

Defining the Role of First Lady


An Honors College Thesis (Honors 499)

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Graduation Date: May 3, 2008

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Abstract

In the Fall Semester of 2006, I took an honors colloquium taught by Larry Markle on the presidents of the United States. Throughout the semester we studied all of the past presidents and compiled a ranked list of these men based on our personal opinion of their greatness. My thesis is a similar study of their wives. The knowledge I have gained through researching presidential spouses has been very complementary to the information I learned previously in Mr. Markle's class and has expanded my understanding of one of the most important political positions in the United States. The opportunity to see what parallels developed between my rankings of the presidents and the women that stood behind them has led me to a deeper understanding of the traits and characteristics that are embodied by those viewed as great leaders.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my dad for helping me to participate in and understand the importance of history and education at a young age.

I would also like to thank Mr. Larry Markle for encouraging a study of political history reconciled with a study of personal values.

I would like to thank my mom and sisters for helping me to develop my writing style and for serving as great role models and female leaders in my personal life.

I would finally like to thank my many proofreaders, who were instrumental in helping me to meet the deadlines and fulfill the requirements of this project.

***Introduction:
Defining the Role of First Lady***

Trying to define the role of first lady is of tremendous difficulty. Because it has no official duties or required tasks, any actions performed by the office holder are met with extreme controversy. As distinct as the many presidents that have occupied the White House, the often less famous first ladies provide an equally enthralling history of American society and politics. Although the 'office' of first lady is often considered to be second in power only to the president, the Constitution does not offer any guidance for the women who find themselves whisked into this important and contested role. Therefore, each first lady must make the position uniquely her own, magnifying her strengths in a pursuit to support her husband as the leader of the United States of America.

The vagueness that surrounds the office of the first lady has offered the press incredible freedom to criticize the wife of the president since the nineteenth century. Although the title of first lady was not widely accepted and used until the 1930s, the position has never experienced a lack of attention from the media. The missing guidance for this prestigious role has been mirrored in the historical fight to decide upon a proper title for the wife of the president. At the onset of the presidency and the new country, the title was greatly disputed to ensure that the first lady was not perceived as acting in too queenly of a capacity. Partially due to the fact that her duties in the White House and Washington were ill-defined, "suggestions of titles for the president's wife ranged all the way from 'Marquise' and 'Lady' down to a simple 'Mrs.'" (Caroli 22). It is also suggested that the woman occupying this position was referred to as "Presidentress" or "Mrs. President" (Caroli 13). As the position evolved and mass media became more effective at communicating the events of Washington to the entire nation, the title of First Lady became popularized. Unfortunately, this new visibility of the president's wife and her

actions, both political and personal, also led to increased criticism of any and all duties she performed.

The office of first lady has evolved with the changing social and political needs of the country, rendering it nearly impossible to create a definition which could be suitably applied to every woman who has filled the position. What was once an office considered to be merely a social station in Washington society has experienced reigns of secrecy and openness with the press and public. The balance of tradition and innovation in the choice and means with which projects are advocated has created great diversity in the personal decisions made by first ladies and their husbands.

The most important aspect of the office of first lady is her marriage to the president. Because she is not the individual elected to office by the voting public, her only obligation may be to loyally support her husband and family. Creating a balance between expressing her own political opinions and acting as a surrogate on behalf of her husband has proven to be a difficult task for several of the more outgoing wives to manage. However, election of her husband to national office does not change or diminish her role as wife, and possibly mother, regardless of what other responsibilities she might assume once in Washington. It is because of this marital relationship that, "many first ladies have served at great personal expense and only out of a sense of duty to their spouse or to the nation" (Watson 31). First ladies have, therefore, taken their wife role to many extremes. Some, fearing to present any idea incongruent with the president's agenda, have completely secluded themselves and offered no channel for the press to gain personal information on the president's family. Although many have been wonderful personal supporters of their husbands, their political views have differed substantially, and several first ladies have had to make the choice between expressing their own views and remaining veiled behind their husbands'. Some have become more controlling of the demands

upon their husband's time and energy in an effort to preserve his health, while others have encouraged him to pursue all political and professional opportunities presented to him. Scandal and infidelity have cursed many marriages of the White House, but all first ladies have persevered through their personal struggles to maintain their marital status. Regardless of personal or religious convictions surrounding marriage, the role of first lady should first and foremost be defined by her commitment to her husband and their relationship as a married couple. Although it is not a requirement that she have the political savvy to further her husband's career, it is of critical importance that she does not detract from or undermine his political success by contributing to an unbalanced relationship.

A balance between tradition and innovation with regard to the duties of the first lady is also of crucial importance. Although the role has come a long way since the era when it was merely a social extension of the Presidency, the role of first lady continues to evolve with each new occupant in the White House. Fluctuations in the balance of personal and political partnership between the president and his wife are frequent. While the basic duties of first lady, such as social advocate for women's issues, have remained steadily defined by tradition, "the office evolves with each personality occupying it and the preferences and agenda of the particular president" (Watson 32). The less defined roles of the first lady, such as campaigner and political partner, are often influenced by societal standards unique to each time period. It is important that all first ladies understand their strengths and weaknesses in order to help the office evolve into a position in which they can thrive during their tenure in the White House.

The relations that a first lady maintains with the press can greatly complement or hinder her husband's popularity as well as her own. It is important that she reach an agreement with the press allowing her to balance the information displayed about her private and public lives. Although many first ladies have used the press to their great advantage, it is unlikely that all first

ladies have had the opportunity to develop the rhetorical skills and public etiquette required of someone held in such high esteem before entering the White House. Because the press can be vicious and critical or flattering and complementary, the first lady must maintain good relations with the press, even if she desires minimal coverage of her personal life. Unlike other powerful and successful women, the position of a first lady, “imposes particular constraints on her behavior and helps explain some of the venom – and some of the love – showered on her” (Troy 4). Regardless of the other duties she is performing while acting in the role of first lady, each woman occupying this unique position must be willing to compromise and create amnesty with the press. The press has the ability to shape the public’s opinions of each and every action that a first lady executes, despite political party differences or controversial personal and career choices. If she can create a bipartisan image of herself, the first lady is often instrumental in appealing to voters by exuding a spirit of compassion from within otherwise sterile administrations. For many voters, the first lady also seems more concerned with the common man than her husband, and she must therefore appear relatable and genuine in order to refrain from deterring voters. The avoidance of a negative press image created and maintained by the first lady is crucial because, “Few Americans will vote for a president because they like his wife – but many more refuse to vote for him if they dislike her” (Troy 134). Therefore, it is not necessary for a first lady to make her entire private life vulnerable to public scrutiny, but she must refrain from creating an atmosphere of hostility, arrogance, or division from within the White House.

Even with the many innovations that have been made in the still undefined role of first lady, the importance of the social obligations of the president’s wife cannot be overlooked. It is the social adeptness of the women who have filled this position that has allowed the first lady to become a symbol of American womanhood. Although the first lady’s role has obviously

overcome many stereotypes and has made great strides in terms of gender equality, the role of social hostess and leader of the nation's women is still viewed as a primarily feminine role. Her personality is shown through her personal relationships created in the social realm, and the social events at which she presides as hostess can generate invaluable goodwill for her husband. The expectations for social functions in Washington, and specifically the White House, are incredibly high, and the themes and moods created in these events often defines the success of social events across the world. The schedule of a thriving first lady is undoubtedly rigorous as "she must contend with a bewildering array of formalities in social etiquette and protocol, entertain a wide variety of guests and host everything from casual teas for Senate wives to state dinners for hundreds of diplomats" (Watson 76). In this social realm, first ladies are once again challenged to find a balance between tradition and innovation. Because of the unrestrained flexibility of the role, the social realm is another area where the press maintains a scrutinous eye and is quick to comment on any fault or mistake. A successful first lady in terms of the events she hosts and attends and the people she chooses to invite or reject can have an enormous influence on the perception and popularity of her husband.

More recently, campaigning and political savvy have been required of first ladies. As presidential campaigns continue to increase in size and length, more and more support is drawn from the first ladies. The wife of the president is often required to act as an ambassador to foreign dignitaries, speak on behalf of the president on national tours, and have a well-rounded understanding of current events and policies for every occasion. Her role as a diplomat has been met with controversy in the past as she is neither an appointed nor an elected official. However, it is becoming increasingly common to see a first lady who, "serves as the official presidential envoy; at other times she acts as a U.S. ambassador of goodwill or simply accompanies the president during his travels" (Watson 91). Even before she begins her reign in the White House,

the wives of presidential candidates are critical in helping their husbands to cover the nation with their campaign promises and policy visions.

One of the more traditional roles of first lady, that of social advocate, has continued to increase in importance throughout American history. Volunteerism, women's issues, beautification, and education are just a few of the many projects first ladies have chosen to focus on during their possession of the White House. Their freedom in choosing a project to advocate has increased greatly as more achievements have occurred with regard to equal rights: a direct result of their personal efforts and the influences they impart on their husbands. Although it is beneficial to adopt a project that upholds and supports the goals of the president's staff, it is not a prerequisite for the first lady's success in this area. It is in this role that first ladies are allowed to distinguish themselves most fully from their husbands. Through the choice of a particular project to which they will devote much of their time during the next four years, the first lady is opening up an avenue to connect with the more common citizens who would otherwise not have access to the White House. It is rare for criticism to surround these advocacy projects because of their all-encompassing, humanitarian scope. Unlike presidents who are consumed with party politics, "few [first ladies] have been openly critical of their predecessors (unlike Presidents, who tend to be ferociously judgmental of those who have preceded or followed them into the Oval Office)" (Truman 6). It is in the role of social advocate where first ladies often find the most enjoyment and personal fulfillment.

For the purposes of this thesis, the first ladies will be evaluated on their commitment to the role of wife and mother, balance of tradition and innovation while in the White House, their ability to maintain pleasant relations with the press, their fulfillment of the traditional social responsibilities of the first lady, their attempts to aid with campaigning and diplomacy, and their success and commitment as a social advocate. It is of crucial importance to remember that not

every first lady is endowed with the same strengths and that she has not directly chosen to be placed in this high profile and highly criticized position. Because there is no concrete definition of her role in American society, it is those women who have best adapted and balanced the role to meet their personal needs, their husband's needs, and the country's needs during their term that will be regarded as the most successful first ladies. The duties of first ladies have continued to evolve and will likely be continuously redefined in the future.

Death, marriage, and substitution have occurred in the position of first lady while several presidents have been in office. These personal sorrows, joys, and decisions make it difficult to organize the first ladies without regard to their husband. In order to incorporate those women who played the role of hostess for an absent or introverted first lady, and to include presidents who remarried and consequently had two first ladies during their tenure, the first ladies in this thesis will be arranged, in chronological order, by their husbands' tenure.

When compiling the overall ranking, each woman who served a significant term as White House hostess or first lady will be ranked individually based on her unique accomplishments or shortcomings and will only be judged on the roles which were applicable to her fulfillment of the office. For this reason, Harriet Lane, the niece of bachelor James Buchanan, will be included in the rankings. Neither Hannah Van Buren nor Letitia Tyler will be included in this ranking due to a lack of substantive material found on their White House performance. Laura Bush will not be included in the ranking due to the absence of impartiality as a result of her current position in the office. A brief synopsis of her early endeavors in the office of first lady will, however, be included at the end of the thesis.

First Ladies Ranking

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

Individual Analysis of the First Ladies

MARTHA WASHINGTON

HUSBAND: GEORGE WASHINGTON

TERM: 1789 – 1797

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. As the woman charged with setting precedents for all future presidents' wives, Martha Washington had an important role to carve into the American government and American history. More so than any other first lady, the first first lady had the important task of combining traditional European customs with colonial simplicity. It was Martha's task to ensure that the presidential couple was viewed and treated appropriately in the highly volatile and emotional atmosphere after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War.

Ceremonial balance nearly eluded Martha's tenure in the White House. Although her friendly personality was known for making guests feel at ease, the influence of European royal customs on her fulfillment of the first lady role could not be overlooked. Once her husband took office, Martha, "took to wearing extravagant clothes, rode about in a gilded coach" and accustomed herself to the pomp that inspired others to call her 'Lady Washington' (O'Brien 14). Aside from her aesthetic approach to the wardrobe and transportation of the office however, Martha fostered a great deal of accessibility between citizens and the presidential family. She initiated and returned calls from other women and hosted calling hours where the President would make an informal appearance. At these events, Martha eased much of the discomfort caused by the undefined and emerging role of the first couple by controlling the social protocol for formal entrances and exits. Her adeptness at balancing formality and familiarity kept her from offending guests and aided in "bridging the murky gap between presidential dignity and democratic accessibility" (Truman 21).

PRESS RELATIONS. Due to the size and structure of the country at this time, the First Lady did not have to deal with an abundance of newspaper columnists or other public examiners. At this point, much of the business being conducted by the government was unknown outside of New York City and only social gossip flourished among the ladies in society. However, due to the uncertainty of how a president would manage the role of the nation's leader without assuming a kingly capacity intrigued many citizens and a close scrutiny was conducted on the social, economic, and political aspects of the Washington's life. This constant inquiry was not appreciated by the First Lady. Although she adapted well to the pressures of a public figure, "she found the formalities dull and restrictive and complained of the loss of her cherished privacy" (Watson 38).

