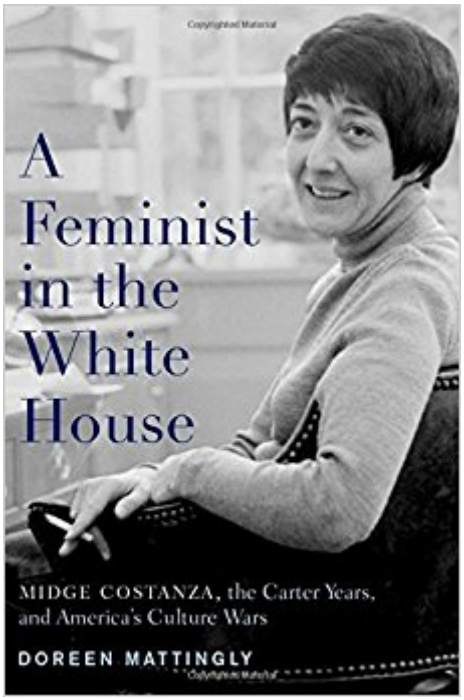
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A Feminist In The White House: Midge Costanza, The Carter Years, And America's Culture Wars



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Synopsis

A feminist, an outspoken activist, a woman without a college education, Midge Costanza was one of the unlikeliest of White House insiders. Yet in 1977 she became the first female Assistant to the President for Public Liaison under Jimmy Carter, emerging as a prominent focal point of the American culture wars. Tasked with bringing the views of special interest groups to the president, Costanza championed progressive causes even as Americans grew increasingly divided on the very issues for which she fought. In A Feminist in the White House, Doreen Mattingly draws on Costanza's personal papers to shed light on the life of this fascinating and controversial woman. Mattingly chronicles Costanza's dramatic rise and fall as a public figure, from her initial popularity to her ultimate clashes with Carter and his aides. While Costanza challenged Carter to support abortion rights, gay and lesbian rights, and feminist policies, Carter faced increased pressure to appease the interests of emerging Religious Right, which directly opposed Costanza's ideals. Ultimately, marginalized both within the White House and by her fellow feminists, Costanza was pressured to resign in 1978.Through the lens of Constanza's story, readers catch a unique perspective of the rise of debates which have defined the feminist movement and sexual politics to this very day. Mattingly also reveals a wider, but heretofore neglected, narrative of the complex era of gender politics in the late 1970's Washington - a history which continues to resonate in politics today. A Feminist in the White House is a must-read for anyone with an interest in sexual politics, female politicians, and presidential history.

Book Information

Hardcover: 328 pages
Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (May 31, 2016)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0190468602
ISBN-13: 978-0190468606
Product Dimensions: 9.4 x 1.3 x 6.3 inches
Shipping Weight: 2.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)
Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews
Best Sellers Rank: #116,647 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #26 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Women in Politics #97 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Elections & Political Process > Leadership #133 inÃ Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Social Activists

Customer Reviews

"...a splendid, wholly engrossing biography." --Women’s Review of Books"This book identifies factors driving development, location, and the height of Manhattan skyscrapers from the late 19th century. The focus is on market land values, signaling location demand with building heights resulting from location value. Evidence, not geologic features, justifies economic theories on land use and building heights and development of New York’s skyline...Recommended for New York City development details. Familiarity with its streets will give greater insight to the city’s development." --E. C. Erickson, California State University, Stanislaus"The biography is a fascinating and thorough look at the way second-wave feminism played out in the political arena, and highly relevant at this particular political moment." --Publishers Weekly"I covered Midge Costanza for Newsweek, and the controversies described in this book give Midge her due as a principled advocate while raising questions about the appropriate role of a White House staffer. Drawing on a wealth of material, the author documents her subject’s increasing feminism and her clashes with the president who made history when he named her to his staff. In the end, each felt betrayed by the other and the reader will feel torn too knowing how the story ends." --Eleanor Clift "For anyone interested in presidential politics this book is a must read. The meticulously documented story of the life and career of Midge Costanza lays open the inner workings of the Carter White House at a time when the role of women was changing dramatically. It also sadly portrays how badly Carter was served by his top male assistants who sought to crush and marginalize the influence of strong loyal women throughout his administration." --Peter Bourne, Former Special Assistant to President Jimmy Carter, 1977-1981 "The lessons learned from Midge Costanza’s life have informed the political path of the modern LGBTQ movement-even for those who didn’t know it. The seeds that were her passion, including uncompromising idealism, drive and political risk-taking have grown into a fierce forest of activism and change. A Feminist in the White House skillfully surfaces political and cultural tensions that we still see playing out today in the work for women’s equality and LGBTQ freedom. This should be required reading for anyone interested in how far we’ve come and how far we have left to go." --Rea Carey, Executive Director, National LGBTQ Task Force

Doreen Mattingly is Associate Professor of Women’s Studies at San Diego State University.

