

## Fearless Women: Feminist Patriots from Abigail Adams to Beyoncé

**Elizabeth Cobbs**

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The historical biographies collected in Elizabeth Cobbs's *Fearless Women* cover those who advanced women's rights at each stage in American history.

Arguing for broader definitions of feminism and patriotism that encompass their nuanced historical meanings, the book calls those who "subscribed to the belief that women and men are entitled to equal dignity and opportunity" feminist. The diverse subjects include a nineteenth-century immigrant who escaped an abusive marriage, Rosa Cavalleri, and world-renowned gymnast Simone Biles. And the book's coverage also extends to surprising figures like conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly who, despite spear-heading the modern antifeminist movement, is credited with advancing women's rights to participate in government.

The book is divided into eight parts, each corresponding to a time period within American history. Each period is paired with a specific goal of women's rights movements, including the right to learn and the right to compete. In each period, two women are introduced who exemplified the activism and struggles of their time. The result is masterful, blending historical objectivity with intimate knowledge of the subjects and an abundance of citations with frequent descriptions of women's body language, as with "Rosa smiled as she sank into the chair." Further, Cobbs is unflinching in describing the challenges the women faced, including rape and imprisonment. The women's stories weave together, with Cobbs commenting on what earlier figures would have made of their later counterparts' achievements, as when she reflects that Chicana feminist movement leader Martha Cotera would have agreed with Beyoncé's message of both challenging and uplifting men in one's community.

Delivering a timeless message of equality, *Fearless Women* is wide-ranging in its biographical surveys of the women who shaped the US's struggle for women's rights since her founding.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (March / April 2023)

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