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America's First Ladies:
A Catalyst for Change in Female Leadership, Power and
Influence or a Reinforcement of Gender Norms in
American Society?

By

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of the requirements for
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ABSTRACT

GRINHAUS, DEBORAH KIM: America's First Ladies: A Catalyst for Change in Female Leadership, Power and Influence or a Reinforcement of Gender Norms in American Society?

ADVISOR: Lori Marso

My work examines the nature of The Office of the First Lady of the United States as a lens through which to view female leadership, power and influence in America. Through analyzing the singular experiences of four controversial First Ladies; Abigail Adams, Jacqueline Kennedy, Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama, this dissertation illustrates the ambiguities and challenges associated with The Office of First Lady as a metaphor for female power. Why analyze the First Ladyship as compared to other political posts held by women? The Office itself is not elected, appointed, institutionalized or legal. Therefore, how do these women use The Office, a feminized position accorded through marriage, to maintain, disrupt, challenge or reinforce gender roles and stereotypes in American society? Each First Lady analyzed through this work represents a shifting ideal of women in America as constructed through the era in which they served. While the feminist movement has either benefited or been disadvantaged by these First Ladies, what are the ultimate contributions of the Office? With a former First Lady potentially making her second run for the Presidency, it is clear that the Office of the First Lady of the United States yields more power than once thought imaginable.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the role of First Lady has been perceived as largely symbolic. She is expected to represent an ideal—and largely mythical—concept of American womanhood. Many former First Ladies were highly accomplished, but true stories of what they had done in their lives were overlooked, forgotten or suppressed. By the time I was preparing to take on the role, history was finally catching up to reality. In March 1992, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History revised its popular First Ladies Exhibit to acknowledge the varied political roles and public images of these women. In addition to gowns and china, the museum displayed the camouflage jacket Barbara Bush wore when she visited the troops of Desert Storm with her husband and featured a quote from Martha Washington: “I am more like a state prisoner than anything else”. The exhibit’s chief curator, Edith Mayo, and the Smithsonian were criticized for rewriting history and demeaning the “family values” of the First Ladies –Hillary Clinton (2003, 119).

As defined by Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, a ‘Lady’ is: “a woman of superior social position or a courteous, decorous, or genteel woman” (Merriam-Webster). What does it then mean to be the *First Lady*? Unarguably, the First Lady is responsible for upholding the definition stated above to the greatest extent. As the ‘First’ of all the Ladies in the country, the President’s spouse is the most well recognized and scrutinized woman in America. In addition, she serves as a role model, figurehead and symbolic representation of American culture. Her ideals, values and morals must exude patriotism for her country, support of her husband, care for her children, and the genteel aspects that come associated with being a lady. As a result, the First Lady holds up a mirror to American society by means of representing the quintessential feminine post. In order to mirror social trends and garner public approval ratings, First Ladies have been restricted to fulfill duties that commonly align with society’s view of gender stereotypes and cultural norms associated with womanhood. For example, the First Lady is recognized as the “hostess” of the United States and is responsible for planning arrangements for State dinners, White House decor and other sorts of event planning – all very ‘feminine’ tasks.

The name of the institution itself, “First Lady” carries with it an extremely feminine essence, creating an ideal - usually mythical (as stated by Clinton) - that the First Lady is expected to live up to. Through the name *First Lady*, it is clear that the office is so premised on the existence of a wife that the institution inevitably and immediately becomes feminized. She is not the First *Woman*, or the First *Female*, for a reason. Rather, she is a *Lady*, and the most important one at that.

This paper works to analyze the potential the First Lady has in changing the perceptions of female power in America. However, we must ask the question, what is power? What does it mean for women to be powerful or powerless? Power in society has traditionally been gendered (male power vs. female power). From the beginnings of our nation, men have had the ability to form government, make laws, attend universities, vote, run companies and hold the most prestigious job of all, the Presidency. Through all of these important responsibilities, men acquire what is seen as legitimate forms of power. The availability of resources, status and authority only serve to further define their power. Since women are not typically represented in these spheres, an inevitable power divide between men and women has come to bear fruit. How then, do women gain the ability to acquire the same level of power as men? When female power is defined by motherhood and success in being a wife, the roles between men and women are diametrically opposed. The disruption of these norms, say, represented by a woman in a traditionally male dominated sphere, causes great discomfort and difficulty towards the perception of women in American society. The First Lady is the closest role model women have to influencing the most powerful position of all, the Presidency, and in turn, the nation. This is exactly why the First Lady is being analyzed for her contributions to

the perception of female power. She, perhaps, is the first feminized post to attain resources, status and authority, the very essences that define traditional male power.

History has proven that in gender relations, women are struggling to live in a world dominated by male supremacy. While the foundation that has been laid down has allowed man to stand on a universal platform, it has alienated women, causing female power to be seen as a paradox or an oxymoron within American society. As a result, because “women have historically served in secondary positions, they have learned to internalize this subordinate status” (Fox and Lawless 2005). It is common these days to find articles in *The New York Times*, or *Washington Post* citing what it means to be a female in a position of power, not just politically. These articles are often attempting to explain the perception of females in leadership roles in corporate America and typically, the perception is a negative one. For example, studies have shown that when a female speaks up in the workplace, be it meetings, presentations, pitches, etc., they are usually perceived as bossy, aggressive and frustrated (Sandberg 2013). When a woman does not speak up at all, they are seen as submissive, as a mouse, having nothing intelligent to contribute to the conversation (Soloman 2013). On the other hand, men are respected and valued for their outspoken nature in the workplace. The statistics that Stephen Soloman (2013) presents, regarding executive rank in big companies, in his *New York Times* article, “Why So Few Women Reach the Executive Rank” are overwhelming:

“Women make up only 16 percent of directors at Fortune 500 companies, 4 percent of chief executives at Standard & Poor’s 500 companies and 10 percent of chief financial officers at S.& P. 500 companies. On Wall Street a small, but increasing, number of traders and executives are women (although the numbers are even worse at hedge funds, where only 3 percent of assets are managed by women).”

In comparison however, more than 57% of bachelor's degrees from four-year institutions are awarded to women (Soloman 2013). Although more women are being educated in our country, women are not reflected in positions of power in numbers that match their education. Rather, our society feels more comfortable and willing to accept men in these positions and as a result, so few women have been able, or even attempted, to enter these spheres.

Richard Fox and Jennifer Lawless (2005) argue that women are not as politically ambitious as men due to “the longstanding patterns of traditional socialization that persist in U.S culture ... these different social roles and social expectations for women and men have permeated the landscape of human civilization throughout time” (7). The roles Fox and Lawless speak about are that of “public extra-familial jobs done by men and intra-familial jobs performed by the female” (8). Due to these long standing traditions, women have been kept out of the sphere of politics and therefore, have been deprived of the ability to acquire political power. What sort of obstacle does this pose for women? Why is it important for women to be represented in government? And, why is the Office of the First Lady such an important figure symbolically and literally, for all women in America? As Jennifer Lawless (2009) explains in her book *Sexism and Gender Bias in Election 2008: A More Complex Path for Women in Politics*, “women feel better about government when more women are included in positions of political power” (76). On a similar note, Barbara Burrell (1997) argues that:

Women in public office stand as symbols for other women, both enhancing their identification with the system and their ability to have influence within it. This subjective sense of being involved and heard for women, in general, alone makes the election of women to public office important because, for so many years, they were excluded from power” (151).

As many scholars argue, there is a clear connection between the “inclusion of more women in positions of political power [and the] changing nature of political representation in American government” (Lawless and Fox 2005, 7). As a result, the First Lady has great influence in helping further develop the nature and gendered constructs of political power. She has the ability to make the visibility of women in positions of political power, as the First Lady is one itself, more comfortable in American culture. However, if women fail to pursue public office, “large gender disparities in office holding will persist and continue to carry serious implications for the quality of political representation” (Lawless and Fox 2005, 7). Therefore, the need for women to participate in political office is extremely pivotal if the gendered rhetoric ingrained in our society is ever to be deconstructed.

Why look at the First Lady, and not at other positions of female leadership? Female senators and women in the House of Representatives are undoubtedly also great indicators of female leadership and power within America society. So why is the office of the First Lady being explored as opposed to these other posts? Primarily, women who hold offices in either the Senate or House of Representatives hold elected positions. These elected positions are fulfilling roles and responsibilities that are mainly for men. As a result, they are in a male sphere of power carrying out jobs that have clearly stated rules and definitions. Female senators and representatives know exactly the duties they are to fulfill to how to carry out their responsibilities. On the other hand, the office of the First Lady is much more ambiguous and undefined. By virtue of the name of the institution itself, First Ladies stand within a female sphere of power. They have accorded the office through marriage, a very feminized institution. The fact that First Ladies

acquire their power, female power, through means of their husband detracts from their perception of having an authoritative and influential post. Females in congress must coordinate a campaign, come from prestigious educational background, and have gained the merit of being warranted such a post by their own means - not by means of their husband. In this sense, women who hold these posts carry much more organized and legitimately recognized forms of power.

As demonstrated, the office of the First Lady of the United States is one important, and maybe surprising, lens through which to analyze the perception of female power and leadership in America. The office itself is not institutionalized or defined, not even in our very own Constitution. However, as Carl Sferrazza Anthony (1990) argues, “this institution, albeit unofficial, has its own history and roots” (7). There are no written rules or responsibilities laid out for women who take up the office. This ambiguity causes much tension to arise between the First Lady and the American public. Carl Sferazza Anthony’s two volumes titled, *First Ladies: The Saga of the Presidents’ Wives and their Power* (1990), chronicles the balance between power, expectations and acceptance in the post of First Lady. This dynamic is a difficult one as, “Americans are ambivalent about presidential wives. The public expects the First Lady to fulfill a multitude of roles flawlessly, and there is criticism at any departure from perceived standards. At the same time the criteria for success as a First Lady constantly change as the public’s view of women evolves and develops” (Gould 1996, xv). As Lewis Gould (1996) recaps in his essays on the 42 First Ladies up to Hillary Clinton, the office of First Lady is in a distinct position to respond to the changes in American society and the social demands on women. Therefore, the office is a flexible entity, one that is subject to be modeled and

shaped differently each time by its owner and era. In addition, “Americans have sensed that the wife of the president of the United States says something meaningful about the way the nation has chosen to organize its private and public affairs” (Gould 1996, xix). As a result, the First Lady becomes an influential representation of American society, and in turn, a powerful tool through which to deconstruct gendered norms and redefine the role of women.

