



No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women

Estelle Freedman

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Repeatedly declared dead by the media, the women's movement has never been as vibrant as it is today. Indeed as Stanford professor and award-winning author Estelle B. Freedman argues in her compelling new book, feminism has reached a critical momentum from which there is no turning back. A truly global movement, as vital and dynamic in the developing world as it is in the West, feminism has helped women achieve authority in politics, sports, and business, and has mobilized public concern for once-taboo issues like rape, domestic violence, and breast cancer. And yet much work remains before women attain real equality. In this fascinating book, Freedman examines the historical forces that have fueled the feminist movement over the past two hundred years—and explores how women today are looking to feminism for new approaches to issues of work, family, sexuality, and creativity.

Freedman begins with an incisive analysis of what feminism means and why it took root in western Europe and the United States at the end of the eighteenth century. The rationalist, humanistic philosophy of the Enlightenment, which ignited the American Revolution, also sparked feminist politics, inspiring such pioneers as Mary Wollstonecraft and Susan B. Anthony. Race has always been as important as gender in defining feminism, and Freedman traces the intricate ties between women's rights and abolitionism in the United States in the years before the Civil War and the long tradition of radical women of color, stretching back to the impassioned rhetoric of Sojourner Truth.

As industrialism and democratic politics spread after World War II, feminist politics gained momentum and sophistication throughout the world. Their impact began to be felt in every aspect of society—from the workplace to the chambers of government to relations between the sexes. Because of feminism, Freedman points out, the line between the personal and the political has blurred, or disappeared, and issues once considered “merely” private—abortion, sexual violence, homosexuality, reproductive health, beauty and body image—have entered the public arena as subjects of fierce, ongoing debate.

Freedman combines a scholar's meticulous research with a social critic's keen eye. Sweeping in scope, searching in its analysis, global in its perspective, *No Turning Back* will stand as a defining text in one of the most important social movements of all time.

From the Hardcover edition.

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