



*Smoothing the Peaceful Transfer of Democratic Power*

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## REPORT 29

# THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST LADY

MaryAnne Borrelli, *Connecticut College*

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## WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

**The White House Transition Project.** Begun in 1998, the White House Transition Project provides information about individual offices for staff coming into the White House to help streamline the process of transition from one administration to the next. A nonpartisan, nonprofit group, the WHTP brings together political science scholars who study the presidency and White House operations to write analytical pieces on relevant topics about presidential transitions, presidential appointments, and crisis management. Since its creation, it has participated in the 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017, 2021, and now the 2025 transition. WHTP coordinates with government agencies and other non-profit groups, e.g., the US National Archives or the Partnership for Public Service. It also consults with foreign governments and organizations interested in improving governmental transitions, worldwide. See the project at <http://whitehousetransitionproject.org>

The White House Transition Project produces a number of materials, including:

- **WHITE HOUSE OFFICE ESSAYS:** Based on interviews with key personnel who have borne these unique responsibilities, including former White House Chiefs of Staff; Staff Secretaries; Counsels; Press Secretaries, etc. , WHTP produces briefing books for each of the critical White House offices. These briefs compile the best practices suggested by those who have carried out the duties of these office. With the permission of the interviewees, interviews are available on the National Archives website page dedicated to this project:
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- **\*TRANSITION ESSAYS.** These reports cover a number of topics suggested by White House staff, including analyses of the patterns of presidential appointments and the Senate confirmation process, White House and presidential working routine, and the patterns of presidential travel and crisis management. It also maintains ongoing reports on the patterns of interactions with reporters and the press in general as well as White House staffing.
- **\*INTERNATIONAL COMPONENT.** The WHTP consults with international governments and groups interested in transitions in their governments. In 2017 in conjunction with the Baker Institute, the WHTP hosted a conference with emerging Latin American leaders and in 2018 cosponsored a government transitions conference with the National Democratic Institute held in November 2018 in Montreal, Canada .

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First ladies are among the most important political actors in the White House. Historically, first ladies have had more contact with presidents than any other member of the administration. As trusted presidential advisers, these women have lobbied on behalf of specific projects, groups, and policies; participated in staffing decisions, controlled access to the president; and shaped the policy agenda.

The East Wing and West Wing staff are well integrated.<sup>1</sup> First ladies' chiefs of staff in recent administrations have held the title of assistant to the president, and have participated in the Oval Office morning meetings for senior presidential advisers. The budget of this office is fully integrated into the budget for the White House, a requirement of the 1978 White House Personnel Authorization Act (Public Law 95-750).

Since 1992, the Office of the First Lady has averaged 16 to 25 staff members. Across the decades, staff responsibilities have become more specialized and departmentalized. Specific staff members and detailees were assigned to Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* and *Joining Forces* initiatives, for example. In contrast, Rosalynn Carter relied on a Director of Policy and Projects to advance her policy initiatives.

Communications are an arena in which the president's and the first ladies' priorities are almost entirely in sync. Strategic political outreach to presidential constituents, with attendant electoral and governing consequences, is the predominating responsibility of the modern first lady.

### LESSONS LEARNED

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1. The first lady serves as "the president's protector," guarding the president against poor judgments made by the president or by the president's staff. (See the section titled, "I. Presidential Advising: The First Lady as Presidential Protector.")

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, East Wing refers to the staff working in the first lady's office. West Wing identifies the staff assigned to other subunits in the White House Office. The East Wing of the White House, however, is not exclusive to the first lady's office. Meanwhile, the so-called West Wing staff is located in the West Wing, but also in other sites such as the Old Executive Office Building (EOOB). *East Wing and West Wing references notwithstanding, all of these staff are members of the same White House Office.*

2. First ladies aided presidents to realize the full consequences of their decisions by asking “wait-a-minute” questions. (See section titled, “I. Presidential Advising: The First Lady as Presidential Protector.”)
3. The first lady needs to control and frame communications. (See the sections titled, “II. Communications: The First Lady as Political Actor and Presidential Surrogate,” and “The First Lady on the Public Stage: Routes to Success.”)
4. First ladies need to anticipate close and unremitting scrutiny throughout the presidential term. (See the section titled, “The First Lady on the Public Stage: Routes to Success.”)
5. When the first lady’s own initiatives complement the president’s policy priorities, she gains more opportunities to advance the presidential agenda. (See the section titled, “The First Lady on the Public Stage: Routes to Success.”)
6. First ladies are both presidential spouses and members of the White House Office. (See the section titled, “Relationships in the White House.”)
7. The first lady’s staff needs to be organizationally suited to the managerial and political priorities of the president. (See the section titled, “Staff Arrangements in the Office of the First Lady.”)
8. The work of the first lady begins before the inauguration, during the transition, and extends long after the presidential term. (See the section titled, “Before, During, and After the Presidential Term.”)



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### INTRODUCTION

The professional and political expertise of the first lady, which typically includes years of campaign and governing work, should not be underestimated. Nor should we overlook the deeply personal connection that provides presidents a source of solace in such a high pressure environment. Modern first ladies have come to the White House with extensive experience, having served as campaign surrogates, speech editors and media consultants, and political and policy advisers throughout their husbands' pre-presidential careers. Though some presidential marriages were stronger professional partnerships than others, each first lady was knowledgeable about the rhythms, opportunities, and costs of political decision-making.<sup>2</sup>

Critics from the left and the right, however, have argued for many years that first ladies should be marginalized rather than empowered. Contending that wives exercise a kind of power that lacks transparency and accountability, these opponents describe the first lady as a threat to democratic ideals of merit-based, electorally-driven governance. The formalization of the post has done little to allay these concerns, particularly among feminists who are deeply suspicious of the gender role-modeling provided by a woman whose power is derived from her marital status.

Presidents, however, have found their wives too useful to marginalize. Since the Hoover administration – and in a number of earlier presidencies, as well – first ladies have been extraordinarily effective in mediating and amplifying the president's message. Whether speaking on behalf of presidential policy priorities during the term or in the campaign, whether reaching out to the public at large or more specific voter cohorts, spouses have proven effective communicators and fundraisers. Yet their success has not earned them unqualified support, from the public or from the presidential administration.

This report discusses the first lady's responsibilities and resources, and identifies continuing challenges and controversies, as detailed through extensive oral history interviews conducted with members of the White House staff. No other member of a presidential administration is married to the

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the pre-presidential careers of the modern first ladies, and the relevance of these experiences to their tenure as presidential spouses, see: Carl Sferrazza Anthony, *First Ladies, Volumes I and II: The Saga of the Presidents' Wives and Their Power*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991. MaryAnne Borrelli, *The Politics of the President's Wife*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. pp. 25-58, especially Table 2.3 on p. 57. Kati Marton, *Hidden Power, Presidential Marriages That Shaped Our Recent History*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2001.

president. And yet the first lady is one among several senior officials within the White House Office. We present the reflections of first ladies, and their staffs, on how to manage this tension.

## THE ROLES OF THE FIRST LADY

The most important tasks performed by the first lady are presidential advising and communications. Like every other member of a presidential administration, presidential spouses manage risk and conflict in their efforts to win popular support for their presidents. A first lady's calculations, however, are about the politics of a marriage, as well as the politics of a government. It goes without saying that the intimate nature of their relationship with the president enhances their ability to give advice, while at the same time serving as a sounding board for weighty decisions and complex problems.

### *PRESIDENTIAL ADVISING: THE FIRST LADY AS PRESIDENTIAL PROTECTOR*

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This function is dependent on – and unusually revealing of – the presidential marriage. “Protection” takes many forms, but it is most consistently construed as the first lady contradicting expressed preferences of the president or the presidential staff in order to advance the president's interests.

Whether the first lady is successful in protecting the president – which is to say, whether the first lady is successful in challenging members of the White House Office, including the president – is ultimately dependent upon her own authority. And that, in turn, is dependent on the first lady's own reputation in campaigning and in governing. Speaking to this point, Martin Anderson, assistant to the president for policy development, assessed Nancy Reagan's reputation on the basis of her relationship with the president, as he observed her role in campaigns, in the governor's mansion, and in the White House.

Now I've said this before. I think if [Ronald] Reagan had any weakness it was that by and large he tended to believe that people told him the truth. If you handed him a piece of paper he assumed that you had checked it and it was right. He was not suspicious of people. Nancy was suspicious of people. As she should have been. ... So she was valuable in many ways ... (Martin Anderson interview, p. 43)

Richard E. Neustadt, the dean of presidential studies, judged this role so valuable to a president that he regularly asked senior staff who was performing the “Nancy function” within a White House. (Martin Anderson interview, p. 45) This role is also reinforced when the first lady is perceived as prioritizing the president, rather than her or his own political ambitions. As Anita McBride, Laura Bush's chief of staff in the second term, observed,

[Laura Bush] made that very clear. “I'm not here for me, I'm here for George, and these are the things where I feel I can do to help what he's trying to accomplish.” So that actual well-known knowledge about Laura Bush and the way she looked at the job as first lady of the United States made it very easy for me to operate within the White House structure and the system, and to get the assets that we needed to do things, like take a plane, get the military support, get the Secret Service support ... (Anita McBride interview)

The first ladies' influence also reflects the presidents' assessment of their experience and expertise. In this, presidential spouses resemble every other member of an administration, whose power is dependent on their perceived access to and influence with the chief executive.<sup>3</sup> Clinton White House Counsel Abner Mikva explained,

[Hillary Rodham Clinton] was a very important role player. Again, the President trusts her, he respects her. He has great confidence in her judgment and her capacities. As I indicated before, she frequently had the last word just because of who she was and where she was and who he talked to last. As you've already heard, the President frequently would try to keep an open mind, and she certainly was a big influence on him in many things. (Abner Mikva interview, p. 87)

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<sup>3</sup> MaryAnne Borrelli, *The Politics of the President's Wife*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. pp. 27-28.



This is arguably one of the greatest tests of a president's managerial ability within the White House Office: To benefit from the protection afforded by the first lady, without incurring the political costs of appearing to need that aid.

### *1. Presidential Personnel Decisions: Appointments, Promotions, Resignations*

In regard to personnel, first ladies have generally been credited with having exceptional judgment about the personalities and credentials of prospective members of the administration. Clinton Secretary of State Madeleine Albright reported that her own cabinet nomination, reflected Hillary Clinton's influence in the president's personnel decisions.

Hillary was the major reason I was Secretary of State. Hillary told me, and [President Bill Clinton] told me, that Hillary said, "Why wouldn't you name her? She has the same views you do on Bosnia and she has been articulating them very well." (Madeleine K. Albright interview, p. 39)

Not infrequently, senior White House staff members have contrasted the incisive personnel judgements of the first lady with a more optimistic (even naïve) outlook on the part of the president. As Reagan political strategist Stuart Spencer observed throughout the presidential campaign,

No one else will say this, but I say this: She was the personnel director. ... Over the years, [Nancy Reagan] developed, she knew who fit best with her husband. She knew what his weaknesses were and his strengths. And she always had that number one criteria; whose agenda do they have? That's very important and very smart politics, because people come in and out of these campaigns, Democrat or Republican. Their agenda isn't [the candidate's]. They have their own agenda and they're going to use [the candidate] to get there. In varying degrees, that's fine, but during an extended period of time they better have the same agenda as the candidate and what they're trying to do. She was very good at sorting out what agenda each person really had as they came forward. (Stuart Spencer interview, p. 13)

Don Regan, Reagan chief of staff, did not have a good relationship with First Lady Nancy Reagan and was ultimately fired from his post. Although his memoir records many criticisms of the president's wife, it includes the following piece of praise for the first lady:

Her husband was all but incapable of firing a subordinate, and I suppose that she had become used to supplying the missing determination. Her purpose was to protect the President from embarrassment and to insulate him from associates who might tarnish his reputation; in this she was above reproach.<sup>4</sup>

Significantly, even first ladies who claimed to distance themselves from politics often contributed to the president's personnel decisions. Bess Truman, who minimized her participation in campaigns and limited her time in Washington, was credited by her husband with his appointment of Charlie Ross as his press secretary.<sup>5</sup>

### *2. Presidential Outreach: Guarding Against Overload and Overexposure*

In monitoring the president's public outreach, the first lady has regularly questioned the schedule, press relations, and communications strategies provided to the president.

First ladies have insisted that White House staff recognize that a president's time is finite and precious. Reagan director of appointments and scheduling, Frederick J. Ryan, Jr. described Nancy Reagan as both measured and focused in making these interventions.

... she was more involved in being sure that he was not overscheduled because of the impact it would have on [the president's] health. Or on his performance. If they were traveling around the world meeting with heads of state, she would want to make sure that he had not been so scheduled and overloaded with events that he was overextended. ... It was very important to her that he be able to function at his best, so she was focused on that. (Frederick J. Ryan interview, pp. 6-7)

<sup>4</sup> Donald T. Regan. 1988. *For the Record, From Wall Street to Washington*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Truman, *Bess W. Truman*. New York: Macmillan, 1986. pp. 257, 286, 303, 310, 344.

### 3. *Presidential Policy-Making: Attentive to the Present and to the Future*

First ladies have sought to protect presidents from squandering their political resources on unpopular or extreme policies. In several instances, first ladies have given greater consideration to the electoral consequences of the presidential agenda than have presidents themselves. White House Counsel Lloyd Cutler credits Rosalynn Carter with playing this role throughout her husband's presidency.

Others have probably said this to you as well, but Mrs. [Rosalynn] Carter was very important in every single one of these fields — political, substantive, personnel, and other matters. It was very visible that they had a very close relationship and that he talked to her about absolutely everything. (Lloyd Cutler interview, p. 25)

President Carter echoed Cutler's assessment, acknowledging that he relied on the first lady to offer more "political" recommendations that clarified the consequences of his policy priorities.

A lot of my advisors, including Rosalynn, used to argue with me about my decision to move ahead with a project when it was obviously not going to be politically advantageous, or to encourage me to postpone it until a possible second term and so forth. It was just contrary to my nature. I felt like I was ... I just couldn't do it. (President Jimmy Carter interview, p. 67)

Senior White House staff repeatedly describe first ladies as working to conserve their presidents' political resources for the future, guarding against an obsessive focus on the present. In doing so, first ladies have worked to protect their presidents' legacies.

This perspective is very evident in debates among Reagan staff regarding United States – Soviet Union foreign relations. James F. Kuhn, who did advance work in the campaign and first term, and then served as the president's personal assistant, was both blunt and positive in his statements.

Ronald Reagan would not have been nearly as successful as he was without her. Even though she wasn't a policy person, she knew what was going on. She was his ultimate protector. She had a major role in getting him to engage the Soviet Union. She was the one who worked on him the most, to open up his mind. You recall in 1983 he gave that speech in Florida and called them the "Evil Empire." But she thought, *He's got to do this and he's the one to do it and the time to do it is now*. So she really had to open up his mind. (James F. Kuhn interview, p. 17, emphasis in original)<sup>6</sup>

### *COMMUNICATIONS: THE FIRST LADY AS POLITICAL ACTOR AND PRESIDENTIAL SURROGATE*

Modern first ladies have emerged as influential advocates for the president, for the presidential policy agenda, and for the president's party, serving as the presidents' emissaries to issue networks, party members, and the general electorate.

Public demand for a transparent and responsive White House has grown since the Nixon administration, even as the executive branch has become increasingly politicized and presidents have attempted to concentrate as much control over policymaking as possible within a small group of trusted White House staff and advisers. As a result, recent presidential administrations have had to identify ways to reconcile the public's desire for an open and accessible administration with their own need to secure confidentiality in advising. First ladies are ideally situated to help strike this balance.

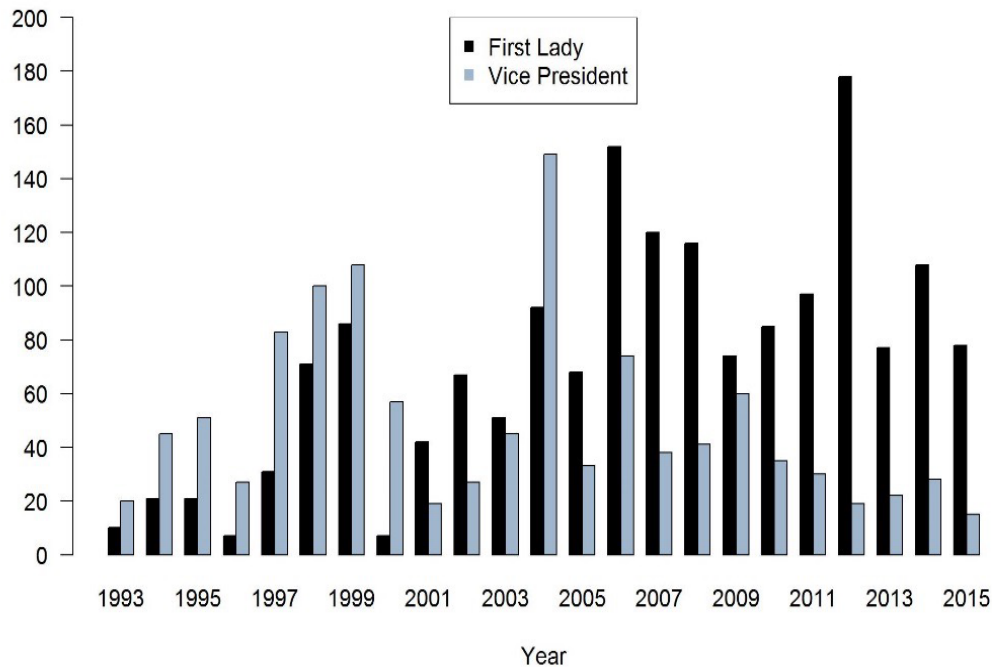
First ladies have adapted their communications with the public over time, and have also changed the frequency of their public appearances. Like the White House in general, presidential spouses have capitalized on the proliferation of social media and used these outlets to communicate directly with the public, rather than through the press. Further, from the Clinton through the Obama administrations, the volume of speeches delivered by presidential spouses has risen consistently. As Figure 1 shows, in most of these years, spouses made more public speeches than vice presidents.<sup>7</sup> In fact, over the last 22 years, first lady speeches have surged while vice presidential speeches have remained constant. This disparity suggests

<sup>6</sup> For a contrasting and critical view of Nancy Reagan's influence over foreign policy, see Helen von Damm, *At Reagan's Side*. New York: Doubleday, 1989. See also James G. Benze, Jr., *Nancy Reagan, On the White House Stage*. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2005. pp. 68-86, 122-140.

<sup>7</sup> Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President: Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, p. 24. Lauren A. Wright. July 28, 2016. "Bill Clinton's Role: Messenger-in-Chief." *The Huffington Post*.

that a large share of the messaging responsibility entrusted to surrogates has been disproportionately shouldered by first ladies.

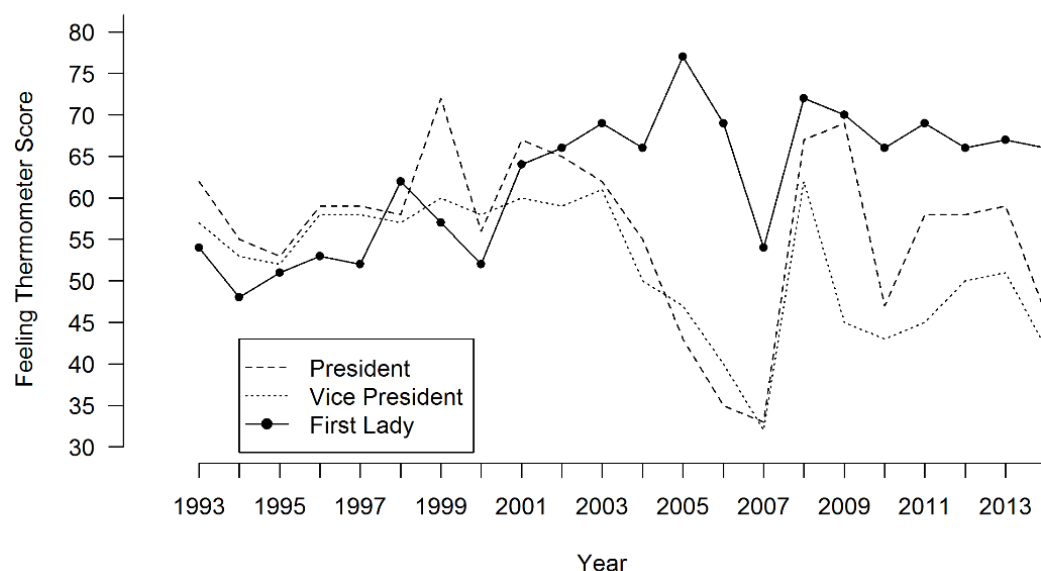
**Figure 1. First Lady and Vice President Speeches**



Graphic courtesy of Lauren A. Wright, originally published in *The Huffington Post*. Data collected from The White House Briefing Room websites.

