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A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton

By Carl Bernstein



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Carl Bernstein's stunning portrait of Hillary Rodham Clinton shows us, as nothing else has, the true trajectory of her life and career with its zigzag bursts of risks taken and safety sought. Marshaling all the skills and energy that propelled his history-making Pulitzer Prize reporting on Watergate, Bernstein gives us the most detailed, sophisticated, comprehensive, and revealing account we have had of the complex human being and political meteor who has already helped define one presidency and may well become, herself, the woman in charge of another.

We see the shaping of Hillary as a self-described “mind conservative and heart liberal” —her ostensibly idyllic Midwestern girlhood (her mother a nurturer, but her father a disciplinarian, harsher than she has acknowledged); her early development of deep religious feelings; her curiosity fueled by dedicated teachers, by exposure to Martin Luther King Jr., by the ferment of the sixties, and, above all, by a desire to change the world. At Wellesley, we watch Hillary, a Republican turned Democrat, thriving in the new sky's-the-limit freedom for women, already perceived as a spokeswoman for her generation, her commencement speech celebrated in *Life* magazine. And the book takes us to Yale Law School as Hillary meets and falls in love with Bill Clinton and cancels her dream to go her own way, to New York or Washington, tying her fortune, instead, to his in Arkansas.

Bernstein clarifies the often amazing dynamic of their marriage, shows us the extent to which Hillary has been instrumental in the triumphs and troubles of Bill Clinton's governorship and presidency, and sheds light on her own political brilliance and her blind spots—especially her suspicion and mishandling of the press and her overt hostility to the opposition that clouded her entry into the capital. He untangles her relationship to Whitewater, Troopergate, and Travelgate. He leads us to understand the failure of her health care initiative.

In the emotional and political chaos of the Lewinsky affair we see Hillary, despite her immense hurt and anger, standing by her husband—evoking a rising wave of sympathy from a public previously cool to her. It helps carry her into the Senate, where she applies the political lessons she has learned. It is now *her* time. As she decides to run for president, her husband now *her* valued aide, she has one more chance to fulfill her ambition for herself—to change the world.

In his preparation for *A Woman in Charge*, Bernstein reexamined everything pertinent written about and by Hillary Clinton. He interviewed some two hundred of her colleagues, friends, and enemies and was allowed unique access to the

candid record of the 1992 presidential campaign kept by Hillary's best friend, Diane Blair.

He has given us a book that enables us, at last, to address the questions Americans are insistentlly—even obsessively—asking about Hillary Clinton: What is her character? What is her political philosophy? Who is she? What can we expect of her?

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Read an excerpt from *A Woman in Charge*

A Woman in Charge is Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Carl Bernstein's illuminating account of Hillary Rodham Clinton, revealing the complex of motivations and machinations behind her extraordinary life and career. Drawing on over 200 interviews with Clinton associates (both colleagues and adversaries), as well as major pieces written by and about the former First Lady, Bernstein has constructed an indelible portrait of perhaps the most polarizing figure in American politics, from her midwestern roots to her own presidential ambitions; but don't take our word for it--read an excerpt from the first chapter and decide for yourself.

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Chapter One: Formation *I adored [my father] when I was a little girl. I would eagerly watch for him from a window and run down the street to meet him on his way home after work. With his encouragement and coaching, I played baseball, football and basketball. I tried to bring home good grades to win his approval.*

—*Living History*

Hillary Rodham's childhood was not the suburban idyll suggested by the shaded front porch and gently sloping lawn of what was once the family home at 235 Wisner Street in Park Ridge, Illinois. In this leafy environment of postwar promise and prosperity, the Rodhams were distinctly a family of odd ducks, isolated from their neighbors by the difficult character of her father, Hugh Rodham, a sour, unfulfilled man whose children suffered his relentless, demeaning sarcasm and misanthropic inclination, endured his embarrassing parsimony, and silently accepted his humiliation and verbal abuse of their mother. Yet as harsh, provocative, and abusive as Rodham was, he and his wife, the former Dorothy Howell, imparted to their children a pervasive sense of family and love for one another that in Hillary's case is of singular importance. When Bill Clinton and Hillary honeymooned in Acapulco in 1975, her parents and her two brothers, Hughie (Hugh Jr.) and Tony, stayed in the same hotel as the bride and groom. Dorothy and Hugh Rodham, despite the debilitating pathology and undertow of tension in their marriage (discerned readily by visitors to their home), were assertive parents who, at mid-century, intended to convey to their children an inheritance secured by old-fashioned values and verities. They believed (and preached, in their different traditions) that with discipline, hard work, encouragement (often delivered in an unconventional manner), and enough education at home, school, and church, a child could pursue almost any dream. In the case of their only daughter, Hillary Diane, born October 26, 1947, this would pay enormous dividends, sending her into the world beyond Park Ridge with a steadiness and sense of purpose that eluded her two younger brothers. But it came at a price: Hugh imposed a patriarchal unpleasantness and ritual authoritarianism on his household, mitigated only by the distinctly modern notion that Hillary would not be limited in opportunity or skills by the fact that she was a girl. Hugh Rodham, the son of Welsh immigrants, was sullen, tight-fisted, contrarian, and given to exaggeration about his own accomplishments. Appearances of a sort were important to him: he always drove a new Lincoln or Cadillac. But he wouldn't hesitate to spit tobacco juice through an open window. He chewed his cud habitually, voted a straight Republican ticket, and was infuriatingly slow to praise his children. "He was rougher than a corncob and gruff as could be," an acquaintance once said. Nurturance and praise were left largely to his wife, whose intelligence and abilities he mocked and whose gentler nature he often trampled. "Don't let the doorknob hit you in the ass on your way out," he frequently said at the dinner table when she'd get angry and threaten to leave. She never left, but some friends and relatives were perplexed at Dorothy's decision to stay married when her husband's abuse seemed so unbearable. "She would never say, That's it. I've had it," said Betsy Ebeling,* Hillary's closest childhood friend, who witnessed many contentious scenes at the Rodham dinner table. Sometimes the doorknob remark would break the tension and everybody would laugh. But not always. By the time Hillary had reached her

teens, her father seemed defined by his mean edges—he had almost no recognizable enthusiasms or pretense to lightness as he descended into continuous bullying, ill-humor, complaint, and dejection.

