



Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future

By Jennifer Baumgardner, Amy Richards

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A powerful indictment from within of the current state of feminism, and a passionate call to arms

From Lilith Fair to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to the WNBA--everywhere you look, girl culture is clearly ascendant. Young women live by feminism's goals, yet feminism itself is undeniably at a crossroads; "girl power" feminists appear to be obsessed with personal empowerment at the expense of politics while political institutions such as *Ms.* and NOW are so battle weary they've lost their ability to speak to a new generation. In *Manifesta*, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards show the snags in each feminist hub--from the dissolution of riot grrrls into the likes of the Spice Girls, to older women's hawking of young girls' imperiled self-esteem, to the hyped hatred of feminist thorns like Katie Roiphe and Naomi Wolf--and prove that these snags have not, in fact, torn feminism asunder.

In an intelligent and incendiary argument, Baumgardner and Richards address issues instead of feelings and the political as well as the personal. They describe the seven deadly sins the media commits against feminism, provide keys to accessible and urgent activism, discuss why the ERA is still a relevant and crucial political goal, and spell out what a world with equality would look like. They apply Third Wave confidence to Second Wave consciousness, all the while maintaining that the answer to feminism's problems is still feminism.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Two youthful alumnae of *Ms.* magazine present not a manifesto, but a talky defense of contemporary feminism, directed in part at disappointed Second Wave foremothers. Arguing that feminism is already all around us, the heart of the book is a long, unbridled paean to tough and sexy "girlie culture," as represented by Xena, Ally McBeal, the Spice Girls and little girls wearing Mia Hamm jerseys. Sporting green nail polish and Hello Kitty lunchboxes isn't infantile, the authors declare, but a "nod to our joyous youth." At the same time, they caution young women not to stop and rest on the success of cultural feminism, but to develop political lives and awareness. The book suffers mightily from its determined evenhandedness; Baumgardner and Richards typically temper any negative comments with an immediate positive note, and vice versa. Whether this feminist duo's ambivalence reflects schisms in the movement, their own fear of offending other feminists or simply the awkwardness of joint authorship, the result is shallow, both as a critique and a call to arms. Analysis of the few Third Wavers who are already visible in the media ought to have been surefire; instead, the chapter "Who's Afraid of Katie Roiphe?" comes too late (after 200-odd pages) and is too tame and indecisive. The authors pointedly clamp down on their own irritation with Roiphe, referring to her simply as a "controversial" figure among left-wing feminists. Fewer history lessons and more pique might have given this book more force. (Oct.)

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From Library Journal

Baumgardner and Richards, two writers with *Ms.* affiliations, start their analysis of U.S. feminism with a wonderful assumption: that "girl culture," from women rock stars and athletes to female entrepreneurs and inventors, have become an integral part of the national psyche. Thanks to Second Wave feminist agitators, today's young women—those who grew up believing that they could be anything they wanted to be—have unprecedented opportunities. Now, as responsibility for women's liberation falls to them, decisions about goals, strategies, and direction have to be made. *Manifesta*, which is far less shrill than the name suggests, urges young women to pick up where their mothers, aunts, and adult mentors left off. Their challenge? To fulfill feminism's promise of justice, equality, and sexual freedom for all. Complete with appendixes to teach novices the nuts-and-bolts of community organizing, this book is a reasoned and passionate call to action and an exciting how-to guide for both burgeoning and seasoned Third Wave feminists. Recommended for all high school, college, and public libraries. DEleanor J. Bader, Brooklyn, NY

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From Kirkus Reviews

By addressing itself specifically to young women, this imperfect but relatively thorough treatise helps fill a gap in the current debate between older feminist luminaries, some would say "dinosaurs", such as Gloria Steinem, and the crop of news making younger female writers who tend to embrace anti-feminism. Both authors are former editors at *Ms.* who have since moved on to various leadership roles in the so-called "Third Wave" of feminist writers and activists now in their 20s and early 30s. They combine a brief historical assessment of the movement for women's equality (focusing particularly on the tumultuous developments of the 1970s) with a call to action aimed largely at girls and young women who, the authors believe, have benefited from the previous generation's struggles but continue to experience forms of sexism and relative powerlessness. By linking contemporary pro-female culture (the Lilith Festival; magazines such as *Bust*, *Sassy*, and *Jane*; women's basketball and soccer) to its intellectual and political roots from the 1960s and '70s, Baumgardner and Richards aim to provide counter-evidence to the perennial claim that feminism has

died or outlived its usefulness. Many pages are spent on a useful analysis of the strengths and shortcomings of "girl power"-a healthy, positive, empowering attitude toward the traditional trappings of female youth culture, but not quite a political strategy, in the authors' estimation. Their study falters in a few ways: repetitiveness, an over-reliance on personal anecdotes in the opening pages, and a penchant for making controversial claims without providing sources (for example, the "fact" that some states won't allow a mother to make medical decisions on behalf of her children without the father's approval). Still, simpatico older women will be heartened by the authors' knowledgeable discussion of pro-woman attitudes and actions among the younger set, while girls and young women may find political or personal inspiration in their account. An important contribution to the subject, despite its flaws. -- *Copyright © 2000 Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

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