

Warrior, Queen, Scientist, Activist: Gritty Women Who Bent the Arc of History

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Twenty-five historical women are profiled in the essay collection Warrior, Queen, Scientist, Activist, remembered for their achievements and their strengths.

Jan-Benedict Steenkamp's essay collection *Warrior, Queen, Scientist, Activist* explores the lives and accomplishments of women throughout history.

Split into three general parts, each dedicated to a particular area of women's history, the book reaches back to antiquity and extends into the twenty-first century. The first part is dedicated to women whose defining moments happened in war, including Joan of Arc and Virginia Hall. The second focuses on women who lived their defining moments in politics, including Hatshepsut and Eva Perón. And the last section focuses on women who made human rights breakthroughs, including the biblical Esther and Angela Davis. Each part includes seven chapters; in total, twenty-five women are profiled, remembered for their achievements and their strengths.

Each chapter begins by giving enough historical background to make the events comprehensible and let the woman's role be perceived for its full relevance. In Joan of Arc's chapter, there is an overview of the conflict between France and England during the Hundred Years' War, thus making it clear how important Joan and her mythos were. In Virginia Hall's chapter, the book illuminates exactly what she was facing by going to France as a spy for the Allies, letting her courage and the danger she was exposed to shine through.

Although there is a biographical component to the chapters, they also contain analyses of how and why each woman's leadership style was effective. In the chapter dedicated to Elizabeth I, for example, the balance she struck between naval and continental strategy is deemed to be one of the key factors in Britain's ongoing success. And when the book focuses on Theodora, it analyzes the strategy behind her rise to power from a courtesan to empress of Byzantium.

Originality is somewhat undercut by the book's use of Isaiah Berlin's metaphors in categorizing the women into leadership categories (though it adds a new category too), identifying the women as hedgehogs (visionary but uncompromising), foxes (pragmatic and improvisational), and eagles (combining the best qualities of both). It's a shortcut method for summarizing their perspectives, with the book filing Cleopatra as a hedgehog, Wu Zetian as a fox, and Harriet Tubman as an eagle. A table summary of these strategies centers their strengths and weaknesses in an even tidier fashion later on, while a notes section at the book's end further sums up the themes and patterns of the women's lives to seek commonalities between all twenty-five women.

Warrior, Queen, Scientist, Activist is an essay collection that celebrates women's leadership throughout history.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (August 7, 2024)

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