

GOVT-485-001 America's First Ladies (1 credit virtual)
America's First Ladies: The Role of Time, Culture, and Personal Stories on their Influence and Legacies.

Fall 2023 Semester
Sa 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
9/16/2023 &
Sa 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
10/28/2023

Instructor Information

Dr. Diana B. Carlin (she, her, hers)
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Office Hours

Thirty minutes before and after each class. All other times by appointment. Contact me via email or text and we can set up a Zoom call to discuss.

Communication Policy

I am fine with you texting me or emailing. If we need to talk, please let me know a suitable time to call you. To be safe, use both email addresses. I check gmail on my phone but not AU.

Instructor Bio:

I am an emerita (retired) professor of communication and former association provost at Saint Louis University in St. Louis, MO and also a retired communication studies faculty member and former graduate and international dean at the University of Kansas. I am currently an adjunct teaching this course at American University. My background is in political communication with an emphasis on presidential rhetoric, political debates, and women in politics. It is through my interest in women and politics that I developed an interest in first ladies—they were the first women in the country with real political clout. I am one of the co-authors of your textbook which was tested on a group of AU students last year in this course and it represents many of their suggestions. We are also publishing a trade book version of the book for the general public. I lecture both in person and virtually on a variety of political communication issues including first ladies and have authored book chapters on Martha Washington, Julia Grant, Lady Bird Johnson, Barbara Bush, Hillary Clinton, and Michelle Obama. I also authored an article for the *White House History Quarterly* on first ladies and *Sesame Street* (the most fun I've had writing about them yet). I am one of seven founders of the First Ladies Association for Research and Education (FLARE). I've authored books on presidential debates and have appeared on most major news shows talking about them every four years. I've lived in the Washington, DC, area twice—first as a visiting professor at the University of Maryland and the second time as the dean in residence at the Council of Graduate Schools. I have extensive international experience and have had Fulbrights to France, Myanmar (Burma), and Kuwait. In my spare time I travel (especially where I can zip line), binge on most of the streaming networks, read a couple books a

week, serve on a variety of boards, cook, and entertain friends for dinners, and spoil grandchildren.

Course Description:

America's First Ladies: The Role of Time, Culture, and Personal Stories on their Influence and Legacies. America's first ladies are more than fashion, social gatherings, and supporting their husbands. Since Martha Washington defined the role as it fit her background and the times, every first lady has adapted the role. This course examines the ways that the historical context, tradition, culture, and women's roles, and the first lady's personal story--including her marital relationship--all affect how she carries out the role and influences both the presidency and American history. Crosslist: GOVT-685-001.

Statement on Diversity

I support American University's vision of a thriving AU community where equity prevails because diverse ideas and perspectives from individuals of all identities and experiences are understood, appreciated, and fully included. As a result, all perspectives on the material in the textbook, additional readings, and discussions are valued. There are no real right or wrong answers in the course—I am looking for your reactions and interpretations to the material and that will differ based on your own unique background and insights.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the course, you will have demonstrated that you can:

- Explain how historical context, social and cultural norms, women's roles, first ladies' personal histories, and marital relations impacted the way each first lady enacted the role.
- Identify major changes in the role over time.
- Identify ways that first ladies exhibited agency or the power to make decisions and choices.
- Identify individual first ladies who made significant contributions to the role.
- Explain how the role evolved and stayed the same since Martha Washington.
- Analyze first ladies' communication strategies and explain what made them succeed or fail.
- Identify ways in which first ladies impacted the presidency and U.S. history.
- Apply a variety of research sources to understanding and analysis of first ladies' histories and impact.
- Apply and evaluate a variety of classification systems of first ladies' roles as they pertain to specific first ladies.

