

aid in the drafting of legislation, the Alley Dwelling Bill, to fix the housing problems she was witnessing (O'Brien 162). Ellen became highly visible as a result of her immersive project because she was touring the neighborhoods and meeting citizens who were directly affected by the declining areas. This visibility eventually translated into positive press for her and her husband. Had Ellen remained in the White House longer, her continuing work with this project could have greatly aided her husband's career.

Throughout her tours and work in the slums of Washington D.C., Ellen retained great anonymity. While talking with residents of the areas she did not reveal that she was the first lady in hopes of developing a personal and more genuine relationship with each individual (Truman 53). Because Ellen was able to devote so much energy to this cause, despite her busy social schedule she inspired many other busy Americans to begin volunteering their time for humanitarian causes as well. A true example of how actions speak louder than words, Ellen's work with the housing initiative is truly admirable.

Even though doctors frequently encouraged Ellen to rest as a result of her disease, she did not limit her advocacy efforts to the housing sector. Instead, Ellen devoted her time and power to improving the working conditions of postal employees and child laborers. Her leadership throughout this time "portrays the Wilson marriage as a particular partnership, with Ellen playing an important, background role in Woodrow's success while, at the same time, pursuing her own interest" (Caroli 170). Her short stint as a universal advocate impacted many people. Her sincere interest in this facet of the first lady role paved the way for other twentieth century first ladies to better define themselves through humanitarian and volunteer efforts.

OVERALL, Ellen showed enormous potential in the office of first lady. Her ability to balance several tasks simultaneously and to experience success in all of them is one of the first examples of an extremely successful first lady. Her advisory role to her husband was critical to

his success and she was instrumental as a sounding board for ideas and also as a researcher on several legislative issues. Her self-motivated efforts in housing reform and labor conditions left an important legacy for future first ladies. Without ignoring her social duties, Ellen Wilson was able to inspire the country through her universal volunteer efforts.

EDITH WILSON

HUSBAND: WOODROW WILSON

TERM: 1915 - 1921

WIFE. In the role of spouse, Edith took on many of the same traits as Woodrow's first wife, Ellen. Edith too, took extra measures to ensure that Woodrow took time for relaxation and she was active in an advisory role for his political career (O'Brien 169). Especially after Woodrow's stroke, Edith became intensely protective of Woodrow and nearly isolated him from his own elected position. She filtered criticism from reaching him and was equally mysterious in reporting her husband's supposed replies and communication (Truman 340). Although Edith claimed Woodrow needed to continue his presidency to expedite his recovery, her forceful strategy was clearly ineffective in aiding Woodrow at regaining competency (Truman 127). The alienation strategy she employed was very similar to the strategy Ellen had taken and therefore Woodrow saw no cause for alarm when Edith began dictating his friends and companions. Edith's protective measures became so drastic that she "forbade anyone from seeing him. Not even Vice President Thomas Marshall was admitted. Nobody involved in the business of government was allowed to see the president's real condition or to discuss vital matters with him" (O'Brien 170). This strategy lended itself to rumors and criticism from the public about Edith's response and motives to handling her husband's disability.

Edith encouraged Woodrow's patience even prior to their marriage. In order to refrain from offending anyone too quickly after Ellen's death, Edith requested the President exercise caution in displaying his affection for her. Unfortunately, Woodrow was completely enamored with Edith and visited her with unrestrained frequency. Gossip began to intensify about the romantic courtship and "his closest advisers started to worry about the impact of a hasty marriage on his chances for reelection" (Truman 119). Despite Edith's attempts to adhere to the advisors, the couple was married within just a few months of Ellen Wilson's death.

The love notes that remain between Woodrow and Edith provide an intriguing overview of the Wilson's years in the White House. Their desire to experience a profound closeness is evident in these documents and their overwhelming emotionalism helps to explain the lack of judgment Wilson exhibited in later years. In more than one instance, Woodrow based the success of a decision on his wife's reaction (Truman 120). During his illness, Edith, likewise, "abandoned ideas that differed with his rather than risk upsetting him" (Caroli 181). It is this blind attachment from both parties that led to the deterioration of Wilson's popularity and the suspicion of Edith's role as surrogate president.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. The largest innovation during Edith's tenure was a result of cultural transformation. Previously, the president and his wife had always maintained separate bedrooms, including Woodrow and Ellen. Edith, however, influenced the president to allow the newlyweds to share a room and contributed to the social revolution of the 'roaring twenties' (Truman 122). This seemingly trivial detail helped the whole country to more openly talk about private issues that were previously deemed inappropriate for normal conversation.

Edith increased the ceremonial persona of the first lady while in the White House. She became the first White House spouse to "christen a ship bound for active duty," opening the door for the first lady to be delegated to similar superfluous activities in the future (O'Brien

171). Her nearly constant physical connection to Woodrow allowed Edith to see a great deal of the presidency to which previous first ladies had always remained ignorant. Although this connection resulted in a great deal of gossip concerning Edith's actual influence over Woodrow, it offered the president a constant source of support and reinforcement, especially once his health began rapidly declining.

PRESS RELATIONS. It has already been mentioned that Edith was severally criticized for the separation she instigated between her husband and the world after his stroke. Her policy in this area encouraged rumors that "Edith Wilson was running the government" (Caroli 179) even though she insisted that "she never made a 'single decision' on public affairs, she only decided 'what was important and what was not'" (Truman 128). Luckily, it was uncustomary for people to truly question whether Edith would usurp Woodrow's power during his illness like it would have been if one of the male members of his administration had attempted to enforce a similar isolated strategy. Edith created a veil between the presidency and the public by completely withholding "the severity of her husband's illness from the public" despite "public epithets of 'Her Regency' and 'President-in-Fact'" (Watson 2). This separation was deceiving and irresponsible on the part of Edith. By encouraging Woodrow to remain in the presidency even though he was incapable of performing many of the tasks he was charged with, Edith forced her husband to disrespect the office to which he was elected.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. There is little information on the social undertakings of Edith Wilson. Although she was thoroughly involved in the Wilson administration, she seems to have greatly undermined the importance of the social realm. As a result of her attempt to modify the social responsibilities in order to conform to society during World War I, she became known for introducing 'austerity' to the Washington social scene

(Truman 124). Instead of encouraging interaction with the American public, Edith harbored an attitude of secrecy and hostility that did little to aid her husband's growth or popularity.

Instead of extravagant balls and events filled with social protocol, Edith attempted to connect to the public by transforming the executive mansion into "a model of wartime sacrifice" (Caroli 178). Edith carefully watched the Wilson's personal finances, observed meatless days, and added sheep to the White House lawn. In this way, Edith was able to sympathize better with those suffering from the impact of World War I. The sheep served multiple purposes, such as freeing additional men to attend to war work and allowing Edith to auction off the wool from the White House sheep to benefit the Red Cross (Truman 124). Her efforts to assume the same difficulties in daily life as the average American allowed Ellen to understand and combat some of the other criticism hurled at her and her husband.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Edith Wilson was consistently involved in Woodrow's political affairs, even before he suffered a debilitating stroke. She was known for decoding war messages, aiding with diplomatic correspondence, and advising Woodrow on every document to which he was exposed (O'Brien 169). Despite Edith's defense that she did not make any decisions for Woodrow, many people were still unwilling to accept her assumption of so many presidential responsibilities. Her intermediary role indirectly decided many important things on Woodrow's behalf. By silencing certain groups, especially the women suffragettes, Edith kept Woodrow incredibly ignorant of the national sentiment on many issues. It is largely a function of the role she played in Woodrow's political affairs that contributed to her dissatisfactory contributions to the legacy of the first ladies.

OVERALL. Confidence, in the case of Edith Wilson, led to unnecessary and politically harmful situations. The intense connection she had to Woodrow's political life left her incapable of catering to the voters who were intimidated by such a regimented focus. Although she tried

to connect with the nation's wartime suffering, she kept her husband vastly ignorant of the nation's voice and also overly controlled the representation of her husband to the nation. Instead of encouraging the resignation of her incapacitated husband after his stroke, Edith encouraged Woodrow to continue his presidency even though it was clearly not in the best interest of the American people. The Wilson's profound love for one another led them into a mindset that facilitated many of Wilson's worst decisions.

FLORENCE HARDING

HUSBAND: WARREN HARDING

TERM 1921 - 1923

WIFE. Florence Harding is another example of sacrificial love. Before and throughout Warren's presidency, "Florence devoted herself to Warren's career as though her own reputation were at stake" (Caroli 187). Florence seriously considered the consequences that each of her actions as first lady would have on her husband's reputation. Unfortunately, Florence's personal devotion to Warren did not translate into optimism about his political career. Whether she was concerned about his personal wellbeing or his political reputation, "she saw only tragedy in his future" (Caroli 190). This constant fear and paranoia led to a great deal of physical stress on Florence. Neither Warren nor Florence had a temperament or personality that lended itself well to dealing with the stresses of the White House. The frequent attacks of nephritis that left Florence debilitated on the third floor consequently caused increased stress on Warren and strained their already floundering reputation with the nation (Truman 325).

It is also unfortunate that Florence did not save much of the personal correspondence between herself and her husband. Because of the corruption that marked their administration,

Florence spent “five days going through Warren’s papers, burning potentially incriminating evidence” (Truman 243). This suspicious behavior that Florence involved herself in is perhaps evidence enough of the Harding’s poor personal choices. Regardless of the ethical implications of their activities, the Hardings were united in their operations and Florence supported if not encouraged Warren, even in his most illegal behaviors.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. In order to maintain her popularity, Florence did little to change the role of first lady during her husband’s presidency. One significant contribution, however, was her insistence on “adding a Secret Service agent to the usual retinue of housekeepers, maids, and stewards” (Caroli 193). Unfortunately, Florence did not use this new resource wisely and often had the guard perform tasks unrelated to her security. As first ladies became more involved in society, however, the protection offered by this service would certainly be welcomed and necessitated.

PRESS RELATIONS. Florence Harding had one of the best understandings of the importance of the first lady’s relationship with the press. In an attempt to appear consistent and unified with Warren on political interrogations, “she curbed her inclination to speak out and deferred to Warren” (Caroli 191). From her experience working with the newspapers, Florence also had a sense for when a response to a reporter was unwarranted, helping her to avoid falling into a trap of vicious gossip or saying something that she would later regret (Caroli 191). Her forethought and practical application of the press concepts she learned prior to the presidency aided her remaining on good terms with the curious press once in the White House.

Aside from merely defining a workable relationship with the press, Florence used the press to achieve social goals. Her attempt to encourage and support female journalists was well received and was an early mirror of Eleanor Roosevelt’s relationship with female journalists. Florence agreed to exclusive interviews with female reporters and put a special emphasis on

ensuring that these occasions were substantive. By discussing “matters beyond social affairs such as current political issues,” Florence was able to grant female reporters “angles on those stories that were typically covered by male journalists” (Watson 11). This selective action greatly helped the advancement of women. Still conscious of male reporters, however, Florence avoided some of the controversy created by Eleanor Roosevelt for employing a more radical version of this strategy.

Florence was also talented at manipulating the press. Perhaps from her experience working on newspapers before reaching the White House, Florence seemed to be acutely aware of how ideas and biases would be portrayed. In her desperate attempt to appear youthful, Florence gave “the public a picture of a much healthier First Lady than was actually fact” (Caroli 192). Florence knew that it would be beneficial for Warren to have a wife that appeared vivacious and able to compete on the social scene with the much younger wives of some of her husband’s most fierce competitors. Florence also “tempered her feminism so that it either fit accepted standards or remained very private” (Caroli 193). This attitude avoided controversy that would associate itself with the Harding administration and aided Florence in appealing to a much wider constituency than would otherwise have occurred. Florence’s unique background with the press and her application of this knowledge to her position as first lady made her very successful at finding a balance between public and private life.

In a more physical sense, Florence also knew what association with the press would be most beneficial for herself and her husband. Especially at the beginning of the Harding administration, “she added some dash to her own image by associating with the capital’s wealthy, risk-taking social leaders” to avoid any charges of her small town background making her an inadequate person to fulfill the prestigious first lady duties (Caroli 188). This knowledge of where to position herself in a photograph or what photograph to refrain from appearing in

greatly aided her in maintaining a positive press image throughout her husband's presidency. She was able to subject her will on the press in such a way that the professional photographers and journalists were not offended by her suggestions, an improvement over other first ladies with strict press policies.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Immediately upon learning of her husband's success in the presidential election, Florence "saw herself as the queen of Washington" and began to plan the most expensive inauguration in history (Truman 237). As one of the older first ladies, however, Florence had a constant fight to appear youthful and beautiful in order to be accepted by Washington society. Her desire for acceptance led Florence and her husband to partake in activities that were illegal for the rest of the country. Even though prohibition was in effect throughout the Harding presidency, Florence encouraged Warren's liquor consumption at weekly poker games(Truman 240). This irresponsibility was inappropriate for a president and his wife and it is inexcusable that they were able to avoid the ramifications of the law. Fortunately, however, the Hardings did not receive any major criticism from the press or public as a result of their personal choices.

When Florence was not serving bootlegged liquor, she was very successful at making the White House an open location for all people to reach the highest authorities. Because she had a firm belief that the White House belonged to everyone, she "worked hard to make it (and herself) available to visitors" (Caroli 194). Her acceptance and openness in this area greatly boosted her popularity. She was known to approach tour groups in order to mingle with visitors and act as an impromptu guide, offering travelers a unique opportunity to interact with the first family (Truman 238). Her personality was well suited to meeting the social demands of the first lady's office although Florence made little lasting impact on the social opportunities at the White House.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Florence's attempts to aid Warren in his administration were less successful than her accomplishments in other areas. Most notably, her suggestions for personnel appointments "peopled the administration with unscrupulous cronies who used their appointments to fill their pockets" and consequently "sank the Harding presidency into a slough of corruption" (O'Brien 178). This unfortunate and unintentional mistake of Florence's was detrimental to her husband's reputation and legacy.

Most of Florence's influence in the political realm was irrational. She was not well educated in the politics of the day and seemed to base all decisions and advice off of an unfounded and "mindless hostility to Democrats" (Truman 238). However, Warren's receptiveness to Florence's advice is widely unknown due to her destruction of personal documents. Although it is clear Florence hoped to bolster support for her husband by ostracizing democrats, her actions and advice in political matters were an unsound and dangerous support for Warren.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Although not a major component of her first lady accomplishments, Florence Harding did experiment with a minor social advocacy issue. Her energy was invested in war veterans, whom she maternally considered 'my boys' (O'Brien 178). Her profound appreciation for those who had served the country in the First World War allowed her to dedicate time to them in a variety of manners. Florence not only performed the typical hospital visits, but she also "intervened on behalf of their benefits and treatment, and began holding annual White House garden parties at which they were the honored guests" (O'Brien 178). Her hospitable and caring treatment of these men helped the rest of the country to have a deeper respect and appreciation for the war fighters as well. By helping these men on an individual basis, Florence was able to connect with and better understand the problems and issues facing American veterans.

