First Ladies of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: An Evolution of the Role

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It is often noted as one of the more powerful positions in the executive branch in American politics and stands as an unofficial and un-elected position acquired by circumstance. The unique position of First Lady has led several authors to examine the role and influence that first ladies possess during their husband's tenure as President of the United States. This piece examines the First Ladies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, assigning each first lady to an original typology. The piece then assesses the involvement of each First Lady according to their activity within the White House, in domestic issues, and in international affairs. Finally, this piece ends with a discussion of the trends that have emerged over the course of twentieth and twenty-first centuries, evaluates the role as it has evolved in our society, and discusses the potential of the role of First Lady in future presidencies.

INTRODUCTION

It is a position that can only be gained through circumstance and there are no clearly delineated responsibilities or duties. Although, precedent and a changing world has revolutionized the role and given unlimited possibilities for those that occupy this position. The position of the United States First Lady has given several women the platform to raise national awareness to issues, such as the war on drugs, breast cancer, education, literacy, and human rights. Some first ladies have taken the potential of the position to reach out internationally and advocate for the rights of women and children, lobby nations for education reform, and respond to belligerent international actors.

Each first lady is unique and has advocated issues of importance to their time. This study examines the involvement of twentieth and twenty-first century first ladies following suffrage, identifying trends observed throughout the first ladies' tenures and the examining evolution of the role throughout the decades. This study provides an original typology to represent the different and evolving roles of the first ladies. This piece concludes with observed trends over time and exploring the potential of the position in the future presidencies.

PREVIOUS ASSESSMENTS OF THE FIRST LADY

Several authors have provided detailed historical accounts of the activities of the first ladies, commenting on their communication abilities and their individual nuances while serving the country as first lady. Some studies have given historical accounts of the first ladies according to the era they were apart of such as: The Federal Era, The National Period, The Antebellum, The Mid-Victorian Age, The Gilded Age, The Gay Nineties, The Progressive Era, The Great War, The Jazz Age, The Great Depression and World II, and The Atomic Age and Fabulous Fifties. (Anthony 1990a) Other studies have sight out a more simple division of the first ladies such as:

The New Nation 1775-1830, Growing Pains, Slavery, and the Civil War, 18-1865, The Post Civil War Era: The Age of Reform and World War I, 1865-1920, Modern Times, 1920 to Present. (Mayo 1996) Some authors have given the accounts of first ladies according to the chronology of their service to country. (Wertheimer 2004a; Wertheimer 2005b; Harris 2005) However, some researchers have sought out methods of highlighting the more influential first ladies of the twentieth century and omitting the others (Anthony 2003b).

In a study conducted by Siena Research Institute, first ladies were rated according to their intelligence, background for the job, value to the country, value to the presidency, the extent to which she was her own woman, integrity, accomplishments, leadership, courage, and public image. (Roberts II 2003) One author sought to define the precedents set by first ladies, precedents broken, and the further refinement of the role according to each first lady. (Caroli 2003) Finally, in Myra Gutin's *The President's Partner,* Gutin provides a systematic evaluation of twelve first ladies proceeding suffrage. Author Myra Gutin offers three categories to her typology in *The President's Partner: The First Lady of the Twentieth Century.* Gutin defines the first category as the *White Housekeepers,* describing the first ladies that served as the White House hostess, having minimal interaction with the Press and refusing to express their opinions to the general public. The second category, *The Emerging Spokeswoman,* describing the first ladies that attended to the hostess role of the first lady and additionally, having an open relationship with the press and frequent interaction to discuss projects. These first ladies are described as seeing their engagement with the general public as a necessity. Finally, the third category, *Political Surrogate and Independent Advocate,* explains the first ladies that attended to the hostess role and engaged with the general public through the Press, but additionally,

expressed their strong opinions on the president's policies and issues that were emergent at the time and spent time overseas engaged in foreign policy matters (Gutin, 1989).

