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## Editor's Notebook: "Remembering the Ladies"

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# Editor's Notebook

## "Remember the Ladies"

by Michael Kryzaneck

The next presidential election is not until 2008 and already there is speculation that the choices of the major party candidates will both be women. Dick Morris, Bill Clinton's White House strategist, has come out with a book in which he sees the next election as a contest between Hillary Clinton and Condelezza Rice. Of course, writing a book about two prominent women running for the highest office in the land gets people's attention and sells copies. But whether Morris is right or wrong, women may finally be on the threshold of real political power, at least that is the hope.

To date, the history of women in American politics has been, to say the least, disappointing. Since the founding of the nation about 12,000 people have served in the Congress, but only 215 of those legislators have been women. Also since the founding, 582 people have held cabinet positions, but only 29 have been women, 20 of whom were appointed only in the last decade. The situation at the state and local level is even worse as about 12% of the nation's governors and mayors of the 100 most populous cities are women. One glimmer of hope is that there has been an increase of female state legislators from 8% in 1975 to 22.5% in 2005 (Massachusetts is 20<sup>th</sup> of 50 states in terms of the proportion of women in the legislature).

While progress in bringing more women into positions of authority within our political system has been real and expanding, we still lag far behind many other democracies in the world in looking to women for national leadership. Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain, Golda Meir of Israel and Indira Gandhi of India led their respective nations with great honor and success. There are currently seventeen women heads of state in the world and twenty-two women are speakers of parliaments. In the most recent German election Angela Merkel became the first female chancellor in the history of this major European power.

So why hasn't the United States been able to elevate a woman to the highest position in the national government? Certainly there remains in our society a reluctance among some to put a woman into the ultimate

power office fearing that she would not be able to act decisively during a crisis, or would be unwilling to flex our military muscles. There of course is no evidence that a woman would be unprepared or incapable of defending this nation, or exercising the military option in order to protect national interests. But stereotypes, unfortunately, are difficult to remove from the national psyche.

What evidence is available shows that women have unique talents that may make them better leaders and more effective proponents of national interests. Women are better at consensus building, interpersonal communications, collaboration, and power sharing. Women are more apt to use negotiation rather than aggression to solve a problem and clearly are better listeners, willing to involve a broad range of sources before coming to a decision. Women are less prone to be impulsive, rigid and isolated. Women, quite simply, bring a whole new set of qualities and skills to leadership that has been absent from male dominated government in this country.

And yet, despite the benefits that would accompany a woman president, the prospects that someone like Hillary Clinton or Condelezza Rice would be able to break through the presidential glass ceiling are dim. Though there

*I long to hear that you have declared an independency. And, by the way, in the new code of laws, which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.*

—Abigail Adams  
in a letter to John Adams, 1776

is poll data that shows an increase in support for a woman president, and less of a willingness to buy into the traditional stereotypes about women and their ability to exercise firm and decisive leadership, there is still overwhelming evidence that a woman running for the highest office in the land would face enormous obstacles from raising money from men (who still control the wealth of this country) to answering all those inane questions about her ability to be "strong," (which is a code word for acting like a man).

I personally hope that this country does not have to wait too long to join the rest of the major democracies in placing a woman in the White House. Sadly, we have been slow in recognizing the leadership talents of individual women and the qualities and skills that a woman might bring to the Presidency.