment of a 'right of privacy' or 'liberty' in matters related to marriage, family, and sex."²³ This set a precedent for future cases and shifted the focus of abortion rights advocates toward the federal courts. The case's emphasis on privacy rights would later be pivotal in the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision, making *People v. Belous* a significant precursor in the fight for abortion rights.

However, amidst these legislative and judicial advancements, uncertainty loomed regarding the future of abortion law in California. As Jane Lange McGrew highlighted, complex legal and constitutional questions showcased the ambiguity surrounding abortion rights during this period. She

²⁰ *People v. Belous*, 71 Cal.2d 954 (Cal. 1969).

²¹ Matt, 2019, "Before *Roe v. Wade*: The 50th Anniversary of a Landmark California Case. Planned Parenthood Advocates of Arizona," Planned Parenthood Action Fund. September 3, 2019. <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-advocates-arizona/blog/before-roe-v-wade-the-50th-anniversary-of-a-landmark-california-case>.

²² *People v. Belous*, 71 Cal.2d 954 (Cal. 1969).

²³ *People v. Belous*, 71 Cal.2d 954 (Cal. 1969).

noted, "Until the court further clarifies the extent of the right to bear children, the future of abortion law in California is uncertain," encapsulating the ongoing legal debates and the pressing need for clarity in defining reproductive rights.²⁴ This uncertainty not only reflected the complexities of navigating constitutional principles but also contributed to a climate of instability and tension surrounding abortion rights, as stakeholders grappled with the implications of legal ambiguity on access to reproductive healthcare. The unresolved legal issues indicated a broader struggle within the judicial system to balance individual rights with evolving societal values, showcasing the tenuous nature of reproductive freedoms during this transformative period.

Understanding the evolution of abortion policy in California during this transformative period provides crucial context for examining how legislative changes and court cases influenced attitudes towards reproductive rights and shaped public discourse surrounding abortion. These developments reflected changing societal norms and laid the groundwork for broader conversations about autonomy, agency, and the right to make decisions about one's body.

Diversity of Views and Framing

Newspapers from 1967-1969

The late 1960s marked a period of significant social and political change, with California at the forefront of various movements advocating for civil rights and personal autonomy. Against this backdrop, newspaper coverage of abortion reflected the broader socio-political climate and the shifting dynamics of reproductive rights advocacy. This intersection of media and social movements is critical to understanding how public perceptions were formed. Historians have emphasized the influence of newspaper representation in shaping public opinion and influencing societal attitudes toward contentious issues like abortion.

Katie Woodruff's study, "Coverage of Abortion in Select U.S. Newspapers," suggests that news does not support public understanding of abortion as a common, safe part of reproductive health care. Such framing may undermine public support for policies that protect access to this common health care service.²⁵ This study is one example of how it is essential to explore how the specific media narratives of the 1960s shaped the trajectory of reproductive rights advocacy during this transformative period. Analyzing these newspaper narratives helps us understand the role of journalism in influencing public opinion and policy development, revealing the long-term impacts of coverage on reproductive

²⁴ Jane Lang McGrew, "To Be or not to be: The Constitutional Question of California Abortion Law," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 118 (1970): p. 643.

²⁵ Katie Woodruff, "Coverage of Abortion in Select U.S. Newspapers - PMC." PubMed Central (PMC). 2019.

healthcare debates and highlighting the importance of critical media literacy in shaping informed public discourse.

Newspapers in California were instrumental in shaping public perceptions and debates surrounding abortion during the 1960s. Articles from publications such as the *Madera Tribune* and the *National City Star News* exemplify the diverse opinions on this contentious issue. For instance, the *Madera Tribune's* article "Should Abortion Law Be Liberalized" by Carroll Brugmann from 14 March, 1967, begins with a quote from California State Senator Anthony C. Beilenson of Los Angeles, stating, "Virtually every abortion is a criminal act."²⁶ This startling declaration immediately grabs the reader's attention, framing the issue in stark, uncompromising terms and setting a dramatic tone for the discussion that follows. By opening with such a provocative statement, the article marks the intense emotions and moral complexities surrounding the abortion debate. It then presents differing views from various political figures, illustrating the broader societal and political debates of the era and illuminating the diverse perspectives on abortion legislation. This approach not only reflects the contentious nature of the issue but also encourages readers to consider the wide range of opinions and the underlying ethical dilemmas.