This study falls at a time where the most recent studies have looked at the first ladies on an individual basis or have categorized first ladies according to the era. Gutin's has provided a vital tool in assessing the first ladies according to their different roles, yet this typology has become outdated since its publication. As the world has changed so has the role of the first lady and this study will seek address the changed nature of the role and create a typology that applies to twentieth and twenty-first first ladies according to their activity and subsequent influence.

METHOD

This study will assess first ladies in the twentieth and twenty-first century following women's suffrage in 1920. Just as Gutin, this study considers the women's suffrage as a turning point in American history. Suffrage influenced several social changes and provided credibility to the notion that women could gain a role in politics, as millions gained their right to vote (Gutin, 4). The findings were gained through examination of literature speaking to the role of first lady, biographical accounts of first ladies for a first-hand account of their contributions and activities, and news articles that speak to the influence and role of the first lady. Additionally, the findings of this study will be purely normative. As the office of the first lady has evolved significantly into the twenty-first century, it has sometimes lacked a high standard of accountability and significant documentation for researchers to examine.

The Gutin typology has provided the clearest and most concise typology of twentieth and twenty-first century first ladies in recent first lady literature. While this typology served as the inspiration for this study, further research made it apparent that a typology modification was not sufficient to encompass the expansion and evolution of the role of first lady. Thus, the

development of a new typology emerged. There are a number of important differences when comparing this new typology to Gutin's. Gutin's research only extended to 1989, therefore the research was broadened to encompass the most recent occupants of the role. The expansion and evolution of the role in the last fifteen years, particularly the first lady's role in international and global affairs, has led to a reevaluation of Gutin's emphasis on interaction with the media as the sole measure for division into each category. The new typology will focus on political activity through consideration of multiple factors. These factors include: hostess duties inherent to the role, public speaking, advocating domestically, and advocating internationally.

The typology used in this study features three categories. The *Ceremonial Role* is occupied by first ladies whose role was limited to performing traditional hostess and homemaker duties customary of early twentieth century women. The *Domestic Advocate* includes first ladies who pioneered and advocated new endeavors outside of the ceremonial role on a national level. It seeks out first ladies who had a national presence in some capacity and asserted their personal preference with the issues advocated. The *Universal Actor*, describes the first lady who has followed the natural progression from White House hostess to domestic advocate and has taken up various causes on an international level. In addition to promoting her own agenda abroad, she occasionally acts as political surrogate to the president.

This study will focus on the first ladies from 1921 to 2008, assigning a category to each according to their role under normal circumstances. This study will provide a detailed account of the activity of first ladies relevant to their category. Finally, this study will conclude with the trends observed in study and areas for future research.

FIRST LADY TYPOLOGY

CEREMONIAL ROLE

The hostess duties in this role consisted of activities, such as planning and presiding over White House events, entertaining foreign dignitaries, and interior upkeep, as well as redecoration of the White House. The homemaker aspect of this role was evidence by these first ladies reluctance to involve themselves outside of the home. They believed it was their duty to allow the president alone to run the country. The first ladies who typify this role are Grace Coolidge, Bess Truman, Mamie Eisenhower, and Jackie Kennedy.

GRACE ANNA GOODHUE COOLIDGE

Grace Coolidge (1923-1929), similar to Mamie, used her afternoons to schedule meetings and invite numerous people to the White House on a weekly basis. The Coolidges entertained more than any previous presidency (Roberts II, 223). In addition to entertaining, Grace undertook numerous redecorating projects that included both the family quarters and historic state rooms (Anthony 1990, 418). Grace had absolutely no access to presidential decision making, realizing that she did not have the power to persuade the President to adopt a particular course of action or enact specific legislation. She acknowledged, "If I had manifested any particular interest in a political matter, I feel sure I should have been properly put in my place" (Gutin, 18).

