



Notes from the Cracked Ceiling

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In the presidential election of 2008 America seemed ready to elevate a woman to the presidency or vice presidency and—with Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin—was on the verge of actually doing so. Words like inevitable and phenomenon were in the air and the political and cultural stars seemed to be aligned.

Why didn't it happen? What will it take to make it happen soon?

In a probing analysis sure to ignite controversy, acclaimed White House correspondent Anne Kornblut argues that the optimists are blind to formidable obstacles that still stand in the way of any woman who aims for America's highest political offices. And she makes clear exactly which strategies and common assumptions will need to change if a woman intends to break through the "highest, hardest glass ceiling" of all. Delving deep inside the Clinton and Palin campaigns, Kornblut reveals:

- the strategists' mishandling of their candidates as women by failing to strike the right balance between femininity and toughness
- Clinton's weathering of a series of stinging gender-based attacks, until accusations of "pimping out" her daughter, Chelsea, finally brought her to tears
- that Barack Obama was celebrated for his "historic" win in Iowa, even though it was not the first time an African American had won a caucus, but few noticed when Clinton became the first woman to win a primary in New Hampshire
- that Palin was chosen solely by men, none of whom had experience in running women for office

Drawing from exclusive interviews with prominent women in both parties, Kornblut pinpoints where politically ambitious American women have gone wrong and what it will take to put them on track to the ultimate prize: the presidency. Former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice asserts: "We crossed the bar on African Americans some time ago. I'm not quite sure we've crossed it on women." House Speaker Nancy Pelosi remarks on the "suit of armor" women must don to survive the sexism and viciousness of politics. Homeland Security Director Janet Napolitano confronts the false rumors that she is a lesbian and reveals what an invigorating "kick in the pants" it is to be in politics. And California gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman, the former head of eBay, compares politics to business: "It feels to me, thus far, as less of a meritocracy and more of a popularity contest. More of a little bit of an old boys' club."

Kornblut identifies the surprising realities of gender politics, such as the harsh treatment female candidates often receive from women voters, the gap between the United States and other countries when it comes to the electability of women, the "mommy penalty" that handicaps women candidates with young children, and the special appeal that women with law enforcement backgrounds have with voters.

Notes from the Cracked Ceiling reveals that the highly touted new era of gender-equal politics never got as far as was commonly perceived and is now in full retreat. It is essential reading for anyone who cares about politics and the limits for women that persist.

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