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Martha was accustomed to the proper social practices and protocol of her era and easily integrated the increased social attention required of the first lady into her private life. Her personality allowed her retain a "charitable demeanor to all who met her, including her husband's growing throng of enemies" which prevented increased criticism from falling upon her husband (O'Brien 14). Immediately upon her arrival in the capital, Martha began to fulfill the social obligations that such a prestigious position assumed. She set rigorous standards for her social schedule that would be continued by first ladies for many years, including the practice of returning all calls she received within three days. She increased the visibility of the president to the public by opening the president's home to all guests on New Year's Day, a tradition that would be continued into the official White House in Washington D.C. (Caroli 26). Her agreeableness made her seem more approachable to all citizens and her presence is reported to have aided in improving her husband's disposition as well.

OVERALL. Martha Washington had an important role in creating protocol for a completely undefined position. Although she managed to balance the social aspect of her new position as presidential spouse well with her personal commitments, she did not create the same long standing precedents that her husband did for his office. Her gregarious personality made her a natural success at social hostessing but she unfortunately lacked political depth. Her traditionalist views of wife can be attributed to the era in which she lived although she seems to not have made any major attempts at societal reform or governmental progressivism.

ABIGAIL ADAMS

HUSBAND: JOHN ADAMS

TERM: 1797 – 1801

WIFE. Much more is known about the partnership between John and Abigail Adams than that of their presidential predecessors. It was common knowledge in society that the educated and well-read wife of President John Adams viewed herself as his equal and did not refrain from influencing his policy decisions. Even though he was well known for his stubbornness, Abigail was equally well known for her ability to influence his political ideas and decisions, and many individuals looking to contact John first confronted his wife. Perhaps as a result of her experience during John's vice presidency, Abigail was able to save for the couple's retirement while meeting the social obligations demanded by her husband's new office. Luckily, her experience with politics allowed her to be viewed as the "sort of capable partner who made life in the political limelight a lot easier" (O'Brien 21). Although her views on the woman's role in politics were very progressive, she and her husband were able to create a partnership dynamic that influenced John's political career without affecting their married life. Because of her careful

fiscal monitoring and control over family responsibilities, Abigail was able to increase her husband's attention and focus on his political duties as leader of the nation.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Abigail Adams was much more progressive in her approach to the office of first lady than her predecessor. Because of her influence over her husband and the political partnership the two had created, Abigail came to be known as a 'minister without portfolio' almost immediately upon John's assumption of the office. Although this angered some advocates of the more traditional role of females in society, it greatly expanded the opportunities that a first lady could pursue both politically and personally. Abigail's interest in politics and women's rights inspired her to voice her opinions to society at large by writing "semi-official letters explaining or reinforcing some point made by the president" (Bober 182). Although she knew the importance of following Martha Washington's example in a still chaotic and hesitant society, Abigail was also able to achieve a new degree of independence for the wife of the president. Her uncommon educational background for females of the era aided in her transition of the "move beyond a merely ceremonial role to involve herself in substantive issues" during her time in the White House (Caroli 34). Regardless of the innovation she initiated in the role of first lady, she always did so with the support of her husband, silently advocating that future presidential couples balance political and personal support.

PRESS RELATIONS. The progressive stance that Abigail took with regards to her position as a woman in the political arena caused severe controversy. The feminism adhered to by Abigail forced many to criticize her role as minister without portfolio by saying that she had "stepped beyond the proper bounds for her sex" (Caroli 28). Abigail chose to be aggressive in her approach to the office regardless of the fact that she knew the importance of gaining a favorable rapport with the press. By defending her personal views on women, she made it more

difficult for her husband to receive constructive and unanimously positive feedback. She did, however, attempt to gain the press and larger public's support of her husband. She is known for "commissioning pro-Adams journalism in the press" as well as using her own propaganda to appeal to women citizens (O'Brien 21). In her attempts to direct the material written about her husband, Abigail began leaking favorable stories regarding her husband and his policies to the press. In every encounter she had with the press she attempted to support her husband's decisions in order to improve his wavering image.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Like Martha Washington, Abigail's personality was an asset to her husband's somewhat impersonal administration. She was similar to her husband in her scholarly attitude and belief that the elite should rule society. Her experiences during the adversity of the Revolutionary War allowed her to more appropriately justify her appreciation for freedom, especially women's freedom in society. Her involvement in her husband's politics, combined with her motherly personality, made her appear more approachable than the president and afforded her the opportunity to intercept many of the supporters, and critics, of her husband's administration before they angered John. Trained to act appropriately in many diverse social situations, Abigail responded graciously to adverse circumstances including her husband's defeat after his reelection campaign. The combination of her scholarly background and personality made her a success in the role of social hostess as she could bring purpose and intellect to otherwise superfluous social functions. Despite the criticism she received, Abigail handled the role of presidential spouse with courage and today she, "remains the prototype of the modern woman. Abigail was well read, intelligent, and functioned as an equal partner to her husband" (Truman 79).

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Abigail's role as 'minister without portfolio' created great controversy during her husband's administration. His willingness to allow his wife to interact

with key political figures, study divisive policies, and take part in official government correspondence was politically disadvantageous to him. Due in part to their partnership marriage and in part to her own scholarly background, Abigail rarely differed in political temperament from her husband. Although this political unification of the couple may appear to be an asset to the administration, her "enthusiasm for the Alien and Sedition Acts...helped sweep John Adams out of the presidency in 1800" (Truman 93). These acts were poorly accepted by the nation and Abigail's unrelenting support of her husband in cases such as these acts and the controversial pardoning of John Fries did little to improve his image with the citizens. Her role in communication, however, especially the writing of semi-official letters, aided in clarifying some of John's more important and contentious decisions. Another political blunder incurred by Abigail was her popular support of the notion that "the new country should be led by an educated elite" (O'Brien 21). This attitude alienated many potential supporters of her husband's administration and harmed her attempts to rally many women behind her political endeavors.

OVERALL. Abigail Adams was instrumental in expanding the role of first lady to include more than mere ceremonial responsibilities. Unfortunately, her tenure in the White House was also met with great controversy surrounding her progressive views of women in society and her support of several unfavorable political decisions. With her education and background, Abigail began a tradition of advocating for women's rights that would continue until the 20th century. Despite her courteous and friendly manner to all guests of the President, Abigail's approach to politically supporting her husband was unhelpful to his popularity and political career.

DOLLEY MADISON

HOSTESS FOR THOMAS JEFFERSON (1801 - 1809)

HUSBAND: JAMES MADISON

TERM: 1809 - 1817

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. As the first to use the term 'First Lady,' Dolley Madison had an import role in further formulating the office of White House hostess. She began the tradition of acting as a social hostess during widower Thomas Jefferson's term in the White House. The creation of this essential social position gave future first ladies the opportunity to employ a family friend or relative to facilitate the White House social occasions when the president's spouse did not desire to do so herself. In this capacity, Dolley assured "a central role for whoever served as the president's hostess" and also increased her personal reputation for "adroitly mixing politics and parties" (Caroli 35). Many of the customs she participated in and the protocol she created continued from her hostessing under Jefferson into her first ladyship during the term of her own husband.

Another important innovation that Dolley encouraged during her extended tenure was diversity at White House events. She began the popular tradition of mingling, "writers and artists with the usual guest list of politicians and diplomats" at formal events and created an "unassuming style that set the tone of the White House" for many future occupants (Truman 23). To create pride in the White House, she began a tradition of physically improving the White House's décor. Even before the White House was completed, and again after the White House fire, Dolley demanded that the exterior be improved to prevent citizens from fearing an incompetent government.

Perhaps the most important innovation Dolley made to the office of first lady was her adoption of a social cause. Her role as social advocate for war orphan relief was the first of many such peaceful and unquestionable causes that the most future successful first ladies would

adopt. Through her balance of the traditional social practices of first lady and her innovative attempts to begin advocating a social cause, Dolley Madison created a prestigious and long lasting reputation for herself and the office.

PRESS RELATIONS. Dolley Madison's gregarious personality, patriotic support for the country, and loyal devotion to her husband greatly facilitated her relationship with citizens and newspapers. Her popularity was solidified when she infamously saved George Washington's portrait from devastation during the White House fire. Dolley's values and charisma were also very beneficial to her husband's political career. To avoid giving the appearance of a divided marriage, Dolley completely supported all policies and positions held by James. Her outgoing personality assisted her in her desire to further her husband's career as she "showered her husband's enemies with the same attention that she gave his friends" (Caroli 37). Like many other presidential wives, Dolley Madison enhanced her husband's reputation with the public through her cheerful demeanor.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. As previously mentioned, Dolley's friendly and outgoing personality were tremendous assets to both the Jefferson and Madison administrations. In order to increase support for her husband, Dolley engaged in "visiting all the congressmen's families who moved to Washington" (Caroli 38). Her attention to every person, regardless of status, helped to cultivate political support from many sources and to ease tensions that Abigail Adams had created through her support of government by the elite. Dolley's personality has even been attributed with cementing her husband's second presidential victory. Her gracious nature and "her cheerful impartiality brought the disenchanting around...she convinced them to stick with the incumbent" (Caroli 39). Clearly, her social reputation and personality were complimentary to her husband's political ambition.

Dolley's insistence on exploiting her own values instead of conforming to those more popular in society advanced the popularity of the Madison administration. Instead of following the plain fashion of the era, Dolley dressed extravagantly and assumed an atmosphere of luxury within the White House. She ignored those who wished to prohibit balls and parties and refined the social hostessing that occurred at the White House with flair and enthusiasm. The only reason Dolley was able to refrain from distancing herself and her husband from the more economically conservative population was her retention of "the virtues of honesty and charity," likewise, her "generosity of spirit was the secret of Dolley's charisma" (Truman 22).

OVERALL. The innovations that Dolley Madison made to the office of first lady were numerous and of substantial importance. Her experience at handling social functions allowed her to easily balance the traditional role of presidential spouse while easily and noticeably enhancing her husband's popular support. Her personality was ideal for the highly visible position and her ability to defend the dignity and reputation of the first lady position was paramount to continually adapting and redefining the role in the future.

ELIZABETH MONROE

HUSBAND: JAMES MONROE

TERM: 1817 – 1825

WIFE. Elizabeth and James Monroe were seemingly unable to balance their personal relationship with the public demands of the White House. Elizabeth frequently claimed ill health and spent large amounts of the time away from the White House and her husband. It is noted that, "After seven years in the capital, she and her husband remained 'perfect strangers'" (Caroli 42). Elizabeth's desire for privacy greatly deterred her from pursuing any great causes with the first lady role and perhaps diminished political support for her husband. Elizabeth also expressed

great concern over how others would view her role as wife of the president. She used her belief that “the president’s wife, should remain in the shadow of her husband” as another way to excuse herself from fulfilling the obligations of first lady (Gould 75). Although Elizabeth realized that her husband’s elected position transferred enormous social status to her as well, she was unable to define her proper role or to use her influence wisely.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. The introverted and private Elizabeth Monroe had the unfortunate task of succeeding the popular and extroverted Dolley Madison. Elizabeth’s desire for privacy for herself and her married daughters prohibited her from accomplishing many of the traditional social obligations of first lady. Effectively reversing Dolley Madison’s work in equalizing the social boundaries between the president and legislators, Elizabeth insisted that visitors always call upon her. This change in social climate was met with hostility and citizens not only refrained from calling on Elizabeth “but went so far as to boycott official presidential functions. And on those few occasions when they did attend, Elizabeth made things worse by being a no-show” (O’Brien 35). These actions set a poor tone for the Monroe administration and did little to bolster political or social support for either James or Elizabeth. Likewise, her inattention to the social functions of the White House weakened the first lady role that the previous women had spent so much time defining as a position of influence and openness. If nothing else, Elizabeth’s insistence on privacy allowed later wives to excuse themselves from public obligations to more fully pursue their personal lives.

One important accomplishment that Elizabeth handled with questionable success was the decision to refurbish the White House. Although not all first ladies pursue the redecoration of the historic mansion, Elizabeth started a trend that would encourage her predecessors to renovate and decorate the White House as was suitable to their individual personalities. Unfortunately, “the European-style furniture she used...merely made the mansion look more

aristocratic to American eyes" (O'Brien 35). Her foreign taste in decorating coupled with her need for privacy greatly diminished her success as First Lady.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. It is obvious that Elizabeth Monroe's quiet personality met with backlash from the press and public. Although she tried to find excuses for her avoidance of performing the social duties of first lady, they were poorly accepted by the public. Instead, women became jealous of her selfish use of the position and "viewed her as mysterious and unapproachable" (O'Brien 35). Her social actions did little to improve the cold relations caused by her personality. Although she attempted to distance herself from the public during Monroe's first term, her increasingly private actions during the second term met with even greater backlash. Elizabeth's "open refusal to court public favor puzzled observers" and afforded little positive value to the Monroe administration (Caroli 43). Although not every first lady will have the personality that dazzles and captures the attention of the American population, Elizabeth's extreme unwillingness to try to use the social arena of the first lady role wisely was incredibly detrimental to her husband.

Like many who would come after her, Elizabeth asked her daughter to help her facilitate social events. Eliza Hay, however, uncertain of what her role was to be, harmed the reputation of the Monroe administration. Instead of adhering to the developing social protocol in Washington, Eliza "managed to alienate virtually all members of Washington society" through her impatience and aristocratic tendencies (Gould 75). Elizabeth did little to intervene and improve upon the reputation her daughter was creating. Instead, Elizabeth based her behavior at the few social engagements she did attend off of French customs she had learned earlier in James' career, making her appear too royal for the taste of Washington society. Regardless of how Washington reacted to Elizabeth's European conventions, the strict social protocol forced foreign dignitaries to show increased respect for the relatively young country and presidential

office (Gould 75). No balance was established between simplicity and extravagance in Elizabeth and Eliza's approach to fulfilling the social responsibilities and this decreased potential support they could have fostered. It is unfortunate that even the delegated hostess could do little to improve upon Elizabeth's success in this area.