However, this article provides reasons why abortion should be liberalized. Brugmann provides testimonies from doctors and the California Medical Association, claiming that "California doctors agree overwhelmingly that the state is archaic and obstructs good medical practice." The wording Brugmann uses showcases strategies used to advocate for abortion liberalization during the 1960s. By citing testimonies from reputable sources such as doctors and medical associations, the article aims to appeal to authority and scientific expertise to bolster its argument. The use of words like "overwhelmingly" emphasizes consensus among medical professionals, framing abortion liberalization as a necessary step forward for medical practice in California. This tactic underscores the broader effort to legitimize abortion as a legitimate healthcare procedure and challenge the existing legal barriers perceived as obstructing medical progress.

Similarly, the *National City Star News* featured an article in which Reverend W. Francis B. Maguire of the Church of the Good Shepherd expressed his views on abortion, stating:

But I am particularly alarmed by permitting abortion in cases of 'statutory rape' where the girl involved may be healthy, knowledgeable, responsible, and a willing partner in sexual relations, the sole ground for abortion being that she is a minor. I cannot see

²⁶ Carol Brugmann, "Should Abortion Law Be Liberalized," *Madera Tribune*, 75:122, (14 March 1967).

how such a concession can be made in this instance without the slightest moral justification.²⁷

Reverend Maguire highlights the religious and moral concerns that influenced the abortion debate, reflecting the deep ethical divisions within society. However, Reverend Maguire's assertion that minors involved in statutory rape could be seen as willing participants is profoundly problematic. It overlooks the inherent power imbalances and legal protections designed to safeguard minors, presenting a viewpoint that many would find ethically indefensible and deeply troubling. These examples demonstrate how newspapers provided platforms for individuals to express their views on abortion law, capturing the diversity of opinions and societal debates surrounding the issue.

Furthermore, Reverend Maguire's wording in his statement reflects deep-seated moral concerns regarding abortion, particularly in cases involving statutory rape. Phrases such as "particularly alarmed" convey the gravity of his objections, emphasizing the seriousness of his ethical stance. Additionally, his characterization of minors involved in statutory rape as potentially "healthy, knowledgeable, responsible, and a willing partner" reveals skepticism about the vulnerability of underage individuals in such situations. This language not only reveals Reverend Maguire's moral position but also reveals underlying assumptions about the agency and culpability of minors. Additionally, his assertion that permitting abortion in these cases lacks "the slightest moral justification" demonstrates a strong moral absolutism, overlooking the complexities of consent, coercion, and the rights of minors.²⁸ Overall, Reverend Maguire's wording reveals the tensions between religious teachings, moral absolutes, and the complexities of real-world situations, underscoring the challenges of reconciling divergent values and perspectives in discussions about reproductive rights.

However, it's crucial to recognize that the examples cited from newspapers such as the *Madera Tribune* and the *National City Star News* offer only a snapshot of the broader discourse surrounding abortion in California during the 1960s. While these articles provide valuable insights into diverse opinions on the issue, they do not represent a comprehensive picture of the state's populace or the entirety of media coverage on abortion at the time. Moreover, the viewpoints expressed by individuals like Reverend W. Francis B. Maguire highlight the complex intersections of religion, morality, and law in shaping attitudes toward abortion. Nonetheless, while newspapers played a significant role in shaping public discourse on abortion in 1960s California, they provide only a limited perspective. Understanding the complexities of this historical period requires a nuanced examination of various sources and viewpoints to grasp the full spectrum of societal debates and attitudes surrounding reproductive rights.

