

CREATING LASTING LEGACIES AND POWERFUL POSITIONS:
A Survey History of the Roles, Traditions, Impacts and Influences of Sixteen First Ladies
of the United States, from 1789-2001.

By

Jess R. Gagliardi

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ABSTRACT

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Jess R. Gagliardi

First ladies are an important element in presidential administrations and have parallel structures, as they are in a position to be leaders, have important roles, supported various causes and have tremendous influence over presidents. First ladies have developed this role from scratch, entirely since Martha Washington who built a powerful institution in the federal government. Many first ladies have sponsored programs and causes, and have been role models for the people of their times. At times, activism by these women in support of causes and policies has run afoul of social convention and ideological opposition, consistent with evolving roles and expectations for women.

Sixteen first ladies have been highly influential in creating and establishing influence and importance in United States History. The early first ladies of influence and importance include: Martha Washington, Dolley Madison, Sarah Polk, Mary Todd Lincoln, Lucy Hayes, Edith Wilson and Lou Hoover. In 1933, Eleanor Roosevelt significantly changed the role of first lady, becoming a vital facet of the presidential administration. First ladies since 1945 of authority and influence include: Bess Truman, Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush and Hillary Clinton. Each of these ladies have established themselves as assets to presidents, and enlarged their public role beyond serving as the unofficial White House hostess. These sixteen first ladies have taken advantage of the opportunity in their positions and created lasting legacies during their tenures as first lady.

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I dedicate this work to my parents, Al Gagliardi and Mitzi Weese Gagliardi, who have never asked anything except for me to do my best. With their unconditional love, they have encouraged me in all my ambitions and inspire me to be as good as they are. I have been tremendously fortunate with them as parents and hope to continue to make them proud. In February 2013, my world changed forever. My mother passed away while I was in the bulk of my research and writing this thesis. As I continue to cope with her death, I remember her enormous strength and love of life as she battled with cancer, and hope that I can be as strong as her in the face of adversity. Mom and dad: thanks for all the support, love of learning, encouragement, inspiration, and most of all, thanks for giving me life. I love you both, and I always will.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: More than the President's Wife

"[The role of First Lady is] much more of a twenty-four hour job than anyone would guess...Now that I realize what they've had to put up with, I have new respect and admiration for every one of them" – Betty Ford on the work of a First Lady.¹

More than ever, most people can correctly identify who the current First Lady of the United States is, but few could probably articulate what capacity she has in the federal government. First ladies are highly visible during the campaign season leading up the election, on television, social media and all throughout the news. Most people presume that the first lady has certain responsibilities and duties within presidential administrations, but the role of the first lady has been made up entirely of evolving traditions, practices and self-given duties, as there is no federal document that lists out any responsibilities or duties. In fact, at one point in early in first lady history, first ladies can simply retire to the family quarters in the White House and not be seen or heard of, if they wish to do so. Currently, first ladies have no real prescribed duties, but do play a role in administrations, along with socio-political expectations, such as hostess duties. Because some first ladies have used their roles for opportunity in sponsoring programs and causes since 1789, the institution of first lady has become an influential and important component of presidential administrations.

The institution of the first lady is a peculiar part of the federal government structure that generates great influence and has acted, at times, as an advisor to presidential administrations. Yet her role remains enigmatic, largely the product of how the wives of presidents have interpreted and developed this privileged role in presidencies. From Martha Washington to the current first lady, Michelle Obama,

women who have been or acted as the first lady have developed this important part of the presidency to keep up with its traditions, roles and furthering causes and programs. Being close to the president, first ladies are a person of great influence and having that power is helpful in supporting causes and taking advantage of the opportunity they are presented with.

The first question to settle involves determining if an “office” of first lady exists. Practically, the answer is yes. Starting at the same time of a president’s inauguration, their wives step into a role as first wife, first mother, head hostess, planner, and diplomatic dignitary, to name a few. Without a constitutionally-defined or legislatively-prescribed job description, the role of first lady has evolved under the public eye.

A welter of factors explains how active first ladies have been and which causes they champion. Some support programs and politics out of personal convictions, life experience, or out of a desire to model a particular aspect of the role of wife or mother.

Not all first ladies have had equivalent impacts on their evolving roles, especially those who were seen to play a role in shaping the president’s agenda or policies. There have been several influential first ladies who either changed the institution of first lady or were influential in presidential advising, exemplified by Dolley Madison, Edith Wilson, Eleanor Roosevelt, Roselyn Carter and Hillary Clinton.² There have been first wives who were highly criticized publicly, like Mary Todd Lincoln, or were the brunt of jokes like Barbara Bush. First ladies have received backlash from opponents in their programs and causes, such as Hillary Clinton with health care reforms. Not every first lady had enjoyable time in the White House; most had to endure public scrutiny in some form.

From Martha Washington through each of her successors, first ladies have reflected the times that they lived in. In the patriarchy of the early republic, wives were quiet, passive and endured the roles of being submissive housewives. In the Early Republic and Antebellum eras, spanning the time from Elizabeth Monroe to Julia Gardiner Tyler, some presidential spouses were absentee first ladies and often sent their daughters, nieces or other close female relatives in their place for official state functions. Wives of the Civil War era and up to the World Wars era remained removed from the political arena, but fulfilled their hosting duties as examples of the Victorian Era woman; a few women are excluded during this time which includes Mary Todd Lincoln, Lucy Hayes, Edith Wilson, Lou Hoover and Eleanor Roosevelt, as they were politically vocal and progressively active. Beginning in the 1930s, first ladies became more consistently and more politically active in presidential administrations, demonstrated by the modernizer of first ladies, Eleanor Roosevelt.³

In the same manner her husband enlarged the role of the federal government during the Depression and World War II, Eleanor Roosevelt transformed the role for first ladies. Roosevelt created the contemporary understanding of the first lady's role. She understood the unique role she was presented with as the president's other right-hand advisor, and she capitalized on it; likewise, the first lady was able to do what the president could not, especially in the areas of race and poverty. It may just be the unique relationship and partnership she had with Franklin D. Roosevelt, but Eleanor firmly took grasp of her influence and made herself an activist for social change and equality for the people of the country. Nearly all first ladies since Roosevelt have had a cause or program that they promoted to better the country. This was certainly the lasting legacy of

Roosevelt; changing the role of first lady and modernizing that position into an “office” that supports causes, awareness and programs to help better the United States.

Some of the programs and causes first ladies have sponsored are controversial, such as Hillary Rodham Clinton’s health care reforms and Nancy Reagan’s crusade on drugs, whereas other first ladies have generated less controversy, such as Lady Bird Johnson’s highway clean-up movement and both Bush wives’ promotion of literacy and education. Maybe the type of program or cause a first lady sponsors can be explained with their background and/or the expectations of first ladies to have a cause or program. It becomes clearer with modern first ladies that they choose their programs and causes because they have backgrounds and connections in those areas.

No two first ladies have been alike as each has brought different experiences to this institution. Martha Jefferson, Rachel Jackson, Hannah Van Buren, Ellen Arthur and Alice Lee Roosevelt never experienced their time as first lady, as they died before their husband’s elevation to the presidency.⁴ Letitia Tyler, Caroline Harrison and Ellen Axson Wilson died during their husband’s term of office.⁵ Martha Washington, Martha Jefferson, Dolley Madison, Mary Scott Harrison and Edith Bolling Wilson were widowed before marrying the men who would become president. Rachel Jackson⁶, Florence Harding and Betty Ford were divorced before marrying future husbands. Rachel Jackson’s circumstance generated a significant scandal in the context of antebellum social propriety.⁷

Two presidents entered office having never been married; James Buchanan and Grover Cleveland. However, in Cleveland’s second term as president, he wed Frances Folsom. Eight first ladies became widows while in the White House: Anna Harrison,

Margaret Taylor, Mary Todd Lincoln, Lucretia Garfield, Ida McKinley, Florence Harding, Eleanor Roosevelt and Jacqueline Kennedy. Only six former first ladies, Abigail Adams, Elizabeth Monroe, Abigail Fillmore, Jane Pierce, Lucy Webb Hayes and Lou Hoover died before their husbands after leaving the White House. Seventeen former first ladies survived their husbands after living in the White House: Martha Washington, Dolley Madison, Louisa Adams, Julia Gardner Tyler, Sarah Polk, Eliza Johnson, Julia Dent Grant, Frances Cleveland, Edith Kermit Roosevelt, Helen Taft, Edith Bolling Wilson, Grace Coolidge, Bess Truman (who lived the longest of any former first lady), Mamie Eisenhower, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford and Nancy Reagan.⁸

Education backgrounds of the first ladies grew as more opportunity became available. Higher education for women was less common in the nineteenth-century, but more opportunity grew in the late 1800s. Lucy Hayes became the first to graduate college, earning her degree in 1850. Many first ladies had received some sort of education and only a small percentage received formal education, however, fourteen graduated from college besides Lucy Hayes, which includes: Frances Cleveland, Caroline Harrison, Helen Taft, Grace Coolidge, Lou Hoover, Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson, Pat Nixon, Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush and Michelle Obama. Of those who finished college, four went on to receive graduate or professional degrees: Pat Nixon with an equivalent of a Master's degree in education, Laura Bush with a Master's degree in library science, and Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama with law degrees.⁹

Five former first ladies are still alive as of 2014, along with current first lady Michelle Obama: Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, Laura Bush and Hillary

Clinton. Having six living first ladies is not a common occurrence. This provides a rare moment when these women can support for one another, and creates a sorority among these women, similar to the presidential fraternity.¹⁰ In demonstrating how this sorority hints towards cohesion, some first ladies have created alliances, as seen at Betty Ford's funeral with Rosalynn Carter speaking not only about their days as first ladies, but of their friendship. These two particular first ladies have formed unlikely bonds with one another, as their husbands ran against each other in 1976. Though they came from different political parties and campaigned against the other, a friendship grew from seemingly adversaries to trusted bond, evident in Carter's eulogy at Betty Ford's funeral.¹¹

Rather than provide short vignettes on each first lady, this study focuses on those who have shaped the institution of first lady. Several first ladies took advantage of using their influence to push forwards with their programs, while others either did not have a cause or elected to keep a low profile, again much of this depending on the current times of their era.

Several first ladies that have gone on and made careers for themselves after their tenure in office, and in some cases, used their influence for continued promotion of important and sometimes controversial public causes. One in particular, Hillary Clinton, has gone on in her own career immediately after her occupancy as first lady, becoming a United States Senator from New York and later, Secretary of State. Eleanor Roosevelt remained very active in public life as a delegate to the United Nations promoting human rights, and became the primary author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹²

The methodology this study utilizes is an analysis of the most influential sixteen first ladies, exploring and ranking each with traditions created, presidential administration influences, stances taken and programs sponsored, and the variables that are included with the 2008 Siena Research Institute's "Ranking of the First Ladies" (see Table 1 and 2). Also this study includes elements of analyzing and celebrating first ladies who have had programs to help further the progress of society and their role of first lady. Sixteen have stood out to be some of the more progressive first ladies that have made an impact on this institution.

The first ladies fall into two groups: foundational and the modern first ladies. The foundational first ladies up to Eleanor Roosevelt developed traditions and established the role. Martha Washington established the practice of hosting social events, state dinners and helped guide President Washington on various issues. Dolley Madison became a dominant political figure for her social events and ability to bring people together, as well, her furnishing the White House and saving important, official items during the War of 1812. Sarah Polk excelled in an advisory role and added traditions to White House social events.

Mary Todd Lincoln worked to restore prestige to the presidency and became a target of scrutiny for her outbursts; however, she traveled with President Lincoln and showed attention to soldiers on a regular basis. Lucy Hayes banned liquor in the White House, an act for which she was praised and reflected in those days in the White House. Edith Wilson became significant with her stewardship over President Wilson, possibly making major political decisions. Lou Hoover became the first to establish the traditional sponsorship of programs and causes first ladies are expected to have.

The modern group begins with Eleanor Roosevelt who completely transformed the first lady and continued to expand their role in both the presidency and public. Bess Truman brought desired independence and sophistication for first ladies and much needed renovations to the White House.

Jacqueline Kennedy's work with art and White House preservation won over many. Lady Bird Johnson actively sought out her own legislation to clean up the United States from litter and trash. Betty Ford spoke honestly with the country about women's health and controversial topics that were taboo in the 1970s. Rosalynn Carter supported mental health care and demonstrated co-power in the White House alongside the president.

Nancy Reagan promoted the "Just Say No" campaign and became the protector of President Reagan's public image. Barbara Bush taught people the importance of education and literacy. When the Clinton's moved into the White House, the country acquired a dual presidency and Clinton worked diligently on health care reform and showed authority in the White House. Because of the influence and lasting legacies these first ladies exhibit, they are the focus of this study.

There have been forty-four women who have been married to the presidents, and there have been approximately fifty women who have assumed the role of first lady (or hostess) at some point in time, so studying sixteen women prove to be a reasonable sample to show the progress of how this office has developed over the years. Each contributes her part to the foundation and support of keeping up this structure that is the Office of First Lady. Presidents have relied on this institution for support, mainly relying

on first ladies to provide guidance, companionship and overall support in this demanding job.

It will be interesting when this institution expands further and the first first gentleman, or whatever nomenclature he chooses, enters into this position. Would they continue the precedent set by women, having a program to raise awareness, or would he take on a completely different role? Certainly, the fields of political history, gender history and first spouse history would have a brand new element on which to focus and explore and start doing more comparative history, and see how sex plays a role in a female-dominated institution. This can also go further into other categories with the first homosexual couple to occupy the White House, and other types of relationship scenarios that are possible. But for now, only women have occupied this position and understanding the roles are important not only for women's history, but also understanding the presidency. There is no way to fully understand the presidency without knowing about their wives and her influence with the president.

The history of first ladies embraces several paradigms including feminist history, women's history and political history. With the feminist paradigm, first ladies are analyzed in their roles and are promoted for breaking barriers when they become activists for causes, or reflecting the limitations imposed on women by patriarchy. First ladies also serve as important metaphors in women's history. They are wives and mothers and, often, follow the trajectory that many women have followed to obtain Constitutional personhood and negotiate the relationship between biology and socially-constructed roles. First ladies add to the American woman experience in history in a few ways. Finally, the role of first lady has evolved with the imperial presidency. First ladies are

also on a stage that allows for them to undertake programs or causes to benefit others, which has helped women through history.

The seven women from 1797 to 1933 have been important in the foundation of first ladies, including: Martha Washington, Dolley Madison, Sarah Polk, Mary Todd Lincoln, Lucy Hayes and Edith Wilson and Lou Hoover. From 1933-1945, the United States gained a gem first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, who modernized the role of first lady. From 1945-2001, eight women continued building the institution, including: Bess Truman, Jackie Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Hillary Clinton. These women exemplify the most noteworthy and influential first ladies who have shaped the role and had a cause or program during their careers as first ladies. All sixteen of these women have played a significant role in presidential administrations, been powerful with influence and have made lasting legacies in their positions as First Lady of the United States.

Many people know of the first ladies, but not many know exactly what they are required to do or what their role is in during a presidential administration. Historically, first ladies have influenced trends in fashion, setting examples the expectation for women, and others who championed a cause or program they find that will benefit society. Since no formal job description for first lady exists, the first ladies themselves have created and developed the role over the years starting with Martha Washington, redefined and modernized by Eleanor Roosevelt, and expanded by several others. This institution is made up of roles and traditions that have been developed for over two hundred years.

It is evident by studying the first ladies that they are more than the president's wife. First ladies have served as hostess, advisor, partner and political allies. Each first lady has brought a unique presence in the White House, with some being idolized and praised for their efforts, or fallen as victims of criticism, or forgotten and ignored. First ladies have greatly impacted presidential administrations and society in an exclusive position in the political arena of the United States government.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“I hope that someday someone will take the time to evaluate the true role of the wife of a president, and to assess the many burdens she has to bear and the contributions she makes.” – President Harry S. Truman¹

Research on first ladies has changed significantly over the years, becoming more inclusively scholarly with biographies, autobiographies, articles and scholarly works. As more attention has been given towards first ladies, the research has moved from simply biographical information to in-depth analysis and research. Edith Roosevelt once stated, “a lady’s name should appear in print only three times...at her birth, marriage and death.”² Many presidents mentioned their families in their autobiographies and other writings, but only with basic, succinct information. Martin Van Buren did not ever mention his family or gave any information about them in his writings of his life or his presidency.³

Compared to the many other facets of women’s history, studies on the first ladies are limited, although the literature has been growing. Only a handful of scholars have actually completed works on first ladies, with many biographical in nature, but several analyze information to explore what has been done to find the deeper understandings. Even sampling works on presidential administrations, little is covered except for biographical information and anecdotes from events that have occurred during administrations, so it is clear that women have been left out of the picture in this regard as well.

Scholarly Sources

Betty Boyd Caroli's *First Ladies: From Martha Washington to Michelle Obama*, examines each first lady with their biographical information and activities during and after their terms and groups them together in different eras. It is interesting how first ladies are similar to one another, and how active first ladies reflect different historical eras. This is the most recent as it gets to 2010 and the first two years of Michelle Obama's term as first lady in the last chapter titled "Turning Points."⁴ The main focus of Caroli's book is not only grouping First Ladies together into eras that preceded chronologically with historical eras, but also shows the progression of the role of first lady. This book analyzes the transition from the first lady from White House Hostess to the Office of the First Lady. Though not much detail is given about their early first ladies, due to few primary sources, but those early first ladies including Martha Washington and Dolley Madison have lengthy chapters showing the early activism, and Caroli uses a plentiful amount of sources such as letters, diaries, personal writings, newspapers and collected works to show the progress of first ladies.

Robert P. Watson and Anthony J. Eksterowicz's *The Presidential Companion: Readings on the First Ladies*, is a collection of different essays entailing various aspects of Office of First Lady, from the beginning with Martha Washington, to the differences between White House Hostess and an Activist First Lady, as well as Companion and Codependent First Ladies, private versus public and more features of the first lady. The collections are broken down into four parts: Founding and Development of the First Ladyship, Social and Behind-the-scenes Influence, Political and Policy Influence and the Modern First Lady.⁵ The resource is useful for examining and measuring the progress, roles and influences of first ladies.

Unlike Betty Caroli's books, *The Presidential Companion* does not include every first lady, rather, selected essays on those who made a significant impact as a first lady. The section on Political and Policy Influence describes with the first ladyships of Eleanor Roosevelt, and those first ladies that have testified in Congress, including Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosalyn Carter, Betty Ford, Nancy Reagan and Hillary Rodham Clinton, which has a lasting effect on their specific policies they wanted to achieve (see Table 4).⁶ A section is dedicated to those first ladies that took on an active role in presidential administrations, such as Rosalyn Carter sitting in cabinet meetings⁷, Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Rodham Clinton getting appointed to government positions⁸, as well as Hillary Clinton making history in 2000, being elected to the United States Senate from New York after her tenure as first lady.⁹ The First Lady Activism section of this work examines with the first ladies from Eleanor Roosevelt forward and all their agendas or projects. Similar to this work, *The Presidential Companion* takes in all the aspects of activism and importance to the president in a collection of works to show first lady importance.

One essay showing political activism is "Breast Cancer and First Lady Betty Ford's Leadership", by MaryAnne Borrelli, which presents Betty Ford's public announcement of her mastectomy and breast cancer, and because of her strength to share her story, many women had become aware of the seriousness of the disease, as well as to be more educated on the matter. During her time as first lady, as well as the time after, she educated thousands to even possibly millions of women about addictions and illnesses, making her a significant first lady.¹⁰

Like other works on first ladies, *The Presidential Companion* examines various aspects into the office, including activism, personal struggles, relationships to their husband's political career, campaigning, and influences to people of the United States, and looking past what they did as White House Hostess, presenting more of a study, because of the use of primary sources, such as first lady's diaries, newspaper articles, and other items used for analysis and examination.

Periodically, similar to presidential history and ranking of presidents, first ladies have also been ranked. *Rating the First Ladies: The Women Who Influenced the Presidency*, by John B. Roberts II, applies this method to first ladies. Roberts includes the Siena Research Institute's ranking of first ladies and compares the rankings from the previous 30 years.¹¹ In the bulk of the research, each first lady is analyzed and justification is articulated through the work on the ranking position. Ten factors are included in the rankings, taken from the Siena Research Institute, which includes: background, intelligence, value to country, "own woman", integrity, accomplishments, courage, leadership, public image and value to the president. These variables then are used to compile the rankings (see Table 1 and 2).

Molly Meijer Wertheimer's *Inventing a Voice: The Rhetoric of American First Ladies of the Twentieth Century* is similar to *The Presidential Companion* in that it presents a collection of essays of first ladies from Ida McKinley to Hillary Clinton. The various essays take a critical look into each of these first ladies and how they contributed and expanded the institution of the first lady and how each approached their roles. Though some were more involved than others, each lady in the twentieth-century became

known for something they did or promoted. This collection of essays pulls from a variety of primary sources, newspaper articles, speeches, personal writings and articles.

First Lady Series, Biographies and Articles

Paul F. Boller, Jr., author of *Presidential Wives: An Anecdotal History* presents biographical history of each first lady, from Martha Washington to Hillary Clinton. Boller writes on each lady discussing their biographical information. Boller's main sources include diaries, newspaper articles, biographies and autobiographies, and other works. Boller organizes his work chronologically, giving a chapter to each individual first lady, and focuses on each first lady's contribution to the president or to a program. To bring some more humane elements to researcher, each chapter ends with a handful of anecdotes that gives interesting information and tidbits into each wife's lives. *Presidential Wives* completes Boller's trilogy about the presidency, and gives a voice to one of the most important parts of the presidency. This is considered one of the benchmark resources on the history of first ladies and references utilized by many.

A good portion of the historiography of first ladies is constructed mostly of biographies and autobiographies, and more and more, each first lady typically has a monograph/ biography, and some of the more modern first ladies have published autobiographies. Autobiographies are useful, but some become flag-waving parades and seem to have the need to justify events that happened, which is hagiography and has no real or useful importance. Many of the modern first ladies wrote autobiographies in which they defend their husband's administrations, which include Eleanor Roosevelt, Lady Bird Johnson, Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan Barbara Bush, Hillary Clinton and

Laura Bush. Biographies are typically more reliable in covering the life of a first lady, because a higher level of analysis has been completed.

Two recent developments in the history of first ladies have been series published by the University Press of Kansas series on Modern First Ladies, and the Presidential Wives Series by Nova Science Publishers, Inc. The University Press of Kansas has published works on the modern first ladies, which each volume including history of each first lady with particular attention to causes, programs and achievements.

Several books from the University Press of Kansas became useful in analyzing several first ladies, including Nancy Beck Young's *Lou Henry Hoover: Activist First Lady*, Sara L. Sale's *Bess Wallace Truman: Harry's White House "Boss"*, Barbara A. Perry's *Jacqueline Kennedy: First Lady of the New Frontier*, John Robert Greene's *Betty Ford: Candor and Courage in the White House*, James G. Benze's *Nancy Reagan: On the White House Stage*, Myra G. Gutin's *Barbara Bush: Presidential Matriarch*, and Gil Troy's *Hillary Rodham Clinton: Polarizing First Lady*. The volumes in this series are valuable academic resource in the ways that the series connects how the first lady's life background history connects to their influence, programs and causes while in the White House. This series includes many primary sources and references scholarly works and mirrors the University Press of Kansas presidential series.

The Presidential Wives Series produced by Nova Science Publishers, Inc., focuses on their lives in the White House, with some biography of pre- and post-White House years. This study includes Paul Zall's *Dolley Madison*, James S. McCallops' *Edith Bolling Galt Wilson: The Unintended President* and Jeffrey S. Ashley's *Betty Ford: A Symbol of Strength* and Pierre-Marie Loizeau's *Nancy Reagan: The Woman Behind the*

Man. This series compliments the University Press of Kansas presidential and modern first ladies series, adding further understanding of the importance of first ladies.