Elizabeth's adherence to European protocol created a several backlash in the United States. By 1819, women were socially boycotting Elizabeth's White House events and Elizabeth did little to lessen the tension that was building between herself and Washington society (Gould 76). Even though the ramifications to Elizabeth's reputation were clear, Louisa Adams followed in the same fashion as Elizabeth with equally dismal success. It is unlucky that Elizabeth did not attempt to reconcile her differences with Washington society. Although foreign dignitaries felt comfortable with her European conventions, those individuals who had the power to elect her husband began to feel alienated

OVERALL. Elizabeth Monroe did little to further the still developing office of first lady during her husband's term as president. She poorly balanced her personal life with the high demands of a public figure and created a hostile and unfriendly environment in the White House and Washington. Although she greatly reduced the social obligations of first lady in the interest of privacy, she did so without concern for the public's interpretation of her actions. Similarly, her ignorance of the political implications of a first lady's actions on her husband's career was unfortunate. Her nearly elitist attitude and unforgiving attachment to privacy reflected poorly on her husband and her term as first lady was therefore one of the most unsuccessful in presidential history.

LOUISA ADAMS

HUSBAND: JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

TERM: 1825 - 1829

WIFE. John Quincy and Louisa Adams' marriage was particularly stormy while in the White House. John Quincy had never viewed women as political equals and refrained from doing so with his wife as well. Although well schooled and intelligent, Louisa was not expected or encouraged by her husband to use these gifts for his benefit. There seems to have been no partnership, political or otherwise, in their marriage during the White House years. Louisa had been "reduced to a mere ornament, and a pointless one at that" and she "made no secret of the fact that she did not particularly enjoy her husband's company" (Truman 282). Like the Monroe's, by the end of John Quincy's administration the couple was barely speaking and Louisa was looking for excuses to distance herself from the White House. Unfortunately for this couple, the political duties of the chief executive seemed to have been prioritized over maintaining a healthy married relationship.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. As a result of her social appearances, Louisa was as unsuccessful at finding favor with the America public as she was at being a pleasant companion to her husband. Her European growth and upbringing were unsettling to the American people to whom she seemed 'too foreign' (Caroli 45). Although she did not fight with the press over her right to a private life like Elizabeth Monroe, she followed her predecessor's example by refusing to initiate social calls. This practice was viewed as elitist by many Americans and also contributed to Louisa's lack of popular support. Louisa was willing to return calls that she received, but her sincere dread of the obligations of first lady forced her to suffer "long bouts of depression that made her physically ill" (O'Brien 41). As much of a contributor as any other aspect of her performance, the fact that Louisa despised "participating

in the ceremonial parts of her husband's job, especially since her opinions on important matters did not count for much" made Louisa a dismal representative as First Lady (Truman 48). Perhaps if Louisa had worked at creating a more amiable atmosphere around the White House, she could have aided John Quincy in superseding his aloof and antisocial reputation. As it was, however, Louisa contributed to the sterile ambiance of the Adams' administration.

OVERALL. Louisa and her husband refused to create a partnership that would allow the first lady role to become a substantial asset to her husband. No political or social benefits were reaped as a result of their inharmonious marriage and the inhospitable environment was detrimental to Louisa's mental and physical health. Neither one seemed willing to offer the sacrifices that a successful marriage requires and this unfortunately lessened the strength of John Quincy's presidency.

ANNA HARRISON

HUSBAND: WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON

TERM: 1841

WIFE. Although William and Anna were only the first couple for a few months, a few character traits that could project the success or failure of a longer term presidency are evident. By the time William had taken office and held the duties of chief executive for nearly two and a half months, Anna had yet to arrive at the White House (O'Brien 46). This delay and hesitation to travel to Washington to be with her spouse seemed unsupportive and, if continued, would have likely hindered the public image of his personal life.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Without ever traveling to the White House, presiding over a social function, or advocating a universal cause, Anna Harrison made a very important improvement in the privileges of a first lady. Because no other woman had yet been widowed

while their husband was serving as president, Anna was the first to receive compensation upon her husband's death. In her favor, "Congress passed legislation providing financial aid to the grieving widow: a cash grant of \$25,000 as a lump sum pension and 'the franking privilege'" (Garrison 42). This award would be refined and adapted in the future, but Anna's acceptance of these honors contributed to the growing sense of importance about the president's spouse.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Even though Anna never began performing the social obligations of first lady, her reaction to her husband's election and inauguration imitate the attitude she likely would have held had he completed a four year term as president. Upon hearing the election results in favor of her husband, Anna "became despondent and refused to appear in public" (Caroli 63). Already, before reaching Washington, her lack of public notoriety and social position caused alarm. Clearly, no attempts would have been made by Anna to purposefully further her husband's career even if she had been afforded the opportunity to control the White House social events.

OVERALL. Unfortunately for Anna, the impression she left during her husband's two and a half month presidency did not leave much expectation for her future potential as the White House social arranger or America's universal advocate. Her hesitancy in arriving in Washington showed a lack of the support that is incredibly crucial to creating a successful presidential partnership.

JULIA TYLER

HUSBAND: JOHN TYLER

TERM: 1844 – 1845

WIFE. Although Julia Gardiner married John Tyler when only eight months remained in his presidential term, she undoubtedly increased his public appeal and popularity. As a

supportive new wife, Julia “began pouring over newspapers and books to learn more about her new husband’s background and opinions” (Garrison 68). Despite the ridicule the presidential couple received for their age difference, Julia handled her new position as presidential spouse with flair and thoughtfulness. It is clear that Julia understood the importance of cultivating a strong marriage so that her position as first lady would unquestionably complement her husband’s career.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Julia Tyler, unlike her immediate predecessors and John Tyler’s first wife, had no problem or argument in fulfilling the social obligations of the first lady. She hosted balls, planned guest lists, and attracted support for her husband with ease. Julia also made some of the first attempts at using the first lady role to directly influence political policy. This increase in the political reach of the first lady would continue to grow and expand into the 21st century, reaching a climax with the political partnership of Bill and Hillary Clinton.

Julia changed many protocols and traditions during her short reign of the White House. Completely adoring of her new husband, “she initiated the custom of musicians greeting the president with ‘Hail to the Chief’” in order to improve the prestige and respect surrounding the presidential office (Caroli 65). In the press, she likewise commanded a new respect for both herself and the President and went to great lengths to ensure that both of them had their accomplishments and activities published for all to read.

After her tenure in the White House, Julia continued to define the effects that a first lady could have. Due to the age difference at the time of their marriage, Julia outlived John. This situation ushered her in to “a five-year campaign to win a federal pension for herself and other widows of Presidents” from which several of her successors have benefitted (Truman 336). It is remarkable that Julia could make such important changes to the office of first lady while only in office for a short amount of time.

PRESS RELATIONS. It is evident that Julia Tyler understood the importance of gaining favor with the press for the purposes of improving the support of her husband's office. Julia had the initiative to hire a press secretary to ensure she and her husband were receiving favorable attention from the public. She also "assigned her older brother Alexander to pen equally lyrical accounts of her parties for other New York papers" (Truman 292). The impression Julia created for herself and the office of first lady bordered on royal excess and many individuals were unconvinced by her attempts to influence and attract the average American to the center of power and social activity. It is admirable of Julia that she had the foresight to begin handling press relations officially, especially after her somewhat contested marriage to the much older John Tyler.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. The young Julia Tyler filled the White House with glamour upon her marriage to the aging President. Her youthfulness and spirit were attractive to many in Washington society and she was able to introduce the polka, a dance that had previously been considered too racy for high society. She enjoyed fulfilling the social planner role and "persuaded herself and everyone else that White House entertaining was not revelry but a duty" which she happened to be an expert at performing (Truman 293). She was less successful, however, at reassuring average citizens that she didn't have royal aspirations for the office of first lady. At first, Julia was able to fill her balls with many admirers and each event added to the popularity of her husband. Her personality was well suited for this esteemed social position and she "dazzled every politician in Washington" with her flirtatious, impulsive style (Truman 291).

For others, Julia's personality contributed to a sense of alienation. Her excess in fashion and strict adherence to elaborate social protocol made her appear to many as an elitist. She was known for appearing with up to six ladies in waiting and was often seen wearing gold

headdresses, resembling crowns, and elaborately decorated gowns. At many of her events she “received her guests seated in a large armchair on a raised platform” surrounded by her ladies in waiting and appearing to many as a woman who had been carried away with her sense of social importance (Truman 294). Her once famous and well-attended balls also turned into elitist functions when she attempted to use them to make a political statement in favor of her husband’s annexation policy. Julia “politicked relentlessly for the annexation among her legion of adoring congressmen and senators” and did not hesitate to use the White House social season as a means to achieve political support for her husband’s policies (Truman 295). Fortunately, however, despite Julia’s turn towards elitist hostessing, her adaptations to the White House social functions still increased attendance at her events and were successful at encouraging voters to interact with her husband.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Julia, even as a new spouse, had considerable leverage over the political decisions of her husband. Perhaps as a result of the studying she did immediately upon entering the White House, she was fairly versed in the current issues of the day, especially the annexation issue. Julia also kept informed with frequent trips to listen to the debates in the House of Representatives (Truman 291). This visibility in the political realm allowed Julia to freely engage herself in the politics of her husband’s administration without forcing her social reputation to suffer.

Concerning the Texas of question, Julia was instrumental in circulating important documents to loyal supporters of John (Garrison 70). She also encouraged her husband to evaluate the relevant importance of traditional procedure in dealing with this controversial issue and persuaded him to ignore certain protocol in the interest of timeliness. Without attempting to create a political persona of her own, Julia was pertinent in furthering the aims of her husband.

OVERALL. Julia Tyler adapted the role of first lady to suit her festive personality but in so doing distanced some voters who saw her as an elitist wishing to garner a royal social status. She attempted to improve her husband's popularity through her social events and guaranteed a great deal of respect for the president through her introduction of new presidential protocol. The enthusiasm that Julia poured into her balls and social obligations could have been well spent as a social advocate if she did not have such a selfish approach to the position of presidential spouse.

SARAH POLK

HUSBAND: JAMES K. POLK

TERM: 1845 – 1849

WIFE. Sarah Polk maintained a very close political and personal relationship with her husband throughout his term in office. Although there were certain aspects she disliked with regard to the obligations of first lady, she did not neglect them completely in order to refrain from offending any supporters. She also adopted many new tasks in order to better watch her husband's health. This dedication to every facet of the office represents an exception for the time period when many wives were choosing to employ a hostess to manage their official duties. Sarah, however, "felt comfortable fitting herself into her husband's career." and "whenever she could help him, she was there" (Caroli 82). Sarah was a very early example of those first ladies who would wisely use their own intellectual capabilities to aid their husbands through the proofing of speeches, scanning of newspapers, and monitoring of workload. Because Sarah remained childless, she was able to focus every ounce of attention on remaining attentive to the needs of the president and deciding how she was most capable of serving him.

Even before his ascent to the presidency, James appreciated Sarah's support and tireless work for him. His long standing encouragement of her participation led to considerable speculation that she was overly influential and perhaps controlled her husband. His agreeableness to her moral codes furthered these suspicions to which Sarah replied "she was simply assisting her husband in order to protect his health" (Caroli 87). Although this working relationship formed some less than favorable rumors about Sarah as a wife, it was instrumental in sustaining the strength of the Polk's partnership marriage during their White House years.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Sarah Polk instituted several new aspects to the role of first lady. Without completely abandoning the offices which she disliked, she found a way to balance her many roles in a way that allowed her to continue enjoying the first ladyship. Her imposition of religious beliefs on the White House and Washington society was nearly a cause of controversy. Paving the way for future First Lady Lucy Hayes, Sarah "forbade liquor at receptions and dinners and also banned music and dancing" citing her Presbyterian religion (Truman 99). Her husband's allowance of this new mix of religion and politics caused many to question the balance of power in their relationship and concerned many conservative politicians that Sarah was making the political decisions.

Another innovation that Sarah employed to ensure achievement in each facet of the first lady job was her employment of a hostess. Unlike her predecessors who arranged for a hostess in order to completely abandon their personal obligations, Sarah simply delegated the more trivial tasks to another woman while remaining very active in most projects. This small detail aided future first ladies in acquiring a larger and more diligent staff to help them achieve public success.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. As has been mentioned, Sarah "meant to be more than a hostess" and her unique fulfillment of the social obligations bestowed upon a

first lady manifest this desire (Caroli 85). Although her predecessor had dazzled society with her extravagant balls, the actual number of Julia's official events was scarce. Sarah, however, decided to entertain often and on a smaller budget. All parties thrown by Sarah were financed within the president's salary, greatly aiding her husband's popularity. It is reported that, "even women whose husbands opposed James politically became Sarah's loyal friends. ... Sarah maintained friendships with several important men" and her parties resulted in increased social support for James (Caroli 85). The bipartisan environment that Sarah was able to create was a substantial help to her husband's time in the White House.