Florence also experimented with women's issues, a cause that had previously gone relatively untouched by first ladies because of the intense controversy surrounding the fundamental arguments. Florence was unafraid to become the "the government's most visible champion of women's causes" and reinforced her commitment by aiding female journalists and opening supporting the "National Women's Party, a controversial organization that pushed for an equal rights amendment" (O'Brien 178). Florence's courage in associating with this cause greatly freed future first ladies from experiencing negative consequences for choosing women's issues as their topic for social advocacy. Because of her detailed understanding of the press, Florence was able to aid the women's movement without generating negative publicity for herself or her husband.

OVERALL. The scandals that Florence contributed to throughout her husband's term as chief executive cannot be overlooked. Luckily, Florence had prior experience with the press that allowed her to manipulate the coverage she received so that she avoided controversy and the generation of ill will. Her work for women's causes and veterans was a significant step with regards to the social advocacy role of first ladies in terms of dedication and enthusiasm towards her constituency. Unfortunately, because Florence chose to destroy much of her personal documentation in order to safeguard her reputation, it may be difficult to gain a clear understanding of her life in the White House. It is clear that Florence had the correct blend of characteristics to make her a success as first lady if she had not abused the position of power to act above the confines of the law.

GRACE COOLIDGE

HUSBAND: CALVIN COOLIDGE

TERM: 1923 – 1929

WIFE. Calvin Coolidge required a great degree of subservience from his wife, Grace, in order to sustain their marriage. In order to support her husband, Grace was willing to sacrifice many parts of her private life. She fully understood the importance of her new position as the president's wife and described her situation as "This was I and yet not I – this was the wife of the President of the United States and she took precedence of me; my personal likes and dislikes must be subordinated to the consideration of those things which were required of her" (Caroli 203). Although it is unfortunate that Grace could not fully realize her individuality while her husband was chief executive, the degree to which she accommodated the desires of her husband is extensive.

The harsh personal demands and limitations placed upon Grace by her stoic husband would have been an emotional burden to anyone attempting to fulfill the position. Thankfully, Grace was able to adapt to the situation and neutralized her frustrations by separating her public and private lives. This strategy allowed Grace to "put up with a lot of otherwise meaningless rules and regulations and constant demands on her time and patience" (Truman 249). Grace's complete understanding of her husband's mentality and approach to his elected office allowed her to complement his personality and support his presidential endeavors.

Unfortunately, the coping strategies that Grace developed to handle the stress in her own life were not transferable to her husband. Despite her good intentions and desire to attend to Calvin's needs, Grace was simply unable to "share her inner peace with her wounded, brooding husband" (Truman 257). This is especially important because the influence of Grace's

personality on 'Silent Cal' could have greatly increased his popularity. As it was, Grace's temperament simply had to supplement her husband's lack of charm.

Grace was unafraid to challenge society's judgments of her quiet husband by recognizing and accepting his social flaws and personal weaknesses. Grace's openness that "was not above teasing her husband for his verbal parsimony" was imperative to turning this potential source of alienation into an attractive personal characteristic (Truman 246). The gentleness that Grace exuded allowed her personality to complement Calvin's colder public image and contributed to her own popularity as well.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. To reconcile the first lady position to the strict demands of Calvin's administration, Grace shied away from making any significant innovations in the expansion or depth of the first lady role. Her approach to the position is described as choosing to "accede to the wishes of her husband and limit her activities to those her predecessors had made traditional – working with the Girl Scouts and giving receptions" (Caroli 204). Fortunately, it was these social activities and goodwill projects that allowed Grace to achieve the degree of visibility that would best reflect upon her husband's sterile administration.

Grace did put her own spin on the traditional redecoration of the White House. Instead of relying fully upon the appropriation from Congress, Grace thought it necessary to appeal to "private donors and received from Congress permission to accept gifts of both cash and furniture" (Garrison 122). The decision to fundraise these contentious funds aided Grace in the creation of her unassuming and admired public persona. Her elimination of the "European influences that had infiltrated the mansion when Theodore Roosevelt" resided there also contributed to and reinforced her reputation for simplicity. The uncontroversial approach that Grace took with regards to the redecoration of the White House aided her in gaining a more universal group of admirers.

PRESS RELATIONS. Grace's relationship with the press was as unsubstantial as her approach to the social responsibilities of the office. Her basic and honest approach, however, allowed her to achieve the type of visibility that her husband needed to increase his support across the country. Portraying the role of first lady as a chiefly social function, Grace revoked the substantial increases made in the depth of the role by her immediate predecessors. Regardless of the fact that "though ubiquitous and adored, the first lady did not offer opinions on current issues," this policy ensured that Grace always appeared supportive of her husband's political positions (O'Brien 185). Although Grace played no major role in helping to define a prestigious responsibility for the presidential spouse, her quiet and subdued approach to managing the press was an irreplaceable advantage to her husband.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. As has been mentioned, Grace's personality was an extraordinarily valuable asset to Calvin during his presidency. Although her sociable attitude appears to be a completely opposite approach than Calvin's to the social opportunities of the White House, it in no way detracted from her husband's unique character. Without focusing on the typical wardrobe or social protocol of the most traditional first ladies, "Grace's natural dignity and determination to remain just what she was earned her the praise and the satisfaction that no clothing extravagance could've matched" (Caroli 201). The humility that Grace exhibited during her reign as first lady provided immeasurable aide to the Coolidge reputation.

Calvin, in an unprecedented illustration of presidential and spousal power, micromanaged every detail of Grace's activity as first lady. Although Grace was seemingly aware of the implications and importance of her role, "Calvin continued to exert an absurd degree of influence over her. He insisted on personally approving every menu and guest list, prowled the kitchen and pantry to make sure nothing was being wasted, and habitually scheduled events for

her without even consulting her” (O’Brien 184). This unnecessary monitoring left Grace in a position to make very few innovations to the position of presidential spouse. Her talent for hostessing was grossly underappreciated and she made no attempt to defend her own abilities.

Operating under Calvin’s strict limitations, Grace was severely limited in the scope of social projects she assumed. Although she met monthly with the wives of cabinet members, meetings “did not go beyond social schedules and the ‘insoluble problems’ that have confronted cabinet wives since the country’s founding” (Caroli 198). Although this is a poor representation of the First Lady’s intellect and importance, it still afforded her the visibility that Calvin sorely needed. Even when attending to merely social functions, it was evident that Grace “loved people and parties, and her enthusiasm warmed everyone around her” (Truman 247). Her natural approach to the social scene reinforced the unpretentious reputation she hoped to gain by eliminating European influences from the White House. Undoubtedly refreshing, Grace’s attitude more than balanced out her husband’s detached style.

OVERALL. It is lamentable that Grace was not encouraged to pursue her unique aspirations as first lady. The subservience that she showed to her husband was beneficial to her husband’s reputation but detrimental to the progress that first ladies had been struggling to achieve in substantiating the office. Her personality was well suited to the social obligations of the first lady, but even in this position she was restrained by her husband to a point where she was unable to function advantageously. Her personality was a great asset to the office of first lady but her husband refused to allow Grace to use it wisely and at her own discretion. The natural popularity that Grace attracted was important in avoiding additional controversy during the Coolidge administration.

LOU HOOVER

HUSBAND: HERBERT HOOVER

TERM: 1929 - 1933

WIFE. Lou Hoover is another example of spousal sacrifice in the White House. She desired for each of her actions to support her husband's administration and was willing to change her own life before expecting those around her to change theirs. Because she valued people as an important part of a functioning White House, Lou "preferred to increase her work load rather than offend anyone," including Herbert (Caroli 214). This decision obviously increased the stress that Lou personally experienced during her years in the White House, but added to the peace felt within the Hoover administration. Grace was apt to conceal her feelings, even from her husband. For example, even though she found the office of first lady to be disagreeable, she "was convinced that America needed four more years of Bert's leadership" and extended enormous amounts of energy during the reelection campaign to keep her husband unaware of "any hint of rifts within the official family" (Allen 151). Unfortunately, Lou could not prevent the emotional effects of defeat from entering the White House and the positive atmosphere she had struggled so hard to maintain in the White House began to collapse. Regardless of the outcome of the election, the amount of energy Lou expended to ensure that her husband and those around her were always content was very effective during the earlier years of Herbert's tenure.

Lou's admiration for her husband also manifested itself through her desire to protect him from uncomfortable or potentially detrimental situations. Her personality was a natural aid in defending her husband because of her ability to easily change the subject of conversation if "she saw a topic was starting to embarrass or annoy her husband" (Truman 267). Lou found it especially helpful to use "extravagant statements about her absolute faith in Herbert Hoover's

judgment” to reform the conversation, hoping that her support and admiration would become contagious (Truman 267). This approach to her marriage with Herbert strengthened the Hoovers’ personal commitment to each other throughout the presidency. The unwavering consistency Lou developed to show her support of Herbert’s policy and visions also contributed to the steady environment in the Hoover White House.

Lou strove to facilitate the creation of simplicity in the Hoover’s personal life. Through her influence, “they decided to invest in a weekend hideaway, close enough to Washington that the president could return quickly in an emergency, but far enough away to achieve the rustic simplicity they both enjoyed” (Allen 124). This location allowed the Hoover’s a more relaxed atmosphere and an area where they could more fully focus on their relationship, an area of Lou’s life that she had a difficult time balancing during her first year in Washington (Allen 132). Although the Hoovers were the first presidential couple to consistently use their own second home during the presidency, such a location would also be employed by future first ladies to escape the increasing clamor of the White House.

PRESS RELATIONS. Despite Lou’s resistance to the coverage of her life by the press, she ultimately put tremendous effort into developing a working relationship with reporters. Both Herbert and Lou had always been “loath to reveal their private feelings to the American voter and were appalled at the thought of publicizing them for political gain” (Truman 269). Her reluctance to share personal information with the press during the national economic crisis naturally gave reporters an impetus to write articles unnecessarily full of speculation and rumor. Although this policy isolated Lou and Herbert, Lou always preferred to maintain a quiet and safe relationship with the press rather than risk Herbert’s reputation. More importantly, however, Lou demonstrated a “willingness to take a public role as First Lady,” a tactic modern first ladies

would also come to implement and perfect (Caroli 213). This division allowed Lou to appear completely loyal to her husband even when they experienced personal difficulties.

To deal with the press that was horribly critical of the Hoover administration because of the country's economic situation, Lou expanded the approach to how she projected her public life. According to historians, at the beginning of the administration Lou "gave no press conferences and steadfastly refused to be either interviewed or quoted" even though she was willing to talk to the press under her own circumstances (Allen 147). In contrast, however, by the end of the Hoover administration, Lou had begun to completely endorse her husband's reliance on volunteerism. By the end of the administration, Lou "issued a constant stream of radio messages and press releases imploring Americans to help each other and to not lose confidence or hope" (O'Brien 193). This improvement and growth in Lou's relationship with the press certainly became a great asset to Herbert. Although she was ultimately unsuccessful at convincing the nation to mirror the trust she had in her husband, her individual support of Herbert was undoubtedly appreciated.

Lou was especially conscious of how her image with the press would compare with Herbert's. She was especially cautious not to create an image that would portray her as being a disloyal or unsupportive wife. To eliminate the opportunity for this reputation to develop, she began disclosing even less information, on both public and private matters, to the press. Lou began to tailor "her own suggestions for economic recovery to fit her husband's remedies and her public pronouncements on how to end the Great Depression reinforced her husband's reputation" (Caroli 215). Although this approach to deal with the press forced Lou to sacrifice her individual intellect, it was a constant source of support for her husband and his administration.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. As a result of Lou's efforts in attending to the social responsibilities of first lady, entertaining became a 'Hoover hallmark' (O'Brien 192). Despite the economic crisis facing the nation, the social hostessing performed by Lou was seen as a necessary distraction to maintain the morale of the suffering country. Thankfully, Lou took a conscious effort in performing the social responsibilities and instead of purchasing a controversial and expensive wardrobe, "she began complementing her chic wardrobe with dresses made from homegrown cotton to promote American agriculture and industry" (O'Brien 193). This thoughtfulness was appreciated by the country and was certainly reinforced by the Hoover's charitable efforts.

Although Lou became known as a hostessing success, her efforts stemmed from an unsound motivation. The decisions she made in this arena, such as "inviting guests to the White House for [Herbert's] pleasure rather than for his growth, and diverting conversation from difficult topics" greatly undermined the potential value of White House social events (Caroli 216). The desire for pleasure led Lou to invite talented entertainers, making the White House a center for cultural diversity instead of political debate. Lou especially enjoyed furthering the career of young American musicians and showcased many new talents at her smaller teas and 'evening musicales' (Allen 132, 149). These artists succeeded at distracting White House guests from the economic crisis of the nation but were ineffective in creating deep-rooted support for her husband.

Despite the constant criticism Herbert received as a result of the economy, the White House was never void of visitors or guests. Because she was not interested in creating fashion history and wanted her role in the White House to reflect highly on Herbert's administration, "she instituted a series of small teas as an alternative to the huge diplomatic reception" and the country responded with ample support (Allen 128). Although Washington did not expect Lou to

direct her social events in this manner, the strategy aided in reinforcing Herbert's desire to improve the economy through individual action.

Unfortunately, not all of Lou's innovations in the social realm were received with the same degree of support as her teas. Although she diminished the social obligations for future first ladies by "doing away with a longtime custom she considered superfluous: calling on the long list of other political households to leave a card in person or to visit briefly," this activity contributed to the reputation that showed Lou in a particularly arrogant light (O'Brien 192). This aspect of Lou's personality was reinforced by several other social habits including her relationship with the White House staff. Lou and Herbert, unusually progressive in their attitude towards African Americans, were also incredibly class conscious. To interact with the servants at the White House as little as possible, "Lou went so far as to devise a series of hand signals for giving instructions" so that she would not have to converse with them at official events (O'Brien 195). This unfriendly attitude and complicated system was efficient but regrettably left the servants feeling underappreciated. Her unwillingness to compromise also contributed to her reputation as an arrogant woman, doing little to improve to popularity of Herbert even within the White House itself.

In contrast, Lou understood the value of people as a tremendous asset. She was known for her tendency to fret "over the illnesses of the White House staff" and was sincerely interested in doing her "utmost to eliminate injustice and deprivation from American life" (Truman 268). Immediately upon entering the White House, Lou knew where she wanted to focus the prestige of the first lady position, and it did not lie in the social arena. She did think, however, that "the service should be impeccable, the food of the highest quality, the entertainment first class and representative of the nation's best talents. The décor should combine comfort with elegance, and at the same time reflect the historical significance of the

building itself" (Allen 120). These high aspirations led Lou to make unfavorable choices in dealing with personnel. Citizens, however, came to respect the Hoover's inhabitation of the White House as a result of her hosting style that mixed with the grandeur deserved by the highest office in the nation with a down-to-earth attitude to which every average American could relate.