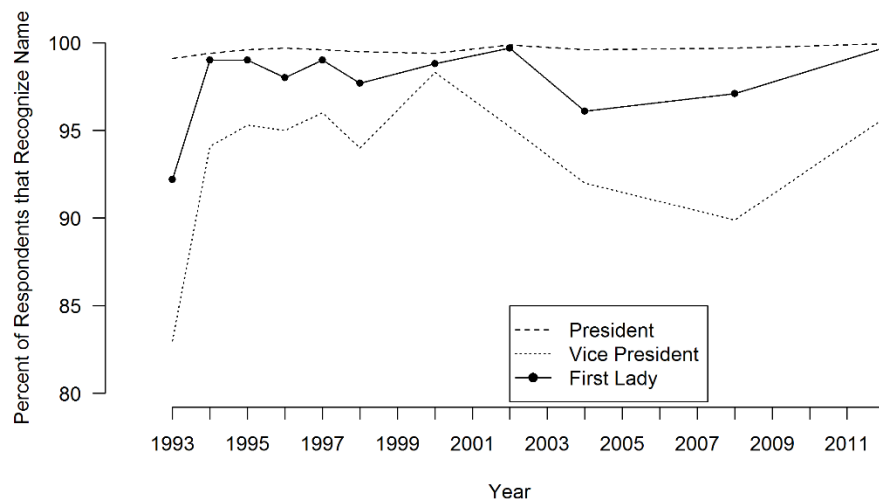
There are several reasons why public appearances of presidential spouses have increased in recent administrations, and many of them have been recently documented using quantitative data. First, White House staff have sought to capitalize on the consistently higher approval and favorability ratings presidential spouses enjoy when compared to presidents and vice presidents, illustrated in Figure 2.<sup>8</sup> The first lady's favorability, unlike vice presidential favorability, has not fluctuated according to upward and downward swings in public opinion of the president.

<sup>8</sup> Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President: Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, p. 36.

**Figure 2. First Ladies Favorability**

Graphic courtesy of Lauren A. Wright, originally published in her book, *On Behalf of the President*. Data collected from ANES, Gallup, and Pew.

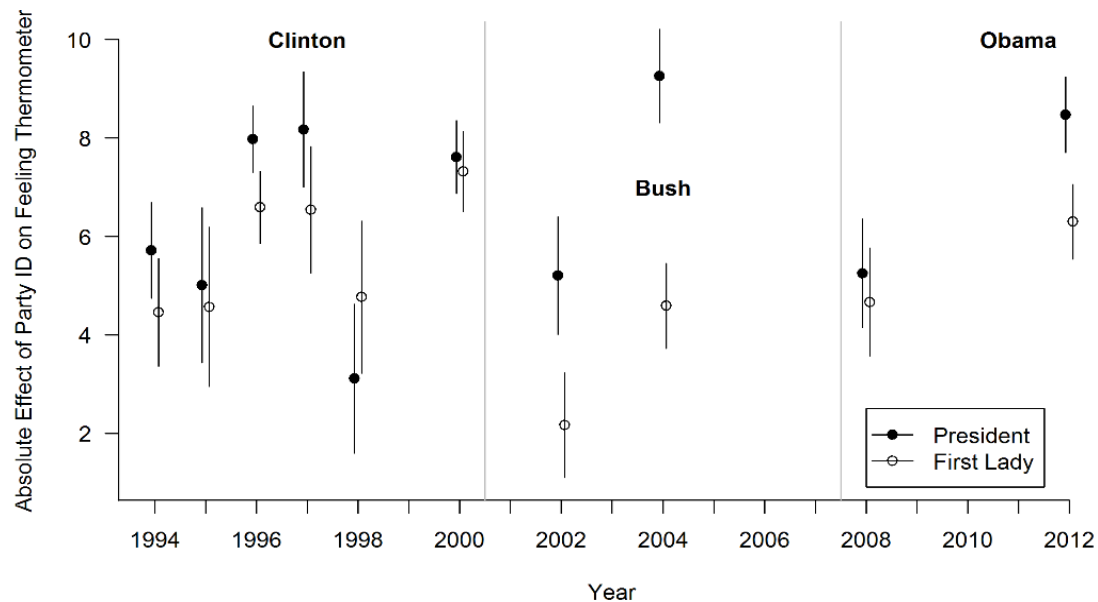
Second, first ladies have substantially higher name recognition than vice presidents, as Figure 3 shows, an outgrowth, perhaps, of their surging public appearances and the alternative media outlets they use to spread the administration's message to large audiences, such as late night talk shows and reality television.

**Figure 3. First Ladies and Name Recognition**

Graphic courtesy of Lauren A. Wright, originally published in her book, *On Behalf of the President*. Data collected from ANES.

Third, although surveys have shown that partisanship is a strong predictor of favorability toward the first lady, the relationship between respondent party identification and evaluations of the president's spouse is much weaker than the relationship between party identification and evaluations of the president. As Figure 4 demonstrates, in some years, partisanship is a statistically significantly weaker predictor of feelings toward the first lady than feelings toward the president.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President: Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, p. 41.

**Figure 4. Favorability and Partisanship, Presidents and First Ladies**

Graphic courtesy of Lauren A. Wright, originally published in her book, *On Behalf of the President*. Data collected from ANES. Regression models estimated using Ordinary Least Squares.

Put together, these data suggest that first ladies may have better tools and opportunities than presidents and vice presidents to influence public opinion, including their apparent ability to somewhat transcend deeply held partisan beliefs that politicians have trouble overcoming in their messages, and to interact with a public that has more positive attitudes toward first ladies than presidents and vice presidents.

At the same time, scrutiny of the first lady also has increased. Asked by reporter Helen Thomas what she considered the worst part of being first lady, Nancy Reagan responded, “Nobody is prepared for being under the kind of magnifying glass that you’re under. I don’t care how long you’ve been in public life.”<sup>10</sup> First ladies have used the following strategies to manage this stress, seeking to ensure that the coverage they receive ultimately is to the presidents’ and their own advantage:

### 1. *Controlling the Narrative and the Frame*

The media has different rules of engagement for first ladies than for other members of the administration. Journalists rarely ask presidential spouses tough questions, even though spouses are capable of answering them. Instead, reporters opt for soft questions about life in the White House or on the campaign trail, making it easier for first ladies to control the narrative and gain favorable coverage.

Compounding this advantage is the flexibility presidential spouses have with the White House press corps. First ladies have many more opportunities to defy the Press Room rotation, a practice that encourages different news outlets take turns interviewing the president or key staff. A former communications director for the first lady once described it as “a network strategy,” the notion that “someone got the first crack at it last time, now you’re at the end of the line.”<sup>11</sup> They can – and do – regularly seek alternative forms of coverage such as late night or daytime talk shows. These are typically very low-risk settings, which generate positive publicity for the White House.

Lady Bird Johnson and her press secretary, Liz Carpenter, devised communications strategies to capitalize on these opportunities. In Carpenter’s words,

[We took] forty trips covering what we estimated at the end of time two hundred thousand miles. ... But the total effect, and I realize this more every day and I even begin to realize it watching it unfold in the press, was

<sup>10</sup> Helen Thomas. 1999. *Front Row at the White House, My Life and Times*. New York: Scribner. p. 278.

<sup>11</sup> As quoted in Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President: Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, p. 68.

simply that it was the best way in the Johnson Administration to underline a success story. The hardest thing to do is to get the success story told. (Elizabeth Carpenter interview, pp.1-2)

When anti-war protesters disrupted Lady Bird Johnson's speeches and travels, however, the first lady lost control of the narrative. Media coverage then shifted from telling the story of the administration's domestic policy successes to detailing its military failures.<sup>12</sup>

Even presidential spouses with high approval ratings have not been able to reverse downward trending assessments of an administration and its president.

## 2. *Selecting Outlets*

Both the outlets and the procedures for accessing those outlets are different for the East Wing and West Wing press and communications operations. As a communications strategist for Michelle Obama explained,

The West Wing eventually has to ... give everybody access. The East Wing does not. You get to pick and choose. And you can't hide your head in the sand, because when you do have something important to say, people [in the press corps] have all this pent up anger, so your interviewers don't care about your topic, they care that you've never given them an interview. And so, you do have to do things periodically to feed the beast and keep people engaged. But you don't have to do it the same way the West Wing does.<sup>13</sup>

## 3. *Creating Visuals*

Throughout the modern presidency, and earlier, first ladies have often chosen to embody the priorities of the president and the administration through dress, demeanor, and self-display. Jacqueline Kennedy's fashion choices reinforced presidential messages of generational change and vigor, while adding a note of high culture and refinement. Rosalynn Carter's decision to appear at the presidential inaugural ball in the dress she had worn six years earlier at her husband's gubernatorial inauguration was widely reported as evidence of the administration's populist frugality – and widely critiqued as failing the fashion industry and denying the public a glamorous inaugural ball. Nancy Reagan favored a rich red – wearing it so often that the shade became known as “Reagan red” – which had a more monarchical connotation. Michelle Obama has rejected established fashion houses, choosing designers who were often first-generation Americans, coming from nations not traditionally identified with *haute couture*. This intentional strategy reinforced the president's message that the United States was a nation that celebrated talent in all its people.<sup>14</sup>

The West Wing, also, has used the person of the first lady to convey presidential messages. Nixon Deputy Assistant to the President Dwight Chapin described this as an important element of the communications strategies employed during the president's 1972 visit to China: The first lady's red coat was intentionally chosen to convey a presidential message about the vitality, power, and authority of the United States.

When [the president] wasn't available [for the media], we used Mrs. Nixon. And she, for that trip, had taken -- and most people would remember this that were old enough -- she wore a beautiful red coat, and against the drabness of China, the red coat just popped out, and it spoke volumes about America, just in a very subliminal way. (Dwight Chapin interview, p. 53)

## 4. *Using the Symbolic Power of the White House*

First ladies have used White House social events and entertainment to extend and strengthen presidential networks. Bringing together decision-makers from the administration, the executive branch, the Congress, and Washington society provides opportunities for relationship-building and conversation

<sup>12</sup> Jan Jarboe Russell, *Lady Bird, A Biography of Mrs. Johnson*. New York: Taylor Trade Publishing, 1999. *passim*. MaryAnne Borrelli, *The Politics of the President's Wife*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. p. 116.

<sup>13</sup> As quoted in, Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President, Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger. p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> “High Culture, Popular Culture, and the Modern First Ladies,” in *Women and the White House: Women, Popular Culture, and Presidential Politics*, ed. Lilly Goren and Justin Vaughn. University of Kentucky Press, 2013. pp. 238-244.

that facilitates policy negotiations.<sup>15</sup> Guest lists, seating charts (particularly for the president's table), artists, and artistic programs have all routinely been subject to extensive reviews.

Ann Stock, Clinton social secretary, particularly emphasized the importance of deciding who would be seated at the president's table.

I think one of the most important things for me with the president and with the first lady was looking at their time. ... [At a state dinner,] there are eight other people at the [president's] table. That's eight hours of his time... Who on that guest list should get eight hours of his time? ... [W]hat's going to be the most productive use of his time? ... [W]hat are we trying to accomplish? Who needs to be there? (Ann Stock interview)

Ford social secretary, Maria Downs, outlined the planning that went into guest lists for state dinners.

Let me walk you through the routine [for a State Dinner]. First, we compiled the guest lists from input from various senior staff and State Department. I'd go over it with Mrs. Ford in great detail, and she'd ask, "Why is this person on the list, and why is this one on the list?" They were that much into the detail of it, and then [Chief of Staff] Dick [Cheney] would go over it with the President before, and then the two of them would get together and add, delete, do whatever they chose. But the President always kept his little notebook with a list of people he would like included. They were never pushy about "this person has to be included." They would recommend the people that they thought would be the best match to whoever was coming to dinner. I remember a couple of times thinking that the people who were picked out as being the stars of the dinner, not because they were celebrities, but people of interest were the ones that they had suggested. (Maria Downs interview, p. 13)

Guest lists have only been part of the planning for state dinners. The Clinton social secretary, Ann Stock, provided the following list of consultations that she conducted for each state dinner.

Our advance team goes to the country or their advance team comes here if the dinner's here. And if that's the case, it's usually a couple of months out.

There's a meeting at Blair House, it draws together everybody that's going to be involved in it, starting with the chief of protocol and the social secretary, and all of the key decision-makers in the White House, maybe the communications person ... you want to know what they're allergic to, what they eat, what they don't eat, is there anything in the Chinese culture, is there a number that's unlucky, is there a type of flower, that, you know, if you put it on there it means death? ... a lot of [it] the State Department researches, but it's looking at what needs to be addressed and then, start to look at what the events are. (Ann Stock interview)

One of the greatest challenges is accommodating the powerful individuals who want – and expect – to attend. The Clinton administration accommodated increasing numbers of people by moving events out of the mansion, setting up tents on the White House lawns. And still, as Ann Stock noted, there were difficulties in organizing the events.

For example, Nelson Mandela. ... [W]hen we put together that list of the amount of people that needed to be on it ... it was 800 to 1000 people. And the dinner was only 220 ... and another 50 or 60 people to come for entertainment. So, how do you take care of all these people? ... And so we ended up with about two days of Mandela events. ... Plus the state visit. You're just trying to figure out how all of that transpires. (Ann Stock interview)

When everyone cannot be accommodated, the social secretary is expected to mediate the conflict. If this has not been possible, tensions with the West Wing have escalated, sometimes to the point that the president and first lady have become involved.

In memoranda leaked to the press during the Nixon administration, the West Wing and East Wing staff were shown keeping detailed statistics on the percentages of VIPs attending Sunday worship services at the White House. Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman instructed First Lady Staff Director and Press Secretary Connie Stuart that the president "wants the balance to be 80% VIP." Stuart countered that there was need of more advance planning to reach these individuals with invitations. Her responding memo closed with a counter-assertion that was telling by reason of its detailed content and pointed tone: "Incidentally, the actual percentage for the Sunday in question was 72.11% VIP and 27.89% non-VIP. (That is counting the guests of Congressmen and Cabinet people as VIPs – because we have to.)"<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> MaryAnne Borrelli, *The Politics of the President's Wife*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. pp. 59-90.

<sup>16</sup> As quoted in Helen Thomas. 1975. *Dateline: White House*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. pp. 155-156.



In the Ford administration, Social Secretary Maria Downs, had a positive relationship with the president's chief of staff, Richard "Dick" Cheney. Downs had worked in the West Wing before accepting her East Wing appointment. She was also the first East Wing staff member to hold a presidential commission, a distinction requested by the first lady in an effort to ensure that Downs would be respected by the West Wing.

I remember getting back a guest list – from the President and First Lady – with names scratched off. But there was one in particular who was a very, very, heavyweight business type executive with a lot of support in the West Wing. I was surprised when the name was off, but I didn't think anything of it.

But when the invitations went out, it was a different story. I remember [Chief of Staff] Dick [Cheney] calling and saying, "You know, Maria, I know you've gotten quite a few calls about this. Fill me in on it." So I told him exactly what happened, and he said, "Okay, let me talk to the President about it." And that's the only time he's ever questioned me about the guest lists. It ended up the businessman was put back on the list but was never invited after that to another White House event. When I thanked Dick for getting everybody off my neck, and it was the first time I'd been through the experience, he said, "Look," we had this conversation afterwards, "you did a good job. That's what you were hired to do, and you were within your realm to question it and take him off." (Maria Downs interview, pp. 27-28)

Many of Downs' successors have worked hard to establish constructive West Wing relationships. Clinton Social Secretary Ann Stock, for example, lobbied to be included in the 7:30am daily meeting of the senior staff, to ensure that she would be well informed about White House decision-making.

As we worked closer and closer with the West Wing, I was insistent that I be in the 7:30am meeting. And the reason I was insistent that I was in that staff meeting is if I wasn't, I had to wait on somebody else to tell me what was transpiring in the next day, two three, four, week, ten days.... I'm a political person, and in order to do a job really well for them ... it's helpful to ... get some sense of what the chief of staff and the President's side, or what the issues person or the communication person is thinking about for this event, rather than have it translated by somebody else. (Ann Stock interview)<sup>17</sup>

This White House social outreach by the first lady has created enduring political narratives and frames for the president and the administration.

Michelle Obama described the White House as a place of privilege when she opened the "Poetry Jam," which was among the first of the cultural events this presidency hosted. In her statement, the first lady made it clear that she and the president controlled access to the mansion, and that they would exercise this power to deliver a strong and clear political message.

Tonight's event is really just another way for us to open up the White House and once again make it the People's House -- to invite people from all different backgrounds to come and share their stories and speak their minds; for all of us to learn about different forms of communication and to be open to hearing other people's voices. For it is one thing for people to tell their stories in their own spaces, and quite another for those stories to be welcomed in this space.

Barack is President today because many people who thought their voices didn't matter or wouldn't be heard decided to show up on Election Day and vote anyway. And that's the beauty of our democracy. And we have to remember that democracy is really, really big. It has room for lots of voices, which sometimes take us out of our comfort zones, but that's what makes it so meaningful.<sup>18</sup>

But it is not enough to have the power to control access to the White House; first ladies and their staff must also exercise this power well. Clinton social secretary, Ann Stock, noted that planning White House events was a challenge in itself. Getting the invitations out was a critical task that she stressed had to be accomplished. A telephone call, though it might seem personal and welcoming, ultimately undercut the impact of an occasion.

[T]he one thing you want to do on an invitation is get the invitation out. People can't imagine receiving an envelope that says "The White House" on it. They carry it around their community and show it to everybody...

<sup>17</sup> (For a further discussion of East Wing – West Wing relationships, and of the importance of daily meetings to those relationships, see the section titled, "Relationships in the White House.")

<sup>18</sup> "Remarks of the President and the First Lady at Poetry Jam," East Room of the White House, 12 May 2009. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/video/President-and-Mrs-Obama-Open-White-House-Poetry-Jam#transcript>



[Y]ou see people when they walk through the door. It's a very different thing, they walk through the door and they go, "I'm in the home of the President," not "I'm in the home of Barack Obama." But everywhere you look, there's a reminder of some administration or a social aide telling you something about an administration, and you can't help but feel where you are, and the weight of the history of the building and the majesty of where you are. (Ann Stock interview)

Social events and entertainment, in brief, provide the first lady (and thus the presidential administration) with invaluable opportunities to create meaning, integrate the administration into the Washington community, and showcase the president's priorities.

## THE FIRST LADY ON THE PUBLIC STAGE: ROUTES TO SUCCESS

First ladies have several advantages in conducting press relations and implementing their communications strategies.

There is more public interest in the first lady than in most elected officials. Presidential spouses have higher name recognition than vice presidents and, as we demonstrated earlier, their major public speeches and appearances often draw more viewers, and television ratings tend to be higher on average when they appear on popular programs.

First ladies have also topped Gallup's poll of the most admired women for decades. Hillary Clinton has been rated the most admired woman in the world in every such poll conducted by Gallup since 2002, and first ladies have been rated the most admired women in more than 80% of the years Gallup has asked respondents to rate them since 1948.<sup>19</sup> Presidential spouses are also consistently deemed the most trustworthy political figures in *Reader's Digest* polls, and have higher favorable ratings than presidents and vice presidents in almost every year the American National Election Studies has included the measure in its survey, as presented in Figure 2.<sup>20</sup>

First ladies are evaluated by different criteria than the public uses to rate presidents and other surrogates, allowing them an opportunity to transcend the partisan evaluations most politicians have trouble overcoming. For this reason, party organizations and candidates have relied heavily upon first ladies for outreach during general and midterm elections in regions where the president is unpopular and in swing states.

First ladies have often been cited as the most requested stump speakers by county and state party organizations, and they have few rivals as fundraisers. Laura Bush raised approximately \$15 million for the 2006 congressional midterms alone,<sup>21</sup> and it has been reported that Michelle Obama topped the list of effective fundraisers for the DNC in the 2014 midterms.<sup>22</sup>

First ladies can help cover ground, raise funds, and win airtime in the grueling environment of a national campaign, *and* they can offer the unique perspective of a life partner who can credibly attest to the character and leadership qualities of the candidate.

