



From Liberty to Magnolia: In Search of the American Dream

Janice S. Ellis

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From Liberty to Magnolia: In Search of the American Dream is a true, powerful, and compelling story about the enduring scourge of racism and sexism in America. It is a personal account of how that bane of evil plays out in the lives of blacks and women despite the great promise of the American Dream being available to and achievable by everyone. It shows how, more often than not, access to the playing field and the rules of the game are not equally and fairly applied among men and women, blacks and whites, even when they come prepared with equal or better qualifications and value sets to play the game.

This book is also hopeful, filled with expectancy. From Liberty to Magnolia will help decent and fair-minded Americans—America as a nation—see how the country has been and continues to be enslaved by its own sense of freedom. This sense of freedom is one that boasts and finds it acceptable to persistently disrespect, deny, marginalize, and minimize the value of two of its largest and greatest assets—women and people of color—when there is overwhelming evidence throughout the landscape that shows America has everything to gain by embracing two groups that make up the majority of its citizenry.

From Liberty to Magnolia: In Search of the American Dream is written for Americans from all walks of life who care deeply about how our great nation can become even greater if we boldly and courageously face our internal, crippling, and unnecessary fear—the fear that we stand to lose rather than gain by embracing and extending mutual respect and supporting equal rights and equal opportunity for our fellow citizens regardless of their race or gender.

The book is a beacon for all who are concerned about America's future and who want America's children of all colors to realize their full potential. It will inform the racists and non-racists, the sexists and non-sexists. It will inspire and empower men and women who are in positions that can make a difference and have the will to do so—parents, teachers, policy makers, social and human rights activists, journalists, business leaders, faith leaders, and many others. Caring Americans, working together, can break the chains of racism and sexism that keep America bound.

A Discussion Guide is included for use by book clubs, classes, and group forums.

From Liberty to Magnolia: In Search of the American Dream Details

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From Reader Review From Liberty to Magnolia: In Search of the American Dream for online ebook

Gail says

In this lovely book, Dr. Ellis describes her journey from a small farm in rural Mississippi to a high-powered job in corporate America and beyond. Along the way, she struggles with the dual challenges of being black and female; I don't doubt that being a Southerner was a subtle barrier for her as well when she moved north to pursue education and work. The author expresses herself well and quickly draws you into her story. She paints a picture that feels vivid and real. This is a story that needs telling from a woman who both lived through and watched key events in contemporary Black and women's history unfold in a way both personal and political.

Being from the same age cohort as the author, this book traveled terrain with which I am deeply familiar: the civil rights upheavals of the 60s, the assassination of Dr. King, the bursting of the women's rights movement onto the scene in the 70s, as well as the shift from traditional health care delivery to managed care in the 80s and 90s. Superimposed on this dynamic and at times deeply disruptive period, was the life of a young girl who dreamed of a time when her words would inspire others to take up the banner of social justice and make a difference in the world. By any measure, Dr. Ellis beat incredible odds to achieve those childhood dreams.

The tug Dr. Ellis experienced, trying to sort out when discrimination and mistreatment was due to her color or her gender, is one that now has a name: intersectionality. At the time, there was no such clarity and little in the culture or academy that helped women of color develop a positive identity. Janice, without any guidance beyond her own reading and experiences, struggled mostly alone yet incredibly successfully. Her journey was complicated by the impact of black male misogyny. She was subjected to serious physical and emotional abuse at the hands of men in her adult life; one was a husband, one a fiancé. How she managed to survive those relationships, complete a PhD program, successfully raise two sons, and achieve professional excellence is beyond imagining. It is a tribute to her drive and perseverance. For her, faith and her deep religious roots in the black church, were also instrumental to her ability to believe in a better future for herself and her family.

Throughout her life, Dr. Ellis has been writing (and at times, speaking as well). She is well-known for her political columns. Her decision to pursue self-expression and her purpose through writing a column was inspired by the commentary of Eric Sevareid and Walter Lippmann. Most writers pick a genre and rarely veer from it; their voice and rhythm fit their chosen writing vehicle. At times, the continuous narrative is disrupted by the author's propensity to slip back into her writing comfort zone. As the momentum was building around her journey, she abruptly detours from her path in two chapters in Part II. She pursues an academic discussion of Mr. Lippmann and his career as a columnist; she sprinkles excerpts from her columns into this section as well. Other reviewers have commented on their difficulty with this part of the book. This decision to give an in-depth look into the man who inspired her detracts from her purpose - to write a memoir that connects people to her and enables them to feel inspired by her personal triumphs and challenges. In my view, the book would have been more effective if this material had been omitted.