Lou, instead of undertaking the traditional White House renovation, chose to pursue a project more appropriate during the economic crisis. Her interest in history "inspired her to do further research into the old house's historic furnishings" instead of merely replacing the worn out furniture with more modern pieces (Allen 123). This project enriched Lou's period as first lady, especially in the often unessential social realm. Combining her genuine interest with the fulfillment of a duty helped to create enjoyment for Lou in the stressful and high profile position.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Lou's individual and secretive approach to a humanitarian project is certainly noteworthy. Although the goodwill Lou created through her charitable endeavors could have had far reaching effects on Herbert's popularity, the Hoovers chose to keep their personal efforts private. A growing volume of mail was received by Hoover each day speaking of the hardships being suffered by average Americans and pleading for financial assistance. In order to keep the relief network under control, Lou maintained anonymity in her responses to these entreaties (Allen 146). In an attempt to help as many of the distressed as possible, Lou handled almost all of the correspondence she received personally. Her responses to individuals resulted in her "writing check both large and small to individuals for whom she thought it was possible to make a difference" (O'Brien 193). This extreme personal charity was a source of inspiration to thousands of Americans and was a remarkable endeavor for such an esteemed woman to pursue. The potential for the knowledge of this assistance to mitigate the criticism

against Herbert's policies was colossal, but Lou and Herbert remained remarkably humble about their contributions.

Lou also expounded her energy on a variety of other social interest issues. To adhere to the more traditional roles of first lady, Lou "used the First Lady's star status to call for more and better school athletic programs for women and urged parents to enroll their daughters in the Girl Scouts" (Truman 267). This approach to women's empowerment resulted in limited controversy, a positive thing for the frequently criticized administration. She supplemented her support of feminine ability by encouraging women and other individuals across the country to form their own relief networks to aid suffering neighbors (Allen 146). Lou's effort in this area reemphasized Herbert's call towards volunteerism, helping the administration to appear more unified.

To give the administration increased visibility, Lou also continued Ellen Wilson's previous project of working with the individuals in Anacostia Flats. Although she was forced to "maintain a smiling silence" during her trip, Lou became the only notable member of the Hoover administration to visit the area (Truman 271). She aided the World War I veterans in the encampment through simple activities, such as handing out sandwiches and coffee, but she was also instrumental in bringing the issue to the attention of the press (Garrison 54). Lou was far from embracing the cause of Anacostia with the same degree of emotion and zeal as Ellen Wilson, but her efforts were not completely void of significance for those individuals she was able to help. Her one-on-one approach to social advocacy may not have helped the greatest number of Americans but it certainly helped more than a few Americans in a very concrete way.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Lou played an active role in the politics of the Hoover administration. Lou had the opportunity to travel "extensively through the world with her husband, translating for him...and serving in all capacities as his closest adviser and partner"

(Watson 54). The loyal support Lou showed for her husband through these actions allowed Herbert to rely on her for unwavering support for his policies and decisions, an attitude that was hard to come by after the economic crisis. Unfortunately, Lou's political influence stopped short of having "the authority to urge him to make a dignified withdrawal, or suggest a change of tactics" (Truman 272). This lack of equal political partnership helped Lou to avoid some of the negative impacts that more involved first ladies had created for their husband's while still allowing her to exert a strong influence. Lou's willingness to lead a sacrificial life for the benefit of her husband's political career was an immeasurable aid to his wavering confidence.

OVERALL. It is clear the Lou did everything in her power to cultivate a supportive atmosphere in which Herbert could run his administration. Her humility and genuine interest in pursuing social responsibilities and advocacy projects was a welcome addition to the Hoover administration. Her sacrificial nature was also an important part of Herbert's support structure, allowing him to count on her for unwavering loyalty. Unfortunately, Lou's fear of disrupting the little peace that remained in the White House persuaded her not to fully immerse herself in performing the roles of first lady. Her individual talents and personality were not allowed to shine through her official efforts, severely limiting her legacy as first lady.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

HUSBAND: FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

TERM: 1933 – 1945

WIFE. Although she would become one of the most successful first ladies, Eleanor Roosevelt entered the White House with a sense of trepidation. Not only was she reluctant to accept the social obligations which she viewed as demeaning, but she expressed the common

fear “as to how to combine her own private concerns with the demands of her public role as wife of the president” (Caroli 225). She was extremely concerned with using the power of the first lady for substantial social issues that would benefit her husband’s presidency and did not want to be confined to many of the traditional or ceremonial roles.

Eleanor’s extreme desire to complement, reinforce, and influence Franklin’s decisions led her to participate in activities that embarrassed, alienated, and frustrated her husband. Once Franklin began to discourage her constant prying into his work, the relationship between Franklin and Eleanor took a dramatic negative turn. Instead of supporting Eleanor’s agenda, Franklin openly rejected his wife’s activities and “never before or since has a President so totally repudiated his wife’s politics in public” (Truman 65). This unfortunate miscommunication reversed the partnership reputation that a stubborn and determined Eleanor had worked hard to create. Regrettably, this was just one of the areas where Eleanor and Franklin had a difficult time reconciling the differences in their personal aspirations.

It has been said that “no president more desperately needed the zone of peace within the White House that other First Ladies have felt it was their primary duty to create” than Franklin Roosevelt (Truman 67). Eleanor, however, was completely unable to establish an environment of tranquility in the White House. Whether it was a result of her overly ambitious schedule while first lady, her tremendous desire to influence Franklin’s policies, or her frequent and prolonged absences from Washington, Eleanor was constantly contributing to a sense of unhealthy competition and aggravation in the Roosevelt White House. Instead of fostering a loving spousal relationship and offering a constant outpouring of support to Franklin, “Eleanor Roosevelt continued to see her husband largely as a personage, a man to prod and lecture” (Truman 69). This disassociation and lack of meaningful personal relationship did not aid Eleanor in pursuing great causes that complemented the administration’s policies. Because of her

stubborn attitude, Eleanor insisted on achieving her elaborate goals instead of compromising to better serve her husband.

Despite the creation of her own public identity, Eleanor did value and honor her commitments to husband and family. Her views on women's rights were progressive and they simply did not blend well with the traditional view of wife and mother. It has been stated, however, that only after "she fulfilled her roles as mother and wife... did she turn to projects that enabled her to fulfill her own needs and desires" (Wertheimer 24). This distinction, although debatable, is certainly a great accomplishment while in the office of first lady. With unique demands facing Eleanor from a variety of sources, it is commendable that she could create her individual and formidable identity while fulfilling her duties as wife of the president.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Most first ladies have not taken advantage of the innovation that Eleanor sought to achieve for their office. Because Eleanor was passionate about her teaching job, she was reluctant to leave the position upon her husband's election to the presidency. She eventually compromised and "arranged for a leave of absence from her teaching, but she stubbornly continued her other professional activities, including lecturing and writing" (Caroli 225). Perhaps the biggest criticism she faced with regard to maintaining her own career was the idea that she would have her own income, something many Americans believed was unnecessary based off of the amount of the president's compensation. To combat the public's fears and to avoid further negative publicity on this issue, Eleanor "donated much of her income to organizations such as the Women's Trade Union League and the Red Cross" (Caroli 225). This spirit of compromise served Eleanor and Franklin well and allowed her to preserve a sense of independence that was critical to her personality.

PRESS RELATIONS. Eleanor's activist agenda had the potential to become a liability to Franklin's presidency. Because of her sincere and passionate desire to achieve equal rights for

African Americans and women, Eleanor found herself participating in many activities that conservatives did not find appropriate for women. Luckily, however, “most of the mainstream media delighted in praising her, often implying that she was able to retain her womanly attributes while matching wits with men” (Wertheimer 36). The polarity Eleanor created through her crammed schedule was taxing on Franklin but ultimately won him a greater support from feminists throughout the country. To further her personal campaign for women’s rights, Eleanor used every press opportunity to show herself “meeting with women of all races, classes, and professions” thus placing special emphasis “on the importance of women in the public sphere” (Wertheimer 17). Ensuring that her activities were always newsworthy, Eleanor had a controlling and influential relationship with the press. She understood the importance of how her image would be reflected onto Franklin’s presidency and although she became outspoken on many controversial subjects, “the threat of harming Franklin’s chances prohibited her from doing more” (Caroli 233). Her ability to manage the information flow from the press allowed Eleanor to pursue and accomplish many goals which had previously been unapproachable to the first lady. Eleanor’s capacity to accept the great criticism that was aimed at her also aided her in keeping a positive rapport with the press.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Eleanor Roosevelt nearly abandoned the social obligations of first lady. Entering the office afraid of the restrictions that social responsibilities would place on her ability to effect change on the nation, Eleanor instead chose to use the social responsibilities for many new causes, pleasure and relaxation excluded. The constant demand that Eleanor placed on guests and her husband to discuss heated political topics or divisive social issues made her “no kind of company when [Franklin] wanted to relax without listening to her voice of conscience” (Truman 71). Likewise, many guests felt intimidated by the outspoken Eleanor and were deterred from complementing her White House

events. Although she did so with the best of intentions, Eleanor “often miscalculated people’s moods and tried to bring up serious matters when everyone wished to relax and be frivolous” (Caroli 228). The ambition that made Eleanor so successful in championing social causes left her unpopular in the social sphere. Entertaining is perhaps the only facet of the first lady role in which Eleanor did not leave a sustainable contribution.

Because Eleanor desired to accomplish so much in the political realm she was unsuccessful at balancing and contributing to the social responsibilities of the first lady. She consistently displayed her preference “to spend her time working for her own friends and projects” (Caroli 231). This selective criterion for which activities received the first lady’s attention deterred Eleanor from creating many new affiliations for the office. Her personal projects, such as equal rights for women and African Americans, were expansive and universal in nature and therefore made up for the contacts that she otherwise ignored due to her selectivity. Eleanor “recognized the importance of access to the President” and used the many connections she gained through her advocacy campaign to invite people to the White House (Truman 62). Her unique blend of old and new projects filled the White House with activity, although unsocial in nature. Her untraditional approach to using the social potential of the first lady fit well with the vigorous style of the Roosevelt administration.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Eleanor Roosevelt was deeply invested in humanitarian advocacy projects before entering the White House and the increase in prestige only increased her desire to aid her beloved causes. Especially fond of promoting causes specifically related to women, Eleanor found it important to be active in her work instead of merely dedicating her name to various organizations. Aside from writing a manifesto encouraging working women, Eleanor held several press conferences praising working women, especially those who were also married (O’Brien 201). Eleanor expected equal opportunities for women seeking employment and the

all-female journalist press conferences she initiated created new jobs in the press for women, a field which had previously been a field dominated by male employees (Truman 229). Although the limitation to women that Eleanor imposed at her press conferences created uproar within many established news systems, the sheer desire to report on this first lady's myriad of activities caused many established papers to alter their personnel ratio. Eleanor's fight for equal rights was drastic and, at times, extended beyond the scope which Franklin would've preferred.

Constrained by a physical disability that required the use of a wheelchair, Franklin was unable to visit many of the constituents who most needed his help. Eleanor seized this opportunity to claim that her husband "needed her as his eyes and ears" (Truman 57). Using this excuse to travel around the country, Eleanor campaigned for her favorite women's issues as well as Franklin's New Deal legislation. Although her outspokenness often caused alarm to advisors in the White House, "her travels resulted in widespread public admiration for a woman who truly cared about the American people," especially by women and African Americans (Wertheimer 19). Through her initiatives to reach out to people, Eleanor fashioned a humanitarian interest for the Roosevelt administration. Although some of the popularity she achieved was not transferable to her husband, Eleanor's connections with influential people throughout the nation certainly aided in Franklin's multiple reelections.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Eleanor used the same excuse to champion her husband's political causes as she had to pursue her individual social causes: his physical condition required her to be his eyes and ears. The sheer amount of speeches, articles, press conferences, and tours Eleanor undertook greatly expanded the political influence of the first lady. Her most important work occurred when "she preached the gospel of New Deal legislation and pressured her husband to adopt her daring solutions to labor disputes" and simultaneously when she took the more traditional route and "met with average Americans, shook hands, made contacts, and

reported it all back to the president” (O’Brien 201). Although she was vocal in her political support of Franklin and outgoing in her personal agenda, much of Eleanor’s political influence is suspected to have gone undetected. Her unified approach to the office of first lady allowed her to mingle personal politics into the Roosevelt administration with little commotion.

At the onset of the administration, Eleanor was not as adept at pursuing her agenda without dispute. In her attempts to support New Deal legislation Eleanor was asked to direct several of the new programs and initiatives. Unfortunately, Eleanor saw this as an opportunity to support her own causes above the presidential aims and “her insistence on using the department to advance her welfare agendas got her in hot water with Congress, and she had to quit” (O’Brien 201). This small upset did not prevent Eleanor from further advocating her personal ideals for the New Deal and she frequently caught herself in situations that put the Roosevelt administration at a disadvantage. The involvement Eleanor had in the political realm of Franklin’s presidency would not be rivaled until Hillary Clinton assumed the role of first lady.

OVERALL. Eleanor’s use of the first lady role was indisputably ambitious and was instrumental in expanding the political and advocacy possibilities for future first ladies. One historian summarizes Eleanor’s reign by asserting that:

the mere catalog of her activities would fatigue a squadron of Olympic athletes. She held 348 press conferences in her twelve years in the White House. She received and tried to answer as many as three hundred thousand letters a year. She wrote books, a monthly magazine column, a daily newspaper column, and she worked tirelessly to win access to the President for people and groups she supported. (Truman 60)

Throughout all of these activities, Eleanor single-handedly increased the potential for the first lady to effect change. Had her efforts been less polarizing and more consistently beneficial to

her husband's reputation, Eleanor Roosevelt could have made a much more substantial and affirmative impact on Franklin's presidency. Her reinvention of the first lady office led Eleanor to ascertain that she had accomplished with enormous success many of the goals she had outlined at the beginning of the administration.

BESS TRUMAN

HUSBAND: HARRY TRUMAN

TERM: 1945 - 1953

WIFE. Bess and Harry did not have the ideal sense of communication necessary to create a strong presidential partnership. Harry was "unable to inform Bess about all that he needed to deal with" and this became increasingly frustrating to Bess who wanted to fully defend and support her spouse during his time in office (O'Brien 208). Bess was able to maintain a "tempering influence on her husband" that was characteristic of many presidential spouses (Caroli 243). This ability to moderate her husband's emotions served Bess in creating a pleasant atmosphere at the White House that would allow Harry the opportunity to relax and enjoy his time as president. Bess was also instrumental in persuading her husband away from the tendency to overwork, what she viewed as one of the most important aspects of her job (Truman 13). This focus on the partnership of marriage was refreshing to Americans after Eleanor Roosevelt's reign where the importance of social causes seemed to trump the value of family relations. Fully aware that she did not have the political talent to be a completely equal partner to her husband, Bess refrained from engaging in activities that would cause alarm and decided to head in the opposite direction of Eleanor Roosevelt by leading a quiet life. She spent a great deal of time creating a safe environment for her family while in the White House

because “family was still the most important thing to Mrs. Truman, and she guarded its privacy with ceaseless, stoic silence, preferring a role in the background that adopted no causes, made no stir” (O’Brien 208). Bess began to worry immediately upon her husband’s election, that she would lose her husband to the consuming office of chief executive and did everything in her power to prevent this. Laughter remained a staple of the Truman household throughout this time, a part of Bess’ attempt to protect Harry from the demands of the office.

