

Virginity OR Death!

And Other Social and Political Issues of Our Time



Katha
Pollitt

"Over the years, I've been outsourcing my thinking on a host of issues to Katha Pollitt. You can do it too—start with *Virginity or Death!* and get smarter overnight."—BARBARA EHRENREICH, author of *Nickel and Dimed*

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“As this book, which is greater than the sum of its brilliant parts makes clear, Katha Pollitt, who is famously a feminist, is also a humorist, a moralist and a most hilarious, wise, and incisive observer.”

–Victor Navasky, author of *A Matter of Opinion*

Through presidential administrations Democratic and Republican, Katha Pollitt has observed and exposed the inconsistencies and illogic of those who stand in the way of progress solely to hold on to their power. In defense of human rights and equality, she assails the corrupt and educates the misguided with compassion, Swiftian wit, and complete literary authority.

In this compelling collection, Pollitt skewers one hypocrite after another. She suggests, for example, that creationists be permitted to oppose the teaching of evolution only so long as they agree to forgo the benefits of the theory—such as flu vaccines. She gently wonders if those who denounced the decision to allow Terri Schiavo to die in peace would themselves be satisfied to be video-diagnosed by Senator Bill Frist. And in the title essay about fundamentalists’ antagonism toward sex education and STD prevention, she asks, “What is it with these right-wing Christians? Faced with a choice between sex and death, they choose death every time.”

Pollitt is one of the most eloquent and persuasive voices in American political conversation of this or any other era, and *Virginity or Death!* Is a marvelous demonstration of her keen insight, mordant humor, and sense of justice.

“Katha Pollitt has long and rightly been hailed for her brilliance, wit, and great insight into politics, social issues, and women’s rights. As with all of her work, I am enormously grateful for *Virginity or Death!*, and also deeply jealous.”

–Anne Lamott, author of *Traveling Mercies*

Virginity or Death!: And Other Social and Political Issues of Our Time Details

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From Reader Review *Virginity or Death!: And Other Social and Political Issues of Our Time* for online ebook

Lauren says

If you need a reminder of those good days when your 401K was growing, read Katha Pollitt's essays. Biting and funny, these essays from "The Nation" can be a bit repetitive at times, but that's only because these points needed to be hit home again and again. I prefer reading her personal essays, but her political essays are crucial.

Susan says

Her writing is sharp, wry, witty, incisive. Each essay is very interesting and self-contained, about 3 pages long (good for traveling!). Her columns cover a wide swath of political and social issues, and in general she's got something to say that is very worthwhile.

Zoe says

I loved reading this collection of Katha Pollitt's columns from 2001-2006. Her writing covers a host of topics that have already been forgotten by many but are so important-- abortion politics, Terri Schiavo, Bush's re-election, Andrea Dworkin's death, etc. If you feel like apathy is taking over, Pollitt's funny, sharp writing will certainly get you all riled up again.

Morgue Anne says

I have to admit, dating a feminist (yes, he's a male feminist) has probably made me want to read a few more books on the subject than I would have picked up on my own, but that doesn't mean I disagree with their views, or think feminism is a bunch of "ugly, pissed off lesbians". Really, the reason I avoid books like this is because I hate having someone's opinion shoved down my throat. I have never been able to express my opinion on just about anything without getting in a fight or being shot down (I might have said something along the lines of "Motley Crue rocks!" and had people agree with me once, but when it comes to politics, religion, etc, forget it), so I tend to keep in a "they're my opinions and you can't have them" mindset while I quietly listen to the thoughts of others, and maybe suggest an article or two they should read. I was pleasantly surprised by Katha Pollitt, however. True, there was some down-the-throat shoveling of thoughts, but all of her facts checked out - she had obviously done her homework - and once in a while she nodded a head to the other side, giving them a chance to not be horribly wrong. All in all, not terrible, and I have to admit I agree with almost everything she had to say on matters ranging from abortion, welfare, Bush's presidency, and more abortion, but I think I'll still keep my views to myself.

Colleen says

I love this woman. She writes so well, with insight and wit. I share most of her views, so for me she tends to take me further down roads of thought that are familiar, to intellectual spaces that are profound and incredibly relevant. Plus, she's fun. These essays are academic in stature but not in style; definitely accessible reads.

Unwisely says

There's no reason it should have taken me that long to finish this slim volume, but as it's a collection of columns, it's eminently put-down-able. I had never heard of Katha Pollitt, and in fact only picked it up because she appeared on a Feminist Summer Reading List I happened to see right when I was looking for a book.

I adore her, but be warned, this will take you emotionally through most of the battles of W's presidency. I got angry all over again. But she's now added to my RSS reader, so I can get angry about *current* issues.

Nicki says

Ugh, let's see. In the couple of pages I read, Katha Pollitt turned out to be a White Feminist(TM) islamaphobe who was convinced that religion is the root of all evil. She also proceeded to tell us that all religious women are anti-woman and should not consider themselves feminists until they renounce their far-right ways.