ELIZABETH VIRGINIA WALLACE TRUMAN

Bess Truman (1945-1953) directly followed the legacy of First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. Roosevelt had set a high precedent for subsequent first ladies, but shy and silent First Lady Truman resigned herself to the social demands of the role and spent the other significant portion of her time as First Lady in Independence, Missouri, her childhood residence. She refused to

adopt a cause as many first ladies had done and emphasized her role as hostess, only making herself available to women's groups per request. (Anthony 1990, 531)

MAMIE GENEVA DOUD EISENHOWER

Mamie Eisenhower (1953-1961) epitomized this view of the role when she said, "Ike took care of the office. I ran the house" (German, 232). She spent most of her time serving as a hostess and in the two terms that her husband was in office, the Eisenhowers set records for entertaining, handling seventy official state visits. Many days, Mamie would spend her mornings coordinating the scheduling of events and reviewing invitations and menus (Roberts II, 272).

JACQUELINE LEE BOUVIER KENNEDY

Jackie Kennedy (1961-1963) was the first "television" first lady, and the first to appoint a press secretary for herself (Berger, 44). However, she appointed a press secretary strictly in an effort to avoid the press (Gutin, 71). Evading the press was said to result from her shy personality and desire to protect her privacy and that of her family. Her public speaking was relegated to extemporaneous, ceremonial speeches. (Berger, 45) She often neglected her ceremonial duties by refusing to attend political functions; however she did stage elaborate state dinners that provided cultural entertainment (Gutin, 57; Natalle, 44).

DOMESTIC ADVOCATE

The first ladies in this category were proficient in their traditional duties as White House hostess, but did not limit themselves to these responsibilities. In addition, they expanded the role and advocated domestic issues that were emerging in society. First ladies considered most appropriate for this category are Florence Harding, Lou Hoover, Lady Bird Johnson, and Betty Ford.

FLORENCE KLING DEWOLFE HARDING

Florence Harding (1921-1923) stepped outside the traditional role of first lady most notably in her availability to the press (Anthony 1990, 387). Unlike her predecessors, Florence was publicly vocal on a number of issues. She supported women achieving excellence in their field and believed they should be as active as possible in politics. (Burnette, 138) She went as far as to hold informal press conferences exclusively for female journalists (Anthony 1990, 387). She was actively involved in veteran's affairs, visiting hospitals and publicizing national relief efforts (Burnette 138). Florence was also very passionate in supporting the Animal Rescue League. Her concerns encompassed economic issues, which were not considered a normal interest for first ladies (Burnette 139).

LOU HENRY HOOVER

Lou Hoover (1929-1933) was the first of the twentieth century First Ladies to give formal speeches, delivering a total of fifteen speeches on topics including the support of her husband's Depression relief programs, discussion of the Girls Scouts and other youth organizations, and addressing a number of other groups on ceremonial occasions (Gutin, 45). She also set a precedent for broadcasting radio addresses (Gutin 43). Lou promoted the arts by creating the White House Arts Program, which included thirty-minute concerts after state dinners showcasing emerging American artists (Atkinson, 171). She was also highly involved in volunteering for the Girl Scouts organization, as well as advocating education and civil rights (Atkinson, 168-169).

CLAUDIA TAYLOR "LADY BIRD" JOHNSON

Lady Bird Johnson (1963-1969) played a large role domestically, choosing two pet projects: women and the beautification of America. These were in addition to performing the many ordinary activities of the First Lady. (Anderson, 160) Regarding women, Lady Bird advocated

women in government by suggesting them for top positions and sought to encourage women of achievement by hosting special events. Her efforts concerning beautification were rewarded when Congress passed a law protecting the natural environment and beautifying the country's highways. (Mayo, 235) President Johnson encouraged his wife to be an activist, to state her opinions, and to take an active role in his presidency. Lady Bird took up this challenge and became involved in every facet of her husband's administration, both public and private, although her influence was limited to domestic policy. (Gutin, 109) Lady Bird was also an active, involved public communicator, delivering 164 speeches during her White House tenure, taking part in press briefings, writing magazine articles, making statements, and using both radio and television to share her ideas with the nation. (Gutin, 113) She was a participant in 718 different ceremonial activities and estimated that she spent 75 percent or more of her time on official duties (Gutin, 118-119). Lady Bird helped further expand the role of the First Lady through her use of radio and television, her advocacy of pet projects, and her involvement in the different facets of the Johnson administration.

