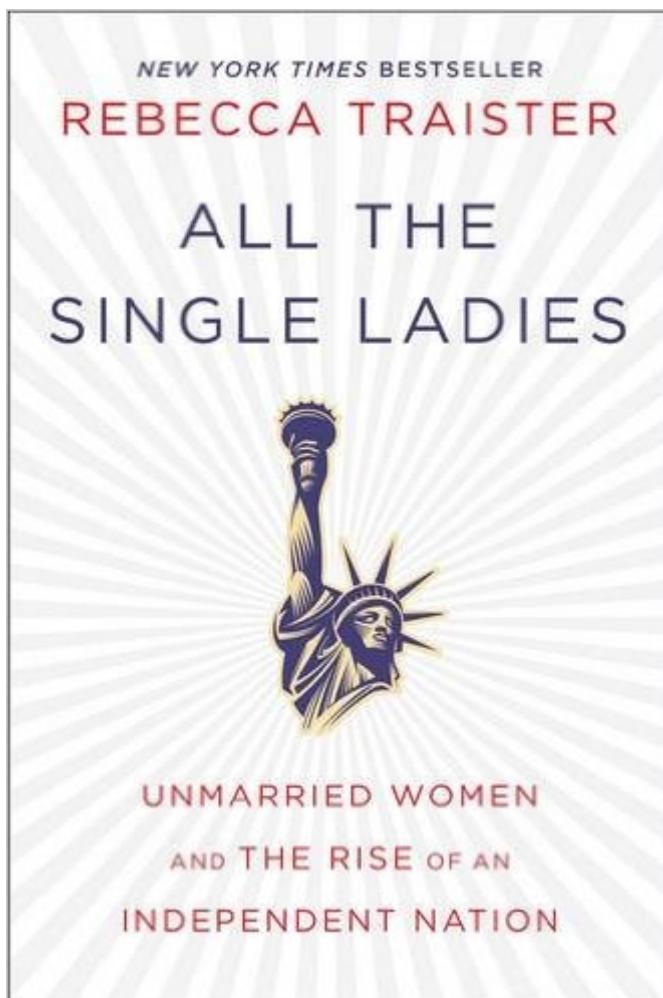


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All The Single Ladies: Unmarried Women And The Rise Of An Independent Nation



