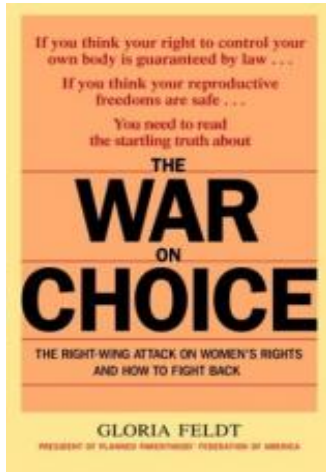


# The War on Choice: The Right-Wing Attack on Women's Rights and How to Fight Back

by Gloria Feldt

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## About the Book

Accessible and impassioned, here is an eye-opening look at the right wing strategy to reverse the gains American women have made over the past 50 years. **The War on Choice** chronicles the actions being taken at the highest levels of government to turn back the clock on women's rights.

With the White House acting in anti-choice lockstep with the majorities in both House and Senate, religious extremists are now in key decision-making posts, our federal judiciary is filled with recent appointees whose values are drastically out of step with the pro-choice sentiments of the majority of the American people, abstinence-only sex education is now the rule, ideology has trumped science in domestic and global health policy, and the Supreme Court balance in favor of reproductive freedoms is perilously close to toppling. But while many of the individual facts are known, no one until now has connected all the dots and drawn the Big Picture that shows exactly how radical and how successful this quiet revolution has been.

Judge by judge, law by law, and appointee by appointee, **The War on Choice** speaks the truth about what is happening, and also tells the stories of some of the women whose lives have been affected by these court decisions and federal policies. A keen analysis of current events, combined with a hands-on plan of action for those who want to raise their voices in protest, this book will be riveting reading.

And there is no one better equipped to write about the insidious, step-by-step chipping away of rights, or about what we can do to fight back, than Gloria Feldt, President of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Her thirty years of work with the organization combined with her personal experience - as a woman who came out of the same West Texas political landscape as did George W. Bush but faced a very different economic and social reality as the mother of three children by the age of 20 make her the ideal spokeswoman for those who are alarmed by the current political climate?

This book will be a wake-up call, describing in jaw-dropping detail the story of what the anti-choice movement is doing to the rights to birth control, abortion and privacy?

## Discussion Guide

1. In the Introduction, Sally Blackmun describes being pregnant as a nineteen-year-old college sophomore in 1966. Abortion was illegal in most states at the time, and her options were limited to having the baby and giving it up for adoption or marrying the baby's father, which she did. Gloria Feldt talks about growing up in west Texas in the 1950's. She was fifteen when she first got pregnant and then married. For both women, these life-altering experiences formed the foundations for later pro-choice attitudes and actions. Was there one defining moment or experience in your life that shaped your opinions about women's reproductive rights? Do you think the experiences are any less powerful for women who have always had legal access to contraception and abortion?

2. On page 5 in the Chapter entitled "Good Ol' Boys and Bad Old Days," Feldt writes, "This isn't an abortion war, it's a culture war, and its objective is to take away the economic, social, and political gains women have made since those years" (before *Roe v. Wade*). She continues that, "Over the past fifty years, women have gained an astonishing amount of power, and *Roe v. Wade*, which gives women control over their fertility, was another major step toward empowerment. Not only did it legalize abortion but it became a symbol of our independence, because reproductive freedom is fundamental to a woman's aspirations ? to education, financial stability, and self-determination." Do you agree that opponents of abortion are, indeed, seeking to deprive women of their economic, social and political power? Or *is it* really abortion, itself, that is at issue?

3. In her discussion of sexuality education, Gloria Feldt addresses the fact that the teen years are often a difficult, confusing time, when hormones are running wild, self-esteem is plummeting and emotions are in turmoil. She cites the statistic that, in this country, "six in ten women and seven in ten men have had sexual intercourse by their eighteenth birthday. . ." (page 65). What do you think is the likelihood that abstinence-only programs will have any impact on this pattern of sexual activity? Do abstinence and comprehensive sexuality education have to be mutually exclusive? Does sexuality education belong in public schools at all or should it be the responsibility of parents to impart this information to their children? Do you agree with Feldt that abstinence-only programs violate two key Constitutional principles ? separation of church and state and freedom of speech? In what ways?