Assignments and Course Requirements

1. FLARE Focus. Review the current FLARE Focus on the website at [FLARE | First Ladies Association of Research and Education \(flare-net.org\)](https://flare-net.org) and the archive of FLARE Focus articles at [FLARE | FLARE Focus \(flare-net.org\)](https://flare-net.org). Based on the assigned chapters and a review of other chapters of interest to you, prepare a FLARE Focus article that meets the requirements outlined on the website:
 - Essays must be 600-800 words, including endnotes, and submitted electronically in Microsoft Word to the editor. Adhere to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
 - All essays must have at least one link to a research-based source where a reader can go for further information on the topic. Substantive claims in the content must have links to sources.
 - Any photographs must be in the public domain and kept to a minimum.
 - Essays should reflect the expertise of the writer and the topic must reflect the FLARE mission.
 - Essays may not promote a particular political party bias in keeping with FLARE's nonpartisan standing.
 - Essays should be written for a general audience and reflect a style that indicates an educated interest level that is jargon-free. (30%) **DUE October 13 by 5 pm submitted on Canvas. Rubric will be posted on Canvas.**
2. Class participation. You are expected to contribute in two ways: (1) give a report on your FLARE Focus article and (2) discuss the assigned readings, videos, and question prompts in class. (30%)
3. Final paper. You are to select a question or questions at the conclusion of one of the chapters in the text and prepare a response that is based on research from primary and secondary sources as discussed in Chapter 17. The paper is to be 4-5 pages in length (undergraduates) or 6-7 (graduate students) in essay format using a style manual of your choice for citations and the bibliography. At least three sources should be consulted including those provided in the syllabus and Chapter 17. Details are on Canvas. (40%) **DUE November 30 by 5 pm submitted on Canvas. Rubric will be posted on Canvas.**
4. Graduate students are to read the optional readings on Canvas assigned to undergraduates and write a brief reaction 2 pages to one of the two articles. Specifics for the assignment are on Canvas.

ZOOM LINK: The Zoom links for each course will be sent to you via email one week prior to class and a reminder the day before

TEXTBOOK—Diana B. Carlin, Nancy Kegan Smith, and Anita B. McBride. *U.S. First Ladies: Making History and Leaving Legacies*. San Diego, CA: Cognella, 2024 (yes, that is correct). The book is available in both paper and as an e-book. The bookstore has the paper copy. However, you can purchase the book in either format directly from the publisher at: [GOVT 485 | 685 - America's First Ladies: The Role of Time, Culture & Personal Stories on Their Impact and Legacies \(cognella.com\)](https://cognella.com).

Other short readings are included in the schedule.

Supplemental Reading and Resources

Books

- Carl Sferrazza Anthony. *First Ladies: The Saga of the President's Wives and Their Power 1789-1961*. New York: William Morrow, 1990.
- Carl Sferrazza Anthony. *First Ladies: The Saga of the President's Wives and Their Power, 1961-1990, Volume II*. New York: William Morrow, 1991.
- Kate Andersen Brower. *First Woman: The Grace and Power of America's Modern First Ladies*. New York: Harper, 2016.
- Lisa M. Burns, ed. *Media Relations and the Modern First Lady from Jacqueline Kennedy to Melania Trump*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020.
- Betty Boyd Caroli. *First Ladies: The Ever-Changing Role, from Martha Washington to Melania Trump*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Lewis L. Gould, ed. *American First Ladies: Their Lives and Their Legacy*, second edition. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Kati Marton. *Hidden Power: Presidential Marriages that Shaped Our History*. New York: Anchor Books, 2002.
- John B. Roberts II. *Rating the First Ladies: The Women Who Influenced the Presidency*. New York: Citadel Books, 2003.
- Katherine A.S. Sibley, ed. *A Companion to First Ladies*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.
- Susan Swain and C-SPAN. *First Ladies: Presidential Historians on the Lives of 45 Iconic American Women*. New York: Public Affairs, 2015.
- Margaret Truman, *First Ladies*. New York: Random House, 1995.
- Robert P. Watson, *The President's Wives: Reassessing the Office of First Lady*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

Online

- American University School of Public Affairs First Ladies Initiative [First Ladies Initiative | School of Public Affairs | American University, Washington, DC](#)
- C-SPAN Series on First Ladies and multiple other programs on First Ladies can be located at this link: [Search | C-SPAN.org](#)
- First Ladies Association for Research and Education (FLARE) [FLARE | First Ladies Association of Research and Education \(flare-net.org\)](#)
- National First Ladies Library [National First Ladies' Library](#)
- Smithsonian First Ladies Collection [The First Ladies | National Museum of American History \(si.edu\)](#)
- White House Historical Association (sections on first ladies, first family life, slavery in the president's neighborhood) [Homepage - White House Historical Association \(whitehousehistory.org\)](#)
- White House Museum [White House Museum](#) (section on the east wing includes information on first ladies)

Grading Scale

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	Below 60
There are 100 points possible in the course	

Assignment	% of Grade
FLARE Focus Essay	30%
Class participation	30%
Final paper	40%

Schedule

Required Reading and Assignment Before the First Class

READ: Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 17 of the Textbook *U.S. First Ladies: Making History and Leaving Legacies* and : Grad students read: [Republican Motherhood | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](#) Campbell, *The Presidency: A Two-Person Career* (on Canvas).

September 16 9:00 am-5:00 pm

9:00-9:15 Introduction of instructor and class members. Why are you taking the course? Who is your favorite first lady and why?