²⁷ Reverend W. Francis. B. Maguire, "Episcopalian Pastor Gives Abortion View" *National City Star-News*, 84: 77, (25 May 1967).

²⁸ Maguire, "Episcopalian Pastor Gives Abortion View."

Newspapers from 1970-1973

During the early 1970s, newspapers like *Synapse* and the *National City Star News* played crucial roles in shaping public discourse on abortion, particularly within California. *Synapse*, as the student newspaper of the University of California, San Francisco, likely reflected the attitudes and activism of younger generations regarding abortion. On the other hand, the *National City Star News* provided insights into the perspectives of its community, influenced by its distinct socio-political climate. Analyzing these two sources offers valuable insight into the evolving newspaper representation of abortion during this transformative period in California. Each publication, with its unique demographic, geographical coverage, and editorial perspectives, contributed to the complex and diverse public discourse surrounding abortion in the early 1970s.

In this era of shifting attitudes toward reproductive rights, California stood at the forefront of the fight for abortion rights. Before the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, most Christians, especially white Evangelicals, did not prioritize the abortion issue.²⁹ However, California has already taken significant steps to liberalize its abortion laws. Governor Ronald Reagan's signing of the Therapeutic Abortion Act in 1967 made California one of the first states to legalize abortion in certain circumstances, setting a precedent for the rest of the country. Despite this, Reagan was personally opposed to abortion. Throughout his political career, he consistently spoke against it, later becoming a vocal advocate for overturning *Roe v. Wade*. As president, he reinforced his anti-abortion stance, stating at a 1987 March for Life rally that “our national commitment to the dignity of all human life must begin with the respect for our most basic civil right: the right to life.”³⁰ Although his signing of the Therapeutic Abortion Act played a role in expanding access, Reagan later expressed regret, believing the law had been abused beyond its intended scope. Throughout the early 1970s, legal battles and legislative efforts further shaped and refined abortion rights in the state, solidifying California's reputation as a progressive leader in reproductive healthcare.

Newspapers during the early 1970s, such as the *National City Star News*, provided coverage of the religious dimensions of abortion, reflecting the diverse religious perspectives on the issue. Religious institutions played a significant role in shaping public opinion and policy regarding abortion, with beliefs often intersecting with moral and ethical considerations. The article “Spotlight on Religion: The Church and Abortion,” featured in the *National City Star News* on 21 May 1970, by Reverend Lester Kinsolving, provides an insightful exploration of the diverse stances of religious institutions regarding abortion, offering valuable insights into the intricate landscape of religious perspectives on

²⁹ Randall Balmer, “The Religious Right and the Abortion Myth,” *Politico*, (10 May 2010).

³⁰ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks to Participants in the March for Life Rally,” *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*, ([22 January 1988](#)).

the matter. Specifically, the article delves into the views of various Catholic leaders on abortion. Notably, it reveals that churches in National City were primarily interested in making statements rather than engaging in direct political action, as expressed by Bishop Raymond Gallagher: "We have no desire to effect a legislative program in this regard."³¹ This observation indicates a prevailing trend where religious entities aim to influence public discourse and moral conscience without necessarily advocating for specific legislative changes. Such a stance reflects a cautious approach to navigating the complex intersection of religious beliefs and public policy, highlighting the delicate balance between moral authority and political activism within religious communities.

The word choices in the article reflect a nuanced understanding of the dynamics within religious institutions regarding abortion. For instance, the use of the term "Spotlight on Religion" suggests a deliberate focus on the role of religion in shaping attitudes toward abortion, positioning it as a central theme of discussion. Moreover, the characterization of churches as primarily interested in "making statements" rather than "engaging in direct political action" suggests a strategic approach to influence public discourse without necessarily committing to specific legislative agendas.³² This choice of language exemplifies the cautious and calculated nature of religious involvement in the abortion debate, showing the delicate balance between moral influence and political engagement.

