



Women

Annie Leibovitz , Susan Sontag

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The photographs by Annie Leibovitz in **Women**, taken especially for the book, encompass a broad spectrum of subjects: a rap artist, an astronaut, two Supreme Court justices, farmers, coal miners, movie stars, showgirls, rodeo riders, socialites, reporters, dancers, a maid, a general, a surgeon, the First Lady of the United States, the secretary of state, a senator, rock stars, prostitutes, teachers, singers, athletes, poets, writers, painters, musicians, theater directors, political activists, performance artists, and businesswomen. "Each of these pictures must stand on its own," Susan Sontag writes in the essay that accompanies the portraits. "But the ensemble says, So this what women are now -- as different, as varied, as heroic, as forlorn, as conventional, as unconventional as this."

Women Details

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Zanna says

In advanced consumer societies, these 'narcissistic' values are more and more the concern of men as well. But male primping never loosens the lock on initiative taking. Indeed, glorying in one's appearance is an ancient warrior's pleasure, an expression of power, an instrument of dominance.

Sontag's essay for this book moves restlessly over the surface of its subject, opening cans of worms and leaving them to wriggle uncomfortably into our consciousness, leaving a impression of something well-begun but half-done. Perhaps this is the intention: 'Men, unlike women, are not a work in progress'. The profoundly felt absence is, as Sontag says, *justice* for women.

While she discusses attractiveness and the male gaze, her remarks really only consider White woman-ness. When she describes the threatening aspect of female sexuality, beauty-as-femininity and masculinity-as-strength, there is no attempt to consider how Black, Latina, Asian etc women's (and men's) sexualities are constructed against the White feminine ideal as deviant, which is disappointing in a book that features many Black women.

'In a few countries where men have mobilised for a war against women, women scarcely appear at all. The imperial rights of the camera - to gaze at, to record, to exhibit anyone, anything - are an exemplary feature of modern life, as is the emancipation of women'

This casual identification with the 'imperial'(!) freedom of the camera to gaze on the other with woman-emancipation is ill at ease with the first sentence. To me it seems odd that she mentions women outside America, where the entire photography project was conducted, while neglecting the fraught issues of race (and social class and even celebrity) that Leibovitz seems to have considered in choosing her subjects. Images of the Williams sisters, Jamaica Kincaid watering her garden wearing a frown that resists reading, and a beautiful Yoruba woman with her children carrying themselves proudly on a beach in Florida bear the ongoing history of racism. The White women here have felt themselves human in front of Leibovitz, whatever Sontag says; their faces declare it. In contrast, the Black women never gaze back carelessly at the White woman holding the camera, but resist her, fend off the 'imperial' gaze. Maybe I am only projecting here.

Among all the images of actresses and politicians off-duty, and astronauts, athletes and miners in their uniforms, Leibovitz has made the decision to depict three 'showgirls' in their work-wear alongside their everyday selves, in both modes as it were. This sudden doubling perhaps anticipates and cuts off narrow assumptions about these women and presents questions about the experience of performance, but if showgirls can only become human outside their costumes, the status quo (fear of female sexuality, the whorephobic aspect of misogyny) stands unchallenged. The disruption fails to awaken critical consciousness to the fact that every appearance before the camera must be performative, lulling us back into passive consumption. Not that this isn't an enjoyable book, but in so far as it moves me to speak it calls on me to be combative!

Lea says

Amazing book. I got a signed copy for christmas after seeing an Annie Leibovits show in Columbus right before. What an awesome gift! Thanks Chris!

Avory says

I didn't read the essay, but I did look at all the photographs. I thought they were gorgeous, and I loved the juxtapositions. I especially liked the showgirls where they were shown in and out of costume. This is a great book to have on the coffee table when you need a little inspiration.

Shelly says

Annie Leibovitz's photography is amazing. She has an incredible eye and her talent is off the charts. The collection of photographs were very interesting to look through. I was disappointed that they weren't more of her popular stuff. I was expecting some of her iconic photos. And there was way more nudity than I was expecting. I wasn't expecting any and there was quite a bit. I had to keep it away from my kids who were big-eyed when they peeked over my shoulder.

darrienmichael says

Leibovitz, as usual, produces memorable images while Sontag provides the words. Although, it is just as easy to provide your own words and put Sontag's aside. That is part of the beauty of the book. Oh, and it looks great on my coffee table. The book is a true celebration of women and their multifaceted complexity. Or you can just look at all the nice pictures.