Historically, some First Ladies have gone above and beyond the call of duty, using their platform of First Lady as a path to launch their own political careers and step into an influential sphere traditionally dominated by men (e.g., Hillary Rodham Clinton). On the other hand, other First Ladies have reinforced societal structures that have bound females to serve as helpmates to their husbands and fulfill the feminine tasks associated with the role (e.g., Jacqueline Kennedy). Therefore, they have failed to use their position to usher in a new definition of female power. While Jacqueline Kennedy found a love of fashion, the arts and restoration of the White House during her time in office, those very spheres remained extremely feminized. Jacqueline Kennedy exercised female power in a female sphere. On the other hand, Hillary Clinton found a love of policy making and involvement in political affairs – spheres typically dominated by male power. The backlash and negativity associated with Hillary’s progressive agenda represent the tensions, challenges and difficulties associated with the Office of the First Lady.

Each First Lady has approached the office with different expectations of what they might do, how they will do it and why. For example, Pat Nixon just wanted “to go down in history as the wife of a President” (First Ladies Research). Nancy Reagan believed “it’s an important, legitimate role for a First Lady to look after a President’s

health and well being. And if that interferes with other plans, so be it. No First Lady need to make apologies for looking out for her husband's personal welfare... The First Lady is, first of all, a wife" (First Ladies Research). On the other hand, there have been First Ladies that view the position through a drastically different lens. During her time as First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt stated, "...but there isn't going to be any First Lady. There is just to be plain, ordinary Mrs. Roosevelt...I never wanted to be the president's wife, and don't want it now. You don't quite believe me, do you? Very likely no one would – except possibly some woman who had the job" (First Ladies Research). Just as Eleanor Roosevelt detested the role of First Lady, "Lady" Bird Johnson believed, "the First Lady is, and always had been, an unpaid public servant elected by one person, her husband" (First Ladies Research). As represented through these First Ladies, every woman that comes to hold the office approaches the tasks, responsibilities, and perception of the role differently. Does this affect the extent to which they use their platform to help redefine the female power, leadership and influence in American society?

Throughout the middle-late twentieth century, the Office of the First Lady began heading toward a greater state of visibility primarily through activism on behalf of the First Ladies. Although each First Lady has had the opportunity to champion a cause that she feels passionate about, she must always keep in mind the ideal of womanhood she is supposed to represent in order to be favorable with the public. For example, Rosalynn Carter urged her husband to implement a council on mental health, Nancy Reagan founded the "Just Say No" campaign regarding student alcohol and drug addiction after being highly scrutinized for her lavish lifestyle and as a former librarian, Laura Bush launched "Ready to Read, Ready to Learn," combating youth literacy programs. It is

clear to see that each First Lady has the power to mold, define, and shape her legacy in the White House, to an extent. The freedom given to each First Lady is limited and constrained by the ideals and societal constructs placed on the institution. Through exploring the means by which several First Ladies have either advanced or contracted the role of women in American society, one is able to recognize the effects the office has had on female power in America.

It is the central purpose of this paper to explore the ways in which a position granted by virtue of a very gender stereotypical institution, marriage, may have the potential to transform the perception of female power and leadership in America. This dissertation will analyze the time in office of four controversial First Ladies: Abigail Adams, Jacqueline Kennedy, Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama. Through each chapter, a historical context of the moment in which each First Lady took the office will be laid out. The backdrop to which each First Lady served is an important reflection of the social demands and expectations on women of the time. In turn, these dramatic and controversial moments in history will shed light on the extent to which each First Lady was able use her public influence to bring the plight of women in society to the forefront of the conversation. Secondly, each First Lady will be analyzed in relation to the changing conceptualizations of femininity in America. In relation to female leadership and power, it is important to provide a road map for the relationship between white women and black women throughout our nation's history. As there have been 43 white First Ladies and only 1, current, black First Lady, how has the trajectory of each group's experience reflected the office? Have Michelle Obama's predecessors used their platform to help deconstruct gender norms and racial divisions in America? Or have they harmed

the black feminist movement and opportunity for equality for *all* women? Lastly, each First Lady will be recognized for their ultimate contributions to the office in addition to being applauded or scrutinized for the extent to which they help disrupt gendered constructs in American society and worked towards improving the perception of powerful women in America.

Chapter 1: Abigail Adams – “Remember the Ladies” 1797 -1801

Abigail Adams is most remembered as the First Lady of the United States who encouraged her husband to “Remember the Ladies” (Gould 1996) while drafting the Declaration of Independence in 1776. This famous quote by Adams is a testament to the extraordinary ambitions she had for women and American society as a whole. She was a progressive and intellectual thinker who used her knowledge and values to influence her husband, John Adams, the second President of the United States. Abigail Adams knew her role as First Lady brought unique power and influence to her ideas and as a result, she utilized many resources to ensure her messages were disseminated and ideas debated in order to advance the status of women in the Republic. However, Abigail’s activism was done within a very conservative framework and as a result, Abigail Adams simultaneously reinforced gender stereotypes and inequalities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Abigail Adams was born in Weymouth, Massachusetts on November 11, 1744. She was a descendent of notable English families and came from a well-respected, well-educated background. Abigail was heavily influenced by her grandparents, Elizabeth and John Norton who helped cement Abigail’s values, ideas and morals through “discipline with justice and dignity” (Gould 1996, 17). Abigail’s mother also demonstrated a strong belief in religion, devotion and the family. As a result, Abigail believed that “nothing bound the human mind but religion” (Gould 1996, 17). As a young girl, Adams was ahead of her years (a sentiment that would hold true throughout her time as Stateswoman and First Lady as well). At the age of 17 she wished to be able to “study with the same

“great Masters” who taught the male members of [her] family” (Gould 1996, 17).

Clearly, a very ambitious young woman, Adams was laying the foundation for the influential life she would have as mother, wife, activist and second First Lady of the United States.

Abigail met John Adams as a young 15 year old while John, himself was 24 and at the time in love with another younger woman (Gould 1996). Their first meeting was not a case of love at first sight. Rather, John was not fond of Abigail or her sister, feeling they lacked personality, wit and humor (Gould 1996). In addition, John was not originally fond of Abigail’s other family members, including Abigail’s father, William. John was concerned with his extravagant possessions and ownership of a slave, named Tom. John believed that William, a Reverend, concealed much of his wealth and belongings in order to be more favorable in the eyes (Gould 1996).

In 1755, fresh out of Harvard University, John returned to Braintree, Massachusetts where he and Abigail would meet once again. Their second meeting was much more successful and would be the beginning of one of the most historical and influential partnerships in American history. Although they came from different class backgrounds and families, John and Abigail soon fell madly in love, which became evident in their admiration, and dedication to one another (Gould 1996). They were married on Thursday, October 25, 1764 after a rampant epidemic of smallpox broke out in Boston the March prior (Gould 1996).

The marriage of Abigail and John Adams had to weather many hardships, mainly brought on by distance and lack of contact. The letters they wrote back and forth are of great historical significance and give enormous insight into their romantic and influential

relationship. They also provide extensive documentation of the events of the Colonial America, making Abigail's writing one of the greatest contributions to her legacy. Through their correspondence, we learn that John came to view Abigail as a lifetime partner, confidante, and trusted ally. Many argue that from the beginning, Abigail Adams was the stabilizer in her husband's epic journey and influence in creating a new nation (Gould 1996). While John was away, Abigail would stay involved and active by reaching out to her husband's colleagues and friends. John would often attempt to do his best to "quench her Eveship's thirst for related politics" (Gould 1996, 20), as Abigail had an innately inquisitive nature.

John and Abigail went on to have four children: Nabby, John Quincy, Charles, and Thomas. Being a mother was important to Abigail, however, she was able to take her knowledge further than just the kitchen and the nursery by exploring her interests and the rest of the world through her reading and writing. Although Abigail began working immediately as a mother (she had their first child just 10 days shy of 9 months after they were wed), Abigail also shared household chores with her husband, especially while he was away (Gould 1996). For example, Abigail helped out with management of the residence finances and the farming of their property for food (Gould 1996). This partnership was rare for eighteenth century women, as domestic duties were not typically shared with the male head of the household. Due to the fact that John regarded Abigail as an equal, Abigail exercised great influence over John's ideology and beliefs.

The historical correspondence that took place between Abigail and her husband began when John went to Philadelphia in 1774 to serve as a delegate for his colony in the First Continental Congress (Gould 1996). Their letters spoke about the complex public

issues and politics that the nation's new leaders faced such as loyalty to the crown, independence and revolutionary sentiments, a new form of government, and slavery (Gould 1996). John entrusted Abigail with many of these dilemmas, both personal and professional, acknowledging her wisdom and intelligence in finding the best solution. Abigail's responses to many of John's letters reflect her well-grounded advice in addition to her own attentive reporting of the news happening in New England. Through their correspondence, Abigail kept John very much in tune with the happenings of his colony's newspapers and the citizens' responses to the activities, legislation, news, and events of the Revolution (Gould 1996).

Abigail was again separated from her husband when he was sent to explore the territory of France and England in 1778, in order to fulfill his diplomatic service as minister. Their separation came to an end when Abigail joined her husband in France in 1783. During this visit, the King of England welcomed her into the land with open arms. His reception of Abigail represents the shifting relationship between the British Crown and Colonial America. When both John and Abigail returned to America, John was elected to serve as Vice President of the United States (1789-1797) and would soon become President in 1797. Becoming Vice President and President of the United States meant not only a change in position for John Adams, this too meant a change in position, power and influence for Abigail.

I. Historical Context

John Adams was an Enlightenment thinker who strongly supported American independence from the British Crown. His enlightenment values and political beliefs made him a dedicated Republican who advocated for an Independent America with a strong central government and Constitution (Staloff in Waldstreicher 2013). As President,

Adams followed in the footsteps of his predecessor, George Washington, and implemented policies that upheld Republican values and emphasized civic virtue (McCullough 2002). Although Adams followed in the footsteps of Washington and supported the economic policies advocated by Alexander Hamilton, Adams was an extremely independent-minded President and often made decisions without consulting those in his administration (McCullough 2002). Adams had a pugnacious spirit with a unique capability of making confident decisions in the face of extreme opposition and as a result, he created much tension between himself and his supporters (Siemers in Waldstreicher 2013).

During the onset of John and Abigail's political life, America was experiencing a tumultuous and chaotic time. There were many problems facing the new nation and pressing questions that needed to be addressed. Should the Colonies revolt and break away from British rule? Should the institution of slavery continue to be upheld and if so, should any restrictions be placed on it? What will the role of women be in the newly formed government? Should they be granted the rights to an education, voting, and ability to hold government office? While there were many pressing questions the leaders of the Republic faced, the largest issue affecting the nation was that of Independence. The American Revolution took place between 1765 – 1783 and caused many political, social and intellectual changes within American society (Morgan 1956).