ELIZABETH BLOOMER FORD

Betty Ford (1974-1977) is known as the most important feminist first lady between Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Clinton. Ford was significantly involved in domestic affairs, advocating abortion rights and the Equal Rights Amendment. (Pope, 553) This was her most famous work on behalf of women. She also participated in the opening ceremonies of several museum exhibits on the history of American women. (Anthony 2003, 115) She raised awareness of breast cancer as she publicly endured her own struggle and eventual mastectomy. (Pope, 553) She was successful in persuading her husband to petition Congress for $50 million for the advancement of the arts (Anthony 2003, 115). Ford was very vocal and outspoken on several issues that were

politically charged at the time. She took advantage of her high visibility and influence to support the issues that were most important to her. (Gutgold, 325).

UNIVERSAL ACTOR

Universal actors fulfill the ceremonial role, advocate issues domestically, and extend their influence internationally. These first ladies, Eleanor Roosevelt, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush, Pat Nixon, Rosalynn Carter, have transcended former expectations of the role of first lady and take on their own agenda while representing the United States and president. These first ladies have crossed borders and oceans to support troops, acted as political surrogates in foreign affairs, lobbied the United Nations, and created organizations that promote the freedom and rights of women and children throughout the world. These first ladies have truly transformed the role of first lady and have shown that this unelected role has unlimited potential.

ANNA ELEANOR ROOSEVELT ROOSEVELT

Eleanor Roosevelt (1933-1945) is considered a universal actor in this study due to her ability to fulfill the traditional ceremonial role of the first lady, her ability on the domestic level to advocate the New Deal and her considerable efforts to reach out to the African-American community, and internationally, she traveled during war times as first lady. Many have referred to Eleanor Roosevelt as "the first lady of the world" (Hoff-Wilson). While first lady, Eleanor made several speeches addressing women's special abilities to recognize social issues and worked to educate people that the recognition of all individuals would bring about a healthier society (Barry, 17).

During her husband's first term in office she was consumed with his New Deal programs, and was instrumental in garnering support for them (Scharf, 89). She was also a champion of the civil rights movement and even sat on the board of the NAACP (Gutin, 89). As with everything

she did, she took a gradualist approach to the issues of racial segregation and social welfare programs. She found herself acting as a conduit for pleaders of special causes and would actively pursue those causes when she deemed them worthy (Scharf, 132).

During the war, Eleanor made a habit of traveling abroad alone and representing the United States in war times. She toured England for three weeks in the fall of 1942 to visit American troops and to observe war efforts of British women (Scharf, 126). Their efforts convinced her that American women could also play a significant role (Scharf, 126). In 1943, she traveled to the South Pacific as an official representative of the Red Cross where she visited wounded soldiers and cemented alliances. [1] Eleanor's time as first lady gave the role a whole new meaning, even if wasn't elected. Eleanor helped pave the way for proceeding first ladies to carry an agenda and strongly advocate and champion issues (Barry, 35).

PATRICIA THELMA CATHERINE RYAN NIXON

On a domestic level, Pat Nixon (1969-1974) publicly backed the Equal Rights Amendment and also voiced her support of abortion after Roe v. Wade. Pat also launched a national initiative that encouraged volunteer programs, claiming that people were her cause (Roberts II, 297-298). She traveled extensively for the purpose of strengthening U.S. foreign relations. As first lady, she "logged more international mileage than Eleanor Roosevelt" (Anthony 1990, 201). Her visits often had direct effects on that nation's policy with regard to the U.S. According to one Peruvian official, sending Pat to that country meant more to the people and government of Peru than anything else President Nixon could have done (Anthony 1990, 186).

[1] Eleanor is often known for her work with the United Nation and obtaining a position on the Human Rights Commission until President Eisenhower replaced her in 1953 (Berger, 74). However, Eleanor's most notable influence took place after she was a first lady. This study focuses on the activity during their tenure as first lady, so while Eleanor's has several notable and recognizable achievements, they will not be considered with her placement in the universal actor category in the typology.

