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## Book Reviews

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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*No Place for a Woman: A Life of Senator Margaret Chase Smith.* By Janann Sherman. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000. Pp. 299. Cloth \$20.)

In the half decade between 1995 and 2000, three major biographies of Maine's remarkable United States Senator, Margaret Chase Smith (1897-1995) have appeared. All of them [Patricia Ward Wallace's *Politics of Conscience: A Biography of Margaret Chase Smith* (1995) and Patricia L. Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith: Beyond Convention* (1996) and the one reviewed here] have added to our knowledge and appreciation of this remarkable woman's influence upon her native state.

Born in 1897 in Skowhegan of poor, working-class parents, Margaret Chase Smith was the oldest of six children, four of whom lived into adulthood. Her early life was a struggle, but her parents, particularly her mother, impressed a work ethic upon her daughter's psyche. She labored at a variety of jobs, including telephone operator, store clerk, and teacher. She dreamed of going to college, but a better-paying position always seemed to emerge, which, with her straightened circumstances, appeared to be a safer bet than taking a chance on college. Her talents as an intelligent, capable, and versatile working woman attracted the attentions of several who came to know her, including Clyde Smith, one of Skowhegan's "movers and shakers." Through his influence, she became increasingly involved in Skowhegan affairs and women's club activities in Somerset County and throughout the State. She and Smith became a familiar twosome in the area, but they would not marry until 1930. By then, she had emerged as an indispensable partner in his political career. When he won election to the House of Representatives, she accompanied him to Washington as his secretary and chief adviser. Following his sudden death in 1940, and upon his deathbed instructions, she put her political experience to work, ran for his seat and won. In the House, she became interested in defense issues and anything that related to her home state, working hard for her constituents.

After four full terms in the House, she decided to seek a Senate seat, defeating both a sitting and a former governor for the Republican nomi-

nation. She was easily elected in the fall and, at the time of her entry into the United States Senate, she was the only female member of that body. Although not the first woman to serve in the Senate, she was, however, the first woman elected to both houses of Congress. By 1950, she became increasingly upset with the attacks by her Senate colleague Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin on the loyalty of many respectable Americans. His ruthless and unsubstantiated assaults on people whom she considered patriotic Americans aroused her indignation and ire. Although she got several colleagues to join her in opposing McCarthy on the Senate floor, none spoke out as she did in her famous "Declaration of Conscience" in June 1950. This was a true act of courage, given the climate of anticommunist hysteria whose flames were fanned by McCarthy's rhetoric. As a freshman senator and a woman, she took an enormous risk with her political future. She paid a price for this act of courage, being denied her choice of committees, and having to fight off McCarthy's attempt to deny her re-election. She won handily in 1954, and would be returned to the Senate every six years until Congressman William Hathaway ended her political career in 1972. During her years in the Senate, she was usually unpredictable in her voting. In many ways she was a liberal Republican who often acted independently of her party affiliation. She served many years on the Armed Services Committee rising to ranking member and became respected as a leader on defense issues. Her support for space exploration was another area where her influence was felt as well. Through the years, she did not always see eye to eye with her Senate colleagues from Maine, Senators Brewster, Payne, and Muskie. Their relations, especially in the case of Muskie, were often troubled. During her tenure in the Senate, Smith depended heavily on the advice and direction of General William Lewis, who after 1948 became her closest confidant. He was instrumental in fostering her "fortress mentality," i.e., if a person did not always agree with Margaret, he or she must be an enemy. This made relations with the Senator difficult for some, particularly those in the press. She appeared increasingly prickly about her prerogatives and anything that could be perceived as a slight. After her Senate career, she spent much time lecturing throughout the nation. When her Library was dedicated in 1982, and with the passing of General Lewis, who had planned every detail relating to it, she committed the remainder of her life to meeting with scores of school children and visitors until her death in 1995.

Janann Sherman, an American history professor at the University of Memphis, has produced a very readable biography of Smith. It provides

fewer details than University of Florida English professor Patricia Schmidt's longer study, but the two books differ little in emphasis or conclusions. Patricia Ward, professor of American history at Baylor University, has written a more critical, but less satisfactory book on the Senator. All three of these biographies were forged from a feminist point of view, despite the fact that Margaret Chase Smith always insisted that she was not a "fellow traveler" with feminists. She usually thought of herself as an American and United States Senator first, and as a woman second. That is not to say that, through her long career, she did not support legislation that improved conditions for women, particularly in the military. Her run for the presidency can also be seen as a pioneering effort to make it easier in the future for a woman to be considered for the nation's highest office.

All three of these biographies cover Smith's earlier career extensively and, in this reviewer's opinion, neglect her later Senate career from 1960 to 1972. As her seniority increased, her role in the Senate was clearly more significant in this period than we are led to believe, despite her party's minority status. Her relationship with the national and state Republican party also needs to be more fully understood. There is little in any of these studies about her relations with her Maine Senate colleagues. Much more should be known about the dynamics of the Maine delegation in Congress and her place within it. There also are few details about her dealings with Maine Governors and the State's U.S. House membership including Clifford McIntire, Stanley Tupper, Frank Fellows, Charles Nelson, Robert Hale, James Oliver, Peter Garland, Frank Coffin, and of course William Hathaway.

Sherman's study is also unfortunately flawed with careless errors. On page 32, she confidently states that President Herbert Hoover carried only Maine and Vermont in 1932. In fact, he won four other states, including Pennsylvania. Perhaps the most glaring mistake is found at the end of the book where she quotes Governor James B. Longley as speaking at Smith's memorial service in 1995. Longley died in 1980, fifteen years before the Senator's death. One is left to wonder if she got Longley confused with the other independent Maine governor, Angus King.