During this time, America was divided into two alliances; those who sought independence from the British crown (Patriots) and those who wished to remain under the rule of the monarchy (Loyalists) (Ketchum 2002). Patriots began to reject life under the British monarchy and sought to fight for Independence from Great Britain. Events

such as the Stamp Act of 1765, Boston Massacre of 1770, Boston Tea Party of 1773 and Coercive Acts amplified anti-British sentiments within the Republic (Nicolson in Waldstreicher 2013). Adams himself, a clear supporter of sovereignty from the British Crown, was an opponent of the Stamp Act for he felt it violated two fundamental rights of the Colonies (Nicolson in Waldstreicher 2013). Primarily, Adams felt that the monarchy only had the right to tax the Colonies if the Colonies granted the crown their consent. Secondly, Adams supported the idea of being tried in a jury of one's peers. The Stamp Act helped heighten revolutionary sentiments within the colonies and developed Adams' position as a diplomat and important figure throughout the Revolution (Wong in Waldstreicher 2013).

In addition to the Stamp Act, the Boston Massacre of 1770 was a pivotal event for Adams. The British soldier's who were accused of killing 5 civilians after a conflict that occurred on the streets of Massachusetts, sought Adams for legal counsel (as no one else would defend them) (McCullough 2002). Adams was placed in a difficult position, as he knew that that his decision to represent the British soldiers may hurt his reputation as a leader of the American Revolution. However, Adams felt it his duty to uphold his commitment to the protection of innocence and as a result, he defended the British soldiers, stating famously;

It is more important that innocence be protected than it is that guilt be punished, for guilt and crimes are so frequent in this world that they cannot all be punished. But if innocence itself is brought to the bar and condemned, perhaps to die, then the citizen will say, "whether I do good or whether I do evil is immaterial, for innocence itself is no protection," and if such an idea as that were to take hold in the mind of the citizen that would be the end of security whatsoever. (McCullough 2002).

John Adams held his beliefs and values in high regard and was not willing to compromise them for the sake of his popularity. Although Adams' decision to defend the soldiers made him unpopular amongst Patriots in the Republic, Adams was elected as a representative to the First and Second Continental Congress in 1774, and 1775 (Bailyn 1967).

The Continental Congress forged together after the British Parliament placed what is known as the "Intolerable Acts" or "Coercive Acts" against the state of Massachusetts following the Boston Tea Party. These acts removed Massachusetts' ability to self-govern and many other rights that had been previously granted (Bailyn 1967). The Acts and restrictions that were placed on Massachusetts outraged the other colonies. Therefore, the other colonies rallied behind Massachusetts and created the Continental Congress in order to spearhead departure from British rule. Adams garnered much influence in the Congress and was one of the leaders in urging Americans to declare independence (McCullough 2002). In addition, Adams spent time overseas as a diplomat, encouraging foreign leaders to support the revolutionary cause (Wong in Waldstreicher 2013). Lastly, Adams largely influenced and helped Thomas Jefferson in drafting the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and was its greatest supporter in the Congress (McCullough 2002).

When it came time to draft the Constitution, Adams also played a pivotal role. Although many citizens expected a revised and updated version of The Articles of Confederation, the Articles were disregarded as drafting of the Constitution began (McCullough 2005). There were those in favor of central government, administration, and amenities such as a National Bank were known as the Federalists. These men, including John Adams, were typically wealthy and well educated. Their interests were

concerned with economic protection and the desire to be powerful (McCullough 2005). On the other hand, there were anti-Federalists such as Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry. Although Adams and Henry were not, the individuals they represented were typically debtors, farmers and other lower-class individuals (McCullough 2005). They opposed the Constitution as they felt the absence of a Bill of Rights deprived the public of basic rights. In addition, they were traumatized by tyranny under the British-crown and felt that one central government would hold too much power (such as the ability to tax) (Ketchum 2002).

Based on his impressive credentials in the events leading up to and during the Revolution, Adams earned himself a spot as George Washington's Vice President in 1789, and his own election as second President of the United States in 1797. John's term as President was anything but smooth and easy. The Adams administration faced much internal disunity as factions began to take over the Federalist Party (led by Adams' opponent, Alexander Hamilton) (Nicholson in Waldstreicher 2013). In addition, Adams and his party faced much opposition by Jeffersonian Republicans, who were "anti-administration" and opposed legislation such as the Jay Treaty and the National Bank, claiming that these were unconstitutional (Wood 2001).

Adams earned much distrust and hatred through his signing of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 (an Act that Abigail strongly supported) (Nicholson in Waldstreicher 2013). Republicans and other oppositionists felt that the Alien and Sedition acts were a means of strengthening the Federalist Party while suppressing all other voters who disagreed with Federalist strategy (Wood 2001). However, one of Adams' largest accomplishments during his presidency was his ability to resolve the conflict in France,

known as the ‘Quasi-War’, while facing the opposition of Hamilton and the faction within the Federalist Party at home (Nicholson in Waldstreicher 2013). Although Adams was able to resolve the relationship with France effectively, many believe that the signing of the Alien and Sedition Acts were one of Adams’ largest mistakes and were a direct contribution to his loss against Thomas Jefferson for a second term as President in 1800 (Haupt in Waldstreicher 2013).

The sentiment towards the institution of slavery was another issue greatly dividing the populace of the North and South in Colonial America. In 1787, just before Adams entered office as the Vice President, slavery was made illegal in the Northwest Territories and the Constitution prohibited Congress from banning the slave trade until 1808 (Horton 2004). However, in 1793, Eli Whitney’s creation of the cotton gin directly increased the demand and need for slave labor in America, encouraging those in the South to press for lighter restrictions on slavery (Horton 2004). The same year that Whitney invented the cotton gin, the U.S implemented what are known as fugitive slave laws. However, it is important to keep in mind that attempts to enact laws making it easier for slave-owners to reclaim their slaves began in 1784 under the Articles of Confederation (Horton 2004). However, the fugitive slave laws ensured that the federal government would protect slave-owners rights to their property, as stated in the Constitution. However, since slavery had already been abolished in the Northern territories, the law was loosely enacted, to the great indignation of slave-owners in the South (Wood 2004). Abolitionist sentiment continued to develop during this time and much more organized efforts, such as the Underground Railroad, began to work hard towards emancipation for slaves (Wood 2004). In addition, politicians in the North

passed ‘personal-liberty’ laws that granted runaway slaves the right to a jury trial (Horton 2004). Lastly, the North legally prohibited state officials from capturing, returning, or placing slaves in state jails.

Both John and Abigail Adams are known for their opposition to slavery. John was extremely proud of the fact that he never owned a slave and believed the institution to be a poor reflection of the ideals America should represent (McCullough 2002). As a result, he supported many of the laws enacted by the Northern territories that worked towards helping the slaves and abolishing slavery throughout the new nation (Wood 2004). Abigail supported her husband's beliefs on slavery and was appalled that American men were willing to deprive slaves the same basic rights they fought so hard to get from the British (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). She believed in the freedom and education of blacks and made her stance on the subject very clear to her husband (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013).

Lastly, there were many issues affecting women during this time as American society was drastically affected by the Democratic ideals of the Revolution and parting ways with Colonial views of women. The status of women varied slightly from colony to colony in Colonial America. For example, Quakers, who were prevalent in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, demonstrated egalitarian views of women from early on (Berkin 1997). Quakers, in general, believed that all individuals, regardless of sex or race, obtained the same ‘inner light’ (Hackett 1989). However, in the remainder of the colonies, there were few occupations and possibilities available to women due to coverture and traditions of patriarchy that were brought over from Europe. Coverture stated that women had no legal identity when married and that every action, activity, etc.,

was under the authority of either their father or husband (Berkin 1997). Since the majority of women in Colonial America were married, the most readily available occupation was that of “housewife” (“goodwife” in the New England Colonies). The housewife in Colonial times had the main responsibilities of keeping the home clean, children behaved and home manufacturing (Berkin 1997). As manufactured goods from the home became an imperative aspect of success in Colonial America, women helped produce products such as dairy and textile. Although women were producing these goods within the home, ownership of the goods belonged to the husband who also claimed ownership of the capital made off of the goods produced (Wood 2001). Due to the fact that women were placed within a very limited sphere, most women occupied their time by ensuring their responsibilities within the home were fulfilled while supporting their husbands endeavors outside of the home (Berkin 1997). As women’s involvement in affairs outside the home was limited, women in Colonial American demonstrated intense patriotism and loyalty to their husbands and country as a means of staying involved in societal affairs (Berkin 1997). The limitations placed on women, meager opportunities available, and complete autonomy of the male patriarch is what Abigail Adams considered to be the ‘female condition’ during the Republic.

In addition, there were some overlapping issues that affected both men and women. Women were divided between those who supported separation from the British and those who expressed ultimate loyalty to the British crown. Just as John did, Abigail strongly supported separation from British rule and was appointed (by her husband) to help convince other women in the Republic to support Independence as well (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013).

The Revolutionary war helped open up opportunities for women to serve as nurses and other skilled workers on the battlefields (McCullough 2005). Although women expanded their sphere just a bit during the Revolution, when the war was over, women remained subordinate to men and mother/ wife remained the only occupation available to them. Rosemarie Zagarri (2011) believes that the American Revolution undoubtedly created a fundamental debate regarding the rights of women in America and fostered an environment in which women's participation in government became a more favorable and viable possibility. However, as possibilities were created, a growing sentiment and backlash towards women's rights escalated, leading to a greater marginalization of women from political life (Zagarri 2011).

Women's issue regarding female education, the right to vote and own property, and hold government positions were all also pressing questions of the time. At this moment in history, women were not granted the rights to the same education as men and were dominated by the conservative beliefs of separate gendered spheres. Abigail supported separate gendered spheres and believed men and women were placed on Earth to fulfill different duties (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). However, Abigail believed that women still had a fundamental right to an education, the same education granted to men (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). This educational limitation placed on the female sex was by far the greatest source of trouble and distress for Abigail. Abigail expressed to her husband the benefits of educating women in the Republic and highlighted concerns regarding absolute power being placed in the hands of men, as she believed men could easily become tyrants (Barker-Benfield 2010). Abigail also expressed her willingness to

vote, if she were to be called upon by her country (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013), but never aggressively advocated for women's greater participation in government.

Unlike many other women in the Republic, Abigail demonstrated economic independence and took control of many property transactions in the absence of her husband (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). While Abigail's role within the home may have been more expansive than that of other housewives she preferred to remain within her gendered sphere, fulfilling the specific, domestic responsibilities allotted to women (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). As a result, Abigail truly exerted most of her efforts towards the plight of female education. Abigail used her words to implement a female rhetoric and feminist theme within the beliefs of her husband. Therefore, when it came time to discuss voting and ownership rights under the new Constitution, John's ideas undoubtedly had a feminist undertone (Barker-Benfield 2010). However, John did not advocate these rights as aggressively as many of his other causes (Barker-Benfield 2010).

