

Saint Louis University
Communication Department (3 credits Hybrid)

Course Description

Instructor: Diana B. Carlin

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester students will have demonstrated that they 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 also stayed the same since Martha Washington.
- Analyze first ladies' communication strategies and explain what made them succeed or fail.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the various communication channels available to modern first ladies.
- Identify ways in which first ladies impacted the presidency and U.S. history.
- Apply a variety of research methods to 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.
- Develop and execute a major research project that culminates in a publishable article (graduate students).
- Write a FLARE Focus article.
- Apply a variety of research tools and resources to the study of first ladies.

Required Reading

- TEXTBOOK—Diana B. Carlin, Nancy Kegan Smith, and Anita B. McBride. *U.S. First Ladies: Their Lives and Their Legacies*. San Diego, CA: Cognella, 2023.
- Karin Vasby Andersen, "The First Lady: A Site of 'American Womanhood,'" in Wertheimer, pp. 17-30. (Canvas)
- Karlyn Kohrs Campbell. "The Rhetorical Presidency: A Two-Person Career," in Martin J. Medhurst, ed. *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency*. College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1996, pp. 179-195. (Canvas)
- Molly Meijer Wertheimer, ed. *Inventing a Voice: The Rhetoric of American First Ladies of the Twentieth Century*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004. Introduction, pp. 1-15. (Canvas)
- Katherine A.S. Sibley, ed. *Southern First Ladies: Culture and Place in White House History*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2020. Introduction pp. 1-10 (Canvas)

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.
- National First Ladies Library [National First Ladies' Library](#)

Online

- 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 \(flare-net.org\)](#)
- 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)
- Smithsonian First Ladies Collection [The First Ladies | National Museum of American History \(si.edu\)](#)
- Presidential libraries—you can link through [www.nara.gov](#).

Assignments

1. “Fill in the gaps” biographical report. The textbook does not go into depth on most of the early first ladies. Using other resources such as biographies from the National First Ladies Library, Library of Congress, White House Historical Association, sources at the end of chapters in the textbook, memoirs, collected biographies such as Sibley, Gould, Caroli, or full biographies of a first lady, develop a more complete profile of the first lady during her White House years who is featured in Chapters 3, 4, 5 (see the following for a bibliography by first lady [FLARE | FLARE Selected Bibliography \(flare-net.org\)](#)). The paper should include the following: (a) what contributions did she make to the presidency, development of the FL role, politics, or social change that were not mentioned in the book; (b) what in her personal history influenced her contributions and choices as FL; (c) using one of the category systems from Chapter 1, how would you categorize her? The paper is 5-6 pages for undergraduates and follows standard essay format with a style manual of your choice for citations. You should have at least two sources. Graduate students should include additional information on either the way that historical or social context influenced the FL—theoretical analysis is encouraged. The paper is 7-8 pages with at least four sources. You will give an oral report of 8-10 minutes and answer questions; PPT is an option but not required (20%). DUE DATE: September 22.
2. Response to Cognella questions about the book. Your feedback on the book will improve it for future students and we will acknowledge you in the first edition. Questions to address are on Canvas. DUE DATE: October 20. (5%)
3. Communication Analysis. Select a first lady’s speech and write a rhetorical criticism following guidelines on Canvas. The paper should be 3-4 pages long and follow essay style and use an appropriate style manual for citations. Graduate students’ papers should be 5-6 pages. DUE DATE: November 3 (15%)
4. Write a 500-word FLARE Focus article and submit it to FLARE for review and possible publication. DUE DATE: November 17. (15%) [FLARE | FLARE Focus \(flare-net.org\)](#).
5. Final project for undergraduate students is a research project that takes a traditional first lady role or issue and traces it historically and makes an argument for its importance to the presidency and/or society. Essay format with appropriate citations. Eight to ten pages. DUE DATE: December 15 (35%) Topic idea is due November 10.

Final project for graduate students is a publishable essay (20 pages) which explores first ladies from a focused perspective such as: an issue that developed over the course of first lady history—chapter 2 is an example on civil rights and race—examines first ladies from a feminist perspective and considers how feminism was enacted at various stages of our history, identifies a key issue in a presidency that a first lady influenced or can look at a group of first ladies who influenced policy, examines first ladies’ legacies in terms of societal change, examines rhetorical choices and impact of a single first lady or a group of first ladies in similar situations. DUE DATE: December 15. (35%) Topic is due November 10.

6. Class participation. This includes attendance and contributions to discussion. (10%)

Grading Scale

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|-------------|----------|------------|
| A 93-100(+) | C+ 77-79 | D- 60-62 |
| A- 90-93 | C 73-76 | F Below 60 |
| B+ 87-89 | C- 70-72 | |
| B 83-86 | D+ 67-69 | |
| B- 80-82 | D 63-66 | |

Tentative Schedule

August 25—In person: Introduction to the course, the US presidency as a two-person career, evolution of the role and permanent duties and issues, preparing to research, reacting to the textbook.

Readings: Textbook Chapters 1, 2, and 17.

Campbell, Two-person career (on Canvas)

Andersen, Inventing a Voice (Canvas)

Questions for textbook review (Canvas)

September 1—In person: The first three—Washington, Adams, and Madison. View FLARE program on Abigail Adams before class ([\(66\) Abigail Adams and the "Reigns of Government."](#) - [YouTube](#)) and be prepared to discuss. Questions to consider: How did they exhibit the two-person career, how were they examples of American womanhood, is the concept of Republican wife/mother compatible with the concept of agency with these three? What do you consider their major contributions, and any negatives? We will view excerpts from the C-SPAN programs on these three and will discuss what experts said.