What started out as a mercy mission for victims of an earthquake that left eighty thousand dead and eight hundred thousand people homeless had direct political consequences for the United States. In her speech accepting the Grand Cross of the Sun award from the president of Peru, First Lady Nixon claimed that the people of the Americas were all family (Anthony 1990, 186). President Velasco had been courting the Soviets and pursuing anti-American policies for the two years that he had been in office. However, in his Independence Day speech, a month later, the Peruvian president spoke of the significance of Pat's visit and U.S. solidarity with Peru (Anthony 1990, 187).

In 1972, Pat met with the leaders of three African nations as the only First Lady to travel to Africa (Anthony 1990, 195). President Nixon had been invited to the inauguration of Liberian President William R. Tolbert, a personal friend, but asked his wife to go in his stead as his personal ambassador. She was honored with a ceremony that was reserved for heads of government, a nineteen-gun salute and a review of the honor guard. Her natural ability to read people and her genuine interest in people once again made her trip both a personal and professional success. She partook in the native festivities, dressing in traditional dresses and dancing with the women. When the women wrapped a lappa cloth turban around her head, she felt that the women had accepted her. She was further honored with the Grand Cordon of the Most Venerable Order of Knighthood award, the nation's highest honor. In Ghana, she addressed the National Assembly, and one tribal chief claimed that, "not even a lion could destroy" the bond that her trip created between Ghana and the U.S. (Anthony 1990, 196) H. R. Haldeman, President Nixon's Chief of Staff, "praised [the trip] as the single event of the administration to receive 'universal approval'" (Anthony 1990, 197).

Her trips to the Soviet Union, China, and Southeast Asia were no less effective. In the Soviet Union, her visit with Victoria Brezhnev paved the way for greater Soviet acceptance of a summit between Brezhnev and Nixon (Anthony 1990, 200). Upon the Nixon's return from the Soviet Union Congress assembled for a report from the president, but it was Mrs. Nixon who received a standing ovation upon entering the chamber (Anthony 1990, 201). In many ways, Mrs. Nixon was the perfect first lady. She was devoted to her husband, and believed in him and his integrity both personally and professionally. She refrained from making public statements because she believed that right belonged to the president alone, and that he spoke for both of them. She endeavored to present the public with an image of her that was both an accurate representation of who she really was, and a model for a nation that would be looking to the first lady to uphold the integrity and dignity of the White House to the world. However, she was not afraid to speak for both her husband and her country to the nations of the world. She was conscious of the fact that no matter where she was or what she was doing, she was representing the American people and her husband's administration; yet she never let that fact alter who she was or force her to portray something she was not.

ELEANOR ROSALYNN SMITH CARTER

Rosalynn Carter (1977-1981) is often seen as having been more successful in her role as first lady than her husband was in his as president. She has been placed in the category of universal actor due to her abilities to maintain the White House and extend her southern hospitality to White House guests (Gutin, 154), advocate for issues such as mental health on the national level, and her extensive traveling, often on behalf of the president. .

The *New York Times Magazine* recognized her potential to impact national policy early on and began comparing her to Eleanor Roosevelt. *Time* magazine recognized her as the second

most important person in the United States when her husband was in office (Blair and Parry-Giles 2005, 144; Berger, 145; Gutin 157). She soon demonstrated her ability to hold her own in the arena of Washington politics. Her increasing activism led some to question, "Who elected her?" (Berger, 147) She attended cabinet meetings regularly, and met with the president for "weekly working lunches" (Gutin,150; Berger, 144).

One of the most important functions of Rosalynn's first ladyship was that of her political surrogacy to her husband (Berger, 152). Although she was an advisor to her husband, she relegated her influence to domestic policy issues such as mental health, where she was appointed honorary chair of the President' Commission on Mental Health (Berger, 147: Gutin, 151). In 1978, President Carter sent Rosalynn as his political surrogate to Latin America. The purpose of the trip was to promote stronger relations and to explain the president's policies on a variety of issues, including human rights and arms sales (Gutin, 153). She assumed both the duties of first lady and ambassador, making her schedule heavier than an official presidential visit (Berger, 152).