In contrast, the article "Abortion Practices and Techniques Aired at the UCSF Symposium," featured in *Synapse* - The UCSF student newspaper on 6 April, 1973, by Dale Sprouse, provides a compelling insight into a pivotal event at the University of California, San Francisco. As a student newspaper, *Synapse* offers a unique perspective, capturing the interests and concerns of the university's diverse student body. The symposium showcased groundbreaking medical procedures and became a focal point for heated debates and protests among students and faculty alike. Attendees were exposed to cutting-edge advancements in abortion practices, underscoring the evolving landscape of reproductive healthcare. However, amidst the display of innovation, the event faced opposition from protesters. A mother of six, among the few dozen protestors, expressed her grievances by stating, "We're mad at UC... We feel they are having an all-day course in murder."³³ This quote encapsulates the passionate resistance against the symposium's discussions, reflecting the contentious nature of debates surrounding abortion rights during that era. The article delves into the tensions between medical progress and societal resistance, offering a nuanced portrayal of the complexities inherent in the intersection of science, ethics, and activism within the student community.

³¹ Reverend Lester Kinsolving, "Spotlight on Religion: The Church and Abortion," *National City Star News*, 87: 77 (21 May 1970).

³² Kinsolving, "The Church and Abortion."

³³ Dale Prouse, "Abortion Practices and Techniques Aired at UCSF Symposium," *Synapse* - The UCSF Student Newspaper, 17: 21 (6 April 1973).

The wording in the article effectively captures the multifaceted nature of the UCSF symposium and its significance within the broader context of reproductive healthcare debates. The article highlighted the symposium's comprehensive coverage, noting that "The program covered such areas as the legal status of abortion and malpractice issues."³⁴ This acknowledgment stresses the depth and complexity of the discussions held at the event. By addressing malpractice concerns, the symposium underscored the legal vulnerabilities faced by medical professionals performing abortions, reflecting broader anxieties within the medical community about the risks of litigation and criminalization. Additionally, Dr. Walter Ballard, Chief of Maternal Health and Family Planning of the State Department of Public Health's Bureau of Family Services observes that "It almost seems to me that women are using abortion as a primary method of birth control", which adds a layer of concern regarding societal trends in reproductive behavior, suggesting potential ethical considerations surrounding abortion practices.³⁵ His statement also implies a perceived disconnect between contraceptive access and abortion rates, raising questions about whether policy efforts should focus on expanding birth control options to reduce reliance on abortion. The inclusion of these quotes provides valuable insights into the nuanced perspectives within the medical community and the broader societal discourse on reproductive rights. By juxtaposing legal, ethical, and medical viewpoints, the article effectively illustrates the ongoing tensions between reproductive autonomy and regulatory oversight. Overall, the article navigates the complexities of the UCSF symposium, offering a nuanced analysis of the intersection of medical innovation, ethical considerations, and social activism.

Building upon the analysis of *Synapse* and the *National City Star News*, it becomes evident that these newspapers actively participated in shaping public opinion and influencing ethical considerations surrounding abortion during the early 1970s in California. Their coverage provided information on legal and medical developments and served as a platform for discussing the moral and ethical dimensions of reproductive rights. As we look deeper into the impact of these newspapers on public opinion, we can explore how their reporting influenced societal attitudes, shaped policy debates, and contributed to the broader discourse on abortion ethics in California and beyond.

Impact on Public Opinion

The discourse surrounding abortion legislation in the 1960s and 1970s was deeply influenced by public opinion and ethical considerations, as evidenced by contemporary primary sources. Examining primary sources from newspapers and publications of the time provides valuable insights into the diverse viewpoints and evolving attitudes towards abortion within society. Public opinion regarding abortion underwent significant shifts during the 1960s, reflecting changing social attitudes and political

³⁴ Sprouse, "Abortion Practices and Techniques Aired."