Bess seemed to adapt better to the demands of the White House during Harry’s second term as president. After his reelection, Bess “no longer saw [the office] as something inflicted on her by one of fate’s crueler blows” (Truman 86). She was relieved of some of her pessimism after surviving the first few White House years and began to show a much broader interest in the role of first lady after the 1948 election. Bess’ dedication to Harry did not diminish with the increased effort she put in to the role of first lady, and her calm experiences during the first years in the White House allowed her to create a better balance between a public and personal life towards the end of the Truman administration.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Bess’ contribution to the renovations and remodeling of the White House is especially significant. Her interest in history caused her to convince “the government [to] pay for a very expensive renovation [of the White House] rather than razing the old structure and erecting a new one” (O’Brien 209). Although extremely out of character for Bess, her passion for saving the White House that had fallen into disrepair caused her “to lobby congressmen like crazy” for the more expensive option (O’Brien 209). Her burst of enthusiasm was successful and it is largely in part to Bess that the original White House remains the residence of the chief executive today. After the success she experienced from publicly supporting the renovation of the White House, it is curious that she would not use her persuasive powers to advocate other projects to the public.

PRESS RELATIONS. Bess did not easily follow in the footsteps of Eleanor Roosevelt. After Eleanor's commanding presence, the press expected an equal openness to accompany Bess. Unfortunately, Bess was reluctant to disclose information to reporters in an effort to protect her family. Knowing her limitations, Bess "refused even to try public speaking" and instead "kept carefully in her husband's shadow" (Caroli 240). Although this was Bess' natural reaction to the office of first lady, the press found it an extremely unfavorable strategy and did not look favorably on her decision to approach the public in this manner. Once after scheduling a press conference and then cancelling it on short notice, the press increased their resentment of the new First Lady and Bess increased her reluctance to transmit information to them (Truman 76). Although Bess' strategy to dealing with the demands of the press had been used by some of her predecessors, it met with exceptionally hostile attitudes during Bess' tenure. The tremendous responsibility of following in the footprints of Eleanor Roosevelt proved too much for the quiet and more subservient personality of Bess.

Contrary to the peace that her silence contributed to, Bess' lack of public dialogue also caused her political intellect to become suspect. Bess' "refusal to speak out on matters of public concern gave readers the impression she knew less than she did" (Caroli 241). This criticism did not cause Bess to change her strategy and the public view of her knowledge was faintly diminished. Fortunately, "it was understood in Washington that she did not lack opinions" but that she merely thought "her public role consisted of keeping quiet and making sure her hat was on straight" (Caroli 240). This understanding granted to Bess by society was critical to her success. Although she did not have the temperament to compete with Eleanor Roosevelt, the press slowly began to accept her quieter presence.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Even with her quiet personality, Bess was an exceptional hostess, especially relative to her predecessor who abandoned this aspect of the

role. Although her overall schedule as first lady may not have been as ambitious as that of Eleanor Roosevelt, “between November 26, 1946, and February 18, 1947, [Bess] had to superintend eleven ‘official’ gatherings,” and “innumerable teas, luncheons, and personal appearances with groups who thought they could benefit from a photo with the First Lady” (Truman 85). Bess’ ability to balance the spike in social activity during those three months is incredible and only reflected positively on Harry’s presidency. Once Bess realized the impact that White House social events could have on her husband’s career, she undoubtedly better utilized the role for his benefit. Her gentle personality and eventual interest in the social affairs of Washington helped her to further the reputation of the Truman administration.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Even after Harry began to inform Bess less about what was occurring in his administration, the influence Bess maintained over her husband remained evident. The Trumans did not negate the influence Bess had and it is therefore interesting that she would so adamantly refuse to speak to the public about certain issues. Like many first ladies, “she directly affected his cabinet appointment, styled his responses to queries and attacks, calmed his legendary fits of temper” as well as “edited his speeches, gave her opinion on policy decisions, and offered an objectivity to criticism that Harry was notoriously incapable of realizing himself” (O’Brien 208). These activities left her political involvement visible and left little room for doubt that she did fully understand the political issues of the day even if she did not speak openly about them. The feminine genius that Bess brought to the political side of the Truman presidency assisted Harry greatly in appearing more personable. Her behind the scenes influence helped Harry to create both a stronger reputation and sense of support.

The personnel decisions that Bess helped to induce were a crucial aspect of the Truman presidency. Her listener personality gave her “a deadly eye for character” and she was instrumental in spotting “would-be power grabbers” (Truman 80). This intuition of how people

function helped Bess to offer Harry positive personnel suggestions. Instead of attempting to get her own family members appointed as Mary Lincoln had or filling the administration with corrupt individuals as Lou Hoover had, Bess chose people who “did more to stabilize the Truman presidency” than any other activity during the Truman’s eight years in the White House (Truman 81). Bess’ unwavering support and strength of character greatly aided Harry in his political endeavors, regardless of the rumors that she was poorly informed of what was occurring in the administration. With the talents and influence over her husband that she demonstrated in this area, it is surprising that she would not take a more active public role.

OVERALL. Bess experienced enormous personal growth during her time in the White House. Her eventual willingness to speak publicly on the White House renovation issue, her peace-keeping strategy within the personal confines of the presidency, and her feminine influence on Harry’s politics were all benefits to Harry’s administration. Her social hosting abilities also consistently aided the reputation of her husband and the press eventually became sympathetic to the calm Bess Truman who had a style completely separate from that of Eleanor Roosevelt. Although Bess was originally hesitant to embrace the role of first lady, the way in which she used her own strengths to reshape it after Eleanor’s redefinition of the role, made her fairly successful at balancing the many areas of the office. Her untiring support of her husband was valuable to Harry and the entire administration.

MAMIE EISENHOWER

HUSBAND: DWIGHT EISENHOWER

TERM: 1953 - 1961

WIFE. Mamie Eisenhower did not try to feign political prowess while her husband, Dwight, served as president. Instead, Mamie was consistent at insisting “her husband was the elected official and that she was his wife. No more, no less” (O’Brien 215). This honest approach to their partnership and marriage did not leave the press questioning Mamie’s lack of political involvement throughout her eight years in the White House.

Unfortunately, Mamie’s physical condition, including a “weak heart and her dizzy spells,” forced Mamie to take “a number of long vacations from the White House and a lot of bed rest” that left her unable to be completely successful in fulfilling all the responsibilities of first lady (Truman 217). During the presidency, Dwight also suffered physically from the stress of the White House. After his first heart attack, Mamie took the traditional wife and first lady role as “the guardian of Ike’s schedule, constantly urging him to take vacations” and to pay greater attention to his health (Truman 218). Similar to Edith Wilson, Mamie insisted that Dwight run for another term to give him the motivation to fully recover from his heart attack. Even though she became anxious “every time he gave a speech,” Mamie’s intense interest in her husband’s health could not prevent him from experiencing another heart attack during his second term (Truman 218). Despite the poor physical condition that the Eisenhower’s found themselves in by 1961, their marriage relationship was still strong by the end of their time in the White House. Mamie’s insistence that her husband’s election to the presidency did not change her vocation as his wife, she was better able to balance the public roles of first lady with her private life.

PRESS RELATIONS. Mamie found it easy to invite the press into her public life. Journalists noticed a particular improvement over Bess Truman in the way Mamie “gave interviews with

enthusiasm, shook hands, preened before the crowds, and welcomed the sight of cameras” (O’Brien 215). Despite her desire for popularity, the press continued to be disappointed that she did not offer the same substantial and political opinions that Eleanor Roosevelt had, but her willingness to share information on nonpolitical subjects was appreciated. The limited number of press appearances Mamie made helped to defend her from the criticisms of her health condition. Fortunately the worst criticism Mamie appears to have reaped from the press was about her poor health and it is therefore likely that her relationship with the press was profitable for Dwight’s reputation.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Mamie placed the greatest amount of her time and energy as first lady into creating a pleasant social environment around the White House. Mamie’s “bubbly good cheer” was known for energizing visitors who came to the White House and she put this same energy into preplanning her popular social events (Truman 217). This compassion for people extended to the White House staff and Mamie was adored for her small demonstrations of emotion, such as “if someone fell ill, a bouquet from the First Lady cheered him or her toward recovery” (Truman 216). Those surrounded by Mamie appreciated her positive attitude despite the physical toll that the demanding social position was taking on her. Her desire to generate popularity clearly showed through in the manner in which she interacted with all people.

Mamie was equally pretentious about planning for social events as she was for making guests feel welcomed once they arrived. Before each event “she meticulously reviewed menus and seating arrangements for luncheons and dinners. ...handled her household finances with a thrifty eye...scanned the local newspapers for bargains and hustled the staff around the city to nail down the good buys” (Truman 215). Mamie’s ability to become a talented hostess while restricting her extravagance to a simple budget was esteemed by those who found themselves

at these events. Instead of attempting to make the White House a “showcase of high culture,” Mamie decided to foster events that would leave the executive mansion a “reflection of popular taste” (Caroli 249). Mamie’s ability to produce this simple environment contributed to the success of her realistic social events and refrained from alienating any of the lower classes who wished to imitate Washington society. Although they never had a political focus, Mamie was able to improve her reputation through her commitment to the social responsibilities of first lady.

Mamie’s regular and cheerful appearances with Dwight in the social realm helped to compensate for her lack of political interest. Mamie is known as “...unquestionably the least political of the modern First Ladies” and was unable to generate much support for Dwight through political activities (Truman 218). Her personality did not lend itself well to “any policy or advisory dimension of the institution but was a success at campaigning and projecting the ideal of American womanhood and motherhood during the 1950s” (Watson 55). The feminine reputation that Mamie maintained helped her to appear a genuine White House hostess and presidential spouse. Instead of attempting to do things in an area where she had little skill, Mamie’s decision to stick to the basics of first lady social hostessing allowed her better support her husband. Although she did not have a political aspect to her office, this lack of substance did not detract from her husband’s popularity.

OVERALL, Mamie Eisenhower used her personal talents well while in the White House. She knew where her personality would not substantially support her husband, such as in the political realm, and instead of forcing herself into uncomfortable situations, she maintained a schedule that allowed her to feel confident in her accomplishments. Mamie’s genuine and cheerful approach to dealing with the press and social responsibilities was admirable and it is regrettable that she did not choose to use these same character traits to champion a universal

or humanitarian cause. After the fight of her predecessors to greatly expand the power and opportunities for a first lady, it is disappointing the Mamie was only able to embrace the role of social hostess. Although Mamie was not critical in developing support for her husband, she also was not engaged in tarnishing any part of his public image.

JACQUELINE KENNEDY

HUSBAND: JOHN F. KENNEDY

TERM: 1961 – 1963

WIFE. Jacqueline Kennedy understood the importance of each role the president's spouse needed to play during her years in the White House. With regard to the role of wife and mother, Jackie knew it was important to create the allure of a happy family. She also ensured that the relationship she had with her husband created an environment where John didn't "have to fight the day's political battles over again at night" (Truman 32). This cultured an environment of peace in their personal lives that may otherwise have been lacking. Despite the illusion Jackie wanted to create about their marriage, her husband's escapades were not unknown and Jackie's frequent absences from the White House became relevant to the reputation of both White House residents. Citing excuses such as "Jackie had gone for a walk," the First Lady escaped for "three- and four-day weekends she spent at Glen Ora, the getaway house and Virginia" as well as other "long vacations she took without her husband" (Truman 41). The noticeable absence of Jackie from everyday life in the White House did not portray the harmonious image of a marriage that American's desired to see. Although the charisma of both John and Jackie allowed for Jackie to continue these individual retreats, her motivation for making these escapes may have influenced the energy she put into other areas of the office.

Jackie did not want the dignity that came with the presidency to affect her personality. For this reason, “most of her time as first lady revolved around two agenda items: caring for her family as wife and mother” (Wertheimer 45). This dedication was consistent with her desire to remain grounded while in the White House as well as to project a symbolic feminine image to America. Instead of embracing other traditional social roles of the office, Jackie was found “shunning the title of first lady [because] she preferred to be called ‘Mrs. Kennedy’ and made every effort not to make the role of first lady a series of public appearances to greet visitors to the White House” (Wertheimer 43). Her own spin on the priorities of her official duties helped Jackie to distinguish herself among modern first ladies. Despite the faults in the Kennedy marriage, Jackie was successful at creating the illusion of ‘Camelot’ that helped make John’s presidency so successful.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Jackie served in the first lady office during a very transformative time with regards to both politics and women’s rights. Without greatly expanding any duty of the first lady or leaving an irreplaceable legacy in any area, Jackie did make an important innovation to the office. Her personality easily allowed her to create relationships and her ear for languages increased her popularity even in foreign countries. For this reason, Jackie became the “first modern first lady to represent the United States to the pope and the prime minister of India without her husband by her side” (Wertheimer 62). These simple appearances which came naturally to Jackie represented the opportunity for first ladies to become unofficial ambassadors for the United States. Although few of her successors would have the same effortless success that she experienced in her international travels, her willingness to pursue these roles helped to expand the potential impact of a first lady’s reign.

Jackie was also innovative in the use of White House staff. Because she desired to preserve as much time for herself as possible during the most hectic times in her schedule, she

became the “first president’s wife to employ her own press secretary” (Caroli 256). As will be discussed in the next section, Jackie was enormously protective of how the press created her image and the inclusion of a modern press secretary facilitated this constant monitoring. Jackie enlarged her staff for other projects as well, especially when airing the renovation of the White House, but her “competent, diligent, and loyal East Wing staff...was often at odds with the president’s advisers in the West Wing” (Perry 77). These small differences did not have a major or lasting effect on how the First Lady contributed to the success of the Kennedy administration. The use of White House staff allowed Jackie and would continue to allow future first ladies to better focus on their personal talents while in the White House.

PRESS RELATIONS. Both Jackie and John seemed to have enough charisma to never encounter a negative situation when dealing with the press. As a general rule, “the first lady left the public pronouncements to her husband, but she attracted the spotlight” (Perry 131). Her dealings with the press were of a nonpolitical nature, similar to those of her immediate predecessors, but her charm and presence left the press fascinated with her public life. Because of her personality, that lack of political substance in her press appearances was insignificant and did not affect her reputation or the portrayal of her husband.

The press had experienced several new journalism trends since the fierce fights they had experienced with first ladies in the past. Whether they were becoming more adaptable to the privacy requested by first ladies or the public interest in White House life had simply shifted, Jackie Kennedy’s desire for the balance of public and private life arrived in Washington at a time that coincided well with current journalism trends. Instead of arguing with Jackie about the exploit of her private life, “Mrs. Kennedy’s enforced dichotomy between her private and public life...meshed perfectly with the media’s standards in the early 1960s. Consequently, the press coverage of Jacqueline Kennedy usually emphasized the fairy-tale elements of the Kennedy

White House” instead of focusing on substantial issues (Perry 80). The chance alignment of Jackie’s expectations matching the press’ expectations greatly facilitated the First Lady’s relationship with the press. Her ability to consistently and constantly portray an image of harmony in the White House was easily reflected onto John’s administration and greatly influenced his popularity.