Although known for her charm, Sarah also had a more unpleasant side that was not concealed to those who inflicted political harm or criticism upon her husband's administration, often forcing her social events to take on a political focus (Caroli 88). For example, those who denounced the Texas annexation were forbidden from returning to the White House. Without abandoning her social duties completely, Sarah balanced her intellectual and hostessing duties by delegating those jobs which could easily be managed by another person. She found it appropriate for her religious beliefs to control the White House and all guests had to conform to her personal restrictions during their visit. Although intellectual, she "lacked some of Abigail's [Adams] wit and sophistication" which made her appear unsuited for such a prestigious national position (Caroli 91). Fortunately, however, Sarah was able to balance her social duties with the political atmosphere of the White House to create an encouraging environment for her husband's endeavors.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Sarah was very attentive to the political needs and environment of her husband and took an active role in easing his work life. Her intellectuality allowed her to complement James' administration by intertwining political elements and discussions into her social agenda. Sarah, like her husband, had an inclination to politics and was actively involved in

his decision making process. Her impact on policy became controversial when it was realized that James was rarely consulting his cabinet and that “he and Sarah ran the government virtually alone” (Truman 101). In addition to acting as a consultant, Sarah read speeches, scanned newspapers, drafted correspondence, and did everything in her power to cater to potential voters for her husband. Despite the political partnership that Sarah and James shared, her tasks often forced her to do behind the scenes work at home instead of actively campaigning for her husband’s expansionist policies (O’Brien 81). She was inclusive in her political activities to ensure that her actions did not alienate supporters or enemies of her husband’s career.

OVERALL. Sarah Polk was very involved in her husband’s career. Although she tried to prevent her husband from overwork, “the President literally worked himself to death” (Truman 101). She was fairly irrational in her treatment of those critics of her husband, but she was also much more moderate than her predecessor in terms of social hostessing. Without abandoning the role of hostess, Sarah was able to delegate many of the insignificant or less important housekeeping duties while still taking control of major social functions. Her schedule allowed her to actively enhance her husband’s career but she was also “one of the few nineteenth century First Ladies to develop her own supporters – people who valued her abilities and judgment apart from her husband’s” (Caroli 85). Her imposition of religious beliefs on White House life and her controversial engagement in her husband’s political policies was to divisive to offer consistent support to James.

MARGARET TAYLOR

HUSBAND: ZACHARY TAYLOR

HOSTESS: BETTIE BLISS

TERM: 1849 - 1850

WIFE. Margaret Taylor was devastated to move to the White House. She saw Zachary's new position as president as an occupation that robbed her of her husband (O'Brien 69). She took little interest in being supportive of her husband's political campaigns and showed an equally minimal interest in fostering support for her husband through her use of the first lady role. Due to this lack of support, "Margaret Taylor became the first wife of a president to be accused of having poisoned her husband" (Garrison 110). This suspicion was encouraged when she refused to have Zachary's body embalmed after his death. More recent scientific evidence, however, has proven that the potential deadly lemonade that Zachary was drinking before he died did not contain any arsenic, only whiskey, freeing Margaret of these murderous accusations.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Beginning a trend for her immediate successors, Margaret relinquished hostessing duties to a younger and more enthusiastic hostess, her daughter Bettie Bliss. While Bettie appealed to the always youth conscious Washington, Margaret was free to seclude herself on the third floor of the mansion. Bettie was described as having the "the artlessness of a rustic belle and the grace of a duchess" (Whitehouse.gov). Washington found Bettie to be a very agreeable social hostess, but they did not excuse Margaret from delegating this important function of the first lady. Bettie had more success than Eliza Monroe who had tried to carve out a similar hostessing role for herself, but she was unable to transfer her popularity to her mother.

Members of Washington society were offended that Margaret had delegated several of her duties to her daughter and that she took no interest in performing the ceremonial or social

duties of first lady for herself. Her lack of public appearances “perpetuated the myth of the coarse farm woman” (Garrison 110). Margaret did nothing to correct rumors about her mannerisms or sophistication, potentially harming her husband’s support base. She remained so isolated during her time in the White House that no picture or painted portrait of Margaret has met the criteria to be named an official representation of the first lady (Garrison 107).

Margaret’s self-inflicted isolation was disappointing to her husband’s administration. Instead of expanding the role of first lady as her predecessor had done, Margaret preferred to remain anonymous.

Although Margaret tried to greatly distance herself from the public while her husband was president, she was still noted to make occasional social visits (O’Brien 69). Even when making the sparse social visits to meet dignitaries or foreign officials, Margaret’s personality left little impression upon them and did not portray the compassionate and welcoming side of the president’s administration. Unfortunately, these rare social visits were not enough to salvage her reputation in the eyes of the public.

OVERALL. Margaret did little, if anything, to support and encourage her husband as the twelfth president of the United States. Her refusal to embrace the social role of first lady offended many members of Washington society and Margaret was not able to connect with any marginalized citizens due to her lack of tact and grace. Her self-induced isolation prohibited her from being responsive or engaged with the important political issues of the day. Even after the death of her husband, Margaret Taylor was questioned for harming him physically, an interesting correlation to her impact on his political career.

ABIGAIL FILLMORE

HUSBAND: MILLARD FILLMORE

HOSTESS: MARY ABIGAIL FILLMORE

TERM: 1850 -1853

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Like her predecessor, Abigail chose to employ her daughter as White House hostess. For Abigail however, she remained more united with her husband and the events of the White House and was spared the ridicule reaped upon Margaret Taylor for seeking complete privacy. Even though she delegated the social role of first lady to a younger family member, Abigail was instrumental in making an important and lasting change in the White House. Venturing to influence the leaders of the land:

She prodded and persuaded her husband and his supporters to pass a special congressional appropriations bill earmarked for a White House library. With \$250 made available to her, she transformed a second-story room in to the first library. Tastefully decorated and provided with a piano, it became what many guests considered to be the most delightful room in the mansion. (Garrison 115).

This addition to White House culture has grown and flourished since Abigail's tenure and has always appealed to a knowledge-hungry society. This small step towards an intellectual basis in the role encouraged Abigail's successors to further substantiate the impact of their office.

Abigail also enjoyed one of the notorious pastimes of her successors Abigail Adams and Dolley Madison. Although Abigail Fillmore was relatively insignificant in any of the political policy decisions of her husband, she was interested in and followed current political events. Straying from her strict social seclusion, she became "a regular at the congressional visitors galleries, and she developed a fascination for listening to debates" (Harris 196). It is unfortunate the Millard was not able to use Abigail's political interest to create or support any of his policies.

It is equally unfortunate that Abigail refused to integrate the information she learned at these debates into her responsibilities as first lady to further support her husband's administration. Had Abigail applied her congressional experiences to the social role of her office, she could have revived the social events of the White House and contributed to generating support for her husband.

PRESS RELATIONS. Within the four years that Margaret Taylor resided in the White House, technology had rapidly increased the availability of photography to the press. This presented a unique problem to Abigail who became the first first lady to truly worry about the public's perception of her physical appearance. Even though she was less active than Sarah Polk, Abigail's visibility was huge as a result of a photographic postcard of her that began to be sold throughout Washington in 1853 (FirstLadies.org). The increased focus of the press on Abigail's appearance instead of just her social activities justified the First Lady's employment of a hairdresser and wardrobe maid. The increased attention on Abigail seemed to be contradictory to the "prevailing idealization of a wife as a purely private person whose domain was strictly domestic" (FirstLadies.org). Publicized information on the first lady would be exponentially expanded in the future but Abigail handled her unique situation with the press well. If Abigail had not paid attention to the increased image she was broadcasting with the advent of cameras, she could have ruined her own reputation and that of her husband.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. After her implementation of a hostess figure, Abigail was unwilling to appear at social occasions or to make public visits. She resisted leaving the White House unless escorted by her husband, Millard, and the Fillmore couple insisted on taking "every chance they could to withdraw and leave the parties to the young women" (Caroli 69). The Fillmore's were equally well known for rejecting most social invitations

and it is curious how Abigail, especially, was able to escape office without serious repercussions to her reputation.

Many citizens also approached Abigail with appeals for favors, both personal and political. Her intercessions included such small favors such as entrance in to West Point, but they highlighted her compassionate nature. The thank you letters to Abigail that remain attest to her responsiveness to these citizens when she perceived that their need was genuine (FirstLadies.org). Although the favors that Abigail attempted to grant often bordered on nepotism, those whom she helped remained very loyal to her. Her strategy in this area would be implemented by several of her predecessors and encourages the image that the first lady is the public access point to the White House.

OVERALL. Unfortunately, Abigail's "intellect and ability went mostly unused during her years as first lady" (O'Brien 71). It is clear that Abigail was capable of influencing her husband and other politicians by her success at instituting a White House library, but her skill in this area was not wisely used to play the part of social advocate. Because Abigail presented a unified front with her husband in their unresponsiveness to society, she is not solely responsible for distancing prominent figures from her husband's administration. Although introverted, Abigail did not appear to be exclusive of any particular societal groups and was therefore neither an asset nor a liability to her husband's administration.

JANE PIERCE

HUSBAND: FRANKLIN PIERCE

TERM: 1853 - 1857

WIFE. Tragedy was a constant factor in the family life of Jane and Franklin Pierce and it played an active role in constantly redefining their relationship. Shortly before Franklin assumed

the presidency, the couple witnessed their son, Bennie, be killed in a train accident. Jane had still not fully recuperated from this event by the time she reached the White House and her grief affected her performance. After the election of her husband, Jane was reluctant to begin residence in the executive mansion and “she made it clear that she was not happy there and never expected to be” (Garrison 146). Although grieving time is exceptionally important after such a tragedy, Jane was in no condition to support the president throughout his official tenure. Jane had previously been uncomfortable as the wife of a Congressman and she was unenthused about being promoted to the more demanding role of first lady.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Like the first ladies before and after her, Jane Pierce delegated her social responsibilities to an alternate family member. Because she was struggling with the death of her son, she preferred to remain secluded upstairs in place of attending and initiating social events. The public afforded Jane and her husband a great deal of sympathy due to the untimely death of their child. Jane received especially “wide latitude in refusing to undertake official responsibilities as First Lady” which she took advantage of to retain every ounce of permitted privacy (Caroli 71). Although Jane eventually attempted to attend and even organize some of the social events held in Washington, she remained solemn and “her appearances were anything but cheery” (O’Brien 81). Her black clothing and lack of attention caused a gloom to settle over the White House social season that lasted the extent of Franklin’s presidency. She imposed her religious beliefs upon her husband and the rest of the White House staff by forcing Franklin to read aloud from the Bible each day. It is lucky for Franklin that the public approved of his wife’s social hermitage and that his image was not hindered by her dismal and infrequent social appearances.

OVERALL. Jane made no notable achievements in the social responsibilities of the first lady but she was fortunate to have received the public’s grace as a result of her grief over the

death of her son. Because she remained isolated on the third floor of the White House writing letters to her deceased son, little is known about her time in office. Even during her tenure, "Washingtonians called her 'the shadow of the White House'" and she did little to dispel this association (Garrison 146). Her frequent depression and lack of close personal friends also contributed to her failure in aiding her husband through the first lady role. Without appointing a social hostess to attend to her duties, Jane's success in this role would have been even more minimal.

HARRIET LANE

HOSTESS FOR: JAMES BUCHANNAN

TERM: 1857 – 1861

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Since the reign of Dolley Madison under Thomas Jefferson, no president had employed a hostess significant enough to receive credit as fulfilling the duties of first lady until James Buchanan appointed his young niece to facilitate the social aspects of the presidency. Although her actions and choices as hostess still reflected upon the president, she had some degree of freedom in breaking from the previous introverted first ladies and began to reenergize White House life. She reintroduced an air of royalty to the members of the White House, took an unprecedented role in politically promoting the Buchanan administration, and began an important custom of infiltrating culture and art into the political sphere. These innovations and her handling of the more traditional roles "all make her sound very much like a First Lady of the twentieth century" (Caroli 75).

PRESS RELATIONS. Harriet was enormously popular as a White House hostess, especially after the limited and meager efforts of her predecessors. Unfortunately, however, she was not well trained in portraying a positive public image and her "girlish innocence and her insistence

on having her own way caused the president some embarrassment” (Caroli 73). Her youthfulness generally appealed to Washington, as she was only twenty seven, and her popularity was increasingly critical as tension mounted near the end of her uncle’s administration. Despite the occasional social blunder, the amnesty that Harriet experienced with the press and Washington society was an asset to James.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Even though she bordered on treating her unofficial position in the White House as a position of royalty, Harriet was well versed in the treatment of individual relationships. Her attitude and mannerisms left others feeling that she was “always courteous, always in place, silent whenever it was possible to be silent, watchful and careful” which were particularly important characteristics because they gave the allusion that she “made no enemies and never involved herself in any controversial issue” (Caroli 74). Although she was definitely a social asset to her uncle as a result of her personality, the statement that she was uninvolved in controversial issues is misleading, as she experimented with campaigning on behalf of James. Harriet’s personality also made her a target for those seeking access to the president. Her friendliness encouraged others to approach her with appeals that they feared the president would immediately dismiss. While she thoroughly supported her uncle’s political agenda, she also tried to comply with those who sought her aide (Caroli 74). In another attempt to appeal to every sector of society, Harriet used the social hostess role to emphasize American art and to mingle culture with politics. She not only increased the White House emphasis on culture to enrich social events, but she also used her social power to protect James politically. When sectional tensions were at their highest point, “she carefully organized seating arrangements at White House events so as to keep political enemies apart from one another. She also encouraged her guests not to discuss sensitive political issues at White House socials” (Watson 63). This dual approach to the role of social

hostess was a welcome and positive change from the hidden first ladies of the two previous centuries. Nearly every aspect of her social schedule aided the floundering and chaotic Buchanan administration.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Harriet Lane was successful at politically complementing her presidential uncle. Although unprecedented and controversial for the time period, Harriet fully immersed herself in promoting her uncle's political agenda. Even though she was not the wife of the president, Harriet "showed evidence of considerable exposure to Washington politics and to foreign courts" (Caroli 73). This political savvy was highly regarded by James and other diplomats, allowing Harriet to reclaim an advisory role for the first lady that had been missing throughout previous administrations.

