

**Ellen F. Fitzpatrick.** *The Highest Glass Ceiling: Women's Quest for the American Presidency.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016. 318 pp. \$25.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-08893-1.

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In accessible and engaging prose, historian Ellen Fitzpatrick chronicles the political careers of three women who attempted to ascend to the American presidency. The campaigns of Victoria Woodhull (1872), Margaret Chase Smith (1964), and Shirley Chisholm's (1972) foreshadowed Hillary Clinton's 2016 run. They further illuminate the struggles women have long faced in gaining full entrée into American politics. Fitzpatrick declares at the outset that "Clinton may have been the most successful female presidential candidate, but she had emerged from a longer race" (p. 3).

Indeed, the past resonates throughout this book. The richly textured history of women's pursuit of the presidency focuses on three individuals over the course of a century at a time when patriarchal views were at their apex. Fitzpatrick begins with Victoria Woodhull, who first sought the presidency in 1872. Running for office in the aftermath of the Civil War and long before women could vote, Woodhull was a spiritualist healer, a stockbroker, and feminist. She accepted the Equal Rights Party's nomination in the summer of 1871. However, Woodhull was a free-love radical whose role in a sex scandal proved to be her political undoing. In fact, according to Fitzpatrick, "on election day in 1872, the first woman to see the American presidency was in prison" (p. 63). At a time when her gender, the law, and her age worked

against her, Woodhull lived life freely, openly, and unapologetically in a gendered space where women who did so were considered morally suspect. But her political sojourn laid the foundation for future women politicians.

Decades later, in 1963, Margaret Chase Smith encountered similar challenges despite her extensive political experience as Maine's three-term Republican senator. Smith had served in the Senate longer than any woman in the twentieth century. Her political strengths and foibles were well known. President John F. Kennedy described her as "a very formidable political figure." But her Republican colleagues were less certain about her political efficacy because, according to Fitzpatrick, she had voted "across the political spectrum from liberal to conservative from the day she entered the House in 1940" (p. 66).

Smith's elevation to national electoral office came through the death of her husband Clyde Smith. But that was not her only entrée into the political realm. Smith possessed well-established networks through Sororsis and the Maine Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs which had long served as critical sites for women's political efficacy since they obtained the right to vote in 1920. Channeling the leadership skills she had gained through her membership in these organizations, Smith won her first election in

1930, to the Maine State Committee. And after her husband died in 1940, Smith gained his seat congressional seat under the “widow’s mandate” whereby women could be elected to complete the congressional term of a husband or male relative.

As the United States watched World War II unfold in Europe, many doubted Smith’s ability to serve during a time of international crisis. She was plagued by traditional notions about women’s historical associations with peace movements. Yet Smith defied expectations and downplayed her gender when she assumed her husband’s office by focusing on military preparedness and national defense. However, as much as she denied it, Smith acted in feminist ways. She repeatedly voted for the Equal Rights Amendment and even cosponsored the measure in 1945. Along with Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, she also defended female defense industry workers during World War II when they were criticized for high job absenteeism rates. Along these same lines, in 1941 Smith initiated legislation to equalize minimum wages for men and women working in defense industries. And she advanced a bill to improve conditions for military nurses. One wonders what her role was in promoting an increase in the number of African American nurses. Did she, for example, interact with Mary McCleod Bethune or Mable K. Staupers, executive director of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses, both of whom advocated tirelessly for this cause?

Throughout the next three decades, Smith’s sought a senate seat and won, became involved in a relationship with a younger, unmarried man, and was slandered by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Yet, she achieved an important precedent for future politically involved women in 1964 when the Republican Party formally nominated her for president. Unfortunately, her political career ended in 1972 after she supported American intervention in Vietnam.

It was also during 1972 that the first African-descended woman decided to run for president. In doing so, US Representative Shirley Chisholm, according to Fitzpatrick, “battled not only her fellow Democratic contenders but the incredulity that greeted her very presence in the presidential primary” (p. 145). That is, unlike Victoria Woodhull and Margaret Chase Smith, Chisholm had to justify running as both a black person and a woman. But she was up for the challenge. When questioned about being subjected to “humiliations,” she responded, “I can handle them. That’s been the story of my life” (p. 147). Indeed, she had been involved in politics since college, had worked with Brooklyn’s 17th Assembly District Democratic Club in the 1940s, held a seat in the New York State Assembly, and in 1968 was elected to the House of Representatives after defeating civil rights leader and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) co-founder James Farmer.

Chisholm understood well that she was challenging a white, male, and patriarchal tradition by running for president, and yet she was willing, Fitzpatrick relays, “because I understand” (p. 148). Chisholm astutely harnessed the enthusiasm of black and white college students newly enfranchised by the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, which lowered the voting age to eighteen; the women’s movement; and those who were impoverished and underemployed.

Competing with Alabama governor George Wallace, who also sought the Democratic Party’s nomination in 1972, Chisholm embraced poor and rural African Americans during the Florida primary. She and Wallace both positioned themselves as “champions of the poor.” But while Wallace campaigned on promises to cut federal aid programs, Chisholm supported increased aid and legislation for the poor. Both, however, shared a disdain for northern and midwestern liberals.

Chisholm, like Chase Smith, prioritized her duties in the house during the primaries. And like Smith, according to Fitzpatrick, her dedication

yielded her few rewards in the presidential race. After a widely circulated fake press release charged that Chisholm had been committed to a Virginia mental institution in the 1950s after being diagnosed as a schizophrenic, her campaign was irreparably damaged. And unfortunately, in the end, most African American delegates at the Democratic National Convention were committed to George McGovern. However, Chisholm gained more delegate votes than any woman candidate, slightly more than 151, at the convention. She retained this record until Hillary Clinton's candidacy in 2008.

Fitzpatrick astutely notes that financing remains the most formidable obstacle to a presidential run for both women and men. Yet Hillary Clinton's 2008 campaign, which reflected the aggregate experiences of Margaret Chase Smith, Shirley Chisholm, and Victoria Woodhull, was still a remarkable achievement. Women presidential candidates will perhaps always struggle with the intersectionality of race, at times, and gender every time, but their presence in political spaces is no longer exotic. Fitzpatrick has done a tremendous job of relaying this fascinating history. She has produced a book that can and indeed should be read by academics and lay persons alike.

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