

Helen S. Astin & Carole Leland

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VISION

A Cross-Generational Study
of Leaders and Social Change

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by Helen S. Astin and Carole Leland

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A Cross-Generational Study
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Foreword by
Charlotte Bunch

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Social and Behavioral Science Series
and

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FOREWORD

During the past three decades, women have taken a leadership role in redefining fundamental aspects of our lives—work, family, sexuality, equality, and justice. Women have influenced how we define reality, conceive of knowledge, and exercise leadership. This has happened both through the collective leadership of women as a social force and through the efforts of many individual women giving shape to this movement in its diverse forms. Clearly, women have achieved tremendous changes in this time; yet there are few studies of the women leaders who made this happen and of how they did so. What research exists rarely goes beyond the most visible spokeswomen, and little is known of the creative approaches to leadership that have been at the heart of this movement. This book helps to fill that gap with its focus on three generations of women leaders who have successfully worked for change in education and public service.

Helen S. Astin and Carole Leland take us beyond conventional views of leadership by looking not so much at the official positions of leaders but rather at what these women achieved and how they did it. They take us into a more complex and thoughtful exploration of diverse women's efforts to lead through empowering others and enabling groups to take action. They also reveal the fallacy of assuming that because women are still too few in number

in public positions of power they have not been leaders in various efforts at change. By exploring the gains these women have achieved through leadership and what has motivated them to become leaders, we acquire a more complete picture of women's enormous collective leadership for change during this period.

While examining how these women have led, the authors avoid the pitfall of labeling certain traits "female" and instead focus concretely on what committed women leaders have achieved and what has been its impact. Thus, they not only shed light on women's specific leadership experience but also point to models for empowering leadership that are applicable generally. This is much richer, more provocative, and more useful material than the debate over whether there are innately female leadership styles. For that is not really the right question. It is more important to ask why there has been so little attention paid to women leaders over the years as well as why the styles of leading more often exhibited by women are particularly useful at this critical moment in history.

The empowering, cooperative approaches most often associated with women are not exclusively female terrain. If we see these as crucial models for leadership in the twenty-first century, then we do not want only women to adopt them. On the contrary, it is important to break down the mind-set that labels such behavior "feminine," serving to stigmatize it as weak, or less desirable than real leadership, especially at the highest echelons of patriarchal power. It is precisely in such places that female leaders and new approaches are most desperately needed if we are to change the patterns of domination that have become so destructive to the world.

Central to domination is the idea that where there is difference, then one group or approach must be superior and dominate the others: leaders over followers, men over women, whites over blacks, heterosexuals over homosexuals, one religion or nation over another, and so on. The wars, violence, and pillage of nature that have resulted from this hierarchical domination model now threaten the very existence of our planet. As a people we must find a more cooperative partnership approach to relations among us and with the earth; in so doing, we need leadership that is also cooperative and not based on the domination model.

In this search for new leadership forms, it is useful to see cooperative, empowering models not as inherently female but as female-led. That is to say, these approaches have been exercised by women more often than by men because they spring from the socialization of women as nurturers and sustainers of life. Thus women who have often practiced and developed them are now in a good position to assume leadership in teaching their usefulness to a society that must shift toward cooperation and away from hierarchy. As our culture seeks more appropriate styles of leadership in the future, studies of how women have led in varying circumstances will serve us well.

This book also ventures into the realm of women's history recording. The leaders in this study and others like them are too often overlooked by the "great man" approach to history. Women's leadership in civic and community affairs has long played an important role in the United States but has not been acknowledged, much less deemed important. In many ways, then, the women's leadership approaches recorded here are not entirely new. Rather, they are newly acknowledged and valued styles that have gained more acceptance as women's leadership has become more apparent over the past two decades. Women's leadership has grown both in numbers of public figures and in its visibility as all aspects of women's lives have been made more manifest by the women's movement in both politics and scholarship.

Women's leadership in education and community service has been vital throughout this century. Reading this book reminded me of the leadership empowerment that I received as a college student in the early 1960s from both black and white women active in the civil rights movement in the South. While black male leaders were the ones whom the press called on to be the spokesmen, it was often the black women who made things happen, especially in terms of organizing people at the community level before the white male press became interested in civil rights. Theirs was an empowering model that inspired younger women like me (many of whom later became feminists), even when we were not conscious of it as "leadership." Belatedly, this black female leadership of the most formative U.S. social movement in the second half of this century is finally beginning to be acknowledged, recorded, and analyzed. So

too women's leadership in other areas of our society has barely begun to be visible, and books like this one point to the richness of female leadership experience needing to be explored.