Although her relationship with the press was generally peaceful, she did struggle to continue providing adequate protection for her children once in the White House. In order to do so, Jackie attempted to prevent photographs of them from being exploited (Perry 71). Despite the relationship she had created with the press regarding her personal appearance, the media was still curious about her children and constantly sought personal stories and information about them. The public was equally curious about her relationship with the charismatic president, but “try as she might, Jackie would never be able to control the public’s impression of JFK or her relationship with him” (O’Brien 223). The distance between her family and the press seemed to only cultivate this fascination, but Jackie’s insistence triumphed and her family life remained relatively private.

When Jackie did attempt to bolster her public image, she was very protective of how she was presented. She wanted to use her position as first lady to show the “image that a new generation – to which the torch of political leadership had passed – would also spark a renaissance of cultural creativity” (Perry 17). To encourage this impression, Jackie surrounded the White House and her personal activities with culture and flair. Her personality attracted Americans to the Kennedy administration and she was able to integrate the creation of a symbolic image into her social agenda. She was also able to better control the creation of her image by limiting her public speaking “to extemporaneous, ceremonial remarks, for example, brief speeches in India and Latin America” (Wertheimer 45). The lack of substantial press

conferences and public speaking tours took pressure off of Jackie to be a political equal to her husband. She handled the balance of this role well enough that little controversy was created as a result of her decision to maintain a private life.

Jackie was concerned about the press' reaction to the presentation of her pet project: a major renovation of the White House. Before the release of her television tour, Jackie spent extra time ensuring that her efforts would be shown in the most favorable light. Her concern for how her renovation was portrayed was "illustrative of the first lady's larger considerations over how to introduce her work to the public and...she had several practical reasons for wanting to maintain control over how her White House restoration story was told" (Perry 122). Her ability to control her presentation to the press in this and other situations was a tremendous help to establishing her reputation as a nearly flawless first lady and White House icon.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Jackie's natural beauty afforded her the opportunity to focus on aesthetics while in the White House without harsh objections from the public. Although Jackie wanted to use social functions to ensure dignity was portrayed in the administration, she "infuriated her husband by not taking some of her traditional first lady responsibilities seriously" (O'Brien 222). It is also in the fulfillment of social responsibilities that Jackie's personality proved to be contradictory. Although she was personable, friendly, and an expert at creating goodwill for her husband, Jackie often employed "the polite brush-off for numerous semiofficial visitors" and was famous for using the phrase 'Give them to Lady Bird' instead of handling the situation herself (Truman 39). This strategy gave Lady Bird Johnson a great deal of experience at social hostessing in the White House while she was the vice president's wife but it made some of the visitors hoping to experience Jackie's charisma feel slighted. It is unfortunate that Jackie did not better utilize her natural social abilities to create popularity for her husband.

Jackie cultivated a better sense of communication at White House events through a few strategic rearrangements in prior social protocol. Under Jackie's supervision:

round tables seating eight or ten replaced horseshoe or rectangular tables.

Walls painted white or yellow and pale blue tablecloths lightened the rooms and the mood. Flemish style flower arrangements were plentiful and of low height to provide fragrance (to mask the smell of cigarettes and cigars) and color without obscuring sightline. Intimate and lively conversation was now possible. (Wertheimer 52)

These small peculiarities that Jackie embraced and paid attention to during social functions were incredibly important for maintaining the ideal 'Camelot' environment that America perceived the Kennedys to possess. The degree to which she planned ahead with seating arrangements and guest lists also helped to highlight her role during these social appearances. The conversations that occurred in these settings were helpful to John's reputation after previous first ladies had been unable to balance social and political aspects at many White House events.

In fulfilling other social obligations, however, Jackie did not want as much attention attracted to her. Her demands in this area revealed her ever-changing personality. Many expected Jackie to overspend on her wardrobe budget but "...she wanted to avoid any taint of sensationalism in her clothes. ... At the same time she did not want to look stuffy... She wanted only original creations" (Truman 33). Instead of wearing gowns that drew attention to exuberance, Jackie's wardrobe supplemented her natural beauty. Often, her choice of clothing during an event was aimed to have a symbolic connection to the context or theme of the dinner (Perry 84). Jackie received little criticism on her personal style of clothing and awed American women with her sense of style and fashion. Her attention to detail, even in her clothing, helped her to connect to women throughout the country and increased her popularity worldwide.

SOCIAL ADVOCACY. Jackie Kennedy was very liberal in her choice of a cause to advocate during her tenure in the White House. Instead of choosing a humanitarian cause, Jackie devoted all of her time and energy to a restoration of the White House which she viewed as a source of pride for all Americans. More than improving the physical condition of the mansion, Jackie hoped to restore the historical significance of the president's home. To achieve her goal, "she scoured the mansion's property in search of forgotten antiques, successfully lobbied her husband and Congress to grant museum status to the building and provide a full-time curator, and hunted down collectors across the country who had historical treasures to donate" (O'Brien 222). The amount of energy she dedicated to this project ensured that the building, and its occupants, would demand supreme respect. It was mentioned that Jackie cared deeply about her reputation and for that reason she "chose the golden word restoration to describe her efforts. The term cast an aura of irreproachable disinterested authenticity on the project, rendering it almost immune to criticism" (Truman 34). This forethought on how the project was to be presented represents an important aspect of Jackie's personality that made her so successful as the presidential spouse.

Unfortunately, Jackie's choice of advocacy project did cause some upset in the country. Despite the formation of the White House Historical Association which helped to defer the cost of the renovation, critics were alarmed to see "the White House and the presidency take on near-royal status" (Wertheimer 43). The cost of renovating was large and Jackie spared little expense at making sure the renovation was complete and flawless. While her additions and changes to the public portion of the White House seemed reasonable, she was "totally reckless in the expenditures she ran up renovating the White House's private quarters on the second floor" that average Americans would never be able to appreciate (Truman 38). This dispute magnified an inconsistent aspect of Jackie's agenda as it added glamour to the White House but

did not improve the building's value as a national monument. Her aesthetic ideals helped to advocate "the pure art of living," an art some thought inappropriate for the first lady to pursue, especially after her predecessors had shown an interest in aiding humanity (Wertheimer 43). Although the project experienced criticism, it was not enough to result in the White House being transformed into anything less than a historical masterpiece.

The restoration of the White House was very comprehensive in scope. Not only did Jackie find authentic antiques and put them on display them in the mansion, but "she wrote the introduction, approved the text, selected photographs, and designed layout for *The White House: An Historic Guide*, which was published in 1962, and became a success with visitors" (Wertheimer 49). This publication was accompanied by a myriad of other publicity and ensured that more Americans would be able to see the changes made to the White House. Jackie's inclusion of those people who would never have the opportunity to travel to Washington helped her to avoid criticism for her expensive project. The risk Jackie took in choosing to renovate the White House in place of advocate for other humanitarian causes was huge but Jackie's popularity successfully prevented any negative association from being attributed to her husband's presidency.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. International trips were Jackie's main source of political involvement during her husband's term in office. Her interest in culture and languages allowed Jackie to win approval from many foreign nations including the "English, who have a tradition of looking down their noses at American Presidents and their wives" (Truman 38). Her glamorous but sincere personality instantly attracted high profile representatives in other countries. Her willingness to travel to these areas on behalf of the President greatly helped his personal reputation domestically and abroad. Likewise, Jackie's natural ability to nurture political relationships in these countries helped to attack stereotypes of the typical American (Truman

37). Jackie wisely used her interest in art and society to aid the Kennedy administration in foreign countries. The intrigue she created surrounding the president and Americans in general highlighted the rising prominence and prestige of the nation. Jackie embraced a similar international attitude at home and used the White House to “cultivate international understanding” through the arrangement of visits to the mansion by foreign students (O’Brien 222). These simple visits were important in Jackie’s pursuit of a better and more cultured reputation for Americans just as her international presence was a great asset to the political agenda of her husband.

Jackie was equally important in the domestic campaigns for her husband. Her charisma aided the staff in grassroots politics but her influence was not exploited by the press. In performing the roles of “campaigner, speech advisor, listener, sounding board, debate partner, and historical consultant to her husband from his senator years until his death...it is clear that Mrs. Kennedy chose to exercise her knowledge and power behind the scenes in terms of President Kennedy’s formal political agenda” (Wertheimer 56). Despite the personal struggles John and Jackie may have experienced, Jackie’s power and aid to the administration is undisputable. She not only complemented her charismatic husband, but also expanded his popularity to those who found her style and grace appealing.

OVERALL. Jackie Kennedy maintained an extraordinary degree of popularity while in the White House. The premature assassination of her husband only furthered this popularity and she maintained her prominence in the United States even after her husband’s death. She lacked any formal or humanitarian outreach activities, but her restoration of the White House cannot be undervalued. Her ability to turn the mansion into a museum has had an enormous impact on history. Her talent at fulfilling the social obligations and exceeding international expectations while still finding time to attend to her personal needs and those of her family was

commendable. Her diplomatic capabilities were essential to the busy Kennedy administration and the legacy she created in the White House left a new standard in fashion and dignity with which all future first ladies were forced to compete. Jackie Kennedy was also important in bridging the gap between traditional and modern first ladies that had previously been an unsteady and wavering distinction.

LADY BIRD JOHNSON

HUSBAND: LYNDON JOHNSON

TERM: 1963 - 1969

WIFE. Lady Bird Johnson is the epitome of a first lady who balanced every area of the office well in order to support her husband instead of gain fame for herself. The unique partnership that Lady Bird and Lyndon cultivated in their marriage gave Lady Bird the “ability to look at her larger-than-life-size husband with an extraordinary combination of affection and objectivity” (Truman 171). This objectivity that was severely lacking in several other presidential partnerships was a wonderful asset to Lyndon. Instead of relying on her for constant support, Lyndon looked to Lady Bird for honesty and the courage to tell him when he was wrong (Truman 171). This sincerity proved to be more beneficial to Lyndon than illogical support would have been. Lady Bird’s truthfulness extended into the other aspects of her first lady role as well, helping her to achieve the goals of the office in a unified manner.

Like many presidents, Lyndon Johnson had a tendency to work long hours on policy revisions, speeches, and other presidential duties. Even though Lady Bird understood that Lyndon was not perfect and there would be times when his work needed improvement, she encouraged him not to spend as much time dealing with these stressors. To protect him from overwork, “Lady Bird knew how to lure him out of the Oval Office to a quiet dinner with a few

friends on the second floor” (Truman 178). Her ability to temporarily distract Lyndon from his work was important in protecting his health and sanity. Lady Bird’s discretion in this area also helped her to know “exactly how far to push him, when to insert flattery, and when to revert to her role as wife. It was this balance of roles that made her effective in her dealings with her husband and in the execution of her duties” (Wertheimer 89). Understanding the necessity of growth in a marriage relationship, Lady Bird and Lyndon quickly established a work-life balance that eased the strain on their relationship during Lyndon’s presidency.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Lyndon and Lady Bird cultivated one of the best working presidential partnerships that the White House has witnessed. Lyndon trusted Lady Bird’s personal approach to politics and was not ashamed of the individual identity she took on while in office. Lady Bird knew the importance of working closely with her husband on major projects and she became “the first presidential spouse to hit the campaign trail on her own, campaigning across the South to offset the hostility to the president’s support of the 1964 Civil Rights Act” (Watson 56). Her feminine character allowed her to reinforce Lyndon’s position without creating deeper damage to the Johnson administration. Lady Bird’s interest in politics and willingness to substantiate the political side of her office on a national level acted as a spring board for her successors.

Like Jackie Kennedy, Lady Bird chose to expand the White House staff. Because Lady Bird chose to pursue a project so large in scope and workload, she became “the first to employ a full-time projects manager for her massive, nationwide beautification and conservation program” (Watson 111). This addition to the East Wing staff aided Lady Bird in achieving her personal goals without ruining the balance she had created between her public and private life. This innovation also signaled future first ladies to delegate more tasks to assistants as the definition of the first lady role evolved and gained more momentum and substance.

PRESS RELATIONS. Lady Bird's popularity was of immeasurable value to Lyndon.

Competing against Jackie Kennedy's charisma and glamour to establish her own equally valuable reputation was no easy feat for Lady Bird. Fortunately, Lady Bird understood the worth of her public image and spent time cultivating good relationships with members of the press. Instead of arguing with the press in an effort to establish privacy for her family, an ideal she knew "was a naïve fantasy – she accepted curiosity about her as part of her job" (Caroli 267). This strategy was preferred by the press to previously employed tactics of evasion. She won triumphant approval from the press for this strategy and they were more understanding of her when she was unwilling to share personal information. Lady Bird's relationship with the press allowed her to be more successful and widespread in her beautification campaign as well as in portraying a positive representation of the Johnson administration.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Lady Bird had received a great deal of practice in fulfilling the social obligations of first lady while her husband was vice president. While working under Jackie Kennedy, she learned to accept her predecessor's "star quality – without a trace of the envy or anxiety" (Truman 171). Despite the terrific undertaking it was to follow in the footsteps of Jackie, Lady Bird completed her social duties with a self confidence that allowed her to exceed the expectations placed upon her. The calmness that Lady Bird exuded during her tenure was also critical in creating a reputation that could rival the success of her predecessor.

Much of the success Lady Bird experienced in the social realm was a result of her organization. Although Lady Bird desired to support her husband through social hostessing she refused to fulfill the social obligations at the expense of wrecking her work life balance. Instead of threatening this balance, Lady Bird chose to run "her side of the White House in the manner of a chairman of a large corporation. Leaving details of flower arrangements and menus to

assistants” so that she could retain time for the projects she felt were most significant (Caroli 271). The extra time she had allowed her “to meet and shake hands with every single member of the White House staff” (Truman 173). This small gesture helped to empower the staff and contributed to the productive and friendly environment throughout the White House. Before attending events involving prominent public figures, Lady Bird “studied briefing books and consulted aides so she had something friendly and personal to say to almost everyone on the guest list” (Truman 183). By delegating menial tasks and refraining from over-committing herself to trivial social events, Lady Bird was able to focus more time on her chosen projects and to foster better relationships. Her social skills clearly generated support for herself and her husband’s presidency.