For its length and readability, Sherman's study is perhaps the best of the three. Sherman repeats with fewer details the startling revelation first made public in Schmidt's biography that Clyde Smith did not die of a cataclysmic heart attack but from the effects of an advanced case of syphilis that affected his heart—the price of being a consummate "lady's man." Sherman's book is quite similar in interpretation and content to

Schmidt's but with less background and analysis. In fact, much of the story in the earlier work is repeated by Sherman with a similar selection of quotations and a narrative that is frequently close to Schmidt's version. It seems unusual then that there is no citation of the Schmidt biography in the notes—only in the bibliography. Curiously, the dust jacket design for Sherman's volume differs little from Schmidt's, highlighted by a commanding (but different) photo of the Senator surrounded by a brick-red border in contrast to the maroon border of the earlier volume.

Despite these studies, there is much of the Margaret Chase Smith story still to be told, particularly regarding her career after 1960. In the meantime, we have three biographies that will inform and entertain us in studying and assessing a life that is uniquely a Maine story. We shall never see the like of Margaret Chase Smith again, but her experience adds an important dimension to understanding our State and its remarkable history.

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*April 1865: The Month That Saved America.* By Jay Winik. (New York: Harper Collins. 2001. Pp. xviii, 461. \$32.50.)

On April 10, 1865, Maine's Joshua Chamberlain was given the honor of accepting the formal surrender of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. For some students of his life, Chamberlain's actions at Appomattox, and not his battlefield heroics at Gettysburg, were the highlight of his military career. At Appomattox, Ulysses S. Grant had insisted upon giving the South the honor of a formal surrender, and Chamberlain carried the gesture of reconciliation one step further. Some 28,000 near-starving soldiers laid down their arms that day, and when the column approached Chamberlain, he ordered his men to "carry arms" as a token of respect for the defeated South. In front of Confederate General John Gordon, Chamberlain wheeled his horse around and dipped its head low; signifying "honor answering honor." Out of such moments, and others like it, Jay Winik's *April 1865* weaves a history of the closing month of the Civil War.

The book's subject, in a strict sense, is small, but its reach is large,

nothing less than the origins of American nationhood. Winik is a wonderful storyteller and in *April 1865* he blends biography, anecdote, and macro-historical reflection into a seamless web. Winik brings a unique perspective to the American Civil War. Before he became a historian, Winik worked as an adviser to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee where he was a witness to civil war in Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. Not surprisingly then, Winik brings to his study of the American Civil War an attention to (in the latest vernacular) “nation building.” Winik’s argument is simple. “April 1865 is a month that could have unraveled the American nation,” he writes, “instead, it saved it.”

To Winik, civil wars normally do not end but instead trigger an unending cycle of violence and recrimination. During the “last month” of the Civil War, he argues, precisely the opposite happened. Winik’s work is part of a long tradition of Civil War counterfactual history. The “road not taken” in Winik’s view was an ongoing guerrilla war waged by the South. Though Winik does not supply a great deal of evidence that a guerrilla war was a seriously considered option, its possibility does endow honorable gestures such as Chamberlain’s with larger historical consequence. The magnanimity of Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, and even Chamberlain and the restraint of Lee, Joseph Johnston, and Nathan Bedford Forrest averted the “balkanization” of the United States. The conclusion of the Civil War, then, was nothing less than miraculous. The American Civil War, Winik argues, was, ironically, the first stitch in a *national* fabric of a political entity that had been until 1865 merely a compact between states. It is a point that has been made before, but it bears repeating. Walt Whitman could write in the preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* that the “United States themselves *are* . . . the greatest poem” and George Bush could declare in his 2001 State of the Union that the “United States *is* grateful” [my emphasis] without being accused of garbling the language. The United States began the Civil War as a union and ended it as a nation.

As a work of historical literature, I would recommend *April 1865* to the general reader almost without reservation. As a work of serious history, however, I have some profound reservations. Winik is not a trained historian. As a result, among the lacunae of the book is any consideration of the historiography of the Civil War Era. As a result, Winik all but duplicates an older, conservative, and in some cases racist narrative about the end of the Civil War.

For Winik, as for “peace Democrats” during the war and Jim Crow-era southern historians after, the ultimate meaning of the post-Civil War

period was only the restoration of the Union. One of the book's virtues, whether intentional or not, is that it restores the national question to the forefront of our historical consciousness. Yet Winik's exclusive focus upon sectional harmony ignores the other central issue raised by the war. Namely, what would be the social, political, and economic fate of the three to four million emancipated slaves? Winik, inconceivably, wrote a history of the Civil War's settlement—a war that ended without a formal peace treaty—that all but ignores Reconstruction. In line with an older and more conservative historical tradition, Winik interprets Lincoln's Reconstruction policy as unfailingly charitable and suggests that any deviation from benevolent peace terms for the vanquished would have been vengeful and irrational. Every "decisive moment" in *April 1865* relates to national reconciliation and not racial equality. He worries about "post-Civil War" guerrilla violence against national political authority but essentially ignores the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the decade-long campaign of violence against equal citizenship for African Americans in the South. Winik discounts, in the end, the way in which sectional reconciliation—"nation building"—occurred only after a decade of continued bloodshed and the collapse of Radical Republican efforts to insure the most basic rights for African Americans. Honorable gestures in April 1865 did not save American nationhood. Instead, it was the slow and painful reconciliation of the North to the prospect of racial home-rule in the South. American nationhood, in short, was built upon a foundation of white supremacy that would go virtually unchallenged into the 1960s.

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