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Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work Is Done

By Susan J. Douglas



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From the author of *Where the Girls Are*, a sharp and irreverent critique of how women are portrayed in today's popular culture

Women today are inundated with conflicting messages from the mass media: they must either be strong leaders in complete command or sex kittens obsessed with finding and pleasing a man. In *Enlightened Sexism*, Susan J. Douglas, one of America's most entertaining and insightful cultural critics, takes readers on a spirited journey through the television programs, popular songs, movies, and news coverage of recent years, telling a story that is nothing less than the cultural biography of a new generation of American women.

Revisiting cultural touchstones from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *Survivor* to *Desperate Housewives*, Douglas uses wit and wisdom to expose these images of women as mere fantasies of female power, assuring women and girls that the battle for equality has been won, so there's nothing wrong with resurrecting sexist stereotypes?all in good fun, of course. She shows that these portrayals not only distract us from the real-world challenges facing women today but also drive a wedge between baby-boom women and their "millennial" daughters.

In seeking to bridge this generation gap, Douglas makes the case for casting aside these retrograde messages, showing us how to decode the mixed messages that restrict the ambitions of women of all ages. And what makes *Enlightened Sexism* such a pleasure to read is Douglas's unique voice, as she blends humor with insight and offers an empathetic and sisterly guide to the images so many women love and hate with equal measure.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a sharp-witted polemic against the media's stereotyping of females and feminism, University of Michigan communications professor Douglas (*Where the Girls Are*) parses music, movies, magazines, television dramas, reality TV, and news coverage to demonstrate how the girl power of the early '90s developed into enlightened sexism: a response, deliberate or not, to the perceived threat of a new gender regime. Given women's progress, enlightened sexism assumes, now it's okay, even amusing, to resurrect sexist stereotypes of girls and women. According to Douglas, this media trend includes stereotypes of black women as lazy and threatening in characters like Big Momma or Omarosa on *The Apprentice*, and the insidious sexualization of young girls. Douglas supports her analysis with data, such as on women's continuing inequitable pay and professional opportunities, black women's struggles for equality, and the negative consequences of the rising use of plastic surgery. And while the media have focused on girls bullying other girls, a much bigger problem, says Douglas, is sexual harassment of young girls by boys. Readers may not agree with Douglas's politics, but her position that women's interests are being harmed by the media is well argued and well documented. 16 pages of b&w photos. (Mar.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Douglas defines "enlightened sexism" as a response to the "perceived threat of a new gender regime" following the gains made by feminists since the 1970s. Her premise is that, under the mistaken assumption that full gender equality has been achieved, it is now "OK" to resurrect sexist stereotypes because they will no longer undermine women's equality. She explores the rise and evolution of media-created fantasies from the early 1990s to the present in TV, movies, popular songs, even network news, demonstrating how women have increasingly been reduced to stereotypes obsessed with their figures, clothes, shopping, and aging. From Beverly Hills 90210 and Buffy the Vampire Slayer to reality shows like The Bachelor and Survivor, women have been increasingly trivialized as overly emotional, unable to get along with each other, and constantly in competition for male approval. Douglas injects humor throughout, and notes the differences between her and her "millennial" daughter. She concludes with the hope that this new generation will not give up the fight. --Deborah Donovan

Review

"Douglas's writing is quick and witty; an easy, fun read. . . . 'Enlightened Sexism' is the perfect description for a feeling young women have long struggled to name. It's sure to dominate the vernacular for years to come." ?*Newsweek.com*

"Susan Douglas wrote the most important book of the year. In book-reviewese, 'important' is usually code for boring, but not in this case. Douglas' book is anything but. It's exciting and it's relevant and it's sassy." ?*Las Vegas Weekly*

"Combines solid academic research with a witty, irreverent and frequently hilarious writing style." ?*Detroit Free Press*

"A rambunctious jaunt down pop culture memory lane with a wisecracking guide pointing out interesting stuff you didn't know about intimately familiar landmarks." ?*AnnArbor.com*

