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## Book Review: The Rights of Women: The Authoritative ACLU Guide to Women's Rights (Fourth Edition)

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***Book Review: The Rights of Women: The Authoritative ACLU Guide to Women's Rights (Fourth Edition)*<sup>1</sup>**

Maxcy Grasso<sup>2</sup>

*The Rights of Women* serves as a guide to outline the legal rights women hold in the United States. Beginning with an overview of how the court system works, the book is very accessible and does not assume any previous legal knowledge on the part of the reader. The guide is divided into 11 sections, each discussing a different topic of the law including, but not limited to, employment, reproductive freedom, education, and the criminal justice system. The authors formatted each section in a Q&A style with clear and concise answers to each topical question. Questions range from “How does the Constitution treat affirmative action programs that classify on the basis of sex in order to help women?” to “Must a victim immediately report her rape for her attacker to be prosecuted?” Given the range of topics and their universality, it seems appropriate to advocate that this guide belongs in every household. The latter is argued given that the law is only effective if citizens are aware of their rights and are civically engaged. While there may be many laws that exist to protect women from discrimination, this discrimination will persist if these laws remain unknown to the public. *The Rights of Women* does an excellent job at breaking down laws that protect women in the United States.

*The Rights of Women* is not just for lawyers, scholars, or activists, it is written for everyone. Legal jargon is complicated to understand and monotonous; the book avoids this by breaking down specific laws and court cases utilizing layman's terms. Further, the book's topical sections, allow the reader to utilize it more as a guide rather than a book that must be read from cover to cover. This is facilitated by the Q&A. For example, if I am looking to determine the legality of sex-segregated education I can employ the index and quickly find the question “Do public schools violate the Constitution when they only admit students of one gender?” which is immediately followed by the answer that “in many instances public schools' single-sex admission policies violate the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution.” The book goes on to provide specific examples of cases where single-sex admission was found to violate the Equal Protection Clause and other instances where the policy is protected under the Constitution. Providing these concrete examples makes the law more understandable and provides useful context for the reader.

In addition to the clear formatting, *The Rights of Women* also provides practical knowledge and resources. For instance, the employment section takes readers through the process of filing a claim for discrimination through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The authors include specific website links and office information as further resources, so that if someone reading this guide was seeking guidance, they would know what resources to utilize to assert her rights. It is clear the authors did extensive research on court cases that apply to women and the law. Throughout the guide the authors cite numerous cases, and at the end of each chapter there are three to four pages of endnotes demonstrating this. The authors also provide research

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beyond the law. In many cases the authors cite quantitative studies that either supported or opposed a certain policy or law.

However, the authors are judicious in their inclusion and provide balance with respect to the granularity of the information provided. For example, sections provide depth in relation to the demonstrated legal precedence. This is readily noted in the discussions of employment or education compared with trafficking. Additionally, the book details what the law is, not what it should be. While the author's personal opinions are mentioned from time-to-time within the book, it is not distracting from the overall purpose of informing readers on the law. Having this deliberate unbiased description assists the reader in understanding the law in context.

A unique attribute of the book is that it serves as a comprehensive guide to women's rights in the United States. Most other books on gender and the law focus on one specific topic; *A Troubled Marriage* focuses on domestic violence and the legal system while *Getting in the Game* highlights Title IX and its impact on female athletes. While these books provide an in depth understanding of the law, they are limited to only certain laws. *The Rights of Women* has the advantage of serving as a thorough guide with opportunity for versatile readership.

Despite its breadth, the book did surface a few limitations. One area where the book left me wanting a more in-depth discussion was the legal issues and differences specific to women of color. While women of color were mentioned in a few chapters, I believe it would have been helpful to have a specific section dedicated to how women of color have been treated differently under the law. Additionally, it would have been helpful for the authors to include a disclaimer at some point that the law does not always function in the manner assumed, or how we want it to. For example, due to limited resources, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is known for closing cases of workplace discrimination before they are even investigated. While rights exist to protect women from workplace discrimination, it is important to know that the government system may not always function correctly to protect these rights. Further, given the dynamic nature of the law, the book by its nature, assumes a static representation of it. There were multiple instances where I noticed that since the publication of the book, the law has progressed or changed. For the most part, the book is relevant, but it is important to keep in mind the publication date when reading through this guide.

Overall, *The Rights of Women* is an extremely practical book that should be read by every woman in the United States. After reading *The Rights of Women*, I am motivated to read the other books in the ACLU series such as, *The Rights of Indians and Tribes* or *The Rights of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, and Transgender People* to gain a greater perspective of legal rights for different communities in the United States. Given the perspective provided and the detail included, I believe readers from any background can gain valuable insight from reading *The Rights of Women*.