



Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States

By Rickie Solinger

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In the late 1960s and early 1970s, advocates of legal abortion mostly used the term *rights* when describing their agenda. But after *Roe v. Wade*, their determination to develop a respectable, nonconfrontational movement encouraged many of them to use the word *choice*--an easier concept for people weary of various rights movements. At first the distinction in language didn't seem to make much difference--the law seemed to guarantee both. But in the years since, the change has become enormously important.

In *Beggars and Choosers*, Solinger shows how historical distinctions between women of color and white women, between poor and middle-class women, were used in new ways during the era of "choice." Politicians and policy makers began to exclude certain women from the class of "deserving mothers" by using the language of choice to create new public policies concerning everything from Medicaid funding for abortions to family tax credits, infertility treatments, international adoption, teen pregnancy, and welfare. Solinger argues that the class-and-race-inflected guarantee of "choice" is a shaky foundation on which to build our notions of reproductive freedom. Her impassioned argument is for reproductive rights as human rights--as a basis for full citizenship status for women.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States is a thorough feminist history of public policy on abortion since *Roe v. Wade*, as well as a reconsideration of recent political strategy. Rickie Solinger's third book on reproductive rights hinges on a crucial semantic shift in the 1970s from "abortion rights" to the softer, less direct "choice" and "pro-choice," itself an attempt to shake off the awkward "pro-abortion" tag. While "rights" are undeniable, Solinger asserts, "choice" is a market-driven concept. "Historical distinctions between women of color and white women, between poor and middle-class women, have been reproduced and institutionalized in the "era of choice," she continues, "in part by defining some groups of women as good choice makers, some as bad."

Solinger also advances a troubling economic thesis about adoption, defined roughly as "the transfer of babies from women of one social classification to women in a higher social classification or group." Bracing and well-researched, Solinger's arguments should be considered by anyone working for women's and children's rights. --Regina Marler

From Publishers Weekly

Feminists need a paradigm shift, argues Solinger (*Wake Up Little Susie*; *The Abortionist*), away from the post-*Roe v. Wade* concept of "choice" and back to the '60s concept of "rights," based on the approach of the civil rights movement, which argued that all citizens were entitled to vote, for instance, regardless of class status. "Choice" evokes a marketplace model of consumer freedom, she explains, while rights are privileges to which one is justly and irrevocably entitled as a human being. The shift from the language of rights to that of choice was deliberate, aimed at reducing the federal welfare tab and increasing the pool of adoptable children, which began to diminish after the early 1970s, Solinger argues. Once the pill and legal abortion were available, poor women could be considered "bad choice-makers" if they kept having babies they couldn't afford hardly the government's responsibility. (Never mind, Solinger observes, that many poor women can't afford either option and might want children, just as middle-class women do.) Is this progress? No, Solinger writes: "women with inadequate resources... must... have the right to determine for themselves whether or not to be mothers." With its crisp, jargon-free prose and copious footnotes, Solinger's reexamination of those twin bogeys the Back Alley Butcher and the Welfare Queen is a provocative read for any modern feminist.

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From Library Journal

This work considers the issues of abortion, adoption, and welfare since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. Over the past 28 years, decisions on these issues have been increasingly framed not as rights but as choices, like consumer choices, which in theory can be limited. In addition, there has been consistent political pressure to shape and limit these choices. Solinger, the author of other works on reproductive politics (e.g., *The Abortionist: A Woman Against the Law*), points out that abortion can be had by those who do not expect it to be covered like other medical procedures but have the resources to pay for it themselves. Mothers can stay home to raise children if they have the resources, and middle-class mothers are encouraged to adopt from the less-advantaged again, because they have the resources. Because contraceptives, abortion, and adoption are available, poorer women who become mothers are assumed to be poor choice makers. While there are many

books on the concept of choice, particularly relating to abortion, the juxtaposition of choice and class when considering women's reproductive rights makes for insightful reading. Recommended for women's rights advocates and scholars and students of public policy. Mary Jane Brustman, SUNY at Albany Libs.

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