³⁵ Sprouse, "Abortion Practices and Techniques Aired."

dynamics. A gradual liberalization of attitudes towards abortion during this period is noted, with increasing support for reproductive rights and women's autonomy over their bodies. Some articles, such as "Abortion Laws Make Criminals of Women" (*Desert Sun*, December 30, 1968), illustrate the divergence of opinions within society regarding the legalization of abortion. Senator Maurine B. Neuberger, Chairman of the Citizens Advisory Council on the Status of Women, emphasized the fundamental nature of a woman's right to choose, stating, "the right of woman to determine her own reproductive way of life was basic," highlighting the contentious debate surrounding this issue.³⁶ The use of the title as the opening line of the article immediately grabs attention and serves as a shock factor, revealing stark contrasts in perspectives.³⁷ While some advocated for liberalizing abortion laws to empower women, others condemned the criminalization of abortion as unjust and detrimental to women's health. This fluctuating public sentiment set the stage for further debates and legislative actions in subsequent years.

Ethical considerations surrounding abortion emerged as a contentious issue, intersecting with religious beliefs and moral principles. Discussions often revolved around questions of morality, human rights, and the sanctity of life, drawing from various religious and philosophical perspectives. California has historically been significant in the religious landscape of America, serving as a hub for diverse and evolving religious movements, especially due to California's diverse religiosity and cultures.³⁸ The articles "Spotlight on Religion: The Church and Abortion" (*National City Star News*, May 21, 1970) and "Abortion; a Moral Question" (*Citrus College Clarion*, March 19, 1971) reflect the diverse religious and moral viewpoints prevalent during the 1970s. While some religious leaders and moral philosophers condemned abortion as a moral transgression, others emphasized the importance of compassion and reproductive choice. These ethical complexities continued to shape public discourse and legislative developments in subsequent years. Furthermore, California's role as a trendsetter in religious and cultural shifts has influenced broader national conversations about the intersection of faith and reproductive rights.

The landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) reflected a culmination of societal debates and legal deliberations surrounding abortion rights, establishing a legal framework while sparking ongoing controversies. Historians highlight its significance, while primary sources like "Recent U.S. Supreme Court Ruling In Tune With Jewish Law, Rabbi Says" shed light on intersections of cultural, and religious perspectives, and legal interpretations. For instance, a Rabbi noted Jewish law's alignment with Justice Blackmun's emphasis on physical and psychological harm as

³⁶ "Abortion Laws Make Criminals of Women," *Desert Sun*, 42: 126 (30 December 1968).

³⁷ "Abortion Laws Make Criminals of Women," *Desert Sun*.

³⁸ Eldon G. Ernst, "The Emergence of California in American Religious Historiography," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 11: 1 (2001): p. 35.

key issues in the ruling, underscoring the complex interplay of religious traditions, legal principles, and societal norms shaping attitudes towards reproductive rights.³⁹ Moreover, the ruling prompted Jewish leaders to further engage in public discussions, emphasizing that Jewish law permits abortion to protect the life and well-being of the mother. This perspective contrasted with more restrictive religious views and highlighted the diversity within religious interpretations of abortion. The involvement of Jewish scholars and religious figures in the abortion debate illustrated the nuanced and varied religious beliefs that influenced public policy and societal attitudes toward reproductive rights.

The inclusion of religious perspectives in such articles can significantly influence public opinion by framing abortion debates within broader ethical and moral contexts. By highlighting how religious traditions align or conflict with legal principles, these articles contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the issue. They also provide a platform for religious leaders to voice their interpretations, potentially swaying public sentiment either toward support for reproductive rights or toward more restrictive views. Additionally, when religious leaders like Rabbis or Reverends express viewpoints that align with landmark legal decisions, it can lend moral authority to the legal framework established by the Supreme Court, thereby reinforcing its legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Conversely, when religious leaders oppose such rulings, it can fuel ongoing controversies and mobilize opposition movements. In this way, the newspaper's portrayal of religious responses to legal decisions plays a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes and influencing the direction of public discourse and policy-making on reproductive rights.