It is clear that John and Abigail entered political life at a tempestuous moment in American history. Adams' role before, during and after the Revolution has cemented him as one of the most important Founding Fathers in American history. He advocated for separation from the British crown while maintaining his beliefs to counsel and the protection of innocence. He was a prominent figure during the Revolution and had much influence at the Philadelphia Convention, in drafting the Declaration of Independence and American Constitution. John and Abigail's views regarding the abolition of slavery largely aligned with the growing sentiments of equality and emancipation that others in the Republic supported as well. Although Abigail advocated more strongly for women's right to an education than did John, she continued to heavily influence his views on the

topic. The political climate of the time is indicative of the intense moment in history that John and Abigail lived through. The conflicts, issues and questions relevant during this moment in history serve as a backdrop against which we can thoroughly analyze Abigail's thoughts, power, influence and agenda as First Lady of the United States.

II. The Office of the First Lady of the United States – John and Abigail's Political Life

Abigail's influence on the female condition during the eighteenth century came well before, during and long after she held office as the First Lady of the United States. Adams' role from the very beginning of her marriage to John allotted her great influence as John valued her advice, wisdom, intellect and truly viewed her as an equal. She encouraged him to challenge both himself and his ideas, and that of those around him (Gould 1996). Abigail knew that John's elected posts would expand her influence greater than ever before. Although Abigail stayed well within the domestic and conservative sphere expected of women in the Republic, she was John's equal in their own private sphere. John pronounced and viewed Abigail as his "best, dearest, worthyest, wisest friend" (Gould 1996, 42). As a result, he would listen to her just as if she were sitting at the table helping draft the Declaration of Independence. As a matter of fact, John often commented to Abigail that he felt she was wiser than many of the men sitting at those tables before him, stating that her letters were "clearer and fuller Intelligence, than I can get from a whole Committee of Gentlemen" (Gould 1996, 43). In a letter to his granddaughter Caroline, John described Abigail as "more beautiful than Lady Russell, had a brighter genius, more information, a more refined taste, and at least her equal in the virtues of the heart" (Gould 1996, 42). In the public sphere they may have not be viewed as equal, however, privately, John and Abigail were nothing short of equals.

Abigail used her position as Second Lady and First lady to urge white women's rights, mainly the right to an education, upon her husband. In addition, although it was not the main focus of Abigail's agenda, she urged an end to slavery during her time in Office (Holton 2009). Abigail's opposition towards slavery was coupled with the growing sentiments of Revolution and equality that were disseminating across the Colonies. As a result, Abigail's views regarding slavery aligned with the already existing abolitionist cause. At this time, Quakers had already formed to support the emancipation, as they believed in ideals of equality and freedom for all. Abigail used her confidence and intelligence to argue for causes she felt adamantly about and therefore, Abigail expanded the office for female power within the context of eighteenth century activism.

As Lewis Gould (1996) explains, Abigail was acutely aware of the special condition of being born female and the limitations it imposed on her and her fellow peers throughout society. The restriction within a gendered sphere did not bother Abigail. However, it was the failure of society and government to recognize a women's right to vote that truly appalled Abigail. During her life in the political spotlight, Abigail championed various causes such as a women's participation in government affairs, protection from male abusers, female education, economic opportunity and independence and control over the body and childbearing decisions (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). Historians confidently agree that there was a clear intention by both John and Abigail to limit the size of their family, a practice that was not very common during this time as there were no incentives in controlling procreation. However, the Adams' "considered an over-abundance of children a form of slavery" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). The connotation of slavery, in Colonial times, is unarguably a very negative one. Slavery

exists all around the Adams' who publicly condemn the institution. Therefore, the decision to align to the institution of slavery with an over-abundance of children represents how adamantly they felt about the negative aspects of having a large family, procreation and servitude.

In terms of child-bearing, the means by which Abigail and John limited the size of their family are unknown, however, "the more important point is that Abigail acted on her own principles, which were surely progressive at a time when family limitation was only beginning to trump fecundity (Kleep in Waldstreicher 2013, 6). The demonstration of Abigail Adams "act[ing] on her own principles" (Kleep in Waldstreicher 2013, 6) is a clear representation of her progressive and feminist beliefs. Abigail and John's decision to limit the size of their family was an unusual pronouncement to make during Colonial America and "although Abigail would not have expressed her ideas about family planning in anachronistic feminist language, she clearly believed that women should assume control of their bodies" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). This serves as a powerful sentiment for a woman living in the Republic and "since [the issue of women's control of their own bodies] has become a feminist concern, Abigail deserves some credit for raising it at a time when most people avoided words having anything to do with intimate matters" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). Even if Abigail only "advocated family planning only within a small circle that included her sisters and husband" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013), this behavior "place[s] Abigail among the more progressive women of her era" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). Therefore, as Crane argues, if the word 'feminist' had existed in the eighteenth century, Abigail would have earned the label on this ground alone (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013).

Abigail was also extremely intrigued by the writings of outstanding women and the works by men that spoke of sympathy on the subject of women (Gould 1996). For example, Abigail read the works of Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay & Reverend James Fordyce, D.D., who wrote *Sermons to Young Women*. Reverend Fordyce's work was written out of a genuine and sincere regard for the female sex and their complex role in society. In addition, Abigail read the work of John Shebbeare who wrote about the inhumanity associated with barring women from the same educational opportunities and advantages as men (Gould 1996). The works Abigail read only worked to strengthen her awareness of the female plight.

When Abigail's cousin, Isaac, requested her approval for his voyage to England, Abigail responded with envy, and discussed the clear restrictions placed on women of the time. Abigail responded:

“women you know Sir are considered as Domestik Being, and altho they inherit and Eaquel Share of curiosity with the other Sex, yet but few are hardy eno' to venture abroad, and explore the amazing variety of distant lands. The Natural tenderness and Delicacy of our Constitutions, added to the many Dangers we are subject to from your Sex, renders it almost impossible for a Single Lady to travel without injury to her character. And those who have a protector in an Husband, have generally speaking obstacles sufficient to prevent their Roving” (Gould 1996, 21).

Abigail's letter to her cousin is just one example of the deep frustration Abigail felt regarding treatment and perception of women in the Republic. Abigail felt that women's social code inevitably depicted them as fragile and dainty, constantly needing to be cared for. Abigail couples this perception with the dependency women are expected to have on men, partially due to the many dangers they are subjected to them under patriarchy. All together, women are greatly limited in every aspect of their lives, including that of exploring and traveling. Yet, as Abigail so clearly states, there are still women who want

to explore and take advantage of travel opportunities. Abigail's assertion brings forward the idea of women who are not as fragile as men may think and who are willing to take risks and break free of conservative limitations placed on women. Through her letters to John, other family members and friends, it is clear that the early 1770s were a time of deep reflection and analysis for Abigail regarding the perception of women in the Republic. In addition, women's inability to receive an education and exclusion from political affairs were some of Abigail's main concerns.

Abigail reflected immensely on the virtues of the female sex under patriarchy. For Abigail, she believed it to be the "most disinterested of all virtues" (Gould 1996, 28), because of women's lack of recognition in awards, honors and offices. Property was also a big issue on Abigail's radar. She found it absurd that even in the freest of countries, property was under the control of a female's spouse and subject to their disposal under a law that gave them sovereign authority. Abigail found these laws to be hypocritical and an inaccurate reflection of the democratic ideals the new nation was supposed to uphold. As Elaine Crane advocates (in Waldstreicher 2013), Abigail was able to gain much economic independence and confidence in owning property due to her husband's absence. Once she realized that women were able to participate in the same transactional and economic activities as men, Abigail advocated that women not be barred by law from such happenings. Historian Edith Gelles commends Abigail for becoming "a confident businesswoman and manager of property" without constantly asking for John's approval in many of the transactions in which she engaged (Gelles 1992). On the other hand, Rosemary Keller acknowledges that Abigail did indeed become the breadwinner of the family during her husband's absence, however, that Abigail viewed herself as her

husband's substitute, and that she was only to participate in such activity when absolutely necessary (Keller 1994).

However, Abigail condemned the institution of slavery and did not believe anyone should be able to own slaves, including women. Abigail and John were both large opponents of slavery and never owned any slaves of their own. As a result, the economic independence, including the right to own property, that Abigail advocated for women does not include that the ownership of slaves.

It is also important to remember that Abigail had many advantages over the typical woman in the Republic. Although Abigail was uneducated, she came from a well off family and married into a powerful and well-respected family. Her husband viewed her as an equal and allowed her to speak freely about her ideas and beliefs. These are some of the advantages that granted Abigail the resources to engage in such progressive economic activity. However, not all women of the time were entrusted with such great responsibility in the absence of their husbands. Scholars largely contest Abigail's views on the economic independence of women. Sources disagree as to whether or not Abigail aggressively advocated for women's economic independence or rather, just assumed such responsibilities in the absence of her husband. While sources are split regarding Abigail's economic belief and the extent to which she advocated for women's rights in this realm, there is no argument that Abigail whole-heartedly recognized that American society was built to guarantee the success of men while often disregarding the plight of women.

Abigail's will is a perfect example of the awareness she obtained for the frightening reality facing women in America's economy. Abigail knew that hard working, well of men in the Republic were granted with the resources and capabilities to

achieve successfully in the economy. However, American society was not built to help and support women's role in the American economy the way it did men's. As a result, Abigail only left behind inheritances to her female relatives in her will. Her decision speaks volumes to the concern she felt for females in the early nineteenth century. Abigail's will places her firmly on the side of female economic independence as it was greatly gendered content (Nagel in Waldstreicher 2013). Furthermore, Nagel (in Waldstreicher 2013) argues that, "Abigail's concern for womankind was never clearer" (156) than in her will. Through her will, "Abigail designed [a] gender statement, as well as a declaration of female solidarity" (Namerode in Waldstreicher 2013, 48) through its insurance and awareness of the need to care for her female relatives.

