



From activist to policymaker

Book details Jayapal's progressive agenda

In 2015, Pramila Jayapal became the first South Asian American to serve in the bicameral Washington state Legislature. At the time, she was the only woman of color serving in the state Senate.

Two years later, she was catapulted to the national stage when she was elected to Congress, becoming the first Asian American to represent Washington state at the federal level.

Jayapal was dubbed the “Godmother of the Squad” — the squad being the four progressive women of color (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley and Rashida Tlaib) who were elected to Congress in 2018. Jayapal became co-chair of the increasingly influential Congressional Progressive Caucus in early 2019.

Jayapal has written a timely new book, “Use the Power You Have: A Brown Woman’s Guide to Politics and Political Change.”

When working on this project, Jayapal couldn’t have foreseen the George Floyd tragedy nor the social upheaval that his death has sparked, yet she does state in these pages, “I believe that change is not just coming, she is breathing down our neck.”

Jayapal, a naturalized citizen, was born in India and came to the United States as a student when she was 16. She has been active in immigration reform issues for years, beginning with her founding of an immigration rights organization following the 9/11 attacks.

This book is presented in two parts. The first seven chapters retrace her personal journey — from immigrant pursuing the American Dream, to naturalized American citizen scrutinizing the unvarnished reality of how difficult it has become for millions of Americans to attain that dream.

Issues impacting immigration, environmental justice and economic inequality are what kindled her activism in the first place

and what continue to fire her up.

The first section also includes her meteoric rise in politics, and here Jayapal is unable to avoid a self-congratulatory tone in detailing actions that have netted her extensive coverage in the press.

This Week’s Book

‘Use the Power You Have’ by Pramila Jayapal

The New Press — 368 pp — \$27.99

The second section details Jayapal’s “moral visions” relating to immigration, “Medicare for All” and the \$15 minimum wage.

It is here that she also identifies and dissects the “Three Supremacies” — white, corporate and individual — and talks about how important it is to tackle institutionalized inequities.

In the United States in 2020, she reports, “60% of Americans do not even have \$1,000 in their savings accounts and 40% cannot afford a \$400 emergency expenditure.”

Meanwhile, the CEO/worker pay ratio has shot up over the last 50 years from 20:1 to over 220:1.

“If politics is the art of the possible, then it is our job to change the limits of what is possible,” Jayapal writes.

So she offers this “brown woman’s guide” not only to women, immigrants and people of color, but also to “allies of all stripes” to help make that happen.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com.

USE THE POWER YOU HAVE

A Brown Woman’s Guide to Politics and Political Change

Pramila Jayapal



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