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Ashley Lee

Northeastern University, Boston, USA

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Book Review: Fierce and Fearless: Patsy Takemoto Mink, First Woman of Color in the US Congress¹

Reviewed by Ashley Lee²

Fierce and Fearless is an incredibly insightful biography that follows the life of Patsy Takemoto Mink, the first woman of color in the US Congress. This biography tells the tale of her upbringing as a third-generation Japanese-American in Hawaii (and the tension between her Japanese and American identities), her political journey getting elected into Congress, her achievements in the legislature, and the struggles that she faced due to her identities as a woman of color who also became a mother during her political career.

This biography is collaboratively written by Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, a feminist historian of Asian American identity and politics, and Gwendolyn (Wendy) Mink, Patsy Mink's daughter and a political scientist. The historical perspectives provided by Wu are skillfully interwoven with Wendy Mink's anecdotes and stories, which are relayed in the first person. The back and forth between Wu's factual account of Patsy's life, which resembles a traditional biography, and Wendy's stories, which provide a more lighthearted, personal account into how Patsy Mink was perceived by someone so close to her, create a nuanced and vivid account of Mink's life. With respect to the authors' research methods, the bulk of their research was conducted using filing related to Patsy Mink stored at the Library of Congress.

Fierce and Fearless goes into great detail about the different policies that Mink supported over the years and why. For example, the book discusses Mink's support of the prevention of nuclear testing, which was especially relevant during the time of the United States nuclear arms race against the Soviet Union. On this topic, the narrative offers both historical insight about the context of the arms race at the time, the policies that most people favored, and the interests that Mink considered in her personal anti-nuclear stance. Supplementing this information is a story from Wendy about a vivid memory she had of waking up one morning to news that a nuclear bomb would be detonated near their home. Wendy chronicles the rapid evacuation their family had to make and provides detailed descriptions of what experiencing the detonation was like in person. Adding such personal stories provides for a well-rounded, multilayered perspective on Mink's anti-nuclear stance, also making the information resonate more with readers.

Additionally, the biography spends a good amount of time discussing the hardships that Mink faced at various points in her career. For example, the book discusses topics like the blatant sexism that she endured in her first run for Congress, the patronizing comments she received after being elected because she did not look like the white men in her midst, and the comments that Wendy and Patsy both received about Patsy either not being a good-enough mother or good-enough politician because she had to balance the two roles and could not fully attend to either. These anecdotes serve to put into perspective the difficulties faced by a woman and a woman of

¹ Wu, J. T.-C. & Mink, G. (2022). *Fierce and Fearless: Patsy Takemoto Mink, First Woman of Color in Congress*. New York, New York: New York University Press.

² Ashley Lee is a Politics, Philosophy, & Economics major at Northeastern University, USA
Email: lee.ashley@northeastern.edu

color in politics. The discussion of Mink's perseverance amidst such adversity provides balance and even inspiration.

At times, the discussion about Mink's political life becomes overly detailed. Even for a reader majoring in politics, the discussion was quite dense. Perhaps this biography was intended to be read by more politically minded people who are interested in the nitty-gritty of politics and why Mink chose to support one initiative over another, but the average reader might find an overarching, more simplistic overview of her policy stances regarding a certain topic to be more digestible. A greater focus could have been placed on detailing Mink's personal life, as this is generally an area of interest to many readers of biography. Indeed, in comparison to some other biographies and autobiographies, *Fierce and Fearless* focuses much less on the subject's personal life (e.g. childhood upbringing, hobbies, personal stories) and more on the specifics of her career choices.

Specific to the validity of the facts provided, it is undeniable that this book is a trustworthy source of information. When discussing topics like relevant policies, their effects, or other background information, Wu consistently retains an objective tone and refrains from interjecting her own biases. Considering Wu's background as a professor of Asian American studies and an author of multiple other books in the realm of Asian American history and politics in general, she is a credible, reliable, and trustworthy source of the information presented in this biography.

Jointly, Wu and Wendy Mink paint Patsy Mink to be an incredibly influential, resilient, and inspirational figure who successfully overcame a plethora of obstacles in and throughout her pathway to Congressional office. Readers are left in awe of Mink's many significant accomplishments and with a tremendous amount of respect for her and the legislative work that she has done. It is incredibly important for people to know about Mink and read about the work she has done in advocating for women's rights, in particular, her work on major laws like Title IX, the Early Childhood Education Act, and the Women's Educational Equity Act. This biography truly emphasizes how Mink has been an immense influence and inspiration in paving the way for women to succeed in US society, and it is worth the read despite the density of content.

Altogether, *Fierce and Fearless* is an extremely valuable contribution to Asian American and United States political literature. Considering the flagrant underrepresentation of Asians in US politics, it is exceptionally important to continue to talk about Asians, uplifting their voices, and lauding their accomplishments so that hearing about Asians (and other racial minorities) in positions of power in this society becomes increasingly normalized.