From Publishers Weekly

Which Hillary Clinton will prevail in this sprawling, muddled biography? Is she a "messianic" idealist or a ruthless pragmatist given to negative ad campaigns and vilifying opponents? A liberal feminist firebrand or a closet traditionalist and Washington prayer-group fixture? A Lady Macbeth, a First Soul-mate, or a stand-by-your-man marital martyr? Bernstein (*All the President's Men*) gives us all these Hillary's, foggily uniting them by reference to her "extraordinary capability for change and evolutionary development." (Then again, the Senate candidate who "told voters largely what they wanted to hear" seems much the same species as the Wellesley student-body president who "was more interested in...achieving victory than in taking a philosophical position.") Bernstein's ill-balanced treatment puts "the Journey"-Hillary's mystic term for her politico-conjugal relationship with Bill Clinton-at the center of the story, particularly her dominant, sometimes disastrous role in Bill's scandal-plagued administration. Ever the investigative reporter, the author serves up chapters of eye-glazing Whitewater arcana and probes Hillary's emotional turmoil as she defends Bill from bimbo eruptions, but flits through her entire post-impeachment career as a high-profile senator and leader of the Democratic party in a scant 19 pages. Bernstein provides a densely detailed road-map of Hillary's life, but we get little sense of where the Journey has taken her. Photos.

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Review

"*A Woman in Charge* . . . stands as a model of contemporary political biography . . . Bernstein has produced an excellent book: thorough, balanced, judicious and deeply reported . . . He offers a three-dimensional portrait of a person with enduring strengths (discipline, tenacity, a sustaining religious faith) and weaknesses (excessive secrecy, a tendency to self-righteousness and a habit of nursing grudges)...Bernstein almost always finds new facts and telling details...[His] account benefits enormously from remarkably candid on-the-record assessments of both Clintons by intimates such as close friend Jim Blair and Betsey Wright, Clinton's gubernatorial chief of staff in Arkansas." —Ronald Brownstein, *Los Angeles Times*

"Serious, well-researched and fair...*A Woman in Charge* is . . . painstaking, sensitive and elegantly written."—*The Economist*

"A remarkably revealing portrait."

—Byron York, *The Wall Street Journal*

"Carl Bernstein presents a . . . balanced and convincing picture of Mrs. Clinton . . . He also poses the essential concerns voters will need to confront in deciding whether they will support Mrs. Clinton's 2008 candidacy."—Robert Dallek, *The New York Times*

"[Carl Bernstein] has not lost his reporter's touch, and *A Woman in Charge* has already refocused serious questions—and supplied new information—about Hillary and Bill Clinton, their past behavior and their current ambitions to regain the White House."

—Kevin Phillips, *The Washington Post Book World*

“You could say Bernstein has written the definitive book on Hillary.”

–Lynn Bronikowski, *Rocky Mountain News*

“Bernstein’s *A Woman in Charge* is sprightly written, often insightful in its judgments, and studded with factual nuggets that enhance the Hillary saga.”

–Walter Shapiro, *Salon.com*

“This book is really a considerable achievement.”

–Peter Grier, *Christian Science Monitor*

“Those who adore Clinton (and those who despise her) will find anecdotes to savor in Bernstein’s account. But the book aims higher, trying to illuminate a person who remains a mystery to millions. To pry open that truth, the author tracked down sources who might shed light on Clinton’s character. He spoke to friends, mentors and staffers; he gained access to the papers of the late attorney Diane Blair, one of Clinton’s closest friends. The work paid off.”–Josh Getlin, *Los Angeles Times*

“*A Woman in Charge* revisits in revealing and compelling detail the spiritual and fleshly perils that shaped the [Clintons’] journey.”–Chris Lehmann-Haupt, *New York Observer*

“A layered, thoughtful, critical biography of the woman who, at this writing, seems poised to become the 44th president of the United States...[a] revealing, admiring, often surprising book.”–*Kirkus Reviews* (starred)

“Eight years in the making, Bernstein’s thorough look at Hillary Clinton is both fair and fascinating...the quotes make the book...Through [his] interviews, Bernstein moves the Hillary story to a deeper place.”–Ilene Cooper, *Booklist*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rosa Johnson:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to often the Mall. How about open or even read a book entitled *A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton*? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can better than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have some other opinion?

Scott Bourquin:

The book *A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton* give you a sense of feeling enjoy for your spare time. You should use to make your capable far more increase. Book can for being your best friend when you getting anxiety or having big problem with your subject. If you can make looking at a book *A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton* to become your habit, you can get more advantages,

like add your own capable, increase your knowledge about many or all subjects. You may know everything if you like start and read a guide A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton. Kinds of book are a lot of. It means that, science reserve or encyclopedia or other folks. So , how do you think about this publication?

Carl Johnson:

Playing with family in the park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with close friends is thing that usually you will have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try matter that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition info. Even you love A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton, you may enjoy both. It is good combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh can happen its mind hangout fellas. What? Still don't get it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

Alice Ressler:

A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton can be one of your starter books that are good idea. Most of us recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort to get every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton but doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource info that maybe you can be among it. This great information could drawn you into completely new stage of crucial thinking.

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