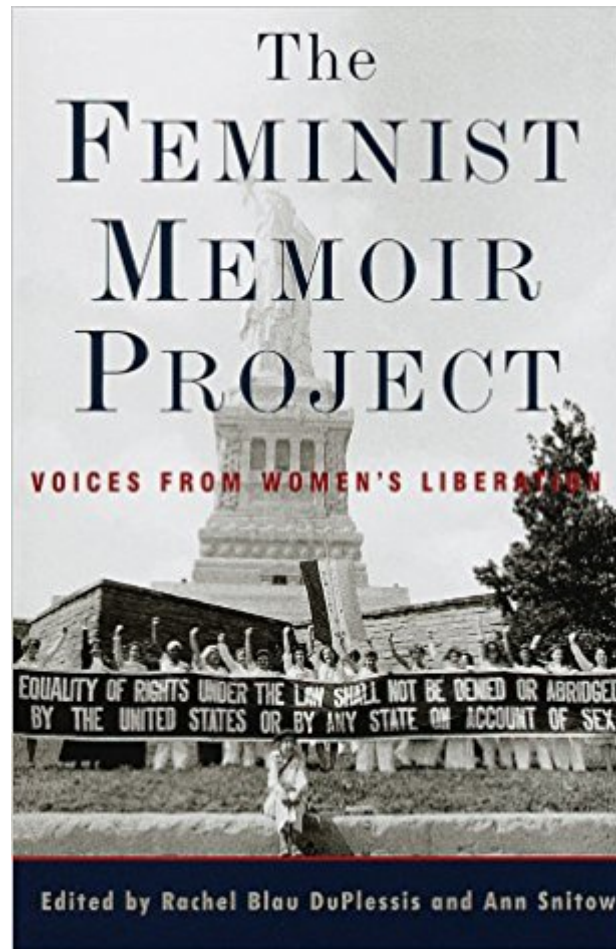




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The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices From Women's Liberation



Synopsis

The women of The Feminist Memoir Project give voice to the spirit, the drive, and the claims of the Women's Liberation Movement they helped shape, beginning in the late 1960s. These 32 writers were among the thousands to jump-start feminism in our time. Here, in pieces that are passionate, personal, critical, and witty, they describe what it felt like to make history, to live through and contribute to the massive social movement that transformed the nation. What made these particular women rebel? And what experiences, ideas, feelings, and beliefs shaped their rebellion? How did they maintain the will and energy to keep such an unwomanly struggle going for so long, and continuing still? Memoirs and responses by Kate Millett, Vivian Gornick, Michele Wallace, Alix Kates Shulman, Joan Nestle, Jo Freeman, Yvonne Rainer, Barbara Smith, Ellen Willis, and many more embody the excitement that fueled the movement and the conflicts that threatened it from within. These stories tell how the world we live in changed. With The Feminist Memoir Project, these activists contribute to yet another movement project, the political work of memory.

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Customer Reviews

As the editors assembled this collection of memoirs from feminism's "second wave" of the 1960s and '70s, they were lectured by a member of a younger feminist generation about the need to move forward. "It is time for the old to let go of '70s politics," she told them. "To practice a little strategic forgetfulness." Contrary to this stance, the editors see the history of feminism as a necessary

building block for further activism. "Ignorance of that time ... is also an odd handicap," they write, "like running a relay race with no idea of what's being handed on to you from the runner just behind." An impressive group of women tell stories that should inspire--and amuse--a younger generation. The widely published Chicana activist and writer Elizabeth Martinez writes about experiencing racism in the women's movement on the eve of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination; documentary photographer Paula Allen and writer Eve Ensler (most recently known for her acclaimed play *The Vagina Monologues*) recount falling into "activist love." Artist Nancy Spero recalls her first feminist action, in which several women crashed a stag party of eminent art critics in New York and covered the porn-watching men with pies. Anyone interested in feminist history will find this book an accessible guide to the past. --Maria Dolan

For this mammoth, I-was-there series of reflections on the second wave of American feminism (roughly 1965-1980), the editors invited women whose lives were "transformed by the contemporary U.S. women's movement" to contribute memoirs centering on their motivations and to "take a long view" of the movement's achievements and lingering fallout. Thirty women wrote memoirs, which were then, intriguingly, critiqued by six others. From "consciousness-raising," that *de rigueur* ritual of the movement, to worries over whether "a change of discourse changed social conditions," most authors were energized either by sexual identity questions (the "free love" movement of the '60s, the Pill, abortion rights, equitable division of child-care duties) or by professional or workplace questions, though civil rights and antiwar convictions drove others. Contributors include Kate Millett, Vivian Gornick, Barbara W. Emerson (daughter of civil rights pioneer Hosea Williams), Italian immigrant Anselma Dell'Olio, Carol Hanisch (who recalls the talismanic but apocryphal bra burnings of the 1968 Miss America Contest) and Lesbian Feminist Liberation founder Joan Nestle. Overall, the collection is successful in conveying the urgency and importance of the goals pursued during this crucial period in the history of feminism. Unfortunately, the selections made by editors DuPlessis and Snitow (literature professors at Temple University and the New School for Social Research, respectively) for the most part reproduce the well-traveled path of the movement's mostly white, elite leaders and membership. And it is striking that, even with hindsight, many authors seemingly can't manage the "long view," remaining narrowly focused on their own personal lives and problems. Still, these are memoirs, not histories, and with the legacy of slogans like "the personal is political" continuing to haunt public life, the circumstances that drove these citizens to action often make compelling reading. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Has gross errors and leave outs in its history chronology.

Though many feel that women in the feminist movement have done their good deed and now they can just go away, I FEEL a book of this caliber is just what we need to remember! Why is it that in school we are forced to drool over war heros, blood and the lifes lost to senseless wars like Vietnam and when it comes to the womens peaceful movement (which could be accountable for the mass shift UP in overall economics, women working is a good thing) we are not allowed to remember! Read this book and discover truth. side note: I grew up in the 70's 80's and feel I may be the only woman of my generation who feels so strongly with such a thirst for these essays. Am I alone out here?

I bought this book suspecting I should have been born in the 1950's so I could participate in the second wave of feminism. After reading the thoughtfull essays in this anthology, I came away even more convinced that I was right. As depressing as some of the circumstances seem by todays standards, these women surmounted impossible odds, and for that, I am profoundly gratefull and only wish I could have been there to help out. Having been born in 1979, I cannot imagine how exhillarating this movement was. From fighting to legalize abortion and contraceptive information, to the women's health movement to debates over sexuality and equal rights, the modern feminist movement (matched only by the civil rights movement for breadth and impact) has had the most imediate impact on American society. The fact that most people (women and men) support these goals and take their victory for granted shows both how successful feminists have been in the battle, and how much we still need to do to preserve our ground while working on new areas. Because women's history remains largely unsung in public schools, we need more books like this to educate (and hopefully) inspire the next generation of feminist activists.

A lot of the personal essays in here from women who were on the frontlines of the `70s feminism are interesting. But the editors are tiresome. The best thing that can be said is they didn't get out of their own way. Their "dissection" of people's personal lives is unnecessary--readers (especially the college-aged readers this book is undoubtedly intended for) are intelligent enough to form their own conclusions. And why do the editors focus solely on black and white relations--what about Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and Arabs? And why not a single essay from a feminist with a disability? Also, the editors disbelief at one of the memoirists' moving story about marching in the civil rights movement with her father is especially offensive.

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