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History recently published articles on four first ladies as a topic for educators, in its spring 2013 issue. Carol Berkin, professor emeritus at Baruch College, and editor for the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, analyzes the lack of constitutionality boundaries, the institution of first ladies, and how it is influential in guidance for women.¹² There are five articles, including Berkin's, that examine the contributions of Martha Washington, Dolley Madison, Eleanor Roosevelt and Betty Ford. Betty Boyd Caroli's article on the contributions of first ladies focuses on how there are no responsibilities or duties assigned to the president's wife; however each first lady has defined it for herself. Caroli investigates how the first lady became a national figure after 1865, and how more and more people were paying attention to the first lady, and shows how the institution expanded over the years to present day.¹³

Patricia Brady's article describes Martha Washington's role as wife and how that led to the strong bond between her and George Washington. Brady lists all the ways in which Martha helped George, and how she became his backbone. Whenever Martha was away, George turned to others, such as his cabinet or close friends to entertain him or help host functions. This sort of dependence can be seen with each president and shows how important and needed the first lady is.¹⁴ Catherine Allgor's article presents the power Dolley Madison gained as first lady, as well as how influential Madison's furnishing the White House became an asset for the presidency. Dolley Madison knew the power the White House would have, and there needed to be a place to exhibit it.¹⁵

Maurine Beasley's article analyzes Eleanor Roosevelt as first lady and how she was ambivalent in becoming first lady, although she embraced Franklin D. Roosevelt's election to the presidency. However, because of her past, she saw the opportunity to promote her causes and help women. Roosevelt, met with criticism of abusing her position, tried to do good for the country in her programs, which makes her the most influential first lady in First Lady History.¹⁶ The last article featured is Gil Troy's article on Betty Ford and her role as a feminist first lady. Troy analyzes Betty Ford's straightforward attitude and her openness about women's health issues. The article also analyzes Ford's outspoken views on issues and her own troubles with addictions, and how she needed to break away from the straightjacket some first ladies wore during their tenures.¹⁷ Each of these five articles takes a different approach to analyzing these four first lady's influences they had during their time as first lady, and adds to the greater picture of first lady history.

Scholarly articles and papers published in recent years have focused on the typology of first ladies and how first ladies have become assets for presidencies. Mary Anne Borrelli's "The First Lady as Formal Advisor to the President: When East (Wing) Meets West (Wing)" addresses different ways in which to write about the first ladies, defining first ladies as, "In addition to her informal role, the first lady is a formal member of the White House Office"¹⁸ Borrelli continues addressing that Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosalynn Carter and Hillary Rodham Clinton have served in a formal capacity within the executive branch, and her articles addresses the myriad of examples how first ladies are an extension of the president.¹⁹

Anthony J. Eksterowicz's and Robert N. Roberts' "First Ladies: Constitutional and Job Description Problems?" promotes making the first lady an official cabinet member, stating "To further mitigate these so-called problems (first lady's job and management), we argue that the president should be required to appoint the first lady as a presidential aide or advisor."²⁰ This paper argues and evaluates different ways in which the first lady's performance is affected while in office and how the first lady is similar to a presidential aide, who likewise do not have constitutional job descriptions, yet exercise considerable power and influence for the president.²¹

Similarly, Gary D. Wekin's "Being First Lady in the Plural Presidency: Rules of the Game" analyzes first ladies in three roles: ladyship, political role and behaviors.²² Wekin attempts to systematically think about the first ladyship, concluding that the first lady should take a counselor role, rather than attempting a co-presidency, being she would be able to wield unlimited influence and not be accused of usurping anyone's authority.²³

A quest for typology has increasingly driven the scholarly study of first ladies. Hannah G. Holden's "The Ring of Power: A Typology of American First Ladies" organized first ladies into 4 main areas: active-public, active-private, passive-public and passive-private.²⁴ Shaelyn M. McClanahan, Courtney M. Page and Laurelin M. Weiss attempt create a similar typology of first ladies in their organizing of first ladies into three categories: ceremonial role, domestic advocate and universal actor.²⁵ There have been many attempts to try and organize first ladies in numerous ways, each adding a new layer of how to study first ladies and will continue to help with future studies on first ladies.

Popular Works

Other useful biographical and anecdotal information sources include *First Ladies Fact Book: The Childhoods, Courtships, Marriages, Campaigns, Accomplishments, and Legacies of every first lady from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* which presents basic information, as well as a narrative history of each person's life. There are many anecdotes, personal statements, and useful information that are given to help get a better understanding of each first lady for survey reference.

Margaret Truman's *First Ladies: An Intimate Group Portrait of White House Wives* presents a work written by the child of former First Lady Bess Truman who took an interest in researching and interviewing former first ladies to gather information and experiences to show the personal parts of living in the White House. Truman writes on many first ladies, and some of her interviews reveal the realities some first ladies faced such as Jacqueline Kennedy's desire to stay private because of her children and avoiding White House functions as much as possible and Hillary Clinton preparing for her new role as first lady by reading everything she could find about first ladies and concluded that almost all of them played some sort of political role in their husbands' presidencies.²⁶

Margaret Brown Klapthor's *The First Ladies*, published by the White House Historical Association is a quick reference book gives succinct details and anecdotes during each lady's time in the White House. Each section on the ladies has the official White House portrait and brief histories of their time as first lady and after leaving the White House.²⁷

Rae Lindsay's *American's First Ladies: Power Players from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* presents highlights of various events each first lady accomplished in the White House. Lindsay organizes each first lady into categories, such as The Pioneers,

Private Pains, Elegant Entertainers, The Spokeswomen and Supportive Stand-ins,²⁸
Each section gives brief details on each lady, and then the contributions each made during first ladyship tenures.

First lady historiography, as a whole, is growing. As more attention is focused on first ladies, more scholarship is appearing, augmenting the understanding of the role of the first lady. Though the historiography is growing, first lady scholarship is not plentiful; however, like in women's history, more works are being produced to make the picture clearer. In appraising first lady historiography, much of the work is noteworthy. Works that are done on first ladies rely on primary sources, some of which are hard to obtain. As an emerging sub-field of women's and political history, first lady historiography is expanding, and with more attention being given to first ladies, the field can only continue to grow and the picture being painted on first ladies will become more complete.

All of these sources examined have led to the augmented and better understanding of the roles, progress and influence of the first ladies during their time as First Lady of the United States.

Chapter 3

Creating, Developing and Inaugurating Traditions with Early First Ladies

“I live a very dull life here...indeed I think I am more like a state prisoner than anything else.” – Martha Washington on being the president’s wife¹

Article II of the United States Constitution defines the executive branch in the federal government and the powers and duties of the office of President, yet there is no government document that lists any roles, expectations, responsibilities, duties or ways in which the president’s wife should conduct herself. Part of this is due to the fact that women did not participate or were not allowed to participate in the political process, and the founding fathers probably did not foresee first ladies having influence or becoming significant in politics. As the young nation was organizing and tackling the issues of the day, Martha Washington had no direction on what her new role was. From the period between Martha Washington in 1789 to Louise Hoover in 1933, several first ladies took an active role as an unassuming advisor to the president and some choose to be absentee first ladies who sent daughters, nieces or other females in their positions for official functions.

Although these early first ladies were valuable and essential to presidents, not all were very well received. Many first ladies were criticized, and more so, all first ladies have been targets of political and personal attacks, coming from the press and the public.² The early first ladies were in a political enigma with how much they can “impose” on the presidencies and what their roles are. More so than any of the institutions in the federal government, first ladies have built their institution from nothing and into something.

It is evident with these early first ladies the various traditions started, from official holiday dinners and events, to the expansion of White House staff with budgets. Within this institution, seven of these early women impacted this entity in ways of advising the president and establishing influence as first lady. The early first ladies included Martha Washington establishing and setting early precedents, Dolley Madison building up character in the White House, Sarah Polk as a close and trusted advisor to the president, Mary Todd Lincoln reinstating prestige to the White House and battling harsh political criticism, Lucy Hayes adding traditions and symbolizing womanhood during her day, Edith Wilson's stewardship presidency and Louise Hoover's setting a precedence with first lady's sponsorships of causes and programs. These seven first ladies exemplify the growing roles and expanded the importance within presidential administrations.

Martha Washington: First Lady of a New Nation

When Martha Dandridge Custis Washington traveled to New York City in 1789, she had no way of knowing what was expected of a president's wife. Everything she did for eight years set a precedent and the tone for future first ladies to continue and develop upon, dimply paralleling George Washington's own presidency of precedents. Martha Washington's elegance remained simple, and her natural friendliness became instantly apparent to many.³ Washington set the nature for the first lady, and each first lady after has taken some element from Martha Washington's lasting legacy.

Martha Washington, born June 2, 1731, in Virginia, to a wealthy tobacco planter, lived a comfortable life growing up.⁴ Martha married Daniel Parke Custis in 1750, but he died eight years later, leaving her a large estate and a young widow that bachelors fancied. Martha met George Washington some time later, and after a few courting dates,

they married in 1759 at her plantation house.⁵ The couple moved to Mount Vernon, where they would live on a plantation and raised the children she brought into the marriage. George Washington held a few political offices and a military career that would lead into the American Revolution, where he would rise to commander of the Continental Army. Martha Washington became a popular figure in camps, making socks and keeping soldiers in good spirits along with hosting dinners and socials for the army officers.⁶

When George Washington won election as the first president of the new United States, Martha's life changed dramatically as she became the country's head hostess. In the beginning, Martha stayed out of the spotlight, but she kept her social events and calling card open. Though Martha Washington had no former protocol to follow, some of her hosting ideas came from her days of the American Revolution, following George Washington and troops from camp to camp, while taking the lead in acting as a hostess for dinners and social events.⁷ While Martha traveled to different camps, her arrival acted as a signal for other women, such as officer wives, to travel to Martha, where they would sew, chat and perform other duties.⁸ This is some of what Washington carried forward in her time as first lady. Another way the new first lady could have come up with ideas for her role may have come from copying the courts of Europe, imitating the stylized mannerisms and well-delineated social etiquette. Some of these customs may have been imitated, but in most cases, the president and Washington chose different standards in presidential entertainment.⁹

Lady Washington, the title many called her as many did not know how to refer to the president's wife, supported hosting events at the president's house, including the

Tuesday Levée walks, weekly dinners on Thursdays, evening receptions on Friday nights, which the president also attended, and dinner parties for government officials and foreign visitors.¹⁰ Martha Washington encouraged the president with the Tuesday Levées, as it gave the president time to meet with the citizens of the country, hear people's concerns and for citizens to see the president. In day to day activities, the first lady kept the president on a strict schedule. Washington made sure the president did not stay up too late and was known to say, "The general always retires at nine o'clock, and I usually precede him."¹¹

In the formal dinners and social events, Washington remained mindful about simplicity. Lady Washington seemed to never be too extravagant or spend more money beyond what was needed.¹² Although Washington entertained in a formal style, she tried to keep her socials and entertainment simple; the first lady's hospitality made guests feel welcome.¹³ Many applauded Mrs. Washington's simplicity with events. In all of these events, Martha Washington stayed dedicated to the president, and rarely permitted guests to talk politics. When engaged in conversation, Washington tried to keep the topics on non-controversial themes.¹⁴

Some critics of Lady Washington thought she was thoroughly Federalist in her sympathies, and held the Jeffersonian Republicans in contempt.¹⁵ This criticism could originate from early political clashes, and some thought the president, and by extension his wife, should remain neutral in politics. Though Martha Washington may have disliked the anti-Federalists of the day, it was not her character to speak out against them; Washington would rather keep a nice politeness at events and stay away from unsettled

topics of the day. These talks were reserved for the president, Congress and other officials in a different venue.

Though, at times, Lady Washington expressed her opinion on policy matters, especially in foreign affairs. President Washington worked on peace with Britain through Jay's Treaty, and Washington expressed in her correspondence that it reached the time to put the turmoil and animosities of the [American] Revolution to rest by restoring good relations with England.¹⁶ Jay's Treaty became controversial and led to the beginnings of the party system in politics in the United States, after trying to correct problems from the Treaty of Paris.¹⁷

In other social areas, many people were curious about the chief executives' house, which drew many callers to Washington. It was the duty of a gracious lady to return all calls of all women who left calling cards, and Washington did, and impressively all within three days of the original call.¹⁸ The first lady was expected to pay for all social event expenses. No precedence had been set to appropriate money to the first lady and Washington paid for all the expenses of dinner and events, including entertainment, on a salary of \$25,000 a year. Though the Washingtons owned land and slaves, they did not have liquid assets for fast cash.¹⁹

Lady Washington's first reception became the most elegant of any that she hosted. Washington dressed for the occasion in a simple white dress trimmed in silver.²⁰ The precedence of dressing formally for official events was set, not only because it was the custom of the day, but because she saw the importance of these receptions. Because the first lady dressed in a simple gown, this lack of extravagant dress drew criticism for what some saw as her lack of social graces.²¹

As the inaugural first lady, Martha Washington has been influential as the leader and setting early social precedents. Lady Washington could have simply stayed at Mount Vernon (some suggest she wanted to) and take a hands-off approach while George served his time as president. Washington created the atmosphere of what the first lady was expected to do, which other early first ladies continued with presidential administrations. Abigail Adams commented that Lady Washington took on her role with, “Her manners are modest and unassuming, dignified and feminine, not the tincture of hauteur about her.”²²

Dolley Todd Madison: First Lady of a Young Nation

Throughout Dolley Madison’s occupancy as hostess and first lady, she exemplified great leadership. Many people of the young country copied Madison on a regular basis, such as her use of snuff and rouge.²³ Her personality and character captured many people who came to the White House. The first lady’s social events represented elegance, and because of her great memory of recalling people and information from past meetings, she gained respect of many leaders of the day.²⁴

Dolley Todd Madison, born on May 20, 1768, in North Carolina, came from a Quaker family.²⁵ Early in her life after the American Revolution by 1783, Dolley’s father, John Payne, under manumission practices, freed his slaves as many upper-southern slaveholders did; this act not only changed her life from plantation life to city life, but aligned her with Quaker ideals about passivity.²⁶ Dolley had been married to John Todd, but became a widow when he died from a disease he caught while working with the sick. From her first marriage, Dolley Todd had two boys; the younger son died the same day as John Todd.²⁷ Later, one of Dolley’s friends, Aaron Burr, introduced her

to James Madison.²⁸ While Dolley and James courted, she grew nervous to entertain him, as he was a Virginia congressman and the principal author of the Constitution, making him one of the most powerful men in Philadelphia and she was came from a Quaker family.²⁹ Though James was seventeen years older than Dolley, the couple married in 1794, and consequently, Dolley was expelled from the Society of Friends, as James was not a Quaker himself.³⁰

Dolley Madison gained a favorable reputation for her social graces during her life. This carried forward during her years as first lady from 1809 to 1817. In all actuality, Madison's tenure as first lady spans close to sixteen years, from the Jefferson and Madison presidencies. When Thomas Jefferson became president in 1801, his wife, Martha Jefferson, had been dead for nearly twenty years, so Madison stepped in and acted as the hostess, alongside Jefferson's daughter, Martha Jefferson Randolph, when she was not available at the President's House.³¹ Madison served as the first lady or as designee the second longest out of all first ladies in United States history, behind Eleanor Roosevelt. During Madison's time as hostess and first lady, she worked on furnishing the White House.³²

Starting in the Jefferson administration and preceding to the Madison administration, Dolley Madison partnered with Benjamin H. Latrobe to furnish the Executive Mansion. The first occupants of the newly constructed Executive Mansion saw a short stay with the Adams' family and Thomas Jefferson made no real effort to furnish the mansion.³³ Since Madison had a likeness for fashion and decorating, she saw her opportunity to decorate it, and in her mission, Madison spent \$11,000 which she purchased new china and silver.³⁴

As a hostess, Dolley Madison took her place at the head of each party and social event at the Executive Mansion. The first lady presided at the first inaugural ball in Washington in 1809. Madison became the first to hold a gala inaugural ball, a tradition that would continue for years.³⁵ The first lady enjoyed political discussions of the day, although she did not approve of heated debates and could stop a quarrel.³⁶ Madison developed a network to engage women in politics, inviting women to official functions.³⁷ For other social events, Dolley Madison invited guests to the Executive Mansion or traveled to people, consuming entire days of going from one end of Washington to the other. Because this made from long and busy days, Madison reserved Sundays for herself.³⁸

Dolley Madison is perhaps most famous for her role in protecting and preserving items in the Executive Mansion. The events of the War of 1812 led British troops attacking the capital in 1814, where the troops took over the mansion and served themselves dinner prepared for the Madison's before proceeding to set fire to the house. Before the British troops reached the abandoned mansion, Madison directed the slaves to save important items, especially the Lansdowne portrait of George Washington painted by Gilbert Stuart.³⁹ Although the popular myth has Madison herself saving the portrait, this was not the case. The first lady directed the slaves to gather the silver, documents, original drafts of the Constitution, and the Washington portrait, among other items.⁴⁰ In trying to get out fast, the frame the portrait had to be broken, as it was fixed to the wall, and the portrait had to be rolled up to be moved safely.⁴¹

Dolley Madison did not let much intimidate her. After the British attacks on the mansion, the first lady continued social calls and hosting formal dinners with different

political figures. After the Madison's returned to Washington, Congress debated whether or not to move the capital of the United States to another location. The first lady became one among several influential women to keep the capital located in Washington.⁴²

After her tenure as first lady, Dolley Madison continued to exude her likeability. Congress had granted her a permanent seat on the floor of the House of Representatives.⁴³ Daniel Webster stated that Madison was "the only permanent power in Washington, all others are transient."⁴⁴ Madison kept in the public eye even after the Madison's left Washington; many referred to her as "Queen Dolley." When Madison died in 1849, President Zachary Taylor, most of his cabinet, and many congressmen attended her funeral. At her funeral, President Taylor stated, "She [Madison] will never be forgotten because she was truly our First Lady for a half-century."⁴⁵

Sarah Polk: First Lady of Diligence

Sarah Childress Polk exemplifies a serious and meticulous woman, a combination that worked well for Polk as first lady. The first lady and President Polk believed that the president's office required their attention, time and labor, so neither took much time for recreational activities.⁴⁶ Sarah Polk is one of the first who took an active role in helping the president, rather than just hosting social events.⁴⁷

Sarah Childress Polk, born on September 4, 1803, came from a wealthy farming family. Sarah's father, Joel Childress, a well-known planter, wanted his children to have the best and because of his wealth he was able to provide those opportunities. Mr. Childress sent his sons to public school and to a private academy for boys, where his daughters took classes when the regular school day ended.⁴⁸ After their academy training, Joel Childress sent his daughters to Nashville to attend Mr. Abercrombie's

School for Young Ladies and later to Moravian Female Academy.⁴⁹ Sarah benefited from her father's ability to pay for formal education.

Sarah Childress met James Knox Polk while in Tennessee. Sarah was given advice from Andrew Jackson, who thought she would like James. With the conditions of being able to support her, the couple married on January 1, 1824.⁵⁰ Although they never had children of their own, the Polk's took in a nephew as their ward, and a niece after James died, and raised them as her own. Sarah Polk, tall in figure, had noble beauty and wore vibrant colors and these characteristics helped in her role as the first lady with a spirited nature.

James Polk had a strong interest in politics and Sarah assisted him with speeches, advised him on policy matters and took an active role in campaigns.⁵¹ To show some of her independence, Polk did not engage in petty political games like many political wives did during the Petticoat Affair. In the Jackson administration, the Petticoat Affair involved the social ostracizing of Peggy Eaton, a cabinet wife after suspicion of Eaton having an affair and was sexually promiscuous, a taboo action in these days. However, Sarah Polk continued to greet and call on Peggy Eaton despite the snubbing and exclusion of Eaton by other cabinet wives.⁵²

In 1844, James Polk became president and Sarah continued her role with advising the president and altered social events of the White House. As an advisor, First Lady Polk often discussed policy matters with the president. It is not certain how influential Polk had in this capacity, or if the president used her to discuss ideas, but the president appeared to be open in discussing matters with the first lady.⁵³ Polk served as her husband's confidential secretary, working on average twelve to fourteen hours a day in

that capacity. Polk explained that she assisted her husband in order to protect his health, who suffered from urinary stones from a young age.⁵⁴ Because James' had some health issues, he would keep late hours which only added to his poor health and Sarah became the main person who kept him disciplined.⁵⁵

Some might argue that Sarah Polk wanted to be involved with political discussions while she was first lady. Polk preferred discussing politics with the men attending White House receptions rather than making small talk with ladies in attendance. The accepted practice of the day found ladies making small talk while men discussed politics.⁵⁶ Sarah Polk never tried to insert her personal thoughts, but she guilefully talked with others through President Polk.⁵⁷ After all, Polk's interest was James becoming president, and might not have married him had he remained clerk of the Tennessee state legislature.⁵⁸

Sarah Polk's thoughts on human equality, specifically the slave question, were provocative, which during this time in United States history became a growing problem. One day, Polk asked the president to look out a window to observe the slave workers. First Lady Polk stated, "The writers of the Declaration of Independence were mistaken when they affirmed that all men are created equal," and continued with, "that the men toiling in the heat of the sun, while you are writing, and I am standing here fanning myself, in this house as airy and delightful as a palace... Those men did not choose such a life."⁵⁹ It is interesting that in the early days of the slavery question, Polk would engage the president in a political statement on freedom and race inequalities.⁶⁰

For social events, Sarah Polk changed some customs in the White House. During her time as hostess, the first lady banned dancing, cards and hard liquor at official

functions.⁶¹ Polk did not even dance at the inaugural ball. Because of her “dull” character, some dubbed her with the nickname “Sahara Sarah”.⁶² Although many poked fun at the first lady’s ban of alcohol, there are accounts of Polk bending on her own bans by serving wine at functions. In a December 1845 dinner, a congressman’s wife recorded that the dinner included glasses for six different wines, from pink champagne to port and sauterne, which formed “a rainbow around each plate.”⁶³

In her efforts in redecorating the White House, Sarah Polk oversaw the installation of gas lights, instead of keeping the oil lamps and candle-lit chandeliers.⁶⁴ Along with redecorating the White House, Congress did not approve funds for the first lady to use, so she went to the attic and cellar for furniture to use in the White House. In one particular find, Polk took a billiard table to the basement to use for storing fresh flowers that she would send to sick friends, orphans and journalists who wrote favorably of her.⁶⁵ The first lady kept her word about living off of the \$25,000 presidential salary, and the Polk’s were the first occupants of the White House to make a good effort to living within that salary.⁶⁶

Sarah Polk’s influence to the president became significant to his political well-being. Few previous first ladies had consulted with the president on matters and engaged in political discussions of the day, and for Polk to have discussions on the slavery and freedom paradox remains significant for any first lady. Because of Sarah Polk, the Office of First Lady grew with continued contributions and significance to the president, a facet of Polk’s lasting legacy.

Mary Todd Lincoln: The Beleaguered First Lady

Mary Todd Lincoln became the first presidential wife to draw significant public criticism. Most criticisms against Lincoln came from her hailing from a Kentucky family fighting for the Confederacy and spending funds extravagantly during the Civil War. Many challenged Mary Todd Lincoln's loyalty, and because of personal anguish, harsh criticisms and a mental disability, Lincoln was not widely liked nor admired. Lincoln became meddlesome and an impediment on the presidency, victimized by harsh criticism.⁶⁷ Though many attacked Lincoln she remained active in supporting troops and refurbished the White House to exemplify the prestige of the presidency.

Mary Todd Lincoln, born on December 13, 1818, in Lexington, Kentucky, came from wealthy parents with southern ties. Mary Todd received education from Mentelle's Academy in Lexington, Kentucky, a finishing school for females. In her youth, Todd was opinionated and never shied away from expressing her thoughts on issues, which Abraham Lincoln admired.⁶⁸ With the Todd family having connections to politicians in the Kentucky area, Mary was encouraged to participate when she felt she could hold her own in discussions and with her quick wit, she left many speechless.⁶⁹ Politics always interested Mary Todd. Prior to her courtship with Abraham Lincoln, Todd courted briefly another future politician, Stephen Douglas, but the relationship failed to grow, and pursued her interest with Lincoln.⁷⁰ On November 4, 1842, Mary Todd married Abraham Lincoln and gave birth to four sons, of which only Robert Todd Lincoln lived to adulthood.⁷¹ Though Mary Todd lived the life of a political wife and remained around political circles, she suffered mentally and socially when Lincoln became president in 1861.

