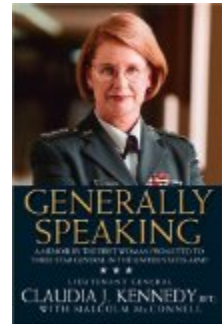


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Claudia J. Kennedy, Malcolm McConnell. *Generally Speaking: A Memoir by the First Woman Promoted to Three-Star General in the United States Army*. New York: Warner Books, 2001. x + 368 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-446-52793-4.

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A Guide to Professional Leadership

A Guide to Professional Leadership

Retired Lieutenant General Claudia J. Kennedy has collected her thoughts and experiences to produce an autobiography full of professional advice, and her title, *Generally Speaking*, aptly describes the manner in which she lays out her life. Chapters are divided into themes that are not chronological, allowing Kennedy to ensure that her message of equality, professionalism, and honor are enumerated without readers getting caught up in a timeline. At the same time, Kennedy skips to different parts of her life within chapters, causing some confusion about the sequence of events. She uses anecdotes and social facts to illustrate her points, providing insightful and appalling stories of her plight as an officer and a woman. The social facts noted throughout the book provide great supporting elements, but they are not documented, and readers may question the validity of Kennedy's broad generalizations. Still, this autobiography is inspiring counsel for any professional, whether in the military or not, and connects broad social trends to Kennedy's military experiences in order to offer career insights based on thirty-two years of military service.

In order to comprehend the depth of her writing, some understanding of Kennedy's background is in order. She was the first and only woman ever promoted to Lieutenant General in the U.S. Army. Kennedy earned her bachelor's degree in philosophy at Southwestern Memphis University. Her father was a career soldier and her mother encouraged Kennedy not to be restrained

by social expectations. Kennedy's career began in the gender-segregated Women's Army Corps (WAC), and she completed the WAC's Officer Basic Course, Military Intelligence Officer Advance Course, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the U.S. Army War College. Her decorations include the National Intelligence Distinguished Service Medal, the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit (with three Oak Leaf Clusters), the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal (with three Oak Leaf Clusters), the Army Commendation Medal (with three Oak Leaf Clusters), and the Army Staff Identification Badge. Kennedy's service spanned the integration of the WAC into the mainstream U.S. Army, the sexual scandal at Aberdeen and its aftermath, and her own sexual harassment case against another general officer. That case cost Kennedy both personally and professionally, although it also brought her support and respect from a wide variety of Americans. Controversy during her career seems to have always been founded on her gender, but she never has to justify her legitimacy. Her life and decorations speak for themselves.

The principle themes in *Generally Speaking* are listed within the chapter names: devotion to duty, loyalty and ethics, and fairness and equality. At times, the reader may question the validity of Kennedy's explanations for her actions. Time makes people both wiser and forgetful, and she concedes very few mistakes in her life. Instead, she positively attributes experiences as lessons learned. Most everything is portrayed as though it is all part of a

big plan. Readers may be skeptical of how Kennedy actually felt during many of the events she describes, but given her lifetime of service it is hard to doubt her intentions or integrity.

Kennedy portrays sacrifices for one's organization or profession as necessary and proper, and points out that her commitment to the Army cost her a husband while she was on tour in Korea. She asserts that in the military, duty takes precedence over personal needs, and while in uniform she consistently considered the needs of the Army over her own. Her life revolved around her job, which she argues was acceptable because that was the path she chose. She contends that her first assignments were not demanding, but she continually gave the Army second, third, and fourth chances. She worked late into the night in order to earn promotion in rank and assignment. No matter what her assignment, she put forth all her effort. With time, her efforts resulted in a spectacular career in the Military Intelligence branch of the integrated, all-volunteer Army.

One of the strongest themes in Kennedy's work is fairness and equality, and they appear in almost every chapter. One of her assignments was to survey the Army in the aftermath of the sexual harassment and assault scandals at Aberdeen in the 1990s. Her findings pointed to large failures of leadership in integrating or including women. Many women complained to her that the ineptitude of the sexual harassment system frightened them away from formal charges. Kennedy also confronted

stereotypes of female professionals. Had she more thoroughly documented individual facts it would have brought more legitimacy to her arguments, nonetheless, the broad assertions she makes regarding women in the military still make for compelling reading.

The organization of this book makes it more than an interesting autobiography about a woman in the military. It transforms it into a professional advice guide, much like Morris Janowitz's 1960 book entitled *The Professional Soldier*. Kennedy tells what every professional needs to know. Her ethics and values encroach upon every aspect of her writing. This book would be widely enjoyed by military and civilian audiences. I highly recommend it for female military personnel, in order to better understand a predecessor's struggle, and to gain insight into the battles they continue to fight every day. Just as important, this book also contains valuable lessons for men. An understanding of a woman's perspective will help them re-evaluate their treatment of the opposite sex, and understand the conflict many women still wage against harassment in institutional environments. Kennedy's book should connect to adult professional audiences. It starts slow, but escalates to a tale of a great American.

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