Not here for it.

Kristen Northrup says

I'm just sad that I haven't been reading her columns all along. I don't always agree with her (hell, I'm more or less a conservative), but even then, she's just got a style that's both fun and thought-provoking. And that's the real value to these pieces -- pointing out the bits in (no-longer) current events that are more pleasant to not think about. It's better for me to be prodded to think about them. And again, some pieces made me laugh out loud, particularly the title piece and *Baby, It's Cold Inside*. She's less radically liberal than I expected from her mainstream reputation, and more pragmatic. Even speaks against cultural relativism. Good stuff.

Diana says

In a series of essays plucked from her work for the Nation, Pollitt takes jabs at US politics and policy, predominately on issues of human rights. While reading the book I found myself angered by the situations she was discussing but also amused at the ways she could turn an issue on its head. Her essays (such as the title piece "Virginity or Death!") often focus on the rights of women...Those essays are what drew me to the

book, but shouldn't turn you off from it - there are many messages to be found in Pollitt's work.

Roxanne says

I really enjoy Katha Pollitt. This book is a collection of columns she wrote for *The Nation*, 2001 to 2006. Pollitt is a champion of the feminist cause--of women's causes--and I love the way her mind works. This book, though, as a sum of its parts, is a bit depressing, because she keeps addressing the same issues and nothing changes. Granted, 2001 to 2006 was not exactly the most progressive era in the history of women's rights, but still. You'd think we'd come a little farther. On the plus side, Pollitt calls attention to events and atrocities that everyone should know about, and makes such radically common-sense arguments that I can't believe anyone who's read her doesn't agree with her. I'm glad to have her.

Elizabeth says

I couldn't put this book down. It's just a collection of her *Nation* columns, so none of the essays are more than a few pages long and they are organized chronologically, which makes for a somewhat disjointed read. However, it also makes it easy to say to yourself, "I'll just read one more before I go back to studying for the bar exam," over and over and over again....

Tamara Agha-Jaffar says

Virginity or Death!: And Other Social and Political Issues of Our Time is a compilation of articles the feminist scholar, essayist, poet, and social critic Katha Pollitt wrote for *The Nation* from 2001-2006. Because of the time frame, some of the articles are obviously dated. However, the collection provides a useful recap of the Bush administration policies while giving a historical perspective on some of the issues we continue to face today. Many of her predictions have come true, especially those she made about the dire consequences that would ensue if the US continues along the same path in its Middle East policy.

Pollitt takes obvious delight in puncturing the misinformation and deceptions perpetrated on the American public. She unabashedly expresses her views, sometimes wielding her sword of acerbic wit and humor to do so, but always making a serious point. And although I didn't agree with everything she says, I still found the collection to be choke full of keen insights delivered in her inimitable style of a refreshing, no-nonsense, cut-to-the chase punch.

Highly recommended.

Sherreka Burton says

Review: This book definitely made me feel both smart and stupid. Smart, because I was reading it; stupid, because half the time I had *no* idea what Katha was talking about. I'm not ashamed to say that I'm not politically minded. Politics is a subject that has eluded me for years: I just don't get it. I learned a lot from

this book that I probably should've already known; I'm glad that I read this book. Katha doesn't miss a beat at giving anybody the business. She's scathing, knowledgeable, and fact-based, and she dishes this all out with wit, snarky though it may be. I found myself thinking about subjects that I normally give no thought to: the out-datedness of our Electoral College, why Republicans so adamantly opposed the feminine ideals (keeping women submissive in regards to sex!), etc.

Favorite Essay/Thought Process: "Cold Comfort"; I had no idea the Japanese government rounded up unwilling females to serve as "comfort" for its military at base locations. The fact that the US turned its head to get justice for the victims: Horrifying? Yes. Surprising? No. (Other pages of note: pg. 21, 30, 35, 44, 127, 142, 157)

Favorite Quote: "If the mating game worked fine when women were ignorant and helpless and breaks down when they smarten up, that certainly tells us something about marriage." (pg. 258)

Recommend? Without hesitation.

Re-read? Yes, I also need a personal copy to refer back to should I happen to get into any heated debates.

Jennifer says

There's some really good stuff in here, but it feels very dated. Definitely has a place in a Political Science or Women's Studies class, but I felt like I was stuck in a doctor's waiting room reading a 10-year-old magazine.

Jimcgold says

Katha Pollitt writes the "Subject to Debate" column for The NATION. This work is a collection of over 45 essays, each approximately 1100 words in length. Topics range from women's health, national and foreign policy, and the occasional frontal attack on a politically conservative position. She is to the left of center. I learned a lot about the abuses of power and loss of woman's rights in a variety of cultures. Organizations listed that benefit women are given reviews. Some essays are better written than others, and subject matter is at times repetitive.