That said, reading the selection of columns in the Appendices confirms that she is an excellent political columnist and capable of applying a sharp analytic mind to the issues of the day. Many of the things she wrote 30+ years ago are still relevant today. Her intent was to "evergreen" her columns, which is to say not make them specific to a single event but rather expose the systemic issues that were revealed in the day's news. She clearly was able to succeed at that. I hope that she pursues putting together a book of new essays

as well as some of her columns and perhaps revising this book in a second edition to tighten up the narrative of her personal life journey.

Her narrative, while compelling, jumps around at times which leads to repetition, something others have noted too. I sense that at times she slips into writing columns about separate periods of her life, each with a different focus or message but supported with some of the same evidence from other chapters. While it doesn't make the book hard to follow, it does interfere with the continuity of her narrative. A skilled editor might have helped minimize these issues in what is otherwise a well-written book.

I have enormous admiration for this woman and am grateful to her for writing this deeply personal book. With great courage, something she has in abundance, she exposes her struggles, even taking on how evolving attitudes towards female sexuality felt to a deeply religious Black woman of the South. She openly airs her disappointments when life didn't go as planned and her fear about eventually remarrying. Through it all, she holds no grudges when she has good reason to do so. There is no question that she is an exceptional woman. It was eye-opening to learn what a black girl of 8 or 9 was thinking and feeling while this white girl of a similar age was also staring out the window and dreaming. My unearned privilege gave me a much easier go of it and my heart broke for that child a few states away from me who witnessed degradation and hate towards herself and her family. Thankfully, she not only survived, but thrived, and gave us all this wonderful story to inspire others.

Disclaimer: I received a free copy of the book in exchange for an honest review. My opinion, including pros and cons, is my own.

Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says

See more of my book reviews on my blog, [Literary Flits](#)

I was delighted to be chosen to take part in this tour because I really wanted to read Janice Ellis's autobiography and I can honestly say that I wasn't disappointed. Ellis is a truly inspiring woman, determined and ultimately successful despite her two social disadvantages - being black and being female. Ellis came of age about sixty years after W E B Du Bois published his essay collection *The Souls Of Black Folk* so it was shocking for me to be reminded just how little progress had been made in black people's rights in over half a century. Ellis discusses the ongoing sharecropping labour system that Du Bois had witnessed beginning in the years immediately following American slavery's abolition. Du Bois also wrote of the debate over whether black people should be educated and to what level. Ellis demonstrates how such regressive attitudes were still very much in practice in the 1960s when even one of her college tutors made it painfully obvious that he didn't believe she should be in his class - and not because of a lack of intellectual ability either!

Reading of Ellis's fights to be taken seriously academically, professionally and even in her personal life allowed me to think over the opportunities I have had - and sometimes squandered - in my life. She writes in a very engaging way and I felt like she genuinely spoke to me through the pages of this book. Ellis shows that it is possible for courageous and single-minded people to break through social barriers of race or gender, but I found it saddening that it is still so very difficult. It is important that women such as Janice Ellis have the opportunity to tell their stories of breaking the mould, and that their efforts are widely recognised. *From Liberty To Magnolia* is well-written and, I think, would be appreciated by readers worldwide. Many of Ellis's struggles are not specific to America so she should (and hopefully will) be an inspiration to young women everywhere.

Leila says

I wasn't really sure what I was expecting when I started this book, but what I got was a journey following the life of a young black female, going from being a little girl on her mom and dad's farm in Mississippi to becoming quite the successful woman with a college degree.

The book mentions quite often that the author is a black female – two minority groups – during her time of growing up. Both of which created struggled that she overcame.

I found the book very detailed and some parts were repetitive, but I thoroughly enjoyed reading the struggles and more importantly, the triumphs that Janice accomplished in her life.

Just the fact that she was a wife, mother of 2, going to college, working, caring for her children, caring for her home, and doing all of her school work – alone – is amazing. I couldn't do it even with a partner. And then to get a divorce and do it all – alone – absolutely alone, just the three of them – was astonishing.

Janice is an absolute inspiration and her story showed that even with struggles – real struggles – and things standing in your way; if you really set your mind to something, you can overcome and achieve your dream.

There is only one other human being that has inspired me as much as Janice has and that is Helen Keller. While neither similar human beings, both overcame obstacles that I can only imagine in life to be the successful women that they are. How can you be any more inspirational than these two women!?

