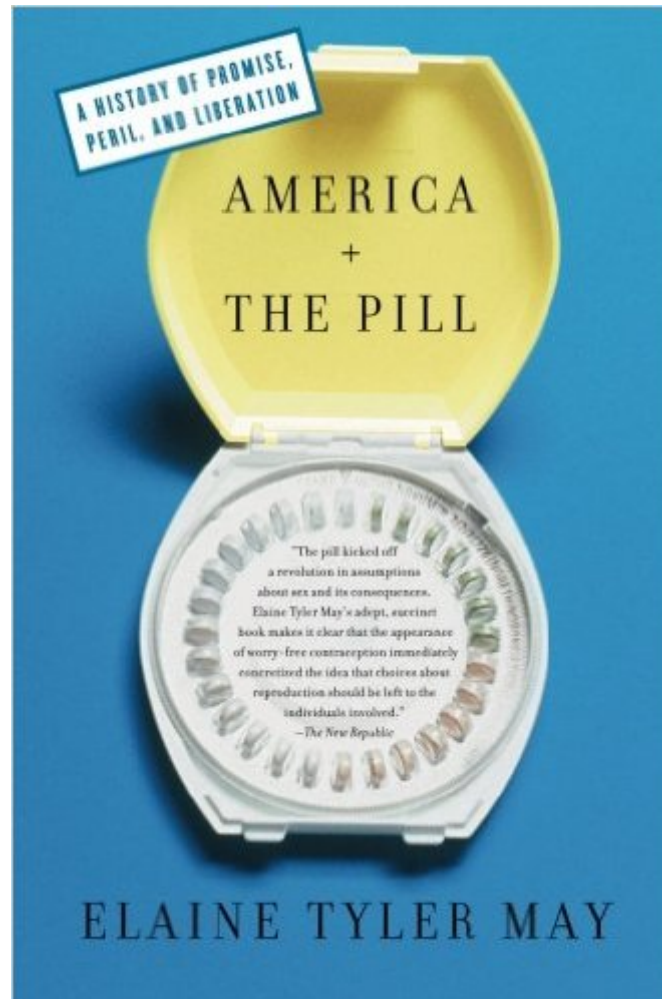


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America And The Pill: A History Of Promise, Peril, And Liberation



Synopsis

In 1960, the FDA approved the contraceptive commonly known as "the pill." Advocates, developers, and manufacturers believed that the convenient new drug would put an end to unwanted pregnancy, ensure happy marriages, and even eradicate poverty. But as renowned historian Elaine Tyler May reveals in *American Women and the Pill*, it was women who embraced it and created change. They used the pill to challenge the authority of doctors, pharmaceutical companies, and lawmakers. They demonstrated that the pill was about much more than family planning; it offered women control over their bodies and their lives. From little-known accounts of the early years to personal testimonies from young women today, May illuminates what the pill did and did not achieve during its half century on the market.

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Customer Reviews

This book provides a short, but interesting history of the birth control pill in America and discusses some of the positives and some of the negatives that have come to be associated with the pill. I doubt many younger people are aware that birth control was illegal in many states until about 1960. In fact, it remained illegal in Connecticut and Massachusetts until the Griswold case in 1965. Doctors who prescribed any sort of birth control were in danger of going to jail, and the primary method of birth control was rhythm roulette or the withdrawal method. The doctors who undertook the work of developing the pill did so under the cloak of controlling "women's issues" rather than as birth control. It was believed that when the pill came out, the level of promiscuity among women would

rise. In fact, no such thing happened, although women in marriage had a bump in their libidos, as they no longer had to worry about getting pregnant at every turn. The release of the pill really didn't unleash the wave of sexual freedom that was feared and sometimes credited to the pill. The book discusses issues for women such as side effects of the pill and the gradual movement toward a low dose pill that was much safer than the original pill. Some women had real issues with the pill while others had no problems at all. It was interesting to see the mix. The book also described the effort to invent a birth control pill for males, although so far, all efforts of that front have been unsuccessful. Indeed, many women pointed out that if men had to take the pill, they would be a whole lot less interested in sex, as it is documented that men's libidos are tied directly to their fertility. The book was a very interesting read on the history of the pill, as well as some of the societal and physical side effects. I would recommend this book to anyone who doesn't know the history of the pill as it is quite enlightening!

Historian May traces the development of the contraceptive pill and concludes: The feminist movement liberated women and used the pill as an important tool to gain control over their lives; there is no evidence that the pill caused a boom in premarital sex; and the pill has had little impact on world fertility rates or overpopulation. May shows that the pill simply enlarged the repertory of methods available to women to reduce the power gap between men and women. "The pill has been at the center of the major transformations in women's lives over the past half-century." And she shows "how much has changed and how much has remained the same." May traces the legal battles over contraception and also focuses on the Vatican "old boys club" 1968 rejection of its own theological commissioners' 73 to 10 recommendation that it relax its opposition to contraception, a rejection ignored by the overwhelming majority of Catholics. This book easily rates five stars. --- Edd Doerr, President, Americans for Religious Liberty

While an interesting and easy read, May lacks a critical eye on many issues she encounters in this book. Her dismissal of the problematic way the pill was tested on women in Puerto Rico is just one example.

This is a short look at the repercussions of the Pill in American society since its introduction in 1960. As the author contends, its impact has not been as revolutionary as initially foretold (the world is still filled with many problems) and because it is individual women who take the Pill - some women love it (finding it empowering, efficient) and others come to loath it (for the side affects or other

reasons). At times this book is a little too cursory (with other recent books used as sources) and given to generalizations. For instance when speaking of this current century and the fear of pregnancy (on page 149) she states: 'Today there is no longer the terror of facing an illegal abortion, a shamed reputation, banishment to a home for unwed mothers, or hasty abortion'. Oh really - to begin with in many states it is very difficult for a teenage girl to obtain an abortion. Unfortunately when it comes to sexual behavior and 'shamed reputation' there is always someone who wants to push his or her view of the world unto a young person (particularly if it is a puritanical point of view). But regardless the author provides a brief but good history. Elaine Tyler May is obviously in favour of contraception and the education of women and men to make an informed choice. She points out that Republican presidents over the years have always tried to repress access to birth control knowledge and devices - the most recent one was trying to promote abstinence to the detriment of basic contraceptive knowledge. In the best chapter in the book (A Pill for Men) she illustrates that men are very willing to take a drug (with various side effects) that enhances their virility but are extremely reluctant to have a drug to prevent fertilization. My favourite quote in the book (from page 25) "Every child should be a wanted child. Those who want them should be able to have them; those who don't should be able to prevent them".

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