Readings: Textbook Chapter 3

Republican motherhood: [Republican Motherhood | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](#) Kerber (handout)
[How is the term Republican Motherhood usually defined by historians? - Estaticasgratis.com](#)

September 8—In person Early to mid-19th century—the absentee women, those with some impact, and the change agents. Before class watch C-SPAN on Sarah Polk [Q&A with Amy Greenberg | C-SPAN.org](#).

Questions to consider: What role did Southern culture play in shaping the role beyond Martha and Dolley? How did the presidential marriage impact the role? Has Mary Lincoln been given fair treatment? What surprised you about some of these first ladies? Why do we know so little about them? We will view excerpts from C-SPAN on a few of these women.

Readings: Textbook, Chapter 4

Sibley (on Canvas)

September 15—Zoom Mid to late 19th century—More assassinations, deaths, activism, and setting the stage for Eleanor. We will view excerpts from presentations for the White House

Historical Association, FLARE, and C-SPAN and discuss. Before class watch FLARE program on Edith Wilson: [\(66\) Taking a New Look at Edith Wilson - YouTube](#).

Readings: Textbook, Chapter 5

September 22—Zoom: Biographical reports are due by class time and presentations in class. Eleanor Roosevelt—we could do an entire class on her! Why was Eleanor able to do what no previous first lady had done? What did her post-White House life suggest about a first lady's enduring influence? Why is she ranked number one on every poll? Should she be? GUEST SPEAKER—Nancy Kegan Smith who wrote the chapter on Eleanor.

Readings: Textbook, Chapter 6.

September 29—In person Stepping back from activism. Before class listen to the podcast on Designing Camelot ([Designing Camelot - White House Historical Association \(whitehousehistory.org\)](#)). The military wife from Martha to Mamie (review slides on Canvas before class). Why did Bess and Mamie step back from Eleanor's activism? Could they have been activist in different ways? Why is Jacqueline Kennedy's influence enduring? How did Donald Trump impact Melania's enactment of the role?

Readings: Textbook, Chapter 7

October 6—Zoom Lady Bird Johnson—a return to activism. GUEST SPEAKER—Nancy Kegan Smith who wrote the chapter and worked with and was a friend of Mrs. Johnson. We will view videos on the Whistle Stop Tour.

Readings: Textbook, Chapter 8

Lady Bird speech at Williams College (on Canvas)

October 13—In person First Ladies and Communication Choices. Before class watch the FLARE program on first ladies and speeches ([\(66\) First Ladies In Their Own Words - YouTube](#)). How have communication choices changed over time? How have they stayed the same? What do you think are the most effective ways for a 21st century first lady to communicate? We will watch excerpts of several first ladies' speeches, TV appearances and other communication examples for discussion. We will discuss the basics of rhetorical criticism for your paper.

Readings: Textbook Chapters 13 and 14

Speeches on Canvas—Roosevelt, Bush, Clinton

How to write a rhetorical criticism

October 20—Zoom Review of Textbook is due. We will discuss your reviews—be tough on it as we want the best book possible. Guest Speaker Anita McBride, chief of staff to Laura Bush, Director of American University's First Ladies Initiative, member of the White House Historical Association Board of Directors, and co-author of your textbook. This class looks at how the office of the first lady changed over time from duties, staffing, and physical location and how first ladies influenced the White House itself.

Readings: Textbook Chapters 9 and 16

October 27—Fall Break—NO CLASS

November 3—Zoom: Rhetorical Analysis is due. Oral presentations on the analyses. Before class watch the FLARE program on Pat Nixon ([66 Pat Nixon: Unheralded First Lady - YouTube](#)) and we will discuss. Why is Pat Nixon misunderstood or underrated? How did the marriages of the first ladies in this chapter influence their roles? What other factors affected what they were able to do and not do as well as how we view them? We will watch excerpts of the FLARE program on Betty Ford and Nancy Reagan and breast cancer. What legacies did this group of women create?

Readings: Textbook, Chapter 10

November 10—In person The Baby Boomers. Barbara Bush was the last of the WWII generation first ladies and the next four first ladies (we will only touch briefly on Michelle Obama, however) had careers and approached the position differently from their predecessors and from each other. Why was the country not ready for a co-presidency? How did Laura Bush expand on Barbara Bush's legacy on literacy? How did each of the women use communication strategies successfully or not?

Readings: Textbook, Chapter 11

November 17—Zoom FLARE Focus article due. Michelle Obama makes history. How were the Obamas the personification of the American Dream? How and why did she use social media rather than traditional media? You should have the topic for your final paper decided by today.

Readings: Textbook, Chapter 12 and refer back to Chapter 13.

November 24—Thanksgiving Break—NO CLASS

December 1—Zoom First ladies on the political stage and first ladies and war. Before class watch the FLARE program on First Ladies and War ([66 First Ladies and War - YouTube](#)). We will discuss the ways in which first ladies' political activities changed, especially from the early first ladies such as Abigail Adams, Dolley Madison, and Sarah Polk to modern first ladies who have their own campaign staffs and often dovetail their activities with their husbands' agendas. We will also look at the ways in which first ladies responded to wartime situations which have a political dimension.

Readings: Textbook, Chapter 15

December 8—Last class—In person This class will provide an opportunity for you to “workshop” your final paper. You should be prepared to describe your research approach, what your major thesis is and how you are developing it. You can ask for additional research ideas and get general reactions from the class and instructor. The remainder of the class will be looking back and looking forward. Read Chapter 1 again before reading Chapter 18. How have your views of first ladies changed over the course of the semester? How would you describe the

evolution of the role? How would you rank the first ladies? What classification system would you create for analyzing the first ladies?

Readings: Textbook, Chapters 1 and 18

December 15—Final paper due (you can submit earlier)