



Thinking Out Loud

Anna Quindlen

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"A splendid collection...Eloquent, powerful, compassionate and droll. There is considerable variety in the subjects she addresses....Compelling."

THE CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER

Thinking out loud is what Anna Quindlen does best. A syndicated columnist with her finger on the pulse of women's lives, and her heart in a place we all share, she writes about the passions, politics, and peculiarities of Americans everywhere. From gays in the military, to the race for First Lady, to the trials of modern motherhood and the right to choose, Anna Quindlen's views always fascinate.

More of her views can be found in LIVING OUT LOUD, and OBJECT LESSONS.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Thinking Out Loud Details

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From Reader Review Thinking Out Loud for online ebook

Lisa says

Anna Quindlen is an amazing writer and this is a great book of columns she wrote for the *New York Times* in the early 1990s. The only reason the book isn't "amazing" (5 stars) is because some of the columns, especially those about the presidential campaign between George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, are of necessity dated. But part of one column--about the famine in Somalia and the difficulty in getting relief supplies to the many thousands of starving--could have been written last summer, or yesterday. Quindlen works with words as well as any writer ever published, and her columns are thoughtful, thought-provoking, and sometimes laugh-out-loud funny. (Her column on the Easter Bunny should be reprinted every year.) Highly recommended for those who can enjoy the great writing while ignoring current irrelevance of a few entries.

Sharon Thomas says

This is a selection of New York Times editorials from the late 80s and early 90s by Anna Quindlen. These are the editorials that won her the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary. She is smart, funny and a joy to read, partly because I share her politics. It is charmingly outdated, however. She vilifies Bush The Father, for example, whereas he seems to me to be positively statesmanlike in comparison to his son. I found the snapshot of political perspectives from that era to be interesting, and a little depressing since everything has gotten so much worse.

James Swenson says

I know Anna Quindlen is alive, well, and writing successful novels, but I really miss her columns. Our local paper's editorial pages are desperate for her blend of insight, intelligence, and outrage.

These columns were published in 1990-92: over twenty years ago. Why don't more of them feel more dated? A generation later, we're still dealing with the same issues. In this collection, Quindlen is writing about an ill-considered rush to a poorly justified war in Iraq; about shaming victims of sexual harassment; (on a related note) about Clarence Thomas, the useless, unqualified member of the Supreme Court's hateful bloc.

"Today," Quindlen writes in 1990, "is [my little girl's] second birthday and she has made me see fresh this two-tiered world.... My friends and I have learned to live with it, but my little girl deserves better. She has given me my anger back, and I intend to use it well." She did.

MaryEllin says

Quindlen is another of my favorite writers. Love her style and her plain-spokenness.

Deb says

A retrospective read

Although the book's high-quality writing reflects what is to be expected of Quindlen, this collection of essays is now quite out-of-date, as would be expected of a book consisting of newspaper columns written in the early 1990s. Nonetheless, it makes for some interesting reading by providing an insightful (and intuitively on the mark) prelude to the political, social, and cultural climate of today.

Lisa says

I enjoyed Living Out Loud (she discussed parenting and issues related to being 30-Something) much better than Thinking Out Loud. This book focuses on current events and politics that are clearly outdated. Her 2004 book, Loud and Clear, focuses on issues related to her career (some feminist topics are bantered and readdressed, but from a more mature and experienced Quindlen), politics, aging, parenting older children, living in post 9-11 New York, and various experiences she chooses to discuss.

I'd say skip reading Thinking Out Loud; read Living Out Loud (if you haven't already done so) and then Loud and Clear (it's neat to read about how her family and personal issues have transitioned over the years).

Carol Storm says

How appealing it is to read a serious work of political commentary by a woman as courageous and compassionate as Anna Quindlen. What sets her apart from other feminist authors is her grasp of middle-American values (love of home and family, reverence for the struggles of her immigrant ancestors and at least a qualified loyalty to the Catholic church) and her insistence on humanity and compassion as the supreme qualifications for political and cultural leadership in our society. She brilliantly assimilates the best of the Sixties counterculture, the Civil Rights Movement, and Feminism, (not to mention the traditional Democratic liberalism of FDR and the New Deal) and combines them in a distinctive voice that is always delightfully irreverent and accessible.