Mary Todd Lincoln exemplifies a formidable nineteenth century role model for women, investing time and energy into her marriage and family. What set her apart from the typical woman of these days was her wit and intelligence, and she channeled her ambitions into her husband's political career.⁷² Lincoln stepped outside the conventions she was expected to conform to, which led to her demeanor as first lady.⁷³

As first lady, Mary Todd Lincoln suffered from the criticism for her southern family ties. With the country divided, Mary Lincoln's border-state family remained more sympathetic to the Confederate cause, and her brothers fought on the side of the Confederacy.⁷⁴ People questioned her loyalty to the Union. Amidst the criticisms, Mrs. President Lincoln⁷⁵ charged herself as the lady of the entire White House and became the primary decorator and social director. Lincoln's social events served not only to meet the president, but to discuss military and political affairs among politicians.⁷⁶

Lincoln received vast criticism for her extravagant personal spending. This became a significant problem, and the House of Representatives committee on Ways and Means conducted an investigation into her spending. A political battle ensued between the first lady and Congress, as they challenged line by line her expenses. President Lincoln intervened, speaking to the committee investigating her spending as well as defending her loyalty to the United States.⁷⁷ Though Congress allotted \$20,000 for the first lady to redecorate, Lincoln set out to purchase fine rugs, china, wallpaper, crystal and other items.⁷⁸ Lincoln continued and purchased handmade rugs, velvet wallpaper and draperies, lace curtain, silk and brocade upholstery, more china and luxurious accessories; Lincoln overspent her budget by \$7000, and she wanted the president to ask Congress for more money, but he refused.⁷⁹

The first lady's defended her spending by stating previous administrations forgoing maintenance and she wanted to restore the prestige of the presidency.⁸⁰ People became critical of Lincoln for limiting White House events because of the war crisis, but people were equally critical of her fine extravagant gowns and condemned her for spending the taxpayer's money renovating the White House.⁸¹ Some guests detested her style of dressing, as one visitor stated after leaving the White House that the "weak minded Mrs. Lincoln had her *bosom* on exhibition", and another stating, "She stuns me with her low-necked dresses and the flower beds which she carries on top of her head."⁸² The first lady received many complaints from opponents causing the White House to filter the mail. In the period of Victorian-style which saw conservative dress, Mary Todd Lincoln's extravagant and sometimes revealing flair became the center of gossip in Washington during events.

As the Lincoln administration limited freedom of speech and press during the war,⁸³ many turned to Mary Todd Lincoln to channel their frustrations. By August 1861, attacks against Mrs. Lincoln were so vicious that that *Chicago Tribune* wrote, "HOLD ENOUGH!" and came to her defense.⁸⁴ Lincoln became victimized and called many things, from crude and vulgar, vain and pretentious, frivolous and flighty, stupid and ignorant, wasteful and extravagant, meddlesome and conniving, and greedy and corrupt.⁸⁵ These were the common phrases used against the first lady, as well as against President Lincoln.

Lincoln suffered regularly from headaches and known for her erratic behavior. To make matters worse, Lincoln suffered a head injury from a carriage accident as first lady and suffered from the loss of her son, Willie, who died at the White House in

February, 1862. These events took a toll on her physical and mental health. The first lady tried to keep up with the presidential image, and during one event at the White House, Willie's health worsened through the evening and died shortly after. Lincoln received denigration for lacking in her motherly duties, rather than attending to her sick son.⁸⁶

After Willie's death, Lincoln suffering increased with random outbursts and mood swings, and after much debate, the first lady most likely suffered from bipolar disorder.⁸⁷ Lincoln suffered from mental collapse after Willie's death. The first lady had convulsions, stayed in bed for days, dreamt about Willie, and attended séances to communicate with her dead son.⁸⁸ During the time after Willie's death in 1862, Lincoln curtailed her entertaining, and received accusations of shirking her social obligations.⁸⁹ For all of her actions, Lincoln suffered scrutiny from many people, not helping her mental stability.

Mary Todd Lincoln worked to mend her reputation as first lady. The first lady visited hospitals where soldiers were recovering and accompanied President Lincoln on military visits and she regularly visits to hospitals and brought flowers and fruit and helped the soldiers with writing letters to loved ones.⁹⁰ In accompanying President Lincoln on military visits, Mary Todd Lincoln presence showed that she cared for the soldiers, as well to try and dissolve any issues people had of her southern ties. Some thought the first lady better at and more consistent with reviewing the troops than President Lincoln. As soldiers passed by the White House for review, President Lincoln was required to review and inspect them and at times, he slouched or talked to others

instead of attending to the troops, yet the first lady remained more attentive during drills.⁹¹

Mary Todd Lincoln's tenure as first lady came to a quick end with the assassination of President Lincoln on April 15, 1865. Shortly after the assassination, Lincoln was committed to a hospital in Illinois, where her mental health declined and went the rest of her life unstable. An article in McClure's Magazine put it best, stating, "The bullet that sped its way and took her husband from earth...took her too."⁹² Mary Todd Lincoln was kept away from the president while he laid weakening through the night into the morning. Many pictures have the first lady by his side, but she was kept away. It was only after the president passed away that Mary was alerted. She stated, "Oh, why did you not tell me he was dying?" and her sobbing could be heard throughout the house.⁹³ Along with seeing her husband assassinated, Mary Todd Lincoln suffered further in widowhood, enduring claims of Ann Rutledge was her husband's one true love, claims that the former first lady became a blackmailing harridan besmirching Lincoln's memory and pawning off her jewelry and clothes, and political enemies continuing their suggestions of her disloyalty in her White House years.⁹⁴ After the assassination, Mary Todd Lincoln might have been in a sleepwalking state barely able to function, but still showed some mental firmness, such as sending Frederick Douglass the president's walking stick in a gesture of appreciation.⁹⁵

Even years after her departure from the White House, Lincoln's mental instability only worsened and caused problems, especially for her son, Robert Todd Lincoln, who had saved files on her illness, titled "MTL Insanity File."⁹⁶ In this file, Robert Todd Lincoln kept thoroughly complete records of Mary Todd Lincoln's conditions, and

included her illness diagnosis, biased trial and other incriminating evidence. In the 1980s, Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith, Robert Todd Lincoln's grandson, inherited the "MTL Insanity File" and passed it off to be published, in hopes that history would treat Mary Todd Lincoln "more kindly."⁹⁷

Mary Todd Lincoln's lasting legacy encompasses the attention she gave to soldiers and toning down of official functions in respect to the war. However, her legacy is shadowed by her mental issues and spending, which she became a target and attacked by many, one of the first to be widely attacked and criticized during her occupancy as first lady.

Lucy Hayes: First Lady Paragon of Morality

Lucy Ware Webb Hayes is the first wife of a president to earn a degree from college. Hayes' graduated from Wesleyan Women's College in Ohio, and earned membership into the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority (Lou Hoover also became a member later). Few options existed in the mid-nineteenth century for women to attend college and Hayes accomplished completion. Due to her banning vices and demonstrating moral behavior, Lucy Hayes became an upstanding example of womanhood and loved by many.⁹⁸

Born on August 28, 1831, in Chillicothe, Ohio, Lucy Webb came from a respected family. Lucy and her mother moved to Cincinnati, where she enrolled into one of the first colleges for women, Wesleyan Women's College.⁹⁹ There Webb met Rutherford Hayes who practiced law. Rutherford Hayes stated of Lucy, "a bright sunny little girl not quite old enough to fall in love with...and so I didn't." Rutherford, nine years older than her, and Lucy dated exclusively until their marriage.¹⁰⁰ The Hayes' were

married on December 30, 1852, and their union produced eight children, but three sons died before reaching the age of two.¹⁰¹

When the Hayes' entered the White House in 1877, Lucy brought new changes to social events. The first precedence established involved the official title of "First Lady" utilized by Mary C. Ames, a reporter, which became widely accepted by many.¹⁰² The first lady brought simplicity in dress and formalities back to the White House. *Philadelphia Times* hailed Lucy Hayes for the "stand which she has taken against extravagance in dress."¹⁰³ The first lady's ban on alcohol for social events and dinners immediately gave her the nickname "Lemonade Lucy."¹⁰⁴

Many people credit the first lady banning liquor at the White House; however, the idea originally came from President Hayes. President Hayes favored abstinence in principle, as it was kept with the Republican Party.¹⁰⁵ Because the first lady made the official ban, Hayes became celebrated and highly praised by many groups for doing so, especially from Protestants groups. Although the ban on liquor existed, one event saw the ban lifted. In August 1877, the Hayes' hosted two Russian Grand Dukes, Alexis and Constantine. Secretary of State William Evarts appealed to Hayes to serve wine at the event. President and First Lady Hayes yielded to the request and served wine at dinner; however, the first lady never again allowed alcohol to be served in the White House.¹⁰⁶

In defense of the first lady's ban of alcohol, President Hayes said, "The exclusion of wine from the list of refreshments has turned out exceedingly well...disgraceful things were done by young men made reckless by too much wine."¹⁰⁷ The alcohol ban became favored by friends of the temperance movement and writing in his diary, President Hayes continued to believe he made the right choice with the ban.¹⁰⁸

Because of support of the first lady's support of banning alcohol in the White House, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union decided to create a monument for Lucy Hayes in appreciation of her support of sobriety. The Temperance Movement had its beginnings in the 1820s and 1830s, but forty-fifty years later gained more momentum in the country. The first lady had membership in the Women's Christian Temperance Movement Union, and the organization wanted to reward the first lady with a memorial for setting an example of clearing vices out of the White House. At first, the group proposed a drinking fountain memorial on the White House grounds, but the president thought people would ridicule the meaning. The organization finally set on a portrait for the first lady and raised \$10,000 to fund the contract. The commission went to Daniel Huntington to paint the portrait, which eventually became Hayes' official portrait.¹⁰⁹

In the political arena, the Lucy Hayes kept away from involvement directly with political discussions. Though the president and first lady are examples of progressives of their time, both had supported women's suffrage; however Hayes held considerable influence over the president. Some joked and called her the Head of the Nation and that in the absence of his wife, in the White House, Mr. Hayes became the acting president.¹¹⁰

Morally devout in her beliefs, Lucy Hayes, a Methodist, conducted daily prayers, hosted Bible readings and Sunday night hymn-songs at the White House. In adding traditions, the Hayes' started the Annual Easter Egg Roll at the White House, an event little changed since its inception. Originally, the traditional Easter Egg Roll had been held at the Capitol, but Congress passed a law closing the Capitol grounds to children rolling eggs. The first lady did not want to disappoint the children and moved the event to the White House lawns.¹¹¹ White House traditions allow for small breaks in political

engagements and to bring together politicians, demonstrating how first ladies' influence adds lasting events to the White House; many events continue on undisturbed.

Lucy Hayes made significant impacts during her tenure at the White House. "Lemonade Lucy" cleared the White House of vices. Though Hayes did not discuss policy with the president often, she had substantial influence over President Hayes, impacting the presidency in an indirect way, due in part from her educated background and understandings. When Hayes died in 1889, flags across the country were lowered to half-staff in honor of the most idolized woman in the country.

Edith Wilson: First Lady in Command

In March 1915, while attending tea with Helen Woodrow Bones, Edith Bolling Galt encountered President Woodrow Wilson at the elevators in the White House.¹¹² When Edith Wilson became first lady, she grew to be a commanding force in the government. Some suggest that during her stewardship over the president, Wilson took on the role of president herself, which would make the first lady the first to make presidential decisions in the history of the United States. First Lady Wilson soon established a strong position and stood nose-to-nose with many powerful political figures and presented an intimidating sense of command.¹¹³

Born in Wytheville, Virginia, on October 15, 1872, Edith White Bolling's family had historic significance as direct descendants of Pocahontas and John Rolfe. Edith enjoyed a luxurious life. Her first husband, Norman Galt, a prominent jeweler in Washington, died in 1908, and Edith continued living in a wealthy lifestyle. On one particular day, after enjoying tea at the White House with Helen Woodrow Bones, the president came back from a rained-out golf outing and was introduced to Edith Galt.

Woodrow immediately invited Edith to stay longer.¹¹⁴ President Wilson and Edith courted for a while and married on December 18, 1915.¹¹⁵

First Lady Wilson adjusted to her new position with ease. Wilson acted as a presidential confidante, and joined the president as he went through his daily schedule. She voiced her thoughts on various issues and people, and pushed the president to fine tune his positions.¹¹⁶ In acts of advising the president, the first lady disliked Robert Lansing and William McAdoo because she thought they were not loyal to the president, and played a part in eliminating Joseph Tumulty, the president's secretary, who she thought spent too much time with the president. Wilson did not like people being too close to the president and became jealous of some of his inner-circle associations.¹¹⁷ Another example of the first lady voicing her opinions comes with women's suffrage. Wilson thought the activists distasteful and unfeminine and called suffragists "disgusting creatures".¹¹⁸ President Wilson disregarded suffragists as well. Although the first lady opposed suffrage, she donned orchids given to her by suffragists, and eventually, like the president, had a change of heart and gave support for the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.¹¹⁹

As first lady during wartime, Edith Wilson set examples of rationing and serving the soldiers in the war. The first lady led by example for days to be designated for specific purposes, such as gasless Sundays, meatless Mondays, wheat-less Wednesdays and so forth.¹²⁰ Wilson took to her sewing machine to make clothes for the soldiers, sporting a Red Cross uniform and went to soldier's canteens in Washington to hand out coffee and sandwiches on a semi-regular basis.¹²¹

The first lady earned the nickname “The Shepherdess” after she brought sheep to the White House grounds. The sheep kept the lawn trimmed and she used the wool to auction off to raise funds for the Red Cross. In her effort, Edith Wilson raised \$50,000 and 98 pounds of wool she donated.¹²² Also during the war, Wilson’s job as first lady included christening new ships. The first lady named the ships with Indian monikers, being in her opinion the English already took the “good” names.¹²³

After the war, Edith Wilson joined the president in Europe at the peace conference held in Paris. When the Wilson’s returned to Washington, the president faced rejection from the Senate approving the Versailles Treaty and joining the League of Nations.¹²⁴ In response, President Wilson started a crusade and toured the country to gain support from people and force the Senate agree to the treaty and the League of Nations. On September 25, 1919, the president fell ill in Pueblo, Colorado, and a month later suffered from a stroke which limited his physical activities. Some wanted the president to resign citing incapacitation, but his doctors advised against it. The president’s doctors ordered him to bed rest, and the first lady took on the role of his shield. Dr. Francis Dercum stated that the president’s mind was as good as ever, and that there was every reason for him to make a decent recovery as long as Wilson shielded him from “every disturbing problem.”¹²⁵ Wilson screened everything the president received and guarded the president from visitors, including the Cabinet and top-ranking senators. Dr. Dercum initiated this plan, yet he suggested that if another person could handle a matter, like a cabinet member, then Wilson should send it to them, and only have the president deal with matters that he must. Wilson offered to let Vice President Thomas Marshall take

over the presidency, but Dr. Dercum advised against it, as he thought it would not be good for the country.¹²⁶

Edith Wilson kept people away from the president for nearly a year and a half. Wilson turned the White House into a hospital and a prison of sorts. Iron bars were placed in the windows mainly for protection; however some thought the bars were installed because the president became wild after his stroke.¹²⁷

During the president's recovery, First Lady Wilson began her stewardship. Wilson stated that [President Wilson] "was first my beloved husband whose life I was trying to save...and after that he was President of the United States."¹²⁸ The first lady became the intermediary body with cabinet members, advisers, senators and all others near to the president. Wilson received the president's mail, memos and other documents, read them, made summaries, discussed the issues with the president and recorded his decisions.¹²⁹ Because she handled official documents, the first lady received criticism by political leaders, especially from Republicans. Wilson inherited names such as "Presidentress" and her husband became the "First Man"¹³⁰ Some outsiders supported her way of handling of the situation, receiving support from Dolly Gann, the sister of Kansas Senator Charles Curtis who stated, "I am glad there was a woman in the White House who knew how to take the reins and use authority when it was passed upon her."¹³¹

Edith Wilson tackled President Wilson's biggest issue of getting the Versailles Treaty ratified. The first lady sent messages to senators who supported the president, and when Woodrow Wilson gained strength, he dictated notes to be sent to Senator Hitchcock, one of the senators leading the fight for ratification.¹³² At one time, a

“Smelling Committee” visited the president after ratification failed in the Senate to check if the president became completely incapacitated. This committee was formed to discuss issues with the president, but in all reality, served to check on the president’s health. The committee included Senators Albert Fall of New Mexico and Senator Hitchcock of Nebraska. Once they met with the president to discuss relations with Mexico, they saw the president remained in a good state of mind, which gave hope for his recovery.¹³³ Later, Edith Wilson allowed other leaders to see the president included Secretary of State Robert Lansing, the Cabinet in April 1920, and King Albert and Queen Elizabeth of Belgium.¹³⁴ From the time of his stroke until the end of his presidency, the first lady rarely left his side.

Edith Wilson became an important figure after World War I and a controversial figure from political opponents of the president. As first lady, Wilson set out to become an example for people helping with the Red Cross and rationing goods to help the war effort, but her duties changed after the president’s stroke and she controlled many features of the executive office and likely made several presidential decisions. If First Lady Wilson indeed made decisions, then the United States experienced a female who exercised executive powers, though indirectly. It is arguable that Wilson acted as the first female president, as she made the best of a serious circumstance. It is obvious that Edith Wilson not only protected the president, but worked to keep the country moving forward in the days after World War I.

Lou Hoover: First Lady of Airwaves

Louise Henry Hoover traveled the world and is the only first lady to be fluent in an Asian language. Because of her family background, Hoover became a supporter of

volunteer programs and started the tradition of first ladies promoting a cause or program. Hoover's intelligence, generosity, executive skills and activism hid her shyness and modesty.¹³⁵

Louise Henry Hoover, born on March 29, 1874, in Waterloo, Iowa, came from a Quaker family. Henry's parents taught her to help and serve others, and her dad taught her that she could do anything boys could do.¹³⁶ When Lou graduated high school, she attended Stanford University, studying geology. It is in the Geology Department that she met Herbert Hoover. They both discovered they had many things in common and dated regularly. Herbert graduated before Lou; however the couple remained in contact. When Lou graduate in 1898, and before leaving to China, Lou and Herbert married on February 1899, gave birth to two children.¹³⁷ Hoover had a lifelong interest in China, and when she needed to convey a private message to Herbert, she spoke in Mandarin.¹³⁸

As a cabinet wife, Lou Hoover became involved with Girl Scouts and volunteerism, activities she carried into her tenure as first lady. In 1922, Hoover won election as the national president of the Girl Scouts and conducted a local troop while in Washington.¹³⁹ Hoover also promoted health and wellness for females and organized the first National Conference on Athletes and Physical Education for Women and Girls. The organization continued in many schools and colleges across the country. Hoover continued her involvement in these programs as first lady.

To Lou Hoover, the Girl Scouts were integral to the healthy functioning of American society. The first lady also thought the combination of outdoor and domestic training fostered a self-sufficiency that she thought was lacking in the modern life.¹⁴⁰ While first lady, Hoover increased membership from 200,000 to 500,000 with major

fundraising campaigns, and helped organize the Girl Scouts leadership to function better.¹⁴¹ The first lady served in a leadership capacity for the Girl Scouts which gave a new generation of females the tools to expand their sphere and balance between individuals and technology.¹⁴²

Upon entering the White House, Lou Hoover filled rooms with objects from all over the world, and decorated the Monroe and Lincoln rooms and the Oval office with historic pieces from their historical eras.¹⁴³ When the White House opened for the inauguration, each room displayed a souvenir from their travels. In her restoration project, Hoover personally paid for additions to the White House. The first lady reproduced furniture owned by the Monroe's in the Monroe Room, and restored Lincoln's study for President Hoover's use and her own wardrobe.¹⁴⁴ The first lady added bookcases to the walls in the upstairs corridors, which she thought were too bare and cold.¹⁴⁵ Hoover employed a staff of three secretaries to help her plan events and to organize invitation lists, which opened her schedule to attend other events.¹⁴⁶ Many of the social events at the White House were funded by the Hoover's personal funds because of the economic depression.¹⁴⁷

Lou Hoover took to their airways when the Great Crash of 1929 occurred, followed by the Great Depression, and broadcasted messages to recruit volunteers to help people in need. First Lady Hoover tamed down social events and dinners and changed her wardrobe to simple styles to set an example for people of the United States during the Depression. Hoover urged people to tighten their belts, continue to work hard, and carry on with "activities that are essential" until the economy righted itself.¹⁴⁸ When Hoover took to the radio in November 1931, she stated, "My plea is that our most important duty

is to find when, how, and where people need help,” urging people to help others when they could.¹⁴⁹ With the first lady’s Quaker background, helping and serving others became her main cause.

Lou Hoover made it a point to promote female issues. The first lady became the first to promote her message through the radio. The first lady did not have her own radio program, but reported on various topics on a consistent basis. In a broadcast from Camp Rapidan in 1929, she urged listeners to make their homes more attractive places for young females. Hoover stated, “Is it [the home] just a place where mother and the girls drudge a good part of the day in order that father and the boys may have a place to come to eat and sleep? [Everybody should help] with dishes, sweeping...Boys, remember you are just as great factors in the home making of the family as are the girls.”¹⁵⁰ Hoover’s broadcast messages included both domestic and feminist undertones.

Another importance of Lou Hoover involved the creation of Rapidan Camp. The first lady oversaw the construction of the presidential retreat resort, meant to allow the president and others a place for relaxation. Camp Rapidan includes cabins for the president and guests, as well as trails for hiking and streams provided fishing.¹⁵¹ Since the building of Camp David, Camp Rapidan has been restored and made into a historic site, preserving part of Hoover’s legacy as first lady.

Lou Hoover started a new element that continues with nearly all first ladies; she promoted first ladies to officially establish sponsoring a cause during their tenure. Nearly all the first ladies after Hoover have done the same. As well, First Lady Hoover kept many of her papers assisting scholars understand and assess the Hoover presidency. Both the first lady and the president knew the importance of archives for historical research

and initiated the Hoover Institute on War, Revolution, and Peace, helping provide research opportunities.¹⁵²

These early first ladies developed the core roles, traditions and responsibilities future first ladies observe, especially that of hostess. But much like white women in general, first ladies enlarged their sphere of operation precisely by employing their feminine role strategically. As the institution of first ladies approached the twentieth century, more independence and more political activism are apparent with the first ladies. Mirroring United States history, more opportunities for women existed, such as education and work, and we see the first ladies move away from a domestic, submissive role, to a more empowering role. The power of first lady would change and develop further with Eleanor Roosevelt, who greatly expanded the role of first lady and establish a dominant force in presidential administrations. Up to this point in history, from 1789 to 1933, each of these ladies created legacies and brought legitimacy to the role of First Lady of the United States.

Chapter 4

Portrait of an Activist: Eleanor Roosevelt as First Lady

“It was hard for me to remember that I was not just ‘Eleanor Roosevelt’ but the ‘wife of the President.’” – Eleanor Roosevelt on life in the White House.¹

Eleanor Roosevelt is one of the most influential and important women in the twentieth-century United States and without a doubt, she is the most important first lady. As first lady, Roosevelt transformed and modernized the duties of the first lady and consequently established the “Office of the First Lady”. Roosevelt devoted a great deal of time and energy into her many programs and duties she prescribed herself. Eleanor Roosevelt could have simply played the traditional role of White House hostess, but her nature led her down a productive path and worked to help better the country.

Early Life and Early Politics

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, born on October 11, 1884, in New York City, grew up in a privileged family, but experienced a life of heartbreak. Her father, Elliott, and Theodore Roosevelt were brothers.² As a young girl, Eleanor’s mother, Anna, did not see her as pretty; Anna stated that young Eleanor looked plain and gawky and called Eleanor “granny” because she acted old fashioned in various ways. Eleanor adored her father, Elliot, and longed for his company. Elliot, an alcoholic throughout Eleanor’s early life, only visited sporadically in her youth, and died when she was 9 years old. Her mother, Anna, died almost two years before Elliot and Eleanor was sent to live with her Grandmother Hall.³ Before Eleanor reached ten years of age, her mother, a brother and her father had died, leaving her heartbroken, especially after Elliot died.⁴

Not long after her father's death, Eleanor's grandmother sent her to school at Allenswood in England, headed by Marie Souvestre.⁵ At school, the shy Eleanor broke out of her shell, developed social skills, and become loved by Souvestre and the other young female students. Eleanor loved Allenswood, describing her experience as "the best time of my life."⁶ Eleanor wanted to stay for the last year of her studies, but her grandmother wished her to return to New York to become part of society and social circles.