Finally, presidential spouses, somewhat by nature of their unelected, outsider status, are often more relatable than their presidential and vice presidential counterparts. They spend more time interacting with the public due to a less restrictive schedule, a smaller security detail, and fewer official responsibilities. Due to their close personal relationship with the president, public statements made by first ladies on behalf of

<sup>19</sup> Gallup, "Most Admired Man and Woman." <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1678/most-admired-man-woman.aspx>.

<sup>20</sup> Reader's Digest, "Reader's Digest Trust Poll: The Most Trusted People in America." <http://www.rd.com/culture/readers-digest-trust-poll-the-100-most-trusted-people-in-america/>.

<sup>21</sup> Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President: Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, p. 90. Richard Benedetto. May 21, 2006. "Laura Bush travels without 'all the political baggage.'" *USA Today*. Based on data from the RNC, NRCC, and NRSC. [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-05-21-laura-bush\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-05-21-laura-bush_x.htm)

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Murphy. September 16, 2014. "Michelle Obama and the Top Women Smashing Fundraising Records." *The Daily Beast*. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/09/16/michelle-obama-and-the-top-women-smashing-fundraising-records.html>

the administration ring truer, more genuine, and perhaps more believable, allowing the presidents' spouses to humanize the presidency without appearing presumptuous.

In summary, what the White House and presidential campaigns have in a first lady is ...

- a surrogate that carries the public and private weight of the president's ear,
- is beloved, trusted, admired, widely recognized, and closely followed by many, sometimes regardless of party,
- who can easily evade the sharp inquiries of reporters,
- who garners media interest whenever coverage is desirable,
- who can be deployed successfully in a polarized electoral environment.

Modern first ladies and their staff have employed the following strategies to capitalize on these opportunities ... and to minimize the likelihood of popular and media critiques.

#### SET A FOCUSED ISSUE AGENDA

Throughout the modern presidency, first ladies have typically focused their public outreach and communications on an intentionally limited set of policies. Typically, the first ladies have set their own issue agenda, in consultation with the president, with careful vetting by West Wing and East Wing staff. This process has been eased by the fact that the first ladies seldom encountered strong public pressure to effect immediate change.<sup>23</sup> As Anita McBride, Laura Bush's chief of staff, explained,

... I think it is important to be grounded, know who you are, and maybe not try and take on too much too fast. That's the luxury of this position, in so many ways. You don't have every problem come to your desk the way it does for the president. You do get to pick and choose. And, you really could drill down a lot deeper over a more extended period of time on a single issue than the president can in so many ways. (Anita McBride interview)

As McBride suggests, the public has granted the first lady time to set an agenda for herself, selecting a "project" that will stretch across the presidential term. While First Ladies Jacqueline Kennedy, Betty Ford, and Rosalynn Carter focused on policies distinct from the president's agenda, the more recent norm has been for the first lady's political agenda to complement the president's.

In the Ronald Reagan administration, Nancy Reagan conducted an anti-drug media campaign while her husband waged a war on drugs. In the George H.W. Bush administration, Barbara Bush advocated for family literacy while her husband self-identified as the "education president." In the William J. Clinton administration, Hillary Rodham Clinton was the custodian of two major campaign promises, to reform healthcare insurance and, later, to prioritize human rights in international relations. The first was one of the most important promises made by the president in his 1992 election campaign; the second was a continuing focus for the administration as it struggled to set out its foreign policy doctrines. In the George W. Bush administration, Laura Bush also divided her attention between domestic and international issues, advocating for libraries and literacy (in the administration that negotiated and passed the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act), and for human rights internationally (in a wartime presidency that challenged international definitions of torture). In the Obama administration, Michelle Obama prioritized childhood health and mentoring, and military families, as the administration devoted itself to reforming healthcare domestically, to changing military and humanitarian policies internationally. As this brief list makes clear, the policy agendas of recent first ladies have been centered on "common-sense" valence issues. They already have broad public support, making them marketable packaging for the president's broader, often more controversial policy agenda. In advocating for their issues, the first ladies have also advocated for the presidents' priorities.<sup>24</sup>

Reflecting back on Hillary Clinton's work to advance healthcare reform in 1993-1994, some senior White House staff subsequently concluded that the issue was poorly suited to leadership by a presidential

<sup>23</sup> For an overview of the strategies used by modern presidential spouses to provide substantive representation and advance public policies, see: MaryAnne Borrelli, *The Politics of the President's Wife*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. pp. 151-193.

<sup>24</sup> Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President: Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger.

spouse. Among those who recanted their support was White House Counsel Bernard Nussbaum, who had known Clinton for decades before she became first lady.

I was very supportive of what she wanted to do. ... There's something uncomfortable about using your relationship as a spouse to get into some sort of official position. Although I didn't see any of that at the time. I thought, he's a smart guy, she's a smart person, they worked together in Arkansas on education and things like that, and I saw no problem with it at the time. ... But for Hillary – I've never said this before – to try to turn herself into an assistant to the President or one of his chief assistants, I'm not sure it was right. It's a tricky role for a spouse to play, and maybe we were a little too un-thinking and arrogant in having that happen. (Bernard Nussbaum interview, pp. 98-99)

Nussbaum's struggle to verbalize his concerns reveals the conflicts to be anticipated and managed by first ladies. As a member of a presidential administration, the first lady has public sphere responsibilities. As the president's wife, the first lady has private sphere responsibilities. Many people in the White House and throughout the electorate – including Nussbaum, as seen from his statement – doubt that a first lady can appropriately exercise both public power and private influence.

Most modern first ladies have stepped back from exercising formal, public leadership. Instead, they have embraced longstanding partisan and gender traditions in order to win the political capital they need to advance their husband's careers. But that choice has come at some cost to the presidential spouses, as Barbara Bush made clear. In response to a reporter who asked if Bush regretted limiting her life to being a homemaker, the first lady pointedly rejected this description of her career.

Do you think you'd say that to Arthur Miller, who wrote two plays? Would you say, "You chose to be a homemaker" to him? I've written two books. I've done a lot more than raise a wonderful family.<sup>25</sup>

In fairness to the reporter, Bush had deliberately cultivated the image of an engaged matriarch. She had not advertised her role as the founder of two successful foundations, one fundraising for cancer research and the other for family literacy. Nor had she drawn attention to her work throughout her husband's campaigns, as a fundraiser and as a surrogate. Even in this quote, she provides little information about her accomplishments, mentioning only that she "had done a lot more than raise a wonderful family." But Bush was probably even more frustrated by the media's response to her statement: Picked up by a number of outlets, the media focused on her knowledge of Arthur Miller's opus (he had actually written twenty plays, in addition to his screenplays, novels, essays, one-act plays, articles, and autobiography) rather than investigating her achievements.<sup>26</sup>

### PRIORITIZE AUTHENTICITY

First ladies have intentionally crafted their public personae to win widespread support.

In 1984, Barbara Bush drew extensive media coverage when she referred to Geraldine Ferraro as "that \$4 million—I can't say it, but it rhymes with 'rich.'" In the 1988 campaign, she refurbished her image and established herself as a caring matriarch. The White House accepted and fostered this highly gendered persona, which generated political capital that was expended on the president's behalf.<sup>27</sup> As G.H.W. Bush Assistant to the President for Public Events and Initiatives Sigmund Rogich noted,

We used [Barbara Bush] really well. First of all, you couldn't give her something she didn't believe in. She wasn't going to do it and if you forced her to do it, she wouldn't do it well. She'd be kicking and screaming before the camera, so we just didn't try to do it. But she never said "no" and she had a great sense of humor and she would tweak you when you had it coming. All those things came into play. (Sigmund Rogich interview, p. 25)

<sup>25</sup> As quoted in Pamela Killian. 2002. *Barbara Bush: Matriarch of a Dynasty*. New York: St. Martin's Press. p. 199.

<sup>26</sup> This perception of Barbara Bush as a satellite wife, uninvolved in politics and focused on the private sphere, generated a national controversy when the first lady was invited, disinvited, and then invited again to deliver a commencement address at Wellesley College. See: Rosanna Hertz and Susan M. Reverby, "Gentility, Gender, and Political Protest: The Barbara Bush Controversy at Wellesley College," *Gender & Society* 9 (October 1995): 594-611.

<sup>27</sup> For a critical examination of Barbara Bush's self-framing, see: Marjorie Williams, "Barbara's Backlash," *Vanity Fair*, August 1992. <http://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/1992/08/williams199208>

Like Barbara Bush, Laura Bush was lauded by many for her authenticity.<sup>28</sup> Focusing on a specific set of policies, Bush advocated strongly for the programs with which she associated herself. Speaking of Bush's participation in the Middle East initiative, her chief of staff, Anita McBride, stated,

And President Bush launched a very important initiative called the Middle East Partnership Initiative that really was targeted a lot on women because he really believed, and so did Mrs. Bush, that women are the key to peace in the Middle East. And there was a whole range of programs under the Middle East Partnership Initiative that focused on education, that focused on political empowerment for women, for rising democracies, and focused on health diplomacy. Laura Bush could be a voice in all of those. ... And she was wildly aggressive with her schedule. Anything that we presented her made sense if it fit with the Initiative. If it felt authentic to her then she would do it, absolutely would do it.<sup>29</sup>

### ESTABLISH CREDIBILITY

Recent first ladies have gained credibility by having professional experience in the domestic issue areas they highlight.

Laura Bush's background as a teacher, a librarian, and as someone who had already put literacy programs into place as first lady of Texas, was a solid foundation from which she could authoritatively promote education-related programs. And the first lady regularly reminded her audiences about her professional and personal expertise, as when she testified before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions in 2002.

My emphasis on making sure that preschool children are provided stimulating activities and interactions with adults and other children so they can develop strong language and pre-reading concepts from birth onward stems from my own experiences as a mother, a public school teacher, and a school librarian.<sup>30</sup>

Bush then continued on with her statement, connecting her Ready to Read, Ready to Learn initiative to the No Child Left Behind Act. This was a convincing, cogent communications strategy that stressed the first lady's background as an educator.

Michelle Obama's experience as an executive at one of the foremost hospitals in the United States, where she focused on community health, connected seamlessly with her efforts to abolish childhood obesity. Like Laura Bush, Obama paired her professional expertise with her familial identity. As she declared at the 2014 White House Summit on Working Families,

... that work-family balance is so fragile, and you realize how fragile it is ... a broken toilet, a sick child, a sick parent, that that balance is thrown off. ... That's why it's so important for women and men who are in the position to make these demands to do it. ... this fight isn't about me or Barack, because things are different now. We live in the White House. Grandma lives upstairs – thank God. And we have resources that we never could have imagined. So this isn't – the fight isn't about us. It's about every mother and father out there who doesn't have the leverage to make those demands.

We're fighting for them because we know how bad it is, we know how tough it is.<sup>31</sup>

In this way, Michelle Obama skillfully intertwined the private and the public sphere, her personal and professional roles, and her privilege and her empathy. It is the appeal of Obama's self-presentation that led so many commentators and observers to call for her to do even more for women, particularly for African-American women. In her case, success generated new challenges.

<sup>28</sup> A number of scholars, however, have argued that Laura Bush was alternatively an apologist for the administration or as a willfully naïve spokesperson. For example, see: Michael L. Ferguson, "Feminism and Security Rhetoric in the Post-September 11th Bush Administration" and Lori J. Marso, "Feminism and the Complications of Freeing the Women of Afghanistan and Iraq," both in *W Stands for Women, How the George W. Bush Presidency Shaped a New Politics of Gender*, ed. Michael L. Ferguson and Lori Jo Marso. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007. pp. 191-244.

<sup>29</sup> As quoted in, Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President, Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger. pp. 96-97.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Senate, "Forum on Early Learning: Investing in Our Children, Investing in Our Future." 2002. Hearing of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. 107th Congr, 2nd Sess. Senate Hearing 107-256, 24 January. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-107shrg77367/html/CHRG-107shrg77367.htm>

<sup>31</sup> "Remarks by the First Lady During Conversation with Robin Roberts at The White House Working Families Summit," The Omni Hotel, Washington, D.C., 23 June 2014. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2014/06/24/first-lady-speaks-working-families-summit#transcript>

As a general rule, first ladies have gained credibility by focusing on issues congruent with traditional gender roles for women. Health, education, and family well-being have been near-constant concerns.

### *BE POSITIVE*

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The policies advanced by the first ladies have often focused on raising awareness, and the solutions they proffered have been optimistic and non-punitive, even if the administration's broader policies are precisely the opposite.

Nancy Reagan communicated her approach to solving America's drug problem to audiences of elementary school students and parents. But her entreaties to "Just Say No" did not discuss the penalties that should be imposed upon drug abusers. Instead, she addressed addiction prevention and rehabilitation. And she made use of her Hollywood relationships by bringing celebrities like Clint Eastwood and Mr. T on board with her campaign.

Similarly, rather than chastising underperforming schools, Laura Bush discussed the importance of supplying resources to thriving schools, recognizing successful teachers and students. It became a deliberate strategy on the part of the West Wing to use the first lady to give added positive momentum to a policy initiative, which would then rebound to the administration's credit. This was the dynamic behind Laura Bush's leadership of the 2006 White House Summit on Malaria, as her chief of staff, Anita McBride, recounted.

A first lady is a very effective surrogate. ... There was an opportunity in 2006 for the White House to host the Summit on Malaria. And [Chief of Staff] Josh [Bolton] came and met with me and Mrs. Bush in the East Wing, and asked ... our office to take on running this summit, which was held here at the National Geographic — it was a wide variety of sectors that were involved, public, private, non-profit, faith-based community, everybody that you can imagine. We only had six weeks to pull it off. We worked night and day. It was hugely successful.

... It had the bipartisan congressional support, it had the funding. It was showing an enormous and immediate impact and [having the] result of saving lives. And we were very proud, as the first lady's office, to be handed this by Josh and to lead it, to have it be so successful. (Anita McBride interview)

Survey experiments have shown that individuals often respond more positively to policy appeals coming from the first lady, even if the exact same appeal is delivered to respondents with the vice president's or president's name attached to it. Individuals also often cite that the president is better at dealing with an issue, such as foreign policy or education reform, if they have read an excerpt from a speech by the first lady that advocates for the policy.<sup>32</sup>

### *CULTIVATE THE PARTISAN BASE*

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Democratic first ladies have reached out to their party by accenting the connection between their policy priorities and enduring Democratic commitments. They delivered this message even when (perhaps especially when) their husbands were shifting right, seeking the support of Republican legislators for their domestic and international policies. Democratic first ladies Carter, Clinton, and Obama worked to strengthen the government's health, anti-poverty, and family programs.

Meanwhile, Republican first ladies have reached out to social and religious conservatives, stressing personal and parental responsibility. Nancy Reagan's media campaign to "Just Say No" to drugs and Barbara Bush's family literacy programming epitomize a Republican commitment to self-reliant individualism.

Laura Bush's efforts to increase women's access to healthcare and education internationally are also part of this ideological messaging. When the first lady delivered the president's weekly radio address in 2001, she referred to women's rights as distinguishing "civilized people" from "terrorists."

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<sup>32</sup> Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President, Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger. pp. 99-120.



The plight of women and children in Afghanistan is a matter of deliberate human cruelty, carried out by those who seek to intimidate and control.

Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror ...

All of us have an obligation to speak out. We may come from different backgrounds and faiths -- but parents the world over love our children. We respect our mothers, our sisters and daughters. Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it is the acceptance of our common humanity -- a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent. ... The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.<sup>33</sup>

Even as she endorsed Republican principles and policies relating to the Mideast, Bush was reaching out to the widest possible audience with an appeal to “our common humanity.” It was an appeal suited to her professional credentials as an educator of children, her gender role modeling as moral voice within the family, and her partisan associations with social conservatives.

### CULTIVATE THE PRESIDENT’S SUPPORTERS

Interestingly, the president’s supporters during the campaign will often be among the president’s strongest critics as the term unfolds. High hopes fade, especially when campaign promises go unfulfilled. First ladies have been charged with ameliorating this disaffection.

Perhaps the most extraordinary instance of outreach to overcome this alienation is Lady Bird Johnson’s 1964 whistle-stop campaign journey from Virginia through the rural southeast to Louisiana. Undertaken shortly after the president signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the first lady was charged with explaining – primarily to white southerners – why the region should support civil rights for African Americans and vote for the president’s election.<sup>34</sup> Lyndon Johnson was determined not to be the southern president who lost the South for the Democratic party.

In each instance, the first lady spoke as the president’s wife *and* as the target audience’s descriptive representative. When this strategy was successful, the spouse established herself as a thoughtful mediator, knowledgeable about presidential decision-making and accountable to the people.

But simultaneously identifying as a representative of and a representative to the president has been a risky undertaking for presidential spouses: Audiences have sometimes judged the first lady as having crosscutting loyalties that worked to their disadvantage. Lady Bird Johnson, for example, was criticized for her support of the president. During the whistle-stop, southern newspapers reacted with anger to the first lady’s message; *The Charleston News and Courier* dispensed with the usual civility accorded the first lady, challenging her as “a straightout campaigner for an administration they believe is wrecking the country.”<sup>35</sup>

As the Johnson example demonstrates, communications work is politically charged and emotionally exhausting. The first lady is called upon to leverage her expertise and her person on the president’s behalf, often with little apparent success. Modern presidents, however, have seldom abandoned the voting coalitions they forged in winning the presidency. Instead, they have tasked their spouses with transforming disappointed or demanding publics into loyal critics, who will suspend their resistance and their concerns long enough to re-elect the president.

### DON’T MOBILIZE THE OPPOSITION

First ladies, caught in partisan and gender political confrontations, have had to be as attentive to their partisan opponents as to their partisan supporters. Perhaps because the president’s wives have been widely perceived as nationalistic representatives of women, as seen in frequent references to “the first lady of the

<sup>33</sup> Radio Address by Mrs. Bush,” 17 November 2001. The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=24992>

<sup>34</sup> For elaboration see interview of Elizabeth Carpenter, Interview III, 1969. Lyndon B. Johnson Library Oral History Collection. p. 41. See also: MaryAnne Borrelli, *The Politics of the President’s Wife*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. pp. 112-116.

<sup>35</sup> “The Lasting Effects,” *The Charleston News and Courier*, 9 October 1964.

land,” responses to their politicking have been visceral and emotional, as well as partisan and judgmental. As Clinton Deputy Chief of Staff Roy Neel noted,

Moreover, many of [the social conservatives] hated Hillary. And when I use “hate,” I use that advisedly. I’ve experienced those attacks from literally hundreds of people, certainly when I would go back and forth to Tennessee and in the South and elsewhere, because she appeared to be something of an affront to their sense of who they were, to women. I found more women who despise Hillary Clinton than men, ironically. Because to many [of these women], she appears to be a commentary on the life they’ve chosen. She didn’t help herself with the “stay home and bake cookies” comment during the [1992] campaign, but on the other hand, I don’t think she ever really quite deserved their wrath. (Roy M. Neel interview, p. 71)

Given the difficulties that many presidents and first ladies have encountered in sustaining the support of their electoral coalitions, especially when the political environment is volatile, limiting the mobilization of partisan opponents is critically important. As a senior staff member in Michelle Obama’s office summarized that first lady’s policy work,

Every bit of her agenda is intertwined in his and there’s nothing that would give you an opportunity to take a pot-shot at her.<sup>36</sup>

### PRESENT YOURSELF AS APOLITICAL AND NONPARTISAN

First ladies have routinely advocated for policy by relating the president’s policy agenda to their own interests and initiatives, which they contextualize as apolitical. Rather than overtly lobbying for administration-sponsored legislation, as Hillary Clinton did in her highly publicized push for the Health Security Act, Laura Bush and Michelle Obama returned to earlier rhetorical strategies and claimed to speak as nonpartisans.

In the Obama administration, the *Let’s Move!* initiative provided an avenue through which the first lady could help garner public support for the Affordable Care Act. She framed this legislation as encouraging preventative healthcare, prioritizing women’s health and family health, and acknowledging the obesity epidemic. Routinely identifying herself as the “mom-in-chief,” Obama stepped back and away from partisan politics on many occasions. This strategy was both observed and accepted by the press, as a leading journalist acknowledged.

I think [the Obama administration] knew [it] wanted to do health care very early on and [Michelle Obama] actually did talk about health care quite a bit – but from the perspective of a mom. ... She had a tough time in the campaign and I think they have been very careful about making sure the public doesn’t think she’s involved in drafting policy. The goal is to help and not hurt.<sup>37</sup>

### TESTIFY TO THE PRESIDENT’S CHARACTER AND COMMITMENT

As the president’s wife, first ladies have reassured the public of their husbands’ fitness for office, their dedication as the nation’s leader, and their empathy to the people. But while the first ladies have delivered similar messages about the president’s humanity throughout the modern presidency, the precise content of these statements has depended on the public personae of the president and the first lady. One of Michelle Obama’s staff members offered the following contrast of how Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama delivered very different messages about their husbands.