Abigail found it easy to believe that due to females' exclusion in many facets of daily life, women "might be justified in showing indifference to the public welfare" (Gould 1996, 28). However, just the opposite was the case and Abigail was sure to point this out to her husband. The women of the Republic gave everything in support to their country although their country did not respect or hold them to the same regard. For example, John Adams once described Abigail as "patriot and peace loving revolutionary, mother and writer, [who] never discouraged him by work or deed running all hazards for the salvation of his country's liberties" (Gould 1996, 42). Despite the fact that there were extreme patriotic values within the female sex, society was not willing to grant them the same opportunities as men. Abigail made sure that congressional wives and wives all throughout the Republic were not ignored or disregarded. For example, she acknowledged individuals such as Elizabeth Adams (wife of Sam Adams) as a "sister delegate," a novel term to use when addressing the wife of a delegate. Abigail explained

to John, “Why should we not assume your titles when we give you up our names” (Gould 1996, 29). Scholars have also agreed that Abigail’s correspondence to John in many occasions represents, Abigail’s “monolithic loyalty to her husband” (Gould 1996, 28). Abigail prided herself on her patriotism and an unwavering support of her husband’s duties, and in turn, the Republic. As Lewis Gould explains, “As First Lady, [Abigail] must be remembered for her inspiring concept and support of the office of the presidency and of a growing nation for her character and intelligence rather than for any innovations as a White House hostess” (Gould 1996, 38)

During Abigail’s time as First Lady, she was the first woman to hold a pseudo-official government post. This came from her appointment by the Massachusetts Colony General Court in 1775. The Court appointed Abigail to question Massachusetts women who were said to be loyal to the British government and working against the independence movement (Gould 1996). Abigail, alongside Mercy Warren and Hannah Winthrop (the governor’s wife), became the first form of female politicians the United States has ever witnessed. As John Adams framed it to Abigail after her appointment, “...you are now a politician and now elected into an important office, that of judges of Tory ladies, which will give you, naturally, an influence with your sex” (Foner & Garraty, 1991). By appointing Abigail to this position, John had hopes that Abigail would be able to influence other women in the Republic to a large extent and convert their sentiments of loyalty to the crown to sentiments of revolution and American Independence. John acknowledged the immense influence Abigail acquired through her appointment and although John may have believed this power was only affecting the female sex, it would soon be used to influence John and his colleagues as well.

In 1776 when the Second Continental Congress began writing and debating the Declaration of Independence, Abigail used the pivotal moment to bring the treatment of women to the forefront of the debate. It was at this time that Abigail sent letters to John urging him to take the creation of the new government as the perfect opportunity to make the legal status of women equitable to that of men (Gould 1996). Although Abigail was unable to convince John and his colleagues of this goal, Abigail's correspondence was the first instance and earliest known writings that called for women's equal rights (Gould 1996). On March 31, 1776 Abigail began the origins of her women's rights campaign. She hoped her husband would not find her callings out of line as she wrote what would come to be known as her List of Grievances (Gould 1996). It is in her List of Grievances that Abigail made her most famous request to her husband to:

“Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember, all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to form a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation...” (Gould 1996, 25).

Abigail went on to say,

“I cannot say that I think you very generous to the Ladies, for whilst you are proclaiming peace and good will to Men, Emancipating all Nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over Wives. But you must remember that Arbitrary power is like most other things which are very hard, very liable to be broken - and notwithstanding all your wise Laws and Maxims we have it in our power not only to free ourselves but to subdue our Masters, and without violent throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet...” (Gould 1996, 25).

The ideas regarding the equitable status of women that Abigail encouraged her husband to think about most definitely had an influence on his priorities for the new government of America. In a letter to Brigadier General Joseph Palmer in May 1776 (shortly after the List of Grievances were written and sent) John Adams discussed his ideas for who should

have the right to vote in the new government. For John, the moral foundation of the new government was the consent of the people and as a result, he advocated on behalf of the old and young, male and female, rich and poor. Throughout his letters to the General, John very clearly demonstrated a feminist theme as if his wife was right there moving the pen for him (Gould 1996). It was Abigail who echoed the sentiments and constraints placed on women of the time in John's ear. He, who held the tangible power, would reiterate these complaints in his government plans.

The meaning and potential feminist sentiments behind Abigail's 'List of Grievances' are quite controversial. Many scholars contest the accuracy and meaning of Abigail's famous "Remember the Ladies" letter to John and whether or not this correspondence appropriately renders her the title 'feminist.' For example, in Charles Akers' (1980) opinion, Abigail's request to her husband was not a request for a dramatic revolution of the roles of men and women, Rather, Akers argues that Abigail's letter had a much more limited goal in mind. For Akers, Abigail "sought legal protection from abusive husbands whose rights were almost absolute" (Akers 1980, 48). Although, if Abigail were seeking this protection, she would inevitably be creating a revolution in the roles of men and women within society, which we know not to be true. As a result, Akers' argument and analysis of Abigail's famous line is somewhat flawed. According to Lynn Withey (1981), another Adams historian and modern feminist, Abigail was not "politically or temperamentally inclined to favor social revolution any more than she was prepared to advocate a radically different position for women within society." (Withey 1981,82).

Although both Akers and Withey do not believe Abigail's intentions were as progressive as they may seem, Phyllis Levin gives Abigail full credit for "having launched, unwittingly, the timeless campaign for women's rights" (Levin 1987, 81). Rosemary Keller, alongside Levin, strongly believes that Adams' letter was a progressive call to breakdown the societal constructs built around women. Keller suggests that Abigail's famous letter represents her "acute perception, deep concern, and style of advocacy of women's rights" (Keller 1994, 89). Moreover, Keller believes that Abigail's persistence was "the first direct advocacy of women's rights by an American female" (Keller 1994, 90). While Keller (and Levin) both acknowledge Abigail's progressive stance on the role of women, Keller fully acknowledges Abigail's contradictory sentiments. On the one hand, Abigail clearly detested patriarchy and male domination that led to severe gender inequalities within society. Although Abigail was a fierce opponent of this institution, Abigail never sought autonomy or "the right of self-determination for women, as later feminists did" (Keller 1994, 102). As a result, which did Abigail favor - a strong and unwavering commitment to women's rights or a refusal to seek female autonomy due to her belief of gender stereotypes, expectations and spheres?

Paul Nagel would insist it were the latter. Similar to Akers, Paul Nagel (1987) also believes that Abigail's famous letter was written with a much more restrictive intention; to protect women from abusive men, that is all. For Nagel, Abigail gave "perhaps the most famous comment by an American woman on the relation between male and female" (Nagel 1987, 79) but it did not call for a complete social revolution of gendered differences. Edith B. Gelles (1992) argues that Abigail's 'Remember the

Ladies' letter to her husband "has been used to support a (false) picture of her as a radical feminist" (Gelles 1992, 71). In reality, Gelles asserts, that Abigail was very much so content with the sexual hierarchy she, and other women, were held under, and "only occasionally did [she] chafe at the injustice of her submissive condition" (Gelles 1992, 71). Gelles does acknowledge that Abigail demonstrated an "unusual gender awareness for her time" (Gelles 1992, 42), which may have led to the false perception of her as a radical feminist. Gelles also agrees that it was extremely progressive of Abigail, at the time, to call for even just a legal safeguard for women against abusive men and that "Abigail's unwavering belief in women's discrete domestic role [does not] indicate that she no longer expressed interest in women's political status (Gelles 1998, 170). As a result, if feminism has the ultimate goal of creating equality between the sexes, Abigail Adams is indeed worthy of the label regardless of her commitment to gendered spheres and domesticity.

John Adams becoming President of the United States was a double edged sword for Abigail. John himself, envisioned the presidency as "a slippery precipice, surrounded on all sides by rocks, shoals and quicksand" (Gould 1996, 38). Abigail was worried about the vilification and scrutiny her family would be placed under during John's time as President. She was not a fan of the press and was aware that the extremely public platform her family was about to be on would only exacerbate her despise of the press. In addition, Abigail Adams was not the biggest fan of the duties associated with a President's spouse, "in fact, her ceremonial duties reminded her of her state of 'splendid misery'" (Gould 1996, 38). As a Stateswoman, Abigail Adams felt less restricted than she did as First Lady. Becoming "Lady Adams" meant something totally different for

Abigail. Although she had prior experience being an ambassador and politician's wife, her “references to herself as her ‘Ladyship,’ her friend as ‘Lady’ Temple ... illuminated her own new, sharply defined sense of social position and expectations of homage (Gould 1996, 36). Simultaneously, the role worried Abigail. She believed the role “required great courage and firmness, wisdom and temperance, patience and forbearance” (Gould 1996, 36). While Abigail knew that Mrs. Adams, Stateswoman from Quincy, Massachusetts might be able to speak more freely and openly, Lady Adams was held to a much different standard and needed to be much more careful (Gould 1996). Although Abigail may have despised some of the roles associated with being First Lady, Abigail did embrace the power that was inevitably granted with her role. In addition, Abigail fulfilled many of the social responsibilities expected of the First Lady. Similar to Martha Washington, Abigail assisted the elderly and needy, handled requests for funding, and held receptions which would soon be held (by 1800) in the White House (Gould 1996).

Abigail was an extremely independent First and Second Lady. She often traveled freely without the companionship of any men, other than the coachman, which is something she had longed for in her letter regarding her cousin Isaac’s voyage. When asked about her fears and nerves associated with taking such travels, Abigail replied, scolding and bragging that she was far too independent to always need a man by her side (Gould 1996). There is no doubt that Abigail reinforced many gender stereotypes of the time. However, Abigail’s political curiosity, coupled with the awareness that her husband’s powerful position also granted her a unique position of influence, allowed Abigail to become the first advocate for women’s equality. In turn, Abigail expanded the role of women in society through her position as First Lady of the United States.

III. Changes & Conceptualizations of Femininity in the United States

During the Republic, femininity and equality for women was not a priority for society as a new American government was in the midst of being created. When analyzing the influence a First Lady demonstrated in either expanding or contracting the role of women within society, it is important to look at how her specific views and virtues affected all women in society.

During Abigail Adams' time as first Lady, slavery was a strongly integrated part of American society. If white women were said to have no rights during this time, black women fell even lower on the totem pole than black men. During her childhood, Abigail's father acquired slaves and as a result, Abigail was well aware of the role blacks played in society. She and John, however, did not have slaves as they were both strongly opposed to slavery and were supporters of the abolitionist cause (McCullough 2002). Unlike her predecessor, Martha Washington, Abigail was extremely sympathetic to the slaves and felt that "trevail, disease, war, and pestilence might be descending on the country because of the sin of slavery" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013). Abigail viewed slavery as an evil within American society that had the power to place the American democratic experiment at great risk. Throughout her time as First Lady, Abigail made John very aware of the "universality of her liberalism" (Gould 1996, 24), which also extended to her views on slavery. In a letter written to John in September 1774, Abigail explained a situation in which a Negro promised Abigail he would fight for the Governor if John armed them for battle and fulfilled a promise of freeing them if John's side won (Gould 1996). Before asking John for his stance, Abigail expressed her views on the issue stating, "You know my mind upon this Subject...I wish most sincerely there was not a

slave in the province. It always appeared a most iniquitous Scheme to me - fight for ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have” (Gould 1996, 24). The letter written to John is one of the earliest examples of Abigail’s stance on slavery that historians have been able to uncover. In Abigail’s eyes, slavery was the poorest reflection of American society and the democratic principles it was supposed to instill in the new nation.