At Eleanor's social coming out party, she met a distant cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The couple dated and became engaged. The engagement lasted a year, at the suggestion of Sara Roosevelt, Franklin's mother, hoping he would lose interest in Eleanor. Franklin remained interested, and the couple married in 1905.⁷ At the wedding ceremony, President Theodore Roosevelt escorted her down the aisle, and joked about not having to change her name.⁸ Events seemed to be favoring Eleanor, but issues would arise. Sara had great influence over Franklin and never showed appreciation for Eleanor. When Eleanor gave birth to five children, Sara insisted that Eleanor had only given them birth, but she was their mother.⁹ It would take several years later for Eleanor to create bonds and relationships with her children.

In her own career, Eleanor Roosevelt taught at the Todhunter School in New York City. Roosevelt taught American history, American literature, English and current events to students. Eleanor always wanted to challenge students to think for themselves and become analytical. When Franklin became governor of New York, Eleanor continued to teach, but reduced her teaching schedule to three times a week. When Franklin became president, Eleanor resigned her position, and went back for occasional lectures,

graduation addresses, arranged trips for students to the White House and other events. However, Eleanor completely withdrew from the school in 1938.¹⁰

Franklin D. Roosevelt went on to serve in different political offices before he became president. When Franklin became Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Eleanor became a cabinet-level wife and faced more obligations in a new social setting. To stay organized, Eleanor hired a personal secretary, Lucy Mercer and after trip that Franklin and Lucy took, Eleanor's discovery of letters between the two changed Eleanor's life.

After discovering the secret love letters written between Franklin and Lucy Mercer, Eleanor offered to end the marriage with Franklin, but the option did not work for Franklin and his political ambitions. Sara Roosevelt did not want the marriage to end in a divorce, as this was not acceptable in her high society circles. Compromising, Eleanor and Franklin remained married, but their relationship moved towards a partnership and the two never shared a bedroom again in their lifetime. Another part of the agreement instructed Franklin to break off all relations with Lucy Mercer. Eleanor later wrote that "the bottom dropped out of my own particular world".¹¹ Franklin had Val-Kil built for Eleanor, utilized as her own getaway house and she used it to host her guests when vacationing. Val-Kil became her place to go to get away, rather than going to the family estate at Hyde Park.¹²

Luckily for Franklin, the relationship and partnership helped Eleanor continue on as one of Franklin's most important allies which coincidentally helped her to rise into a powerful position. In 1921, Franklin contracted poliomyelitis, more commonly known as polio. This is the event which Eleanor began her role as political confidant to Franklin,

as he never gained full control over his legs again, limiting Franklin to a wheelchair for the remainder of his life.¹³

Roosevelt as First Lady

When Franklin D. Roosevelt won the 1933 presidential election, Eleanor dove in her new position to provide opportunities for others. As the first lady, Roosevelt conducted numerous press conferences, hosted many dinners for guests and acted as the president's eyes, ears and legs traveling the country. Roosevelt became an activist for minority groups, supporting African Americans troops fighting in World War II. Roosevelt became the first to testify before Congress as first lady, and addressed the Democratic National Convention in 1940, setting many precedents in her position of power.

Eleanor Roosevelt worked for gender equity for women in the workforce, exemplified by her many press conferences, in which only female reporters were allowed to participate. Roosevelt held 348 press conferences in the twelve years she served as first lady.¹⁴ Lorena Hickok, a reporter assigned to cover Eleanor during Franklin's presidential campaign, encouraged the first lady to host these press conferences with female only pools.

Just two days after Roosevelt's inauguration, First Lady Roosevelt held her own press conference. Roosevelt used these press conferences to share her ideas on various topics. For example, on June 16, 1938, the topic involved women in the labor force. Roosevelt offered very candid answers, questioning the social norms of the day and challenging the notion of women in the workforce.¹⁵

Eleanor Roosevelt's press conferences presented two actions; first as Roosevelt's talking platform to spread her message and gave opportunity for female reporters, and second, a relationship developed between the first lady and Lorena Hickok. This relationship between Roosevelt and Hickok developed in Hickok growing strong, emotional feelings for the first lady, and ended up resigning her position citing that she "fell madly in love with her [Eleanor Roosevelt]".¹⁶ Eleanor helped in getting Hickok another position, covering the New Deal, which allowed her to keep close to Eleanor.

Lorena Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt exchanged letters daily when they were not together, writing ten to fifteen page letters expressing how much they cherished the relationship and each other's company. Some of the passages show the compassion and love between the two: "I want to put my arms around you & kiss the corner of your mouth," and "I can't kiss you, so I kiss your *picture* [original emphasis] good night and good morning!"¹⁷ Hickok gave the first lady a sapphire ring Roosevelt wore during the 1933 inauguration ceremony.¹⁸ Hickok lived in the White House for four years and took a bedroom in the northwest corner suite on the second floor, near the president's bedroom, remaining in close proximity to Roosevelt.¹⁹ The bonds were strong between Roosevelt and Hickok.

History has addressed this uniquely close relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok. Many considered their relationship lesbian in nature, while others see it as a strong friendship. Scholars such as Lillian Faderman, Hazel Rowley and Maurine Beasley argue the relationship had a sexual component, and that Roosevelt and Hickok were in a fully engaged relationship.²⁰ Other scholars, such as Doris Faber and Doris K. Goodwin do not believe that any physical intimacy occurred more than kisses

and hugs.²¹ Although these letters lead to different theories, the letters do not prove a physical lesbian relationship. With Franklin's betrayal of Eleanor in 1918, she had not been intimate with any person, to history's knowledge. Compelling evidence suggests Lorena Hickok was a lesbian, but these two friends shared similarities and found comfort and a companionship with one another. What really exists in this debate is how a person qualifies lesbian relationships. It was common for women to create strong bonds with one another in the early 1900s; Roosevelt engaged in a strong connection with a friend, whereas Hickok, a lesbian, probably saw it otherwise; lack of evidence concludes the couple did not engage in sexual intimacy.

In efforts to help Roosevelt's New Deal, Eleanor Roosevelt engaged in building a community as a main project as first lady. For the first lady's independent project, her vision led to the development and creation of a self-sustaining community in Arthurdale, West Virginia in 1934. This self-sustaining planned community came under the New Deal and acted as a resettlement community which Roosevelt put a large amount of her income towards the project, and partially influenced by Lorena Hickok, as part of her New Deal investigations. With the community built, all seemed fine and the new town functioned as a regular community. After Arthurdale was built, funding was hard to come by, as Congress and the president had lost interest in it and by 1941, funds were cut off, even though the first lady tried to convince both government branches otherwise.²² Even without funding, opposition still remained because some members of Congress interpreted the community as Communist and too dependent on the government to fully be self-sufficient. The project was ultimately abandoned and is widely considered a failure.²³ Roosevelt promoted other communities similar to Arthurdale to be built for

discriminated groups, as African American and Jewish miners were excluded from Arthurdale; this brought more attention and fueled Roosevelt's interest in working on issues of racial discrimination.²⁴

World War II and Social Justice

Eleanor Roosevelt's political stance with the events of World War II mirrored many people against the Axis Powers and wanted to protect people from the Nazis. Because of her stance, Roosevelt took an active role for the president, logging an impressive travel log. First Lady Roosevelt's travels outside of Washington D.C. were mainly for two reasons: to support troops and to be the president's emissary in the country. Because President Roosevelt could not travel easily, Eleanor went on numerous investigative trips in his place. On one of her trips, the first lady saw soldiers on a journey to the South Pacific in 1943, and it was on this trip that Roosevelt visited with wounded soldiers from battles with the Japanese.²⁵ Admiral William Halsey initially opposed this trip, thinking the first lady should not be visiting war sites, but later offered her praise for the visit.²⁶

The Red Cross confirmed that Eleanor Roosevelt inspired more than 400,000 GIs in hospitals and military bases.²⁷ Roosevelt had a great memory and easily recalled anecdotes and information when revisiting a place she already been to and would take time to catch-up with soldiers and learn how they progressed.

During World War II politics, Eleanor Roosevelt co-chaired with Mayor of New York City Fiorello H. LaGuardia, the Office of Civilian Defense, which offered civilian roles in war preparations. The OCD implemented state and federal measures on civilians for protections in attacks or emergencies stemming from the war. Neither Roosevelt nor

LaGuardia chaired this office long. Both Roosevelt and LaGuardia struggled in aligning their beliefs on what the Office of Civilian Defense should be, as the first lady wanted to focus on broad social problems in the war effort²⁸; Roosevelt resigned in December 1941, after conflicts with the House of Representatives over high salaries to her friends in the OCD.²⁹

Eleanor Roosevelt became active in social justice for minority groups in the United States. Her efforts included work for African Americans and Japanese Americans in World War II, the anti-lynching bill and worked to defeat poor treatments for people domestically. During World War II, Roosevelt visited the Tuskegee Airman, the first African American pilots in World War II. During the visit, the first lady met with Flight Instructor Charles “Chief” Alfred Anderson for an hour. As the armed forces were segregated during this time, Roosevelt’s approval sent a message of support for African Americans.³⁰ In 1941, Roosevelt hosted the Tuskegee Airman at the White House where the group shared their thoughts on building a military establishment in Washington. Through her actions, the first lady became a strong voice in the Roosevelt administration for African Americans.³¹

To help protect people facing horrible treatment and death in Europe, Eleanor Roosevelt remained active in trying to open immigration to the United States for groups whose safety was threatened by Nazis in Europe. The first lady tried convincing the president to allow the United States to become a safe haven for people during the war, but President Roosevelt did not budge on easing immigration restrictions.³² The first lady went many years regretting his decision, and thought she failed with forcing the president to accept refugees from Nazis during the war.³³

Eleanor Roosevelt opposed the president issuing Executive Order 9066, the order forcing Japanese Americans to move into internment camps after the Pearl Harbor attacks in December, 1941.³⁴ The first lady did not support the president's issuing this order and received criticism from people for supporting Japanese Americans. Because of her support of Japanese Americans, the *Los Angeles Times* called for her to retire from public life.³⁵ Executive Order 9066 is obliquely ironic as it forced Japanese American in internment camps, similarly to Hitler's crowding people in concentration camps; however, the United States interned Japanese Americans, rather than the mass murdering of millions Hitler and the Nazis directed.

As a champion for greater racial equality, Eleanor Roosevelt supported the anti-lynching bill as it worked its way through Congress.³⁶ Roosevelt's support of the Costigan-Wagner Bill of 1934 aimed to make lynching African Americans a federal crime. To help passage, the first lady set up a meeting between President Roosevelt and the NAACP president, Walter F. White. Unsatisfactory to Roosevelt, the president worried about losing support from Southern politicians and declared he would not support the bill. The anti-lynching bill later died in the Senate.³⁷ Roosevelt remained disappointed in the president for his lack of support on this matter.

Eleanor Roosevelt argued for protection of African American rights, a continuation of her beliefs during the New Deal. In 1939, First Lady Roosevelt attended the organizational meeting of the Southern Conference on Human Welfare in Birmingham, Alabama. Both black and white delegates attended the conference. When the first lady arrived, Roosevelt found the meeting already segregated into black and white sections. In a quiet protest, Roosevelt quietly moved her chair to the middle of the

aisle sending out a message of her disapproval of the segregated seating. The act became one that many remembered.³⁸

In further demonstrating her beliefs of social equality, Eleanor Roosevelt went to great lengths to help Marian Anderson, an African American opera singer, fight discrimination. In 1939, Marian Anderson was scheduled to perform at concert at Constitution Hall, but the Daughters of the American Revolution denied the right to perform; Roosevelt held membership in this organization. The first lady disapproved of the organization's decision in prohibiting Anderson's performance, and resigned her membership from the organization. Roosevelt helped Anderson move the concert to a new location and with help from Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickles, secured Anderson an open-air concert at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1939.³⁹ More than 75,000 people of all ethnicities attended the concert and many more heard it over the radio, providing the event with one of the largest audiences of the time. In all these gestures, Eleanor Roosevelt revealed her power and influence as first lady and her openness in helping people succeed.

Power in the White House

As the first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt kept a packed schedule that included foreign and domestic travels, hostess duties, daily writings, and political rallying for the president. In traveling, Roosevelt's international travels included trips to Latin America for diplomatic missions to build stronger relations with neighborly adversaries. In the Good Neighbor Policy's main principle involved the United States with non-interference and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of Latin America.⁴⁰ The objective of the policy promoted the United States to remain "good neighbors" with Latin America,

although Latin American governments remained skeptical towards the United States.⁴¹ The first lady, acting as a diplomat, tried to help build relations with Latin American governments.

For her travels, Eleanor Roosevelt was provided with her own C-87A plane, *Guess Where II*, originally intended for the president. Because this particular type of plane easily caught fire or crashed, Roosevelt inherited the plane for the first lady's travels.⁴² Roosevelt traveled by other means including: her car, trains, buses, subways, boats, all of which allowed for her to traverse the country multiple times. In the twelve years, the first lady traveled an average of 40,000 miles in a year.⁴³

Eleanor Roosevelt's trips during World War II were criticized by Republican members of Congress. Republicans condemned Roosevelt for using funds and resources for her trips during war times. Because of the growing criticism, the president asked her to cut down her traveling.⁴⁴ As President Roosevelt's best advisor and right-hand confidant, the first lady could not cut back her travels; luckily, her travels continued despite political challenge.

As the White House hostess, Eleanor Roosevelt sought simplicity when planning meals and hosting events. Events were never extravagant and seemed to center around political business. One example of Roosevelt's simplicity came in June 1939. The Roosevelt's hosted King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, marking the first time British monarchs set foot on United States soil. The unpretentious menu of quintessential American foods Roosevelt picked for the event included ham, turkey, salad, cranberry jelly, rolls, strawberry shortcake, coffee, beer, soft drinks and of all things royal, hot

dogs. The Roosevelt's and the king and queen feasted on the food spread, with George asking for a second serving of the hot dogs.⁴⁵

In Eleanor Roosevelt's role as presidential advisor, there were many issues the Roosevelt's disagreed on and the first lady had a method of getting the president to change his mind. Whenever Roosevelt wanted to influence the president's decisions, she invited people to the White House, creating a captive audience with the president to listen to their needs; the first lady became very influential for utilizing this method in her advisory position, further dominating the president and his decisions.

Eleanor Roosevelt established her dominance with the masses through journalism. Roosevelt wrote a daily column titled "My Day". Within these columns, the first lady shared her views on social and political issues, and at times, using her role as first lady to promote domestic feminism by using non-controversial means to advocate for more controversial causes. "My Day", written six days a week, ran from 1935 to 1962.⁴⁶ Some of the main topics Roosevelt regularly wrote about involved issues with women, race and social concerns like prohibition, to name a few. George T. Bye, Roosevelt's literary agent, encouraged her to write the column.⁴⁷ Through "My Day", Roosevelt reached many readers throughout the country, and educated them of issues people of the United States faced.

Eleanor Roosevelt wrote for other printed publications. *Woman's Home Companion*, a self-help magazine published in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth-century, contracted Roosevelt to write periodically. Roosevelt wrote on a monthly basis for the magazine, which she developed in the platform to answer mail sent from readers. Through Roosevelt's efforts, she published over sixty articles in national magazines as

first lady.⁴⁸ The first lady also wrote a book, *It's Up to the Women* in 1933, urging women to make the best of hard times, and ways that women can help the country survive and rebuild after the Great Depression.⁴⁹

It is a wonder that Eleanor Roosevelt could write on a daily basis anyway, with all of her travels and other duties as the first lady. From her writings and lectures, Roosevelt's earnings totaled \$75,000 in one year; her income matched the presidential salary.⁵⁰ With the first lady's healthy income, she gave most of it away to charity, showing her constant support of others.

In her own political actions, First Lady Roosevelt addressed the National Democratic Convention in 1940. In the 1940 election, President Roosevelt broke a precedent set by George Washington and ran for a third term. To help in his efforts, the president asked the first lady go to the convention to try and win the delegates approval. After a few discussions, Roosevelt agreed to help the president at the convention. On July 18, 1940, Roosevelt flew to Chicago to address the convention, the first time a first lady and a female did so.⁵¹ Roosevelt approached the speaker's podium to address the delegates and a calm settled on the convention and members hung on every word the first lady spoke. Roosevelt's famous phrase, "These are not ordinary times", captivated the delegates and the country to support Roosevelt for a third term.⁵² The first lady's speech helped to secure the nomination for the president to run for a third term. Roosevelt's convention speech shows the power she retained as the first lady.

Though Eleanor Roosevelt's day-to-day schedule remained full as first lady, her tenure came to an end on April 12, 1945, when President Roosevelt died of a cerebral hemorrhage in Palm Springs, Georgia. As the president traveled to Georgia, the first lady

remained in Washington to attend a charity tea.⁵³ When Roosevelt received news of his death, she sent for Vice President Harry Truman. With Roosevelt's present for Truman's swearing in, she recalled that, "I could not think of nothing to say except how sorry I was for him [Truman], how much we would all want to help him in any way we could, and how sorry I was for the people of the country."⁵⁴ Roosevelt made sure the Truman's transitioned in the White House smoothly before retiring to her cottage at Val-Kil, near the family home at Hyde Park, New York.

Eleanor Roosevelt remained active in the political scene after her tenure as first lady. Many thought Roosevelt should run for the United States Senate and would make a great president in her own right. Although Roosevelt never took up these suggestions, she continued her work with other endeavors. In 1946, President Harry Truman appointed Roosevelt to be a delegate to the United Nations. In this capacity, Roosevelt served as the United States Representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights from 1947-1953, and as its first chairperson.⁵⁵ It was here that she drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with John Peters Humphrey of Canada, along with prominent members, Rene Cassin and Jacques Maritain of France, Charles Malik of Lebanon, P.C. Chang of the Republic of China and Hansa Mehta of India, who made up the commission, and others.⁵⁶ This document is revered for its significance as one of the foundational documents for the United Nations.

After Roosevelt left the United Nations, due to politics and changing administrations, she continued to write her daily column, "My Day", and found herself back in a new political position in the 1960s. As part of a campaign promise, President John F. Kennedy established the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women,

which President Kennedy named Roosevelt as its chair.⁵⁷ Roosevelt did not necessarily support Kennedy for president, but after a meeting between these two, Roosevelt agreed to endorse Kennedy as long as he created this commission, which helped him with his campaign.⁵⁸ In further efforts, Kennedy appointed her a member of the Advisory Council of the Peace Corps.⁵⁹

In 1960, Eleanor Roosevelt contracted aplastic anemia, an incurable blood disease and in 1962, contracted bone marrow tuberculosis. Within weeks, Roosevelt died of cardiac arrest on November 7, 1962. Her funeral brought many influential people, including presidents Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, Kennedy, and vice president Lyndon B. Johnson, along with former and current first ladies, a tradition that would continue on to present day.

For most of her life, Eleanor Roosevelt experienced anguish from people close to her that could have easily defeated her moral. Roosevelt's ability to carry on and use energy from her frustration and finding fulfillment is noted by women leaders, including Betty Friedan. Friedan references Roosevelt in her influential work, *The Feminine Mystique*. In this work, Friedan identifies only two women who have found fulfillment in life that veers from a traditional course: "find only two women who had actually fulfilled themselves—Eleanor Roosevelt and Jane Addams."⁶⁰

Eleanor Roosevelt became a leading force and an iconic figure not only for the Roosevelt administration, but all of her life in the political spotlight. Roosevelt championed many aspects of her office by making speeches, writing columns, hosting press conferences, showing support for troops, traveling the world, and became a

confidant and advisor to President Roosevelt. No one asked Eleanor to do any of this; she took all of this on herself to support President Roosevelt and better the United States.

From all of the pain Eleanor received from her mother, father, grandmother, husband, mother-in-law, Lucy Mercer and at times her children, she still remained energetic and focused. Roosevelt likely channeled her anger and frustration to prove she was not meaningless, inferior or worthless, but rather she was essential and had meaning in her life. All of Roosevelt's selfless work and generosity went to help people. Not many close to Eleanor showed the same type of commitment, but the United States benefitted from her pain and grew to love and cherish the first lady.

Without Eleanor Roosevelt's active role as first lady, the office may not have become the influential and significant institution it has become in the government. The United States benefitted from Roosevelt's success from her time as first lady. Roosevelt remains the most influential first lady, and as Harry Truman stated at her funeral, "She was the First Lady of the World."⁶¹

Chapter 5

First Ladies in an Age of Activism and Growth

“As the role of American women changes, so, too, does the role of first lady.”
– Rosalynn Carter¹

As Eleanor Roosevelt transformed and established the Office of First Lady as a powerful White House institution, subsequent first ladies continued to expand the office’s profile. Since Roosevelt, the level of activism varies, yet the role of first lady developed more with her successors taking up causes and programs which defined a first lady by her pet causes.

The period between 1945 through 2001 is marked by significant social change. The ebb-tide of liberalism, resurgent, conservative waves, campus unrest, Civil Rights, the Women’s Liberation Movement, education and women’s health were some of the major trends in postwar America. Eight first ladies in this period added to the role of first ladies, which included: Bess Truman sought independence in the White House; Jacqueline Kennedy restoring history; Lady Bird Johnson’s beautification project; Betty Ford and women’s health and rights; Rosalynn Carter advocating for mental health; Nancy Reagan’s crusade for a drug free society; Barbara Bush’s work towards education and literacy; and Hillary Rodham Clinton’s work for healthcare and influence in the presidency. These eight first ladies are prime examples of continuing traditions, becoming activists in the political arenas and working to better the United States through their influence with the president.

Bess Truman: First Lady of Independence

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt suddenly died on April 12, 1945, Second Lady Bess Truman made her way to the White House to watch her husband take the presidential oath of office. As first lady, Truman re-transformed the duties of first lady, bringing back independence. Her work became powerful and restored a balance between the public and private White House spheres.

Elizabeth Virginia “Bess” Wallace Truman, born on February 13, 1885, in Independence, Missouri, came from humble roots compared to most modern first ladies. Wallace’s father had been mayor of Independence, but died when she was 18.² Bess was gifted athletically and excelled as a student.³ When Bess met Harry, their relationship lasted nine years, with a six-year engagement; Harry went to war, started a business, and Bess’ mother disapproved of the Truman family. Mrs. Wallace thought the Truman’s to be socially inferior to the Wallace’s.⁴ Despite the setbacks, Bess and Harry married on June 28, 1919, and had a daughter, Margaret, in 1924.⁵

Although Bess had no interest in politics, she supported Harry in his campaigns for county judge and United States Senator. When Harry campaigned, Bess accompanied him and shared the platform with him, a developing expectation of wives.⁶ When Truman became a senator, Bess worked in his office which Truman received criticism for having his wife on the payroll, but stated, “She earns every cent I can pay her. She helps with personal mail, helps with speeches and with my committee work. I don’t know where I could get a more efficient or willing worker.”⁷

Bess Truman never expected to become first lady, but on April 12, 1945, she received a phone call from Harry after Roosevelt’s death. Truman shed tears while on the phone with Harry while he explained the situation. Truman quickly went to the

White House, stood next to Harry as he took his oath, and described as looking like, “a woman in pain.”⁸

Almost immediately, Bess Truman canceled the press conferences Eleanor Roosevelt hosted. Truman’s thoughts were simple, “I am not the one who is elected. I have nothing to say to the public.”⁹ The first lady did host one press conference, but she requested many of the questions to be submitted beforehand and answered many by frequently writing “no comment.”¹⁰ Truman agreed to host teas with reporters and attended their luncheons, but insisted that everything she said remained off the record.¹¹ With many reporters disappointed, Truman wanted to keep a simple, low-key life as first lady.