Mattingly has unearthed an important, yet forgotten, story in US women’s political history. The story of a trailblazing advocate for social justice and the structural barriers that she faced that limited her success. So often we think that changes happening now started recently - and miss the fallen

warriors who paved the way with their failures. Midge was an unlikely hero who grabbed the opportunity she was given to create new national conversations about gender and sexual identity in an administration that hadn't yet accepted -or realized - the negative impact that lack of access to power has on the ability for those without access to realize the promises of our founders - life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. She broke boundaries as she fell victim to them. This is the perfect time for Midge's story to come to light - as we witness the nation struggling anew with the sexist tension surrounding our first viable female candidate for president.

This book is amazing! The unwritten (till now) story of the first woman assistant to a president.

Midge Costanza was a wonderful women, full of life and excitement in everything that touched her heart. Doreen Mattingly does a great job of telling Midge's story so we can all get to know her and the machinations of the political machine along with our long history of the fight for feminism and equal rights for all Americans. I lived through the 1960's as an adult woman and it brings up sad memories that, at the time, were just how it was. White men were just superior, all of our American laws proved that. I wish I had known Midge and I wish I had been able to help her, Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem and Shirley MacLaine, at the time. It is extremely sad that our country is almost falling apart and we could have prevented this if Midge had been listened to by President Carter in 1976, instead of just using her to get votes from people who wanted equal rights.

Excellent!

Very Interesting, and helps to broaden the mind. Nicely written.

A Feminist in the White House: Midge Costanza, the Carter Years, and America's Culture Wars by Doreen Mattingly is an eye-opening account of Costanza's time in President Carter's White House and the political beginnings of debates that continue to the present.I had heard Costanza's name but was not really familiar with any aspects of what she had (tried) to do under Carter. Through Mattingly's account readers will both admire Costanza for her ethics and efforts while at the same time be angered by a political system, embodied in this case by Carter's administration, that puts what is right or wrong on a back burner behind political expediency. While most of us know that not all issues can be tackled at once and that some end up pushed aside because of "popularity" it is still frustrating to read about what this woman went through while simply trying to do her job.There

are a lot of very interesting bits of information here about how some talking points that still exist originated in high level meetings. Most important, I think, is placing Midge Costanza front and center as an early activist in many of today's popular culture wars. A remarkable woman during a remarkable time.Definitely for those interested in sexual and gender politics as well as the working of the presidency.Reviewed from a copy made available by the publisher via NetGalley.

An excellent view into the life of Midge Constanza, the first woman to hold the office of Special Assistant to the President, "A Feminist In The White House" is a must read for anyone interested in the history of the women's movement in the United States, as well as the US LGBT movement (Midge orchestrated the first National Gay Task Force visit to the White House). This book is also a fascinating look at an insider's view of the workings of the White House under Jimmy Carter.

You can fin a copy of this review at:[...]Doreen Mattingly championed various topics in her work varying from equal rights for women and gay and lesbian rights, to abortion rights. She chose to portray not only a feminist, but also a friend and did successfully so. Mattingly showed sides of Constanza that led me to both admire her for her ethics and efforts while at the same time I was angered by a political system, embodied in this case by Carter's administration, that puts what is right or wrong on a back burner behind political expediency.I often found myself flooded with bits and pieces of information most of which is still up-to-date and was left at the back-burner for decades now. I have to admit I found myself smitten with this remarkable woman, who struggled to do her job and fought fearlessly the remarkable men of her remarkable time.I wouldn't be lying if I call this a powerful and influential read, especially if you are a strongly convinced feminist at heart. Late 1970s were painted by the shades of a complex shades of gender politics, sexual politics and of course the feminist movement. The events that occurred then still resonate today, therefore I find it a must to read this profound book about being a woman.

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