Harriet's willingness to promote her uncle's policies despite the social norms of the time was incredibly advantageous to James immediately prior to the outbreak of the civil war. During her political endeavors, Harriet went as far as to meet with a Democrat in order to promote her uncle's presidential agenda (Caroli 73). The political astuteness and campaigning knowledge that Harriet was able to contribute to the Buchanan administration was well received by most of country despite the sectional tension that was arising throughout his term.

OVERALL. As the only official hostess to be ranked in this thesis, Harriet Lane did an admirable job in nearly every category. Her inclination towards acting like royalty was found intolerable by some, but she was friendly and gracious to most people. Harriet did little to detract from the success of her uncle and she was very bold in the innovations she made to the campaigning aspect of the office. Harriet appears to be an especially qualified candidate for the modern day first ladyship, particularly in comparison to her below average predecessors. Although Harriet was well intentioned, some of her more bold political movements may have been more harmful to her uncle than she realized.

MARY TODD LINCOLN

HUSBAND: ABRAHAM LINCOLN

TERM: 1861 - 1865

WIFE. Although well-educated and from a sophisticated family, Mary Todd Lincoln seemed to view her marriage to Abraham as a mere economic advantage, especially after his ascension to the White House. Instead of using her role as the president's wife in a time of national conflict to aid, comfort, and protect her husband, Mary thought it appropriate to use her time by indulging in extravagant purchases and contributing to the rampant Washington society rumor mill. In contrast to earlier in her marriage with Abraham, by the time she reached the White House Mary had become "so unreliable and impetuous that he could not trust her judgment on any significant matter" (Caroli 93). This inconsistent character was unnecessarily tough on Lincoln during his war torn administration and was equally degrading to Mary's personal reputation.

Communication seemed to be lacking in this presidential partnership. Most likely a result of her wealthy upbringing, Mary saw Abraham as her source of economic security and encouraged him to continue in politics so that he might allow her to continue her extravagant lifestyle. Instead of offering the sound advice and respected feminine perspective that many successful first ladies would generously give to their husbands, Mary, "badgered him more than she helped. ...she interrupted the president's work at the slightest whim," and she poorly communicated to Abraham how she planned to manage the social responsibilities of the White House (Caroli 99). These tendencies on Mary's part weakened the Lincoln administration by robbing the President of a critical and expected source of support. Nearer to the end of the Lincoln administration, Mary became depressed and withdrawn and Abraham was hardly responsive to her constant pleas and requests. Instead, she "was reduced to asking near

strangers to influence her husband on matters about which he used to seek her advice” (Truman 226). This marital tragedy speaks volumes on the pressure and strain the White House places on personal relationships.

Mary, however, performed many of her heinous exploits with good intentions. Since early on in Abraham’s career, Mary had inspired and encouraged her husband. In a similar fashion, she hoped to contribute to his career by making, “the White House a rallying point for peace, civilization, and sanity” (Truman 222). Although these plans did not unfold as Mary expected, her idealism is commendable. Many of her excessive purchases and extravagant social decisions stemmed from her desire to make the president appear more prestigious and to eliminate his somewhat less-civilized country appearance. Even after her behavior became erratic, Mary attempted to give advice to her husband by recommending many people to fill open governmental positions. She began to take advantage of her husband’s position and supported the spoils system that had marred previous administrations by convincing Abraham to commission many of her family members to prestigious appointed positions (Truman 226). In the habit of most wives, Mary insisted that her husband not overwork himself with the abundance of crises presented as complications of the Civil War. Unfortunately it can be said that this insistence on recreation led to her husband’s assassination.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. To make up for her lavish spending habits that are discussed in the Social Responsibilities section of her analysis, Mary was among the first first ladies to seriously attempt to control and cut the White House budget. Unfortunately, Mary went about protecting her family’s assets in an unjust and questionable manner. When rumors began to circulate about her wardrobe expenses and the disgust with her uncontrolled spending became clear, Mary decided to cut White House expenses. Instead of refraining from purchasing new clothes, Mary “responded by selling off excess manure purchased for the White House

grounds and by letting some of the mansion's staff go to cut back on expenses" (O'Brien 89). Even after these poor decisions, Mary petitioned for a salary when she began to personally run the kitchen. Her near theft of money from the government continued when she used appropriated funds to pay for her dresses while saving "two-thirds of the President's \$25,000 salary each year, building up a retirement fund of almost \$70,000 by the end of Lincoln's first term" (Truman 226). Even after leaving the White House, Mary insisted on using her first lady status to increase the amount paid to widowed presidential spouses since she perceived her own situation a result of her husband's 'martyrdom' (Caroli 101). The failure to use personal finances wisely coupled with the irresponsible use of government funds showered negative attention on the Lincoln administration. Mary's policies with regard to spending were lax and both her husband's constituents and critics were quick to notice and distrust the administration.

PRESS RELATIONS. Because Harriet Lane had been the first social hostess in a series of hidden and introverted first ladies, Mary Lincoln entered into the White House when the press was eager for details about the first family. Although Mary relished the spotlight, her ability to handle this popular position was faltering as a result of her inconsistent personality. Refusing to accept responsibility for her own dramatic economic actions, Mary "deftly disposed of her original commissioner as a sacrificial offering to her critics, obliquely blaming him for the red ink" (Truman 225). Instead of being honest with the public about her spending habits, she chose to blame others at the expense of their personal reputation. Even though she hoped this action would improve her public image, it would take much more than a sacrificial staff offering to explain and heal her relations with the nation as a result of her unrestrained spending.

Mary's ability to influence the press was poorly tolerated. Editors enjoyed stories about her overstated spending because of their ability to polarize the gossip mills. Even when trying to salvage her reputation, "Mary Lincoln's influence was negative – petty, unpredictable, and self-

serving” (Caroli 100). If anything, the prestige and splendor Mary attempted to add to the White House backfired for her husband and she instead appeared to be distant and out of touch with the nation. Unfortunately, her poor relations with the press also contributed to her husband’s poor reputation in the southern states.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Like most aspects of her life, Mary Lincoln made sure that the White House social affairs left her the center of attention. It is for this reason that little is written about the social seasons under Mary except for details describing her extravagant dresses and ornate decorations. Her lavish taste in clothes stemmed from the “belief that being first lady came with certain entitlements – one of which was the right to look the part” (O’Brien 83). Although other first ladies had accepted the luxury of stylish and pricy clothes, Mary’s decision to dress in this fashion met with increased controversy as a result of the Civil War that was battering the nation. Besides a mere lavish taste in fashion, Mary had excessive purchasing habits and instead of reusing attire, Mary felt it appropriate to buy multitudes of these ornate dresses. Part of her interest in these items was her desire to prove herself as a society woman and to bolster her personal reputation. She inappropriately used the fashion world as a means “to show Washington and the world that the President’s wife could dress as fashionably as any easterner” (Truman 222). Citizens felt out of touch with a first lady who spent money on frivolous items without guilt when the rest of the nation was being ravaged and torn apart by war. Instead of using style to attract prestige to the White House, Mary abused her social spotlight to selfishly display herself.

Mary’s desire to ‘look the part’ was not limited to her wardrobe, but she also thought it was her social responsibility to thoroughly redecorate the White House. Unlike many other first ladies who successfully redecorated the executive mansion, Mary did not choose to fundraise the capital required. Instead, Mary sought only an appropriation from Congress and “in no time

she had spent the twenty thousand dollars, which was supposed to last four years – and a lot more,” making both Congress and the suffering nation nervous (Truman 223). Mary did not heavily consider the circumstances of her fellow countrymen and the expensive curtains and ornamental furniture she chose to decorate with were seen as purchases in bad taste. This thoughtlessness on the part of Abraham’s wife further alienated him in the executive mansion from average and war-torn citizens because any sympathy extended from the White House seemed less sincere.

In a more positive contribution to the social responsibilities of the first lady, Mary invited African Americans to join her in the White House as guests (O’Brien 88). This was a critical step in helping the president gain support from this suffering and ignored section of the population. Many of the positive emotions created by this social move were negated by Mary’s well known southern ties and sympathies. If her southern background did not already make her suspicious enough, her grief over battlefield deaths in the South made her the first and only first lady to be labeled as a ‘traitor to the Union’ (Garrison 106). This sharp distinction from her husband, whose presidency was based on national unity, further weakened her reputation with many citizens and potentially did the same with her husband’s.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Mary Lincoln may have fared better as first lady if she had remained isolated on the second floor of the White House like several of her predecessors had chosen to do. Unfortunately, Mary thought it appropriate, even with her unstable temperament, to fully immerse herself in some of Abraham’s important political campaigning. Perhaps a result of her husband’s previous political difficulties, Mary refused “to accept anonymity in Washington” and instead attempted to gain “authority and prestige” for her husband’s administration. (Caroli 105, Truman 223). Her southern ties, questionable personality, and selfishness, however, all made it very difficult to accomplish this goal. Instead of charming fellow politicians, diplomats,

and their wives with her intellect and sophistication, Mary unpleasantly controlled inter-cabinet politics which led to “arguments and rumors dominat[ing] White House life” (O’Brien 87). Mary could simply not bear to share any spotlight with another person, including her husband. At one point, she gravely humiliated herself and her husband when she “waded across the muddy field and assaulted the President with every irate verb and adjective in her vocabulary, while the ranking generals of the Army of the Potomac gaped with disbelief” (Truman 231). This example, along with other instances where Mary refused to retreat from the headlines with grace, greatly undermined her husband’s authority, the very aspect of his administration that she was trying to increase.

OVERALL. Even if Mary’s activities were well intentioned, they reflected poorly on her husband who was already presiding over a delicate and emotionally charged nation. The Lincoln’s relationship was not an asset to Abraham as it did not offer him an outlet for relaxation or sound political support. Likewise, the country found it hard to rely on Mary’s attitude for a sense of compassion when she was busy purchasing designer clothing and fabric. With more communication between Abraham and Mary, it may have been possible for Mary to fully endorse her husband’s presidency. As it were, Mary simply contributed to alienating hundreds of citizens who were already stricken by the war.

ELIZA JOHNSON

HUSBAND: ANDREW JOHNSON

HOSTESS: MARTHA PATTERSON

TERM: 1865 - 1869

WIFE. Eliza Johnson faced a great deal of criticism simply by virtue of following Mary Lincoln into the White House. For Eliza, however, she was always loyal and supportive of her

husband. She became a source of comfort and encouragement, especially during her husband's impeachment trials, and she advised her husband "that he should remain true to the principles he held and not depart from them simply because he was facing the strongest opposition he had ever yet faced" (Choate 125). It is evident that Eliza understood the emotional needs of her husband much better than her immediate predecessor. For this reason, she was very successful in aiding Andrew through small tasks such as clipping newspapers, addressing wardrobe issues, and calming his temper (O'Brien 95). Even though she chose to stay out of the social realm of the first lady's duties because she thought she lacked the necessary hostessing skills, her personal skills and influence were certainly a personal advantage to her criticized husband.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Eliza was a major influence in helping her husband to set at least one presidential precedent. After the Civil War, Eliza's compassion led her to support her husband's pardoning of several controversial southern leaders, including Jefferson Davis (Garrison 63). This tradition of pardoning prisoners has been continued during the Christmas season and the tradition of pardoning a turkey on Thanksgiving has also been initiated. Even with the physical illness that Eliza struggled to cope with, she remained an informed and valued member of the White House and Johnson administration.

PUBLIC RELATIONS. Eliza is yet another example of a first lady who refused to seek a balance between public and personal life. Instead of routinely retreating to the third floor while still attempting to appease the press at social functions, Eliza "shunned reporters, made almost no public appearances due to her ill health, and turned over hostessing duties to daughter Martha" (O'Brien 95). This schedule offended and confused the press after Mary Lincoln had so blatantly made a spectacle of herself. Therefore, Eliza's choice to ignore the press and her attempt to disregard the social season reflected poorly on both her husband and herself.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Eliza was physically ill throughout a large portion of her husband's presidency. She used her weakness as an opportunity to remain secluded in the White House and instead delegated her daughter to preside over the social occasions at the White House. Prior to the presidency, Andrew's career had not helped to boost Eliza's confidence in her social skills and "she understood how short she fell of possessing the social skills needed" to act as hostess of the executive mansion (Caroli 75). It is admirable that Eliza admitted her shortcomings in the social sphere which inevitably saved her husband additional humiliation and criticism.

When mentioning that Eliza disregarded the Washington social scene, it is important to note that this is by no means an exaggeration. She is contributed with attending two social events during the four years of her husband's presidency. Although no unusual or negative attention was drawn to her at her dinner appearance, her other appearance was at a children's function where "she greeted her young guests by announcing that she was 'an invalid'" (Caroli 77). This honesty and frankness was too severe for her young audience. Thankfully this misfortune occurred near the end of her tenure as first lady and she did not have an opportunity to repeat this performance. Because Eliza had the foresight to appoint her daughter as social hostess in her place, she avoided further shaming her husband with her social awkwardness.