9:15-9:30 Overview of the textbook and syllabus.

9:30-10:00 Why study first ladies? Based on what you read in Chapter 1, why do you think we should know more about first ladies?

10:00-10:55 Your list of favorite first ladies—how do they compare to the top 15 on the polls? Discuss similarities and differences. What criteria should we use to evaluate first ladies in future polls? We will create the survey.

10:55-11:00 Stretch and comfort break

11:00-12:00 First ladies and race—were you aware of this history? What surprised you the most in the chapter? How does this issue transcend time but also shows the evolution of the first lady's role? How do culture and social norms influence this issue? What other issues are comparable in our history?

We will watch video of Marian Anderson's concert and look at the White House Historical Association's website Slavery in the President's Neighborhood ([Slavery in the President's Neighborhood - White House Historical Association \(whitehousehistory.org\)](https://www.whitehousehistory.org/slavery-in-the-presidents-neighborhood))

12:00-1:00 Lunch break

1:00-2:00 Researching first ladies—resources available to you and how to use them. Guest speaker Nancy Kegan Smith (textbook co-author and Retired Director of Presidential Materials Division, National Archives and Records Administration). Refer to Chapter 17.

2:00-2:55 The First Three—Martha Washington—how time, culture, republican motherhood, and her personal story—especially being a general's wife—impacted her development of the role.

2:55-3:00 Stretch and comfort break

3:00-4:30 Abigail Adams and Dolley Madison—how time, culture, and their personal stories impacted further development of the role with Nancy Kegan Smith. Excerpts from FLARE programs on Abigail Adams and Dolley Madison saving George Washington.

4:30-5:00 Preview of the remainder of the textbook to demonstrate the evolution. Your comments and questions about Day 1 and the assignment.

Required Reading and Assignment Before Class 2

READ: Textbook Chapters 4, 5, 9, 13 and 15 and one additional chapter of your choice.

[Beautification: A Legacy of Lady Bird Johnson \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/learn/press-releases/2022/beautification-a-legacy-of-lady-bird-johnson)

Press release, "Remarks by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson at a Meeting to Discuss Formation of a Committee for a More Beautiful Capital, 2/11/1965", "Mrs. Johnson - Speeches," Reference File, LBJ Presidential Library, accessed August 22, 2022, <https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/ref-ctjspeeches-19650211-1600>.

[Press release, "Remarks of Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson at Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts, 10/8/1967" · Discover Production \(discoverlbj.org\)](https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/ref-ctjspeeches-19671008-1600)

Assignment Due on October 13—FLARE Focus article. Using the criteria developed in the first class, rank the first ladies, and send them to me by October 25 via email.

October 28 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

9:00-10:00 Each of you will summarize your FLARE Focus essay and answer questions from the class. Consider: Why did you select this topic? Why is it important for better understanding of first ladies? What is unique about your approach to the essay from what you read in the book or knew prior to researching?

10:00-10:55 The major contributions of the 19th century first ladies. What factors influenced their level of activism the most? What did they contribute to the role's evolution? Which first ladies do you consider the most important in the 19th century and why? What role did Southern culture play in shaping the role?

10:55-11:00 Stretch and comfort break

11:00-12:00 Setting the stage for activism—what were the incremental changes that made an Eleanor Roosevelt possible? You will provide additional information from the additional chapter you selected to research.

12:00-1:00 Lunch break

1:00-2:30 Guest speakers—working in the White House: What is it like to work for a first lady? What goes on behind the scenes in the east wing? What does a chief of staff do? What does a press secretary do? How does one prepare a first lady for her communication activities? These and other topics will be covered by guests Anita McBride who is Executive-in-Residence Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies in the School of Public Affairs at American University, chief of staff to First Lady Laura Bush, and textbook co-author; and possible surprise guest speaker.

2:30-2:35 stretch and comfort break

2:35-4:00 First ladies after Eleanor and their impact. We will have a general discussion based on your optional chapter reviews of why some first ladies stepped back from activism, how Lady Bird Johnson restored the activist first lady and set patterns for future first ladies, what contributions first ladies from Pat Nixon to Dr. Jill Biden have made, and what challenges and missteps modern first ladies made.

4:00-4:30 First ladies and political activities. We will look at videos of first ladies' political ads, social media, and speeches on behalf of their husbands' campaigns and political agendas.

4:30-5:00 Using the criteria developed in the first class, I will compile your results and share them for discussion and wrap up your concluding thoughts about why we should study first ladies.

Final assignment is due on November 30 at 5:00 pm ET via Canvas