



Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution

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"Lesbian Nation, a collection of essays published by feminist writer Jill Johnston in 1973, was an important early manifesto of lesbian feminist and separatist politics. The term "lesbian nation" became a rallying cry and a powerful symbol of solidarity for early political lesbians, who sought to transform what they saw as a patriarchal society that oppressed and excluded them.

Jill Johnston

During the early 1970s, Jill Johnston was a writer for the bohemian New York newspaper The Village Voice. She was also an exuberant feminist theorist, and an irrepressibly outspoken lesbian. Her book, Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution, included many pieces previously published in the Voice, and was dedicated "for my mother, who should have been a lesbian and for my daughter in hopes she will be."

The essays, with titles such as "There Wasn't a Dyke in the Land," "The Second Sucks and the Feminine Mystake," and "Amazons and Archedykes," articulated Johnston's incisive critiques of patriarchy and the straight feminist movement, spiced with outrageous humor, sex, and gossip.

Johnston's style was brash, passionate, and eccentric. With few sentence breaks and fewer paragraph breaks, her ideas seemed to spill out in a brilliant chaotic avalanche. As she writes in the essay "Love at First Sex," "I think I was so angry that I was conducting a one woman revolution through a very slow calculated but unrelenting exposure of myself in the guise of a literary code hopefully so challenging and fascinating and entertaining and difficult to read that any premature retaliation from a hostile society would be discouraged."

In the general climate of intellectual, political, and sexual excitement that was the early lesbian movement, Johnston's style of personal revelation, mixed with radical political theory, was immensely appealing.

Lesbian Separatism and Lesbian Culture

Among Johnston's radical ideas was one that would become the cornerstone of the lesbian separatist movement of the late 1970s: "All women are lesbians except those who don't know it."

Many early lesbian feminists found that their analysis of male-dominated society led repeatedly to the idea that lesbianism was the ultimate goal of feminism. These women believed that as women began to value themselves and other women, they would naturally begin to withdraw their emotional energies from men and focus them on lesbians.

While few may have believed in the possibility of an actual lesbian nation, many worked hard to create a separate women's culture that included women's literature and periodicals, women's music, women's bookstores, coffeehouses, restaurants, and festivals, a feminized non-oppressive language, and many other institutions that focused solely on women and lesbians. This women's culture became the lesbian nation.

It is perhaps a tribute to the influence of Johnston's ideas and the lesbians who worked to create women's culture both before and after the publication of her book, that in 1976 "compulsory heterosexuality" was named as one of the crimes against women by the Brussels Tribunal on Crimes against Women.

Similarly, Johnston's writing inspired Canadian feminist academic Becki Ross to describe the Lesbian Organization of Toronto, an extremely active lesbian organization from 1976 to 1980, as "the house that Jill built." -- "Lesbian Nation" from glbtq, Inc. (glbtq.com)

Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution Details

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From Reader Review Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution for online ebook

Joey Diamond says

oh this is a crazy crazy book. but i do love her stream of consciousness madness.

RachelHeath123aol.Com says

"The personal is political" was a saying of the early "Women' Lib" movement. This book is a wild and crazy mishmash of personal and political. It is off the mark politically in some places and extremist -- but it is also a fun and fascinating book to read. Jill Johnston was extremely biased in her thinking as a lesbian separatist. Indeed, she also could never completely reconcile or make sense of her resistance to "The Man," defined as the patriarchy, and her being the loving mother of a male child. There is nonsense in this book and great sense. I think the reason I recommend it is because she was a truly gifted writer. Much of the stream-of-consciousness writing has a quality at once poetic and dreamlike. One of my favorite chapters was "The Myth of the Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" and I think this was because I think the whole clitoral vs. vaginal orgasm debate is wrong-headed as a body acts as a unit sexually.

I can't give it more than 3 stars because Jill Johnston was just plain wrong in some areas and I don't condone an anti-male viewpoint. However, I can recommend the book because the writing is wonderful and much of the discussion is fascinating.

Lauren says

Incredible book and one that really made an impact.

Patricia says

Really, really weird. But I'm now kind of obsessed with Jill Johnston, and this book sent me off on a whole research project on 1970s lesbian separatism.

Lisa Guest says

i discovered this delightful dose of radical weirdness in the allentown public library at age 13.

Stephy says

Jill Johnston was a literate Lesbian Separatist who never came to grips with the fact that, until we conquer

the question of parthenogenesis, women will need some donations from men to keep producing children. Those of us who had boy children were outcasts by her definition at a time when we needed community. It was a rough time for everybody, and Lesbian Nation left no room for any disagreement with her theories. It is now a period piece, though it was a very hot flash in the pan back in the day.

Caty says

Made me want to be a lesbian separatist when I was seventeen & dating a boy. Obviously deeply flawed, but great. I esp. love the part about fucking with Norman Mailer's performance.

Kelly H. (Maybedog) says

Dated. No paragraph breaks. Boring.

Amanda Sullivan says

Yeesh.

This book is the perfect response to anyone who claims third wave feminism is a step backwards for humanity. Jill Johnston showcases there have been total nutters running through feminism since at least 1973.