Due to her remarkable ability to act as both political surrogate and a first lady who was in tune with the fears and concerns of the public, President Carter had Rosalynn accompany him to the Middle East Talks that were held at Camp David in 1978 (Blair and Parry-Giles, 341; Berger, 145-46). She supported her husband by attending as many of the meetings as she could and as a testament to great influence and support she was invited to join the procession to announce the historic peace treaty know as the Camp David Accords (Berger, 146).

NANCY ANN FRANCES ROBBINS DAVIS REAGAN

By mid-1984, Nancy Reagan (1981-1989) had established a campaign to reduce drug abuse in America (Gutin, 168). The phrase "Just say no" became synonymous with the First Lady, and she traveled extensively all over the United States to speak and promote her drug awareness program. On October 27, 1986, President Reagan signed into law the "National Crusade for a Drug Free America" bill. Nancy Reagan considered this a personal victory and made an unprecedented joint address to the nation with the President on the problem. (National First Ladies Library 2005)

In April 1985, Mrs. Reagan expanded her campaign to the international level by hosting eighteen foreign First Ladies at the First Ladies Conference on Drug Abuse at the White House. She also spoke about drug abuse in Europe and hosted a second international First Ladies Conference on Drug Abuse at the United Nations. (Gutin, 168-169) In 1986, Mrs. Reagan appeared at the World Affairs council in Los Angeles and her speech "The Battle Against Drugs" was published in Vital Speeches of the Day (Muir and Mooney, 380).

Although she rarely involved herself in foreign affairs, it was Nancy Reagan who defied the conventional wisdom in the Reagan administration's State Department and promoted the idea of President Reagan forging a personal relationship with the new Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. The resulting friendship and future political negotiation brought about the INF Treaty of 1987. This treaty was later considered by many to be an important step in the ending of the Cold War. (National First Ladies Library 2005) Throughout the Reagan administration, as relations between the United States and the Soviet Union were improving, Nancy was with President Reagan as his life and political partner, pushing for peace from behind the scenes. (Muir and Mooney, 375)

BARBARA PIERCE BUSH

Barbara Bush's (1989-1993) term as first lady focused on her campaign to bring national and international awareness to the problem of illiteracy. She had great success with this issue due to the fact that she was involved with it for the previous eight years as the wife of the Vice President (First Lady Biography: Barbara Bush 2007). Barbara believed that illiteracy was the root cause of other social problems. She worked with Literacy Volunteers of America and worked Laubach Literacy International on issues of adult literacy. (Roberts II, 335-336) In addition to opening an international literacy conference in October 1990, she also took part in hundreds of literacy events (Wertheimer 2004, 404). The only greatly significant trip that Barbara took without the President was to Costa Rica. This trip took place in May of 1990 where she was responsible for representing the United States during the inauguration of the Presidentof Costa Rica, Rafael Calderon. This was her first diplomatic duty for which the goal was to "join all Costa Ricans in celebrating those most precious democratic activities—the recognition of the will of the people, the rule of law and the peaceful participation of all citizens in the selection of their leaders." While she enjoyed this mission, she also made it clear this would not happen frequently thus maintaining the position of not involving herself with important political issues (Kilian, 206-207). Barbara Bush is considered one of the busiest first lady's in history. She worked to promote the agendas of both her husband and herself. During her tenure as first lady, she gave hundreds of speeches in addition to performing the traditional duties of hostess, surrogate and political partner. (Wertheimer, 409-410).

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

Hillary Clinton (1993 – 2001) made the position of First Lady her own the day she entered the office with President Bill Clinton in 1993. Hillary is considered to be a universal actor in this typology, as she fulfilled both the ceremonial and hostess obligation of the positions (Mattina, 425), was active in promoting the rights of children and women on a national level, and traveled extensively on the behalf of the United States representing ideas of freedom and rights for all citizens.