Liberty to Magnolia really was an enjoyable read and one that I will be passing on to my tween daughter to read as well, hopefully inspiring her to push forward through all the muck and follow her dreams. To be successful.

Julius Blitz says

The fight for the 'American Dream' is something that has been going on for ages, this approach comes from a fragile time in history, but it is as inspiring as is it brutally honest, it's an important read for all of us. Despite living in a cornered and poor state, Janice never let her back down and she always move forward, a highly intelligent student and always motivated, the sexism and racism were obligatory struggles she faces along the way, but even after all that she earn a well establish place in the society, this is her story. We often hear stories about how great figures were once just like you and me, but we need to remember one thing, not every story nor path is the same, Janice's path was very diverse from many others and at the same time very similar, so if you need to find inspiration to keep moving forward, read this book, Janice is the prime example to never give up against all odds.

Kristen says

From Liberty to Magnolia tells the story of Janice Ellis and how despite all odds achieved her dreams. Being

an African American Woman during the 1900's was not necessarily the easiest thing to be when looking make change, have a career, or in some cases, simply exist.

Her story is an example of it does not matter what your circumstances may be, you can achieve success. It will be hard, without a doubt, especially for those who have found them without any resources to succeed, but it is possible. Her story is an inspiration to those who have been told no because of who they are, yet she persisted!

I would certainly suggest this book to anyone who has a dream. To anyone who has been told no. To anyone who feels their circumstances has more control over their success than their drive.

Stephen R. says

“Liberty to Magnolia” is a fantastic book. When I first saw it, I thought it was historical fiction, but then realized it was the author’s true story, which made it even better. I enjoy reading autobiographies of people who have a different perspective than me, or who have had vastly different experiences – and a professional Black woman who grew up in the South fits the bill perfectly.

I enjoy reading about both race and the woman’s perspective because I’m often convinced that I’m blind to both. I’m the kind of person who generally doesn’t believe racism or the glass ceiling really exists, even though I might be perpetuating both without knowing it.

Janice Ellis’ story is extremely well-written, entertaining, and thought-provoking. I suppose it would be good for Blacks or Women to read, but they can already relate to Janice. So, I recommend it even more strongly for Whites and Men to read as an eye-opener.

Fran says

From Liberty to Magnolia: Janice S. Ellis

Thomas Jefferson was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration states, “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” All men are created equal and there are certain unalienable rights that governments should never violate. These rights include the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. When a government fails to protect those rights, it is not only the right, but also the duty of the people to overthrow that government.

In this debut memoir, a business executive and newspaper columnist recounts her path from a Mississippi farm to high-level positions in the Midwest, contending with racism and gender discrimination.” When you read these words and hear them every time you read them out loud or they are taught to children in schools today, you realize that they have been forgotten in many ways and that everyone needs to remember that All Men and Women are created equal, so why are some considered less?

From Liberty to Magnolia takes us back to the 50’s and 60’s and introduces us to our author, a black child who lived on a farm with her family in the segregated South. Janice Ellis was smart, determined and at the age of 14 she struck out on her own and was determined to not live on a farm but become a commentator

mirroring the skills and demeanor or Eric Severeid and Walter Lippmann. She was determined to soar but first she introduces us to her family, her parents, grandparents, sisters and brothers and we learn about her struggles, her failed marriages and her two amazing sons, as she refused to back down, dealt with adversity only to finally achieve her goals. Marrying young was an obstacle for her and the two sons while married to Thomas felt the abuse, the discord and the fact that he did nothing to contribute to the family and the relationship was toxic. But, this never got her down and even though she was in college and had to be the primary breadwinner, mother, caretaker and more she never faltered and never veered from her goals.

Goals were set from the start as soon as she entered school and when she graduated college Janice did not stop there she went forged ahead to get many degrees. Graduating with a 3.8 GPA bothered her as she was a student that wanted a 4.0 and in her own mind she wanted to strive for the top at all times.

Women's rights and the civil rights movements were just two of the causes that she took up plus the rights of women in the work place. Today as back then women endured as we see on the news daily sexual harassment but she reminds us of segregation, cross burnings in front of her house and the defeatist attitudes some had but not her. With a family to support her goals she soared. The incident where her father's friend was killed because he was involved in increasing voter registration fueled her energies to hope for equality for everyone and the right to vote.