The first lady prided herself on keeping out of the lime-light. In one particular event, Bess Truman, while out doing Christmas shopping, went alone and unnoticed in department stores.¹² Truman disliked limousines and being chauffeured to places; she rather drive her Chrysler. As much as Truman liked driving her car, soon driving “caused too much commotion” and could not easily drive anymore.¹³ In another example of privacy, Truman burnt letters she and Harry wrote to one another. While the letters were being destroyed in the fireplace, Harry rebuked, and she asked “why not...I’ve read them several times”, Harry replied to think of history, which Bess replied, “I have.”¹⁴ Although the surviving letters did not expose personal secrets, the first lady wanted to make sure their lives were kept as private as possible and not endure gossip in history.

New practices Bess Truman engaged in as first lady included handling the bookkeeping of the White House herself. The first lady supervised expenditures and daily menus, inspected each room, wrote her own mail, kept up with friends in Missouri,

played with Margaret, drove herself around, entertained the Independence Tuesday Bridge Club at the White House, listened to baseball games and talked with the president in the evenings.¹⁵ In particular, the first lady loved baseball and often listened to the Washington Senators' games on the radio in her private sitting room.¹⁶ Of the few activities the first lady participated in, she remained enthusiastic about the Spanish class she organized for her and friends at the White House.¹⁷

Bess Truman became a mother to all who worked at the White House. If reporters were sick, she gave them medicine and if a staff member lost a button from their clothes, she sewed one back on. Truman worried about the secretaries, ushers, aides and made sure they were comfortable in their jobs and relied very little on the wait staff.¹⁸ To demonstrate the Truman's simplicity, J. B. West, a White House butler, tried making cocktails on several occasions for the first lady and president and after pouring straight bourdon into glasses, the first lady stated that was the way they liked their old-fashioned!¹⁹ If Truman noticed staff members working too long, she made them rest and sent the maids home on Sundays. The only comment the staff shared was her idiosyncrasy of putting a new bar of soap in each bathroom every morning.²⁰

Bess Truman oversaw a major restoration of the White House. During an event, Truman saw the crystal chandelier moving back and forth and not long after one of the legs of Margaret's piano went through the floor into the Red Room.²¹ The White House suffered from structural problems and needed serious repairs. Truman spoke with congressional leaders to reconstruct the White House instead of building a new one. The first lady won successfully in her lobbying efforts.²² Piece by piece, historic items were preserved and re-installed in the reconstructed White House. During the reconstructions,

the first family moved across the street to Blair House and kept their socials to a minimum.²³ Though the Trumans kept independent, except for their socials, an assassination attempt occurred on November 1, 1950, when two Puerto Rican Nationals, Griselio Torresola and Oscar Callazo tried to kill the president in attempts to make Puerto Rico independent. In the attempt, Leslie Coffelt, a secret service agent, was shot and killed in protecting the president.²⁴ Added security was put into place to see that the president and his family were safe.

Costing nearly \$6 million for the reconstruction, the White House project finished in 1951, and Bess Truman helped with the re-decorating. One of the additions to the White House was the construction of a balcony on the south end of the mansion. President Truman battled the Fine Arts Commission over the plans, and when the commission protested, Truman stated, "The hell with them; I'm going to do it anyway."²⁵ The balcony was added and is known as the Truman Balcony. Many think Jacqueline Kennedy gave the first televised tour of the White House, but President Truman conducted a tour on May 3, 1952, and a record 5,444 people went through the mansion when it re-opened on April 22, 1952, the most up to that point.²⁶

Along with her restoration project, Bess Truman set out to finish the Lincoln Room. The Lincoln bed, along with Lincoln furniture, had been all throughout the White House, and Truman thought it best to have all the Lincoln items in one room instead of spread throughout the mansion.²⁷ In her hunt to find the Lincoln items, Truman found dressers, tables, and chairs for the room.²⁸

Bess Truman worked as a presidential advisor as well. According to Margaret Truman, "Bess never hesitated to try and influence Harry Truman's decisions...but she

never attempted to control him”.²⁹ Truman evaluated people, made suggestions for speeches and expressed her opinions about his policies. The first lady listened to the president’s viewpoints and questioned to make him think harder.³⁰ Truman rarely commented on anything publicly and only stated a few times people should buy savings bonds or contribute to the March of Dimes and Girl Scouts.³¹

As White House hostess, Bess Truman showed charming interpersonal skills. Although Truman did not favor large gatherings, the first lady put people at ease at gatherings and demonstrated a great memory for names of government officials. Truman held her own idea of what the role of the president’s wife ought to be, and neither sought, nor accepted, the opinions of others.³²

Though Bess Truman rarely engaged in public events, she did some social hosting. In her seven years as the White House hostess, the first lady attended 200 teas, 112 luncheons, 140 receptions and 30 state dinners.³³ In all of these functions, Truman oversaw the planning and details for event. Truman’s social calendar grew each year, with lunches for the Congressional Club and the Senate ladies she became friends with.³⁴ Truman lent her name in support of several organizations that she had membership in or held honorary membership, which included the American Newspaper Women’s Club, the Daughters of Colonial Wars, the District of Columbia Chapter of the Red Cross Motor Club, the Women’s National Farm and Garden Association and the United Nations Club,³⁵ and lent her name to cancer research organizations.³⁶

Many do not know how proactive Bess Truman became as first lady. Truman never wanted to be in the spotlight, yet her independence and command demonstrate how influential she became, especially for the White House renovations. Truman did not care

about other people's opinions, and because she remained strong and determined, President Truman dubbed her "The Boss", which she grew to hate.³⁷

Jacqueline Kennedy: First Lady of Restoration

Jacqueline Kennedy became popular in her days as first lady, due in part because of marrying into the Kennedy political savvy family and her likeable character. The Kennedy's brought youthfulness and fashion to the White House. Because of their youth, Kennedy's role became two-fold: being the first lady and a mother to young children.

Jacqueline Lee Bouvier Kennedy, born on July 28, 1929, in Southampton, New York, came from privilege and wealth, and she lived a life of luxury.³⁸ As a young adult, Jacqueline's intelligence led to her to study at Vassar College, *Internationale Universitaire de Paris at Sorbonne* and graduated from George Washington University.³⁹ By the time she reached adulthood, Jacqueline traveled internationally, became a socialite and caught the attention of John F. Kennedy. The couple married on September 12, 1953.⁴⁰

Jacqueline Kennedy's influence became apparent on the campaign trail. Like wives before her, Kennedy followed John as much as she could. Kennedy's pregnancy became an asset for the campaign in gaining voters. Kennedy, a political rarity of the day, exuded youth, intelligence, wit and charm, and John Kennedy told his aids, "As usual, Jacqueline's drawing more people than we are."⁴¹ In her campaign efforts, Kennedy wrote a weekly column "Campaign Wife", hosted press conferences, held fundraisers, campaigned on the telephone and hosted listening parties for debates. Kennedy took every advantage she could to campaign for her husband, including talking

on the microphone in a grocery store, promoting her husband while people carried on with their shopping.⁴²

When Jacqueline Kennedy became first lady in 1961, Anthropologist Margaret Mead stated she presented “a special kind of presence—a combination of qualities that Americans have long admired in young stage and screen stars but have seldom hoped to find in the wives of famous men”.⁴³ Similarly to her presence and likeability during the campaign, the first lady’s graceful behavior became an asset for the presidency. In one of her first actions, Kennedy made the family residence in the White House private family quarters. Kennedy’s goal was to keep Caroline and John Jr. out of the public as much as possible, taking a cue from Bess Truman.⁴⁴ The first lady made it a point “to be a mother and wife first, and then be first lady,” as she described her duties.⁴⁵ Kennedy admired Bess Truman because of her simplicity, and wanted to mirror her predecessor.

Jacqueline Kennedy became a popular hostess in the White House. Kennedy appreciated the traditions of state dinners, but changed the settings into informal affairs, with entertainment, good food and wine and good conversation.⁴⁶ Kennedy reduced the number of courses served from six courses to four, eliminated receiving lines and brought in a different system of seating guests by implementing round tables instead of the usual E-shape, which seated people in long rows and limited the views of gatherings.⁴⁷ Kennedy invited guests other than politicians to events; the first lady hosted artists, writers, musicians, businessmen and others. Entertainment grew to be the center feature of many events, usually including violinist Isaac Stern, cellist Pablo Casals or a Shakespearean troupe performance.⁴⁸ Although the first lady’s events were lively,

Kennedy infrequently attended, citing her absences were due to spending time with her children.⁴⁹

Another factor may have been President Kennedy's infidelity. The first lady's absences allowed for President Kennedy to freely womanize attendees. Secret Service logs show that the president entertained famous females from Judith Campbell, Mary Meyer and most famously, Marilyn Monroe.⁵⁰ Jacqueline Kennedy could not bear to confront the president's actions and wanted to remain out of public scrutiny, so it was easier for the first lady to remove herself from events.⁵¹ Another view of Kennedy's sporadic appearances may have been a passive-aggressive form of punishment towards the president, especially since she made headlines in the news often.⁵²

A major project of First Lady Kennedy became restoring the White House. Kennedy wanted to make the White House an open, national historic museum. When Kennedy first toured the White House, she found it too drab and stated the place "looked like it's been furnished by a discount store...it looks like a house where nothing has ever taken place. There is no trace of the past."⁵³ The first lady persuaded Congress to make the White House a national museum and brought in museum directors, historians and art experts to start restoring the White House to reflect different presidential eras.⁵⁴ New Mexico Senator, Clinton Anderson, chair of the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, introduced a bill in August 1961 to establish the Executive Mansion as a national monument.⁵⁵ Congress appropriated \$50,000 to refurbish the family rooms and replace accessories in the public rooms.⁵⁶

Jacqueline Kennedy worked endlessly in searching for objects in storage that could be brought back into White House service. Her searches located pieces of china

used by the Lincolns, Polks and Harrisons, and a Monroe pier table, among other finds put on display.⁵⁷ People included in this project were William Walton and experts from the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Gallery.⁵⁸ The first lady devoted much time in studying the history of the White House, a personal interest of hers.⁵⁹

Jacqueline Kennedy never liked her restoration project to be labeled “redecorating.” The first lady preferred restoration as she recreated the eras of James Monroe, Abraham Lincoln and preserved history.⁶⁰ After completion of the project, Kennedy prepared the *Historic Guide to the White House* which brought tourists to the White House. When the guide came out on June 28, 1962, Kennedy hosted a ceremony and received praise from the press for sharing the White House rooms, including the newly finished Treaty Room.⁶¹

On February 14, 1962, First Lady Kennedy conducted a tour of the restored White House on television and interviewed by Charles Collingwood. Norman Mailer thought Kennedy to be meretricious in her performance, writing “One did not feel she particularly loved the past of America”, but most of the forty-eight million viewers approved the tour.⁶² CBS donated \$10,000 to ongoing restorations after the tour televised.⁶³ For the tour program, the prepared Kennedy used no cue cards and recalled stories and facts with ease.⁶⁴

In her political role, First Lady Kennedy traveled as an ambassador for the president. President Kennedy called Jacqueline his “number one ambassador of goodwill.”⁶⁵ Kennedy demonstrated a wealth of knowledge about cultures, history and familiarity in foreign languages. At times, Kennedy’s popularity trumped the president’s. In Paris, the first lady proved wildly popular and President Kennedy, joking with the

press, stated “I do not think it altogether inappropriate to introduce myself. I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to France.”⁶⁶

Jacqueline Kennedy’s life as first lady ended on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas, after President Kennedy’s assassination. Kennedy’s presence beside Lyndon B. Johnson during the swearing-in as president remains an important move and sent out a message of unity from one power to the next. This tragic event helped to cement the first lady’s reputation in the hearts of many people of the United States.

Jacqueline Kennedy remained popular after leaving the White House. She had been part of one of the most influential political families in the country and married one of the most liked presidents in history. Although Kennedy became known as a young and fashionable first lady, her work in protecting her family, world travels and restoration of the White House has greatly influenced the institution of first ladies.

Lady Bird Johnson: First Lady of Transformation

Following the Kennedy assassination, Lady Bird Johnson became first lady, as the country ensued frantic. As a politician’s wife for many years in Washington, neither she nor Lyndon B. Johnson thought they would ever occupy the White House. As first lady, Lady Bird Johnson sought her own route to help the United States, which became her beautification project and advocating for head start programs. The Highway Beautification Act became Lady Bird’s legacy and became the first time a first lady actively sought for legislation to pass in Congress.

Claudia Alta Taylor, born on December 22, 1912, in Karnack, Texas, came from a working-class family, though her family eventually became wealthy. Lady Bird’s mother died in her youth, and her father sent her off to Alabama under her aunt’s care.⁶⁷ Lady

Bird, her nickname donned by her nurse Alice Tittle, graduated from the University of Texas, Austin, with degrees in liberal arts and journalism.⁶⁸ On a trip to New York, Lady Bird met Lyndon B. Johnson who proposed marriage on the first date. Lady Bird wanted to wait, but Lyndon persisted and they were married on November 17, 1934.⁶⁹ Lyndon worked in Washington as a congressional clerk and later elected to Congress, Lady Bird became a political wife and managed the home life and business affairs, while Lyndon concentrated on politics in his rise as a leader in both houses of Congress, and later vice president and president.⁷⁰

After the Kennedy assassination, in a mix of confusion and anxiety, the Johnson's let Jacqueline Kennedy remain the White House for two weeks and allowed her to continue the nursery school for the children and playmates, as well to keep out of the public after the assassination.⁷¹ Johnson though, did not waste much time on starting her own projects as first lady. Lady Bird took up the causes of Highway Beautification, Head Start Education and advocated for Civil Rights in the United States.

One of Lady Bird Johnson's first acts as first lady became establishing the modern day staff for the Office of First Lady in the East Wing with a chief of staff and aides. Johnson employed Liz Carpenter as her press secretary with six full-time members for the press; four aids handed details as social secretary and other aides in answering correspondence.⁷² First Lady Johnson never shied away from reporters. Two days after the 1964 State of the Union address, she invited sixty-five newspaperwomen to tour the White House.⁷³ Johnson became excellent at recording thoughts and events as first lady, which she used to write her book, *A White House Diary*, becoming the most complete record of any first lady's tenure since Eleanor Roosevelt's daily columns.⁷⁴

As the White House hostess, Lady Bird Johnson refashioned parties and dancing to the executive mansion. Johnson handled all the luncheons, dinners and receptions with “a watchmaker’s precision.”⁷⁵ The Johnson’s were known to host informal and last-minute dinners, such as one time President Johnson called Lady Bird asking, “Let’s ask Congress over this afternoon.”⁷⁶ For many, pulling this sort of event off with short notice is nearly impossible, but the first lady managed informal gatherings. To try and be personal with her guests, the first lady studied the guest lists, learned something about guests to have something to convey in the receiving line.⁷⁷ In Washington, Johnson had few adversaries, and many had pleasant things to say about her. Speaker Sam Rayburn once said, “That’s the greatest woman I have ever known...she’s good and she’s kind and she doesn’t have a mean thought.”⁷⁸

Lyndon B. Johnson, like presidents before him, committed marital infidelities. From 1965, President Johnson continued his flagrant pursuit of other women and White House logs are full of notations of forty-five minute to one-hour private sessions in the Oval Office with women.⁷⁹ Sometime during the administration, Lady Bird took to a separate bedroom in the private quarters.⁸⁰ Even at the family residence in Texas, women visited the ranch. The president took long walks with these women and even had presents sent to the ranch house from lingerie stores. Once, Lady Bird found a lavender bikini, which she stated, “It must be for one of your lady friends.”⁸¹

As an activist first lady, Lady Bird Johnson hung a sign on her door that read, “MRS. JOHNSON AT WORK.”⁸² Johnson traveled around the country to gather information for the president’s War Against Poverty programs. The first lady found these trips enjoyable because she was able to see how citizens of the United States were living

and the conditions people faced. In many of her trips, Johnson received widespread media coverage as she visited parks, rafted down rivers and met with various constituencies.⁸³ Politically, President Johnson regarded Lady Bird as his indispensable partner and turned to her in his decision making.⁸⁴ Even in Johnson's reelection campaign, Johnson traveled 1,682 miles, making 47 stops in eight states and he called the first lady "one of the greatest campaigners in America" and stated, "I'm proud to be her husband."⁸⁵

As a spokesperson for the president's War on Poverty and the Great Society programs, Lady Bird Johnson promoted the Head Start program for children.⁸⁶ Education became a high priority for both the first lady and the president. Johnson saw education as a necessity in creating a better society and President Johnson, an educator himself, taught before his political career.

As Lady Bird began her second term as first lady, she started the country's beautification program. Johnson did not enjoy riding in planes and traveled in cars and trains. Litter had become a major problem on highways and this concerned the first lady. Along with trash litter, advertisements and billboards littered the air space, and this concerned the first lady tremendously. Johnson became appalled by the "tunnel of filling stations, billboards, neon signs and dilapidated little buildings."⁸⁷

First Lady Johnson set out to change highway litter, both with trash along the roads and billboard clutter, and raised people's awareness of environmental concerns of the country. Johnson set out to get legislation passed, limiting billboards on federal highways and impose fines for littering. In February 1965, the first lady summoned Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall and key female staff members to a private meeting

in the Queen's Sitting Room in the White House to discuss her plans.⁸⁸ Though the first lady took this project on herself, President Johnson put pressure on the House Rules committee to report the measure and pass her bill.⁸⁹ The Highway Beautification Act, known as the Lady Bird Act, won approval in Congress in October, 1965.⁹⁰ The first lady disliked calling the cause "beautification" because she thought it too cosmetic, trivial and prissy, but never thought up a better name.⁹¹

To help her program, Lady Bird held a White House Conference on Natural Beauty and gave speeches on the connection between trash and crime. Different people joined the first lady's cause, including architects, conservationists, philanthropists, and Johnson attended flora plantings and dedicated new parks and gardens.⁹² Johnson paid particular attention to Washington and created the First Lady's Committee for a More Beautiful Capital. In this committee, Johnson went around the capital city and looked for places needing attention. At the White House, the first lady recorded a guide for White House tourists that documented the different trees, flowers and plants on the grounds, adding to the resources created by first ladies Truman and Kennedy.⁹³ Many joined the first lady's cause and she received praise from Robert F. Kennedy, who told Lady Bird, "You're doing a wonderful job. Everybody says so."⁹⁴

As with many political figures, Lady Bird Johnson received backlash from her sponsorship of her cause. Cartoons of her circulated the country, with one showing a maze of highways running through a forest, with a captain reading, "Impeach Lady Bird".⁹⁵ None of this bothered the first lady, and she even joked about the attention given towards her cause.

Bringing in new elements to the Office of First Lady brought Lady Bird Johnson many admirers. Meg Greenfield of the *Reporter* wrote, “What Lady Bird Johnson has done...is to integrate the traditionally frivolous and routine aspects of the East Wing life into the overall purposes of the administration.”⁹⁶ Lady Bird Johnson’s time as first lady saw great efforts with education and the Beautification Act signifying her influence in politics during her tenure as first lady.

Betty Ford: First Lady of Symbolic Strength

Like Gerald Ford being an accidental president, Betty Ford became an accidental first lady. Though the Fords’ stay in the White House was short, Betty Ford made her mark for handling controversial and private issues. Ford discussed drugs, premarital sex, and shared information about her own mastectomy and views of women’s health, leading to her lasting impacts on the country’s consciousness.

Elizabeth Ann “Betty” Bloomer Warren Ford, born on April 8, 1918, in Chicago, Illinois, had her roots from a working-class family. As a young child, Betty started a lifelong love of dance.⁹⁷ In her youth, William Bloomer moved the family to Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she continued with dance and earned a certificate from the Calla Travis Dance Studio in 1935.⁹⁸ After finishing high school in 1936, Ford attended the Bennington School of Dance at Bennington College, but only attended for two semesters.⁹⁹ After a short-lived marriage to William G. Warren, Betty met Gerald Ford, quickly fell in love and married on October 15, 1948, and gave birth to four children.¹⁰⁰

As a young political wife at the age of thirty, Betty Ford split her time between Washington and Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Fords’ did not see much of each other while Gerald served in Congress which took a toll on Betty. Through the years, Gerald

became a rising member in Congress and in 1973, amidst the Watergate scandal, received a call from President Nixon, requesting a meeting at the White House. Ford would become the vice president, and in August, 1974, became president after Nixon's resignation. Just when Betty Ford thought of enjoying retirement, she became the first lady.

As the first lady, Betty Ford became a force of controversy and challenged traditional roles. Ford spoke her mind about controversial topics such as drugs and sex, legalized abortion, and the Equal Rights Amendment, and sharing her own personal issues over health. Although some thought it out of character for the first lady to discuss such topics, Ford stated, "I don't like to dodge a question, and I guess I'm not astute enough to walk around it."¹⁰¹ High ranking feminist Betty Friedan said "she's [Betty Ford] the best kind of liberated woman."¹⁰²

Betty Ford's take on conducting White House business remained simple: be honest and open. Ford stated that the White House had been a grave, but now she wanted it to sing!¹⁰³ On top of making the White House a trendy place, Ford brought her dancing skills to the house, and known to hip bump people as she walked around the White House corridors. In added style, the first lady sported a mood ring and chatting on her CB radio with her handle, "First Mama."¹⁰⁴

When Betty Ford entered the White House, a reporter asked her what cause she planned on supporting. Instead of focusing on just one program, Ford had several interests in the arts and work for the elderly.¹⁰⁵ In the early days of her tenure, the first lady brought uninterested press to herself.¹⁰⁶ In light of her support of the arts, the National Academy of Design has named Betty Ford a Fellow.¹⁰⁷ Ford invited many

people from arts and humanities to the White House and worked on more funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. The first lady became instrumental in getting President Ford to award a Presidential Medal of Freedom to her old dance instructor, Martha Graham, showing her appreciation of the arts.¹⁰⁸

First Lady Ford became unquestionably supportive of equal rights and the Equal Rights Amendment, a proposal aimed at guaranteeing equal rights for women through a federal amendment. Ford became proactive in calling state legislators around the country encouraging support of the Amendment and made contact with several state legislators in Illinois, Missouri, Georgia, Nevada and Arizona.¹⁰⁹ Ford stated that the “Equal Rights Amendment is a must!”¹¹⁰ The first lady received harsh criticism for her campaign which she did not let affect her. It is recorded that almost thirteen cubic feet of mail came to the White House in regards of Ford’s lobbying for the ERA, and the odds ran three to one against her efforts.¹¹¹ Many letters wished for the first lady to remain silent and take on a less controversial cause. Many went to the White House and picketed the first lady with signs reading, “Betty Ford, Get Off the Phone”.¹¹² These picket demonstrations became the first for a first lady, and Ford was proud of it.

Betty Ford advocated promoting women to higher positions. The first lady constantly pushed the president for appointing more and some efforts became successful, such as Carla A. Hills as the secretary of Housing and Urban Development. One area that Ford actively lobbied the president involved appointing a woman to the Supreme Court, but her efforts never came to fruition, as John Paul Stevens received the only Supreme Court nomination Gerald Ford awarded in his presidency.¹¹³

In women's health, First Lady Ford received criticism for her support of the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v Wade*, in 1973. During an interview on "60 Minutes", the first lady stated the Supreme Court's ruling was "a great, great decision."¹¹⁴ Ford received further criticism when asked about drugs and sexual promiscuity. The first lady stated that she might have tried marijuana if she was a young person of the 1970s, and would not be surprised if her daughter had an affair, which Ford would "counsel and advise her on the subject."¹¹⁵ When asked if she thought her kids tried marijuana, Ford stated she believed they probably had tried it.¹¹⁶ This outraged many people in the United States; however, Ford recognized the realities of youth in that era.