However, "Harris Survey Public now favors legal abortions" captures the immediate, broader reactions to the *Roe v. Wade* decision. This article highlights that in the wake of a U.S. Supreme Court decision to allow legalized abortion up to three months of pregnancy, American public opinion underwent a significant shift, now favoring legalized abortions by a 52-41 percent margin. This stark reversal contrasts with previous sentiments; the previous August, the public opposed making abortions legal by 46-24 percent, although that previous June, people favored them by a narrow 48-43 percent.⁴⁰ These statistics show the seismic impact of the *Roe v. Wade* ruling, reflecting a nationwide transformation in attitudes toward reproductive rights, as echoed in the Rabbi's observation regarding the alignment of public opinion with Justice Blackmun's emphasis on the importance of physical and psychological well-being in abortion decision-making. While *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion nationwide, subsequent decades would witness ongoing debates and legal challenges, underscoring the enduring complexities of the issue and the need for continued examination and dialogue.

³⁹ "Recent U.S. Supreme Court Ruling in Tune with Jewish Law, Rabbi Says," *The Jewish News of Northern California*, 123:13 (30 March 1973).

⁴⁰ Louis Harris, "Harris Survey: Public Now Favors Legal Abortions," *National City Star-News*, 90:74, (6 May 1973).

However, different newspapers from the 1960s and 1970s highlight the intersectionality of factors influencing public opinion and ethical considerations surrounding abortion. These reveal the diverse viewpoints within society as well as the influence of intersecting identities such as race, class, and gender on individuals' perspectives on reproductive rights. For example, articles discussing abortion in newspapers targeted towards minority communities may offer unique insights into how issues of access to healthcare and reproductive justice intersect with broader social justice movements of the time. Analyzing these intersections could provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding abortion discourse and its implications for marginalized communities.

Conclusion

The years spanning from 1967 to 1973 in California represent a pivotal era characterized by profound social and political upheaval, where the struggle for reproductive rights emerged as a prominent issue amidst broader movements for civil rights and individual autonomy. Against the backdrop of civil rights activism and countercultural rebellion, California became a battleground for debates surrounding abortion legislation and societal norms. The enactment of the Therapeutic Abortion Act of 1967 marked a significant turning point, reflecting evolving attitudes towards reproductive rights and personal autonomy. This legislation, alongside landmark court cases such as *People v. Belous* (1969), facilitated greater access to abortion services and set California on a progressive trajectory toward reproductive freedom.

Newspaper coverage during this period played a crucial role in shaping public discourse and perceptions surrounding abortion. Newspapers, such as the *Madera Tribune* and the *National City Star News* provided platforms for diverse voices, reflecting the complexities of religious, moral, legal, and societal perspectives on abortion. The diversity of views and framing surrounding abortion underscored the influential role of journalism in shaping public opinion. Despite challenges and debates, including ethical considerations and shifting public sentiment, the trajectory towards greater reproductive rights and autonomy in California remained steadfast.

Ultimately, the legacy of the late 1960s and early 1970s in California is one of progress and resilience in the fight for reproductive justice. The era's dynamic sociopolitical landscape, marked by a spirit of activism and grassroots mobilization, drove significant policy changes and set national precedents in civil rights, environmental protection, and healthcare reform. Legislative milestones and landmark court cases were pivotal in advancing reproductive rights, highlighting California's role as a leader in progressive reform. Known for setting higher state standards that often surpassed federal regulations, California's proactive stance on various social issues reinforced its reputation as a trailblazer in policy innovation.

By understanding the historical context and socio-political dynamics of this transformative period, we gain valuable insights into the forces that shaped attitudes toward reproductive rights, informing ongoing discussions and advocacy efforts for reproductive justice today. Importantly, this era also saw intersections between the struggle for civil rights and the fight for abortion rights, as marginalized communities fought for autonomy over their bodies and access to essential healthcare services. Recognizing these intersections reveals the interconnected nature of social justice movements and highlights the need for intersectional approaches in addressing issues of reproductive justice in contemporary society. The legacy of this period continues to inspire and guide current efforts to protect and expand reproductive freedoms, ensuring that the fight for justice remains inclusive and comprehensive.