Martha Patterson, daughter of Eliza and Andrew, was well suited for the role of social hostess. Her youth, like in previous instances, made her an instant success in the Washington social circle. However, Martha was very practical and not as socially involved as many hoped she would be. Instead of frivolously planning lavish parties while the country was just beginning to recuperate from the Civil War, Martha "covered the worn White House carpets with simple muslin and installed two Jersey cows on the lawn to provide fresh milk and butter" (Caroli 77). This sensitivity to the simple life of many Americans was refreshing, especially after the

aristocratic extreme of Mary Lincoln. Eliza made a wise decision in forcing her young, pleasant, and sensible daughter into the highly controversial White House hostessing role.

OVERALL. Eliza's shy personality was certainly a benefit to Andrew Johnson after the calamity of Mary Lincoln's brashness during the previous administration. Even though Eliza was quiet and reserved, she remained knowledgeable about the political and social happenings of the day and was valuable to Andrew in assisting with the day-to-day aspects of his office. More sympathy was awarded to Eliza for the "grief and poor health [that] sapped her energy" than many first ladies, but she did not escape entirely free of criticism (Caroli 75). Eliza's choice of surrogate hostess and own personal choices regarding the first lady role aided her in making the best of her introverted time in the White House.

JULIA GRANT

HUSBAND: ULYSSES S. GRANT

TERM: 1869 - 1877

WIFE. Julia Grant is one of the first forgiving first ladies to embrace the role earned by her husband's scandalous career. Because Julia adored her husband, she was willing to sacrifice her personal life to aid his political ascent. She became immune to criticism of Ulysses and truly thrived on the attention she and her husband received. It was well known that Ulysses "liked the women around him dependent, and Julia usually humored him by appearing docile and agreeable" without relinquishing her own judgment, independence, and stubbornness (Caroli 111). Julia was the first true first lady in a significant amount of time to have achieved a balance between the roles of supportive wife and social matriarch of the country.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. As the media and press became increasingly important, Julia was ushered in to setting a very important precedent affecting the information flow from the White House. Julia handled criticism from the press well but also saw the value of combating rumors before they began. Julia became the first first lady to issue press releases, a significant increase in the substantive activities of the first lady. The innovation Julia contributed to press relations would become increasingly important as more thorough exposure of the first lady's public life became expected.

Because Julia was the first popular presidential spouse in a long line of alienating introverts, she started the trend for the first lady to become a national leader and symbol. Defined by her own social events instead of just her husband's political career, Julia wrought her own criticism and praise from the public. Perhaps for this reason, Julia became the first occupant of the first lady position to pen an autobiography (Caroli 206). This document is obviously of historical importance, but also represents the independent and strong personality of Julia.

PRESS RELATIONS. Julia was the first woman to hold the office of first lady who had to deal with a significant onset in media curiosity, furthered by the increased use of cameras. This was a distinct difficulty to Julia who had a slight cross to her eye. She immediately realized the value of physical appeal to gain popularity and for this reason she required most photographs to "show her in profile, concealing the intersection of her gaze" (Caroli 110). Despite her physical appearance, Julia was still confident and cheery in front of the press. Her good nature radiated a sense of wholesomeness to the troubled Grant administration.

The strong desire for a personal life unknown to the public was present throughout Julia's term. She desired to protect her husband and her family from vicious press rumors and created new rules for the growing members of the press who aimed to get many sensational

stories out of the first family's, and especially the First Lady's, personal activities. However, after suggesting some very stringent policies, such as shutting off the White House grounds, Julia observed a "'ripple of comment' about the Grants 'getting too exclusive'" (Caroli 114). Although her attempts to afford this privacy to her children are noble, if she would have implemented a privacy policy in smaller and less drastic steps, she may have fared better in maintaining a friendly relationship with the inquisitive media.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Julia cherished the social aspect of the first ladyship. She went to great lengths to entertain with flair and often had twenty course meals prepared by a specialty Italian chef (O'Brien 105). Even though her style was lavish, her guest list was inclusive of many socioeconomic groups. As is common in high society, her parties certainly included the richest families in Washington, but she was conscious to also invite the plain and common citizens who would otherwise not have access to the White House. The importance that she placed on the more common members of the nation's society was mirrored in her treatment of the White House servants. Although she was firm with the White House staff, exhibited through her implementation of a uniform and attention policy, she was also "warmhearted and kind" and Julia "seldom gave unreasonable orders" (Truman 207). Julia's reasoning in making the staff more presentable and standardized, to add prestige and dignity to the White House, seemed to supplement her husband's rough administration.

Unlike Mary Lincoln, Julia's propensity to spend freely while fulfilling her hostessing role was well tolerated. Now that the Civil War was over and the nation was beginning to take small strides towards recuperation, any expense to bring joy and laughter to the political scene was appreciated. In complete opposite fashion of Mary Lincoln, "extravagant spending by the Grants would increase their attractiveness with the public" while the rest of the wealthy also competed to display their material wealth (Caroli 110). This economic freedom certainly contributed to

Julia's love of her position. It was through these elaborate social events that Julia was truly able to draw attention to herself and to reflect some positive light on her husband's administration.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Although a master of the social realm, Julia was not adept to aiding her husband in his political endeavors. She seemed to lack common sense in regard to political decisions which further emphasized her husband's presidential weaknesses. She was disappointed that Ulysses did not keep her very well informed about his major decisions and the confusion it caused led her to declare herself as both a supporter and a critic of the same piece of legislation (Caroli 111). Her faltering memory was evidenced in some social situations but it was in the political affairs of the Grant administration that Julia could simply not acclimate. She reinforced and encouraged several instances of bad judgment on the part of her husband and his cabinet members and she also was questioned about her propensity to nepotism (Caroli 113). Examples of this judgment led to the encouragement of Ulysses to attempt election to a third term. It is unfortunate, but the monetary scheme that Julia was involved in at the onset of Grant's term never allowed her to fully recover political trust or integrity for herself or her husband. Julia was not a political asset to her husband but she did her best to support and encourage him in all of his endeavors.

OVERALL. Julia Grant fully embraced the role of first lady. She received the role of social hostess with energy and consequently was very successful in reviving the social life of the White House. She admired and supported her husband, even when Ulysses made some unconventional decisions, allowing him to rely on her for a steady source of support. Julia also made several substantive improvements to the role of first lady while she continued to maintain the more traditional aspect of redecorating the White House and presiding over the social season. Her personal independence and ambition complemented her husband's but she failed to exercise the political knowledge that could've more fully furthered Ulysses' career.

LUCY HAYES

HUSBAND: RUTHERFORD B. HAYES

TERM: 1877 - 1881

WIFE. As a result of her strong Methodist ties, Lucy highly valued her husband and honored his career. Her entire family was of great importance to her, but “in reacting to the often competing demands of being a good mother or being a valuable wife, it appears that she chose to make herself an extension of Rutherford” (Caroli 119). Lucy’s self-sacrifice in this area avoided several arguments that could have potentially undermined any successes of the Hayes administration. This unanimity between husband and wife is what allowed the Hayes to so concretely uphold their ban on liquor. Most people could not tell “whether it was Lucy or the president who stood more firmly behind the ban” but Lucy was unafraid to take the blame (Caroli 124). It is because Lucy understood the value of her role in supporting the president that she was willing to sacrifice her own popularity to save the reputation of her husband.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Lucy was the first woman to be pressured into acting as an advocate on behalf of lobbying groups and other political movements. Her refusal to become the spokesperson or even an official supporter of any group, including those she supported, such as the temperance movement, set a precedent for future first ladies. Lucy also began to hint at the role of social advocate through her visits to “numerous prisons, schools, and asylums as part of her efforts to improve the condition of such institutions” (Watson 87). The time she spent volunteering and administering to the welfare of others expanded the role of first lady in a concrete and commendable way.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Lucy is most famous for her ban on liquor in the White House during social events, earning her the nickname ‘Lemonade Lucy.’ The commitment to this moral ban stemmed from her religious background and many similar

religious rules were put in place during her time in the White House. She was very vocal and unwavering about her religious beliefs and “stopped short of preaching to others about their drinking habits” (O’Brien 110). Many individuals in society did not appreciate her moral zeal, however, and criticized her for refusing to entertain guests, including foreign dignitaries who were accustomed to wine at meals, with alcohol. These moral guidelines fostered Lucy’s reputation for simplicity.

Despite the controversial ban on liquor, Lucy upheld and greatly contributed to the social aspects of the White House. She understood the value of her popularity to her husband and for this reason she oversaw an ambitious social schedule (Caroli 123). Modest dress was another of her perceived moral obligations, making it difficult for her to compete with the high fashion of many other society women. Even under these stressful circumstances, Lucy refused to retreat from the social scene and continued to oversee White House events that adhered to her religious beliefs.

Lucy was also praised by many for the numerous other positive character traits she exhibited. The White House staff appreciated her attention to individuals through the choice of unique Christmas gifts to each person, and newspapers reported that under her reign “the White House showed ‘a refreshing absence of pretension and formality’” (Caroli 121). Despite imposing moral obligations onto others, people respected that Lucy was mindful of monetary matters and the fact that she was the first presidential spouse to have a college degree was not overlooked (Truman 47). The way in which she chose to balance the social obligations of the White House with her personal convictions showed a great sense of maturity in running the White House that had not been visible in several of the previous young hostesses.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Lucy Hayes was confronted with more opportunities to campaign for causes separately from her husband than any first lady preceding her. Prompted by her

White House ban on liquor, the temperance movement immediately sought to be endorsed by Lucy. Because of her support of women's education, suffragettes equally attempted to receive Lucy's endorsement for their cause. As a surprise to both groups, however neither group, "could get the first lady to officially join their causes or publicly espouse their agendas" and she seemed unsuspectingly traditional when she agreed with Rutherford that "education and a career were fine [for women], but the political decision-making was, as far as Lucy was concerned, the province of men" (O'Brien 110). By managing her political involvement in this way, Lucy remained pleasant to all and refrained from taking advantage of her position of power. After the divisions formed by the Civil War, Lucy did well to remain silent on most controversial political issues and avoided further alienating sections of the country. Because Lucy understood the importance of maintaining a unified front with her husband politically and therefore refused to take part in controversial political activities, she appeared to be a knowledgeable and loyal supporter of her husband.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Lucy made great strides in assuring that the role of social advocate was a main priority on the first lady's schedule. She was not focused in her pursuits but her approach did allow her to reach out to many additional marginalized sectors of society. By devoting her free time to volunteering and visiting "educational institutions, preaching the value of school for both sexes," Lucy was able to gain universal support for her position(O'Brien 110). As the first first lady to truly champion a social cause, Lucy did well to choose an issue that was universal in scope and uncontroversial in comparison to many of the opportunities presented to her. One defining and isolated incidence in her advocacy came when she was appointed:

honorary president of the Woman's Home Missionary Society, an organization that campaigned to better the lives of the poor in the appalling slums of

nineteenth-century America's cities. This was a cause that was beyond criticism from all points of the political spectrum. (Truman 49)

The acceptance of this official role in no way compromised her husband's career or presidential agenda and at the same time allowed her to appear intelligent, aware, and compassionate. Without Lucy's first silent steps into the role of social advocate, many noble causes would have been left un-championed by future first ladies.

OVERALL. Lucy clearly provided the type of support her husband needed. She was happy to consent to the sacrificial nature of the presidential spouse's role and she understood the importance of gaining popularity for herself to reflect back on her husband. Her unwavering stance on remaining out of controversial issues greatly aided in portraying her husband as the servant of the people and efforts to support women's education increased the positive representation of his policies. Although her moral reign over the White House may have been a little harsh, her ability to stick to her own principals while under immense pressure from the general public is admirable. She made important strides in expanding the role of first lady and felt it was her duty to "not violate the Constitution" even though it was her husband who had taken the oath of office (Caroli 124). Her unwavering support and sacrificial attitude made her stand out from the first ladies that preceded and succeeded her.

LUCRETIA GARFIELD

HUSBAND: JAMES GARFIELD

TERM: 1881

WIFE. Lucretia and James had a mutual respect and dependence upon each other. It was common for James to seek his wife's opinions about controversial aspects of his career and Lucretia was happy to offer her input. Lucretia was a dedicated wife and "an intelligent capable

woman who reluctantly relinquished her own autonomy in favor of her husband's career" (Caroli 133). Fortunately, Lucretia's personal sacrifices helped to sustain James' career and their marriage. The two seemed to be as inseparable as James' career while in the White House and their public appearances most often occurred together. The unity that their marriage displayed was a constant support for James throughout his political career.

Although they did not have to undergo much stress while in the White House due to the abbreviated term of her husband, Lucretia assumed an appropriate tone to honor his legacy during the funeral. She insisted that she be a prominent part of the ceremony and that she remain visible throughout the ordeal (Caroli 133). This helped both her and the American citizens to deal with the grief they were experiencing and it reflected the strength found in Lucretia's personal life. This also reemphasized the unique partnership that Lucretia and James experienced that had helped James to be elected to the presidency.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. If Lucretia had the opportunity to remain in office longer, she would certainly have been able to build upon her social hostessing skills. As it were, Lucretia was not comfortable with the demands of this position and was aided by the secretary of state's wife to perform several social tasks. Lucretia is described as "more a bookworm than a socialite" and the process of organizing social events is known to have overwhelmed her (O'Brien 116). Her personality was also described as discrete and forgiving, two traits that would lend themselves well to the sensitive nature of hostessing (O'Brien 113). Employing the expertise of the secretary's wife was a wise decision to help Lucretia affiliate with Washington society. Unfortunately, she never had an adequate opportunity to prove her own capabilities in this area.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. For the short time the Garfields resided in the White House, Lucretia was involved in several political aspects of her husband's administration. James clearly valued

her opinion and looked to her sound advice when making decisions. Lucretia was concretely helpful in making cabinet decisions, both appointments and dismissals, with her husband (O'Brien 117). Lucretia was also able to temper some of her husband's more passionate views about the controversial issues of the day. With regards to women's suffrage, she shared James' view, but "showed a great deal more understanding than he of the particular problems of women" (Caroli 131). This dimension of the Garfield partnership allowed Lucretia to extend her balanced and sensitive attitude upon the president.