Betty Ford may be best known for her openness about her own mastectomy. Soon after becoming first lady, Ford's doctors discovered a lump in her right breast and she Ford underwent a mastectomy in September 1974. After the surgery, Ford insisted on talking about her illness and stressed the importance of regular examinations for preventive care. Ford wanted to raise awareness and encourage as many women as possible for early detection, the key for saving lives.¹¹⁷ When asked about the scarring and physical appearance, Ford stated that it "is not vanity to worry about disfigurement," and continued wearing low-cut dresses after she healed.¹¹⁸ The first lady commented that "When I asked myself whether I would rather lose a right arm or a breast, I decided I would rather have lost a breast."¹¹⁹ Ford thought that if "she, as the first lady, could talk about it [the mastectomy] candidly and without embarrassment, many other people would be able to as well."¹²⁰

Even after her tenure as first lady, Betty Ford continued in making news with her addiction to alcohol and prescription drugs. After interventions, Ford agreed to seek help

and became educated about the issues and saw other women experiencing similar illnesses. Ford created the Betty Ford Center for Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation, which opened in 1982, in Rancho Mirage, California.¹²¹

Though Betty Ford may have been a controversial figure, she reflected the upheavals and social changes of the 1960s and 1970s. Ford never shied away from talking about controversial topics and wanted to raise people's awareness. Because of this attitude, people sought help for health issues and addictions. Ford's openness in these discussions brought awareness for equal rights, women's rights and health issues that helped many in the United States.

Rosalynn Carter: First Lady as Proxy Leader

Rosalynn Carter spent her time as first lady mainly as the president's political partner. Similar to Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosalynn traveled to foreign nations to discuss political matters with leaders, testified in Congress on mental health issues and sat in during presidential cabinet meetings. In her autobiography, *First Lady from Plains*, Carter consistently used "we" to describe various decisions she and the president made in the White House, suggesting her importance to the president.¹²²

Eleanor Rosalynn Smith Carter was born on August 18, 1927, in Botsford, Georgia, in a working-class family. Rosalynn's father died in her youth, leaving her to work to help the family financially.¹²³ Rosalynn became a great student in school, graduating valedictorian and attending Georgia Southwestern College.¹²⁴ Rosalynn's friend, Ruth Carter, sister of Jimmy Carter, set up Rosalynn with Jimmy when she visited from college. When Jimmy left for the Navy, their relationship grew and the couple married on July 7, 1946.¹²⁵ Rosalynn helped with the family business and when Jimmy

began his political career, she offered support and assisted him in campaigns for state office in Georgia.

Rosalynn Carter became an important campaign companion for Jimmy Carter in his efforts for state office and the presidency. In his state office campaigns, Rosalynn addressed letters, telephoned voters and kept records in her spare time. When Jimmy ran for governor of Georgia, Rosalynn traveled the state, talking with voters, handing out brochures and sat for interviews on television and radio. In Carter's second time running for governor, Rosalynn campaigned harder, going to shopping centers, factories, fairs and sporting events.¹²⁶ As a seasoned campaigner, Carter played a major role Jimmy's campaign for presidency. Their son, Jack stated "it was like having two candidates...it meant we could travel twice as far and meet twice the number of people. I think that won it for us."¹²⁷ During the campaign, Carter's travels included visiting nearly a hundred cities, gave interviews for newspapers, radio and television, and spoke in schools, factories, hospitals, nursing homes, senior centers, malls and even campaigned in African American churches.¹²⁸ When Jimmy Carter won the presidential election, Rosalynn Carter took to her new duties of first lady quickly. Right away, she attended the inauguration of Mexico's new president and presided over a mental health conference in Philadelphia.¹²⁹

As first lady, Rosalynn Carter became a sponsor for mental health, elderly care, and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Within the first fourteen months as first lady, Carter visited 18 nations, 27 cities in the United States, held 259 private and 50 public meetings, made 15 major speeches, and hosted 22 press conferences. First Lady Carter gave 32 interviews, attended 83 official receptions, and held another 25 meetings

with special groups at the White House, showing serious commitment as the White House hostess.¹³⁰ In her own events at the White House, Carter oversaw all aspects and details of planning events, and became well-prepared with topics to discuss with guests. Carter stated that “real protocol” involved warmth and placing guests at ease as an important part of traditional southern hospitality.¹³¹ Having so much to do, the first lady procured a staff of twenty-one people, the largest up staff for a first lady up to that point.¹³²

Like Betty Ford, Rosalynn Carter took a proactive role in trying to get the Equal Rights Amendment passed. Carter made calls to state legislators urging for ratification. Her work towards equal rights played a part with President Carter appointing women to high offices which included appointments to cabinet positions and federal courts, more than any other president before. In her advocacy in getting more women in federal positions, Rosalynn mentioned, “...that he needs—more women on the White House staff—more women in departmental jobs—and a list of distinguished women just in case he finds himself looking for a woman Supreme Court Justice!”¹³³

In her advocating for mental health and elderly care, Rosalynn Carter worked diligently and persuaded the president to appoint a Commission on Mental Health and worked as the honorary chairperson in gathering data, making recommendations and presenting legislation to help improve mental health programs around the country.¹³⁴ Carter testified in the Senate Resource subcommittee in February 1979, favoring increasing federal spending for mental health programs and called for the chairman, Edward Kennedy, to securing funding.¹³⁵ The first lady’s Mental Health Systems Act passed in 1980; however the act did not provide national health care for mental health

patients. Instead, the act's three goals provided patients with chronic problems to move to smaller facilities, to incorporate mental health care into the nation's health care system and increase services to the poor.¹³⁶ Carter traveled to nursing homes and senior centers and worked on more legislation in Social Security reforms and services for the elderly.¹³⁷

Part of Rosalynn Carter's activities as first lady involved being a trusted advisor for the president. A White House assistant stated, "You can't be around them and not know how attuned they are."¹³⁸ This relationship helped when the first lady traveled to Latin American countries and Thailand to discuss politics on the president's behalf. The first lady stomached criticism with her travels, as she was not an official spokesperson of the United States government, nor could not legitimately act as such. Through her foreign travels, Carter listened to many issues. Carter traveled with the president to India and the Middle East and conducted her own meetings with health officials around the status of women.¹³⁹ When Carter returned to Washington, she reported to the Senate Foreign Relations committee about the problems she learned.¹⁴⁰

In support of finding peace in the Middle East, Rosalynn Carter played an important role in the Camp David Accords meetings in 1978. President Carter talked with the first lady about the developments of the Camp David meetings, which national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski stated, "Her influence on her husband was considerable."¹⁴¹ Even in the dark days of the Iranian hostage crisis, the president frequently talked with the first lady about the situation, its developments and used her opinions appreciatively; President Carter was not ashamed to admit it.¹⁴²

In other foreign politics, Latin American officials grew skeptical of Rosalynn Carter's presence and talks about administration policies on human rights and nuclear

warfare¹⁴³ In Ecuador, a reporter stated, “You have neither been elected by the American people nor confirmed by the Senate to discuss foreign policy with foreign heads of state”¹⁴⁴ Others questioned her asking, “do you consider this trip an appropriate exercise of your position?”¹⁴⁵ While taking it in stride, Carter responded with, “I am the person closest to the President of the United States...and if I can explain his policies and let the people know of his great interest and friendship, I intend to do so.”¹⁴⁶ Though her efforts, the first lady won over foreign dignitaries on her 12,000 mile tour.¹⁴⁷

Rosalynn Carter’s influence with the president continued with invitations to attend cabinet meetings. The first lady attended at the president’s request to keep abreast of issues. The first lady attended weekly lunches with the president to coordinate their work, and when necessary, the president directed domestic and national security staff to her. Aside from high security matters, Carter knew everything the president did.¹⁴⁸ Along with her influence over the administration, the first lady frequently represented President Carter at official ceremonial events in his absence.¹⁴⁹

Rosalynn Carter’s influence grew into a presidential surrogate.¹⁵⁰ No first lady since Eleanor Roosevelt became so active in daily administration activities, sponsoring programs and traveling as a presidential emissary to foreign nations. In all her domestic and foreign political activities, Rosalynn Carter’s tenure as first lady left lasting impressions on improving the country, during an otherwise difficult administration.

Nancy Reagan: First Lady of Protection

Nancy Reagan’s tenure as first lady is characterized by two major features: she sponsored the “Just Say No” campaign against drugs and became the protector over the president. Nancy projected her power in other ways, such as redefining the wife-

campaigner role and discussed her breast cancer in 1987. Having a strong voice in the White House led Reagan to be an influential first lady of the 1980s.

Born on July 6, 1921, Anne Francis Robbins (her birth name) came from a broken family. Soon after her birth, her parents Kenneth S. Robbins and Edith Lockett Robbins divorced. Edith worked as an actress and Kenneth's work as an automobile dealer.¹⁵¹ After their divorce, Edith returned to acting, Kenneth abandoned the family and Nancy lived with an aunt. In 1929, Edith married Loyal Davis, a wealthy neurosurgeon in Chicago who later adopted Nancy.¹⁵² Growing up, Nancy Davis graduated from the Chicago Latin School for Girls and enrolled at Smith College, where she majored in drama.¹⁵³ Nancy became an actress, moved to Hollywood and eventually met Ronald Reagan, who was in search of assistance because of his leadership in the Screen Actors Guild. A name of "Nancy Davis" appeared on a Communist blacklist and she wanted no connection to communism during times of the Red Scare. After this meeting, Nancy and Ronald formed a close relationship.¹⁵⁴ Nancy and Ronald married on March 4, 1952, and gave birth to Patricia Ann in October 1952 and Ronald Prescott in May 1958; Ronald had two children of his own, Maureen and Michael, from a previous marriage.¹⁵⁵ Nancy Reagan stated, "My life really began when I married my husband [Ronald Reagan]."¹⁵⁶

Ronald Reagan became, in a way, an accidental politician. As president of the Screen Actors Guild, Reagan prepared speeches and became more and more political. At first, Ronald Reagan was a Democrat, Nancy was a Republican. When Ronald married Nancy, he came to admire Dr. Davis whose conservative opinions were partially responsible in him becoming a Republican.¹⁵⁷ In the 1950s, Ronald started voting more for the Republican Party and in 1964 became the co-chair of the California Republicans

for Barry Goldwater.¹⁵⁸ Soon, Ronald Reagan became involved in California politics and in 1967, successfully campaigned for governor of California for two terms.¹⁵⁹ First Lady of California Nancy Reagan liked her position and used it to advocate for veterans and worked for the elderly and handicapped, a program she would continue as first lady.¹⁶⁰

When Nancy Reagan became first lady in 1981, she wasted no time starting her projects. The first lady wanted to renovate the White House to make it fashionable again. Reagan stated, “I believe very strongly that the White House is a special place...and should have the best of everything. I think people want it that way.”¹⁶¹ First Lady Reagan recruited designer Ted Grabor to help with the second and third floors redecorating and redo many of the White House rooms. Unlike her predecessors, Nancy Reagan sought out private donations for her restoration project instead of asking Congress for funds.

In Nancy Reagan’s crusade to collect private funds, the first lady’s redecorating efforts cost over \$800,000.¹⁶² The \$800,000 raised to renovate the White House came mostly from Republican donors.¹⁶³ Along with the White House renovations, Reagan underwent her own “renovation” with new clothes and gowns, reported to cost over \$1 million in designer labels, though some were regarded as “freebies”.¹⁶⁴ As the White House’s renovations came during an economic recession, Reagan endured intense criticism. Reagan’s fashion choices, including designer clothes and new china patterns, saw her approval rating drop to 26 percent by December 1981, although 57 percent approved of the way she handled the duties of first lady, found in the same poll.¹⁶⁵

Nancy Reagan’s focus changed on March 30, 1981, when an assassination attempt was made on the president by John Hinkley Jr.¹⁶⁶ After this event, First Lady

Reagan became the protector over the president and establish her dominance over the White House. After returning to the White House from the hospital, Reagan stated that she stood as the “president’s stand-in.”¹⁶⁷ After the assassination attempt and the first lady asserting her dominance and wanting to protect the president’s reputation, Reagan turned to Joan Quigley, an astrologer, who offered advice to the first lady. Nancy met Quigley in 1980, yet she was able to keep the connection virtually unknown until late in the last year of the Reagan presidency.¹⁶⁸ Reagan relied heavily on Quigley to plan the president’s schedule, and some believe the astrologer had influence over policy or major decisions.¹⁶⁹ Because of Reagan’s superstitions and anxiety from the assassination attempt and her reliance of Quigley’s guidance, this created tension between politicians, the first lady and some constituents, such as the Christian Right. Evangelicals, such as James Kennedy, stated “A belief in astrology and a belief in Scriptures are antithetical” and George Otis traveled to the White House with petitions stating “‘just say no’ to astrology.”¹⁷⁰ Regardless of the defense Reagan gave, Quigley had significant influence over the first lady. Reagan took all of her advice seriously, which she used to dominate the White House.

Further showing Nancy Reagan’s protection over the president occurred during a press conference in 1984. During this press conference, when asked about arms control, it seemed the first lady cued the president, where Reagan was heard saying, “Tell them we are doing everything we can.”¹⁷¹ When asked about it, Reagan stated, “I was talking to myself in sheer frustration” being the press makes the president seem like he is doing nothing, and the first lady stated in a low voice to herself “Tell them we are doing

everything we can.”¹⁷² Virtually every time President Reagan was criticized, the first lady remained close to help prompt him or come to his protection.

A major campaign Nancy Reagan sponsored was “Just Say No”. Started in 1982, the program educated people about the dangers of drugs, targeted towards the country’s youth. Reagan traveled over 250,000 miles in the country and other countries, teaching people about drug abuse.¹⁷³ The first lady appeared on several television shows such as *Good Morning America*, *Diff’rent Strokes* and other popular television shows, made many Public Service Announcements, wrote many articles published in newspapers and magazines and visited drug rehabilitation centers.¹⁷⁴

In 1985, Nancy Reagan took the campaign international. Together with thirty first ladies of different countries, Reagan held the First Lady Conference on Drug Abuse at the White House, and later received an invitation to address the United Nations General, a first for a sitting first lady.¹⁷⁵ Speaking to the United Nations General Assembly, Reagan did not blame other countries on importing drugs but remained critical of the United States for not taking responsibility about the drug problem. Reagan stated,

“It is often easier to make strong speeches about foreign drug lords or drug smugglers...than to arrest a pair of Wall Street investment bankers buying cocaine on their lunch break...It is far easier for the United States to focus on coca fields grown by 300,000 *campesinos* in Peru than to shut down the dealer who can be found on the street corners of our cities.”¹⁷⁶

Organizations joined Reagan’s “Just Say No” campaign, including the Girl Scouts of the United States, the National Federation of Parents for a Drug-Free Youth, and the Kiwanis Clubs, which constructed over 2,000 billboards with the first lady’s message.¹⁷⁷ Over 5,000 “Just Say No” clubs were formed in schools and youth organizations.¹⁷⁸ The campaign did not yield significant results but drug use decreased in the 1980s. A study

by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan shows high school seniors using marijuana dropped from 50.1% in 1978 to 36% in 1987 with cocaine usage dropping from 12% to 10%, and heroine from 1% to 0.5%.¹⁷⁹ With the small percentage drops, overall the decrease in drugs shows some success. Even though the campaign did not yield high success Reagan hoped for, the campaign has lasting effects with educating youth on the dangers of drugs.

Other ways that Nancy Reagan became influential during her time as first lady includes her battle with breast cancer. In 1987, Reagan underwent a mastectomy on her left breast after a lesion was detected.¹⁸⁰ The first lady remained quiet about own personal experience, but promoted women's health and frequent checks for early detection. As a result, more and more women started to get mammograms on a regular basis, similar to Betty Ford's campaign on women's health awareness.¹⁸¹

In her book, *To Love a Child*, Nancy Reagan shared experiences in her work with veterans, the elderly and handicapped. Reagan became involved in the Foster Grandparents Program, which provided foster grandparents for abused children with support and care.¹⁸² Reagan persuaded her friend Frank Sinatra to record a song, "To Love a Child" with the proceeds from the book and song in help funding the Foster Grandparents Program.¹⁸³ In a minor role in White House entertainment, the first lady supported the performing arts and youth with artistic abilities. Reagan used the White House to showcase young performers during the PBS television program, "In Performance at the White House."¹⁸⁴

Nancy Reagan's time as first lady in the 1980s demonstrates how first ladies continued to expand their power and her dominance in the White House shows her

influence within the Reagan administration, mainly trying to protect the president's reputation. Reagan's efforts with the "Just Say No" campaign, coupled with her other White House activities, has been a long-lasting feature during her time as first lady.

Barbara Bush: First Lady of Literacy

Barbara Bush may have been the first First Lady who staked out positions independent of her husband. Bush did not always align herself with the president's political agenda or the party platform; instead of working through the administration, Bush sought an independent route in her programs. Although never finishing college herself, Bush pushed for education reforms in literacy, creating her own foundation and worked towards creating the White House Historical Association.

Born on June 8, 1925, Barbara Pierce Bush comes from a wealthy family in New York. In high school, Barbara traveled to South Carolina where she met George H. W. Bush.¹⁸⁵ After meeting, they developed a relationship and secret engagement while George was a pilot in World War II; meanwhile, Barbara attended Smith College.¹⁸⁶ Barbara left college because of their marriage and children, yet education held a high priority in her life. When Barbara and George married on January 6, 1945, they produced six children, and like many previous first ladies, Barbara supported George in his political ambitions while maintaining her independence.

On the campaign trail for the presidency, Barbara Bush became an asset to George. Although Bush remained quiet on various issues, she helped George with speeches, debates, took interviews and toured the country spreading campaign messages.¹⁸⁷ Bush's friendly manner won praise from the press and voters which helped Bush with campaigns, as George seemed at times detached from the public.¹⁸⁸ Although

previous first ladies had been more fashionable, Barbara kept true to herself. Bush stated she would do anything to “help” her image, such color her hair, change her wardrobe or lose weight.¹⁸⁹ The white hair, blue dresses and faux pearl choker became trademark symbols of the new first lady.¹⁹⁰

It did not take long before Barbara Bush found her cause and program as first lady. Bush chose literacy, which stemmed from her personal life and time as the second lady. In her literacy causes, Bush invited government officials, literacy experts, academics and researchers to the Naval Observatory (the vice president and first lady’s house) for discussions. Those in attendance were highly established professionals, including Sharon Darling, president of the National Center for Family Literacy, Professor David Harman of Columbia University and others with prestigious educational backgrounds.¹⁹¹ Bush was appalled when she learned 23 million Americans were illiterate and another 35 million were semi-illiterate in the country.¹⁹² The first lady could not believe so many people could not read and lacked basic literacy skills. In hopes of helping people become more literate, she continued on with Reading Is Fundamental, an organization she joined while as second lady that promotes reading in youth.¹⁹³

Barbara Bush set out to create and organize the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy that supported reading programs around the country. The mission of the foundation became:

“to establish literacy as a value in every family in America, by helping every family understand that the home is the child’s first school, that the parent is the child’s first teacher, and that reading is the child’s first subject and to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy.”¹⁹⁴

The first lady funded the organization from the royalties received as author of *Millie's Book*, about the Bush family dog's adventures in the White House.¹⁹⁵ Within the program, parents and children would learn to read together through different programs to develop better literacy rates at all levels.

Barbara Bush took her message to the media, appearing on The Oprah Winfrey Show to discuss literacy and to her radio show "Mrs. Bush's Story Time".¹⁹⁶ Bush's radio program began in September 1990 and presented a ten-part Sunday evening show. Bush's goal of her program aimed "to get families back to reading together and to spread the message about reading aloud to children."¹⁹⁷ The first lady wrote an article for *Reader's Digest* titled, "Parenting's Best Kept Secret: Reading to Your Children", which laid out four suggestions and concluded stating, "Get a child hooked on reading...and its joy will last a lifetime."¹⁹⁸ First Lady Bush saw her work rewarded when President Bush signed the National Literacy Act of 1991 into law. The National Literacy Act helped citizens of the country to become more literate, productive workers and informed citizens, creating literacy centers all over the country.¹⁹⁹

Barbara Bush also helped in educating people about social issues. AIDS still remained a new and controversial issue and many people remained uninformed about the disease and preventive care. The first lady took photo opportunities of holding, kissing and playing with children with AIDS to show people the disease did not spread by touching.²⁰⁰ Bush even wrote a letter to the head of a gay organization stating, "We cannot tolerate discrimination against any individuals or groups in our country."²⁰¹ On other political issues, Bush did not always align with conservatives. The first lady stated she supported abortion rights and declared that military assault rifles should be

outlawed.²⁰² Bush thought it best to leave the homosexual debate out of the Republican platform and not take any stand on such social issues.²⁰³

Barbara Bush did not shy away from her White House hostess duties. Bush attended the president's events, hosted her own socials and hosted joint events with others. It is estimated Bush was involved with approximately 25 ceremonial events a month and entertained about 40,000 people annually during her tenure as first lady.²⁰⁴

Barbara Bush also supported the White House Historical Society, developed by one of her predecessors, Jacqueline Kennedy. In this endeavor, the first lady set out to revitalize the funds and renamed the organization the White House Endowment Fund, raising \$25 million to be used to upkeep the White House.²⁰⁵ In a rare and exclusive event in September 1989, the first lady and president hosted a tour of the second floor of the White House not open to the public. This tour had been the first since First Lady Kennedy's restoration tour in 1962, and Bush received praise for the tour and came across as accessible, friendly and funny. In the televised tour, First Lady Bush shared stories about the family residence over the years, and included trivial historical facts, such as Winston Churchill walking around "in the buff", the addition of the Truman balcony and how much she enjoyed being the first lady.²⁰⁶

Barbara Bush shared her thoughts and was a confidant to the president. A White House aide recalled, "She does let him know how she feels, and he listens. He trusts her instincts and often follows her."²⁰⁷ Although the first lady and the president discussed various issues, Bush stated she never tried to direct policy or influenced anyone in their decisions. Because of her independence and proactive role as first lady, Congressman

Jim Leach called Bush “a key element” in the Bush administration which many Americans could connect with.²⁰⁸

As an independent first lady, Barbara Bush worked towards helping the country with literacy and education of social issues. Bush remained her own person in the White House, and became iconic for her motherly presence as first lady.

Hillary Clinton: First Lady of Influence

Hillary Clinton is perhaps the most active first lady besides Eleanor Roosevelt. Clinton completely immersed herself in the projects of healthcare, women’s issues and family protection. Clinton continued the traditions of the typical first lady, but faced higher levels of public scrutiny and a spectacular failure over the management of a proposed healthcare law. Many thought Clinton acquired too much power and influence within the administration as she exemplifies a strong presidential companion dedicated to the country.

Hillary Dianne Rodham Clinton, born October 26, 1947, in Chicago, Illinois, came from a middle-class family. Her parents lived through the Great Depression, impacting Hillary’s knowledge of troubles in the working- and middle-class.²⁰⁹ Her mother, Dorothy Howell Rodham remained mostly a housewife, and her father, Hugh Rodham graduated from Pennsylvania State, but worked as a traveling salesman and businessman.²¹⁰ From a young age, Hillary developed an interest in education and politics, serving in student councils, National Honor Society and the Young Republicans.²¹¹ Hillary graduated from Wellesley College. In the cauldron of the 1960s, Hillary shed her conservative upbringing and embraced Civil Rights and the antiwar movement. At Yale, Hillary Rodham met Bill Clinton and they married on October 11,

1975.²¹² Hillary followed and supported Bill's political endeavors, seeing him elected as Arkansas' Attorney General and Governor for five terms, and then President of the United States.

During the campaign, a scandal arose about Bill Clinton's long-term extramarital affair, which the Clintons addressed in a "60 Minutes" interview. In the interview, Bill stated he wronged Hillary and their marriage, but they were working on their problems. Clinton defended her marriage, stating, "I'm not sitting here like some little woman standing by her man like Tammy Wynette" and that if people did not like her husband, they did not have to vote for him.²¹³ Clinton suffered criticism for her statement against Tammy Wynette. In the long run, Clinton showed her strength and character of accepting to face adversity and help Bill with his campaign.