Inclusion developed into one of Lady Bird’s strengths in the social realm. Although she was able to lure “the great names – and the great wealth” to support her beautification project, her expansive operation involved people from all social spheres and she thereby “prevented the committee from turning into an elitist operation” (Truman 179). Her ability to include many types of people in the agenda of the White House also manifested itself in the more traditional social roles. Lady Bird created and presided over “‘Women Doers’ luncheons, which brought together women from Washington and the rest of the country to hear one of their number tell what women were accomplishing” (Truman 178). Unfortunately, these luncheons were fairly disjointed and were not entirely effective in engaging the nation. Her recognition of others’ accomplishments was very meaningful to those around her and her ability to maintain a cheery disposition at all times greatly influenced the atmosphere at any gathering she attended.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Lady Bird chose her social advocacy focus almost as liberally as Jackie Kennedy did. Fortunately, however, Lady Bird’s efforts towards conservation and beautification could be seen on a national scale and were relevant to every American’s life. At the beginning of

her operation, Lady Bird concentrated solely on beautifying Washington, D.C. Just within the Washington area, Lady Bird supervised the fundraising of the Committee for the Capital that raised two million dollars that was spent in landscaping eighty parks, nine schools, and eight playgrounds, including the planting of 83,000 flowering plants, 50,000 shrubs, 25,000 trees, and 137,000 annuals (Truman 180). If the physical proof of her efforts was not enough of an accomplishment, the manner in which she facilitated this beautification was also an astounding success. Drawing upon her inclusive nature, Lady Bird learned from the beginning to “combine public and private funds and would involve all interest groups as well as environmental experts. She provided opportunity for input and shared ownership” (Wertheimer 86). This strategy helped more people to feel fully invested in the project and thus allowed Lady Bird to continue operating under an expanded reach.

After experiencing such unprecedented success with her beautification of the capital, Lady Bird began a national beautification campaign. She traveled extensively to promote her project and therefore provided a closer glimpse of the Johnson administration to many Americans. Her inclusivity influenced her management of the national campaign as well in the way she “organized cabinet and Senate wives, many of them old friends, to form a speakers’ bureau to handle the appearances she could not make without cloning herself” (Truman 181). Her aptitude for time management helped her to expand her project into something that involved each and every American. By her example and to the delight of her husband, Americans began to spend their “holiday dollars visiting the Catskills or the Grand Canyon rather than Bermuda or Acapulco” (O’Brien 231). After restoring beauty in Washington, Lady Bird chose to extend this restoration to the entire nation.

Her involvement in the beautification campaign went much further than encouraging all Americans to join her campaign. Her speeches “demonstrated the impact of the issue on

everyone in a community, provided examples of legal and public policy actions related to her cause, and challenged her listeners – regardless of their professions – to acknowledge the relationship of the environment to their own lives” (Wertheimer 86). The intense focus of her speeches helped her entire campaign to feel more united and to advance the project beyond the scope of a cosmetic makeover. Her sponsorship of a law and involvement in the legislative side of beautification to “eliminate the proliferation of junkyards and billboards along our nation’s highways” helped her to appear more fully dedicated to the success of the project (Truman 181). Her comprehensive approach to beautification expressed the need to adopt her ideals for cosmetic, economic, and policy ideals throughout the country. To further cement her dedication to this cause, Lady Bird continued to actively pursue beautification and conservation once her husband became a lame duck president and still after the Johnsons left the White House. Her enthusiasm for preserving the beauty of the country was contagious and her greatest feats of the first ladyship resulted from her endeavors in this area.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. The same values that made Lady Bird a success in the other aspects of the office again contributed to Lady Bird’s success in the political arena. Inclusivity, honesty, and activity supported Lady Bird’s political directives and offered valuable assistance to Lyndon. In the spirit of inclusivity, Lady Bird attempted to negate many of the negative social consequences associated with politics. During the presidential election, Lady Bird “did not think it proper for [Lyndon] to speak out against other candidates” and used her support as leverage for how the race was run (Caroli 264). This same desire for political harmony was shown in Lady Bird’s attitude towards previous first ladies. She thought it was an especially important element of her job to reconcile the political factions of the nation and create a bipartisan atmosphere in the White House. Lady Bird openly expressed her disapproval of predecessors that had embraced causes that divided the nation. To authenticate her opinion, Lady Bird “never sought

an individual constituency for herself or pursued a political or diplomatic career in her own right” but fulfilled all of her duties in order to support and gain popularity for her husband (Caroli 268). Instead of winning a following of only half of the country by choosing to advocate a controversial issue, Lady Bird chose to show respect even for those who opposed her husband which helped her to increase her popularity and ability to succeed in her endeavors (Wertheimer 72). The value of inclusivity which Lady Bird championed served her well to accomplish her individual agenda and to promote the activity of her husband.

Honesty also assisted Lady Bird in receiving support from a wide variety of audiences. Within the White House, her confidence and honesty were necessary to become a valued advisor to the president. Thankfully, Lady Bird agreed with her husband on most issues that generated a great deal of public interest. Because Lady Bird thought it important and necessary to criticize her husband so that he could better his political power, she “did not hesitate to voice her opinion about any issue her husband addressed, as is evident in her diary, papers, and biographies of her life” (Wertheimer 78). This vocal challenge that Lady Bird offered to her husband helped her to gain respect with the other members of Lyndon’s administration. Without offending anyone, Lady Bird’s honesty helped to authenticate the Johnson presidency.

Lady Bird also thought it was critically important that her actions reinforce the ideas she advocated. She aided Lyndon’s War on Poverty through her association with the Head Start program for underprivileged children as well as her personal reports on localities she visited during her national travels (O’Brien 231). The visibility provided through her activity in this area only furthered the goodwill that her agenda had already created. Behind the scenes, Lady Bird pursued a number of activities to help Lyndon prepare for important tours, campaigns, and decisions. Most notably, Lady Bird “called most of the congressmen and senators and the governor in each state and asked for their help” before her husband’s campaign in the South to

promote the Equal Rights Amendment (Truman 176). Her charm and affability helped to compensate for the hostility that the Equal Rights Amendment created. Like many first ladies, it was Lady Bird's ability to generate a humanitarian image for the administration that was most useful in furthering political support for her husband.

OVERALL. Lady Bird was an incredibly well balanced and modern first lady. Without abandoning the traditional social hostessing role, Lady Bird was able to use her personality and principles to create an impressive reputation for herself through the political and advocacy roles of first lady. Her inclusion of all people in the work she pursued not only helped her to retain some personal freedom but also increased the investment Americans made in her idealism. Her honesty encouraged growth on her husband's behalf and ensured that her own reputation was not driven solely by her husband's policy decisions. Instead of merely advocating and representing the Johnson administration through speeches and articles, Lady Bird was active in international diplomacy as well as grass-roots politics. Her balance of family protection and divulgence of information to the press contributed to her prosperity in the office of first lady. It is the creation of peace within the White House and society that most noticeably attests to Lady Bird's success as presidential spouse.

PAT NIXON

HUSBAND: RICHARD NIXON

TERM: 1969 - 1974

WIFE. Pat Nixon demonstrated an unrivaled sense of loyalty towards her husband during his presidency. Despite his faults and his refusal to consider her opinions in significant matters, Pat "dutifully accompanied her husband on every trip where her presence was

requested” (Caroli 275). Perhaps as a result of their unequal partnership, Pat had to fulfill the duties of first lady regardless of her sincere dislike of having a public life. Her commitment to supporting her husband, however, motivated Pat to meet the heavy demands that her husband’s elected position placed upon her. Pat thoroughly believed that “Richard Nixon had gifts, ideas, policies, America badly needed” and that her husband was “where he could really be of value to the country and to the world” (Truman 191). This support for Richard was not provided by any other member of his administration. The loyalty Pat demonstrated to her husband by sacrificing her desires for privacy in order to encourage his political success helped to create an image of a peaceful marriage.

Regardless of the image Pat created, the Nixon marriage was not without struggles. Near the end of Richard’s presidency, “Dick shared so little of his official life with her, it is virtually assured that Pat Nixon knew nothing of the details of the Watergate break-in” (O’Brien 240). This lack of communication allowed Pat to be completely honest with reporters when they questioned her about the curious series of events that occurred involving her husband. Unfortunately, this characteristic of their marriage also made it harder for Pat to act as a representative for her husband or to provide the stable support that he needed during the Watergate investigation. Richard’s secrecy kept Pat from understanding the immense stress with which he was struggling and she was simply unable “to communicate with the lonely, brooding man she had married” (Truman 199). Her perseverance in supporting her husband through the strenuous situation of Watergate helped to maintain some shred of the Nixons’ public image. Unfortunately, the same emotions of mistrust that Pat experienced with Richard were inconsolably experienced by the entire nation. Her prioritizing of family life had little effect in competing with the negative feelings of distrust and dishonesty conjured by Watergate.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Pat undertook the traditional role of redecorating the White House during her time in the mansion. To solidify the improvement Jackie Kennedy had made to the historical residence, Pat “recruited a first-class art historian and preservationist” and employed an official curator (Truman 197). Ensuring the White House maintained its museum status, Pat took on an important innovation in making it more accessible to visitors. Knowing that she did not have the same charismatic influence as Jackie, Pat struggled to leave her own legacy on this facet of the first lady position without appearing to compete with Jackie. Remaining humble about her contributions to the preservation of the White House, Pat designed “well-diagramed pamphlets in different languages...arranged for the first time for visitor tours of the gardens” and made the additional decision “to illuminate the White House every night” (Truman 198). These extra details that Pat contributed to the long-running project of revamping the White House allowed her to make an important contribution without appearing to overshadow Jackie Kennedy’s legendary efforts. Pat’s ability to increase accessibility to the White House was particularly beneficial in combating the concealment and secrecy that tainted her husband’s reputation.

PRESS RELATIONS. Following in the footsteps of Lady Bird Johnson and Jackie Kennedy was a daunting task for Pat Nixon who disliked the public attention her husband’s career required. Lacking much of the charisma that aided her predecessors in creating relationships with the press, Pat “stiffened in front of large audiences and television cameras, causing some observers to characterize her as cold and unfeeling” (Caroli 272). This image of “Plastic Pat” was unhelpful to her husband’s administration because it contributed to the unease felt by Americans toward the Nixons. Her loyalty to Richard once again superseded the criticism she received for her perceived insincerity and Pat had to continuously seek amends with the press.

A large part of the resistance Pat faced was her sincere desire for privacy. Because of her tendency to isolate herself, many of Pat's accomplishments in the office went unnoticed. Pat employed several strategies to ensure that she generated the lowest possible profile. One particularly successful approach Pat took to deflect attention involved the supply of brief but purposeful responses that directly connected Pat to her audience (Wertheimer 116). Despite the "horrendous violation to her private self" that Pat perceived politics necessitated, she was acutely aware of how her portrayal as an American icon could be used (Truman 194). One reason Pat refused to comment on Watergate and always employed brief responses to the press on other subjects was her consciousness of the consequences her actions would have on her husband's reputation. She was remarkably sensitive to her responses and mannerisms, knowing they would "become news and grounds for criticism" and implemented a solution "based on the adage: be mindful of unintended consequences" (Wertheimer 112). Although Pat did not always have the most amicable relationships with reporters and journalists, she clearly understood the role they played in connecting her and her husband to the public. For this reason, she did not avoid speaking out on all controversial issues but she did try to maintain a peaceful relationship with the inquisitive press and avoided undermining her husband's popularity.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. The insincere reputation that Pat earned as a result of her interaction with the press made her fulfillment of the social obligations of the first ladyship more difficult. Pat "envisioned a role for herself that went beyond the White House hostess" but she was ineffective at changing the country's perception of her character and personality (Caroli 278). Her public appearances coupled with her husband's political actions gave her the image of an artificial and deceitful woman that she found impossible to combat. That she "adhered rigidly and dutifully to protocol" also contributed to her unflattering reputation (Wertheimer 117). As she had previously done in her marriage, Pat sacrificed herself

to continue supporting and pursuing Richard's ambitions but was imperfect in creating popularity for her husband.

As she had with press relations, Pat understood how great of an impact her fulfillment of the first lady's social obligations could have on her husband. She took her responsibilities in this area very seriously and "spent weeks and months prior to state visits, studying culture and customs, the people and politics with whom she expected to visit" (Wertheimer 109). This preplanning was appreciated by many of the important diplomats who visited the White House and it helped Pat to compensate for her lack of natural charisma. As has been mentioned, her work at making the White House more accessible through lighting, additional tours, and translated guidebooks also contributed to her success in the social realm. Pat did not become well known for planning elaborate occasions but she did make adequate attempts to try to balance her efforts in this area with those in other realms. Like always, her commitment to her husband ensured that the social responsibilities she undertook were aimed at spotlighting and supporting his presidency.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Pat lacked focus in her role as social advocate. She also became the first presidential spouse to consider an intensely controversial topic in her humanitarian outreach. Claiming that she "instinctively sympathized with the poor and unlucky of this world" Pat became the first first lady to defend her pro-choice views on abortion (Truman 190). After facing the criticism that this statement provoked, Pat turned to the advocacy of more universal causes. Even after renegotiating her advocacy agenda, Pat's attention still went to several widespread causes. She validated her lack of concentration by saying that her projects, including the Right to Read literacy campaign, support of American artists, and encouragement of national volunteerism, would be able to attract the involvement of citizens across the country (Wertheimer 111). If nothing else, her sporadic advocacy of so many causes alluded to her

concern for people. The attention she drew from her involvement in these projects, although minimal, helped Pat to foster more positive perceptions of the Nixon administration.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Pat was never a political equal with her husband, but she did engage in several political activities to support his administration. Knowing that her husband was rarely influenced by her advice, the only recorded instance of Pat's direct attempt to influence Richard's policy was her encouragement of appointing a woman to the Supreme Court (Caroli 276). As her relationship with the press reveals, Pat desired to avoid controversial situations that would attract unnecessary attention to her position. Her desire for personal privacy translated into a rejection of the "spouse-as-spokesperson" role that many of her first lady colleagues, past and future, pursued (Wertheimer 111). Aware of her political boundaries, Pat attempted little activity in the political sphere and therefore created little influence on the perception of her husband's policies.

In a more traditional role, Pat continued to represent the humanitarian side of American politics in foreign nations. The same studious approach she took with visitors to the White House she also employed during her travel to foreign nations. For example, "for her husband's history-making trip to China, she read Chairman Mao's 'Little Red Book' from cover to cover to familiarize herself with the country's political atmosphere" (O'Brien 239). This forethought and cultural sensitivity that had also been practiced by Jackie Kennedy was appreciated by countries who maintained a negative stereotype of uncultured Americans. Her feminine influence was once again appreciated when Pat used a trip to Peru to combine "diplomacy and a mission of mercy" that would allow her to personify American compassion to the victims of an earthquake (O'Brien 195). Her use of the political power of first lady to act as a humanitarian ambassador of the United States was well received by other countries. Unfortunately her nonpolitical nature was not as widely accepted in the United States, where her sincerity was constantly questioned.

OVERALL. Pat seems to have attempted to fulfill all obligations of the first lady in a minimal capacity. Conquering the poor reputation that Richard created for himself proved enormously difficult for Pat despite the many ways in which she tried to support her husband. Her willingness to pursue the first ladyship to the extent that she did even though she hated the public life that politics required was of great value to Richard's presidency. Without creating enormous popularity for herself or her husband, Pat succeeded in demonstrating her commitment to her marriage in particularly stressful circumstances. The interference of Watergate severely diminished Pat's success at cultivating national support for her husband and also created additional barriers to properly pursuing her own ambitious agenda as first lady.