<sup>36</sup> As quoted in, Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President, Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger. p. 82. Other first ladies have employed a variety of strategies to divert criticism of their initiatives. When Nancy Reagan was criticized for purchasing china and redecorating the White House while her husband cut budget allocations for social programs, her insistence that private rather than public funds covered these costs did not convince the media. Her expensive gowns increased the criticism. When she dressed in old, ragged clothing, however, and sang her own version of “Second Hand Rose” at the 1982 Gridiron Dinner, the coverage turned (briefly) favorable. Her performance was perceived as humorous and self-deprecating; it temporarily silenced critics, though concerns quickly resurfaced about the first lady’s sense of privilege. James G. Benze, Jr., *Nancy Reagan, On the White House Stage*. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2005. pp. 36-66.

<sup>37</sup> As quoted in, Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President, Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger. p. 69.

[Michelle Obama] is popular because she tries hard to be a normal role model. She's not overtly political, she's very accomplished and very smart, but she's the converse of the president, she humanizes him and she is very arms-open to the public, where he is not. ... It's interesting to compare them to the Clintons because President Clinton had a very open and emotional demeanor; people didn't need Hillary to balance him out in that way because he provided it. President Obama is criticized all the time for being stoic and unemotional ...<sup>38</sup>

Recent experimental research has shown that when presidential candidates are pictured alongside their spouse, survey respondents of the opposite party evaluate the candidate more favorably on average.<sup>39</sup> This is especially true in the case of Bill Clinton and Republican men, who rate Hillary Clinton significantly higher on a variety of measures, including honesty and compassion, when Bill Clinton appears with her, compared to Republican men who viewed the same picture of Hillary Clinton with Bill Clinton removed.<sup>40</sup>

There is also evidence that the spouses of presidential candidates may be more effective messengers than other surrogates. Survey experiments that compared the responses of participants to an appeal by Melania Trump, Governor Chris Christie, or Donald Trump revealed that Melania Trump produced much more favorable evaluations of Trump than did Governor Christie or the candidate himself among Independents, even though the text displayed with pictures of the candidates remained constant in each case.<sup>41</sup>

## RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WHITE HOUSE

There are two sets of relationships that the first lady must manage in the White House, each of which has extraordinary opportunities and risks.

First, there is the first lady's own relationship with the president, and her relations with the senior White House staff, the permanent White House staff, and the wider administration. In each of these, the first lady is acting as a presidential spouse, as a presidential surrogate, and as a principal, *and* as a senior member and chief of a subunit within the White House Office.

Second, there are the relationships that the first lady facilitates (or not) between her staff and the president, the senior White House staff members, the West Wing staff, and the permanent White House staff, and the wider administration.

How the first lady manages these relationships will profoundly affect her status during the presidential term and throughout the electoral seasons. As these relationships are revealed to the media and the public, their conduct will also affect the first lady's status throughout the Washington community and the electorate.

### THE FIRST LADY

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#### 1. The President

The presidential marriage is a personal, professional, and political relationship. In the modern presidency, wives have often been among those who could either say "No" to the president or successfully encourage a president to rethink decisions. The sheer length coupled with the closeness of this relationship allows presidents a source of candid advice offered without political motive. White House Staff Assistant Greg Willard observed that Betty Ford obliged Gerald Ford to consider issues and priorities that he would have preferred to dismiss.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 138-143.

<sup>40</sup> Danielle Paquette. May 18, 2016. "How to Make Republican Men like Hillary Clinton." *The Washington Post*.

<sup>41</sup> Lauren A. Wright. March 30, 2016. "Here's evidence that Melania Trump could actually boost Donald Trump's popularity." *The Washington Post*.



When you would sit down with Mrs. Ford – and you may remember this from your experiences – she’d bluntly say, “Well, tell me what’s going on.” She wanted it all – the good, the bad and the ugly, including some gossip. And not in a mean way, like “I’m going to go rat this person out.” But she enjoyed knowing what’s going on. He, not so much, though. He’d kind of go down that path, “Well, Mr. President, I want to let you know about this. It doesn’t directly affect you, but...” Well, more likely than not, you’d be cut off. “Okay, we don’t need to talk about that.” But Mrs. Ford was – in my experience in those early years – was much more proactive in terms of making sure he was told. She’d say, “Jerry, now you need to think about this!” (Greg Willard interview, p. 28)

And White House Counsel Abner Mikva saw Hillary Clinton successfully lobby the president on behalf of policy initiatives that he did not initially favor.

I don’t know, I can’t think of any issue of any importance at all where they were in disagreement and she didn’t win out. He might start out opposite on something, but as I think back over the year I was there and the other things I know about, when there was any difference of opinion, she prevailed. Not because she yelled at him or leaned on him, but simply because he respected her judgment. (Abner Mikva interview pp. 87-88)

Public judgments of a first lady exercising this power, however, are often negative. The idea of a wife exercising influence raises longstanding stereotypes and fears about the corrupting effects of a ruler’s sexual partner. Letters to the modern presidents and first ladies have regularly indicated that the public makes a zero-sum calculation about the presidential marriage: Her strength is evidence of his weakness.<sup>42</sup> Nancy Reagan’s influence in regard to personnel and policy was widely critiqued, leading Barbara Bush to issue the following statement:

If I thought something was hurting George, I would certainly say to him, “George, I think Jane Smith is doing you a disservice.” I wouldn’t say, “Fire her or fire him.” That’s not the way we work. We have a good marriage. One reason it’s good, maybe, is I don’t fool around with his office and he doesn’t fool around with my household.<sup>43</sup>

Michelle Obama, after enduring negative and even hostile coverage throughout the 2008 campaign, issued a very similar statement through a *New York Times* interview in early 2009.

“He’s [The president is] always asking: ‘Is that new? I haven’t seen that before,’” she said, revealing that she replies: “Why don’t you mind your own business? Solve world hunger. Get out of my closet.”<sup>44</sup>

While this statement may appear assertive, it is more accurately characterized as a promise that the first lady will confine herself to her clothes closet, refraining from involvement in policy making and international relations. Eight years later, this claim appears repeatedly on lists of favorite Obama quotes.<sup>45</sup>

Given the general willingness to defer to the president as the “chief of chiefs,” any challenge issued by a wife to a president is inherently controversial. But it is that widespread deference which makes the first lady’s assertions and power necessary, if a president is to be pushed to recognize the full implications of a decision.

## 2. The Senior White House Staff

Relationships between first ladies and senior staff have ranged from collegiality to hostility, with consequences for the process and the substance of White House decision-making.

<sup>42</sup> This was a strong theme in the public correspondence that critiqued Betty Ford’s controversial 60 Minutes interview. For an analysis of this mail, including excerpted representative passages, see: MaryAnne Borrelli, “Competing Conceptions of the First Ladyship: Public Responses to Betty Ford’s 60 Minutes Interview,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 31.3 (September 2001): 397-414.

<sup>43</sup> As quoted in Donnie Radcliffe. 1989. *Simply Barbara Bush: A Portrait of America’s Candid First Lady*. New York: Warner Books. p. 195.

<sup>44</sup> Tim Shipman, “Michelle Obama Says Her Husband Barack Knows Nothing About Fashion,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 March 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/michelle-obama/5028053/Michelle-Obama-says-her-husband-Barack-knows-nothing-about-fashion.html>

<sup>45</sup> See the lists of Obama quotes at such web sites as the Ed Lover Show (<http://edlovershow.com/playlist/funny-quotes-by-famous-females/item/3173640/>), Good Reads (<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/151158-he-s-always-asking-is-that-new-i-haven-t-seen-that>), and Everyday Power (<http://www.everydaypowerblog.com/2016/07/26/michelle-obama-quotes/>).

In several administrations, senior staff members valued the support provided by the first lady, which helped them in presenting their policy recommendations to the president. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski forthrightly identified Rosalynn Carter as an invaluable ally in policy debates.

A very important in all [these foreign policy developments] was Rosalynn's [Carter] attitude toward me. She liked me ... That was not unimportant with [the president], so I had that additional relationship and that had something to do with my earlier sense of confidence that if we ever had a fight with Mondale or Muskie I felt pretty confident that I would win. (Zbigniew Brzezinski interview along with Madeleine K. Albright, Leslie G. Denend and William Odom, p. 73)

Brzezinski's experience was not unique in the Carter White House: The first lady consistently served as the president's trusted political adviser, which included acting as an intercessor for senior White House staff with information that the president would rather avoid. As Bert Lance summarized,

Rosalynn [Carter] is very political. Rosalynn has superb political judgment. ... [The President] didn't think that way. The cause and effect relationships of political decisions such as the water projects, he didn't spend any time thinking that through because he resolved that he was doing what was right so all the other things fall into place. Now Rosalynn is a great cause and effect thinker. She has got good political instincts and judgments. ... I know, for example, that Pat Caddell [President Carter's polling director] would go to Rosalynn rather than go to the President with what his polling was showing. [Gerald] Rafshoon [communications director] from the media standpoint would do exactly the same. Hamilton [Jordan, senior adviser], if he got to a real knotty problem vis-à-vis a political judgment, would go to Rosalynn. Rosalynn was the resident political expert. ... She knows what she's doing and she's got good instincts and good judgment, and she if anybody could convince [the president] of a change in course or a change in direction. (T. Bertram Lance interview, p. 54)

A similar dynamic was evident in the Reagan administration, in which the first lady advocated on behalf of White House staff and cabinet members who favored a more moderate foreign policy doctrine, seeking to establish relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>46</sup>

In the first term of the Reagan presidency, tensions between the first lady and the West Wing staff were mediated by Michael Deaver, a deputy chief of staff and assistant to the president. A longtime friend of the Reagans, Deaver was a skilled go-between.<sup>47</sup> Yet subsequent administrations have not elected to facilitate communication between the East and West Wings through a single individual in the president's chief of staff office. Instead, subsequent presidents and chiefs of staff have achieved coordination through increased participation of the first lady's staff in meetings once reserved to West Wing personnel. Deaver's position of trust within the Reagan household and White House may have been distinctive to that presidency, but the decision to broaden contacts throughout the staff as a means of coordinating the work of the first lady with the West Wing is also a critical organizational development. (For further discussion of these connections, see the section titled "The Office of the First Lady – The West Wing.")

In turn, first ladies who have taken policy positions at odds with those of the senior White House staff have paid a steep price, both within the White House and in the wider media. A striking – and representative – example of this dynamic was the highly publicized disagreement between Nancy Reagan and Chief of Staff Don Regan. As an indication of the cost of this conflict to the first lady's reputation, consider the following exchange on *Face the Nation*.

... 'Fred [Barnes, of *The New Republic*],' I [Leslie Stahl] said on *Face*, 'you have been going after that woman for doing what everyone in this town wanted done, which is to have Don Regan leave the White House. Why are you picking on her? ... As a woman, I feel there's a hint of sexism in it.'

'That's what my wife says,' he said with an uncomfortable chuckle, 'but in my defense, let me say that Nancy Reagan has overstepped the normal bounds for first ladies in doing something that she couldn't get her husband to do.'

Elizabeth Drew of *The New Yorker* jumped in, agreeing with Fred: 'It's not that she advised her husband, it's not that she pushed him to do things; she went public, she became a player in this town. And in doing that made her husband look weak.'

<sup>46</sup> James G. Benze, Jr., *Nancy Reagan, On the White House Stage*. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2005. pp. 68-86, 122-140. Bob Schieffer and Gray Paul Gates, *The Acting President*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1989. p. 333.

<sup>47</sup> For Deaver's own reflections on Nancy Reagan and on his work in the White House, see: Michael K. Deaver, *Nancy, A Portrait of My Years with Nancy Reagan*. New York: William Morrow, 2000.

'But on the other hand,' I said, 'no one else was doing it –'

'A lot of people were doing it,' said Elizabeth.

'They weren't being effective,' I said, 'and they weren't willing to stick their necks out and really get in there and push.'

'But she has to pay the price for making her husband, at a time he was trying to show he was in command, look like he wasn't in command,' Fred argued. 'That's the price. It was a high price.'<sup>48</sup>

As this quotation demonstrates, the media framed the Regan – Reagan confrontation as a personality conflict between a wife and a professional. It was not identified as a personnel conflict among senior White House staff. Nancy Reagan's political expertise was ignored. Regan was fired, but, as seen in the passage above, Regan found her reputation compromised.<sup>49</sup>

Underlying many of the tensions with the senior staff is the belief that there is no one, except perhaps the president, who can say "No" to the first lady. James F. Kuhn, Ronald Reagan's personal assistant, noted that the president was unequivocally protective of his wife.

I'll tell you something, if you made Ronald Reagan angry, you had to be pretty stupid. Or you were bold enough to, for whatever reasons, or crazy enough, to say something bad about Nancy Reagan. If you said something about her, if you were negative about her, if you hurt her in some way verbally, that would have done it. (James F. Kuhn interview, p. 16)

In the Reagan administration and in a number of others, the perception of the first lady as privileged within the White House hierarchy has rankled many senior staff, particularly those opposed to the spouse's policy and partisan priorities.

Whether accurate or not, this perception of privilege has led senior staff to pick their battles and strategize carefully when engaging the first lady. For Clinton Deputy Chief of Staff Roy Neel, establishing a strong relationship with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton was pivotal to constructive relationships throughout his tenure.

The day after I took my job as Clinton's Deputy Chief of Staff I went to see Hillary. I always liked her, had a lot of respect for her, knew she was smart. I really liked her staff people, I worked closely with them and liked them and trusted them. The first thing she said to me, she said, 'I am tired of hearing that people are saying it's got to be done this way because Hillary says it's got to be done this way,' or, 'This person has to be hired or that one can't be hired because Hillary approves or disapproves. None of these people say this to my face, are willing to stand up to me. I'm really tired of that.' My experience bore that out. The very people who would squawk about Hillary's influence on the process were the very ones who would not go and knock on her door and close the door and say, 'Are you doing this? What are you doing? I disagree with you and I think this is not good for the President.' (Roy M. Neel interview, p. 63)

Clinton Chief of Staff Leon Panetta, who had entered the White House Office by way of serving as the Office of Management and Budget Director, similarly prioritized establishing a strong relationship with the first lady as a policy leader and presidential adviser.

As OMB Director and as the person who has to be a son-of-a-bitch to everybody, I remember telling [Hillary Clinton], even on the costs of healthcare, that what they were saying was the costs were not credible. ...

It happens a lot with the President of the United States. People, by virtue of being in the presence of the President of the United States, find it very tough to stare the President of the United States in the face and say, "Mr. President, you're screwing up. What you're doing, what you're saying, you're making a terrible mistake." It's very tough to do. When it comes to the First Lady, it's probably even tougher. (Leon Panetta interview, pp. 62-63)

Observers and analysts of the modern presidency have consistently acknowledged that the presidents' spouses have a deep understanding of electoral politics, an adversarial respect for media relations, a competitive attentiveness to partisan politics, and a sometimes ruthless determination to effect change. These are intellectual and political resources that are invaluable to the White House Office. And while the

<sup>48</sup> As quoted in Lesley Stahl. 1999. *Reporting Live*. New York: Simon & Schuster. p. 275.

<sup>49</sup> For an extended discussion of this conflict and the accompanying media coverage, see: James G. Benze, Jr., *Nancy Reagan: On the White House Stage*. Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2005. pp. 77-90.

first ladies have not been entirely lacking in self-interest, that self-interest has typically been closely aligned with that of the president. As Laura Bush's chief of staff, Anita McBride, observed,

As [President Bush] says, you know, [Laura Bush is] a woman of few words, but what she says is meaningful, and has always been a big support to him. So the fact that it was so well known in the White House by the staff, starting with [Chief of Staff] Andy Card on down, that Laura Bush was there not for herself, never was there for herself. She was there for her husband, and for the president.

And, in fact that was one of the conversations that we had when I met with her in November, 2004. She made that very clear. 'I'm not here for me, I'm here for George, and these are the things where I feel I can do to help what he's trying to accomplish.' (Anita McBride interview)

This is not a claim that can be made by many of the senior staff. Presidents, first ladies, and staff need to anticipate likely responses to the first lady's exercise of power and leadership in the White House Office.

### 3. The Permanent White House Staff

The importance of the first lady's relationships with the permanent White House staff can not be too strongly emphasized. These offices are possessed of extraordinary institutional memory and institutional capacity, their members having worked in the White House across multiple administrations. The staff has adapted to changes in the lifestyles, interests, and politics of the presidents, first ladies, families, and administrations.

First ladies' contacts with the chief usher's office, for example, begin before the inauguration and continue to the final moments of life in the White House. Throughout the presidential term, the chief usher's office is integral to creating events planned by the social secretary's office. As then-Usher Gary Walters relates in this story from the Ford administration, those shared responsibilities can create strong partnerships.

One of my most vivid memories of that period of time: [Chief Usher] Rex Scouten and [Social Secretary] Maria Downs, there was going to be this dinner and I don't remember right now which head of state was coming. It was in the Rose Garden. And there was a tornado warning in Washington. Of course, we're outside in a tent. A tornado. These things don't appear to fit together very well.

So, I walked from the Usher's Office, just inside the North Portico and I was going to the East Wing.... And as I rounded the corner into what some people call the East Garden Room ... there was Rex Scouten, the chief usher, and Maria Downs, the social secretary, both with their backs to me having a very quiet conversation. And they had their hands up on the mullions of the window and they are just standing there silhouetted against the outside, and these unbelievable black clouds in the distance. And it was just one of those private moments of the chief usher and the social secretary commiserating ... It was a very poignant moment that encapsulated all the details, everything that these two people went through to make this one event proper for the United States, for the President, for the head of state that was coming to visit, and it was all going to be possibly washed away by a simple storm.

Of course it did, and we went ahead and had the dinner outside. But that's one of those moments that have always stayed with me. It was a very poignant moment that encapsulated all the details, everything that these two people went through to make this one event proper for the United States, for the President, for the head of state that was coming to visit, and it was all going to be possibly washed away by a simple storm. (Gary Walters interview, pp. 27-28)

### 4. The Administration

During the presidential term, first ladies have worked closely with cabinet officers and other executives in the presidential administration to advance the president's priorities. Often, first ladies have traveled with cabinet members to showcase White House initiatives and departmental programs. Michelle Obama, for example, traveled with the vice president's spouse, Dr. Jill Biden, and – on varying occasions – with the secretaries of defense, homeland security, and health and human services, among others. She also appeared regularly with members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, emphasizing the president's concern for military families.

Centralizing policy in the White House has been on-going throughout the modern presidency, with departments and agencies directed to focus on policy implementation. Not surprisingly, executives have

resisted this loss of influence over policy formulation and development. These have been tensions that first ladies, like presidents themselves, have had to negotiate. Certainly the 1993 presidential task force for health care reform brought this need for negotiation to the fore. Peter Edelman, counselor to Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Donna E. Shalala, described the problem from the department's perspective.

It was not just that Hillary [Rodham Clinton] was going to be the lead person, but the decision-making was going to be controlled from the White House, by Hillary and Ira Magaziner and other people who were on the White House staff. ... It was a continuing frustration for HHS from the very beginning. Whether or not they thought that [HHS Secretary] Donna [Shalala] would be more pliable because she and Hillary had a relationship, Donna was continually irritated about that. Not on an ego level. It was because she and her staff felt, from a very early stage, that the White House was headed in a disastrous direction. She was constantly going to the White House and saying to Hillary this or that about content and being rebuffed. (Peter Edelman interview, p. 92)

In dealing with the consequences of centralizing policy-making in the White House, the first lady encounters the same opportunities and challenges that confront senior White House staff. But then, as discussed above, there is the added factor of the first lady's status as the president's marital partner. As the above discussion makes clear, the dynamics surrounding that singular role, in the context of policy, ambition, and power, are as difficult across the administration as they are within the White House Office.

## THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST LADY

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The president's spouse is the chief of a unit within the White House Office, which has historically been identified as the Office of the First Lady. Especially in recent presidencies, presidential spouses have been asked to do more – the tasks given them have become more diverse, more numerous, more difficult. Meanwhile, the political environment has become more complicated – polarization between the parties, schisms within the parties, culture wars over gender have all complicated communications strategies. These burdens are also imposed on the staff, who join the first lady in managing the political uncertainties and pioneering innovative responses. How the first lady rewards and disciplines staff, how she models working in the White House Office, how she inspires loyalty ... all these elements of leadership dramatically affect the organizational coherence and effectiveness of the staff and therefore of the spouse.