Synopsis

A nuanced investigation into the sexual, economic, and emotional lives of women in America, this "singularly triumphant work" (Los Angeles Times) by Rebecca Traister "the most brilliant voice on feminism in the country" (Anne Lamott) is "sure to be vigorously discussed" (Booklist, starred review). In 2009, the award-winning journalist Rebecca Traister started All the Single Ladies "a book she thought would be a work of contemporary journalism" about the twenty-first century phenomenon of the American single woman. It was the year the proportion of American women who were married dropped below fifty percent; and the median age of first marriages, which had remained between twenty and twenty-two years old for nearly a century (1890 "1980), had risen dramatically to twenty-seven. But over the course of her vast research and more than a hundred interviews with academics and social scientists and prominent single women, Traister discovered a startling truth: the phenomenon of the single woman in America is not a new one. And historically, when women were given options beyond early heterosexual marriage, the results were massive social change "temperance, abolition, secondary education, and more. Today, only twenty percent of Americans are wed by age twenty-nine, compared to nearly sixty percent in 1960. The Population Reference Bureau calls it a "dramatic reversal." All the Single Ladies is a remarkable portrait of contemporary American life and how we got here, through the lens of the single American woman. Covering class, race, sexual orientation, and filled with vivid anecdotes from fascinating contemporary and historical figures, All the Single Ladies is destined to be a classic work of social history and journalism. Exhaustively researched, brilliantly balanced, and told with Traister's signature wit and insight, this book should be shelved alongside Gail Collins' When Everything Changed.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There is so much to love in this book. In many ways it serves as a validation of single life. There are stories of women with careers, friendships, hobbies, and children that fulfill them, all without a spouse. Unmarried women have helped to usher in major social change, including abolition and the labor movement. Traister illustrates that single women are multi-faceted and have full lives beyond trying to find a man. All women who spent some portion of their adult life single will see themselves in this book. Just to be clear, Traister doesn't disparage marriage. In fact, she is married with two children herself, although she was in her mid-30s before that happened. This book is about women who spend at least some portion of their adults lives unmarried. Most of the time that's due to marrying later, but there are divorced women and women who live with serious partners as well. The point is that this demographic has been growing steadily larger, and is becoming a political, social, and economic force. The best part of this book is the history, which focuses on the late 1800s to the present. It's always refreshing when someone acknowledges that the "traditional" 1950s model of a house in the suburbs with the husband working and the wife keeping the house was a historical anomaly and only applied to a relatively small section of society. Traister recognizes that poor, minority women usually had to have jobs outside the home. Feminism has frequently celebrated white, middle-class women for doing much the same thing that these women have always had to do. Traister not only acknowledges they exist, but fits them into the broader framework of society and how demographics and history have affected them. There is a practicality running through the book that I really appreciated. It's easy to condemn women for having children while single/poor/young, but Traister looks at the economic and social choices that lead women to it. She also looks at some of the more pragmatic downsides of being single. Who will take care of us when we're old? Who will help us haul furniture home from Ikea? What if we just get tired of both earning our own wages and keeping our own homes? The only quibbles I have are that Traister didn't acknowledge the dark side of female friendship. The chapter about the bonds of friendship between women was positively glowing, and there are many wonderful things to be said. However, mean girls and frenemies are a widely acknowledged phenomenon among young women, and it seemed odd to only cover the positive sides of female friendships. I would also have liked a little more depth on child-free women. It's mentioned briefly, but the emphasis is certainly on single mothers, women who have children later in life, and fertility treatments. The number of women who

choose to forgo having children entirely is also growing, and should have gotten a little more coverage.

If you're not aware of it, though if you're not you haven't been paying attention, there are more single women than married women, and young single women remain single much longer than in previous decades, and they have more career opportunities available than just the narrow one traditionally chosen for them, marriage. How this has come about, the implications for women and society as a whole, and how America must change to help women flourish for not only their benefit but for that of the entire country, is the focus of her book. Traister covers lots of ground quickly, sprinkling in generous quotes from famous historical figures (the likes of Susan B. Anthony) and contemporary women (such as Gloria Steinem and Anita Hill) to illustrate her points and enliven the text. She digs back into the roots of the country, with the most time spent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to show that women living single isn't an entirely new phenomena; that, in fact, women had been making progress in asserting their independence right up through World War II, until, in the nineteen-fifties, society made a concerted effort to shove women back on the narrow path of marriage. However, as when anybody or group get to experience the wider bounties of life (remember, not to be too glib, "How Ya Gonna Keep 'em Down on the Farm (After They've Seen Paree) after World War I), the restrictions of one acceptable lifestyle didn't hold for very long, and the modern women's movement changed society, along with a variety of other developments, among them education, an improvement in earnings, urban life, the pill, greater reproductive freedom, and the like, all of which Traister addresses. Naturally, this push for freedom didn't come without resistance, a resistance still very much alive and a tenet of the more conservative wing of a particular political party. Traister tackles these bromides, like the idea of balancing work and family, family as the bedrock of a stable and prosperous society, as well as other made on behave of choosing marriage over independence. She finishes with a brief bullet point appendix outlining some policies and attitudes that need to change to foster and accommodate more opportunity for women. Succinctly, these boil down to America getting more in line with the other developed countries of the world. Yes, the book can feel a bit polemical at times, also a bit like a women's studies survey text, neither of which is bad because you can't progress without effectively arguing your position and most people probably have little idea of women's history. Of course, the reality of readership is that those who might benefit most from the book will either ignore it or dismiss it out of hand. Hopefully, you aren't among them and you'll give Traister a

thoughtful hearing.

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