“Susan J. Douglas says of today's media images of liberated womanhood: Not so fast, buddy! ... [Douglas] shows how glam representations of women calling the shots in the boardroom, the bedroom, and beyond lull us into thinking we're much more powerful than we really are.” ?*Elle*

“Enlightened Sexism is a delightful read. Douglas had me laughing out loud as she made her irreverent but persuasive case against a popular culture that promises girls and women they can be whatever they want as long as they don't want the wrong things.” ?*Ms. magazine*

“[A] lively critique ... Douglas' informal prose and irreverent sense of humor make this book an enjoyable read.” ?*Bust*

“An entertaining read ... The author's takes on the media's obsession with the foibles and pregnancies of celebrities and the biased news coverage of prominent successful women have the ring of truth ... Sharp and savvy.” ?*Kirkus Reviews*

“A sharp-witted polemic against the media's stereotyping of females and feminism ... Well argued and well documented.” ?*Publishers Weekly*

“A must-read: Whip-smart, witty, and scathingly insightful. Susan Douglas has penned a brilliant -- and often funny -- critique of the myths about equality, ambition, and femininity that are currently being served up as ‘reality’ in our media-crazed culture. She challenges those who insist that feminism is outmoded, that strong women are scary and unlovable, and that ‘real’ girl power comes from Botox, a bustier, and the ability to pole-dance in a pair of size-two hot pants. Best yet, Enlightened Sexism offers an antidote to the contradictory messages and predicaments many women experience today. It's a call to action and an inspiration.” ?*Susan Jane Gilman, bestselling author of Kiss My Tiara, Hypocrite in a Pouffy White Dress, and Undress Me in the Temple of Heaven*

“Here is an incisive history of the liberation that doesn't liberate, the story of how the same-old is peddled as ever-so radical. In Enlightened Sexism, Susan Douglas dissects pop-culture pseudo-feminism with wit, style, and a considerable amount of humor.” ?*Thomas Frank, bestselling author of What's the Matter with Kansas? and The Wrecking Crew*

“In this witty skewering of pop culture, Susan Douglas shows how girl-power fantasies – vampire slayers, tomb raiders, lean girls, and mean girls – hold women back by obscuring how far we haven't come. Douglas manages the difficult trick of bringing disquieting news while remaining funny, erudite, warm, and delightful. She's our most enjoyable – and smartest – media critic.” ?*Katha Pollitt, columnist for The Nation and author of Learning to Drive and Reasonable Creatures*

“Enlightened Sexism is an all-too-important reminder that sexism, sadly, is alive and well--and that it's being sold to women as feminism. Whether it's a consumer culture that tells women the Pussycat Dolls and Girls Gone Wild are bastions of feminism, or the media that would have us believe that women have nothing left to fight for--Susan Douglas makes sure her readers know that the battle for equality is far from over.” ?*Jessica Valenti, author of The Purity Myth*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Shawn Midkiff:

Nowadays reading books become more than want or need but also get a life style. This reading routine give you lot of advantages. The advantages you got of course the knowledge even the information inside the book this improve your knowledge and information. The details you get based on what kind of reserve you read, if you want attract knowledge just go with training books but if you want feel happy read one having theme for entertaining such as comic or novel. The Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work Is Done is kind of e-book which is giving the reader unpredictable experience.

Victor Willis:

Spent a free time and energy to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their leisure time with their family, or their very own friends. Usually they carrying out activity like watching television, likely to beach, or picnic in the park. They actually doing same thing every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your current free time/ holiday? Could possibly be reading a book may be option to fill your totally free time/ holiday. The first thing you will ask may be what kinds of e-book that you should read. If you want to attempt look for book, may be the book untitled Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work Is Done can be very good book to read. May be it can be best activity to you.

William Pak:

Why? Because this Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work Is Done is an unordinary book that the inside of the e-book waiting for you to snap it but latter it will shock you with the secret this inside. Reading this book close to it was fantastic author who write the book in such amazing way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining method but still convey the meaning entirely. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this nowadays or you going to regret it. This book will give you a lot of rewards than the other book have such as help improving your skill and your critical thinking way. So , still want to delay having that book? If I had been you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

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