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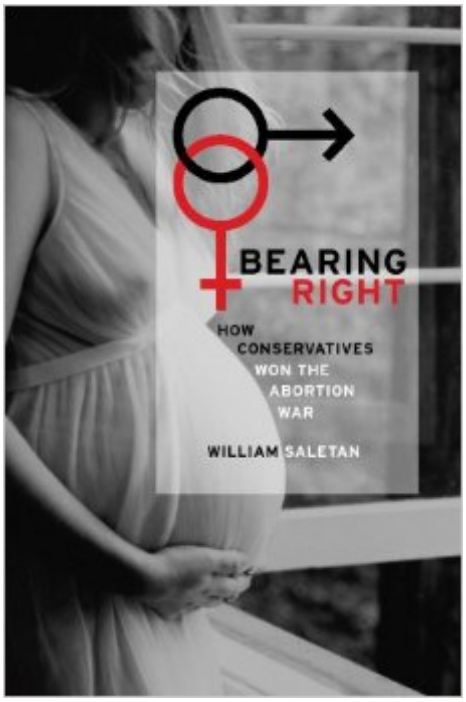
Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won The Abortion War



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Synopsis

In his gripping, behind-the-scenes account, journalist William Saletan reveals exactly how, thirty years after Roe v. Wade, "pro-choice" conservatives have won the abortion war. Having successfully turned abortion into a privacy issue, conservatives now prevail on issues ranging from abortion’s legality and parental notification to Medicaid, rape, and cloning; consequently, reproductive autonomy is now becoming inaccessible to the young and the poor. This eye-opening exposÃ© tells how abortion rights activists—people who desired social change, women’s equality, and broader access to health care—have had their message co-opted in a culture of privacy and limited government. Bearing Right is also a story about the essentially conservative character of the United States today.Saletan tells how, beginning in Arkansas in 1986 during the administration of Governor Bill Clinton, the National Abortion Rights Action League repackaged the abortion issue to give it broader appeal to conservatives. Pro-choice conservatives adopted this new rhetoric and made the abortion issue their own. Saletan takes us through the key events in the ensuing story—the fight over the nomination of Judge Robert Bork, the election of Governor Doug Wilder in Virginia, the convergence of the Bush and Clinton positions on abortion in 1992, and much more—right up to the present day.This book is a crucial lesson in how politicians and interest groups can change the way we vote, not by telling us facts or lies, but by reshaping the way we think—in part through mass marketing. Today, the abortion rights movement must ask itself what it has won and what it is fighting for. This book is sure to play a role in answering that question.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This unfortunately titled volume is sure to attract many puzzled and curious readers: "They/we won the abortion war?!? When did that happen?" But William Saletan's conservatives are the "pro-choice conservatives"; right-to-life activists call them liberals and politicians call them moderates. These swing voters, conservative but not radical, pro-choice but pro-restriction, have dictated the terms of engagement in the abortion war from the late 1980s on. And Saletan's well-written account of abortion politics since that time gives no indication that the conflict is over, or will be any time soon.Bearing Right begins its narrative in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1986. Pollster Harrison Hickman is leading a focus group on a proposed amendment to the Arkansas constitution to ban public funding of abortions, while the strategists of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) watch from behind a darkened glass panel, discussing how to turn the values of the Arkansas populace against the popular amendment. Remarkably, they succeed.Despite voters' widespread disapproval of public funding for abortion, Hickman found a pair of key weaknesses: women were far less likely to support the amendment when rape entered the picture, and men reacted strongly when the amendment was portrayed as government intrusion into private family decisions. The resulting media campaign based on Hickman's insights marked the beginning of a dramatic shift in the terms of the public discourse on abortion rights. Pro-choice activists embraced the language of libertarian conservatism, the first slip onto a politically expedient slope that would gradually erode the meaning of "choice." They soon found that their ungrammatical new slogan, "Who Decides-You or Them?

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