As playful and witty as Quindlen can be, however, it would be a mistake to assume that THINKING OUT LOUD is a frivolous book. Some of the essays collected here address crimes so horrifying and brutal that it's hard to imagine even Anna Quindlen being untouched by pessimism and despair. What's most extraordinary, however, is that even in essays such as "The Perfect Victim" (about the rape of the Central Park Jogger) and "A Changing World" (about the racially charged murder of a black teenager in all-white Bensonhurst) Anna Quindlen insists above all on celebrating the humanity of the victim. Quindlen is a genius at capturing the details behind the story, as well. From her point of view, the humanity and larger than life heroism of the Central Park jogger can be summed up in the fact that she was a Wellesley graduate, Wellesley symbolizing the ideals and aspirations of humanistic, upwardly mobile middle class feminism. Conversely, the brutality and subhuman cruelty of the Italian boys of Bensonhurst she automatically connects with the contempt for higher education and upward social mobility displayed by the proudly working class males in ethnic enclaves like Bensonhurst.

It's only natural, of course, that as a Barnard graduate Anna Quindlen sees higher education as valuable and rewarding in moral as well as material terms. Middle class kids who excel in academics are taught from a very early age to view working class kids with different skill sets as pathetic failures at best, contemptible losers at worst. These are clearly the values that Anna Quindlen accepted unthinkingly as a little girl. Still, it's regrettable that in her essay on the first Gulf War, "Summer's Soldiers," she refers to Gulf War soldiers

(like myself) as "not smart, not rich, not directed enough for college." This is exactly the kind of thoughtless, dismissive, seemingly out of touch comment that can be twisted by a cunning conservative commentator (such as Bill O'Reilly or Rush Limbaugh) to suggest that liberals are smug elitists who hold all working class people in contempt. Such unfortunate gaffes undermine the anti-war movement in any war, because they widen the regrettable but undeniable gap between the progressive leadership of the anti-war left and the great mass of the American people.

Anna Quindlen dismisses the patriotism of more than a hundred thousand Gulf War veterans with a sneer, on the argument that they're not college educated and therefore can't understand the core values of a democracy. Yet she writes with almost religious fervor about her immigrant Irish ancestors, who came to this country not only ignorant of democracy but (for the most part) completely illiterate. Does she really imagine the soldiers who fought the Gulf War were any less patriotic or unselfish than the Famine Irish who came here unable even to write their own names?

My own ancestors were Jews from Eastern Europe. The literacy rate among the Jews at the turn of the last century was much, much higher than that of the Famine Irish of the 1840's, and the Jews never engaged in ethnic cleansing and mass murder of black women and children as the Irish did with astonishing gusto during the Draft Riots of 1863. Yet no one would suggest that Jews made "better" Americans than the Irish.

Anna Quindlen is a gifted, eloquent spokesperson for the values of democracy, yet she has a selective memory about certain aspects of the Irish experience in America. She condemns the violent racism of Italian Bensonhurst with regal hauteur and ice-cold contempt, like Queen Victoria turning up her nose at Jack the Ripper. Yet in another column she acknowledges with almost disturbing cheerfulness that she grew up in a neighborhood "where a Jewish family would have been a rarity and a black family an impossibility." The boys of Bensonhurst used murder to keep their neighborhood all white -- what weapons did Anna's parents use? Does she know? Does she even care? Perhaps in her mind, racism is okay as long as you "want better things" i.e. to send your daughter to college.

On repeated readings, one gets the impression that what Anna Quindlen finds most repulsive about the boys of Bensonhurst is not that they were willing to stoop to murder but that they were defending a working-class neighborhood, not a middle class one. Her loathing for the murderers of Bensonhurst is not really that of the Union Army soldier for the Confederate soldier, where both sides have clearly put everything at risk and are equally willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, but is more analogous to the slaveowner's snide contempt for the white-trash overseer. She has lived in all-white neighborhoods all her life, yet she almost unthinkingly scapegoats working class males, equating their class pride with racial hatred and racial violence. But the equation is not complete unless you factor in the fact that upper class whites take the right to live in "exclusive" neighborhoods for granted.