Hillary was the first and only first lady to be appointed the head of the legislative task force on National Health Care reform by her husband (Mattina, 426). While the task force was ultimately unsuccessful in procuring universal healthcare for all, she remained a strong advocate and took on the press and medical lobbyists. In addition to her fight for health care, Hillary worked closely with the Department of Education, Housing and Urban Development, and Interior in order to form relations to influence change. She also worked closely with Attorney General Janet Reno and with Secretary of State Madeline Albright to advocate the rights of women (Mattina, 426).

She went well beyond the role of the domestic advocate, as she visited eighty-two countries during her time as first lady (Baker). Hillary extended her influence internationally when she attended and spoke at the Beijing United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. Hillary took the domestic issues she advocated so strongly for and brought them into the spotlight of international politics (Clinton, 299). This particular speech gave Hillary the opportunity to advocate for advancement of women through government institutions and through the private sector. (Platform for Action and Beijing Declaration, 160).

Finally, as first lady, Hillary worked closely with Albright to found the nonprofit Vital Voices Global Democracy Initiative (Mattina, 417). This nonprofit would partner with the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations, the World Bank, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the European Union, and women leaders from over 80 countries worldwide. The non-profit initiative hosted Vital Voices Conferences to give women the resources and skills that they needed to sustain themselves and provide for their families. In 2000, the non-profit initiative officially became a non-government organization (NGO), advancing women's economic, political, and social status around the world. (Vital Voices)

LAURA WELCH BUSH

Laura Bush (2001-) has been placed in the universal actor category to due to her strong capabilities to take the traditional role of the first lady, develop programs domestically to promote education, and lobby for international education reform and human rights (Wertheimer 2004, 445). Laura was initially reserved about entering public life, although she quickly overcame her natural shyness and became a key member of the Bush Administration and has visited 68 countries as of 2007 (Baker). Laura Bush took on the responsibility of calming the nation after the September 11 terrorist attacks and advocated reading and literacy as she started her first year as First Lady. (Watson, 333) Laura has had significant active in promoting literacy and education on the domestic level with her program "Ready to Read, Ready to Learn" initiative (Wertheimer 2004, 446). Laura has taken on several projects that bear significant international influence such as Burma, global literacy, and brutality against women in Afghanistan.

Laura's involvement and influence in waging a campaign to rally world pressure on Burma's military junta became public as of 2006 when she hosted an international roundtable on

Burma. She has consulted with her friend, Condoleeza Rice, Secretary of State and Stephen J. Hadley, National Security Advisor. She also submitted a written statement to the United States Senate in August of 2007 raising awareness of the disparaging situation in Burma.

She has worked closely with United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon. (Jackson) She personally called him to make him aware that she wanted to become involved, and since then, she has lobbied officials and diplomats, issued public statements, given multiple interviews and publicly supported sanctions against the junta. October 2007, Laura told a reporter that she and the President were fully prepared to levy sanctions against Burma's military government if they didn't start moving in the way of democracy. (Jackson) According to a reporter, "activists and analysis's credit Mrs. Bush with helping to focus international attention on the conflict in Burma in a unifying that her husband could not." (Baker)

As a result of Laura's frequent visits to countries around the world to promote literacy, Bush became an honorary ambassador of the United Nations Literacy Decade and hosted the White House Conference on Global Literacy. This conference, the first international conference hosted by First Lady Bush, promoted the global and national promotion of literacy. It also underscored the successful programs that had improved the lives of people, especially women and children. The conferences allowed other First Ladies, First Spouses, Ministers of Education, and national decision makers across the globe to improve their literacy programs (White House Conference on Global Literacy 2006).

November 17, 2005, Laura was the first of all first ladies to deliver the Presidential Radio Address in lieu of the President. (Brutality Against Women in Afghanistan) Laura promoted international awareness of brutality of women in Afghanistan. Laura became an international advocate for the rights of women and children by coming out a strong advocate in the early years

of her husband's administration, noted in her Presidential Radio Address and speech at the Conference of Women Leaders, International Women's Day Event. (Wertheimer 2004, 436) At the conference, Laura spoke out against the brutality against women and the junta military, common themes of her tenure as First Lady. (Mrs. Bush's Remarks at Conference of Women Leaders, 2005) Two weeks after speaking out against the brutality of woman in Afghanistan, Laura made a high profile appearance Kabul in Afghanistan promoting women's education and the freedoms of democracy. While there in Kabul, Laura pledged U.S. support to ensure women will participate as full citizens in the Afghani society. (Freeman)