### 1. The First Lady as Chief: Staffing Decisions

Hiring and firing. Praise and promotion. These are the established mechanisms by which executives and managers controll their staff. However, not all first ladies have had this power. Particularly in the Nixon and Ford administrations, the president's chief of staff exercised considerable influence over first lady staffing decisions. Pat Nixon and Betty Ford expended considerable effort to keep control of their personnel decisions; Pat Nixon was able to retain some discretion, but both first ladies ultimately hired staff members recommended by the chief of staff. Rosalynn Carter fought a different battle. Her husband had made a campaign promise to cut the size of the White House Office. The assignment of greater policy and campaign work to the first lady was not factored into the ensuing staffing debates.<sup>50</sup>

Several first ladies have set their own standards in regard to critical leadership tasks. Lady Bird Johnson, who earned undergraduate degrees in journalism and in history, invested time and effort in both speechwriting and speechmaking; she was unable to convince the president to do likewise. In this and other instances, first ladies set a standard for themselves and for their staff, and had the power to sustain that standard even when it was contrary to the routines set in other White House offices.

In more recent administrations, first ladies have exercised significant discretion in making their personnel decisions, creating offices that are distinctively suited to their own priorities and practices. From the earliest days of the William J. Clinton presidency, for example, the first lady's office adhered to a tight

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<sup>50</sup> Gwendolyn B. King, Sanitized Oral History Interview, 1988. Nixon Presidential Materials. pp. 10-11. Sheila Rabb Weidenfeld, *First Lady's Lady, With the Fords at the White House*. New York: Putnam, 1979. pp. 157-176. See also T. Bertram Lance, Transcript, 2003. Carter Presidency Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia. pp. 28-29.

schedule. This structure and culture was largely absent from the West Wing until Leon Panetta became chief of staff, more than eighteen months into the presidential term.<sup>51</sup>

## 2. The First Lady as Chief: Staff Management

The first lady also needs to be a strong executive in order to avoid, or at least minimize, staff failures. When first ladies become too dependent on their staff, the potential for error increases exponentially. Then, the staff consumes and depletes the spouse's political capital. This was the result when Betty Ford's press secretary, Sheila Weidenfeld, failed to consider the different frames and coverage that would be provided by print and broadcast media, in regard to the first lady's *60 Minutes* interview. In that exchange, Ford defended the *Roe v. Wade* decision, advocated the legalization of marijuana, and acknowledged that many women engaged in premarital sex, all stances that generated a media and partisan firestorm.<sup>52</sup> Writing in his memoir, the president described this as an event that pushed him to recognize the rising power of the "Religious Right."<sup>53</sup>

For their part, staff stress the importance of having access to the first lady as their chief resource. This was especially evident in the Nixon administration when, as Penelope A. Adams, Pat Nixon's deputy press secretary, commented,

Well, I always felt there was a little bit of animosity, maybe, from at least some members of the President's staff toward – I don't know if it was animosity, but it was like we were a necessary evil, I guess. I think, in the back of their minds, all Mrs. Nixon did was tea parties or things like that. That really we didn't have much substance to our activities. (Penelope A. Adams interview)

When the work environment is discouraging and dismissive, strong countering messages from the first lady, as the chief of the office, are essential if the staff is to be effective.

Pat Nixon's director of correspondence, Gwendolyn King, stressed the affirmation that she received through her own connection with the first lady, especially during the Watergate scandal.

The morale kept up pretty well until the very last. The worst thing that happened was that the mail really increased; it almost doubled. It came in such great volumes that we had more form letters than we really wanted to have. We were sending up sometimes as many as five hundred letters a night for Mrs. Nixon to sign. ... Sometimes Mrs. Nixon would put a little personal note at the bottom of them. She read them, strangely enough, even with the form letter she would read the incoming, because I think she wanted just to get the feel of how things were going. She continued, and we continued to move the mail normally. We did not turn down anything that we would normally have done until that last Monday night before the Nixons left on Friday. Monday night we sent up a tremendous envelope of mail, and the next morning when I came to my desk, it was all back on my desk in my office, and it was not signed. That was the first time that had ever happened, and that's when we knew things were coming to an end. (Gwendolyn B. King interview, p. 29)

During these same weeks, the West Wing had cut off Pat Nixon's access to newspapers; King shared her own copies with the first lady. The packages of mail that King compiled for Pat Nixon were now even more important, because the first lady had so few connections to the world outside the White House.<sup>54</sup> In this administration, the first lady and the first lady's staff were deeply supportive of one another, presenting a united front to the West Wing and the wider public.

Other first ladies and staff have had similarly symbiotic relationships, providing professional and emotional support to the other. In the Clinton administration, the first lady's staff was fiercely loyal and supportive of its chief. Deputy Treasury Secretary Roger Altman stated,

There's an interesting difference [between Bill and Hillary Clinton] that always has struck everybody who's watched it up close, which is that she inspires fierce loyalty and he doesn't. You look at the turnover that she

<sup>51</sup> On Panetta's performance as a strong chief of staff, see: Charles E. Walcott, Shirley Anne Warshaw, and Stephen J. Wayne, "Report No. 21: The Chief of Staff." The White House 2001 Project, Released 17 December 2000.

<sup>52</sup> Sheila Rabb Weidenfeld, *First Lady's Lady, With the Fords at the White House*. New York: Putnam, 1979. pp. 157-176. See also: MaryAnne Borrelli, "Competing Conceptions of the First Ladyship: Public Responses to Betty Ford's *60 Minutes* Interview," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 31.3 (September 2001): 397-414. See also:

<sup>53</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal, The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979. pp. 295, 306-307,

<sup>54</sup> See Gwendolyn B. King interview, p. 30.



had – or in her case did not have – on her staff, and the turnover that he had. You look at the relationships he ended up having with a lot of people that he was initially close to and were central to his administration, whether it's George Stephanopoulos or whoever else it may be. She inspired, continues to inspire, fierce loyalty and he doesn't. It's quite a difference and I ascribe it to the fact that she does not look at the world as, or at least in my experience, as solely and only politically. She wears her heart on her sleeve much more than he does. Less and less now that she's her own public figure, but that's her nature. (Roger Altman interview, p. 67)

Clinton Deputy Chief of Staff Joan Baggett noted that this commitment provided the first lady with both organizational and emotional support, but that it could also somewhat isolate the first lady.

I had a good relationship with [the first lady's staff]. Because [Hillary Clinton] did a lot of political travel, we did a lot of briefings. ... [Chief of Staff] Maggie [Williams], they were all, they were very protective. You only broke through if you had personal relationships with the individuals, which I did with Maggie and some of the others, and for the most part our staff had good relations with their staff. So we were okay. (Joan Baggett interview, p. 58)

### 3. *The West Wing*

Good relationships between the East Wing and West Wing are essential to maximizing the effectiveness of the first lady as a presidential surrogate and adviser.

The office of the first lady is formally a unit in the White House Office, but it has manifested a distinctive mixture of independence from and dependence on other White House Office units.<sup>55</sup> The first lady's staff have achieved a measure of independence, because, like the president and vice president, the first lady is considered a principal within the White House. As Laura Bush's chief of staff, Anita McBride, recounted,

So the benefit of having worked [in the White House], knowing a lot of the people who were in decision-making capacities that would affect our life, like [Chief of Staff] Andy Card, you know, obviously, I had known him at that point for two decades already and had worked with him as chief of staff. You know, he gave me some of the best advice when I was hired.

He said, 'Look, you have one client. Your client is Laura Bush. You manage her office, you take care of what she wants. If she's happy, then the president will be, too.' And because President Bush wanted Laura – he depended on her and he respected her. (Anita McBride interview)

At the same time, the first lady's staff are dependent upon other White House units because senior staff control resources that are needed by the first lady. When one remembers that first ladies and senior staff have sometimes been at odds, it becomes clear why she needs to be a skilled executive.

In regard to East Wing – West Wing staff relations, the first ladies' staff have stressed the importance of attending the daily West Wing meetings at which senior staff are briefed. The 7:30am meeting has been critical for the first lady's chief of staff, for instance.

In the William J. Clinton administration, attendance at the 10am scheduling meeting in the Old Executive Office Building was also essential to a strong performance by the first lady's staff. As Joan Baggett, the president's deputy chief of staff for political affairs, described these meetings,

It was run by the President's scheduler and he would have all the major offices represented. So the First Lady's office would be there, Political Affairs, Intergovernmental, Public Liaison, anybody that had events on. From some of those departments you might have more than one person, depending on what events were on or coming up, or were being lobbied for, on the schedule. I'm trying to remember, in a typical scheduling meeting, how far out we discussed the schedule. Sometimes there would be a block scheduling meeting and that was longer-range look at what was coming up. (Joan Baggett interview, p. 85)

<sup>55</sup> Anthony J. Eksterowicz and Kristen Paynter, "The Evolution of the Role and Office of the First Lady: The Movement Toward Integration with the White House Office," in *The Presidential Companion, Readings on the First Ladies*, ed. Robert P. Watson and Anthony J. Eksterowicz. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003. pp. 210-229.

McBride also stressed the importance of attending the daily meetings conducted by the West Wing press secretary and the communications director.

You know, having that added voice is so important for the administration, plus there's just so much interest, now that the 24-hour news cycle, people are always paying attention to what the first family is doing in general. So, I think in administrations going forward, it's in their best interests to know how to cultivate and use the very important platform and voice that comes out of the East Wing, and to have people on the West Wing side working very closely with the East Wing team.

... having the first lady or the president's spouse's press secretary be a member of the communications team and sit in on those morning meetings that the press secretary hosts and that the communications director hosts. That's really important, they should be completely married up. And those are things we were able to do from the get-go. (Anita McBride interview)

These meetings provided opportunities for staff to establish formal and informal channels of communication. The meetings were also important as opportunities for the first lady's staff to exercise power across the White House Office: Awarding presidential commissions to some senior staff in the first lady's office indicated that the president identified these persons as senior White House staff; attending the daily meetings expressed that heightened status.

The first lady's staff attended other West Wing meetings, depending upon the spouse's role in the associated policies or decision-making processes. In the William J. Clinton administration, for example, a senior staff member from the first lady's office regularly attended the meetings at which prospective judicial appointees were evaluated. Clinton White House Counsel Abner Mikva remembered,

The judicial nomination process was one of the nicest, most efficient processes I was involved in at the White House Counsel's Office. We would meet, usually once a week, with [Eleanor Dean] Eldie Acheson from the Justice Department, Jack Quinn from the Vice President's office – or somebody in the Vice President's office, Jack was Chief of Staff – somebody from Hillary's [Clinton] office, and me. ...

[Hillary Rodham Clinton] participated at almost all meetings and was very active. I had the feeling that she was content with that – that and the fact that she had the last word. [laughter] She never talked to me about nominees. I don't remember her being involved in any strategy sessions about the judges. But [the first lady's chief of staff] Melanne Verveer usually sat in with us, and I think Melanne regularly consulted with [Hillary Clinton]. (Abner Mikva interview, pp. 18, 23)

Press operations are another revealing example of why good relationships need to be cultivated between the East and West Wings. As previously noted, the first lady's press secretary has some discretion in selecting which outlets will have access to the spouse. If the East Wing and West Wing coordinate their media relations, the administration gains greater opportunities for favorable coverage. At the same time, East Wing selectivity can strain relations with the West Wing. As a senior communications staff member in Laura Bush's office stated about the White House press corps,

They had a president filter. ... So we went around the press room which gave [Press Secretary] Dana [Perino] a lot of heartache because she had to stand in front of them every single day but we got better coverage and we were able to tell the story more authentically ...<sup>56</sup>

The first lady's staff also need to establish good relations with the White House Counsel's Office. For example, new questions for the counsel frequently arise in regard to the proper disposition of gifts from both the general public and from chiefs of state, even though there are well-established procedures in place. This is a matter of concern because, in past administrations, the first lady's receipt of gifts has generated critical media coverage. In the Reagan administration, gifts accepted by the first lady also led to tax problems and fines, which further increased negative coverage during and after the presidential term.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> As quoted in Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President, Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger. p. 67.

<sup>57</sup> Howard Kurtz, "IRS Looking into Gifts to Reagans," *Washington Post*, December 5, 1989. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1989/12/05/irs-looking-into-gifts-to-reagans/93484b2b-d5f0-430b-ad93-04dd967432f2/>



#### 4. The Permanent White House Staff

The staff is often the first lady's emissary to the permanent staff of the White House. Sometimes, social secretaries have pushed for changes that the chief ushers question or resist. Clinton Social Secretary Ann Stock described this desire for change as most marked during the presidential honeymoon period, when all staff members are establishing relationships with one another.

... make sure you're communicating with [the permanent White House staff] really well and don't surprise them. So I had [Chief Usher] Gary [Walters], obviously, in my staff meetings. You ... obviously want to make it work and make it work really well, and they control a lot of levers [so] that if they're not happy, it can be a challenge. ...

... Only one time did I ever have to say to him – I was kind of joking with him – I said 'Are you really going to make me go to the Clintons with this? You're not, are you? Because this is what they want to do.' He's like, 'You're not going to go to the Clintons.' [And I said,] 'Because if I do, I'm going to have to come back to you and tell you I won.' And we laughed and he's like, 'No, I'm not.' (Ann Stock interview)

When the first lady has to mediate conflicts between the permanent White House staff and the staff of the White House Office, she is actually confronting two sets of staff that each have the power to elevate or undermine her reputation. If the first lady fails to exercise leadership, she will lose the full complement of expertise provided by the White House Office staff with its personal and partisan loyalties, and provided by the permanent White House staff with their commitment to the White House and the presidency.

#### 5. The Administration

Historically, there have been close relationships between the first lady's staff and the careerists throughout the executive branch bureaucracy. When the first ladies' projects and policy work has been connected with a department or agency, for instance, detailees from that same department or agency provided needed expertise. In Lady Bird Johnson's office, to give one example, staff members were drawn from the Department of the Interior (to support her beautification work, which included showcasing the national parks) and from the Department of State (to provide expertise in broadcast media, since the first lady's own press secretary had been a print journalist).<sup>58</sup> These arrangements have become the norm, with staff members in the first lady's office and in cabinet departments in regular contact with one another. In the Obama administration, as a current example, detailees have been integral to leadership of the *Let's Move!*, *Joining Forces*, and *Reach Higher* initiatives.

Without exception, in every administration, the duties associated with social outreach and entertainment of visiting dignitaries have led to close collaboration between the East Wing (especially the social secretary), the West Wing, the permanent White House staff, and the State Department. When traveling abroad and hosting events, the first lady and staff have also consistently worked with the National Security Advisor and the National Security Council staff. (See the section, "Using the Symbolic Power of the White House.")

Correspondence has also led the first ladies' staff to reach out to the executive departments and agencies. Throughout the modern presidency, staff working for the first ladies have regularly undertaken what would be identified as "casework" in a congressional office, following through on questions and requests submitted by correspondents. In the Hoover administration, this responsive outreach led to the establishment of a national network, with volunteers throughout the country visiting letter writers from the area who requested aid, assessing their circumstances, and providing access to support services and even to financial sources.<sup>59</sup> Decades later, in the Nixon administration, the first lady insisted that queries referred to executive departments be tracked to ensure the responses were prompt and helpful, identifying

<sup>58</sup> For a discussion of the work performed by detailees in Lady Bird Johnson's office, see: Sharon Francis Oral History, Interviews I through IV, conducted June 27, 1969. The Lyndon B. Johnson Library. The first lady collaborated and traveled with Interior Secretary Stewart Udall throughout the presidential term, and Francis was detailed to provide staff support for the first lady's beautification programs. The State Department detailee was Simone Poulain, who had established a strong reputation for her television work with Dean Rusk throughout the Eisenhower administration. Louise Hutchinson, "About Women in Washington," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 June 1968, section 2, p. 15. See also: Elizabeth Carpenter interview pp. 41-42.

<sup>59</sup> MaryAnne Borrelli, *The Politics of the President's Wife*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. pp. 172-175.

programs and resources that met the letter writers' needs.<sup>60</sup> The Nixon practices continued in subsequent administrations; there are boxes and boxes of public correspondence in the presidential libraries, which have cross-references to the executive departments and agencies contacted by the first lady's staff on the letter writers' behalf.

In addition to these policy and constituent concerns, the first ladies and their staff have reached out to executive departments with more specific queries. For example, when first ladies have held leadership positions on presidential commissions (as did Rosalynn Carter) or presidential task forces (as did Hillary Rodham Clinton), there have been extended consultations with the Department of Justice – often, with the Office of Legal Counsel – regarding the legalities surrounding these appointments and the subsequent performance of the associated duties.<sup>61</sup>

## STAFF ARRANGEMENTS IN THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST LADY

The appendices to this report provide staff lists and organizational diagrams for the Office of the First Lady, from the Carter through the Obama administration. With three Democratic and three Republican administrations, extending across fifty years, these materials indicate how first ladies with different policy and partisan commitments have organized their staff.

Staff interviews across the administrations stress that the first lady's office has been intentionally organized (and reorganized) in response to functional and political demands made by the West Wing, by presidential and congressional campaign organizations; and by the first ladies. Thus, the lists and charts illustrate how first ladies and staff have organized in response to the political environments that surrounded them.<sup>62</sup>

In the section that follows, the focus is on the office as it was organized in the administration's final year. Selecting the fourth or the eighth year, as appropriate, offers two advantages.

- \* These are the staffing arrangements for presidential re-election years, when the first lady is contributing both to campaigning and governing, and when the White House staff is confronting more demands and greater media scrutiny.
- \* This is also the point of the administration at which "title creep" is likely at its maximum. Foreknowledge of how the titles and positions within the first lady's office will evolve can provide some anticipatory information about promotions and innovations. Additionally, since one administration is often perceived as setting a standard for the next, even when there is partisan change in the Oval Office, the "ending point" of one administration may be the "beginning point" for its successor.

While there are important consistencies from one administration to the next, the first lady's office remains organizationally flexible. Staffing arrangements reflect the priorities of the first ladies, as endorsed (via presidential commissions) by the president.

### CONSISTENT STAFF ARRANGEMENTS

Like presidents, first ladies have determined that certain staffing posts and structures are required, if they are to perform their duties. Each of the following elements has been present in virtually every first lady's office from the Carter administration onward.

<sup>60</sup> See Gwendolyn B. King interview, pp. 17-19.

<sup>61</sup> MaryAnne Borrelli, "The First Lady as Formal Advisor to the President: When East (Wing) Meets West (Wing)," *Women and Politics* 24.1 (2002): 25-45.

<sup>62</sup> White House subunits specializing in public outreach are routinely heavily affected by the political environment. See Charles E. Walcott and Karen M. Hult, *Governing the White House: From Hoover Through LBJ*. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1995. Karen M. Hult and Charles E. Walcott, *Empowering the White House: Governance under Nixon, Ford, and Carter*. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2004.

### 1. Distinct Personal and Political Staff

In each office, there have been personal assistants and political experts. With two exceptions, personal assistants have reported directly to the first lady, while political staff have reported to the first lady's chief of staff. The two exceptions occurred during the Reagan and the George W. Bush administrations. In the Reagan administration, the first lady's special assistant reported through the first lady's chief of staff. In the George W. Bush administration, Laura Bush's "personal aide" reported directly to the first lady, *and* interacted directly with the directors of specialized subunits, including the press secretary and the social secretary.

### 2. The Personal Staff

Each first lady has been assisted by personal staff, who have assumed responsibility for tasks relating specifically to the family and to the work performed directly by the presidential spouse. In the Carter administration, for example, the first lady's personal staff assumed responsibility for Amy Carter's schedule, and for the first lady's correspondence, administrative work, and some press relations.<sup>63</sup>

Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, Laura Bush, and Michelle Obama each listed one special assistant or personal aide among their staff; Reagan's special assistant was supported by a staff assistant. Rosalynn Carter had a personal secretary and a personal administrative assistant, both of whom reported to her personal assistant. Hillary Rodham Clinton had the largest personal staff, according to the formal listings, with an executive assistant aided by three special assistants.

### 3. The Political Staff: Social Secretary, Press and Communications, and Chief of Staff

These three specializations trace their origins to very different historical periods in the emergence of the modern White House. In each instance, the functions associated with the post had been performed for many years previously. The tasks were not new. What was new and innovative about these posts was the formal recognition being given by the president to the expertise and the contributions of the first lady and her staff. That investment of human and political capital in the first lady's office has yielded high dividends to the president throughout the term and during the campaigns.