Astin and Leland have shaped a fitting tribute to the legacy of the seventy-seven women leaders they interviewed. By documenting their leadership and why they were so passionate in their quest for social justice, they have furthered that quest and provided us with insights into the nature of cooperative leadership. They have left a visible record not only of these individual women but also of the collective consciousness that they were both a part of and fostered in others. It is the record of a vision of leadership for the future that strengthens those already engaged in seeking a more cooperative and sustainable world and empowers others to imagine such a possibility and to join in the effort to realize that vision.

New Brunswick, New Jersey
June 1991

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PREFACE

We met almost thirty years ago on the Stanford University campus—a researcher completing a major monograph on women and an administrator finishing her doctorate. From that time until the present, we have remained close personal friends and professional colleagues. We have continued to support each other in our professional growth and to share many of the triumphs and tensions of our personal and professional lives. Throughout the years, two major themes have provided our common bonds and prompted continuous dialogue—*women and leadership*.

Leadership, of course, has been a popular, sometimes urgent, theme in the thoughts and writings of many other women and men during the past decade. In spite of voluminous anecdotal and scholarly work on the subject, however, leadership remains an elusive and perplexing phenomenon. We share John Gardner's conclusion that "the conventional views of leadership are shallow and set us up for endless disappointment" (1990, p. xi).

Being dissatisfied with the "conventional views," we looked for new cues and opportunities. In the early 1980s, we heard people beginning to discuss leadership in terms with which we resonated—vision, personal commitment, empowerment, and risk. This was in part the language of the modern women's movement. We realized that the period of social change we had been witnessing and par-

ticipating in offered us leadership by women and for women as a model of leadership for social change. Our in-depth study of seventy-seven women focuses on these "instigators" as well as on some of the women leaders who preceded and followed them. These women had a passion for justice and equality that propelled the remarkable achievements chronicled here and offered the inspiration for our book.

The Study

In 1983 we invited a group of women leaders from diverse fields to meet with us to share their observations about the impact of the women's movement on the lives of women. During our three days of discussion at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, the group reflected on a number of issues affecting women. Among the topics discussed were the progress of the women's movement and the identification of needs and possible strategies for the future. These critical deliberations at Wingspread provided us with the conceptual framework we needed to design and undertake the present study. In addition to helping us identify leadership issues that needed further exploration, the conference convinced us that the experiences of women leaders could be of substantial value in helping us understand not only what leadership means but also what constitutes effective leadership for social change.

We began our study in 1984 with three primary goals:

1. *To profile and compare women who provided leadership during the first two decades of the modern women's movement in the United States, roughly from the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s.* The group of women in this leadership study we called *Instigators* were women who were visible change agents and who are recognized for their significant accomplishments on behalf of women. Some *Instigators* associated with specific organizations, institutions, or coalitions we called *positional* leaders; others, identified as leaders because of their influence and leadership as academic scholars and teachers, we called *nonpositional* leaders.

We considered it essential to include two other cohorts of women leaders in order to enhance our understanding of the social and historical context of leadership, and to explore some aspects of

leadership succession. To our Instigators, therefore, we added a representative group of *Predecessors*, women who served in leadership roles—primarily as institutional administrators—during the 1940s and 1950s; and a cohort of *Inheritors*, women who began to assume leadership roles during the second decade of the modern women's movement.

2. *To document the experiences, perspectives, and accomplishments of the three groups of women leaders during these decades.* Although new women's organizations, legislation, research, and writing developed in the 1960s and 1970s, the actual events—the struggles and the successes—have not often been recorded or reported. Many Americans have a general notion of what the modern women's movement is about, but few know the specifics as viewed through the eyes of the women who played major leadership roles.

3. *To develop a conceptual model for future studies of leadership derived from the experience of leaders in this study.* By focusing on such leadership dimensions as style, strategy, influence, power, and interpersonal relationships, we hoped to contribute both theoretically and practically to the study and practice of leadership.

The Book

This book is about women leaders and a social movement—the modern women's movement. It is about leadership within the context of education, broadly defined: colleges and universities, foundations, national educational organizations, and other public service agencies. While the book is limited to education, we hope that what is learned about women as leaders will inform and enlarge our understanding of leadership. The personal recollections and stories of the women we studied provide significant illustrations of a kind of leadership that is nonhierarchical and collective. We witness through them the passion, the vision, and the personal commitment that have helped us formulate a unique perspective on leaders and leadership. And they remind us that leadership involves a diversity of effective styles, strategies, risks, and initiatives.

This is also a book about legacies. It reminds us that the

accomplishments of the early 1960s were far-reaching, especially in matters of equity and inclusion. In many ways, the study is a personalized history of the struggles that brought about opportunities that many of us now enjoy.

