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Flora Davis

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. One StarBy Evelyn WenningToo technical for me.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. AN EXCELLENT HISTORY OF THE WOMENS MOVEMENT (THROUGH 1991)By Steven H ProppEditor Flora Davis has taught writing and journalism at the New School for Social Research and at Fordham University. She has written other books such as Inside Intuition: What We Know about Non-Verbal Communication, Eloquent Animals: A Study in Animal Communication, etc. [NOTE: page numbers below refer to the 604-page paperback edition.]She wrote in the Introduction to this 1991 book, When I decided to write this book back in 1982, I felt that feminism had reached a turning point. The ERA had been defeated despite broad public support Progress had stalled and in some ways the movement was actually losing ground. I was afraid that the second wave was over. Instead, though feminists faced formidable opposition throughout the 1980s, the movement continued to grow and change. At times, it even seemed to thrive on opposition Nevertheless, the struggle continues In the 1990s, two things are very clear: that in the past, changes only happened because thousands of women MADE them happen, and that in the future, women will gain more ground only if activists continued the effort. Thats why it seems important now to look back over the past thirty years of movement history and ask: How have we come this far? What

have we accomplished and what remains to be done? With this book I hope to provide not only a record of achievements but a grounding in facts---enough detail about how things were done and where the pitfalls lay to help activists work for a better future. (Pg. 11)She says of the aftermath of Betty Friedans *The Feminine Mystique*, As her fame spread, she became something of an outcast in the suburb where she lived. She and her husband were no longer invited to dinner parties, and they were dropped from a car pool after she hired a taxi to deliver to children because she herself had other commitments. Friedans book was so controversial that those who read it couldnt stop discussing it, for it challenged the very basis of many middle class womens lives. (Pg. 51-52)She points out, In the late 1960s and early 1970s, thousands of C-R [consciousness-raising] groups formed around the country. The women who joined them found that consciousness-raising challenged many of their basic assumptions about themselves and their relations to men As women talked in small, homogeneous groups about various issues, they discovered that problems theyd thought were theirs alone were shared by all---and created by male-dominated culture In the end, consciousness-raising drew thousands of women into the movement. Within a very few years, most of its critics had embraced it enthusiastically. (Pg. 88-89)She suggests, Many things separated womens liberationists from liberal feminists. The women generally came from different generations, had cut their teeth politically under different circumstances, and their priorities were seldom the same. Nevertheless, it may have been as much style as substance that made them incompatible. Liberal groups were organized along traditional, hierarchical lines Most womens liberation groups, on the other hand, were determined to operate without leaders and to arrive at decisions by consensus. The commitment to radical equality that was characteristic of womens liberation was carried to harmful extremes in some groups. (Pg. 94)But she also cautions, Radical equality turned out to be a mixed blessing for womens liberation. Groups that functioned without a hierarchy often generated an intense feeling of community, an almost ecstatic closeness However, some womens liberation groups became preoccupied with internal issues of power and carried their aversion to hierarchies to extremes. Women who stood out from the rest for any reason were accused of elitism and trashed. Within the movement, the period from 1969-1971 became known as feminisms McCarthy era because of the dogmatism of some groups. (Pg. 98)She also notes, many of the early womens liberation groups died because theyd done their job. Members used the support of the group to make changes in themselves and their circumstances. They then moved on to new challenges Over the years, they continued to work for the movement in other ways As peoples needs changed, new and more appropriate organizations would spring up. In the womens movement, that was, in fact, happened. (Pg. 143)She recounts, For many NOW members, lesbianism was a sensitive subject because they had had to defend themselves against accusations that all feminists were gay. As the few out-of-the-closet lesbians in New York began to press the organization to take a position on lesbian rights, the word got around that Betty Friedan herself considered the lesbian issue a lavender herring---and lesbians, a lavender menace. Friedan was afraid for the womens movement. She was just beginning to realize, as she wrote later, that some of the best, most hard-working women in NOW were in fact lesbian. She worried that if the enemies of the movement succeeded in equating feminism with lesbianism, theyd discredit the drive for womens rights. (Pg. 262-263)Later, she adds, the gay-straight conflict continued to divide both New York NOW and the organizations national board. In fact, the New York chapter effectively purged both lesbians and their straight supporters in January 1971, by voting them out of office. (This was the chapters second lesbian purge.) However, later that year at NOWs annual convention, the whole membership tackled the controversy head-on and surprised almost everyone by voting overwhelmingly in favor of a strong pro-lesbian resolution and stated firmly that the oppression of lesbians was indeed a legitimate concern for all feminists. (Pg. 268)She observes, In the controversy over porn, many feminists were caught in the middle. Though they deplored the brand or porn that eroticized violence against women, they were afraid the attempt to curb it might undermine free speech In addition, many women were convinced that banning hard-core porn wouldnt accomplish much because a kind of eroticized violence permeated ordinary films, television, and advertising In the mass media, the underlying message wasnt explicit, the way it was in hard-core porn, but that made it all the more insidious. (Pg. 329-330)She acknowledges, After the [Equal Rights] amendments defeat, some feminist critics argued that it might have passed if womens groups had handled certain issues differently. The pro-ERA forces could have explained, according to the critics, that the courts would never order women into the front lines against the will of military leaders and the Congress (which was almost certainly true), and that the ERA would not expand womens abortion rights (probably true). Some said that feminists should also have downplayed their commitment to lesbian rights until the amendment was safely in place. If the movement seemed to court controversy at times, the basic dynamics of social movements were partly responsible disillusioned activists might have withdrawn in disgust if movement leaders had deserted their principles even temporarily, as a matter of strategy. (Pg. 396-397)She reflects, After the defeat of the ERA in the early 1980s, the womens movement reached its lowest ebb. Some of the major national organizations were in trouble financially, and many Americans were blaming the movement for the bind women were in as they struggled to do justice to both job and family. An analysis published in Ms. in the mid-80s noted that even among those who had been the movements allies, there seemed to be a consensus that the nation had tried feminism and it didnt work. Meanwhile, supposedly, feminism itself was dead Of course, that wasnt true. In fact, by the end of the decade the movement was broader than ever before, for throughout the eighties it continued to expand, spinning off new groups and even new