OVERALL. Lucretia was not an overly ambitious first lady but the tasks she attended to were a great resource to her husband. Her unique position in time and strength of character allowed her to become a role model for American women in a very short amount of time. Although not discussed in this paper, she remained dedicated to protecting her husband's legacy after his death and set a great example for post-White House first ladies.

FRANCES CLEVELAND

HUSBAND: GROVER CLEVELAND

HOSTESS: ROSE CLEVELAND (1885 - 1886)

TERM: 1886 - 1889, 1893 - 1897

WIFE. Frances was instrumental in ministering to the elitist attitude of Grover Cleveland. With her inclusive and charming personality she was able to decrease the irascibility of her husband and therefore extend his popularity into more diverse social and political groups (Truman 300). Grover had a tendency to overwork, putting up to eighteen hours a day into his presidential duties, and Frances had the ability to lead him towards healthier habits. In a fairly stereotypical way, Frances was also able to improve the image and appearance of Grover, quite literally, by assisting him with more flattering wardrobe choices.

In Grover's second term, Frances found it increasingly important to protect her husband. With regards to health and security, new issues arose after Grover's return to the White House that had not previously been experienced. Once it was learned that Grover was suffering from cancer of the mouth, he and Frances worked in secret to send him on a secret trip to receive immediate surgery (Robar 68). Upon his return, Frances had to maintain a cover up story that would prevent the public from learning about his physical health as well as nurse him back to productivity all while she was seven months pregnant. Her self-sacrifice in the this area helped her to conceal her husband's weaknesses from the press and proved her support for his career.

PRESS RELATIONS. Immediately upon her marriage in the White House to President Cleveland, Frances felt the demands of a public life. Her youthfulness was immense attractive to the press and they were fascinated by every detail of her life. Despite to attempts to keep their honeymoon as private as possible, many members of the press spied on the first couple and fiercely competed to best report what they ate and what the First Lady was wearing (Robar 31). Frances, although disapproving of the scrutiny of her personal life, handled the situation much better than her husband who already felt that the press throughout the country was in a state of decline because of the personal details they chose to report. It was Frances' calming influence that not only helped to shape her reputation with the press but aided in helping temper Grover's irate attitude towards them.

Like many first ladies, Frances Cleveland adamantly fought the press to establish an appropriate amount of privacy for her and her family. America was fascinated by her youth and inclusive nature and hoped to have unlimited access to her daily life. With the birth of her child, Ruth, however, Frances closed the White House grounds, leading to incorrect speculation that "the first family was hiding some mental or physical defect in Baby Ruth" (O'Brien 127). As a

consequence of protecting the emotional privacy of her family, Frances created an atmosphere that questioned the physical health of her children. The media was quick to assume something besides a need for privacy had led to the barring of the press and rumors were rampant. The President felt powerless to curb this media excitement, but Frances firmly believed these unpopular choices were the best option for her children's safety (Caroli 124). Until she attempted to completely exclude the press from the White House, Frances' personality enchanted the nation. It is commendable that Frances committed herself to her children's safety instead of pleasing reporters even if it caused speculation about the secrecy of her husband's administration.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Before Frances married Grover, Grover's sister Rose had conducted the social responsibilities associated with the presidency. Although Rose fulfilled the duties with relative popularity, the changes Frances implemented were welcomed. Her youthfulness naturally increased Frances' popularity and her love of this particular role also helped her to perform better in this capacity. Washington society was consistently impressed that Frances was already such a natural success at hostessing even at her young age (Robar 34). Frances never seemed to weary of meeting new people and her penchant for remembering visitors was a valuable asset to her popularity. She seemed content to manage the social realm instead of involve herself in substantial political matters and the attention she paid to this area of her duties help to return a sense of excitement and flair to White House social events that had been missing in the previous administrations.

Frances' natural popularity certainly eased the burden of her hostessing role. She paid particular attention to being inclusive with her guests list, ensuring that all social groups were allowed access to her and the White House. For this reason, Frances implemented "Saturday afternoon receptions specifically for working women, who could not attend the weekday doings

at the White House” (Truman 300). This common courtesy and thoughtfulness greatly contributed to the popularity of Frances and consequently the reelection of her husband in 1893. Because everyone felt welcomed by Frances, people assumed her husband was equally receptive to their needs. Her sincerity, enthusiasm, and modesty, however, “could do little to help her husband cope with the public’s disillusion with him,” especially when he failed to solve the nation’s economic crisis (Truman 303). While her popularity attracted people from every economic class, it remained outside the realm of politics and was therefore less easily transferred to her husband and his staff.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Frances took a similar stance as Lucy Hayes in accepting advocacy roles. She isolated herself from becoming too closely connected with controversial issues for which she was targeted as a sponsor because of her intelligence and talent (O’Brien 123). Frances was not deaf to the needs of the lower classes and chose to align herself with a volunteer organization to clothe the poor. This humanitarian effort found favor with most citizens during the time of economic hardship and it did not force Frances to impose any political views upon any other people. She tirelessly devoted time and energy to becoming an “unofficial champion for women’s education and professionalism... helping African Americans” and acting in an advisory role for her alma mater (O’Brien 123). Frances’ discretion in choosing her affiliations was wise and allowed her not to wager her husband’s reputation in any more controversial situations than was necessary. Her advocacy projects spanned many cultural and economic groups, laying the foundation for her widespread popularity.

OVERALL. Although young, Frances charmed the nation with more than just her youthful aura. She spilled energy into working and empowering others and was conscious of many issues facing the people around her. She was a steady, loyal, and irreplaceable support to her husband and the value of her popularity was unsurpassed by another first lady for several years. Frances

Cleveland clearly knew how to use her strengths to make the office of first lady shed a positive light upon herself and her husband.

CAROLINE HARRISON

HUSBAND: BENJAMIN HARRISON

TERM: 1889 – 1893

WIFE. Caroline’s greatest contributions to the role of first lady came through her commitment to the roles of wife and mother in her personal life. Her family was clearly important to her and she strove to create balance in protecting and serving them while adhering to the demands of the nation. The press was quick to label her a “domestic diva while virtually ignoring her other roles” (O’Brien 132). The manner in which she devoted herself to her children and husband allowed the nation to see her as the type of example they were looking for in a modern woman.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Caroline had many great achievements while in the White House. She is attributed with starting the White House china collection, a tradition that would expand and grow throughout the 20th century (Truman 143). This symbolic act allowed decorum to reenter the White House and became a source of presidential pride for later first ladies to inherit

Caroline followed the tradition of using Congressional funding to renovate the White House and to ensure that it was an appropriate residence for the chief executive and his family to live. Although several first ladies have been frivolous with the money granted from Congress, Caroline was able to stretch the funds in order to install “a switchboard to accommodate more than one phone and the first White House electric lights” (O’Brien 133). By modernizing the home, Caroline made the mansion a national point of pride. Instead of adhering solely to her

personal tastes, Caroline renovated the necessary facets of the house to make the basic condition more livable. Other aspects of the renovation project included exterminating vermin which had begun residing in the White House, repairing dilapidated floors, and fixing furniture which had become worn (Caroli 142). Because Caroline used the money she received to fix necessary and common features of the White House instead of purchasing lavish and new foreign accessories, her remodeling of the presidential home met with little controversy. She also averted hostility towards this expense by “giving public tours of the building herself and inviting members of Congress to examine the condition of the building” (Watson 83). The dignity and friendliness she restored to the White House helped to detract attention from her husband’s stoic and distant personality.

In a more political arena, Caroline became the “first presidential spouse to deliver a speech in public that she herself had written” (O’Brien 133). This introduction to campaigning by a woman was revolutionary for the time period, especially when the intellect and proper social position of women was still questioned by many. This speech, however, added to her popularity with those who believed in the advancement of women because it showed she was living in a manner that supported the cause of women’s rights. This courageous step by Caroline would require future first ladies to better express themselves in both the campaign and advocacy areas.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Caroline’s personality and attention to detail throughout her career as social hostess of the White House was a wonderful asset to Benjamin, who had a reputation for appearing dull and remote. Caroline became a celebrated hostess in the newly renovated White House as a result of her strict attention to detail (O’Brien 132). She was successful at balancing the social aspect of the role with protecting and raising her family as well as involving herself in other advocacy projects. Even without a famous

characteristic unique to her hostessing style, the energy Caroline poured into this facet of the office made the Harrison administration appear more enjoyable.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Caroline Harrison broke the precedent set by Lucy Hayes and Frances Cleveland and fully supported a cause using the prestige and popularity that the position of first lady afforded her. Caroline attached “her esteemed name to the advancement of women” (O’Brien 131) and in so doing, helped to “make one of the country’s major medical schools coeducational” (Truman 143). Because women’s roles in society were still fairly controversial at this point in history, Caroline’s full immersion into the advancement movement was potentially harmful to her husband’s career. It seems, however, that Caroline’s dedication and strength was appreciated by society at large and she escaped the White House without great criticism for her obvious social endorsements.

OVERALL. Caroline Harrison appears to have been immune to criticism. Although she made controversial choices, such as attaching her name to the advancement of women, and spending money on reviving the White House, the public continued to maintain a generally positive image of her. Caroline was instrumental in redeeming the reserved personality of her husband through her attention to detail in the planning of social functions. Most importantly, Caroline was able to balance several areas of the first lady role while still protecting and raising her family. Caroline is one of the first examples in White House history to completely achieve several accomplishments in many different areas while still acting as the glue for her large family.

IDA MCKINLEY

HUSBAND: WILLIAM MCKINLEY

TERM: 1897 – 1901

WIFE. In the case of the McKinley's, it is William's devotion and care for Ida that captured the public's attention. Ida suffered from epilepsy and was known for suffering from headaches, blackouts, and seizures (Watson 53). These symptoms severely limited her ability to fulfill many duties of her office. During the presidential campaign, however, William's "heroic devotion to Ida was universally seen as a touching and admirable quality in a would be president" (O'Brien 139). Once in the White House, the McKinley's had to learn to accommodate Ida's alarming physical symptoms, in order to disillusion their guests about the state of her health. The McKinley's did not choose to ignore the disease completely, but attempted to remove Ida from the public view immediately upon the onset of any symptoms. Her disease continued to deteriorate her health while in the White House and prohibited her from attending to many of the traditional first lady functions.

Ida was willing to offer plenty of advice to her husband throughout his term. She also defended him enthusiastically against his critics, a strategy that may have gotten her into trouble on more than one occasion. William's receptiveness to this advice, however, is unknown and it is therefore difficult to value this portion of their partnership.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Despite her illness, Ida attempted to fulfill some of the social functions of first lady. She was known for having outbreaks of bad manners and was frequently rude to guests, but she always "insisted on taking her place in receiving lines" (O'Brien 140). William made no attempts to control his wife's behavior at these events and she consequently offended and alienated some of the visitors to the White House.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Because Ida was ill so often, she was involuntarily contained to the third floor of the White House. Fortunately, she chose to spend her time wisely and “is estimated to have crocheted some 3,500 pairs of house slippers, which she offered to be sold for charity” (O’Brien 142). This thoughtfulness and innovation in volunteerism is notable especially after the many first ladies who selfishly retreated to the third floor. It is reasonable to assume that if Ida had not been contained by her physical condition, she would have exercised more time and energy in charitable endeavors.

OVERALL. Ida’s epileptic condition was greatly debilitating to her as first lady. The demands this disease imposed upon her husband were also strenuous and he had to dedicate much of his time and attention to nursing her illness. Ida intended to play a more active role in the first lady position than she ultimately did but “her deteriorating state and seizures prevented her from realizing her vast potential” (Watson 53). It is clear that the marriage of Ida and William offered a great deal of strength to the couple that allowed them to survive the stresses of the White House throughout William’s presidency.

EDITH ROOSEVELT

HUSBAND: THEODORE ROOSEVELT

TERM: 1901 – 1909

WIFE. Edith had an extraordinary undertaking managing six kids and an equally energetic husband during her stay in the White House. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of having such a large family while in the White House is the task of managing the presidential salary to maintain an appropriate standard of living for the chief executive. Edith believed her husband had no money sense and would be unable to manage the family funds in a way that would allow all obligations to be met. Due to her dominant personality, Edith “had her fingers

on the purse strings- she even gave the president an allowance” for personal expenses (O’Brien 147). Although she strictly controlled the personal finances, there is question about the reasonableness of the amount she spent on her entertainment and social affairs.

Besides handling the family finances, Edith insisted that all “domestic matters-however large and expensive- were her bailiwick” and Theodore consented to her management of these things(O’Brien 148). Edith seemed to breeze through the house work and the bookkeeping as well as the moral directing of her family. She seemed to have as much energy as her husband and was perhaps able to devote herself more fully to the domestic duties of wife and mother as a result of shifting some of her social responsibilities onto a professional staff.

