

Why They Stay: Sex Scandals, Deals, and Hidden Agendas of Eight Political Wives

Anne Michaud

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Why They Stay includes entertaining fodder for better understanding what bargains highly successful women make in order to endure in scandal-plagued marriages.

Knowing that is hard to understand why so many strong, smart, accomplished women stick with their political husbands through humiliating sex scandals, Anne Michaud's revised edition of the social science book *Why They Stay* adds analysis of Melania and Donald Trump's marriage and updates on seven other crisis-ridden American and British power couples.

The book probes the backgrounds and motivations of its high-profile example couples, and theorizes about why their marital arrangements endure. It compares its eight focal women to a fifteenth-century commoner, Elizabeth Woodville, who became a powerful queen and royal matriarch after the dust cleared from England's bloody War of the Roses. Known as the White Queen, Woodville embodied many characteristics that Michaud sees reflected in her case studies six centuries later. The book assigns each of its eight subjects a White Queen Quotient in its chapter summaries.

The book states that there are different social norms for the ambitious White Queens, some of whom wanted to claw up to the top, others of whom wanted to remain in the upper echelons of political and economic statuses. Each couple's motivations and psychological makeup are discussed in detail—and with dishy anecdotes and quotes. The profiles include backgrounds of each husband and wife, from their childhoods through to the present, alongside theories about their psychological motivations. The book also covers the political and financial rewards that the most loyal White Queens receive, from federal judgeships to renegotiated pre-nuptial agreements to sweetheart corporate and real estate deals.

Michaud's observations of the women's behavior are opinionated and trenchant. She reads between the lines of their statements in media, teasing out new considerations of their behavior. Familiar examples, including Hillary Clinton, Jacqueline Kennedy, and Eleanor Roosevelt, are handled alongside less familiar figures, including Wendy Vitter, the wife of a former Louisiana House member and senator who enjoyed being diapered and treated like an infant by sex workers; and Marion Stein, the wife of Britain's 1970s Liberal Party leader Jeremy Thorpe, whose gay (and then illegal) extramarital relationship was uncovered during a bizarre incident involving a hitman and a murdered dog.

The book's conclusions are enlightening and fascinating for political junkies, but also dispiriting and disillusioning for feminists. White Queens are shown to be rewarded tangibly with powerful positions, social perks, and financial gains; there can be smarmy, ugly Faustian bargains too, with heavy emotional fallout and other costs to themselves and their children. Only one of the examples ever divorces her philandering husband, further underscoring how different patriarchal rules apply to men and women. If the gender roles were reversed: it's hard to even imagine an aggrieved husband "acting as a prop" at the obligatory post-scandal apology press conference.

Why They Stay is a thoughtful, researched social science book. It includes entertaining fodder for better understanding what some highly successful women trade to endure in scandal-plagued marriages.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (October 13, 2021)

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