submovements. There were major shifts in emphasis: Some of the big national organizations became more focused on politics most were very concerned about diversity and abortion replace the ERA as THE major issue for many In addition, difference feminism gained strength and the womens movement became globalized. (Pg. 471-472)She concludes, The second wave of the womens movement accomplished an enormous amount during its first thirty years At midcentury, women were limited in the courses they could take in high school; discouraged from considering any but the most traditional, feminine careers; kept out of graduate schools, medical schools, and law schools by quotas; barred from many occupations; automatically fired when they became pregnant; routinely denied credit; and forbidden by law to sit on juries in some states. Most Americans, male and female, took it for granted that as breadwinners, men had a right to earn more than a woman who was doing the same job. Battered wives had nowhere to turn; sexual harassment was a dirty secret; abortion was illegal; and a woman who was raped had to produce a witness if she wanted the rapist brought to justice Feminism in the last half of the twentieth century produced at least half a revolution. (Pg. 491)There have been a number of histories of the modern womens movement [e.g., *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End*, *When Everything Changed*, *The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present*, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*. *American Feminism: a Contemporary History*], but this is one of the best! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. AN EXCELLENT HISTORY OF THE WOMENS MOVEMENT (THROUGH 1991)By Steven H ProppEditor Flora Davis has taught writing and journalism at the New School for Social Research and at Fordham University. 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The Thomas-Hill hearings, the William Kennedy Smith and Mike Tyson rape trials, and new battles over *Roe v. Wade* have brought the modern women's movement into the spotlight. This history shows just what has and hasn't been achieved - with assessments of why there are so few women in Congress, the truth about rape, as well as the ways in which the New Right are trying to take back some of the gains that women have made.

From *Publishers Weekly*: Deliberately short on feminist theory and free of rhetoric, this balanced, gripping, inspirational chronicle of the contemporary women's movement in the U.S. should be a standard resource for years to come. Davis, who has taught journalism at Manhattan's New School for Social Research, tells how activists "virtually reinvented feminism" in the 1960s, fueled by dozens of small women's groups that had survived since the suffragette "first wave" of the early part of the century. She explains how the struggle to ratify the ERA touched off a movement of its own, and how the reproductive rights movement in the '70s brought together NOW, new single-issue groups and older organizations like Planned Parenthood. She investigates media stereotyping and the right-wing backlash bolstered by white males' resentment at the challenges from feminists and from the civil rights movement. Davis suggests that, despite its setbacks, the women's movement of the 1990s is more deeply rooted and more diverse than ever before. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal*: This is an unbiased, finely detailed account of the second wave of the women's movement in America. Rarely is history so emotionally compelling as in

Davis's depiction of the struggles and anger of these activist women. In part one, she chronicles the birth, submersion, and eventual rebirth of feminism; she then examines in part two such issues as women in politics, the women's health movement, and lesbian feminism. In the last section, she discusses where the current movement is and where it is going. Davis interviewed many activist women for this book, but a lengthy bibliography and thorough footnoting indicate scholarly attention to the subject. Another history of the contemporary women's movement is Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor's *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (LJ 5/15/87), but it focuses on the postwar era. Highly recommended for both public and academic libraries. (Index not seen.) See also Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (LJ 9/15/91) and Paula Kamen's *Feminist Fatale* (LJ 9/15/91).--Ed.- Cindy Faries, Pennsylvania State Univ. Lib., University Park Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus sSusan Faludi's *Backlash* (p. 1133) and Paula Kamen's *Feminist Fatale* (p. 1137) sounded the alarm: Feminism in America is in trouble. Now Davis (*Living Alive!*, 1980, etc.) offers a calmer, more optimistic historical perspective in which feminism never died but only dispersed and lost momentum for a while. The women's movement is dead, the media proclaimed in the 1980's (a myth perpetrated by the New Right, according to Faludi, and through the fault of older feminists, according to Kamen). Here, Davis offers the facts: that feminism, like other civil- rights movements, has always made progress in waves, between which there have been periods of regression; that, historically, feminism has been hindered by the conflict between "equality" feminism and "a kind of separate-but-equal movement"; that, though the feminist movement became less visible after the defeat of the ERA in the 70's, it in fact dispersed into myriad submovements, including the fight for equality for women of color, the women's health-care movement, the lesbian movement, and so on. Historically, such diversity is not a bad idea, Davis maintains. Factions that clash within one large group, rendering it ineffective (e.g., the conflict within NOW between white middle- class women and women of color), can often make progress separately, banding together in coalitions for individual causes. Such banding, Davis says, is now occurring on a global scale--a movement, along with the younger generation's gradual awakening to feminist issues through abortion rights, date rape, and other personally involving experiences, that may well prove to be even more successful in the upcoming "third wave." In any case, the progress made in the 1970's was phenomenal, and younger feminists have a firmer base from which to crusade for fairer treatment and a more comprehensive awareness of all women's needs. Davis's levelheaded analysis of how and why some feminist efforts succeed and some fail should provide an invaluable source of information and inspiration for many. -- Copyright 1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.