Edith and her family, especially her husband, remained quite close throughout their White House years. The relationship between Theodore and Edith was a driving force in Theodore’s career and it added purpose to Edith’s tenure as first lady as well. The Roosevelt’s relationship is described as one in which “Theodore’s vision, courage, boundless adventurism-all the things that made him a leader character in the nation’s drama- were given shape and purpose by the wife who grounded him, humbled him, and often mothered him” (O’Brien 149). The same characteristics that led Edith and Theodore to have a successful personal relationship also helped Edith to accomplish many things in her public role. Edith’s confidence and strength allowed her to act as an honest sounding board for her husband and offered him a sense of stable support.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Edith Roosevelt adhered to many of the traditional first lady projects in a more innovative fashion than her immediate predecessors. Because Edith viewed her main role as presidential spouse to attend to her husband and family, she employed professionals to cover various other roles that would normally require her attention. Like previous first ladies, she acquired help to deal with the social details, especially guest lists and

decorations, for many functions (Caroli 154). Edith also contributed to the institutionalization of the job by hiring a professional to manage all of her official correspondence (Caroli 150). These additional aides not only helped to formalize several functions of the White House, but they contributed to Edith's ability to further separate herself and her family from the public's eye.

In other areas of the White House, Edith used a similar blend of tradition and innovation to fulfill her obligations. She chose to continue the White House china collection by selecting her own set to add to the growing variety of dishes, and perhaps in the spirit of Dolley Madison, instituted a portrait gallery (Caroli 154). In her constant attempt to separate the Roosevelt presidency from the Roosevelt family, Edith used the standard congressional renovation of the White House to create an 'Executive Office Wing' that allowed the second floor to become a private space for her family (Truman 308). These innovations helped to demonstrate the unity of Edith's varying roles as first lady as a way to gain privacy for her family.

PRESS RELATIONS. Edith Roosevelt had a rocky start with gaining favor from the press. Upon Theodore's inauguration, Edith instantly realized her disdain for the attention showered on the first family. Before trying to find a balance that would allow the press information and the first family privacy, Edith "never spoke to the press and went so far as to exercise draconian influence over photo ops" (O'Brien 148). Edith constantly attempted to distance herself from the public through these types of standards and consistently fought with the press to guard her privacy. Self-confidence shielded Edith from the criticism she received for attempting to 'manage' any news that left the White House (Caroli 153). The carefully staged photographs she was willing to release to the public were deemed unsatisfactory at a time when rumors were beginning to spread faster and news about the energetic president and his family was in high demand.

Edith eventually reached a more reasonable agreement with the press. Although she began to release slightly more information, it was “hard to find any real information about her” because “almost every word was about Theodore” (Truman 307). This policy ensured that Theodore was in the center of attention all the time. Although Edith personally enjoyed the pranks played by the Roosevelt children, not allowing the press to focus on these deeds safeguarded Theodore from having to respond to additional scrutiny by the public.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Edith’s skills in social etiquette were not the strong point of her career as first lady. She attempted to manage the social scene throughout Washington in the same manner she ran the White House. Unfortunately this strategy led to several hard feelings and more criticism being shed upon Edith. In order to assure that no other social events rivaled those occurring at the White House and that all attention remained on her husband, “she restrained exuberant hostesses and reassured the insecure ones” (Caroli 154). Edith’s choice of style for social events was lavish and met with severe hostility. She was wise enough to minimize her hostessing role during Theodore’s campaign season in order to avoid additional criticism but again began to demonstrate excess immediately after his presidential victory (Truman 310). Edith’s hypocritical actions in the social arena certainly offended many prominent members of Washington society.

Edith attached her very strict moral code to Washington society in a similar fashion, drawing even harsher criticism for her inseparability of personal and public life. Under her direction, “Washingtonians with a lax moral code were watched, their scandalous behavior dutifully reported to the first lady- who would dish out the appropriate punishment: being taken off the guest list for White House events” (O’Brien 149). Edith’s authoritarian supervision of Washington’s moral standards was inappropriate. Many members of society were alienated as a

result of her social punishments and many other popular hostesses were discouraged from achieving personal success.

Edith also tried to dictate the social schedules of the other cabinet wives to ensure that no one was receiving as much public attention as herself and Theodore. This contradiction to her press policy that had attempted to distance herself from the public as much as possible, ensured that Theodore would not have to compete with as many social rivals and would instead gain popularity by default. For these reasons, Edith “scheduled weekly meetings with the wives of cabinet members” (Caroli 153). Her participation in the Washington social season certainly caused undue stress to other hostesses and her often threatening presence was detrimental to her popularity.

OVERALL. Edith Roosevelt presided in a fairly hypocritical fashion as first lady. She insisted on performing all household and maternal duties herself but felt entitled to employ professionals to aid her in some of the more monotonous social details. She was successful in managing her many children and having them aid her in distancing the family from the press. Her moral code and strong sense of self-confidence allowed her to act as a stable figure for her husband who had a volatile personality and reacted instinctively to criticism. Edith helped to balance Theodore by influencing him not to run for a third term and she “was one of the few people who did not hesitate to set him straight” (Caroli 155). The relationship between Edith and Theodore no doubt inspired Theodore to achieve the success that he did while in the presidency. Their willingness to run the country manifested itself in the choices Edith made in managing the role of first lady.

HELEN TAFT

HUSBAND: WILLIAM TAFT

TERM: 1909 – 1913

WIFE. Helen Taft lived her entire life as though she were destined to live in the White House. More ambitious than her husband, it was her drive that helped to inspire and ascend William to the presidency. Even before his election, Helen “confidently outlined her plans for the White House” and was unafraid to speak up on his behalf (Caroli 161). She was capable of achieving all goals she set for herself, and succeeding as mistress of the White House was no exception. Few first ladies were as adept as Helen at budgeting “carefully so that \$25,000 could go into the family’s personal bank account” by the end of the Taft administration (Caroli 164). These additional funds allowed the Tafts more freedom in their post-presidential life and the mere feat of saving this money was an admiral achievement for any American at the onset of the twentieth century.

Because of her determination and ambition, Helen Taft clearly influenced the day-to-day life of her husband. She was known for not only helping him to plan his schedule and imposing on his policy decisions, but she also “ran her amiable husband’s life, down to selecting his friends and his jobs,” including the presidency (Truman 103). This stringent regime left the Tafts with few personal friends on whom they could rely for support and relaxation by the time they entered the White House. A true perfectionist, however, Helen passed on energy and ambition to her otherwise even-tempered husband and was critical to his presidential successes because of the advisory role she played.

Unfortunately, Helen experienced a stroke within two months of entering the White House. This ailment affected the influence she had on her husband and in effect “poisoned Taft’s mind against Roosevelt” (Truman 111). The stroke left Helen with a speech impediment

that stopped her from speaking at social events and made her extremely susceptible to stress. Woodrow's stroke showed no signs of making the Taft marriage miraculously stronger, prohibiting Helen from realizing her full potential in meeting the social responsibilities of first lady.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Helen Taft wanted to ensure that the country, and the world, knew that she was not only William's spouse, but also his political partner. In flaunting her partnership role in a society that was not sensitized to such a prestigious undertaking for women, Helen created a great deal of animosity and speculation surrounding her husband's administration. To begin the first lady partnership role immediately upon inauguration, Helen insisted on riding back to the mansion with her husband on Inauguration Day, a step that fostered "'severe criticism' of Helen's adding a new ceremonial role to those already accepted for First Ladies" (Caroli 162). Her role as presidential partner rivaled that of Abigail Adams both in scope and controversy. As she began sitting in on policy meetings and debates that she was not intended to be a part of, she was seen "trampling several dignitaries in the process" as well breaking revered protocol, such as allowing the president to enter the East Room first (Truman 106). These carefree changes to the role of first lady on the part of Helen offended many of the more traditional officials and reflected poorly upon William's national presence.

Helen Taft is also famous for one particularly large blunder that began the commercialization of the presidency. Once in office, Helen petitioned for and received funds from Congress to purchase a motorcar. After accepting a generous discount from the manufacturer, Helen inadvertently gave express consent for this manufacturer to begin advertising as the official choice of the White House (Truman 108). Helen's severe lack of forethought with this situation could have negatively impacted Taft's reputation and caused great mistrust over the fairness of future presidential decisions.

A final contribution to the role was made by Helen during her husband's tenure that would be revisited by future first ladies. In the name of beautification, Helen "sent out a rush order to all the nurseries in America to ship their Japanese cherry trees to Washington" (Truman 109). Similar projects would be implemented and expanded upon, especially by Lady Bird Johnson, and Helen's small contribution is therefore notable. It is because Helen added this small task that did not fit under any of the traditional roles of first lady to her accomplishments that she created some freedom for the presidential spouse to involve herself in other projects that would benefit the capital or the nation.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Helen had no shame in using the power that was bestowed upon her when she received the title of First Lady. With an attitude that luckily did not extend outside of the Taft administration, Helen used her fiftieth wedding anniversary as an opportunity to "appreciate a material gain" by encouraging guests at the celebration to bring her and her husband personal gifts, some of which she later tried to give to other couples (Caroli 165). This pettiness demonstrated by Helen became apparent in other social situations and did not contribute any degree of popularity to the Taft administration.

Helen lost little time in taking control of the White House after her husband's inauguration and almost immediately began making new staffing decisions. Although her judgment of people was almost entirely based on irrelevant qualifications, Helen always remained at the center of personnel decisions for her husband (Caroli 166). The most striking change Helen made in the social staff at the White House became the center of great debate. Once she began residing in the White House, "she fired the traditional ushers virtually en masse and replaced them with an all African-American staff wearing blue livery," after which "people began murmuring that her changes were far too regal for a democracy" (Truman 108). This

potentially racist decision did little to aide Helen in her social hostessing and was highly unhelpful in gaining support for her husband's presidential decisions.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Helen made it nearly impossible for anyone to directly access the president. Despite her speech impediment, Helen desired to remain at the center of attention, especially within the White House, and she attempted to influence her husband's policy decisions on several levels. Lacking the control of many successful first ladies, she left it "impossible to speak with the president without his wife racing over to interject herself into the discussion" and she was equally attentive to her husband when she "forcefully advised Will on treaty negotiations, cabinet appointments, tariff issues, and pretty much everything else that crossed his desk" (O'Brien 155). Although she was fairly apolitical and was not overly intellectual, Helen felt that she was qualified enough to thoroughly involve herself in her husband's political affairs. It is because of this ambition and determination demonstrated by Helen that her husband was able to reach the office of chief executive.

OVERALL. Helen Taft was a little abrupt as a first lady, leading many to question her motives and her husband's qualifications. She was not blessed with great tact and her ambition as first lady happened to impose upon several influential diplomats and politicians. Helen was responsible for several innovations to the office that have become modern traditions, but her tenure in the White House was otherwise unremarkable. Her relationship with William, especially her contagious ambition, was an obvious asset to him personally but her actions as first lady did little to positively impact his presidency.

ELLEN WILSON

HUSBAND: WOODROW WILSON

TERM: 1913 - 1914

WIFE. Before her death from Bright's disease, Ellen Wilson was careful to ensure that her husband took proper control of his health. Through her intellectual support and relaxing nature, Ellen was able to ensure that Woodrow better balanced his life (O'Brien 162). Despite her illness which was present for the entire extent of her short time in the White House, Ellen consistently sacrificed herself to ease Woodrow's burden. Throughout their marriage, Ellen was aware of Woodrow's private relationship with Mary Peck, but remained tolerant and supportive of his administration and refused to appear jealous in front of the nation (Caroli 170). It is noted that Ellen attempted to avoid gossip created by the scandal with Mary. In the end, "if [Ellen] had not made such a point of treating Mary as a family friend, later inviting her to the White House, the political damage from the correspondence between Woodrow and Mary might have been considerably greater" (Caroli 171). Ellen's self-sacrifice in this situation helped to aid the popular image of Woodrow but was an unfortunate personal choice that set a bad model for other American couples.

PRESS RELATIONS. Like most first ladies, Ellen Wilson was not overly fond of the press and the public interest that was inherited with the White House. Although she was supportive of her husband, especially with regard to political decisions, Ellen "shooed away photographers and refused to appear on the platform with Woodrow" because of her insecure nature (Caroli 174). Although Ellen took an unprecedented and powerful position with her advocacy of housing reform, she attracted relatively little attention from the press. Ellen was "not opposed to acting as an intermediary to promote Woodrow's career" but was not offered the opportunity to create a great public presence before her death (Caroli 172). As was mentioned in the previous

section, the greatest controversy she had to deal with was her husband's affair. Because she refused to appear jealous, the press was gracious towards Ellen and aimed the negative publicity more strictly on her husband. Once she became more seriously ill, the press did not expect her to further expose her private life and she never had to seriously fight with the press to find a level of exposure that was suitable to both parties. During her short turn in the White House, Ellen neither befriended not alienated the curious media.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Because she was ill for the extent of the time she was in the White House, Ellen had few social responsibilities she was expected to fulfill. While alive, however, she did attend to many social events and, with the help of her daughters, earned a "reputation as an elegant hostess" (O'Brien 162). The achievement she acquired in this area greatly aided the popularity of her husband. Her ability to balance her hectic social advocacy schedule while pursuing the traditional social demands, all while Bright's disease continued to physically distress her body is an extraordinary accomplishment.

Ellen was not immune, however, to the common speculations "about the cost of her wardrobe" (Caroli 172). These rumors seemingly accompany the office of first lady and Ellen defended herself against these accounts. In part because of the work she did for African Americans and the poor in Washington, these speculations were relatively unpopular and they did not affect her overall popularity or reputation. Her intelligence was not undermined by her achievements in the social realm due to her pure talent at managing the social demands of her position.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Ellen Wilson became one of the most involved first ladies in terms of social advocacy even though her time in the White House was very limited. Her courage and devotion to housing around Washington greatly inspired future first ladies to pursue similar humanitarian projects. Ellen became the first first lady to tour the slums of Washington and to