Ashley-Marie says

Beautiful photographs and a very thought provoking essay from the late Susan Sontag. Very nice read/look through

Maria Wheeler says

Interesting look at women-especially the two depictions (real life vs. night life) of Vegas showgirls.

Powells.com says

Annie Leibovitz got her start at Rolling Stone in the early seventies. There she made a name for herself and produced some of the publication's most well-known photographs, including the famous shot of a naked John Lennon wrapping himself around a fully clothed Yoko Ono. She went on to become the chief photographer for Vanity Fair, and has been exhibited in scores of art galleries, including the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

Leibovitz's style appears comfortable and ingenuous, to the point of being effortless. And yet, she has the remarkable ability of revealing more than just the features of her subjects — she captures who they are and how they feel. In *Women*, Leibovitz is both photographer and photojournalist. The obvious connection between her subjects is gender, but the women portrayed couldn't be more varied. This collection provides a catalog of American women from all walks of life in their everyday element: from celebrities to construction workers, astronauts, athletes, teachers, politicians, soldiers, and artists. "Each of these pictures must stand on its own," writes Susan Sontag in the book's accompanying essay. "But the ensemble says, So this is what women are now — as different, as varied, as heroic, as forlorn, as conventional, as unconventional as this." *Women* may be remembered as the definitive photographic documentary of its subject at the turn of the century. Ann, Powells.com

<http://www.powells.com/cgi-bin/biblio...>

Gineke says

I enjoyed this book. It's the second book of works from Annie Leibovitz that I've read, and I must say I enjoyed this book a lot more than *Pilgrimage*. Annie Leibovitz is great at portrait photography. She's most known for her celebrity photographs, but I must say that her portraits of regular Americans touched me a lot more.

You can see the dedication in the eyes of the subjects, so can read their strive and laughter in their wrinkles, and they just feel real. Those photographs made me feel like these were people I'd love to get to know better, and that's a powerful thing to convey through a photograph.

David Schaafsma says

I recently reviewed Lauren Greenfield's 2017 collection of photographs focusing on a range of girls in contemporary American society:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

It's not all-inclusive, of course, but it reveals a range of what it might mean to be a "girl" now.

Celebrity (in two senses) photographer Annie Leibowitz in 1999 compiled a collection of photographs of women (and some girls) in 1999 to some fanfare. With an essay by Susan Sontag. I read it when it came out. It bears some comparison to Greenfield's collection, which features fewer celebrities and more problematic (strippers, prostitutes, party girls) representations of females, but in general, the two collections share a resemblance in the range of women they represent.

An update on the Leibowitz collection in January 2017:

<https://www.ubs.com/microsites/annie-...>

Of course there are many collections of photographs of women, if you wanted to make a study of all the studies: Mapplethorpe, Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon's Women in the Mirror, Sally Mann, Cindy Sherman.

Photokitten says

Annie Leibowitz is an amazing photographer. Her art is so moving and compelling, however I feel that many of the images in this book appear to be more contrived than her usual portraits....beautiful just not a MUST HAVE

Kate says

Sontag's essay is a stand up and shout experience. a rally for justice and exploration into the why's of gender and inequality. her main point being that a book of portraits of men portrayed in similar array and profession would be useless and pointless.

a quick read that reminds me why I'm here to be a woman. and then there are the portraits of Leibovitz...

Zöe Yu says

I checked out this book for Susan Sontag's essay, but it feels like superficial. I like all the issues she mentioned in the essay, but it seems itself as a bigot.

Also, the design of the book I don't like it. Because not all the name tags are under the photographs, so I have to look for which one fits which photograph. Very annoying.

Jacques Willems says

If you like Annie Leibovitz' Photography this is a must have.
Beautiful collection of extraordinary portraits from a variety of women of all classes.

Mark says

Checked this out to read Sontag's essay and compare it to her comments on the writers of essays in photography books that she made in "On Photography."

I would say that Sontag's essay was disappointing but it was pretty much typical Sontag so I guess that

would be redundant. The essay was mostly a whinge about the patriarchy and how women have been kept down and so on. While these are certainly extremely important topics, they have been covered far better in many other places. Heck, I would even expect Sontag to cover them better in a different venue. But in a book of photographs celebrating the late 20th century--mostly American--woman, womanhood, and the diversity of such, the essay was not only misplaced but wrong as an accompaniment to the photographs.
