

Course Outline and Bibliography
The General's Wives: Martha Washington, Julia Grant, and Mamie Eisenhower
University of Kansas Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
Spring 2021
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NOTE: This is a three session noncredit course; sessions are 90-120 minutes depending on in-person or virtual

Session 1: Martha Washington

Early Life

- Parents' Background
- Southern and slavery influences
- First marriage
- An independent woman

Washington Courtship and Marriage

- Chance meeting and Washington's pursuit
- Marriage and move to Mount Vernon
- Martha's dower holdings and late husband's wealth
- Early life at Mount Vernon—positioning for the future

The Revolution and Martha's Role

- Visited winter camps every year
- Provided supplies from Mount Vernon resources
- Provided social life for officers and wives
- Tended to soldiers' needs
- Raised money for the troops and personally donated

Military Influences

- Came in contact with a range of citizens
- Recognized sense of duty to country
- Supported her husband and his agenda
- Recognized the importance of soldiers and those who do the work

Influence on the Institution

Supported soldiers after the war: other first ladies through Jill Biden support military and their families

Showed the importance of soft diplomacy through social interactions

Supported charitable causes

Supported husband and family and provided quiet family time

Served as a surrogate for her husband

Session 2: Julia Grant

Julia Dent Grant's Early Life

Family background—life of privilege

Influence of slavery

Education

Southern or Western?

Biographers have described her as more Southern; she self-described as a Westerner

Slavery influences on her life and thinking

Divided family loyalties during the Civil War

Courtship and Marriage

Her brother's roommate

Complementary personalities and shared interests

Devoted to each other as evidenced in his letters to her and her memoir

Military Wife

Had never been out of Missouri until marriage

Challenges of budgeting, cooking, and housekeeping

The Grants as a social hub

Challenges of separations

The In-Between Years

Difficult civilian reentry

Financial problems

Civil War Years

Camp visits and care for soldiers

Close to the action

Grant's need for her to be with him

Spent time in Washington, DC and became familiar with its formal and informal structures

Enhanced her diplomatic and social skills

White House Years

Recognized the importance of staff and took personal interest in them

Elevated the importance of cabinet wives

Loved entertaining and redecorating the White House

Considerable media attention and not all positive; first FL to issue a press release

Enjoyed being first lady so much that she wanted Grant to run for a third term

Used her military background in running the WH

Post-White House Years

Embarked on a worldwide tour and became the first former President and FL to establish diplomatic contacts post tenure

Wrote her memoirs after Grant's death but no one would publish them

Oversaw construction of Grant's tomb and personally greeted soldiers who visited

Session 3: Mamie Eisenhower and a Comparison and Contrast of the Three First Ladies

Sources Used:

Mamie Geneva Doud's Early Life

Family background—A life of privilege

Traditional upbringing and roles

Challenged some Victorian norms

Eisenhower Courtship and Marriage

Meeting in Texas—Inauspicious beginnings

Family's positive reaction

What Ike gave up to marry Mamie (flight school)

Marriage

Adjusting to Military Life

Learning to live on a junior officer's salary

Learning how to cook and manage a home

Conflicts between Ike's dedication to the military and to her

Mamie's successes as a young military wife

Birth and death of first son

Birth of second son

Beginnings of charitable work while in Panama

Advancing Through the Military

Multiple moves and increased importance of her role

War years and volunteer activities

Health problems related to scarlet fever as a child worsen

Facing rumors about her husband

What the Military Taught Her

Management of finances, people, and situations

Soft diplomacy

The importance of those under a command

How to get along with a wide range of people

How to handle the media

How to adjust to international settings and dignitaries

Post-War Years

Columbia University and NATO

Pressure to run for president

At Ike's side during the campaign

White House Years

Neither a traditionalist or a modern first lady

Apolitical approach through spouses

Charitable activities
Special treatment of White House staff
Return to pre-war entertaining
Support for civil rights
Her influence on fashion

The Generals' Wives—Comparison and Contrast

Socio-economic backgrounds
Education influences
Military experiences
Family life and relationship with spouse
Presidential Years

Bibliography

The Generals' Wives

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- White House Historical Association <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/filters/first-ladies>
- First Ladies Initiative American University <https://www.american.edu/spa/gov/first-ladies/>