The subject of race is a constant thread in THINKING OUT LOUD. Anna Quindlen champions Affirmative Action with all the zeal of a Union Army colonel holding to the last at Little Round Top. Yet again, it's interesting that she sees no contradiction between her own girlhood -- all those years in secluded innocence at the all white, all girl, all Catholic private schools she so clearly cherished -- and the multi-racial future she wants for other people's children. I'm not saying I disagree with Anna Quindlen, not at all. I'm just thinking out loud that she didn't insist on going to public school when she was a teenager, in order to make friends with black kids (like my father) or Jewish kids (like my mother). I wonder exactly when it was she discovered that black women were her "sisters." It wasn't when she was serving as an infantryman in Vietnam, and it wasn't when she was a Freedom Rider in Alabama. Anna Quindlen writes about the Civil Rights movement as if it's "her" achievement -- as if somehow she deserves the credit. Yet all of her essays, even the most touching and entertaining, make it painfully clear that she is the product of racial privilege, and that her view of blacks is condescending and paternalistic, closer to that of an "enlightened" slaveowner like Scarlett O'Hara than that of a white-trash renegade like the notorious slave-stealer Huck Finn.

Naj says

This is just my personal opinion, and keep in mind it's from the perspective of a teenager.

I thought it was pretty good, it wasn't dry and boring like many other books I've read, however it wasn't my taste. Yes it was good but not for me. Most of the issues she talked about happened before I was even born making it harder for me to read without having to do research of my own to even understand the article. The other thing I didn't quite like was how she kept writing about the same issues with the exact same opinion. One article was enough, I understand what your stance is. She also seemed quite biased, she never exactly considered things from other sides of the spectrum. I guess she's technically not supposed to do that if she's being persuasive, but it certainly would have made things a lot more interesting. I wanted to her from her as Anna Quindlen, not just another woman or another mother. There are a lot of those but there's only one Mrs. Quindlen. :(

She also seemed to roast men a lot. That was just what I thought though.

Lorna says

Thinking Out Loud: On the Personal, the Political, the Public and the Private is a book of essays by author and Pulitzer prize-winning columnist for *The New York Times*, Anna Quindlen. This is an anthology of many of her columns over the years, mostly written in the early 1990's. While this book may be dated, it certainly is not Ms. Quindlen's fault as it was published in 1993 and she graciously signed my book in the Spring of 1993; it has just taken me this long to take it from the shelf. One striking note was how relevant many of her columns are today. Who would have thought that we would once again be litigating *Roe v. Wade* in 2018? It is a glimpse of the early nineties for many political issues such as the Clarence Thomas hearings and the riveting testimony of Anita Hill during his supreme court nomination hearings, the political race between George HW Bush and Governor Bill Clinton, affirmative action and women's rights. There are the timeless pieces that deal with families and children. All in all, a nice book to remain in my library for further reference.

Brittany says

Always a fan of Quidlen (subscribed to Newsweek solely to read her columns in the end), and Thinking Out Loud did not disappoint! Really great collection of her columns.

On Rodney King (1992) & the 1968 Kerner Commission -

"I looked at my eight-year-old and thought that maybe in 2018, he would write the fiftieth anniversary piece saying that nothing much had changed. I wondered if he would remember how he felt this last terrible week... I've tried to teach him that prejudice is intolerable, but watching the videotape he learned a different lesson. I wanted better for him. For all of them." (23)

On books (1991)

"Reading has always been life unwrapped to me, a way of understanding the world and understanding myself through both the unknown and the everyday. If being a parent consists often of passing along chunks of ourselves to unwitting - often unwilling - recipients, then books are, for me, one of the simplest and most surefire ways of doing that. I would be most content if my children grew up to be the kind of people who

think decorating mostly consists of building enough bookshelves." (119)

On Presidents and Leadership (1992)

"The difference between government and leadership is that leadership has a soul." (183)

On Systematic Racism & Systems of Oppression (1992)

"Only all things aren't equal. Hatred by the powerful, the majority, has a different weight - and often very different effects- then hatred by the powerless, the minority...//Our problem is not the words of a rap singer - it is silences so huge we are drowning in them." (195-196)

On Hillary Clinton during her husband's campaign (1992)

"She is a lightning rod for the mixed emotions we have about work and motherhood, dreams and accomodation, smart women and men's worlds. She was the kind of girl they said might wind up in the Oval Office. Now if she's lucky she'll get the East Wing, a not uncommon kind of pact in two-career marriages... Here in New York... we have the two faces of Eve. We have the women candidates, who are permitted-and I chose that word deliberately - to be ambitious, outspoken, strong, and sure. And then we have Hillary Clinton, who must hawk those cookies and show off her daughter to prove her bona fide."