On another occasion in which Abigail wrote to John in March of 1776, she expressed her doubt that many Virginians did not have a “passion for Liberty” as they so claimed, since they continued to “deprive their fellow creatures of freedom” (Gould 1996, 24). McCullough (2002) writes of another time in Philadelphia in 1791, when a free young black boy approached Abigail Adams’ home asking to be taught how to write. As a result of his courageous request, Abigail decided to place the boy in a local school (with great objections from fellow neighbors) and pay for his education. Adams responded that he was "a Freeman as much as any of the young Men and merely because his Face is Black, is he to be denied instruction? How is he to be qualified to procure a livelihood? ... I have not thought it any disgrace to my self to take him into my parlor and teach him both to read and write” (McCullough 2002, 145).

Through her writings to John, Abigail freely expressed her criticism of the institution of slavery. Although it was not her main point of contention with the new Republic’s society, her liberal views regarding women’s rights to education, a vote, etc., were parallel to her belief in freedom for all, including blacks. As Abigail did so well throughout her whole life, she used her pen and her powerful words to attempt to influence her husband’s perception of slavery, hoping that the effects would ripple to

other delegates and members of the new government. However, Abigail failed to take her influence beyond that of her pen and husband's ear. Her views on slavery were progressive, however, they also stayed well within the conservative framework that societal expectations placed her. Although Abigail wanted to abolish slavery, she upheld her role as a woman, including all of her domestic responsibilities, within the Republic too highly to take her activism for both slavery and women's rights outside of the conservative sphere. As a result, her activism and progressive ideas of abolishing slavery and helping blacks did not succeed.

IV. Women in Leadership

At the time Abigail Adams served as First Lady of the United States, women were given the main responsibilities of caring for the children and the home. Most women in the eighteenth-century were uneducated, did not have their own careers, and occupied themselves with family and household work (Patrick, Pious & Ritchie 1993). They were left out of all political affairs, government activities and business transactions. At this time, women were also left out of being educated in the same disciplines as men and became completely isolated in their own sphere as women. However, it is critical to remember that Abigail did not fight for gendered spheres and other societal expectations placed on women to be abolished. While her quest developed her into one of the first advocates of women's rights, Abigail's feminist goals and actions stayed well within the conservative sphere women were placed in during the late 18th century and as a result, Abigail pursued an aggressive agenda while simultaneously reinforcing the gender norms of the new Republic and 18th century traditions.

To rightly call Abigail Adams a feminist brings about a good argument. How are we to invoke a word that did not exist during Abigail Adams' time? As Elaine Crane argues, to place or deny someone a label that was not known in the English language during their lifetime is "somewhat of a questionable tactic" (in Waldstreicher 2013). For Crane, the most basic form of feminism entails supporting the idea that men and women should share the same economic, political and social rights. Crane argues that feminism is often a controversial standard for many reasons. Does one only need to have a *belief* in equal rights to be a feminist? Or does one have to be an active and outspoken advocate of these rights in order to be granted the label? Lastly, does a partial feminist exist? One that agrees with certain rights and equalities but disagrees with others? (Crane in Waldstreicher 2003). For Crane, when these questions are applied to Abigail's life work and influence, it is important to determine just how central, what we now call feminist causes, were to her life - if they were central at all? "Does it make a difference if she thought, wrote, or acted on feminist principles only rarely or intermittently rather than consistently?" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2003). The trouble that historians run into is that no matter how many letters we read, or facts we uncover, we will never truly know just how often feminist thoughts ran through Abigail's mind and the emphasis she placed on them in her daily life.

One of Elaine Crane's largest criticisms of Abigail Adams is that she had trouble articulating what she meant, although she claimed to mean everything she said (in Waldstreicher 2013). For Crane, this poses great implications in understanding the thoughts and influence that Abigail had during her time at First and Second Lady. However, Crane believes that Abigail used one of women's most powerful tools, her

words, to exercise her thoughts and ideas and as a result, we can conclude some of the brilliant and progressive thoughts Abigail had. Due to the concern Crane highlights (the ambiguity often presented in Abigail's text), Abigail Adams historians have "evaluated her commitment to women's rights in the context of eighteenth-century customs and cultural standards" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013), placing Abigail's emphasis on feminist proclivities in two main areas, domesticity and education, for on these topics her intentions were clear cut.

One of, if not the biggest cause that "Abigail's unique position as the wife of the President of the United States offered [her] a chance to act as an advocate for [was the] expansion of female education" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2003, 201). Before John even became a nationally recognized figure, this one of the aspects of society Abigail constantly spoke about to her husband. Historian Woody Holton (2009) investigates many of Abigail's concerns regarding female and male education of the time. Through his analysis, Holton (2009) discovers just how often Abigail shed light on the "constricted education of American women, how deprived she felt about her own lack of formal learning and how educated women improved marriage, motherhood, and more grandly, the culture of the United States" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2003, 201). While Abigail placed much emphasis on equal educational opportunities for women (as a right), Lynn Withey (1981) shows a clear demonstration that although Abigail was definitely an activist, she "positioned herself squarely within the perimeters of eighteenth-century gender roles" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2002, 201). Although Abigail was an extremely impressive individual, reading extensively and learning how to read and write French and Latin, she knew that a woman should never "shine at the expense of her Husband"

(Withey 1981, 234). As Abigail worked hard to improve her mind and the minds of other women, she cautioned them to never attract “the jealousy of the men and the envy on women” (Levin 1987, 237).

In addition, the appeals Abigail made for female education were made to a very small and private number of individuals with whom she corresponded (Crane in Waldstreicher). On the contrary, she admired women such as Marcy Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay due to the fact that they were able to “claim a public pen” (Crane in Waldstreicher 2003, 201). Despite her admiration for these women, Abigail hesitated at the idea of taking her thoughts to such a public sphere and she did not want to publish her letters as she was worried it was too vain and would risk her reputation with the public (Gould 1996). As a result, while it is appropriate to place the label of activist and champion of women’s rights on Abigail Adams, it is important to remember and be critical of Abigail’s refusal to take these thoughts beyond that of her private sphere of influence. Abigail had the potential to exert her power on a much greater platform. However, her morals and values in upholding tradition confined her and forced her to act well within the constraints placed on women of the time. Abigail ensured that her ideas did not take women out of or away from their sphere of domesticity. Her ideas regarding female education and equality were progressive, however, “progressive within a conservative framework to the extent that education was not an end in itself or a stepping stone to a career” (Crane in Waldstreicher 2003, 201). As a result, “Abigail felt deeply about the education gap between men and women and never deviated from her progressive stand on female education even if that stand had limits” (Crane in Waldstreicher 2003, 201).

In addition, “exposure and frustration made Abigail Adams analytical of her own status. She decided she would not choose to quarrel with the assertion that the study of ‘household good’... was no doubt the peculiar province of the female character. Yet surely, as rational beings, women had to have an alternative way that their minds might with propriety receive the highest possible cultivation (Gould 1996, 35). For Abigail Adams, the advantages of female education were quite specific:

Knowledge would teach our sex candour, and those who aim at the attainment of it, in order to render themselves more amiable and usefull in the world, would derive a double advantage from it, for in proportion at the mind is informed, the countenance would be improved and the face enobled as the Heart is elevated, for wisdom, says Soloman, maketh the face to shine” (Gould 1996, 34)

Remarkably, the arguments Abigail made for female education did not exclude the risks associated with such a task. Abigail knew that there were dangers to be wary of, “for she believed sincerely that it was most dangerous for a female to be distinguished for any qualification beyond the rest of her sex” (Gould 1996, 35). She did have a solution for the problem of envy and jealousy, “the remedy lay in increasing the number of accomplished women, a monopoly, she concluded, being always invidious” (Gould 1996, 35). Abigail knew that if more and more women placed emphasis on female education and achieved at a higher level, educating females would no longer be seen as an enigma.

There is no arguing that Abigail had a determination and passion for elevating women’s place within society. However, this was her second priority. Her role as wife, mother, and the domestic responsibilities that accompanied these roles would always remain her first priority. As Crane, Keller, Gelles, Holton, Nagel and many other historians argue, Abigail did indeed believe in separate spheres and gendered responsibilities between men and women and as a result, this unwavering commitment to

her husband's success and acceptance of gendered spheres limited Abigail's influence and activism. Lewis Gould (1996) describes Abigail Adams as "a proud woman, almost belligerently protective of her husband, ambitious for him, his driven helpmate who would do her utmost to enhance his position and her country's stature" (Gould 1996, 32). In addition, "she was quite willing to live up to her responsibilities as the ambassador's wife (Gould 1996, 32). Through Gould's analysis and the use of the word 'helpmate,' it is clear the while Abigail Adams did have great ambitions for the female sex and developed ideas for women's rights that were well ahead of her time, Abigail did not dare to place these efforts in front of her husband and families needs. Abigail acknowledged the devotion and time and studying it required to be a "black swan" (Gould 1996, 22). To be a black swan during the Republic, a woman had to be considered a learned one, one that gave up many of the domestic cares and duties that were solely the responsibility of women of the time. Although Abigail devoted much of her efforts towards bringing awareness to female plight, Abigail believed that her own personal circumstance and beliefs would never allow her to be a part of such a prestigious membership (Gould 1996). In this sense, Abigail served as reinforcement to the gender norms and stereotypes as her activism only reached the extent of the conservative sphere and limitations placed on women in society during her time.

Although her actions may not have, Abigail's thoughts and ideas expanded well beyond the roles of mother and housewife. Due to her progressive ideas, Abigail was more than two centuries ahead of the women's movement when she wrote:

How miserable must that woman be who, at the same time she has both genius and taste for literary inquiry, can not cheerfully leave the pursuit to attend to the daily cares of the prudent housewife. Though not less to be pitied, is she who is

wholly immersed therein and has no higher ideas than those which confine her to the narrow circles of domestic attention (Gould 1996, 22).

As expressed in the quote above, Abigail felt sorry for the women who did not have higher aspirations than the one's that defined her as a housewife. However, Abigail herself even acknowledged her inability to become a black swan due to her refusal to devote less time to housework and domestic chores and more time to studying and activism. Although Abigail had ideas and thoughts for the equality of women that were influential, she was ready at any moment to drop her own personal causes to fulfill the needs of her husband. For example, When John left in 1774 to serve as a delegate to America's first Continental Congress, he wrote out the principal roles this new position would mean for Abigail as well. In order for him to carry out his duties efficiently and effectively, he created a partnership with his wife back home.

I must entreat you, my dear Partner in all the Joys and Sorrows, Prosperity and Adversity of my Life, to take a Part with me in the Struggle. I pray God for your Health - entreat you to rouse your whole attention to the Family, the stock, the Farm, the Dairy (Gould 1996, 23).

John's call to Abigail to join him in this endeavor leaves her no option but to dedicate all her time and resources to the house and the family, as the passage from the letter indicates. Willingly, Abigail was ready to neglect all of her duties and responsibilities and life as she knew it so that her husband could pursue his goals.