The story continues with how she met Eric Severeid and how this changed her life because she mirrored her radio commentaries called The Janice Anderson Outlook after his style. That worked for a while until she got divorced and she tells us about how she began working for the Mayor and that he asked her to leave this radio position to work in the City Hall Information Booth which required her skills.

Janice received many opportunities in various corporations and working with the Mayor. Running for Mayor gave her a incite into politics even though she lost the primaries by a small margin. Working at the radio station her shows began with Politics as a Spectator Sport, Busing is Not the Issue in School Desegregation, Stress Like Lie, Must Be Managed and many other controversial topics. The Equal Rights Amendment passed by both houses of the U.S. Congress in 1972, but was still awaiting ratification by five more states. By the close of 2016, the ERA amendment still had not been ratified or made part of the Constitution.

Women back then focused on improving their status in the workplace and not only in terms of getting higher positions available to them but equal pay. A gripping topic that she aired that applies to young people today is After College Now What? Creating her own magazine was a first and having it placed as an insert in many newspapers lasted only a short time due to the low volume of newspaper sales. The chapter titled Unavoidable Collisions is quite compelling and deals with the struggles she faces in relationships and in working for one company called where her promotion was denied and she questioned why. Reading that chapter you will have to learn the answers for yourself mainly the section titled: Rebuffed Sexual Advances and the Living Hell that Followed. But, she had met Frank and she is still married to him after 30 years. The Epilogue sums it up and once again allows readers to understand the messages that she is trying to convey like the Civil Rights Act and will skin color ever cease to be a barrier of entry, preventing them or their skills from simply not the same for other racial and ethnic groups as they are and have been for blacks. Dark skinned people she states are discriminated against, marginalized and disenfranchised not just in America, but in countries near and far. Her focus and other messages were on the right to vote, other rights and privileges afforded to white people and her love of books and the power of her words. Throughout the book we learn that she would never stand down, she would not allow herself to be knocked down, she would not tolerate racial segregation and she would make sure her voice would be heard. " My life is a testament that real change comes slowly, in small increments, and often for the few rather than the masses. But what choice do we have but to continue?" Determined, educationally oriented, disheartened when her family at times did not support her goals, with the help of her husband, Frank and her two sons she will surely continue to soar and have her voice heard. As written on the back cover: From Liberty to Magnolia shows readers, especially aspiring women and minorities-with whom her story will have special resonance-how to navigate and ultimately embrace the challenges at all every major crossroads and be triumphant. Janice S. Ellis M.A., M.A., PH.D. Has been an executive throughout her career, government, then in a large pharmaceutical

company, and later as a present and CEO of a marketing firm. She has been writing columns for more than four decades on race, politics, education and other social issues for newspapers and more. From Liberty to Magnolia is America's Promise. Added to the end of the book are discussion questions for reading groups, book clubs and several appendices that will allow you to hear her commentaries as you read them. Informative, informational, historical and replete in history Janice S. Ellis's voice is heard and her thoughts come through loud and clear.

Fran Lewis: Just reviews/MJ magazine

The Book Girl (Andrea) says

I loved this memoir. This is an incredible moving book written by a woman that inspires me, Dr. Ellis. She has a way with words that just really resonated with me. I couldn't put this book down, which is rare for me with nonfiction.

In this book, Dr. Ellis shares her hopes, dreams, and her life with us. I loved the honesty and rawness of her writing. She includes details that will empower women everywhere to speak up and not allow the same treatment against themselves. As a woman, I couldn't help but connect with her story almost immediately. I have struggled in some of the same ways in my personal and work life. I feel many women have experienced gender discrimination at some point in their life.

The stories about being black were eye-opening. I have never had to deal with those discriminations but reading about them couldn't be more timely. My heart broke at times for her. The things Dr. Ellis went through were shocking. While this book dives into her past we can hear stories about discrimination constantly today. Which shows we have a long way to go. I think this book was a great study of race and gender.

The thing I love most is even with all these bad things she doesn't let it destroy her. She doesn't let this turn her to hate. That was amazing in my opinion. I hope she writes more because I can't read about her life and build more understanding around race and gender.

From Liberty to Magnolia: In Search of the American Dream is one of the most powerful books that I have ever read. It is an empowerment to people everywhere and helps build peoples understanding of race and gender. I think readers of all ages will connect with various parts of Dr. Ellis's life.