*The social secretary post* was established during the Theodore Roosevelt administration; it was then increasingly common for society matrons to employ another woman, of similar status but with lesser economic resources, to serve as their aides in planning and conducting events throughout "the Season."<sup>64</sup> When Edith Carew Roosevelt insisted that her husband provide a government-funded social secretary to help her with social entertainment at the White House, she made a claim to power that was both societal and political. In the words of Carter social secretary, Gretchen Poston,

If we look today back at the four years [of a presidential term], every administration cannot escape being known for the visual things they did in the House. So a person in this [social secretary] position could have destroyed the image [of the administration] or ... could have had a lot to do with that image. ... The [social secretary] title is such a misnomer ... but it's now become such a classic title. But it has much more to do with management and much more to do with coordinating ... Sure, menus are there, but much more is involved. (Gretchen Poston interview)

*The press secretary post* was first formally established as an assistant social secretary for press relations post in the Kennedy administration, separating the first lady's media relations from the president's. Lady Bird Johnson removed the post from under the social secretary's supervision, naming Liz Carpenter her staff director and press secretary. A widely known and well respected journalist, Carpenter was a longtime friend of the Johnsons; she had already served on Lyndon Johnson's vice presidential staff, as the first

<sup>63</sup> Donnie Radcliffe, "Life as the First Lady's Confidante and 'Protector,'" *Washington Post*, 14 April 1977. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1977/04/14/life-as-the-first-ladys-confidante-and-protector/6ac7e34a-6759-4c0a-819b-b34d0edf4ffc/>

<sup>64</sup> Edith Benham Helm, *The Captains and the Kings*. New York: Putnam, 1954.

woman to be a vice president's administrative assistant. Carpenter's access to the president was pivotal to overcoming the opposition of senior West Wing staff to an activist first lady.<sup>65</sup>

This melding of the media relations, communications, and chief of staff responsibilities continued until late in the Carter administration. Then, the position was divided into a staff director's post and a press secretary post.<sup>66</sup> The further division between press and communications did not formally emerge until the Clinton administration, which also saw a clarification of these specializations in the West Wing. The two functions continue to be somewhat overlapping in the first lady's office, in part because so much of her press relations are connected to communications.

A discussion of first lady press relations would be incomplete without a historical note regarding Eleanor Roosevelt's work in this arena. Across her twelve-plus years as first lady, Roosevelt conducted 348 press conferences, holding them on a weekly basis while she was in Washington. With the exception of those relating to her work in the Office of Civilian Defense (1942-1943) and those conducted following her return from the Pacific (1943), her press conferences were open only to full-time women reporters. Because Roosevelt did not hesitate to comment on presidential policy- and decision-making, news outlets were disadvantaged if they did not have a woman journalist on staff. In addition to this outreach, Roosevelt was a prolific writer and lecturer. Her syndicated daily column, *My Day*, ran from 1936 through 1962; her publications appeared in virtually every major women's magazine and most of the major political newsmagazines. As first lady, she set herself the goal of earning as much money as the president and she succeeded in the first year, with an income of \$75,000 from her publications and lectures.<sup>67</sup> Roosevelt's outreach was not continued by her immediate successors, and the sheer quantity of her writing remains unequaled, but her use of the press to facilitate her public outreach has gradually emerged as a hallmark of the modern first ladyship.

Media formats and technology have shaped the work of the first lady and the first lady's press secretary. Coverage of the president's wife has moved from the social pages to the style pages to the news pages – and then off the page into broadcast and electronic media. As Mary Hoyt observed of her own experiences as a journalist during the Nixon administration and as the first lady's press secretary in the Carter administration,

I mean I used to write down 'Mrs. Nixon had on white pumps and ... she wore pearl earrings,' you know, and ... how she kept her lingerie drawer which she showed us. Well, I can't imagine a first lady showing a reporter how she kept her lingerie drawer now. It's just a whole different thing. (Mary Hoyt interview)

(For a further and more detailed discussion of press relations and communications strategies, see the section titled, "The First Lady on the Public Stage: Routes to Success.")

The chief of staff title was first used, in the first lady's office, in the Reagan administration. Staff leadership, like press relations, had previously been provided by the social secretary. When Lady Bird Johnson diversified her public outreach and staffing, the first lady's press secretary – the individual who was responsible for that development – assumed responsibility for coordinating the staff. The "staff director and press secretary" post, sometimes known as the "East Wing coordinator and press secretary" continued until the final year of the Carter administration, when it was separated into a staff director post and a press secretary post.

*The chief of staff* title was first held by a man, James S. Rosebush; he succeeded another man, Peter McCoy, whose title was staff director for the first lady. These were the first men to hold leadership posts in the first lady's office and the first in their posts to receive presidential commissions; they were both

<sup>65</sup> Liz Carpenter, *Ruffles and Flourishes, The Warm and Tender Story of a Simple Girl Who Found Adventure in the White House*. New York: Doubleday, 1970. See also Liz Carpenter's extensive documentary materials, located at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library.

<sup>66</sup> See Mary Hoyt Exit Interview (taped) 1980, National Archives and Records Administration. Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>67</sup> Maurine Beasley, *The White House Press Conferences of Eleanor Roosevelt*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1983. p. 1-2, *passim*. Blanche Wiessen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. II, 1933-1938*. New York: Viking, 1999. p. 3, *passim*. See also: Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

deputy assistants to the president.<sup>68</sup> The next time that a first lady's chief of staff received a presidential commission was in the William J. Clinton administration, when the woman serving as the first lady's chief of staff was named an assistant to the president.

The expertise of the first ladies' social secretaries, press secretaries, and chiefs of staff has strengthened the spouses' performance as a presidential adviser, a political actor, and a presidential surrogate. In other words, these posts have endured because their occupants have consistently met the standard set for all members of the White House Office, to extend the reach and power of the president.

## **CHANGING AND EMERGING STAFF ARRANGEMENTS**

The organizational innovations described in the previous section – formally acknowledging the work and contributions of the first lady and her staff, providing more specialized support as the first lady reaches out to more diverse audiences in more diverse ways, bringing greater organizational coherence to the staffing that supports the first lady – are continuing. Though the changes are not linear, or even predictable, three are sufficiently enduring and significant that they merit careful consideration as future presidential spouses organize their offices.

### **1. The Value of Generalists: The Chief of Staff**

The first lady's staff director, as the post was titled in the Carter administration, has variously acquired an executive assistant (in Nancy Reagan's office); two staff assistants (in Barbara Bush's office); an assistant and policy adviser, a deputy, an assistant to the deputy, and an assistant to the deputy and director of research (in Hillary Rodham Clinton's office); an executive assistant and personal aide (in Laura Bush's office); and a special assistant (in Michelle Obama's office). Depending on the administration, then, there have been from one to four layers of staff within the subunit led by the first lady's chief of staff.

Laura Bush's chief of staff, Anita McBride, found that staffing support was absolutely essential given the heavy workload she confronted.

In so many ways, I went to it expecting that I had to do it all, that I had to the operational side of our office, hiring all the personnel, managing their reviews; managing the admin side of it while also taking on this very important and serious directive from Laura Bush to be engaged in both domestic policy and international policy issues where she can contribute to the president.

After about two years of that, I was completely drained. It was too much. Nobody has run it that way since – and, in fact, the Obamas came in, they have a deputy chief of staff for the operational side, Melissa Winter, which really handles a lot of the office-type duties, the personnel, ... Mrs. Obama ... Tina Tchen and Susan Sher before her and the person before that [Jackie Norris] were focusing on her policy engagement. So I was doing both, and it was a lot. I had great people on our team, but still I felt this burden of never having enough time to devote to either one.

... So, I was able to, in the last year, hire a deputy chief of staff for the operations side. ... having her hired as the special assistant to the president and deputy chief of staff, it really helped to free up a lot of my time so that we could make sure that we're not dropping any balls on the policy side. (Anita McBride interview)

Additionally, the different organizational arrangements associated with the first ladies' chief of staff post have had important consequences for the spouse and for the staff.

Most obviously, having more "layers" of staff in the chief of staff office increased the distance between the spouse and the more specialized staff. In the Carter administration, the first lady was separated, in formal organizational terms, from her specialized staff – her directors, her press secretary, her social secretary – only by the chief of staff. In the Clinton administration, this separation had grown, with four layers between the chief of staff and the specialized staff. More layers meant more filters between the first lady and the specialized staff.

<sup>68</sup> "Nomination of Peter McCoy to be an Undersecretary of Commerce," 5 November 1981. The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43208> "Appointment of James S. Rosebush as Deputy Assistant to the President," 8 January 1982. The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41865>

Perhaps less obviously, having more staff in the chief of staff office meant the first lady (a) relied more heavily on generalists and (b) integrated policy work throughout the office. Those staffing the first lady's chief of staff necessarily took a wider and more encompassing view of the first lady's responsibilities and roles, in keeping with their responsibilities for coordinating the staff. This dictated a generalist perspective. Hillary Clinton qualified this reliance by formally identifying two individuals in her chief of staff subunit with more specific tasks – there was an assistant to the chief of staff and policy adviser, an assistant to the deputy chief of staff and director of research. But she did not have a specialized director of projects (as did Barbara Bush), a specialized policy adviser (as did Michelle Obama), or a specialized research associate or assistant (as did Rosalynn Carter and Michelle Obama). By assigning policy roles to individuals working in her chief of staff subunit, Clinton organizationally integrated policy work throughout her office, rather than reserving it to a single specialized individual.

Looking ahead, first ladies will need to carefully consider how they define the role of their chief of staff. The first lady's access and accessibility to specialized staff, the preference for a generalist's or a specialist's political judgment, and the integration of the spouse's constitutive responsibilities throughout the office will all be strongly influenced by the structure of this subunit.

## 2. The Need for Specialization: Correspondence, Advance and Scheduling, and Projects / Policy

Four specializations have appeared in most, but not all, of the first lady's offices in the past six administrations: correspondence, advance, scheduling, and projects / policy. It seems likely that each of these will eventually be formally recognized as a necessary specialization within the first lady's office in every administration, since each is so important to the first lady's political effectiveness.

*The correspondence subunit* has crafted responses to both public bulk mail and formal queries from political officials. In the Nixon administration, the correspondence director also wrote remarks and speeches for the first lady. Since the correspondence director sorted and answered the mail, compiling a daily sample of letters to be read by the first lady, they also provided the first lady with a window onto the political environment. In turn, the first lady could use the correspondence as a form of public outreach.<sup>69</sup>

Of the modern first ladies, Pat Nixon relied most heavily on this channel of communication, spending approximately four hours each day on correspondence. Gwendolyn B. King, her correspondence director, viewed this as a product of Nixon's political experience.

[Mrs. Nixon] had been on the Hill, and she said, 'I used to volunteer in the office up there. It means,' she kept saying, 'it means so much to answer these letters, and we cannot be careless about it.' So I think that, because she wanted it that way, the West Wing suddenly treated the correspondence with greater respect. Certainly they were very much impressed with the messages that we wrote for the First Lady. They were substantial messages, they weren't flimsy things. I had three excellent writers on my staff, and we all worked together. (Gwendolyn B. King interview, p. 43)

Correspondence has continued to be a channel of communication between the first lady and the wider public, showcasing her responsiveness. Ann Haas, in Rosalynn Carter's correspondence office, concluded,

A lot of [the letters] are [written in] desperation, I think. They don't know who else to write to and they know that [the first lady] has visibility and may be inclined to be sympathetic. We actually had a telephone call from a woman who didn't even know that she had a congressman – that she had a representative in Congress. So she's dealing with Mrs. Carter. (Anne Haas interview)

Perhaps this need to have and to demonstrate accessibility is why efforts to combine the president's and the first lady's correspondence subunits have been limited, with first ladies from Barbara Bush onward maintaining their own correspondence operations.

The advance and scheduling subunits provide staffing support that affects all aspects of the first lady's political work. One or both of these subunits has been formally included in all of the first lady's offices since the Nixon administration, except for that of Hillary Rodham Clinton. It may be that in her office, these functions were performed by members of the chief of staff subunit. Notably, Clinton's successors devoted significant personnel resources to these functional specializations. Laura Bush staff included both a director of advance and a director of scheduling, who were supported by a (sometimes shared) deputy

<sup>69</sup> See Gwendolyn B. King interview, pp. 43-44.



director of advance and scheduling. Michelle Obama's director of scheduling and advance was supported by a deputy director, three associate directors, and a scheduler. Formal recognition of the advance and scheduling specializations within the first lady's office seems likely to continue, as the first lady's role as a presidential surrogate shows every sign of expanding.

Rosalynn Carter's director of advance, Carroll Ann Rambo, stressed that this position often involved explaining the first lady's personal and political interests to diverse publics. Family and friends were often among these "publics." In the 1976 campaign, Rambo noted, Rosalynn Carter had regularly stayed with people "in their home, in the spare bedroom and that sort of thing." As first lady, however, as Rambo had to explain,

... if you want to do anything like that, it takes an awful lot of preparation – more people, telephones go in, all sorts of things that didn't exist then. So it's also a matter of very gently letting hosts know that she is the same person but unfortunately as first lady there are other things that come along with it. (Carroll Ann Rambo interview)

Though present-day campaigns seldom have a candidate's spouse sleeping in a spare bedroom, the demands associated with being a presidential spouse – no longer "merely" the spouse of a presidential candidate – remain for advance staff to manage.

Travel by the first lady also typically involves making contacts with local officials, speaking with and on behalf of members of Congress, and providing good opportunities for press coverage. When the first lady travels with the president, their schedules and outreach are designed to maximize media outreach, and to provide some spend time together or with family members. Deputy Assistant to the President Dwight Chapin described this coordination of the president's and the first lady's schedules for the 1974 China trip.

Right, the real significance of China was in the timing, because you basically have a 12-hour difference. So when we were getting up in the morning and starting something, people at home would just be – it would be nighttime. So when we want to go out to the Great Wall of China and have satellite feeds of that in the morning, it's going to be seen in prime time nightly news or nighttime specials. And the networks had prime time specials of all of this. In the evening, when we were doing the banquets and so forth, or going to sporting shows or whatever it might be, we would have the morning news shows, you know, the 'Today' show, the ABC show, you name it. But we had all of this figured out ahead of time, all of the itineraries. So we maximized our use of it and the exposure of the President in any number of different situations. When he wasn't available, we used Mrs. Nixon. (Dwight Chapin interview, p. 53)

Advance, therefore, has had to work closely with East Wing and West Wing staff to ensure that the full range of goals in presidential travel and outreach are achieved.

In the George W. Bush administration, Laura Bush's travel was closely interwoven with the president's policy agenda, albeit with careful distinctions drawn between the issue areas of the first lady and the chief executive: George Bush was the commander-in-chief of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, while Laura Bush focused on health, particularly reproductive and women's health. Anita McBride, the first lady's chief of staff, stressed that Laura Bush's effectiveness as a presidential surrogate abroad was predicated upon close relationships between the East Wing and West Wing staff.

A real groundbreaking [trip] in July of 2005 that we did with Cherie Blair. Remember that year? That's when the Brits hosted the G-8, and the big focus of the G-8 in 2005 was African development.

And so President Bush had had two years of the PEPFAR [President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief] platform, obviously, to promote. The President's malaria initiative had just been announced about six months prior to that, or actually, was getting ready to be launched at the UN in a few months going forward.

Mrs. Bush was quickly becoming sort of the face of the PEPFAR program, going to visit all of these countries in Africa, seeing, really, what the lifesaving initiative was, what the results were, and bringing that back. So, we had already started – and then we took a trip to the Middle East – albeit, a bit controversial, but – we had launched ... a breast cancer program.

We were getting involved in a lot of very serious global policy issues that were supporting the Administration. Burma came a little bit later, but yes, we were already starting that and so she was engaged in human rights, in global health, in global education, in launching an African education initiative.

[Chief of Staff] Josh [Bolten], I think, as a policy person, was able to evaluate the level of contribution that Laura Bush's engagement was making and helping the president. As increasingly the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were taking a lot of the president's time, his ability to go travel some of these places were reduced. Going

back to that point, a first lady is a very effective surrogate and Josh handed us – things began to change a little bit for me and I was very happy with the way we were able to get what we needed. All the assets, all the support, the NSC policy person that was assigned to us, our key people in our office being fully integrated with the domestic policy council, with the National Security Council, with the communications team. (Anita McBride interview)

If the first lady adopts a communications strategy that involves extensive international and domestic travel to showcase the policy priorities and accomplishments of the administration, it will require a corresponding investment in staff and expertise. In addition to the coordination work by advance specialists, policy subunits throughout the White House Office and Executive Office of the President will be drawn into planning. As McBride notes, and as prior staff have testified, international travel has dictated that the first lady and her staff consult with the national security adviser and the National Security Council staff. Documents deposited with the presidential libraries indicate that Pat Nixon, Rosalynn Carter, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Laura Bush all received extensive briefings in advance of their international travel, as part of efforts to coordinate their public diplomacy with on-going security and trade negotiations.

Another, and difficult, element of advance work for the first lady has involved anticipating the popular response to her presence. A higher public profile has elicited stronger popular responses. Clinton Chief of Staff Thomas “Mack” McLarty observed of Hillary Rodham Clinton,

She engendered tremendous enthusiasm around the world as well as here in the United States. So you have very strong positive feelings. But you’re correct: very, very strong negative feelings, some of it from the business community, particularly with healthcare. Even before was the fact that it was felt she was very liberal and had a strong influence on the president. It was a lightning rod in that regard, even from pretty responsible business sources. I certainly got an earful of that on more than one occasion. (Thomas “Mack” McLarty, III interview, p. 73)

At times, opposition has forced the first lady to change communications strategies. As anti-war protests increased, Lady Bird Johnson’s press secretary, Liz Carpenter, shifted the first lady’s travel from urban centers to rural and wilderness areas. When Pat Nixon’s staff failed to take protests into account, the first lady lost control of the narrative: Many of the reporters covering Nixon found her response to the anti-war protesters more interesting than the initiatives she was attempting to showcase. Advance work, in brief, is critical to the effectiveness of the first lady as a political actor in her own right and as a presidential surrogate.

The projects or policy subunits were formally instituted in First Lady Rosalynn Carter’s office, were present in First Lady Barbara Bush’s office, and then again in First Lady Michelle Obama’s office. Carter’s director of projects, Kathy Cade, listed the key tasks of her post, not incidentally contrasting it with West Wing policy posts.

And there are so many issues that demand the president’s attention and the attention of other senior staff ... that if you don’t have an advocate, somewhere, lots of times you just get lost in the shuffle. And [Mrs. Carter] was very much in that role and enjoyed doing that. ...

Mine was really an extraordinary job because even people who worked on the domestic policy staff didn’t have the kind of access to the president that I had to [the first lady]. And we really operated outside the bureaucracy. Which gives you an enormous amount of flexibility and allows you to accomplish a whole lot more than if you have to work through various layers. And basically, it’s also much more fun. ... It gives you a sense that you’ve got a job to do and once you get it done, then there’s a sense of accomplishment. (Kathy Cade interview)

In the Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush administrations, policy expertise seems to have been provided to the first lady by her press secretary and her communications staff, as was done in earlier administrations. That reintegration was particularly well-suited to Nancy Reagan’s policy outreach, since her anti-drug initiative, “Just Say No,” was centered in media outreach.

Though there were separate policy and press secretary posts in Laura Bush’s office, the two worked very closely together. This was a partnership encouraged by Chief of Staff Anita McBride, as part of her larger effort to be as responsive as possible to the political environment.

I tried to be as organized as I possibly could so that I could be responsive to the unplanned occurrences. But it would be a lot of meetings – I always had a meeting at least three to four times a week with my senior team,



the policy director and the press secretary. We were always going through long-range scheduling and planning events and travel for Mrs. Bush, or events that we would be having in the White House.

It was really closely knit. My policy director and the press secretary were just with each other all the time.  
(Anita McBride interview)

In contrast, Michelle Obama has established a series of subunits that provide politically- and substantively-driven policy advising. These most directly include a director of policy and projects (who is a deputy assistant to the president) and a director of special projects, but she also is staffed by a counsel (who is an associate counsel to the president), a senior adviser (who is a deputy assistant to the president), and a director of strategic planning (who is a special assistant to the president). Elevating these posts with presidential commissions sends a clear message about the importance that the administration attaches to the first lady's policy-centered work.