Abigail attributed much of John's success to her own participation and the partnership they shared. For example, upon hearing about John's recognition by the Dutch in 1782, she believed it was her doing as she "sacrificed so much of her peace and happiness to promote the welfare of her country" (Gould 1996, 28). Abigail's acknowledgement of her own sacrifices reinforces the idea that Abigail's own happiness,

causes and actions came behind those of her husbands and the roles she needed to fulfill in order for him to be successful.

Abigail Adams' greatest flaw was her belief that "that women by nature were mothers and fundamentally different from men and best suited to be wives and mothers" (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013, 202). This finite role in which Adams believed constrained her ideas and feminist proclivities. Instead of encouraging women to step outside of the domestic sphere, "Abigail did not herself aspire to anything more than being a good wife and mother" (Withey 1981, 45). In addition, Joseph Ellis also argues that Abigail's "primary focus, what defined her daily life, were her children and demanding domestic duties" (Ellis 2010, 16). Gelles (1992) also finds significance in Abigail's commitment to domesticity. Gelles argues that "Abigail's belief in separate spheres arose from her religious and cultural upbringing. [It] revealed a divinely prescribed patriarchy in which it was her destiny to live in the domestic sphere" (Gelles 1992, 26). While this may seem contradictory, it reinforces the overarching argument that Abigail Adams was progressive, but within a very conservative framework and private sphere. Therefore, Holton (2009) argues that "Abigail's persistent commitment to social hierarchy is evidence that she remained in many ways an archconservative in her final years" (29).

While looking at the controversy associated with Abigail's beliefs between domesticity and female education, Abigail's views on women's place within politics have also left historians perplexed. Historian Charles Akers insists that Abigail never intended to support a women's right to vote, even though she expressed her willingness to do so if called upon (Akers 1980). Withey (1981) believes that Abigail may have hinted at the idea that women should have the right to vote, although such an assertion could be

dangerous due to the lack of concrete evidence in Abigail's writing. As we now know, women's right to vote became the centerpiece of the women's suffragist movement in the 20th century. As a result, if Abigail did truly advocate this position, Levin argues that "Abigail's life illustrates feminism in the most comprehensive, Websterian significance of that electrifying world" (Levin 1987, xv). However, Gelles strongly disagrees with Levin's assertion and believes that any attempt, in the twentieth-century, to place a feminist label on Abigail because of her stance on women's right to vote would be "anachronistic" (Gelles 1992, 10).

V. Conclusion

The argument brought forth by Elaine Crane regarding whether or not it is appropriate to place the label of feminist on Abigail Adams is extremely complex and difficult to work through. While her ideas were progressive and influential, they stayed well within a conservative framework for Abigail's beliefs in domesticity and gendered spheres triumphed her advocacy for women's equality.

Through her intelligence, courageousness, and influence, Abigail Adams left many contributions and a strong legacy to follow for all subsequent First Ladies. Any of the 42 women who have held office after Abigail Adams and have called themselves their husbands' political partners have taken a play directly from the book of Abigail Adams. She spoke her mind and used her influence as First Lady to advise her husband freely on matters of the state, society and law. One of Abigail's most powerful tools was that of her words. As she once stated, "my pen is always freer than my tongue" (Gould 1996, 24).

With her courage to speak her mind as freely as she did, Abigail Adams undoubtedly expanded the role of the First Lady while making women's equality and

place within society an issue to be taken seriously. Her outspoken nature in correspondences with John made Abigail “a forward thinking radical who audaciously pointed out that women were a neglected multitude” (Crane in Waldstreicher 2013, 203).

As politically active and influential as Abigail Adams was, she did uphold the traditional duties of an American First Ladies. In this sense, Abigail reinforced the gender norms associated with the Office and with women living in the Republic. While she had wonderful and intelligent ideas for women’s equality, her advocacy was kept within a very private and conservative sphere. Her fulfillment of the stereotypical duties associated with the First Lady of United States, reinforced the idea that such responsibilities were not only imperative to the role of presidential spouses at the time, but to all women in the Republic. She advocated for women’s rights, to the extent that it did not interfere with her husband’s role or duties. Abigail was a “zealous patriot, as wife and partner of John Adams, she nurtured, with grave personal sacrifice, the American revolution” (Gould 1996, 43).

In addition, any political influence that Abigail derived was through the hands and pen of her husband who reiterated the ideas for women’s equality that Abigail instilled within him. In this sense, it is clear that the Office of the First Lady is a direct representation of societal trends. When John Adams lost his second bid for the presidency, Abigail was devastated both personally and professionally. Following her husband’s loss for a second term, Abigail commented, "I can truly and from my heart say, that the most mortifying circumstance attendant upon my retirement from public Life is, that my power of doing good to my fellow creatures is curtailed and diminished, but tho' the means is wanting, the will and the wish remain" (Gould 1996, 32). Abigail’s

reflection demonstrates that her greatest asset in creating change and having influence was her husband's position and power. Once John's power was lost, so too was Abigail's. Similar to Abigail Adams, there would be future First Ladies who mourned at the defeat of their husband's during election season, for they knew it meant a defeat for them, their ideas and goals, and women in American society as well.

As Gould (1996) argues, Abigail Adams "is indeed a First Lady to remember not only as the Colonial foremother of the twentieth-century feminist movement, but also as America's first suffragette, who championed both the right of women and the abolition of slavery" (Gould 1996, 43). Therefore, it is imperative that we highlight Abigail Adams as a "first-rate talent, a writer with an excellent mind and extraordinary ambitions for women who served her country not just during the presidential years, but during all of her years" (Gould 1996, 43). Although Abigail Adams statements may seem a bit contradictory and ambiguous through the eyes of many historians, it is clear that Abigail took advantage of her unique role as First Lady of the United States and worked hard to expand the role of women within society, albeit within a small, private and conservative framework. As Crane would argue, "her opinions may not always correspond with modern feminist priorities, but considered from an eighteenth, or early nineteenth century perspective, her advocacy of female education, economic independence, family planning, and perhaps even political participation are reasons enough to make room for Abigail Adams in the American feminist pantheon"(Crane in Waldstreicher 2013, 217). Abigail Adams became a role model for future First Ladies and serves as an excellent representation of the societal expectations, influence and power held within the Office of the First Lady of the United States.

Chapter 2: Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy – 1,000 Days 1961 – 1963

*There are two kinds of women, those who want power in the world
and those who want power in bed.
- Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy*

Jacqueline Bouvier was born July 28, 1929 in Southampton, New York. Her father, John Bouvier, was a Wall Street stockbroker and her mother, Janet Norton Lee, was an American socialite and equestrian (Gould 1996). From the time of her early childhood, Jacqueline Kennedy was in the presence of elite company and privilege (Gould 1996). She spent her early years on the family's Hampton estate of Lasata and vacationing on the Hampton shore (Bradford 2000). After her parents' divorce in 1940, both Jacqueline and her younger sister, Caroline, split their time between their father's home in New York City and their mother's home in Long Island (Perry 2004). As a result of the divorce, Jacqueline and her sister were often cared for by maids and governesses, and had little to no parental guidance during their upbringing (Perry 2004). In addition, Jacqueline's father, Jack, was known as a drunk and a womanizer who enjoyed being constantly surrounded by sophisticated women (Gould 1996). Many believe that Jackie's tough upbringing may have contributed to the notoriously private familial life she requested in the White House (Bradford 2000).

Despite the troubles with her parents, Jacqueline was always fortunate enough to be provided a topnotch education (mostly funded by her grandfather). She attended the Chapin School in New York City for most of her elementary school days and then went on to study at Holton-Arms when her mother remarried and moved the family to Washington D.C (Perry 2004). At the age of 15, Jacqueline's mother decided to send her

to Miss Porter's School, a boarding school in Connecticut (Perry 2004). Here, Jacqueline completed her high school diploma and enjoyed spending much time with other young girls who grew up in the same elite, privileged background as her (Perry 2004).

When it came time for Jacqueline to attend college, she chose Vassar College located in Poughkeepsie, New York (Gould 1996). During her time at Vassar, Jacqueline made the decision to study abroad in Paris, France during her junior year (Perry 2004). Many historians believe that this time abroad had a profound impact on Jacqueline's life, love of the arts, and interest in culture (specifically French language and culture), as will be discussed later on through Alice Kaplan's book, *Dreaming in French* (2012). When it was time for Jacqueline to return home, she chose to transfer from Vassar College to The George Washington University, located in Washington D.C (Bradford 2000). Jacqueline would obtain a Bachelor's of Arts degree in French literature and travel the continent of Europe with her sister, Caroline, upon graduation (Perry 2004). Jacqueline's trip throughout Europe with her younger sister served as the basis of her only autobiographical book, *One Special Summer* (Bradford 2000). After graduation and her return from her European excursions, Jacqueline immediately began working as a photographer for The Washington Times Herald (Perry 2004).

As Jacqueline started the new phase of her young adult life in Washington, she ran in the same social circles as a young John Fitzgerald Kennedy. When the two were introduced in May of 1952, John Kennedy was serving his third year in the U.S House of Representatives and became preoccupied running his campaign for a bid to the United States Senate (Bradford 2000). Preceding his victory in November of that year, the relationship between Jacqueline and John began moving quickly (Perry 2004). Three

months after their engagement, John and Jacqueline Kennedy were wed on September 12, 1953 in Newport, Rhode Island (Gould 1996). Jacqueline was 24 years old while John, twelve years her senior, was 36 (Bradford 2000).

While there was much glamour and wealth associated with Jacqueline and John's picture perfect marriage, they faced many setbacks in their first years as newlyweds. Jackie struggled to become acclimated to her new family as "[she] remained somewhat of an enigma to [the Kennedy's] - a confident person who knew her own mind and preferred to keep some distance from them" (Gould 1996, 472). The Kennedys had certain expectations of Jacqueline as demonstrated when Rose Kennedy attempted "to tutor her in domestic arrangements" (Gould 1996, 472). The Kennedy's wanted Jacqueline to fit the picture perfect mold of femininity, wealth and beauty of 1960s society.

In addition, John faced many health problems that were unknown to the public (Dallek 2003). He suffered from Addison's disease in addition to extreme back injuries he endured during his time in the war (Dallek 2003). Moreover, Jacqueline and John had a difficult time having children. Jackie suffered from a miscarriage in 1955 and subsequently gave birth to a stillborn daughter in August of 1956 (Bradford 2000). A year after the birth of a stillborn daughter, Jackie gave birth to their first daughter, Caroline in 1957 (Gould 1996). Three years later, Jackie and John gave birth to their first son, John Jr. (Gould 1996). Jackie also gave birth to the couple's second son, Patrick, prematurely (Bradford 2002) while the First Couple lived in the White House. Sadly, Patrick died two days later (Bradford 2000) and the nation joined in mourning the death of the First Family's son.