Equally important, we acknowledge what the book does not offer. First, we were not able to include the perspectives of many other women leaders who played key roles as Instigators. Many of them were either unavailable or simply out of our reach within the limits of time, money, and geography imposed on our study. Second, while we tried to identify the critical events and outcomes that characterize this period of social activism—especially those directly linked with our seventy-seven leaders—we almost certainly missed some of the important historical events and issues.

Two other points deserve special note. This is not a comparative study of women and men leaders that focuses on gender differences. We value the contributions of comparative works, but, in the interest of understanding leadership and the women's movement, we find our focus on women appropriate and particularly important. We believe that an examination of the "what" and "how" of leadership as portrayed by these women will enable us to think about leaders in a way that will be fruitful to the study and practice of leadership generally.

Finally, this is a descriptive study, not a prescriptive one. It does not tell someone how to become a leader. Our hope is that the personal accounts and commentaries selected from hundreds of pages of interview transcripts will inspire others as they have us, and that they will stimulate more research and writing in greater depth and detail about women and about leaders. Above all, we hope the book will remind us all of the enormous legacy these women have provided and will kindle or rekindle in each of us our own passions and visions on behalf of women and society.

Audience

The book is intended for readers interested in the study and practice of leadership. It will also be of interest to certain specific groups: academic researchers and practitioners, feminist scholars and acti-

vists, and those interested in diversity issues and human resource development.

Overview of the Contents

The book comprises nine chapters. Chapter One provides the context for this study. We discuss the nature of leadership in general and present a conceptual model that serves as the organizing framework for the study. This chapter also provides an outline of the method and process of data collection.

Chapter Two provides a description of the social and historical context. It describes the issues and concerns of the second wave of the women's movement and portrays some of the generational differences of the women in the study, which often are the result of historical imperatives.

Chapter Three describes the formative influences on the women leaders. It looks at the family backgrounds, at mentors and role models, and at key experiences during the early years of schooling, during college, and in work and community activities.

Chapter Four provides an understanding of the forces that shaped the women leaders' commitment to social justice and involvement in leadership activities. It examines their vision and values and the personal dynamics that moved them into action on behalf of women.

Chapter Five describes the outcomes of their leadership efforts—initiatives within the academic community, educational organizations, publications and journals, and legislation and national policy. The chapter also analyzes the triggering events that led to these initiatives and changes.

Chapter Six focuses on the dynamics of leadership. It examines the special skills and strategies for change and it uncovers some of the elements in empowerment. Women leaders describe the critical nature of networks, collective action, and capacity for self-analysis.

Chapter Seven looks at the costs of leadership: what are the challenges, obstacles, and pains that these leaders experienced and how do they manage to overcome them? It also looks at the ways women leaders replenish themselves.

Chapter Eight reviews the accomplishments of the second wave of the women's movement—accomplishments that in large part are the result of the leadership provided by the women in the study during the early years of the movement. The analysis of these issues and accomplishments is that provided by the study's participants themselves, who also talk about a future feminist agenda.

Chapter Nine provides a summary of our major findings and suggests implications for the study and practice of leadership. In outlining future directions, we provide recommendations for further research studies and suggest ways to contribute to the development of the next generation of leaders while continuing to utilize the wisdom and talents of the present cohort of leadership.

The resource materials include a list of the study's seventy-seven participants with their titles and occupational affiliations, followed by a list of speeches and reports by participants made available to the researchers as part of the data. Also included are the proposal for the Wingspread Conference and the themes and questions discussed during this conference that provided the stimulus and basis for the design of our study. Finally, we provide the study's interview guide and questionnaire.

Acknowledgments

In undertaking this study, we have benefited considerably from our active involvement in the women's movement. The timing of our own scholarly work and activism places us squarely in the Instigator cohort.

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environment of beauty and gracious hospitality to reflect, analyze, and envision the future.

We were also assisted in many of the administrative and study details and helped by the perceptive comments and insights of our graduate students: Doris Barahona, Betty Glick, Michelle Riley, and Karen Twede. Genevieve Offner labored over the transcriptions of the interviews and the typing of numerous drafts. The Communications and Processing Center of the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), also typed and retyped the manuscript, and we thank those involved for their valuable assistance. Therese Mahoney typed the final version of the manuscript with patience and great care. We appreciate Mark Rosin's editorial assistance, as well as the help and guidance provided by Gracia Alkema, former senior editor at Jossey-Bass, and our current editor, Rebecca McGovern. We are especially grateful for the support and encouragement of Francine Deutsch and Alexander Astin, our friends, colleagues, and partners. We needed their love and wisdom throughout this process.

We dedicate this book to the memory of Joseph Katz, who brought us together many years ago through a study of adult women that he was directing at the Institute for the Study of Human Problems at Stanford University. After that initial effort, we collaborated on a number of other studies and activities on behalf of women and of education. His gifts to us enriched our lives, our friendship, and our professional commitments.

June 1991

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