CONCLUSION

This piece analyzed twentieth and twenty-first century first ladies beginning with Florence Harding in 1921 and concluding with the current first lady, Laura Bush. Each of these first ladies served their tenure following women's suffrage, which is significant because political involvement became more pronounced following the movement. Through the research conducted, the amount of political involvement each lady undertook became the standard of measure used to divide the ladies into a typology containing three categories.

The category of *Ceremonial Role* was distinguished by its occupants in that they were relegated to the position of social hostess for the White House and were further constrained by the societal definition of a woman's role. Mamie Eisenhower for instance stated publicly that her role as first lady was to be confined to the White House hostess. In contrast, Bess Truman did not publicly define her role, yet she simply assumed it through emphasizing her hostess duties and refusing to take up a cause.

The second category, *Domestic Advocate*, personified a first lady who expanded the role by setting new precedents and advocating societal issues that were relevant to the day, in

addition to performing the ceremonial responsibilities. Lou Hoover was a pioneer in the sense that she was the leading first lady to give formal speeches and broadcast radio addresses. With Betty Ford, advocation meant championing abortion rights and the Equal Rights Amendment.

The third category, *Universal Actor*¸ describes a first lady who has taken the role a step further in the natural progression of the typology to advocate her agenda at an international level, as well as periodically serving as a political surrogate for her husband. Barbara Bush espoused her literacy initiative worldwide along with communicating her husband's agenda abroad. Hillary Clinton enthusiastically promoted universal healthcare during her tenure as first lady. She was also an extensive traveler visiting more than eight-two countries and exporting ideas of equal rights.

From this study emerged two greater trends in studying the role of first lady. First, the majority of the first ladies in the categories of Domestic Advocate and Universal Actor have chosen to promote one or two causes, which held personal significance for them, in addition to, being the focus of their energy and resources. A second trend is that all first ladies in this piece made a concerted effort to support their husbands publicly while in office. For some women this meant not speaking publicly, while for others it meant actively pursuing his goals.

When holistically looking at the first ladies through the typology used in this study, the conclusion can be reached that the evolution of the role has been largely unpredictable until the last thirty years (1977-2007). This consistency is evidenced by the last five ladies all fulfilling the role of Universal Actor. Additionally, it was concluded that each first lady's personality or personal views regarding the role had some impact on the scope of her political involvement.

However, the extent to which her personality defined role cannot accurately be determined due to intervening variables, such as societal values and norms, the President's own

view the role his wife should fulfill, the political atmosphere at the time, all variables not addressed in this study. The potential of the position of first lady in future presidencies will be largely determined by the future first ladies and their ambition and commitment to uphold precedent. However, given the relative consistency of recent administrations, it seems reasonable to conclude that the trend toward greater political involvement both nationally and internationally will continue into the foreseeable future.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Perhaps the most time-sensitive area for future research speaks to the ambiguity of the unofficial nature of the position, should the role of first lady be able to expand? Is it proper for the first lady to be representing both her own causes and those of the president? Should the role of first lady be allowed to continue to expand and broaden to encompass the various activities first ladies are undertaking on a national and domestic level? If this is a proper progression for the role of first lady, should any limitations be placed on the first lady?

Another relevant avenue for future study is determining if first ladies have had influence on domestic and/or foreign policy, and, if so, the precise nature of that influence. Future research may consider how societal values and norms influence the role of first lady. In addition, research could look at the view the president held regarding the role his wife should fulfill, as well as, the effects of the political atmosphere during a first lady's tenure. It is worth noting that while these avenues for future research will be critical to understanding the role of first lady; an accurate assessment will be difficult where there is no easy access to official documentation of their influence and involvement in the decision-making process. As this role has gained a strong platform for advocacy on a domestic and international scale, it is essential that research continues to identify how first ladies use the potential of the office of First Lady.

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