Sex, Work and Politics: Women in Britain, 1830-1918

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In 1830, women of all classes were repressed in a male-dominated society. By 1918, largely through their own struggles, they had seized control over most areas of their lives. Some of these sought access to the public sphere in education, the professions and central and local government. Others aimed to improve women's legal and economic status within marriage. Married women's property rights, divorce, custody of children, domestic violence as well as prostitution were all significant areas in which feminists campaigned for changes in the male-oriented status of the law and the differing moral standards to which wives and husbands were expected to conform. The long campaign for women's suffrage by suffragists and after 1903 suffragettes and the effects of World War 1 culminated in some women getting the vote in 1918 and a decade later women achieved the vote on the same terms as men. Yet, despite these advances for many largely working-class women, the tyranny of multiple pregnancies, poorly paid work and limited access to the means of personal improvement remained. This book explores the ways in which women's status in society developed and changed during the nineteenth and early-twentieth century by looking at the nature of and challenges to women's place in a masculine world, the character of work and how women achieved political and legal rights.

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