BETTY FORD

HUSBAND: GERALD FORD

TERM: 1974 - 1977

WIFE. After the inharmonious and secretive Nixon marriage, the Fords returned a refreshing degree of honest communication to the White House. Not only was Betty able to influence Gerald in many of his career decisions, but "President Ford publicly acknowledged that he valued her opinion and admitted that in one of his most criticized moves, the pardon of Richard Nixon, she had wielded considerable clout" (O'Brien 280). After the events of Watergate unfolded, the integrity between Betty and Gerald generated positive feedback even if the actual pardoning did not. Betty was adamant in her defense that becoming the wife of the president did not change her ability to have opinions and Gerald accepted her unique adaption to the role of presidential spouse.

Before Gerald was elected, Betty had proven her ability to adapt her ambitions and lifestyle to foster his political career. Gerald's long career in politics had allowed Betty time to learn how to better balance her family and private life with the public life required of political individuals, and she used this knowledge well once she reached the White House. She considered the office of first lady a "twenty-four-hour-a-day volunteer job" and was able to continue pursuing many of the projects she had adopted before Gerald became president once reaching the White House (Greene 41). Her use of personal talents to balance her private life with her public life helped and supported Gerald in his new and unsuspected position. Her previous experience had helped Betty learn the importance of sacrificing minor parts of her life without compromising her individuality in order to benefit her husband's career.

PRESS RELATIONS. Betty is best known for her candor while in the White House. Presiding in the aftermath of the Watergate situation, this frankness, honesty, and willingness to cooperate with the press served Betty well in creating popularity and helping bolster the public's support of her husband. Betty explained her candid press appearances by saying "I tried to be honest... I tried not to dodge subjects. I felt the people had a right to know where I stood" (Caroli 282). People respected her openness despite some of the controversial ideas she believed. Feminists, especially, were thrilled to finally have a first lady who was unashamed to attach her power and prestige to their cause, since first ladies had previously only supported this topic in behind-the-scenes efforts (Caroli 283). The accessibility and truth Betty offered the press was precisely the type of approach needed after the betrayal the country felt as a result of President Nixon's actions. Betty's responsiveness to the country's mood and approach to handling the probing media helped to thoroughly distinguish Gerald from his predecessor.

Unfortunately, Betty's reputation for sincerity led her into disastrous press situations. One instance in particular, a television interview with Morley Safer left the First Lady's staff with

a public relations mess to clean up. Leading Betty towards questions that “challenged the core of Jerry Ford’s political persona,” Betty found it impossible to answer the controversial questions in a way that both honored her commitment to honesty and supported her husband (Truman 138). Many Americans who watched the brief interview became disenchanted with the First Lady after listening to her surprising answers. After the interview was televised, the East Wing staff “spent weeks drafting what they eventually called ‘the letter’” which became a “veritable masterpiece of First Lady spin control” (Truman 139). Luckily the press and public were fairly accepting of this euphemistic letter and her courage was proven by her refusal to retract her controversial statements. Although the Ford administration sought to reestablish trust with the public after the Nixon scandal, Betty’s honesty in this situation may have been more harmful than helpful.

Because Betty had previously been so forthright with the press, the media began to put increasing demands and expectations on their relationship with her. Although the issue of Betty’s part in the advocacy of breast cancer knowledge will be discussed in the social advocacy section, it is undeniable that her bluntness regarding her personal fight with the disease caused lifestyle changes in millions of Americans. By using her public image to encourage modern health care practices for all women, Betty did a great public service. Unfortunately, many critics, expecting Betty to be more frank about her struggle with the disease, were “furious over the fact that the first lady’s diagnosis and impending surgery had been kept from them for almost twenty-four hours” (Greene 51). This trivial time lapse is unimportant considering the eventual effect that Betty’s coping with the disease had on the nation. Unconcerned with maintaining her privacy about this issue, it is valiant that Betty was so sincere in her dissemination of health information throughout her recuperation from this intrusive surgery.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Betty's most important aim for social hostessing was to restore a sense of openness to the White House and presidency that had been lost during the Nixon administration. To construct this sort of environment, Betty based the fulfillment of her social obligations on the "four virtues of frankness, concern for others, honesty, and humility" (Wertheimer 125). These pillars helped to distinguish Betty from her predecessors and contributed to her courageous reputation. Betty often struggled to temper these four virtues and thereby alienated many Americans through her outspokenness on a number of controversial topics.

Betty changed several minor details about how social functions at the White House were facilitated to help prove her commitment to presidential accessibility. Disregarding some of the routine and hierarchical social protocol, Betty began to seat the Congressional wives at luncheons by "an egalitarian method, reaching for a number in a hat, rather than the ...arrangement according to their husbands' level of seniority or leadership rank" (Wertheimer 131). This new system met with the same sort of criticism that described most of her efforts in the social sphere. Betty was never capable of gaining absolute support from any faction as "those who admired her traditional life found fault with the liberal views she expressed, while those who favored her liberal views may have had little in common with her traditional lifestyle" (Wertheimer 135). Although she tried to balance these two opposite characteristics of her lifestyle, she was unable to unite any distinct American political divisions.

The remaining tension between political groups did not prevent Betty from presiding over celebrations that guests thoroughly enjoyed. Betty insisted that her social events would place a "decided emphasis on dancing and having a good time" (Greene 89). The celebration and joyous attitude that filled the White House as a result of this attitude aided Betty in distinguishing her hostessing from Pat Nixon's. Betty's fondness of arranging social events

helped her to plan each party “with the guest, not the hosts, in mind” and she involved herself in research to “find out the favorite entertainer of the guests and to throw the type of party that the guest would enjoy” (Greene 87). Many guests appreciated her forethought in planning events and thoroughly enjoyed the occasions on which they had the privilege to visit the White House.

Her well-planned events were not enough to please all Americans, and even her husband was alarmed at the approach she took to fulfill her obligations. Gerald was displeased with “her chronic tardiness to meetings, banquets, and appointments” but this character flaw “resounded a familiar chord with overburdened parents everywhere” and Betty saw no reason to modify her natural tendencies (Greene 87). This unconscious division stemming from Betty’s actions would also be manifested in other areas. As a result of her frankness, it was difficult for Betty to assume a consistent approach to her social schedule. Instead, “in trying to relate and unite such disparate constituencies she instead drew attention to their differences” and therefore created negative attention towards the Ford administration (Wertheimer 135). Her outspokenness that was appreciated by many was also seen as inappropriate by a substantial number of supporters. Her unique place in history, accidentally presiding over the distrusting country after the Watergate incidence, made it difficult for Betty to conquer a substantial social agenda without her actions being met with suspicion and criticism.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Betty’s most noticeable advocacy came as a result of her personal struggle with breast cancer. Her candor about the issue, for which she became famous, was instrumental in helping Americans to accept this disease as a significant threat to women’s health. Because of her struggle to recover, Betty began a revolution that started hundreds of women openly talking about breast cancer. Her influence extended into the way in which “they went to get examinations in droves, resulting in countless diagnoses and saved lives” (O’Brien

247). Her candor in this situation undoubtedly increased her popularity as many women felt indebted to her for inspiring them to learn more about this disease. Betty was at first uncomfortable with publicizing her stint with breast cancer but she understood the value of being honest with the country about her disease (Caroli 134). The balance she cultivated between this personal disease and her public life was necessary to avoid criticism or fear from the country. Her improvement in public speaking skills that resulted from her advocacy of breast exams and cancer awareness also helped her to better fulfill other responsibilities of the first lady's office.

Betty did not limit herself to advocating for breast cancer. Because her surgery had unexpectedly coincided with her husband's presidency, there were many other causes that Betty had chosen to support. She used her reputation as first lady to "become a champion of the National Endowment for the Arts, raised funds for handicapped children, and aggressively promoted better care for the elderly" (O'Brien 247). These aims only furthered her reach and attracted various segments of the population to her work. The women's movement was also of vital importance to Betty, but she increased the amount and type of work she did to support the movement so much that it took on the characteristics of a political activity. These additional causes championed by Betty contributed to revealing the more humanitarian side of Gerald's presidency.

After leaving the White House, Betty once again used her personal story to create widespread awareness of a social issue. When she was forced to deal with her own drug and alcohol addiction, Betty recognized that she still maintained a degree of influence over the nation. To make the most out of her recovery from these diseases, she started the Betty Ford Center for treatment of addictions and served as chairman of the center so that other individuals would be able to win the battle against addiction (Garrison 83). Although the activity of each first lady

after her tenure in the White House is not being considered in the ranking of this thesis, it is important to note what an influence these women maintained after exiting the office. Betty clearly used her influence wisely and helped many Americans feel comfortable enough to confront their disease.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Believing firmly that her new role as first lady did not take away her right to express her opinions, Betty Ford became one of the only first ladies to adamantly speak out about controversial political issues. Within the realm of women's issues, Betty was an especially important political influence. Betty's comprehensive support of the women's movement inspired her husband to appoint more women to government positions, allowed her to openly express her pro-choice beliefs, aided her in the marking of 1975 as "International Women's Year," and affected the country's reaction to the popular feminist movement (O'Brien 247). Her work with the female constituency in the United States aided her husband's popularity even if it often appeared to oppose his political beliefs. In adopting such an open approach to supporting feminism, Betty took the traditional first lady role of advocating for women and transferred it into a more substantial political activity.

Although Betty Ford wanted the right to express her individual opinions and to create her own political identity, she fought adamantly to alleviate the tensions her divisive viewpoints caused. Instead of stressing the difference between herself and her husband, "she stressed the way the Ford partnership had supported her decision" on many issues (Truman 136). In this way, Betty was able to effectively combat the fears of Gerald's advisors that she was a liability to the administration because of her outspoken nature. The public agreed with Betty in this area, with a significant portion believing she was actually an asset to Gerald's presidency, reaching many groups that he would have otherwise ignored (Greene 83). Betty's insistence on harboring

her own political identity gave courage to future first ladies to be open about the personal beliefs that differed from their husbands' politics.

Betty also increased the first lady's political authority through her intense involvement in campaigning and lobbying. Her participation in these two areas came in two distinct manners. First, Betty "became the first First Lady to 'work the phones,' as the professional pols call it, direct from the White House to state capitals like Jefferson City, Missouri, urging legislators to vote for the ERA" (Truman 136). With this approach, Betty was able to continue supporting those issues that she advocated on her own under the mask of working for her husband. Secondly, Betty "became the Ford campaign's chief surrogate in the primary season" which required her to be more discrete with those beliefs that differed from her husband's agenda (Greene 92). Betty's ability to fill both of these distinct roles aided in her success. Gerald's advisors were eventually able to ease their fears about the political liability Betty created once the popularity and following she formed became prominent.

OVERALL. Once in the presidency, Betty quickly learned how to better balance her personal opinions with representing her husband's administration. She admirably attempted to fulfill all the roles of a presidential spouse with varying degrees of success, and her insistence on maintaining her own social and political identity contributed to distinguishing her achievements as first lady from those of her predecessors. Her honesty and frankness were certainly useful in reestablishing the reputation of the White House after Watergate and her openness about her personal fight against breast cancer was also helpful in generating support for herself and her husband. The partnership that she experienced with Gerald aided both individuals in having active agendas while in the White House.

ROSALYNN CARTER

HUSBAND: JIMMY CARTER

TERM: 1977 - 1981

WIFE. Rosalynn and Jimmy were the first modern couple to allow their religious beliefs to accompany them into the White House. Learning from past experience, however, Rosalynn and her husband adhered to their religious and moral ideals without forcing guests or members of the White House staff to do the same. The religious aspect of their marriage also allowed Rosalynn greater freedom in her pursuit of activities. Citing their religious convictions, “Rosalynn could simultaneously claim she had her own identity and freely submerge her personality and ideas in her husband’s” (Truman 147). As a result, Rosalynn and Jimmy were able to be open and honest about the extent of their political partnership. Rosalynn’s influence on Jimmy was well known but was also balanced by her complete support of his career.

Rosalynn took an interesting approach to balance her work as first lady and her personal life. Instead of taking on the traditional protector role to save the president from overworking, Rosalynn was the one that “had to be pried out of her office for a job, a game of tennis, or a swim in the White House pool” (Truman 151). This ambition certainly allowed Rosalynn the opportunity to accomplish many goals while in the White House but poorly balanced her work with her personal life. To counteract the long hours that both she and her husband worked, she established an office in the East Wing and kept the second floor of the White House completely private, “a zone of total relaxation for the President and the rest of the family” (Truman 149). This creation not only helped to sustain the Carters’ marriage but assured Rosalynn of the prominence she held as first lady. Relocating the center of the first lady’s work allowed Rosalynn to more thoroughly separate her personal and public life, a change which most Americans willingly accepted.

PRESS RELATIONS. Rosalynn and Jimmy never strayed from the strategy of fully supporting one another while in the public eye. Unfortunately, Rosalynn was poor at accepting criticism of Jimmy and berated the press on numerous occasions (Truman 151). Rosalynn also struggled to create a positive reputation with the press. She was known for confusing her pronouns when giving interviews which consequently created “speculation about just who was making the decisions in the Oval Office” (Wertheimer 146). This media catastrophe was worsened by the new political roles Rosalynn was accepting and the well known extent of her influence on Jimmy’s policies. Despite her qualifications and the strenuous preparation she underwent, the media remained critical of all her official engagements. Jimmy tried to aid Rosalynn’s efforts by promoting his image as a “liberated” husband and “emphasized Rosalynn’s role as a ‘very equal partner’ and a ‘perfect extension of myself’” (Wertheimer 145). Rosalynn was still unable to defend herself from these accusations and attacks, and the image of her created by the press caused unnecessary speculation over Jimmy’s control of the presidency.

In order to counteract the negative publicity her equal partnership with Jimmy had created, Rosalynn “allowed her photograph to be taken with countless average Americans” (O’Brien 257). These opportunities to interact with the first lady improved the image of her feminine and caring personality. Although her humanitarian connections were not successful at completely reversing the poor reputation she received from her political involvement, they did extend a positive light upon her genuine interest in advocacy activities.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. As with most modern first ladies, Rosalynn delegated many of her social responsibilities and did not see the importance of enthusiastically fulfilling the obligations in this area. Like Betty Ford, Rosalynn’s engagement in politics made her appear “impressive and inspiring to many Americans” but “inappropriate and intrusive to just as many others” (O’Brien 255). Her endearing personality allowed her to continue exercising social

opportunities to promote her husband's career despite the criticism she received for her political involvement. Rosalynn cited her religious faith as an enormous help to her in this area because it gave her the encouragement she required to fully support her husband (O'Brien 255). In order to surpass the many obstacles that arose in the social realm, Rosalynn had to become an expert in compromising.

