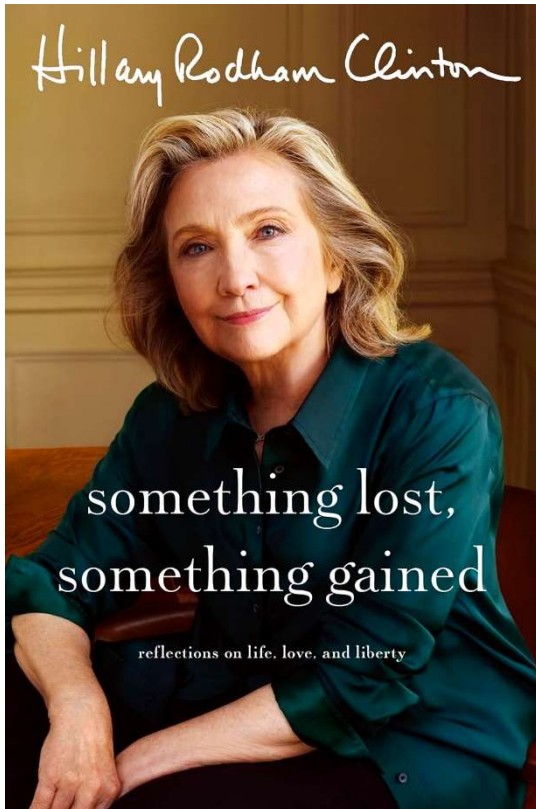


# Clinton provides positive view with 'Something Lost, Something Gained'

Posted: Sunday, December 22, 2024

*"Something Lost, Something Gained: Reflections on Life, Love and Liberty"* by Hillary Rodham Clinton. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2024, 336 pages, \$29.99 (hardcover).



"I've spent more than half a century in the crucible of politics," Hillary Rodham Clinton notes near the beginning of "Something Lost, Something Gained: Reflections on Life, Love and Liberty," her latest New York Times bestseller. "I've seen the best and the worst of it. And at the end of the day, I still believe in the basic decency of the American people."

"I believe that if you dig deep enough, through all the mud of politics, eventually you hit something hard and true: a foundation of fundamental values and aspirations that still binds most of us together as Americans."

So begins one of the more insightful and inspiring manuscripts I've had occasion to read in quite some time. Even though she famously lost the 2016 presidential election, her faith in the ability of the American people to ultimately preserve everything that has made this country great remains unwavering. Her perspective on both the personal as well as the political issues she writes about in the book is bolstered by her somewhat unique vantage point in the ever-evolving history of this nation.

Clinton was the first woman in the United States to be nominated for president by a major political party – and in an important footnote that often gets overlooked, she actually won the popular vote. Her four decades of public service culminated in her role as Secretary of State under President Obama. And prior to being elected to the U.S. Senate, she redefined the role of First Lady by taking a very proactive posture during the presidency of her husband, Bill Clinton.

Honestly, "Something Lost, Something Gained" has it all. Her dissection of the current political landscape is spot-on, from her observations about Trump to her critique of the efficacy of the Biden Administration. Her prose has an honest flavor to it that is often lacking in similar efforts by many of her contemporaries. Consider the following from "This Remarkable Sisterhood," the fifth chapter and one I found particularly instructive:

"It made the news when I all but stopped wearing skirts as First Lady when I started running for the Senate in 1999. Michelle Obama's summer vacation shorts (shorts!) aboard Air Force One also made news. Or, as she called it, "a huge stink." When Jill Biden took the mantle, she got flak not for

her clothes but for her preference to be called Dr. and not Mrs. Biden, as if her hear-earned advanced degree in education, which she puts to use every day in her day job – unprecedented for a presidential spouse – as a community college professor, were nothing but an uppity ornament. The Wall Street Journal had the nerve to call Jill’s preferred title “fraudulent, even comic.” Two steps forward, one step back.”

The narrative shifts regularly between the present and the past. Clinton does an exceptional job of showing how experience shapes character and how you can explain values and behaviors by looking at the formative influences that served as precursors. As such, I was mesmerized by her depiction of the role of religion in her life. Witness the following from “Rebels with a Cause,” one of the concluding chapters:

“I’ve never been one to wear my faith on my sleeve. I inherited a certain midwestern reticence about that (and a few other things, as you might have noticed). For me, faith has never been something to brag about or exploit, even though you see that a lot in politics. But that doesn’t mean it’s not important to me. Quite the opposite: My faith has sustained me, informed me, saved me, and challenged me. I don’t know who I would be or where I would have ended up without it.”

Finally, “Something Lost, Something Gained” serves as a wake-up call for anyone legitimately concerned about the present trajectory of the American Experiment in light of the global rise of populism. She seems to see very clearly the potential dangers that lie just ahead and is fully aware – perhaps more than most – of the threats that lurk around every corner. But she is also optimistic that we can sustain a way of life that many of us cherish if we remain vigilant and focus our collective efforts in a positive direction.

“The suffrage movement has a lot to teach us about the power of effective advocacy movements, especially right now as our democracy hangs in the balance, women’s reproductive rights are being rolled back, and a radical Supreme Court has signaled rights like birth control and same-sex marriage may be next,” the author explains in “Keep Marching,” the concluding chapter. “The suffragists teach us that movements don’t always work in perfect harmony.”

“There are disagreements and difficult tradeoffs, and sometimes progress seems impossibly slow,” she continues. “But the suffragists never gave up. They never gave in to fear of defeat. And in the end, it took all their dogged determination to convince an ambivalent-at-best president, a deeply sexist Congress, and racist southern state legislatures to correct the mistake of our founding fathers and give women the vote.”

On the technical side, Clinton’s literary style is fluid and conversational. Whether she’s talking about her trip to India, her interactions with former Nazis trying to deprogram white supremacists, or her complicated relationship with her husband, she makes the reader feel like an insider – someone to whom she is divulging her innermost thoughts and feelings. This made the book especially hard to put down and caused me to stay up way too late on the nights I was making my way through this exquisite chronicle.

If you’re feeling defeated and depressed about how things are going, you might want to pick up a copy of “Something Lost, Something Gained.” Clinton provides a light in the darkness and, more importantly, a way forward. Highly recommended.

*Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, WKU.*