### 3. Presidential Commissions

The presidential commission confers status; it is a coveted and valued resource. When awarded to staff members in the first lady's office, commissions remind others in the White House Office, throughout the administration, and across the Washington community that the first lady's staff is also the president's staff. Reflecting on these realities, Anita McBride noted that the William J. Clinton administration had made a profound statement about the status of the first lady's office through the use of a presidential commission.

I remember in the Clinton Administration, the [chief of staff] title was elevated to Assistant to the President, and that really, in my recollection, and you may know differently, is the first time that it was elevated. I think Maggie Williams had it.

... I can understand why they did it, given that that was the first time the first lady's office was in the West Wing. I mean, they were setting a whole different stage. They really broke a glass ceiling there for the chief of staff to the First Lady. They really sent a message. This was serious, they were going to be engaged at the highest levels of the White House.

And, as you know from studying the White House, there are a couple of things that really do matter in the hierarchy there. One is location, you know, if you're able to be in the West Wing, and two is title. You know, the commissioned officer titles really do mean something. (Anita McBride interview)

Serving as chief of staff to the first lady and as an assistant to the president, both, is a forthright reminder that this individual should be included in critical staff meetings. Maria Downs, Betty Ford's social secretary, is seemingly the first East Wing staffer to receive a presidential commission. Downs reported that the first lady forthrightly stated that the commission was intended to provide Downs with leverage against an aggressive West Wing.

[Mrs. Ford] called me just before she made the announcement of my appointment, and said I would be the first social secretary that was a commissioned person, a presidential appointment. I did not use the term 'The Honorable Maria Downs' often. But that was, in essence, a way to bring the position up to the level that Mrs. Ford wanted the women in the Ford administration to be considered. (Maria Downs interview, p. 28)

A similar organizational statement has been useful even in administrations with less stressful East Wing – West Wing relations. Anita McBride, for example, became an assistant to the president after she had been serving as the first lady's chief of staff for some time. Though she described her relations with the West Wing as consistently positive, she still felt that the commission was an invaluable resource.

As the organizational charts indicate, comparatively few presidential commissions were awarded to staff in the first lady's office before the Obama administration. In the Obama administration, however, the number of presidential commissions increased sharply. Eight of Michelle Obama's staff were awarded presidential commissions, including one assistant to the president (first lady's chief of staff), two deputy assistants to the president (director of policy and projects; and senior adviser), four special assistants to the president (directors of communications, of special projects, and of strategic planning; and social secretary), and one associate counsel (counsel to the first lady).

## BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL TERM

The work of a first lady is not confined to the four years of a presidential term. Work begins the day after the election, when the first lady must begin planning for the move into the White House and her own responsibilities as the chief of a subunit in the White House Office. Through the term, the responsibilities of the first lady weave together familial, social, cultural, and policy roles. And then in the post-presidential years, recent first ladies have moved their policy work from the White House into the not-for-profit sector through the establishment of 501(c)3 organizations.

### THE TRANSITION

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During the transition, the first lady's responsibilities extend from the personal to the public sphere. The first lady confronts the challenges of creating a new home, new family routines, and a new office, at a time when there is intense popular interest in – and correspondingly high media scrutiny of – the first family, the spouse, and the president.

#### 1. The Residence

While the president has worked with the chief usher to organize the Oval Office suite, the first lady has been assigned responsibility for the residence. Although the new first family does not move in until after the inauguration, the planning begins immediately after the election. Gary Walters, chief usher from 1986 to 2007, emphasized that this process that combined confidentiality, responsiveness, and logistics in equal measure.

Normally there's no contact made until after the election and the President and/or the first lady make direct invitations to the incoming president, incoming first lady ... after the outgoing first lady and incoming first lady have a private get-together and maybe a walk around or something, then the chief usher is usually called in and the sitting first lady usually absents herself ... and there's an exchange of information at that point. And then it's ongoing from that day until January 20. ... Because you need to build ... trust between the first family and the usher's office because we deal with ... the intimate details of the first family, so you have to have a high level of trust. (Gary Walters interview)

The chief usher is also integral to the first lady's social outreach, so this early contact is the first step in establishing a continuing and critically important relationship.

#### 2. The First Family

The first lady has assumed – or has been assigned – the tasks of organizing and sustaining family life throughout the presidential term. Often invisible and presumed, this work involves the functions of homemaking and parenting that have routinely fallen to women. Drawing attention to their importance, Michelle Obama identified herself as the “mom-in-chief,” a title that she incorporated into innumerable speeches. In doing so, she allayed concerns that she would be a confrontational or corrupting presidential wife, a message that reassured her conservative critics and frustrated many of her more liberal supporters.

To establish family routines, the first lady must consult with the ushers and housekeepers. Virtually every aspect of family life requires some coordination with the White House permanent staff. This is in addition to the coordination with the White House Office, which is occasioned by the public work of the president and the first lady.

... at noon on inaugural day ... there's a whole new set of priorities: how the family operates, how many people eat dinner each day, what time do they get up in the morning, what time do they go to bed at night?

So we have to try and collect all that information so that on Day 1 they come into their home when they return from the Inaugural Parade. That's our intent. All the vestiges of the previous administration are gone, all of their stuff is in place and they can try to be as comfortable as possible in what we refer to as their home for the next four, eight years. (Gary Walters interview)

In creating a home and a life for the family in the White House, a first lady is also engaging in collaboration and leadership. As Chief Usher Gary Walters observed,

How do people [the first family and the permanent staff] interact with one another? It's a difficult time the first few months. The families, on the domestic side once again, the thing that I dealt with is just learning to live in the White House ... The second and third floors of the residence are very private, as private as the first families wish them to be. Those people that come to the White House and haven't had servants around them have a more difficult time deciding when they want people there and when they don't want people there. Others that have had servants, it's more of a free flow and an interaction. It's all how people react. It's totally different. I don't think I've found two people who were the same when I was there. (Gary Walters interview)

In brief, the first lady is immersed in staff management in both public and private life.

### 3. Organizing the Staff of the President's First Lady

Like the president, the first lady is recruiting staff, establishing organizational routines, and setting an agenda for the first term during the transition, sometimes extending into the earliest weeks of the administration.

Though the first lady's staffing decisions may be reviewed by the president and by senior White House staff, first ladies have typically selected staff and created offices that suited their managerial, leadership, and political priorities. This was particularly evident in the first year of the William J. Clinton administration, when the president resisted and the first lady upheld a disciplined daily schedule.

Staff recruitment and organization in the first year has, historically, had a lasting effect. Granting or denying the first lady discretion in personnel decisions has foreshadowed the extent of West Wing oversight, revealing whether the president's senior staff acknowledges and respects the first lady as a political actor. (For a more extensive discussion of these relationships, see the section, "Relationships Within the White House Office and the White House.")

## THE FIRST YEAR

As a member of the White House Office, much of whose work is centered in communications and public outreach, the first lady needs to put the positive energy of the "honeymoon" to good use. Social, cultural, and policy initiatives in these early weeks can contribute to the new administration's momentum. This is the moment when the frame is set for the first lady, and it is important that the frame be controlled by the first lady rather than by the media. And if the first lady does not implement a strong communications strategy, the resulting vacuum will leave the media free to set the agenda.

However, first ladies – like presidents – are most likely to make mistakes in these early days, when their knowledge of Washington and of the White House is most limited. Caution has led many first ladies to limit their outreach in the honeymoon period, an understandable response that has cost them opportunities to increase their political capital by building on the enthusiasm of the campaign and the election.

### 1. The Social and Cultural Calendar

Planning and executing social outreach starts even before the first family enters the White House; this overlaps with planning for the inaugural events. As they move into the White House, for example, the president and first lady may want to have an event for their children, suited to their ages. As then-Chief Usher Gary Walters reported,

When the Clintons came in, Mrs. Clinton asks us to do a party for Chelsea and about thirty young people and we did a sophisticated pizza party and had them running all over the house learning about various aspects of the house and finding things that, you know, would help them get a feel for the house. (Gary Walters interview)

But these first weeks are also when the demands of the first lady's responsibilities surface.

Mrs. Barbara Bush ... she said, 'You wouldn't believe, when I moved into the White House.' She said, 'The first day I was there, this guy called the chief usher came up to me and said, 'Are you ready to start planning for Christmas?' She said, 'It's ten months away.' And I said, 'Yeah, we need that long to plan for Christmas.' (Gary Walters interview)

Social secretaries have argued that taking control of the social and cultural calendar early in the first term gives the first lady three advantages.

First, the events deliver the president's message when interest in the new presidency is at its peak, ensuring extensive media coverage. Because this is also the "honeymoon period," the coverage is more likely to be favorable.

Second, senior members of the administration reach out to the Washington community when there is great interest in the new administration. For "outsider" presidents and their staff, less familiar with and less known in the capital, these contacts may be especially valuable.

Third, the first lady can demonstrate leadership to the White House offices, committees, and commissions that contribute so much to the success of these social and cultural occasions.<sup>70</sup>

When the first lady does not act quickly and strongly, opportunities to deliver the president's message are lost, contacts with the Washington community are weakened, and the first lady's reputation is compromised. In an interview with Carl Bernstein, Clinton Social Secretary Ann Stock concluded that the administration's failure to reach out to established Washington society carried real costs.

It was somewhat a wasted [first] year in that it could have been easy for them to help lay the groundwork for healthcare and the rest of their legislative agenda had they skillfully entertained. Oh my God! The people you could have had over there for a movie. And you neutralize your yip-yappers.<sup>71</sup>

Laura Bush also was criticized for her limited social outreach in the first term. She responded by raising the priority of this outreach in the second term. As her chief of staff recounted,

[Laura Bush] set out some goals for herself for the second term, so I went into [being her chief of staff] sort of having an understanding of what she wanted to do. ... But the other [goal] was not directly related to me, but was an important function of the office, was to increase the level of social entertaining, specifically state dinners and official dinners, because so much of what [the Bushes'] plans had been for their time in office and to use the White House as a platform for the global stage was interrupted by 9/11.

And so, although the Bushes have been criticized for kind of hunkering down and not entertaining, there's a lot, actually, that they did do. But Mrs. Bush knew it was something she needed to put a different face on. (Anita McBride interview)

Social occasions and cultural events reveal the political networks and the art forms endorsed by the president and first lady. An invitation to the White House – as guest or as performer – testifies to the recipient's power and status. Providing this recognition to the appropriate individuals is a pivotal task.

In addition to occasions unique to each administration, there are annual social and cultural events. The Easter Egg Roll is just one day, but in 2016 more than 35,000 children and adults were entertained by the South Lawn celebrations.<sup>72</sup> The December holiday season is exceptionally demanding, with receptions for members of the administration, Congress, and the diplomatic community, as well as special parties for children and specific presidential constituencies. As Chief Usher Walters noted, "from [Thanksgiving day] straight on through, usually until the first of February, it's just – there's something major every day." (Gary Walters interview) The planning becomes even more extensive when new events are added to the already-full calendar. During the William J. Clinton administration, for instance, "American crafts" displayed during the holidays were transformed into a traveling exhibit. As the social secretary described,

<sup>70</sup> See, for example: Letitia Baldrige, *A Lady First, My Life in the Kennedy White House and the Embassies of Paris and Rome*. New York: Viking, 2001.

<sup>71</sup> As quoted in Carl Bernstein. 2008. *A Woman in Charge, The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton*. New York: Vintage Books. p. 319.

<sup>72</sup> "2016 White House Easter Egg Roll, 138 Years of Fun," The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/eastereggroll>

[There were] 75 pieces that we then turned into a book and the exhibit traveled the country. It went to 15, 20, 25 cities [and] ... as it went into each city, they organized ... the local crafts artists, so that ... there was a local crafts artist show. (Ann Stock interview)

Holiday decorations at the White House are the subject of documentaries on several cable channels and brief pieces on the network news stations. But Hillary Rodham Clinton's more extensive exhibition gave the first lady an opportunity to extend her cultural outreach to a much wider audience, presenting the White House as the people's house – a message that both the president and the first lady wanted to emphasize.

## 2. The Policy Agenda

Unlike the president, the first lady is not typically pressured to effect major policy changes in the first 100 days of the administration. First ladies, especially those who have entered the White House with young children, have delayed their political outreach for up to two or three months. Michelle Obama, for example, did not plant her White House garden until March 20, 2009 and *Let's Move!*, her anti-obesity campaign for children's health, was not announced until almost year later, on February 9, 2010.<sup>73</sup> This time to set the agenda after entering the White House is a great advantage for the first lady, as Anita McBride, Laura Bush's chief of staff, explained.

I think it is important to be grounded, know who you are, and maybe not try and take on too much too fast. That's the luxury of this position, in so many ways. You don't have every problem come to your desk the way it does for the president. You do get to pick and choose. And, you really could drill down a lot deeper over a more extended period of time on a single issue than the president can in so many ways. (Anita McBride interview)

This "slower start" has also provided first ladies with the space to craft a communications strategy that (a) presents their policy work as complementary to the president's, while (b) is framed as intentional, broadly appealing, and apolitical – as having the qualities listed previously, in the section titled "The First Lady on the Public Stage."

If, however, the first lady has been connected to a campaign promise, he or she is likely to encounter pressures for change similar to those directed at the president. Rosalynn Carter's campaign promise to reform the nation's mental healthcare system led, very quickly, to the establishment of a presidential commission. Recruiting commissioners and staff, establishing leadership and a policy agenda, scheduling commission meetings and public hearings throughout the country all happened in the first year of the presidential term.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Hillary Rodham Clinton's leadership of the President's Task Force on National Health Care Reform, which was tied to a major campaign promise of the president, was announced in January 1993 with a target date of 100 days for the submission of its report. Carter and Clinton, therefore, confronted severe time pressures and constraints, comparable to those encountered by presidents.<sup>75</sup>

## ELECTORAL CYCLES

First ladies have been highly visible throughout the presidential re-election campaigns, as speakers and as fundraisers. As valuable as they have been as presidential surrogates, first ladies have been even more influential as political actors in their own right, leveraging their own political capital on the president's

<sup>73</sup> Jesse Lee, "Planting the Garden," White House Blog, April 9, 2009. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2009/04/09/planting-garden> "First Lady Michelle Obama Launches Let's Move: America's Move to Raise A Healthier Generation of Kids," The White House, Office of the First Lady, February 9, 2010. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/first-lady-michelle-obama-launches-lets-move-americas-move-raise-a-healthier-genera>

<sup>74</sup> Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1984. pp. 291-302.

<sup>75</sup> Clinton, Hillary Rodham, *Living History*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003. pp. 143-155.

behalf with campaign workers and volunteers, as well as voters. As a West Wing communications staff member, who also worked in the 2004 campaign, observed,

There was a tremendous desire among, say Republican candidates or even grassroots activists or donors to see and hear from First Lady Laura Bush. ... she was able to tell stories and share things about President Bush that no one else obviously could. And was able to make the case for him as a leader and as President in a way that no one else could. ... And people really identified with that and appreciated her sharing that on the campaign trail because it made them more interested in trying to help the campaign and trying to work on his behalf... It really sort of bonded them with the idea that they were part of this effort to get him elected.<sup>76</sup>

Some, but not all, first ladies have also participated in congressional campaigns during the first-term midterm election season. If the first lady is ineffective or unpersuasive, participating in these elections will consume political capital that could have been saved for the presidential re-election campaign. But, if the first lady is successful in fundraising and mobilizing, she could strengthen the president's legislative relationships and testify to the president's partisan loyalties.

## THE FINAL YEAR

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Especially in a two-term presidency, the final year is when a presidential administration works to secure its legacy and facilitate its successor's entry into the White House. Raised in a Democratic family, serving in the Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush administrations, Anita McBride had experienced these tensions in presidencies that won and lost re-election, with successors from their own party and from the opposing party. Her assessment, ultimately, was one centered less on partisan priorities and more on the importance of ensuring continuity in the responsible exercise of power.

And so that's something I would hope for anybody who has the privilege to work on transitioning their government or actually being in government – just recognizes that, right away, this is part of the ... continuity. Being the thread, one part of the thread, that hopes to hold everything together. ...this is a temporary custodianship that you have and you ... want to know you've done your absolute best, that you've left something behind that's really for someone else to learn from.

That there's value to your contributions. No task is too small, because it's all really part of having a smooth, functioning environment. The work of the president of the United States is so tough and so unpredictable, that anybody who is working on the president's team needs to go into this putting politics aside – knowing politics got you here, but putting politics aside.

I think that's something I really, really, have learned, feeling this obligation to the continuity of operations. (Anita McBride interview)

### 1. Leaving the Residence

The first lady's tasks in the final year of the presidential term mirror those in the first. In the first year, the first lady worked with the chief usher to organize the residence and the move into the White House; in the final year, the first lady works with the chief usher to organize the move out of the White House. As Gary Walters, the former chief usher, described,

Normally at the end of a two-term administration... I would go sometime around the summer, about the time that they were having the conventions and I would approach the first lady and say, 'Okay, January 20 is your last day in the house. How do you want us to approach, when do you want us to start transitioning your furniture out?' ... 'Who are the movers we're going to use, what are we going to take out, when do we want to ship it, where do you want it to go?' Those kinds of things, and what we do is we packed it up very specifically. ... I also had to coordinate, as we got towards the end of the administration, those items that were gifts to the government that were going to become part of the archives. (Gary Walters interview)

The first lady is also expected to provide the spouse of the president-elect with a tour of the mansion, especially the residence, which is widely reported in the media. When first ladies have not done so, there has been considerable media speculation about tensions between the in-coming and out-going

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<sup>76</sup> As quoted in, Lauren A. Wright. 2016. *On Behalf of the President, Presidential Spouses and White House Communications Strategy Today*. Santa Barbara: Praeger. p. 74.



administrations. Even small gestures of hospitality carry symbolic weight when they are conducted in the White House.

## 2. Closing the East Wing Office

The documents deposited in the presidential archives are foundational to the work of historians and political scientists, a fact that has led many of the first ladies' staff to prioritize careful record keeping. As just one example, the social secretaries, for many administrations, built three parallel "scrapbooks" – one for themselves, one for the archives, and one for the first ladies – that recorded the guest lists, seating charts, invitations, programs, and other artifacts for every social or cultural event conducted in the presidential term. The result was an extraordinary record of how the White House was presented to the many different publics that invited to the White House during each administration.

Documentation of the first lady's policy work has been less consistent. First Lady Bess Truman famously burned her correspondence with the president, deeming it entirely private; she also did much of her lobbying (for cancer research funding, for example) in private conversations with the president. Other first ladies and their staff have left extensive records, sometimes buttressed by exit interviews and oral histories. While these collections sometimes focus on the successes of the first lady, they do help in transitioning the first lady's policy work to its post-presidential form. Laura Bush's chief of staff, Anita McBride, described this process as follows:

I think we were always conscious [about transition planning] for about maybe a year and a half or so out. Working within our own team, I'm big on records and leaving good documentation behind. So, I started really having conversations with some key people on our team, our policy director in particular, and our press secretary to put together some valuable documentation, some that was quantitative analysis of all that Mrs. Bush was engaged in, but other being a real qualitative study, you know, of the policy issues that we were involved in and the agencies that we were able to bring together, the people that we were able to bring together.

Really have it well documented – what the Helping America's Youth Initiative was, for example, which resulted in an executive order as well, creating an interagency task force on youth initiatives, which still exists. So we started meeting internally with our own team to really start documenting the first lady's work and how it integrated into the president's work and measuring, as I said, the quantitative, how many places she went, how many times she did an event on a particular issue. So we were able to draw our own conclusions of the impact of her work.

And so, we started that, I'd have to say, maybe a year and a half out, but really ramped up, obviously, in that final year. (Anita McBride interview)

In addition to compiling and creating records, Laura Bush and her staff were negotiating relationships throughout the transition.

I was hearing from organizations and groups where she had been very involved and very engaged on – their interest in having her stay involved. For example, the Heart Truth campaign, women's heart disease campaign, which was an initiative of the National Institutes of Health, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. They were our public sector partner. Our private sector partners were the fashion industry and Coca-Cola and others. She had become this national ambassador for women's heart disease and how, with that, how would she stay involved?

So, we were evaluating things that were coming in to us. The policy director and I were looking at suggestions that we could give to Mrs. Bush of how she would want to stay involved or not. (Anita McBride interview)

For the first lady, as for the president, there are two paramount priorities in the final year: to do all that can be done to advance the administration's policy initiatives; and to set the agenda for the post-presidential years, with continuing relationships and clear policy commitments.