Another issue that Rosalynn faced that potentially distracted her from realizing her full value in the social realm was "the lack of a network of powerful women ready to defend, support, and promote her" (O'Brien 154). Without this support system that other first ladies relied heavily upon, Rosalynn was unable to spread her influence and idealism to large groups of constituents. She further reduced her following by the harsh and irrational judgment she passed on people simply as a result of their loyalty to Jimmy (Truman 151). Although Rosalynn worked tirelessly to aid Jimmy's political career, she was simply not as successful without her own following of supporters. Even her most universal causes failed to attract the support or cultivate the popularity that Rosalynn needed to truly benefit her husband.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. Rosalynn followed in the shadow of her predecessors with her inability to focus on one specific advocacy project. While in the White House, "she formed a task force to assess and improve federal programs for the elderly, helped organize a national child immunization campaign, and pushed the president to appoint more women to government posts than any of his predecessors" (O'Brien 255). Rosalynn took little more interest in pursuing these objectives than the first ladies before her and she therefore failed to make a lasting or substantial impact for any particular cause. One cause that was cherished by Rosalynn, mental health, received more substantial advocacy efforts than the rest. To share her prestige with this cause, "she spearheaded an ambitious investigation into existing legislation and programs, and oversaw an immense effort to improve upon them nationwide" (O'Brien 255). Her activism for

mental health reform helped to differentiate Rosalynn from her forerunners but further contributed to the chaotic and unfocused advocacy agenda that she was already pursuing.

Rosalynn's contributions were broad enough that they were able to inspire many communities to adopt her causes. Although her extensive pursuits were highly regarded, "her activities were so numerous and her agenda so broad that some journalists believed it diluted her influence and 'fuzzied' her public image" (Wertheimer 148). Her inability to concentrate on one main issue caused Rosalynn to receive criticism in addition to what she was already receiving as a result of her political activity. Rosalynn had structured her advocacy in such a way that "her focus on volunteerism and local community problem-solving also worked hand in hand with her husband's political philosophy of fiscal responsibility" (Wertheimer 150). This connection to her husband's presidency allowed Rosalynn to expend more energy in this area without hurting her relationship with her husband. Combining her agenda with her husband's also helped Rosalynn to obtain more support for her husband from new constituencies that his policies had not directly affected.

Her sincerity in her advocacy was also called into question and resulted in further criticism by the press. When she abandoned her social causes to immersively support Jimmy on the campaign trail, the "sudden switch from altruism to ambition troubled many people" (Truman 153). Rosalynn insisted that she pursued social causes because she wanted to offer some benefit to the unfortunate, but she maintained that her primary duty as first lady was to be Jimmy's wife and to support him in the best way possible. Because "people found it hard to decide when she was speaking as the compassionate First Lady and when she was being a White House political operator," Rosalynn created a threat to her husband through the use of a role that had previously only served to generate positive support (Truman 152). Rosalynn's lack of caution in this area and her ignorance to popular sentiment hurt the potential influence she

could have created through her work with mental health and women's issues. By combining humanitarian work with her husband's political agenda, Rosalynn risked deterring people from supporting what were once universal causes.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Rosalynn's sincere desire to support her husband through an equal partnership role once again threatened her reputation and her husband's popularity. Trusting Rosalynn to represent him, Jimmy sent his wife "to Central and South American – not as a 'goodwill ambassador' but as his official representative on a state department mission" (O'Brien 255). Rosalynn's enthusiastic agreement to this strategy created a diplomatic crisis for the Carter administration. Despite her good intentions and the effort she put into preparing for the trip, the fact that she was "charged with discussing substantive state matters with powerful men in a foreign culture dominated by machismo" seriously limited the impact she would have on this trip (O'Brien 255). Instead of generating a sense of goodwill and peacefulness from her presentations in these nations, Rosalynn caused the Hispanic countries to experience discomfort and uncertainty. Although Rosalynn had been briefed on Jimmy's foreign policy approach and local issues specific to each stop on the tour, she was not prepared to debate these policies, further perpetuating the uncertainty these countries felt towards her (Truman 148). Despite the negative publicity that Rosalynn received from this diplomatic fiasco, she was instrumental in bringing back information about these countries that her husband could use to guide his future decisions. Whether or not her presence in these countries seriously strengthened the bonds between the two countries is debatable, but her courage in accepting this mission and her willingness to sacrifice herself for her husband was extremely valiant.

The criticism Rosalynn received from her activity in South American caused her to seriously consider her political intervention during the later years of Jimmy's presidency. In future international trips, Rosalynn carried out more traditional functions such as extending

sympathy at the pope's funeral and visiting Cambodian refugee camps (Truman 148). Rosalynn did retain an interest in foreign policy, however, and was not deterred from influencing Jimmy from within the White House. At the Middle East Peace Summit at Camp David, Rosalynn played a central role in determining the outcome and she never sought to minimize her role (Caroli 295). Instead of hiding in Jimmy's political shadow, Rosalynn "employed her image as her husband's closest advisor to boost her own credibility as first lady" (Wertheimer 146). This selfish use of the political esteem associated with the office may have been an inappropriate exercise of power but it allowed Rosalynn to greatly expand the political capacity of the first lady's duties. By maintaining an openness about their political partnership and recognizing the influence that Rosalynn wielded over Jimmy even in the face of adversity, the Carters were able to best utilize the first lady's power in the political realm. Public acknowledgement of this partnership aided in avoiding the negative press that resulted from the common question of the first lady's proper role in politics.

OVERALL. Rosalynn and Jimmy Carter left an impression on how a political partnership could be pursued while in the White House. Their experimentation with expanding the advocacy and political reach of the first lady exposed many threats that the two succeeding first ladies would benefit from. One of the few first ladies who had to be saved from overwork instead of saving her husband from overwork, Rosalynn had a well-defined and ambitious goal for her time in office. Her balance of married life with the public life required while in the White House was well cultivated and Rosalynn seems to have had the intentions of sincerely supporting Jimmy through all of her work.

NANCY REAGAN

HUSBAND: RONALD REAGAN

TERM: 1981 – 1989

WIFE. Nancy is one of the most notorious first ladies for putting her marriage to Ronald above any other duties in the White House. In her own words, Nancy said, “the First Lady is first of all a wife. After all, that’s the reason she’s there. A President has advisers to counsel him on foreign affairs, on defense, on the economy, on politics, on any number of matters. But no one among all those experts is there to look after him as an individual with human needs” (Wertheimer 169). After Rosalynn’s dangerous interruption into Jimmy Carter’s political agenda, Nancy’s complacency with being a wife first and foremost helped to ease the storm of criticism from the press. Despite knowing that the main focus of her first lady agenda would remain her husband, her initial reaction to Ronald’s presidential victory was panic (Truman 155). It is evident by her approach to the role that this panic did not deter Nancy from acting as a supportive wife while still pursuing an individual and active agenda. Like previous first ladies, “Nancy tolerated politics only because she knew her husband was called to serve” (Deaver 4). This loyalty to and support of her husband helped Ronald throughout his administration. Her tolerance of her husband’s career in the political field also demonstrates her sacrificial nature that would help Nancy to balance her life throughout the next eight years.

Like many first ladies, Nancy perceived her most important role as wife to be the protection of Ronald’s health. After the assassination attempt on Ronald’s life, Nancy believed her position was more important than ever. In response to the situation, Nancy began “exerting even greater control over the president’s schedule and workload, insisting that nothing was as important as his health and need for recovery” (O’Brien 264). This interference in the president’s daily routine concerned Ronald’s staff members and advisors. Fortunately, however,

Nancy continued performing her protector role despite the criticism she faced. One important aspect of the protector role was Nancy's supervision of the people who surrounded her husband. Without offending his political enemies, Nancy "kept a close eye on her husband's career and on the people around him" (Deaver 147). Her ability to artfully manage his relationships with others was a talent that many previous first ladies had sorely lacked. It is her unique relationship with Ronald, centered on his wellbeing, that allowed Nancy to experience success in the wife role and many other roles of the first ladyship.

Nancy also ensured that domestic affairs in the executive mansion were attended to during Ronald's presidency. She attempted to "tighten the belt on how the first family spends money" since the national economy was in a recession (Deaver 75). Unfortunately, Nancy's high class lifestyle did not translate into the same sacrifice that the country was expecting from the first family and this led to increased criticism of Nancy's wardrobe, social events, and other personal pleasures. Regardless of her good intentions, her control in this area of the Reagans' personal life caused a poor image to be formed about the president's administration.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION. Nancy continued the very important tradition of renovating the White House while she presided there. By the time Nancy inherited the mansion, many of the improvements Jackie Kennedy had made again needed to be updated and modernized. Nancy chose the traditional route of seeking private funds to restore the White House, raising over \$800,000 just to renovate the private second floor (Truman 157). Throughout the house, Nancy contracted to have typical home maintenance projects completed to make the mansion more livable. These projects included tasks that any new homeowner would pursue, such as repairing the fireplaces, refinishing the doors and floors, refurbishing the bathrooms, painting several walls, and replacing the pipes, wires, and floor coverings (Deaver 78). These typical renovations were a great asset to Nancy's time in the White House as well as

to those families that followed her. Her contributions to the maintenance of the White House helped to create a pleasant environment for all residents and guests.

In addition to the upkeep of the mansion, Nancy continued the tradition of adding to the presidential china collection. Unfortunately, Nancy's expensive selection for this collection encouraged severe criticism. The \$220,000 order that Nancy placed for her china selection encouraged America's perception that she placed "too much emphasis on style and elegance" (Truman 157). This criticism was especially severe considering the recession that her husband was facing in the national economy. Despite the inappropriateness of such an extravagant purchase, Nancy's contribution to the china collection helped to continue a tradition that had been implemented by Caroline Harrison nearly one hundred years before.

PRESS RELATIONS. Nancy paid little attention to how her public behavior would have to change once her husband was sworn into the presidency. For this reason, "everything she did early on in her husband's presidency seemed to receive criticism" (Wertheimer 169). As was demonstrated in her inconsistency with limiting the family finances, Nancy would have to experience a significant amount of growth before she would be able to sustain a favorable relationship with the press. Luckily, Nancy usually learned from her mistakes and eventually discovered how to better temper her actions and statements to meet the press' expectations. One crucial aspect of bettering her press relationship was learning to make jokes about herself (Caroli 301). Nancy's ability to recognize her faults and failings helped her to avoid further criticism from the press and dissuaded the press from reflecting her shortcomings onto her husband's administration. The adaptability she demonstrated to conform to the press' expectations also aided her in establishing a more favorable relationship with the media by the end of her husband's second term in office.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERSONALITY. Nancy had an inclination towards extravagant and fine things in her personal life. Americans became familiar with her “closets crammed with fancy clothes and a Rolodex full of rich and powerful friends” (Deaver 5). Her penchant for luxury seemed maladjusted to the recessed economy and Nancy’s attempt to balance her lifestyle appeared minimal. Nancy was, however, extremely sensitive to the public’s perceptions about her social style and personality and how they would reflect upon her husband. Because Nancy “was much too nervous, too eager to adjust to passing public moods to protect Ronald Reagan’s popularity,” Ronald’s advisors hoped that she would excuse herself from any political endeavors as first lady (Truman 163). Nancy continually insisted that the White House deserved the best items available and did not compromise her expensive tastes in clothes and furniture despite the public’s disapproval.

Nancy was as poorly versed in accepting criticism about her husband as she was in gaining public approval for herself. Nancy’s love for her husband was highly visible and she clearly wanted his presidency to be as effective and successful as possible. It was well known that “if you crossed her, you paid for it. If you tried to cross her husband, you paid worse” (Deaver 5). She became obsessed with supporting her husband’s administration and embraced similar social punishments as previous first ladies for those she viewed as enemies to her husband. Many instances of Nancy’s severity seemed unjustified to the public and they adapted their perception of her fittingly. Her attitude often made her appear unapproachable and she therefore was unsuccessful at catering to those constituents who look to the more gentle first lady as their avenue to the president.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE. In contrast to her predecessors, Nancy chose to focus her central advocacy efforts on one theme: drug use. Although the scope of her chosen issue was still wide, Nancy was able to advocate her issue “to sixty-five cities in thirty-three states, to the pontiff’s

side in Rome, and to capitals the world over” (Deaver 91). She knew that drugs affected an increasing number of people and therefore no one felt forgotten by the First Lady’s campaign. If her public speaking tours throughout the world weren’t enough to combat drug use, she also “cut several public service announcements and even spoke to the United Nations about the drug scourge” (Deaver 89). Perhaps as a result of her previous press experience, Nancy understood the importance of her image as first lady and proudly used it to pursue noble goals related to preventing drug abuse. Unfortunately, the broad sweeping statements of Nancy’s campaign eventually succumbed to criticism by the press. Although they adamantly covered Nancy’s original activity in the drug war, “they soon grew weary of the repetitiveness of her message” (Wertheimer, 179). Despite the media’s opinion, the topic proved to be popular with the American public because of its wide reaching scope, and Nancy’s involvement in the fight was perceived as genuine. Nancy’s persistence on this single topic helped America to understand the severity of the drug abuse problem throughout the country and raised awareness of an issue which had previously been avoided in casual conversation (O’Brien 263). Nancy’s success in this advocacy campaign greatly helped her success and popularity. Even though the press once again criticized Nancy for a trivial aspect of her performance, the American public appreciated her sincere dedication to this issue.

Nancy also became the representative for the humanitarian side of the Reagan administration on a number of other individual occasions. Like Betty Ford, “Nancy’s frankness about her breast cancer helped to drive up interest in self-exams and mammograms, as well as bolster general understanding of the often lethal disease” (Deaver 118). The attention she drew to women’s health added to her predecessor’s work in the area and added a more traditionally feminine item to her advocacy agenda. After the 1983 Soviet attack on a Korean airliner, Nancy once again took on the role of social advocate for her husband. In the face of this tragedy,

“armed with nothing but a warm smile and a tough disposition... the first lady spent hours comforting the families of the dead” (Deaver 113). Nancy’s personality naturally lent itself to comforting and showing compassion to those around her. Her willingness to serve Ronald in this capacity throughout his presidency demonstrates not only her courage, but her desire for her actions to reflect favorably upon Ronald’s reputation.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS. Unlike the first ladies who held the office immediately before her, Nancy was able to play a substantial role in Ronald’s political career without alarming the nation with a threat to his personal power. Her influence on her husband was well known, and throughout Ronald’s presidency Nancy remained “an active, engaged member of his circle, and there were times when her opinion was the only one that mattered” (Wertheimer 170). Instead of attempting to carve her own political agenda, Nancy’s behind-the-scenes approach was a superior fit for her own talents and political understanding. In this way, Nancy was able to direct her husband about the changing moods of the nation without directly influencing or lobbying for controversial policies. Her determination to protect Ronald’s reputation, however, forced her to push herself further in the decision making process at times than Ronald’s advisors would have preferred (O’Brien 264). In this manner, Nancy became responsible for several personnel decisions in the same capacity that many previous first ladies had experienced. Her protection of Ronald’s health also translated into a manipulation of his political schedule which was unappreciated by those working closest to him (Wertheimer 170). Her often gentle influence in the political sphere, however, greatly overshadowed her unfortunate pushiness and she did not become a political liability to her husband. A better understanding of the personal trials inherent to the presidency may have benefitted Nancy but even her poor decisions in the political realm were well intentioned to preserve Ronald’s reputation.