Raymond says

Dr. Ellis' memoir chronicles her life story from rural Mississippi to her graduate work and municipal

leadership in Wisconsin and to her work in the corporate world in Missouri. Ellis' life is a story of the challenges and triumphs of being a black woman, in a sense it's a story of intersectionality. I was mostly surprised when I read about her relationship with her first husband and the plexiglass barriers she faced when trying to move up in her professional life. I was very impressed that she mentioned names of the people who did her wrong, very courageous.

Jimmy Jefferson says

A doctor's story of growing and flourishing in a time of racism and sexism

This is the life experiences of a woman who grew up in the racist and sexist period in this great country. Dr. Ellis shares her experiences with us as she describes what it was like to grow up in this time in American history. Today we tell our children they can be anything they want. At the time Dr. Ellis grew up some of the children were told they couldn't do things they dreamed of. This book is about the dreams of Dr. Ellis and the things she faced as she fought to achieve her goals one at a time over the protests of society during this racially charged time. I found this book to be inspiring and a great read for anyone who wants to learn and develop as a person. All people deserve the right to succeed based on ability not color or gender. I recommend this book to everyone as it can share experiences that will help you understand the fights still being waged today.

Katherine Hebert says

Thought provoking

From Liberty to Magnolia is a thought provoking memoir from Janice Ellis about her struggle to rise above her environment and the racism of the world that was also holding her back. The story of her struggle to do better, even without the support of her family who were concerned that she would be heartbroken if she failed, is positively inspiring. While she focuses on the correlation in time with the Civil Rights movement, it feels very current as well with the social discrepancies the world is facing. I know it's a touchy subject but regardless of what side you're on, we all can stand behind someone who rose from the ashes to be something. I applaud Dr. Ellis for shattering the glass ceiling that was holding her down. Her memoir was extremely well written and worth the time.

Rachel Kester says

This novel by Dr. Janice S. Ellis tells the incredible story of a young African American woman searching to find the American Dream during the Civil Rights Movement. Living in the Deep South, she must work to help fight against the evils of racism and segregation, as well as sexism.

This book is well-written and is based on the author's life. It's filled with historical events which will help you to learn more about them while seeing the impact they had on people.

If you're looking for an inspiring book to read, you'll definitely want to check this book out. It's an empowering novel that shows a young woman fighting for what is right and through the many challenges that come her way as she does. It will inspire anyone to work hard and overcome the challenges that they face. At 341 pages, it's a little bit of a long read, but it's well worth investing time into.

Daisey says

I thoroughly enjoyed the first part of this book that described Janice's relationship with her family and her childhood through her leaving home for college and her first marriage. This part drew me into a personal story with details both inspirational and heartbreaking. I didn't stay quite as engaged with the middle part of the book which was primarily about the author's professional life and spent a while delving specifically into her own research and journalistic writing. My interest increased once again during the last section of the book as the story returned to a somewhat more personal description of her career decisions, a move to Kansas City, and her second marriage. Overall, I enjoyed this story of one woman's continually hopeful determination to succeed in the face of discrimination.

*I know the author personally, but I purchased this book myself to read her story and provide an honest review.

Stephanie Chandler says

Dr. Janice Ellis has written a book that will inspire and challenge you to put forth your best and to not waiver for long when life has its way. Her new book, *From Liberty to Magnolia: In Search of the American Dream*, brings you to tears at the injustice, tears with her triumphs, and a belief that walking a path of faith can bridge the gap between the two as it paves the way for the next steps. Dr. Ellis's book will light a path for young women and young men who want to live a life with purpose, morality, and caring for all fellow human beings.

Jerry says

Janice Ellis truly pours her heart out in her enigmatic book, *From Liberty to Magnolia*.

While recognizing that America, as a country, has made significant progresses through its civil rights and women liberation movements, but she is still saddened by instances of endemic sexism and racism that are holding the country back from attaining the glory it is very capable of attaining.

If you are looking for a gripping tale that is partly historical and partly a long, call-to-action missive, this is surely going to be a good read for you.

Writing from the standpoints of two unique groups (women and people of color) that have been continually disrespected and marginalized, Janice Ellis doesn't only reveal her own experiences as she pursued the ever elusive American Dream from her poor, little farmhouse in Mississippi to the Corporate America, but also challenge the systems that make some societal evils perpetuate.

I think this book should be praised for its fairness, directedness, and hope. Janice Ellis doesn't only believe that the America she knew as a little Mississippi girl has tremendously transformed itself in all perspectives, but she strongly thinks it can do more for its citizens.