As first lady, Hillary Clinton made huge strides both in the administration and in public. From the early days of the administration, the president seemed overwhelmed, yet the first lady seemed focused. Bob Woodward commented Clinton had much control during a January 1993 Camp David retreat with the Cabinet and White House staff. When Secretary of State Warren Christopher suggested narrow and focused priorities, First Lady Clinton responded, "Why are we here if we don't go for it?"²¹⁴ Clinton's primary program became advocating health care, expanding health insurance coverage, and ensuring children's immunization.²¹⁵ To be closer to the action, Clinton moved her office from the traditional East Wing location to the West Wing. Clinton's close proximity to the Oval Office allowed her to consult with the president on appointments and policies.²¹⁶

President Clinton created the Task Force on National Health Care Reform and appointed the first lady as its chairperson. In this role, the first lady made appearances in Congress and took her message publicly to promote universal health insurance coverage for the people of the country.²¹⁷ A *New York Times* reporter wrote of Clinton at Capitol Hill as “the official end of an era when Presidential wives pretended to know less than they did and to be advising less than they were.”²¹⁸ Clinton’s energy led her to create a staff of 500, host over 50 meetings with congressional committees, and made headway with acquiring political support.²¹⁹ Health care remained an important issue, but with opposition from Republicans, Congress rejected the legislation proposed by the task force and ended the health care battle.

Additionally, Hillary Clinton received brutal and harsh treatment from the press about her actions working on health care. The press scrutinized her image, characterized her as “grating, abrasive and boastful,” as well as a Marxist, con artist, radical feminist and a “Feminazi.”²²⁰ Commenting about how the press portrayed her, Clinton stated, “I read stories and hear things about me and I go ‘ugh’...I wouldn’t like her either. It’s so unlike what I think I am.”²²¹

Because of Hillary Clinton’s leadership role with healthcare, many compared her to Eleanor Roosevelt. Clinton became interested in former influential first ladies that were presidential partners and not decorative appendages.²²² To try and emulate Roosevelt, Clinton started her own column, “Talking It Over.”²²³ Clinton wrote, “My hope was a weekly column that talks about the most immediate issues on people’s minds—the funny, the sad, the inspiring and the momentous.”²²⁴ Along with other writings, Clinton published *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us*

which focuses on children influences and how society should treat children. The first lady stresses that it takes families, teachers, clergymen, businessmen, neighbors and civic organizations to raise well-rounded children.²²⁵ Clinton faced opposition again, as some thought she was spreading left-wing propaganda.

Hillary Clinton's efforts as first lady aimed at helping children and women. Clinton worked in establishing the Office of Violence Against Women in the Department of Justice with Attorney General Janet Reno, with the goal of protecting women from abuse.²²⁶ The first lady assisted with the Adoption and Safe Families Act to resolve issues with adoption and foster care protections, especially with disabled children.²²⁷ Clinton supported the Foster Care Independence Act, providing funds for teenagers aging out of the foster care system.²²⁸ Clinton worked nobly to help women and children of all ages and situations.

Hillary Clinton supported human rights around the world. In her travels to Beijing in September 1995, the first lady attended the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Clinton crafted her speech on freedoms, human rights and the treatment of women's rights as human rights.²²⁹ Clinton spoke about human rights conditions in China, the brutal treatment of dissidents and the one-child law the country implemented. The first lady spoke critically of the country's view of the value of males being greater than the value of females.²³⁰ Many women in attendance were pleased with the first lady's address. Upon reflecting on her thoughts and political views on human rights, Clinton stated,

“As I travel around the world, I am very grateful for the opportunity that I have to meet with women and to listen to them. Their dreams, their aspirations, their hopes, their concerns. And these are the women...who we must do all that we can to ensure that their voices are heard, heard in

the city halls and board rooms, and trade union offices and political parties, in academia, in families.”²³¹

It would seem Hillary Clinton’s busy schedule left no time for her obligations as White House hostess, but as the White House hostess, Clinton held many receptions, state dinners and holiday functions. The first lady hosted many leaders from around the world, including the Emperor and Empress of Japan, Russia’s Boris Yeltsin, and South Africa’s Nelson Mandela.²³² In her projects and additions to the White House, Clinton restored the Map Room back to its World War II setting, crafted rotating displays in different rooms, and transformed the Blue Room to reflect the times of James Monroe.²³³

Towards the end of her tenure, Hillary Clinton raised the bar in political ambitions for first ladies and decided to seek office in her own right. In 1998, Patrick Moynihan, a long-serving Senator from New York announced his retirement in 2000. Clinton saw an opportunity and within weeks of Moynihan’s announcement, Clinton engage in “listening tours” in New York.²³⁴ Clinton did not live in New York, causing a slight problem with the United States Constitution, as one of the qualifications of “a Senator shall be a resident of the state in which they are elected.”²³⁵ The Clinton’s purchased a house in 1999, in Chappaqua, New York, and solved the residency problem.²³⁶ The first lady organized the Hillary Rodham Clinton for U.S. Senate Exploratory Committee, and announced her candidacy. Again, Clinton met criticism from Republicans, who accused her of using White House funds for her Senate campaign. House Republicans investigated Clinton and came up with an \$182,471 figure, but was never determined if the funds were first lady use or campaign use.²³⁷ Clinton won her Senate election with a sizeable margin and became the first first lady to win election to office. Even though

Clinton became a senator-elect, she continued her first lady obligations to the end of the term.

Next to Eleanor Roosevelt, Hillary Clinton became the most proactive first lady. From an early age to present day, Clinton remained active in politics and became a highly influential figure in recent history. After serving in the Senate, Clinton ran a strong campaign for the Democratic nomination for president in 2008, and later served as secretary of state in the Obama Administration. Although many have tried to stop her, Clinton did not deter from her mission in working for the people of the United States.

Since the twentieth-century, we have seen a tremendous growth with the Office of First Lady. More and more first ladies became activists for at least one cause and many promoted several programs. Since Roosevelt, the first ladies have approached this office with certain purposes, but different interpretations. Bess Truman, Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush and Hillary Clinton all became activists in their own right. These ladies all are examples of how the first ladies' influence has grown and expanded in the White House. Though not all issues were achieved, the battles the first ladies fought became noteworthy and celebrated. More and more since 1945, the first lady has become a leading authority and influence in the federal government.

Chapter 6

Analyzing the Institution and Roles of the First Lady

“Being First Lady isn’t a job, it’s a role.” – Hillary Clinton¹

To fully understand the presidency, having knowledge of the first ladies is important. As the position of the first lady remains the only institution in the government with no Constitutional direction or law establishing boundaries, many first ladies have impacted presidential administrations and have engaged in ways to bettering society. As Carol Berkin, professor emeritus of history at Baruch College and the editor for the Gilder Lehrman Institute for American History writes,

“The Constitution does not spell out the duties or define the powers of a president’s spouse, yet American “first ladies” have, from the beginning of our nation, played key roles as public figures. They have set precedents, set social protocols, embraced reforms, advocated policies, and served as role models for many American girls and young women...”²

In 1789, Martha Washington could have enjoyed a simple, relaxed time during the Washington administration, but choose to engage in activities that essentially defined a role for the president’s spouse. Since Martha Washington, first ladies over the years have built on similar ideas and expanded the role of first lady into what it has become today, with programs, causes and activism for the different aspects of society in the United States.

Some of the early first ladies prior to Eleanor Roosevelt took advantage of their close position to the president and become influential. Most first ladies from 1910 to present day became active and gained more legitimacy, power and impact in the

government. First ladies have evolved their positions from simply social hostess to key aspects in presidential administrations, as well as mirror changes of women in society.

Summary

Sixteen first ladies have proved to be important in establishing their influence in the federal government. Though all first ladies have contributed in some way, these sixteen women each made their own mark on the role and contributed to the development of the “office” as it is today.

Martha Washington’s creation of the state dinners and encouragement of public appearances of the president became important in the early days. State dinners and social appearances have been an important and constant theme in first lady obligations that extended to future first ladies. Dolley Madison, who served both as a stand-in hostess for Thomas Jefferson and as first lady in her own right became an icon of her time. Madison built on social events and state dinners by adding flair and became a savior of artifacts when the White House went under attack in 1814.

Sarah Polk became one of the first presidential advisors, helping James K. Polk with speeches, campaigns and policy matters. Polk changes of the environment made the White House receptions more serious; however, her advisory skills became more significant. Mary Todd Lincoln came into the White House in times of a divided country. Lincoln became the target of political scrutiny with her extravagant spending and public outbursts; however, Mrs. President Lincoln remained active in continuing traditions of hosting social events and visited soldiers in hospitals. Suffering from mental illness and personal grief, Lincoln wanted to return prestige to the presidency. Lucy Hayes’s significance found approval for banning hard liquor in the White House by the

Women's Christian Temperance Movement Union. Hayes, the first presidential wife to graduate from college, brought in refinement into the White House her time as first lady.

Beginning in the twentieth century, a new form a first lady came into the White House as women, in general, were taking a more public role in American life. Building on all the principles of White House hostess, political partner and presidential companion, Edith Wilson wasted no time asserting her dominance and exemplifying wartime duties. After President Wilson suffered a stroke, Edith Wilson's duties transformed to a "stewardess" which allowed her to exercise presidential power. Lou Hoover built upon the influence and duties of first ladies and promoted volunteerism and the Girl Scouts. Hoover's work for these programs carried her to the new frontier of radio in disseminating her message.

Eleanor Roosevelt became the most influential first lady. Roosevelt experienced a life of upset and pain, and channeled that frustration and agony in positive energy to take up causes of social justice, acting as Franklin D. Roosevelt's emissary, and her activism as first lady. Roosevelt was never afraid to push the limits or take on politicians or organizations, and worked to help people of the country. No other first lady has been so influential in that role.

Bess Truman's independence brought a quality and sophistication to first ladies and her work in preserving the White House was built upon by future first ladies. Truman's simplicity and calm nature helped in setting a tone for first families. Jacqueline Kennedy brought youth as first lady in in the early 1960s. Kennedy's work in historic preservation and her lobbying efforts of turning the White House a national museum became a lasting effect she helped to create.

Many causes and programs first ladies have sponsored are always connected personally to them and Lady Bird Johnson's Highway Beautification Act is no exception. Lady Bird saw a chance to work on legislation and pass the Beautification Act, creating a cleaner country which raised environmental awareness in the United States. Betty Ford's time as first lady became praised by the Women's Movement and hated by conservative fundamentalists. Ford never shied away and shared her realist opinion on social issues. Because of Ford's openness about her mastectomy and women's health, many women started to get regular examinations and raised consciousness for health concerns.

Rosalynn Carter's influence in the Carter administration gave her influence as first lady. Because of Carter's relationship with the president, she traveled and acted as a proxy leader on the president's behalf and conducted business alongside the president. Nancy Reagan influential in the White House came by becoming the president's protector and leading the crusade for a drug free society in her "Just Say No" campaign. The first lady traveled the country, hosted an international conference and started programs to education youth on drug and substance abuse. Reagan's drug crusade has left a lasting impression on society.

Starting in the 1980s, first ladies became more autonomous and worked independently. Barbara Bush advocated for literacy and expanded knowledge and education for social issues. Bush's work helped raise literacy awareness in the country. Hillary Clinton is second to Eleanor Roosevelt as most accomplished and influential first lady. Clinton's main targets were healthcare and women's rights, making great strides in both aspects. Although Clinton met opposition, she did not let that discourage her from goals and even continued on in her own political career after her time as first lady.

All aspects of these sixteen first ladies helped to build their authority in presidential administrations and to better the United States in their unique positions as wives of the presidents. Through all of their work, these first ladies have created and added to precedents in creating a significant position in the government.

First Lady Analysis

Though each first lady has interpreted her duties differently, some continuity exists, most being White House hostess and the president's confidant. Some first ladies exemplify their era in history, for example, as the Temperance Movement gained momentum in the country, Lucy Hayes became active with her message supporting bans on alcohol and became a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Movement. During challenging times in the country, Betty Ford did not shy away from giving her personal views on her support of women's health issues, abortion and drug use. Hillary Clinton became the example of the independent and professional woman in the 1990s.

In evidence of continuity, first ladies have continued work involving the adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment and work as presidential advisors. Lady Bird Johnson, Rosalynn Carter and Betty Ford actively sought support from legislators and members of Congress to get the amendment ratified, and although the Equal Rights Amendment has not been ratified, their work remained important. Another form of continuity that transpired from these sixteen first ladies is their role as presidential confidant and advisor. In one way or another, each of these first ladies contributed advice to the president and helped with tasks of speech writing, campaigning or discussions. Though some of the first ladies were not recognized for these tasks, nearly each president utilized decisions

from the first ladies in some capacity. After all, the first lady is the person closest to the president.

Analyzing the consistency from one first lady to another, White House hostess obligations remains the one main facet of the first lady. State dinners have existed from Martha Washington to present day Michelle Obama. Many of the first ladies organized and oversaw the execution of each event, so if there is an “official” responsibility of the first lady, it comes in the capacity of the White House hostess. To add more events at the White house, holiday celebrations have become significant events the first lady oversees and hosts, including Christmas festivities, the Easter Egg Roll and the Thanksgiving Dinner.

In the continuance of work from first ladies over the years, preserving and restoring the White House is one project each has given some thought to. Dolley Madison became the first to furnish the White House, and after years of neglect, Mary Todd Lincoln redecorated the mansion from being dark and gloomily to bright and stately. Lou Hoover decorated rooms with souvenirs from her world travels and Bess Truman oversaw a major restoration project that preserved the White House with as many original pieces as possible. Jacqueline Kennedy turned the White House into a museum and Barbara Bush established the White House Foundation in keep funds available for the mansion. All of these aspects each of the first ladies took on has connected them to a continuous flow of support and appreciate for their predecessors.

Ranking first ladies has become a method in analyzing their influence and significance, mirroring the different rankings of presidents on their success. One ranking study conducted by the Siena Research Institute ranks and compares first ladies in 1982,

1993 and 2003 (see Table 1). Comparing the Siena Research Institute's rankings and this study, there is agreement in first lady influence. In 2003, the top 15 first ladies of the rankings match 12 first ladies included in this study; the top 20 of the same rankings match 14 first ladies, meaning virtually similar results in analyzing first lady significance. The only difference between the Siena Research Institute rankings and this study is Mary Todd Lincoln, who was ranked in the bottom three in all three years of sample rankings.

Appendix B of the Siena Research Institute's ranking of first ladies adds consistency with this study (see Table 2). This study analyzes ten aspects of first ladies including: background, intelligence, value to country, being their "own woman", integrity, accomplishments, courage, leadership, public image and value to the president. Nearly all of the top five ranked first ladies in each category are included in this study. The ten categories the Siena Research Institute used reflect similar values in this study and are inclusive with the difference aspects of what makes first ladies influential in history.

Another set of data comes from the Historians' Ranking of First Ladies, conducted in 2008 (see Table 3). The top 15 first ladies of the Historians' Rankings match 11 first ladies of this study, and the top 20 first ladies match 13 first ladies of this study. There is only a difference of four ladies that did not match to the Historians' Rankings and this study and again, Mary Todd Lincoln is ranked in the bottom three in the Historians' Rankings. It remains no surprise as to why Mary Todd Lincoln would be ranked so low. Lincoln became a liability for the president, acted irrationally and spent extravagantly as first lady. However, for this study, Mary Todd Lincoln validates that what she did as first lady became influential in her attempts to restore the prestige of the

presidency, but she still has an imbalanced and unstable memory in history because of the press and her erratic behaviors.

In looking further into the political roles first ladies have participated in, five first ladies have testified before the United States Congress. Of these five first ladies, three testified in Congress during their tenure as first lady: Eleanor Roosevelt in 1940 and 1942, discussing migration; Rosalynn Carter testified twice in 1979 over mental health and technology; Hillary Clinton appeared over three days in 1993, discussing health care reform. Three former first ladies testified in Congress: Betty Ford in 1991 and 1994 discussing alcoholism treatment in health care plans; Rosalynn Carter in 1991 and 1994, defending the Health Securities Act and welfare; and Nancy Reagan in 1995 testifying over drug control, abuse and trafficking (see Table 4). Roosevelt's, Carter's, Clinton's, Ford's and Reagan's testimonies in Congress exemplify the power each exuded in politics and used their influence as first (or former) lady in helping people through their causes of human rights, mental health, health care, addictions and drug abuse.

Conclusion

The importance of studying the first ladies adds to the better understanding of women's history, political history, and presidential history. There is no way to fully understand any presidential administration without studying the first lady. Not until recently have first ladies been analyzed; the literature on first ladies has been mostly anecdotal. In studying the transformation of how the Office of First Lady has developed and progressed leads more comprehensive understanding of United States history in general.

Almost everyone is conscious of whom the first lady is, but the scholarly study of first ladies and their roles is something of a recent development. Even up to the mid twentieth century, with the second wave of feminism, new expectations for first ladies emerge and again with the first ladies from the 1960s to current day, there is a steady increase of visibility and importance with the first lady. Most recently, with the third wave of feminism and the consciousness of women in power and equality, women like Hillary Clinton and her successors as first lady exude that individuality and career-mindedness of their own. More and more attention is paid to the first lady, and her causes and programs are up for analysis similar to presidential administrations analysis.

The first ladies since 2001, Laura Bush and Michelle Obama, have shown their influence in education and fitness, respectively. Laura Bush became an advocate for education during her tenure, promoting education and literacy, and traveled the United States and countries abroad as a presidential ambassador for George W. Bush.³ Michelle Obama continues promoting her cause of fitness and health, and advocates for healthy eating. First Lady Obama sponsors her “Let’s Move!” campaign which promotes improving children’s health.⁴ Since 2001, Laura Bush and Michelle Obama have become independent first ladies, much like Barbara Bush and Hillary Clinton, a new element for modern first ladies. Both Laura Bush and Michelle Obama have worked independently from the presidential administration agendas. Likewise, both Bush and Obama have continued to fulfill their duties as White House hostess and as presidential confidant.

With a rich history of established positions, duties and responsibilities, future first ladies will likely not deter from continued traditions set by the former first ladies and continue with traditions already made. Though not all first ladies have demonstrated

roles of influence, each in some way has added to this institution. Regardless of political preferences, these sixteen first ladies have created a vast significant presence in presidential administrations; these first ladies have created and developed a significant institution, created lasting legacies alongside the most powerful position in the government of the United States.

Table 1

The Ranking of U.S. First Ladies by Siena Research Institute

Rank	2003	1993	1982 ²
1	Eleanor Roosevelt ¹	Eleanor Roosevelt	Eleanor Roosevelt
2	Abigail Adams	Hillary Rodham Clinton	Abigail Adams
3	Dolley Madison	Abigail Adams	Lady Bird Johnson
4	Jacqueline Kennedy	Dolley Madison	Dolley Madison
5	Hillary Rodham Clinton	Rosalynn Carter	Rosalynn Carter
6	Rosalynn Carter	Lady Bird Johnson	<i>Betty Ford</i>
7	Lady Bird Johnson	Jacqueline Kennedy	<i>Edith Wilson</i>
8	<i>Betty Ford</i>	<i>Barbara Bush</i>	Jacqueline Kennedy
9	<i>Edith Roosevelt</i>	<i>Betty Ford</i>	Martha Washington
10	Sarah Polk	<i>Edith Wilson</i>	<i>Edith Roosevelt</i>
11	<i>Edith Wilson</i>	Bess Truman	<i>Lou Hoover</i>
12	Louisa Adams	Martha Washington	Lucy Hayes
13	Martha Washington	<i>Lou Hoover</i>	Frances Cleveland
14	Lucy Hayes	<i>Edith Roosevelt</i>	Louisa Adams
15	<i>Barbara Bush</i>	Lucy Hayes	Bess Truman
16	<i>Lou Hoover</i>	Louisa Adams	Ellen Wilson
17	<i>Grace Coolidge</i>	<i>Mamie Eisenhower</i>	<i>Grace Coolidge</i>
18	Julia Grant	<i>Pat Nixon</i>	Martha Jefferson Randolph*
19	Ellen Wilson	<i>Grace Coolidge</i>	<i>Helen Taft</i>
20	Bess Truman	Sarah Polk	Julia Grant
21	<i>Helen Taft</i>	Ellen Wilson	Eliza Johnson
22	Eliza Johnson	Frances Cleveland	Sarah Polk
23	Frances Cleveland	Elizabeth Monroe	Anna Harrison*
24	<i>Laura Welch Bush</i>	Eliza Johnson	Elizabeth Monroe
25	Caroline Harrison	<i>Helen Taft</i>	Mary Arthur McElroy*

26	Julia Tyler	Julia Grant	Emily Donelson*
27	<i>Mamie Eisenhower</i>	Julia Tyler	Julia Tyler
28	<i>Nancy Reagan</i>	Lucretia Garfield	Abigail Fillmore
29	Abigail Fillmore	Caroline Harrison	Harriet Lane*
30	Lucretia Garfield	Letitia Tyler	Lucretia Garfield
31	Elizabeth Monroe	Abigail Fillmore	Mamie Eisenhower
32	<i>Ida McKinley</i>	<i>Ida McKinley</i>	Martha Patterson*
33	<i>Pat Nixon</i>	Margaret Taylor	Margaret Taylor
34	Letitia Tyler	Jane Pierce	Carolina Harrison
35	Margaret Taylor	<i>Florence Harding</i>	Letitia Tyler
36	Mary Lincoln	<i>Nancy Reagan</i>	Angelia Van Buren*
37	<i>Florence Harding</i>	Mary Lincoln	<i>Pat Nixon</i>
38	Jane Pierce		Jane Pierce
39			<i>Nancy Reagan</i>
40			<i>Ida McKinley</i>
41			<i>Florence Harding</i>
42			Mary Lincoln

Source: Siena Research Institute. "Ranking the First Ladies." Siena College, Loudonville, New York. December 18, 2008.

1. Twentieth-century **Democrats** in bold, *Republicans* in italics.
2. The 1982 survey lists 42 women, including six who were not spouses but rather a niece, sister, or daughter fulfilling the role of first lady and a seventh, Anna Harrison, whose husband died a month after becoming president. Using feedback from the first survey, the survey directors decided this information made the survey confusing, so they decided to include only actual spouses of presidents and to exclude Mrs. Harrison, who did not have the opportunity to fulfill the role.

Table 2

America's First Ladies: The 2008 Poll, The First and Last in...
(from Appendix B of the Siena Research Institute study)

Background

- 1 Eleanor Roosevelt
 - 2 Jackie Kennedy
 - 3 Abigail Adams
 - 4 Hillary Clinton
 - 5 Lady Bird Johnson
- Last: Eliza Johnson

Intelligence

- 1 Eleanor Roosevelt
 - 2 Abigail Adams
 - 3 Hillary Clinton
 - 4 Jackie Kennedy
 - 5 Lady Bird Johnson
- Last: Florence Harding

Value to Country

- 1 Eleanor Roosevelt
 - 2 Jackie Kennedy
 - 3 Abigail Adams
 - 4 Dolly Madison
 - 5 Lady Bird Johnson
- Last: Mary Lincoln

"Own Woman"

- 1 Eleanor Roosevelt
 - 2 Hillary Clinton
 - 3 Abigail Adams
 - 4 Jackie Kennedy
 - 5 Betty Ford
- Last: Laura Bush

Integrity

- 1 Eleanor Roosevelt
 - 2 Abigail Adams
 - 3 Rosalynn Carter
 - 4 Jackie Kennedy
 - 5 Lady Bird Johnson
- Last: Nancy Reagan

Accomplishments

- 1 Eleanor Roosevelt
 - 2 Hillary Clinton
 - 3 Abigail Adams
 - 4 Lady Bird Johnson
 - 5 Jackie Kennedy
- Last: Mary Lincoln

Courage

- 1 Eleanor Roosevelt
 - 2 Jackie Kennedy
 - 3 Abigail Adams
 - 4 Hillary Clinton
 - 5 Betty Ford
- Last: Laura Bush

Leadership

- 1 Eleanor Roosevelt
 - 2 Abigail Adams
 - 3 Hillary Clinton
 - 4 Jackie Kennedy
 - 5 Lady Bird Johnson
- Last: Mary Lincoln

Public Image

- 1 Jackie Kennedy
 - 2 Eleanor Roosevelt
 - 3 Martha Washington
 - 4 Abigail Adams
 - 5 Dolly Madison
- Last: Mary Lincoln

Value to the President

- 1 Eleanor Roosevelt
 - 2 Abigail Adams
 - 3 Jackie Kennedy
 - 4 Nancy Reagan
 - 5 Hillary Clinton
- Last: Jane Pierce

Source: Siena Research Institute. "Ranking the First Ladies." Siena College, Loudonville, New York. December 18, 2008.