### 3. Preparing for the Post-Presidential Years

Particularly in recent administrations, when the president and first lady have left office at a comparatively young age, planning for the post-presidency has been important both personally and politically. Having been policy advocates and entrepreneurs during the presidential term, the presidential spouses have continued to be issue network leaders after leaving the White House. For Laura Bush and for Michelle Obama, this has been accomplished, in part, through the establishment of 501(c) organizations. Bush's chief of staff, Anita McBride, noted that this process was more gradual for Bush than for Obama, a difference that she ascribed to the first ladies' relationships and planning throughout the presidential term.

PEPFAR had been reauthorized by the Congress had been re-authorized by the Congress in 2008. It still had a foothold at USAID and at the State Department under Hillary Clinton's supervision and direction.

But over the last five or so years, it was moving towards a 501(c)3 initiative, which it is now, because it's been coupled with another initiative, which is breast cancer [prevention and care], which was another initiative of the Bush administration. Part of the global health policy was taking breast and cervical cancer initiative overseas, which we did in the Middle East and we did in Africa. That is now the 501(c)3. It's called the Pink Ribbon, Red Ribbon Initiative.

So, although it was not a 501(c)3 as soon as we left office, the steps and the foundations were being laid over these last six or seven years under the direction of the Bush Institute in partnership with the U.S. Government and the State Department, primarily with Hillary Clinton's leadership from the government side.

So, that's one big example of the 501(c)3 that exists, of an extension of a Bush-era initiative. (Anita McBride interview)

Creating the 501(c) also ensures that the policy work will continue. Each first lady has her own policy priorities, and a change in administration leads to a change in priorities that will disadvantage some networks that previously had close ties to the first lady – and thus to the president.

The heart health initiative, that was one we were hoping would be continued by the Obama Administration, particularly with Mrs. Obama's leadership, because the demographic that was hurt the most is African American women, and she would have been a great champion for it. But she wanted to do her own thing and really did not want to engage in that initiative. So, it languished there for a while. It still exists, I mean, it's slightly morphed. But at the Texas Tech health system in Texas, they launched the Laura Bush Women's Health Initiative, which is primarily focused on Women's Heart Health, so that exists now as a private entity within a private hospital system in Texas. (Anita McBride interview)

For those first ladies whose work has been strongly governmental, sustaining policy commitments in the post-presidential years has been more difficult precisely because the spouse is no longer in the government. Rosalynn Carter, for example, was a forceful advocate for mental healthcare reform during her years as first lady. She sustained that commitment in private life, but establishing herself as a published author and public speaker took some time. Barbara Bush, whose literacy work relied, in significant part, on public-private partnerships during the presidential term, could more readily sustain her activism when she returned to private life.

As the events and responsibilities of the final year make clear, both the personal sphere of the home and the family *and* the public sphere of campaigning and policy making are intensely political.

## APPENDICES

*STAFF LISTINGS**Personal Staff of the First Lady*

<i>First Lady</i>	<i>Staff Member</i>	<i>Title</i> <sup>77</sup>	<i>Tenure</i>
Rosalynn Carter	Madeline F. MacBean	Personal Assistant	1977-1981
	Rita R. Merthan	Personal Secretary	1980
	Carol J. Benefield	Administrative Assistant	1980
Nancy Reagan	Elaine Crispen	Special Assistant	1985
	Mary Feldman	Staff Assistant	1985
Barbara Bush	Peggy Swift	Special Assistant	1991-1992
		Personal Assistant	1990
Hillary Clinton	Pamela Cicetti	Executive Assistant	1997-1999
	Capricia Marshall	Special Assistant	1993-1996
	Missy Kincaid	Special Assistant	1998-1999
	Eric Hotheim	Special Assistant	1998-1999
	Huma Abedin	Special Assistant	1998-1999
Laura Bush	Office Manager, Chief of Staff		
	Sarah Moss	Personal Aide	2001-2002
	Lindsey Lineweaver	Exec Assistant & Personal Aide	2007
		Special Assistant & Personal Aide	2004
		Personal Aide	2003
	Charlene (Charlie) Fern	Speechwriter	2001
	Melanie Jackson	Scheduler	2001
Michelle Obama	Kristin T. Jones	Personal Aide & East Wing	
		Operations Coordinator	2013-2014
		Special Assistant & Personal Aide	2011-2012
	Dana M. Lewis	Special Assistant & Personal Aide	2009-2010

<sup>77</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all “Chief of Staff” titles are “Chief of Staff to the First Lady.”

*Staff Coordination Posts*

First Lady	Staff Member	Title	Tenure
Rosalynn Carter	Mary Hoyt	Press Secretary and Staff Director	1977-1980
	Kit Dobelle	Staff Director	1980-1981
	Christine Hathaway	Administrative Assistant to the Staff Director	1980
Nancy Reagan	Michael K. Deaver	Deputy Chief of Staff [to the President] <sup>78</sup>	1985
	James S. Rosebush	Deputy Assistant to the President & Chief of Staff	1985
	Jane I. Erkenbeck	Executive Assistant	1985
Barbara Bush	Susan Porter Rose	Chief of Staff	1989-1992
	Sally Runion	Staff Assistant	1990-1992
	Elaine Speiser	Staff Assistant	1991-1992
Hillary Clinton	Margaret A. Williams	Chief of Staff	1993-1996
	Melanne Verveer	Chief of Staff	1997-1999
		Deputy Chief of Staff	1993-1996
	Roberta Green	Deputy Chief of Staff	1997-1999
	Evelyn Lieberman	Executive Assistant	1993
	Marge Tarmey	Assistant to the Chief of Staff	1993-1994
	Peggy Lewis	Assistant to the Chief of Staff	1995-1996
	Katherine Button	Assistant to the Chief of Staff & Policy Advisor	1999
		Assistant to the Chief of Staff	1997-1998
	Evan Ryan	Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff	1994-1996
	Nicole Rabner	Special Assistant to the Deputy Chief of Staff	1993, 1996
	Deborah Both	Assistant to the Deputy Chief of Staff	1994
	Noa Meyer	Assistant to the Deputy Chief of Staff	1997-1998
	Shirley Sagawa	Assistant to the Deputy Chief of Staff	1999
	Mary Ellen McGuire	Assistant to the Deputy Chief of Staff & Director of Research	1999
	Diane Limo	Office Manager & Special Assistant	1993
		Office Manager	1993

<sup>78</sup> As the Deputy Chief of Staff to the President, Michael K. Deaver did not hold a formal position in the Office of the First Lady, but he took responsibility for the operation in part to maintain a connection to Mrs. Reagan. He was often a liaison and mediator between the first lady and other senior members of the White House staff in the West Wing. For that reason, he is included in this listing of first lady staff.

First Lady	Staff Member	Title	Tenure
Laura Bush	Huma Abedin	Office Manager	1997
	Eric Woodard	Office Manager	1998-1999
	Andrea Ball	Assistant to the President & Chief of Staff	2001
		Deputy Assistant to the President & Chief of Staff	2002-2004
	Anita McBride	Assistant to the President & Chief of Staff	2007
	Julie Thomas	Assistant to the Chief of Staff	2001
	January Riecke	Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff	2002
	Laurie McCord	Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff	2003-2004
Michelle Obama	Susan S. Sher	Assistant to the President & Chief of Staff & Counsel	2010
		Assistant to the President & Chief of Staff	2009
	Christina M. Tchen	Assistant to the President & Chief of Staff	2011-2015
	Melissa E. Winter	Deputy Assistant to the President & Senior Advisor	2013-2015
		Special Assistant to the President & Deputy Chief of Staff and Director of Operations	2011-2012
		Special Assistant to the President & Deputy Chief of Staff	2009-2010
	David S. Medina	Deputy Chief of Staff	2009
	Jordan A. Brooks	Special Assistant	2012-2014
	Sriramya Gainedi	Special Assistant	2015
	Stephanie A. Lee	Executive Assistant	2011
	Natalie F. Bookey-Baker	Executive Assistant	2010
	Joseph J. Boswell	Executive Assistant	2009

*Correspondence*

First Lady	Staff Member	Title	Tenure
Rosalynn Carter	Rhonda D. Bush	Director of Correspondence	1980
	Patty McGuire	Correspondence Assistant	1980
Nancy Reagan <sup>79</sup>			
Barbara Bush	Joan DeCain	Director, Correspondence	1990-1992
Hillary Clinton	Kelly Karnes	Acting Correspondence Director	1993
	Alice Pushkar	Director of Correspondence	1993-1999
Laura Bush	Desiree Thompson Sayle	Director of Correspondence	2001
	Sydney Johnson	Director of Correspondence	2002-2004
		Deputy Director of Correspondence	2001
	Mitsy Marshall	Director, Correspondence	2007
	Sara Armstrong	Deputy Director of Correspondence	2004
	Campbell Vogel	Deputy Director, Correspondence	2007
	Joan Doty	Senior Writer	2004, 2007
		Staff Assistant	2001-2002
	Sara McIntosh	Writer	2004
		Staff Assistant	2001-2002
	Emmaley Becker	Correspondence Analyst & Volunteer Coordinator	2004
Michelle Obama	Tyler A. Lechtenberg	Director of Correspondence	2010
		Associate Director of Correspondence	2009
	Howli J. Ledbetter	Director of Correspondence	2011
	Margaret E. Freshwater	Director of Correspondence	2012-2014
	Blaine A. Boyd	Director of Correspondence	2015
	Lauren S. Vrazilek	Deputy Associate Director of Correspondence	2011-2014
	Deilia A. Jackson	Deputy Associate Director of Correspondence	2009-2010

<sup>79</sup> None listed in 1985, the year for which data is available.



*Press and Communications Posts*

<i>First Lady</i>	<i>Staff Member</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Tenure</i>
Rosalynn Carter	Mary Hoyt	Press Secretary <i>formerly</i> , Press Secretary and Staff Director	1980-1981
	Faith A. Collins	Deputy Press Secretary	1980
	Paul B. Costello	Assistant Press Secretary	1980
	Vikki Lovett	Press Aide	1980
Nancy Reagan	Jennefer Austin Hirshberg	Press Secretary	1985
	Wendy Weber	Deputy Press Secretary	1985
	Betsy Coons	Assistant Press Secretary	1985
Barbara Bush	Anna Maria Perez	Press Secretary	1989-1993
	Jean Becker	Deputy Press Secretary	1990-1992
	Sondra Haley	Deputy Press Secretary	1990-1992
	Jay Suchan	Staff Assistant	1990-1991
Hillary Clinton	Lisa Caputo	Press Secretary	1993-1994
	Neel Lattimore	Press Secretary	1995-1996
		Deputy Press Secretary	1993-1994
	Marsha Berry	Communications Director	1995-1999
	Karen Finney	Deputy Press Secretary	1993-1996
	Steve Cohen	Deputy Press Secretary	1995-1997
	Julie Mason	Deputy Press Secretary	1997-1999
	Toby Graff	Deputy Press Secretary	1998-1999
	Jennifer Smith	Press Coordinator	1999
	Angela Davis	Press Assistant	1994
	Gordon Johndroe	Press Secretary	2004
	Sally McDonough	Press Secretary	2007
	Noelia Rodriguez	Deputy Press Secretary	2003
		Director of Communications & Press Secretary	2002
Laura Bush		Press Secretary	2001
	Barbara Knight	Deputy Press Secretary	2004
		Director of Communications & Press Secretary	2003
	Tara Donoghue	Deputy Press Secretary	2007
	Ali Harden	Assistant Press Secretary	2001
	Ashleigh Adams	Deputy Press Secretary	2001
	Jacob Yunker	Press Assistant	2004
	Hannah M. August	Press Secretary	2011-2013
	Joanna S. Rosholm	Press Secretary & Deputy Communications Director	2015
		Press Secretary	2014
Michelle Obama	Catherine M. Lelyveld	Director and Press Secretary	2009-2010
	Camille Y. Johnson	Special Assistant to the President & Director of Communications	2009-2010

<i>First Lady</i>	<i>Staff Member</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Tenure</i>
	Kristina K. Schake	Special Assistant to the President & Director of Communications	2011-2013
	Maria C. Gonzalez	Special Assistant to the President & Director of Communications	2014
	Caroline E. Adler	Special Assistant to the President & Director of Communications	2015
	Lauren S. Vrazilek	Deputy Press Secretary	2015
		Deputy Associate Director of Correspondence	2011-2014
	Semonti M. Mustaphi	Director & Deputy Press Secretary	2009-2010
	StephensAssociate		

*Project and Policy Posts*

<i>First Lady</i>	<i>Staff Member</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Tenure</i>
Rosalynn Carter	Kathryn E. Cade	Director of Projects	1977-1981
	Barbara Langhoff	Deputy Director of Projects	1980
	Wanda Davis Lewis	Assistant Director of Projects	1980
	Carol A. Enig	Research Assistant	1980
Nancy Reagan <sup>80</sup>			
Barbara Bush	Julie Cooke	Director, Projects	1990-1992
	Susan Green	Assistant Director	1992
		Deputy Director, Projects	1990-1991
Hillary Clinton	Kathy Staffy	Staff Assistant, Projects	1991-1992
	Pam Barnett	Executive Assistant, Domestic Policy	1993
Laura Bush	Anne Heiligenstein	Director of Projects	2001-2004
	Sonya Medina	Assistant Director of Projects & Policy Advisor	2004
Michelle Obama		Deputy Director of Projects	2001-2003
	Elizabeth Page Austin	Staff Assistant	2004
	Jocelyn C. Frye	Deputy Assistant to the President & Director of Policy & Projects	2009-2012
	Trooper Sanders	Deputy Director of Policy & Projects	2009-2011
	Jennifer J. Simon	Deputy Director of Policy & Projects	2012
	Samuel D. Kass	Executive Director, <i>Let's Move!</i> & Senior Policy Advisor for Nutrition Policy	2013-2014
	Elyse Cohen	Deputy Director, <i>Let's Move!</i>	2013-2014
	Kelly C. Miterko	Deputy Associate Director of <i>Let's Move!</i>	2013-2015
	Debra L. Eschmeyer	Executive Director, <i>Let's Move!</i> Senior Policy Advisor for Nutrition Policy	2015
	Marissa N. Duswalt	(Detailee) Associate Director for Policy & Events, <i>Let's Move!</i> Initiative	2012
	Amanda J. Pearlman	(Detailee) Associate Director for Policy, <i>Let's Move!</i>	2013
	Kirby L. Bumpus (Detailee)	Associate Director for Policy, <i>Let's Move!</i>	2014
	Annina C. Burns (Detailee)	Associate Director for Policy, <i>Let's Move!</i>	2015

<sup>80</sup> None listed in 1985, the year for which data is available.

<i>First Lady</i>	<i>Staff Member</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Tenure</i>
	Charles B. Cooper, II	(Detailee) Executive Director, Joining Forces	2012
	Ricardo O. Morales	(Detailee) Executive Director, Joining Forces	2013
	Steven L. Parker	(Detailee) Executive Director, Joining Forces	2014
	Nicole M. Malachowski	Executive Director, Joining Forces	2015
	Rory M. Brosius	Deputy Director, Joining Forces	2014-2015
	Eric W. Waldo	Executive Director & Policy Advisor Reach Higher Initiative	2014
	Kristin T. Jones	Special Assistant & Director of Special Projects	2015

*Scheduling and Advance Posts*

<i>First Lady</i>	<i>Staff Member</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Tenure</i>
Rosalynn Carter	Jane S. Fenderson	Director of Scheduling	1980
	Nancy K. Jordan	Director of Advance	1980
	Ellen A. Kelley	Assistant to Director of Scheduling	1980
Nancy Reagan	Andrena C. Brown	Assistant to Director of Advance	1980
	Martin J. Coyne	Director of Scheduling and Advance	1985
Barbara Bush	Ann Brock	Director, Scheduling	1990-1992
	Kim Brady	Director, Advance	1990
	Diane Limo	Staff Assistant, Scheduling	1991-1992
	Jane Moore	Trip Coordinator, Scheduling	1991-1992
Hillary Clinton	Patty Solis	Scheduling Director	1993-1994
	Julie Hopper	Deputy Scheduling Director	1993
	Kelly Craighead	Trip Director	1993
Laura Bush	Quincy Hicks	Director of Scheduling & Advance	2001
	Julie Thomas	Director of Advance	2002
	Terra Gray	Director of Advance	2003-2004
	Charity Wallace	Director, Advance	2007
	Melanie Jackson	Director of Scheduling	2002
	January Riecke	Director of Scheduling	2003
	Allison Barnett	Director, Scheduling	2007
	Tiffany Barfield	Deputy Director of Scheduling	2003
	Jenny Lynn Buntin	Deputy Director, Advance & Scheduling	2007
Michelle Obama	Frances M. Starkey	Director of Scheduling & Advance	2009-2011
	Andrea K. Mokros	Director of Scheduling & Advance	2012
	Mackenzie R. Smith	Deputy Director of Scheduling & Advance	2015
	Alan O. Fitts	Deputy Director of Advance & Trip Director	2009-2011
	Kristen E. Jarvis	Deputy Senior Advisor & Director of External Relations	2014
		Deputy Director of Advance & Traveling Aide	2012-2013
		Special Assistant for Scheduling & Traveling Aide	2009
	Jennifer R. Goodman	Deputy Director of Scheduling & Coordinator	2009-2010
	Jeannette M. Cleland	Deputy Director of Scheduling & Coordinator	2011

*Social Secretary*

<i>First Lady</i>	<i>Staff Member</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Tenure</i>
Rosalynn Carter	Gretchen C. Poston	Social Secretary	1977-1981
	Marilyn B. Funderburk	Assistant Social Secretary	1979-81
	Amy Ryan	Assistant to the Social Secretary	1977-81
	Patty Presock	Assistant to the Social Secretary	1977-81
Nancy Reagan	Gahl Hodges	Social Secretary	1985
	Catherine Fenton	Deputy Social Secretary	1985
Barbara Bush	Laurie Green Firestone	Social Secretary	1989-1992
	Catherine Fenton	Deputy Social Secretary	1989-1992
	Celeste Dorsey	Staff Assistant	1990-1992
Hillary Clinton	Ann Stock	Social Secretary	1993-1996
	Capricia Marshall	Social Secretary	1997-1999
	Kim Widess	Deputy Social Secretary	1998-1999
		Assistant & Trip Coordinator	1997
		Executive Assistant	1994-1996
	Robyn Dickey	Deputy Social Secretary	1993-1996
	Anne McCoy	Deputy Social Secretary	1993, 1997
	Sharm Kennedy Gill	Deputy Social Secretary	1998-1999
	Tracey LaBrecque-Davis	Special Assistant to the Social Secretary	1993-1997
	Bonson Frick	Special Assistant to the Social Secretary	1998
	Pamela Von Fuchs	Special Assistant to the Social Secretary	1999
	Helen Dickey	Assistant to the Social Secretary	1993
		Staff Assistant	1993
	Joyce Bonnett	Staff Assistant	1993
Laura Bush	Amy Zantzinger	Special Assistant to the President & Social Secretary	2007
	Catherine S. Fenton	Special Assistant to the President & Social Secretary	2001-2004
	Mary DeCamp	Deputy Social Secretary	2007
	Jeanie Figg	Deputy Social Secretary	2001-2004
	Megan Barron	Special Assistant to the Social Secretary	2004
	Lauren Huguet	Invitation Assistant	2004
Michelle Obama	Jeremy M. Bernard	Special Assistant to the President & Social Secretary	2011-2014
	Julianna S. Smoot	Deputy Assistant to the President & Social Secretary	2010
	Desiree G. Rogers	Special Assistant to the President & Social Secretary	2009
	Deesha A. Dyer	Special Assistant to the President & Social Secretary	2015
		Deputy Director & Deputy Social Secretary	2013-2014



<i>First Lady</i>	<i>Staff Member</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Tenure</i>
	Lauren M. Kelly	Deputy Director & Deputy Social Secretary	2015
	Joseph B. Reinstein	Deputy Director & Deputy Social Secretary	2009-2011
	Samantha J. Tubman	Deputy Director & Deputy Social Secretary	2011-2012
	Erinn J. Burnough	Deputy Director & Deputy Social Secretary	2009-2010
	Sally M. Armbruster	Staff Assistant	2009
	Vianca M. Dyer	Greetings Coordinator	2009
	Jillian M. Burger	Director of Greetings	2014

*Other Offices*

<i>First Lady</i>	<i>Staff Member</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Tenure</i>
Rosalynn Carter			
Nancy Reagan			
Barbara Bush			
Hillary Clinton			
Laura Bush			
Michelle Obama	Andrea K. Mokros	Special Assistant to the President & Director of Strategic Planning	2014-2015

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AND THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST LADY

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