4. The two sides of the women's reproductive rights issue have carefully chosen phrases to identify and portray their positions: "Pro-Choice" and "Pro-Life." How are these labels appropriate? Confusing? Ideal?

5. Another Constitutional principle that is being eroded, according to Feldt, is the system of governmental checks and balances. "The judicial, congressional, and executive branches each have separate powers that serve to protect the Constitution and offset the excesses of the other branches" (page 116). Have President Bush's appointments of judges to lower federal courts threatened this system? What is the impact of these appointments on the future of women's reproductive rights?

6. In Chapter 7, Feldt talks about how the media in this country has allowed itself to be manipulated by the extreme,

right-wing minority, both in the nature and extent of its coverage of women's reproductive health issues--and the terminology that is used. For example, "partial-birth abortion" is not the name of a medical procedure; it is a term created for its public relations value, yet most of the time it's used by the media without qualification. Other such inflammatory terms include "unborn child" (fetus) and "mother" (pregnant woman). Do you think the media does really pander to the right? What about the concept of "fairness and balance?" By giving voice to this right-wing minority in the name of achieving balance, is the media legitimizing extremists or should they be entitled to this forum for their views?

7. What does it mean to you, personally and in terms of attitudes and policies in this country, that many health insurance plans will cover Viagra(R) but not birth control pills?

8. The Bush administration is increasingly at odds with the scientific and medical communities in this country, over a wide range of issues. What are some of these issues and policies that have pitted Bush against the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Cancer Society, the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the *Lancet*, even the Centers for Disease Control? Why are these issues consistent with Bush's anti-choice stance? Do you believe that the administration is consciously waging a campaign to subjugate science to politics?

9. In 1984, under Reagan, the international gag rule was created to deny U.S. family planning funding to any foreign nongovernmental organization that provided advice, information or referrals regarding the availability of abortion; advocated to make or keep abortion legal in their own country; conducted public information campaigns regarding the availability of abortion; provided legal abortion services and procured or distributed equipment intended for use in inducing abortion ? even if these activities were paid for out of their own, private, non-U.S. dollars (page 200). One of President Clinton's first actions was to rescind this rule, but Bush immediately reinstated it upon taking office. How does the international gag rule affect the U.S.'s position in the world community? Do you think support of international family planning programs better serves our foreign policy interests? In what ways?

10. One of the claims of opponents is that abortion causes severe and long-lasting emotional trauma to women. Post-abortion syndrome (PAS) is not recognized by the American Psychological Association or the American Psychiatric Association. However, from your own experience or from the experiences of relatives or friends who have had abortions, do you agree with Feld that "Real science...shows that the emotional response to legal abortion is mainly relief?" (Page 153). If you, or a loved one, has experienced more serious emotional problems after having an abortion, have you been able to find support and counseling to help you feel better? Do you agree that the risk of possible emotional problems connected with abortion ? guilt, grief, depression, remorse -- outweighs the impact of an unwanted pregnancy/child on a woman's mental health?

11. What lessons can members of the pro-choice mainstream learn from their anti-choice adversaries? How can these lessons be put into practice?

## Author Bio

Gloria Feldt is the President of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. She lives in New York City and Phoenix, and is married to Alex Barbanell. Between them they have six children, nine grandchildren, and one great grandchild.

## Critical Praise

"Provocative.... [Feldt] excels when giving concrete plans for how individuals can activate change.... it will rouse readers."

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**Publication Date:** April 13, 2004

**Paperback:** 352 pages

**Publisher:** Bantam

**ISBN-10:** 0553382926

**ISBN-13:** 9780553382921