

Pearls of Political Wisdom

Reviewed By Stuart Nachbar

Pearls Politics and Power: How Women Can Win and Lead by Madeleine Kunin is a primer on women in politics. It is a very well-written work that tells why women have run for office, how they have succeeded, the obstacles they faced, as well as their leadership and legislative styles. It also provides ideas on how women can better help women get elected to office.

Kunin, a former three-term governor of Vermont, assistant secretary of education and U.S. Ambassador to Switzerland has not only presented an insider's perspective; she has used anecdotes from history and other elected officials to effectively present all of the arguments about why women run—and why they do not. While most of the points appear obvious, family responsibilities and fear of electoral defeat being two examples—and it would be a disservice to the reader to ignore them—some also go back to history. For instance, we are reminded that women were not given the right to vote in the presidential elections until 1920, 65 years after that right was granted to African-American men.

Most interesting was a chapter on the history of female heads of state outside the United States; so much of the world has a lead on us. Egypt had a female pharaoh, Hatshepsut, who ruled 3,480 years ago. Joan of Arc saved France from British dominance during the 15th century, at the age of 19. Five British queens wielded the same powers as a king, up to the end of Queen Victoria's reign in 1901. Since 1960, 44 women have been elected as the leaders of their country, some by parliamentary governments where the head of state is selected by the legislative branch—which was mostly men—or won the popular vote in a general election. The first country to elect a female prime minister was Sri Lanka, the Philippines are the first nation to elect two.

Kunin served in the Clinton Administration, so she adds her two cents on Hillary Clinton's prospects in the upcoming election. Clinton, she mentions, is not the first woman to run for president. Twenty one women have sought the office since 1872. Two ran on the Equal Right Rights party in 1872 and 1884, the rest sought the support of Democrats or Republicans, but none came close to winning the nomination.

Kunin demonstrates that Clinton has been bombarded by all of the gender stereotypes and media coverage more suited to a female entertainer or socialite than a presidential candidate. But she praises Clinton's resiliency and instincts to survive. The chapter led me to consider that Hillary Diane Rodham could have succeeded in politics without being married to Bill Clinton. With her Wellesley and Yale Law education, as well as her early experiences on Capital Hill, she might have returned home to later become the senior U.S. senator from Illinois.

I had the opportunity to hear Kunin speak before I bought the book and found her committed, charismatic and interesting. When I reached her at the talk, book in hand, she asked me if I would like to have something special inscribed. I asked her to tell why I should read it. She smiled and kindly said: "This is not only for women."

I agree: it's one of the best career guides on politics I have read. The advice about confronting the political process and facing the public in this book will be appreciated by men and women alike.

Contact Stuart Nachbar at <http://www.EducatedQuest.com>, a blog on education politics, policy and technology or read about his first book, *The Sex Ed Chronicle*, a novel on education and politics in 1980 New Jersey, at <http://www.SexEdChronicles.com>.