On topics from abortion and nuns defying the Catholic dogma (1990) -

"Tell me about it. Tell me about the thing I have never experienced and cannot begin to understand... Tell me about the lives I haven't led, the demons I've never faced." (226)

Laura says

It was interesting to revisit the early 1990s from the perspective of adulthood and see how many of the issues she wrote about then are still exactly the same almost 20 years later. The section on abortion seemed particularly timely, given the Stupak debate. But since I basically already agreed with everything she had to say, it didn't really rock my world. I was just like, yeah, I think I'd like to work with this lady or have coffee or something. But I feel like I'll forget this book rather quickly.

Sarah says

I really enjoy Ms. Quindlen's voice. This is just a side note about the book. There were so many typos. I have never seen this many typos in a book.

Christa Avampato says

I love Anna Quindlen's novels so when I saw this collection of her New York Times columns, I had to scoop it up. For the first half of the book I was engaged and interested. And then I realized that the columns she chose made her out to be someone who is constantly disappointed in the world. I agree with a lot of her political views, and I was grew more depressed about the world around me with each piece.

I recognize that there are a lot of terrible circumstances in the world, though this book had few if any glimmers of hope. If the world really is as Quindlen describes it in this selection of her writing, I wonder how she gets out of bed in the morning.

The upside of the book is that Quindlen is a very powerful writer, and not a single word in the book is wasted. She chooses her phrasing carefully and conveys powerful emotions in each line. I would have liked to read just a little bit of hope in her words from time to time to balance out all of the sadness.

Katie says

I waffled between three and four stars on this. The book was divided into helpful sections based on theme, and while the essays on her kids/family bored me to tears, her essays on politics (especially feminism) were some of the best journalism I've ever read. I guess that evens out to a four-star.

I only started reading Anna Quindlen's work when I was in high school and read Newsweek. As a result, I'd never read (or even really knew of in a solid way) her work for the New York Times. I was such a fan that my mom and I went to see her speak in a lecture series in Pittsburgh. We went to a lot of lectures that season, and I still remember how fucking good Quindlen was. (Stephen Pinker, not so much.)

Quindlen's strength then, as it is in her writing, is her ability to blend the personal and political so well. Which is good, as she states that as a goal of her writing, in one of the introductions to the chapters (which I loved reading and offered real insight into her work). However, and not to be too snippy about it, I really feel that her writing is a heluva lot better when the central theme is political, with the personal thrown in as support, rather than vice versa. A few of the personal essays bordered on meandering journal entries, and I just really didn't care for them. The writing style of them is more ephemeral, while the writing of the political is sharp, passionate, and thought-provoking.

But, of course, the political saved the whole thing, which is fun because they were last. Abortion, feminism, women's rights, etc., is where she really shines. She writes succinctly and honestly, but without at all coming off as though she has All the Answers - even when there's clearly a lot of passion from her on the topic. I really recommend it to anyone interested in political op-ed journalism; it's some of the best stuff you'll read.

A few fave quotes, for fun:

[writing about Robert McNamara and Lee Atwater discussing their regrets]

"It reminds me of fathers who come to their children, now grown, and say, 'These are the mistakes I made. Please forgive me.' And we do forgive, but we are saddled with our characters, shaped by those mistakes."

[on raising a daughter with work to be done for equality]

"It is like looking through a telescope. Over the years I learned to look through the end that showed things small and manageable. This is called a sense of proportion. And then I turned the telescope around, and all the little tableaux rushed at me, vivid as ever. That's called reality."

(Oh, and as a random side note: I hate, hate, HATE the cover of my book and I despise the synopsis on the back. Both make it seem like I'm carrying around some gross self-help book for the single woman. This is especially nauseating considering how much respect Quindlen should garner. Blech. I hope it's different now, as this copy is old and my mom's.)

Christina Rossi says

She is undoubtedly a gifted writer. One of her Christmas columns and her take on traveling with children are

masterpieces. Granted they're weekly columns for The Times, but I find myself wishing--misplaced, I'm sure--that there was some kind of guiding vision behind them. I am asking too much of a newspaper column, no matter the estimable publication for whom she wrote. I didn't finish the book. No reflection on her as a writer; but rather of me as a reader searching for a writer to admire and love. Nice work, Anna!
