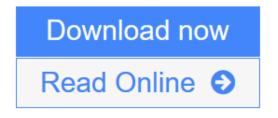


Women, Gays, and the Constitution: The Grounds for Feminism and Gay Rights in Culture and Law

David A. J. Richards



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In this remarkable study, David A. J. Richards combines an interpretive history of culture and law, political philosophy, and constitutional analysis to explain the background, development, and growing impact of two of the most important and challenging human rights movements of our time, feminism and gay rights.

Richards argues that both movements are extensions of rights-based dissent, rooted in antebellum abolitionist feminism that condemned both American racism and sexism. He sees the progressive role of such radical dissent as an emancipated moral voice in the American constitutional tradition. He examines the role of dissident African Americans, Jews, women, and homosexuals in forging alternative visions of rights-based democracy. He also draws special attention to Walt Whitman's visionary poetry, showing how it made space for the silenced and subjugated voices of homosexuals in public and private culture.

According to Richards, contemporary feminism rediscovers and elaborates this earlier tradition. And, similarly, the movement for gay rights builds upon an interpretation of abolitionist feminism developed by Whitman in his defense, both in poetry and prose, of love between men. Richards explores Whitman's impact on pro-gay advocates, including John Addington Symonds, Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, Oscar Wilde, and André Gide. He also discusses other diverse writers and reformers such as Margaret Sanger, Franz Boas, Elizabeth Stanton, W. E. B. DuBois, and Adrienne Rich.

Richards addresses current controversies such as the exclusion of homosexuals from the military and from the right to marriage and concludes with a powerful defense of the struggle for such constitutional rights in terms of the principles of rights-based feminism.

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