Table 3

Historians' Ranking of First Ladies in 2008

First Lady Rank	President's Rank	Name
1	1	Eleanor Roosevelt
2	12	Abigail Adams
3	14	Jackie Kennedy
4	18	Hillary Clinton
5	15	Lady Bird Johnson
6	9	Dolley Madison
7	28	Betty Ford
8	25	Rosalynn Carter
9	4	Martha Washington
10	6	Edith Wilson
11	3	Edith Roosevelt
12	22	Barbara Bush
13	6	Ellen Wilson
14	31	Lou Hoover
15	16	Nancy Reagan
16	7	Bess Truman
17	29	Grace Coolidge
18	27	Lucy Hayes
19	10	Mamie Eisenhower
20	20	Frances Cleveland
21	17	Louisa Adams
22	21	Helen Taft
23	23	Laura Bush
24	35	Julia Grant
25	26	Pat Nixon
26	11	Sarah Polk
27	33	Lucretia Garfield
28	37	Julia Tyler
29	8	Elizabeth Monroe
30	32	Caroline Harrison
31	19	Ida McKinley
32	38	Abigail Fillmore
33	42	Eliza Johnson
34	34	Margaret Taylor
35	37	Letitia Tyler
36	2	Mary Lincoln
37	40	Florence Harding
38	39	Jane Pierce

Source: Carol Boyd Caroli. *First Ladies: from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama*. Rev. and updated ed. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, USA, 2010, 418.

Omitted from this list are presidents who served without a First Lady: widowers Jefferson, Jackson, Van Buren, and Arthur; bachelor Buchanan. Woodrow Wilson's first wife, Ellen, died in 1914 and he married Edith in 1915. John Tyler's first wife, Letitia, died in 1842 and he married Julia in 1844. William Henry Harrison's wife had not yet arrived in the capital city when her husband died so she is omitted from the rankings.

Table 4

First Ladies Who Have Testified before Congress

First Ladies who have Testified before Congress, During their Tenure

Name	Date	Committee	Subject
Eleanor Roosevelt	12/10/40	House Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute	Interstate migration
Eleanor Roosevelt	1/14/42	House Select Committee Investigation Defense Migration	National defense migration
Rosalynn Carter	2/7/79	Senate Labor & Human Relations	Reappraisal of mental health
Rosalynn Carter	4/30/79	House Science & Technology	Technology
Hillary Clinton	9/28/93	House Ways & Means	Health care reform
Hillary Clinton	9/28/93	House Energy and Commerce	Health care reform
Hillary Clinton	9/29/93	Senate Labor & Human Resources	Health care reform
Hillary Clinton	9/29/93	House Education and Labor	Health care reform
Hillary Clinton	9/30/93	Senate Finance	Health care reform

Former First Ladies who have Testified before Congress

Betty Ford	3/25/91	House Select on Aging	Alcoholism treatment coverage under health care plans
Betty Ford	3/8/94	Senate Labor & Human Relations	Health Securities Act
Rosalynn Carter	5/14-16,21/91	House Appropriations	Health and welfare
Rosalynn Carter	3/8/94	Senate Labor & Human Resources	Health Securities Act
Nancy Reagan	3/9/95	House Government Reform and Oversight	Drug control, drug abuse, drug trafficking

Source: Robert P. Watson and Anthony J. Eksterowicz, eds. *The Presidential Companion: Readings On the First Ladies*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003, 186.

LIST OF FIGURES
Portraits of Sixteen First Ladies of the United States



Figure 1

Martha Washington, 1789-1797. Lady Washington established many traditions of the first lady which became vital in setting the tone for future first ladies and the executive.



Figure 2

Dolley Madison, 1809-1817. Madison became one of Washington's most influential people and as first lady, decorated, preserved, and hosted many functions at the Executive Mansion.



Figure 3

Sarah Polk, 1845-1849. Enduring criticism for her dull entertainment and parties, Polk proved to be a strong and important presidential advisor.



Figure 4

Mary Todd Lincoln, 1861-1865. Lincoln became a target of criticism over spending and outbursts, but worked meticulously to hold the prestige of the presidency high.



Figure 5

Lucy Hayes, 1877-1881. Hayes took blame for removing alcohol from the White House; however, being educated gave her powerful influence during her day and demonstrated first ladies becoming examples for women of the country.



Figure 6

Edith Wilson, 1914-1921. Wilson showed strong qualities as the first lady, both in setting an example during war times and becoming a stewardess over President Wilson.

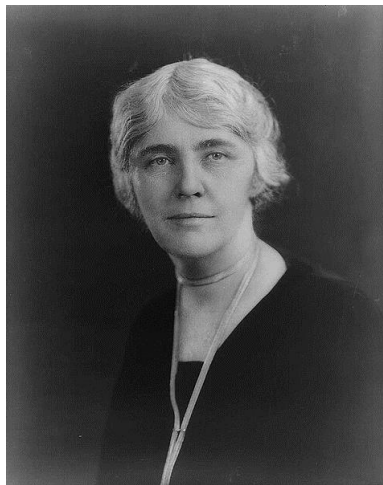


Figure 7

Lou Hoover, 1929-1933. Hoover became the first to establish sponsorship of programs, as she promoted volunteerism and the Girl Scouts, and broadcasted her messages for all to hear through the radio.



Figure 8

Eleanor Roosevelt, 1933-1945. Roosevelt dramatically changed the role of first lady from hostess to presidential companion and brought energy, importance and influence to this unique position.



Figure 9

Bess Truman, 1945-1953. Loving her independence, Truman became an example of a presidential companion and individuality in her White House tenure.

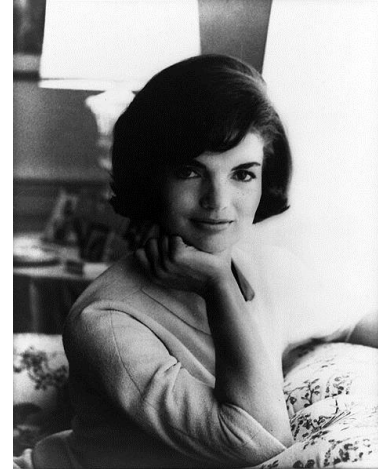


Figure 10

Jacqueline Kennedy, 1961-1963. Kennedy's work for preserving and establishing the White House as a national museum became a lasting project, along with bringing a new air to the presidency.



Figure 11

Lady Bird Johnson, 1963-1969. Wanting to clean-up the country, Lady Bird Johnson became instrumental in her work for the Beautification Act.



Figure 12

Betty Ford, 1974-1977. Ford's openness and honesty raised consciousness on social, substance abuse and women's health issues.



Figure 13

Rosalynn Carter, 1977-1981. An example of a political companionship, Carter played a significant role in the White House and to the president as his personal emissary.



Figure 14

Nancy Reagan, 1981-1989. The “Just Say No” drug campaign raised awareness in the country, and Reagan became powerful as the protector of the president.



Figure 15

Barbara Bush, 1989-1993. Bush promoted education and worked to raise literacy among the people in the country, helping the country become more knowledgeable.

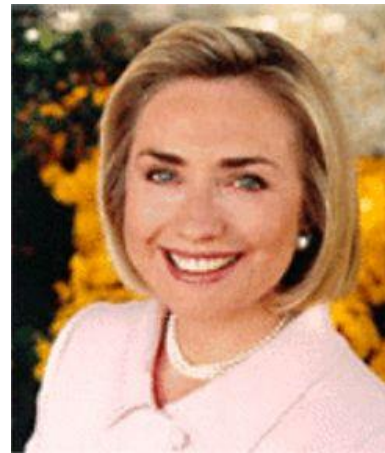


Figure 16

Hillary Clinton, 1993-2001. Like Eleanor Roosevelt, Clinton transformed the role of first lady, showing dominance in the White House, working closely with the president.

Sources: Portraits of Washington, Madison, Hoover, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Ford, Carter, Reagan and Bush found in Dorothy Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, *First Ladies: A Biographical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., Facts of File Library of American History (New York: Facts On File, 2010). Portraits of Polk, Lincoln, Hayes, Wilson, Truman, Johnson and Clinton found in Margaret Brown Klaphor, *The First Ladies*, 9th ed. (Washington, D.C.: White House Historical Association, 1999).

Appendix 1

List of First Ladies of the United States

Name	Presidency	Years as First Lady	Birth/Death Year
Martha Washington	George Washington	1789-1797	1731-1802
Abigail Adams	John Adams	1797-1801	1744-1818
Martha Jefferson*	Thomas Jefferson	N/A	1748-1782
Dolley Madison	James Madison	1809-1817	1768-1830
Elizabeth Monroe	James Monroe	1817-1825	1768-1830
Louisa Adams	John Quincy Adams	1825-1829	1775-1852
Rachel Jackson*	Andrew Jackson	N/A	1767-1828
Hannah Van Buren*	Martin Van Buren	N/A	1783-1819
Anna Harrison	William H. Harrison	1841	1775-1864
Letitia Tyler**	John Tyler	1841-1842	1790-1842
Julia Tyler***		1842-1845	1820-1889
Sarah Polk	James K. Polk	1845-1849	1803-1891
Margaret Taylor	Zachary Taylor	1849-1850	1788-1852
Abigail Fillmore	Millard Fillmore	1850-1853	1798-1853
Jane Pierce	Franklin Pierce	1853-1857	1806-1863
Buchanan Presidency***			
Mary Todd Lincoln	Abraham Lincoln	1861-1865	1818-1882
Eliza Johnson	Andrew Johnson	1865-1869	1810-1876
Julia Grant	Ulysses S. Grant	1869-1877	1810-1876
Lucy Hayes	Rutherford B. Hayes	1877-1881	1831-1889
Lucretia Garfield	James Garfield	1881	1832-1918
Ellen Arthur*	Chester A. Arthur	N/A	1837-1880
Frances Cleveland	Grover Cleveland	1885-1889/ 1893-1897	1864-1947
Caroline Harrison**	Benjamin H. Harrison	1889-1892	1832-1892
Ida McKinley	William McKinley	1897-1901	1841-1907

Edith Roosevelt	Theodore Roosevelt	1901-1909	1861-1948
Helen Taft	William Howard Taft	1909-1913	18681-1943
Ellen Wilson**	Woodrow Wilson	1913-1914	1860-1914
Edith Wilson***		1914-1921	1872-1961
Florence Harding	Warren G. Harding	1921-1923	1868-1924
Grace Coolidge	Calvin Coolidge	1923-1929	1879-1957
Lou Hoover	Herbert Hoover	1929-1933	1874-1944
Eleanor Roosevelt	Franklin D. Roosevelt	1933-1945	1884-1962
Bess Truman	Harry Truman	1945-1953	1885-1982
Mamie Eisenhower	Dwight D. Eisenhower	1953-1961	1896-1979
Jacqueline Kennedy	John F. Kennedy	1961-1963	1929-1994
Lady Bird Johnson	Lyndon B. Johnson	1963-1969	1912-2007
Pat Nixon	Richard Nixon	1969-1974	1912-1993
Betty Ford	Gerald Ford	1974-1977	1918-2011
Rosalynn Carter	Jimmy Carter	1977-1981	1927-
Nancy Reagan	Ronald Reagan	1981-1989	1921-
Barbara Bush	George H.W. Bush	1989-1993	1925-
Hillary Clinton	Bill Clinton	1993-2001	1947-
Laura Bush	George W. Bush	2001-2009	1946-
Michelle Obama	Barack Obama	2009-	1964-

Those First Ladies that names are in bold are those noted in this study.

* indicates president's wives who died before becoming First Lady.

** indicates those First Ladies who died while as First Lady.

*** indicates those First Ladies who married to the current president.

**** indicates President James Buchanan, the only president to never marry, however, Harriet Lane, his niece, would act as the White House Hostess for official functions.

Notes

Chapter 1

¹ Bill Harris, *The First Ladies Fact Book: the Childhoods, Courtships, Marriages, Campaigns, Accomplishments, and Legacies of Every First Lady from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2009), 617.

² For this study, the formal and popularly known names at this time in history are used, instead of their actual names, as some have extended names such as Martha Dandridge Custis Washington, and others went by middle names like Anna Eleanor Roosevelt and Eleanor Rosalynn Carter.

³ Robert P. Watson and Anthony J. Eksterowicz, eds., *The Presidential Companion: Readings On the First Ladies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 158.

⁴ Paul F. Boller and Jr, *Presidential Wives*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999), v.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ There is a debate on whether or not Rachel Donelson was divorced from Lewis Robards when she married Andrew Jackson. When she learned of this, she sought a final and legal divorce from Robards, and then remarried Jackson in 1794. See Patricia Brady, *A Being So Gentle: The Frontier Love Story of Rachel and Andrew Jackson* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 52, 55-57.

⁷ Ibid., v-vi.

⁸ Ibid., vi.

⁹ Betty Boyd Caroli, *First Ladies: from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama*, Rev. and updated ed. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2010), 301, 350.

¹⁰ See Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Presidents Club: Inside the World's Most Exclusive Fraternity* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013). Gibbs and Duffy argue for the president's fraternity, a rare group developed in the Eisenhower presidency, among Harry Truman and Herbert Hoover, which serves to offer support for the current and former presidents.

¹¹ "Remarks by Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter at the Funeral of Betty Ford," The Carter Center, July 19, 2013, accessed July 19, 2014, http://www.cartercenter.org/news/editorials_speeches/rc-remarks-betty-ford-funeral.html.

¹² Johannes Morsink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent (Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), viii, 5-4.

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¹ Robert P. Watson, *The Presidents' Wives: Reassessing the Office of First Lady* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 19.

² Paul F. Boller and Jr, *Presidential Wives*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999), v.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Betty Boyd Caroli, *First Ladies: from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama*, Rev. and updated ed. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2010), 335.

⁵ Robert P. Watson and Anthony J. Eksterowicz, eds., *The Presidential Companion: Readings On the First Ladies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), vii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 289.

¹¹ John B. Roberts, *Rating the First Ladies: the Women Who Influenced the Presidency*, Updated ed. (New York: Citadel, 2004), xxiii.

¹² Carol Berkin, "America's First Ladies," Gilder Lehrman Institute of History, History Now: American History Online, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-now/2013-03/america%E2%80%99s-first-ladies> (accessed March 22, 2014).

¹³ Betty Boyd Caroli, "First Ladies' Contribution to Political Issues and the National Welfare," Gilder Lehrman Institute of History, History Now: American History Online, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-now/essays/first-ladies%E2%80%99-contributions-political-issues-and-national-welfare> (accessed March 25, 2014).

¹⁴ Patricia Brady, "Martha Washington Creates the Role of First Lady," Gilder Lehrman Institute of History, History Now: American History Online,

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/early-republic/essays/martha-washington-creates-role-first-lady> (accessed March 27, 2014).

¹⁵ Catherine Allgor, “Dolley Madison: First Lady and Queen,” Gilder Lehrman Institute of History, History Now: American History Online, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/age-jefferson-and-madison/essays/dolley-madison-first-lady-and-%E2%80%9Cqueen%E2%80%9D> (accessed March 26, 2014).

¹⁶ Maurine Beasley, “Eleanor Roosevelt as First Lady,” Gilder Lehrman Institute of History, History Now: American History Online, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/new-deal/essays/eleanor-roosevelt-first-lady> (accessed March 29, 2014).

¹⁷ Gil Troy, “Betty Ford: A New Kind of First Lady,” Gilder Lehrman Institute of History, History Now: American History Online, https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/seventies/essays/betty-ford-new-kind-first-lady#_edn4 (accessed March 30, 2014).

¹⁸ Mary Anne Borrelli, “The First Lady as Formal Advisor to the President: When East (Wing) Meets West (Wing),” *Women and Politics* 24, no. 1 (2002): 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, abstract, 25.

²⁰ Anthony J. Eksterowicz and Robert N. Roberts, “First Ladies: Constitutional and Job Description Problems?” (conference Papers - American Political Science Association, Boston, Massachusetts, 2002 Annual Meeting), 412.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 429.

²² Gary D. Wekkin, “Being First Lady in the Plural Presidency: Rules of the Game” (conference Papers - American Political Science Association, Boston, Massachusetts, August 29, 2002), 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴ Hannah G. Holden “The Ring of Power: A Typology of American First Ladies” (conference Papers - American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2006 Annual Meeting), 17, 21, 25, 28.

²⁵ Shaelyn M. McClanahan, Courtney M. Page, and Laurelin M. Weiss, “First Ladies of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: An Evolution of the Role” (conference Papers - Midwestern Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, 2008 Annual Meeting), 6, 7, 10

²⁶ Margaret Truman, *First Ladies: an Intimate Group Portrait of White House Wives* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 30, 321.

²⁷ See Margaret Brown Klapthor, *The First Ladies*, 9th ed. (Washington, D.C.: White House Historical Association, 1999).

²⁸ Rae Lindsay, *America's First Ladies: Power Players from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* (Warwick, New York: Gilmour House/R & R Writers/Agents, Inc., 2009), vii-viii.

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¹ Robert P. Watson, *The Presidents' Wives: The Office of the First Lady in US Politics*, second ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2014), 43.

² Robert P. Watson and Anthony J. Eksterowicz, eds., *The Presidential Companion: Readings On the First Ladies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 10.

³ Feather Schwartz Foster, *The First Ladies: from Martha Washington to Mamie Eisenhower, an Intimate Portrait of the Women Who Shaped America* (Naperville, Illinois: Cumberland House, 2011), 3.

⁴ Bill Harris, *The First Ladies Fact Book: the Childhoods, Courtships, Marriages, Campaigns, Accomplishments, and Legacies of Every First Lady from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2009), 1-2.

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⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Patricia Brady, *Martha Washington: An American Life* (New York: Viking, 2005), 114.

⁹ John B. Roberts, *Rating the First Ladies: the Women Who Influenced the Presidency*, Updated ed. (New York: Citadel, 2004), 8.

¹⁰ Paul F. Boller Jr, *Presidential Wives*, 2nd, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999), 6.

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¹² Patricia Brady, *Martha Washington: An American Life* (New York: Viking, 2005), 168-169.

¹³ Margaret Brown Klapthor, *The First Ladies*, 9th ed. (Washington, D.C.: White House Historical Association, 1999), 8.

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²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

²³ Feather Schwartz Foster, *The First Ladies: from Martha Washington to Mamie Eisenhower, an Intimate Portrait of the Women Who Shaped America* (Naperville, Illinois: Cumberland House, 2011), 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

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²⁶ Catherine Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007), 18.

²⁷ Bill Harris, *The First Ladies Fact Book: the Childhoods, Courtships, Marriages, Campaigns, Accomplishments, and Legacies of Every First Lady from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2009), 63.

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²⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁰ Ibid., 59.

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⁴⁰ Rae Lindsay, *America's First Ladies: Power Players from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* (Warwick, New York: Gilmour House/R & R Writers/Agents, Inc., 2009), 31.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Catherine Allgor, *Political Parties*, in Robert P. Watson and Anthony J. Eksterowicz, eds., *The Presidential Companion: Readings On the First Ladies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 48.

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⁴⁴ Ibid.

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⁴⁶ Feather Schwartz Foster, *The First Ladies: from Martha Washington to Mamie Eisenhower, an Intimate Portrait of the Women Who Shaped America* (Naperville, Illinois: Cumberland House, 2011), 43.

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⁴⁹ Ibid., 174.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 173, 175.

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⁵⁴ Walter R. Borneman, *Polk: the Man Who Transformed the Presidency and America* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2009), 8.

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⁵⁷ Ibid., 88.

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⁵⁹ Anson and Fanny Nelson, *Memorials of Sarah Childress Polk* (New York, 1892), 110.

⁶⁰ Paul F. Boller Jr, *Presidential Wives*, 2nd, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999), 94.

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⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁷² Catherine Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln: A Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: a Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 198.

⁷⁵ Mrs. President Lincoln is the name she and others chose for her title, and this is what she was officially known by. At this time, “First Lady” had not really been established, so the nomenclature had yet to be determined for the president’s wife and constantly changing from first lady to first lady.

⁷⁶ G. J. Barker-Benfield and Catherine Clinton, *Portraits of American Women: from Settlement to the Present*, 2nd ed., ed. G.J. Barker-Benfield (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1998), 249.

⁷⁷ *Lincoln Lore*. January 1975, 1-4.

⁷⁸ Margaret Truman, *First Ladies: an Intimate Group Portrait of White House Wives* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 222-223.

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⁸⁰ Jason Emerson, "Mary Todd Lincoln," *New York Times*, December 13, 2010.

⁸¹ John B. Roberts, *Rating the First Ladies: the Women Who Influenced the Presidency*, Updated ed. (New York: Citadel, 2004), 110.

⁸² Ishbel Ross, *The President's Wife: Mary Todd Lincoln: a Biography*, 1ST ed. (New York: Putnam, 1973), 108-109.

⁸³ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: the Civil War Era (Oxford History of the United States)* (Philadelphia: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), 596. Clement Vallandigham was a former Congressman and political agitator during the Civil War. Vallandigham had objected President Lincoln and his suspension of *habeas corpus* and other civil rights, and in turn, President Lincoln had him arrested for his seditious actions during the Civil War.

⁸⁴ Ruth Painter Randall and Mary Lincoln, *Mary Lincoln: Biography of a Marriage* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), 308.

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⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁸⁸ Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: a Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 219, 222.

⁸⁹ Margaret Brown Klapthor, *The First Ladies*, 9th ed. (Washington, D.C.: White House Historical Association, 1999), 40

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⁹³ Catherine Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln: A Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 4.

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⁹⁵ Catherine Clinton, “The Compelling Mrs. Lincoln,” found in Frank J. Williams and Michael Burkholder, eds., *The Mary Lincoln Enigma: Historians On America's Most Controversial First Lady* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), 355

⁹⁶ See Mark E. Neely and R. Gerald McMurtry, *The Insanity File: The Case of Mary Todd Lincoln* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, foreword, ix. Along with Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith hoping that handing over the “MTL Insanity File” would help explain Mary Todd Lincoln’s illness and that history would treat her kindly, he also hopes that the files would show his grandfather, Robert Todd Lincoln “acted in the best possible way towards his mother.”

⁹⁸ Feather Schwartz Foster, *The First Ladies: from Martha Washington to Mamie Eisenhower, an Intimate Portrait of the Women Who Shaped America* (Naperville, Ill.: Cumberland House, 2011), 70.

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¹⁰² Paul F. Boller Jr, *Presidential Wives*, 2nd, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999), 147.

¹⁰³ Charles Richard Williams, *The Life of Rutherford Birchard Hayes* (Columbus, Ohio, 1928) II: 299.

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¹¹² James S. McCallops, *Edith Bolling Galt Wilson: the Unintended President* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2011), page 13.

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¹¹⁶ James S. McCallops, *Edith Bolling Galt Wilson: the Unintended President* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2011), 29.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

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¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Kristie Miller, *Ellen and Edith: Woodrow Wilson's First Ladies* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 151, 155.

¹²¹ John B. Roberts, *Rating the First Ladies: the Women Who Influenced the Presidency*, Updated ed. (New York: Citadel, 2004), 202.

¹²² James S. McCallops, *Edith Bolling Galt Wilson: the Unintended President* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2011), 40.

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¹²⁴ John B. Roberts, *Rating the First Ladies: the Women Who Influenced the Presidency*, Updated ed. (New York: Citadel, 2004), 204.

¹²⁵ Edith Bolling Galt Wilson, *My Memoir*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1939), 289.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 289-290.

¹²⁷ Rae Lindsay, *America's First Ladies: Power Players from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* (Warwick, New York: Gilmour House/R & R Writers/Agents, Inc., 2009), 201.

¹²⁸ Edith Bolling Galt Wilson, *My Memoir*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1939), 290.

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¹³⁰ Alden Hatch, *Edith Bolling Wilson, First Lady Extraordinary* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1961), page 219 and Bess Furman, *White House Profile: a Social History of the White House, Its Occupants and Its Festivities* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010), 299.

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¹⁴⁰ Nancy Beck Young, *Lou Henry Hoover: Activist First Lady* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 112.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

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¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁵⁰ Betty Boyd Caroli, *First Ladies: from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama*, Rev. and updated ed. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2010), 185.

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Chapter 6

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