On January 3, 1960, John F. Kennedy launched his nationwide campaign for President of the United States (Schlesinger 2002). A pregnant Jackie took on a distant role during the campaign (Perry 2004). Scholars have noted that Jackie never expressed much interest in taking on a more active role than she needed to as she had somewhat of a disdain for politics (Gould 1996). This contributed to her, vagueness and lack of promises to fulfill a cause or project, a normal and very much expected campaign promise of the First Lady (Gould 1996).

From the sidelines in Georgetown, Jackie did the best she could to please her husband's advisors and create a sense of involvement in the campaign. She was able to write a weekly newspaper column titled, *Campaign Wife* (similar to Eleanor Roosevelt), gave television and printed interviews, and even appeared in television commercials (Perry 2004). Jackie rarely made public appearances but when she did, she captivated the audience with her beauty, age, sophistication, and intellect (Gould 1996). However, there was not much more involvement from Jackie during the campaign for, "any speechmaking on her own, beyond the innocuous "glad to be here" comments, would have been unusual for a candidate's spouse" (Gould 1996, 480). In the appearances Jackie did make, many of John's advisors felt that she "had not really warmed to the crowds, and... implied the campaign would gain form her absence" (Gould 1996). These staff members believed that Jackie's "reserve and upper-class Eastern reticence did not endear her to all audiences... [in addition] she showed little understanding of what most of her contemporaries in the Midwest thought or did" (Gould 1996, 480). Although Jackie did not become overly involved or present during her husband's campaign, she fulfilled "the expected routine of the female components of candidates' families at the time" (Gould

1996, 479). She exuded the image of a beautiful and intelligent woman in addition to dedicated mother and loyal wife. Jackie became a standard product of 1960s society and a role model for many women in the nation. When Jackie stood next to her husband at the inauguration just a short month and a half after winning the election, she became the third youngest First Lady of the United States (Perry 2004).

I. Historical Context & The Kennedy Administration

The moment in history during which the Kennedy's moved into Pennsylvania Avenue was an extremely turbulent time in American society. The 1960s brought radical changes to both the political and social landscape of the United States as many social norms and orders were being challenged. More Americans voted in the 1960s than in any other decade since WWII and African-Americans, women, students and anti-war demonstrators caused great social upheaval and change. John F. Kennedy served as the fresh face of a new era. Campaigning on the most ambitious agenda since Roosevelt's New Deal, Kennedy promised the American people a "New Frontier" (Strober and Strober 2003) that included a series of reforms seeking to end inequality and injustice. Under his Democratic administration, JFK implemented a sweeping civil rights measure and massive tax cuts, founded the Peace Corps, promised the U.S would land a man on the moon, advocated for women in the workplace, and signed the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty with the Soviet Union and Britain (Schnapper 1979). While JFK famously suggested that the U.S people should "ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," (Strober and Strober 2003), he also experienced many failures during his Presidency such as the Bay of Pigs incident and increased involvement in the Vietnam War (Schnapper 1979).

Vietnam

The 1960s is largely defined by the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. Much of John F. Kennedy's legacy revolves around the decisions he made in regards to escalating the U.S' participation. After WWII, the United States' Foreign Policy was focused towards containing Communism and putting an end to the "domino theory" (Schnapper 1979); the assumption that if one country fell to communism, surrounding countries would follow suite. Kennedy himself was a fervent supporter of ending communism (Patterson 1989). Since the beginning of the chaos in Southeast Asia, Americans supported the military government of Ngo Dinh Diem (Strober and Strober 2003). However, "corruption, religious difference, and mounting successes by the Vietcong guerillas weakened [Diem's] government... and threatened the stability of his regime" (Patterson 1989). As a result, in early 1962, Kennedy made the controversial decision to increase U.S aid in Vietnam when he signed the "National Security Action Memorandum – Subversive Insurgency (War of Liberation)" (Reeves 1994, 96). Although Kennedy began to send more aid to Vietnam, the situation continued to worsened. This created much upheaval in the States as students and anti-war protestors took to the streets to detest Kennedy's decision (Patterson 1989). In September of 1963, Kennedy declared, "It is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it, the people of Vietnam, against the Communists" (Patterson 1989). While Kennedy acknowledged the responsibility of the people of Vietnam, he refused to agree with those who believed the U.S should withdraw (Strober and Strober 2003). Kennedy believed that the U.S "made this effort to defend Europe [from

Communism]. Now Europe is quite secure. We also have to participate – we may not like it – in the defense of Asia” (Patterson 1989). Although Kennedy and his Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson, notoriously disagreed regarding U.S strategy in Vietnam, it is unclear whether or not the U.S involvement in Vietnam would have escalated, as it did under Johnson, if Kennedy had not been assassinated in November of 1963.

Civil Rights Movement

The end to state-sanctioned segregation was one of the most promising and pressing issues of the 1960s. At the time, Jim Crow laws were upheld in the South while most southern states disobeyed the Supreme Court’s decision in the famous 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Ed* case, declaring segregation unconstitutional (Dallek 2003). At the beginning of his run as a politician, Kennedy himself admitted to having minimal knowledge regarding the Civil Rights campaign (Strober and Strober 2003). However, as Dallek (2003) points out, once Kennedy became more knowledgeable, he was a clear advocate of integration and of civil rights. His brother and Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, was also influential in urging the President to support civil rights. Robert Kennedy played a key role in obtaining Coretta Scott King’s release from jail (Martin Luther King Jr.’s wife) after she had been put behind bars for attempting to integrate a department store (Dallek 2003). Robert’s involvement in this affair generated a substantial amount of black support to his brother’s candidacy (Dallek 2003).

During the beginnings of the Kennedy Administration, the civil rights movement had mixed feelings regarding Kennedy’s support of equality and justice for African Americans in the U.S (Schnapper 1979). While many African Americans lost all faith in previous governments that declared their unwavering commitment to freedom, others

believed Kennedy exemplified a new age of politics and reform (Block and Umansky 2005). Grassroots movements, such as the Freedom Riders, began to gain momentum in 1961 as many demonstrators rode the trains, busses and attend the restaurants and shops across the upper South (Block and Umansky 2005). The Freedom Riders were met with much violence and hostility from whites including law enforcement officials (Dallek 2003). Robert Kennedy urged the Freedom Riders to “get off the busses and leave the matter to peaceful settlement in the courts” (Reeves 1994, 96). Through these demonstrations and escalating violence, Kennedy came to realize what a pressing issue Civil Rights had become. As a result, during his first State of the Union Address in 1961, Kennedy declared:

The denial of constitutional rights to some of our fellow Americans on account of race - at the ballot box and elsewhere - disturbs the national conscience, and subjects us to the charge of world opinion that our democracy is not equal to the high promise of our heritage (Swharz and Hamlyn 1964).

Although Kennedy highlighted the issue of Civil Rights in his State of the Union and seemed to be in support of the civil rights movement, the first half of his administration was preoccupied with other issues such as the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Cold War and Vietnam (2003). As a result, the administration attempted to “keep the President out of the civil rights mess” happening on the domestic front (Dallek 2003), to the dissatisfaction of civil rights activists who believed in Kenney’s promises. As Kennedy attempted to distance himself from the grassroots movements, civil rights leaders came to view Kennedy as being lukewarm, or soft on the Civil Rights issue (Schnapper 1979). An example of this would be Kennedy’s decision to send federal marshals to protect the Freedom Riders as opposed to federal troops or FBI agents (Strober and Strober 2003). As a result, activists complained that Kennedy’s commitment to the cause was weak and

initiative towards legislation and reform was extremely slow (Dallek 2003). Martin Luther King urged the President to take more initiative, such as Abraham Lincoln, and issue the “Second Emancipation Proclamation” (Reeves 1994) to liberate African Americans. However, Kennedy failed to issue the order.

On March of 1961, Kennedy signed the Executive Order 1095 which established the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity and ensured that all “employees are treated during employment without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin” (Reeves 1994, 515). Kennedy continued to tell civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., that if “[they] got into a long fight over this in Congress, it [would] bottleneck everything else and we will still get no bill” (Reeves 1994, 467). Realizing that clashes and violence were on the rise, Robert, and advisor Ted Sorenson, urged the President to be more aggressive about civil rights legislation and reform (Reeves 1994). As a result, Kennedy gave his famous civil rights address on national television and radio, outlining his proposals for civil rights legislation including, an end to segregation in public schools and other facilities, and greater protection of voting rights (Reeves 1994).

Two months later, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom occurred in which thousands of, primarily, African Americans, rallied for economic and civil rights (Reeves 1994). As the President feared this would have a negative impact on his proposals, he declined an offer to speak at the march (Reeves 1994). Here is where Martin Luther King Jr., gave his famous ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, with which the President was very impressed (Schnapper). After the successful and non-violent March, the leaders were invited to meet with President Kennedy at the White House (Reeves

1994). Kennedy felt that the favorable outcome of the event would help bolster his chances of passing his civil rights legislation (Reeves 1994). Before his assassination, Kennedy was only able to get his original bill out of the House committee (Reeves 1994). However, the future and pivotal Civil Rights Bill of 1964, signed by President Johnson, contained many of Kennedy's original ideas and proposals (Strober and Strober 2003).

Women:

Women in America were experiencing a revolution and unprecedented transformation during the 1960s as well. As Avital Blanch and Lauri Umansky (2005) would describe:

[It] opened to the Cold War sputters of the Nixon-Kennedy debates. Women hovered at the edge of the public imagination in the early years; Jackie in pill-box hat; Marilyn crooning to the President. They were not, by anyone's estimation, at the helm of American culture. Then the sixties happened, and somehow, in the house of that fierce decade, women launched a juggernaut that outspaced anything NASA could concoct... (1).

Politically, many findings contributed to the newfound attention directed towards women's equality. In 1957, the National Manpower Council (NMC) concluded a study that analyzed women's contributions to society other than wife and mother (Feminist Chronicles). The NMC found that women were "essential" and "distinctive" in the workplace and as a result, "the Secretary of Labor should establish a committee to review the consequences and adequacy of existing Federal and state laws which have a direct bearing on the employment of women" (Feminine Chronicles). In addition, in 1959, three landmarks books were written to help bring women's issues to the forefront of the social and political conversation. *A Century of Struggle* by Eleanor Flexner "contained an implicit call to arms" (Feminine Chronicles); *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* by Malcolm Newcomer, argued that the participation of women in the

academic field was in sharp decline (Newcomer); and lastly, *Women and Work in America* by Robert Smuts highlighted the fact that the role that women played outside the home had drastically changed from 1890-1950 (Smuts). As a result, Smuts urged society to reevaluate its expectations of women and their evolving role in society (Smuts).

Due to the urgency from the writings of Newcomer, Smuts and Flexner, in addition to the study conducted by the NMC, Kennedy established the President's Commission on the Status of Women and named well-respected Eleanor Roosevelt as its chair (Strober and Strober 2003). The establishment of the commission was seen as remarkable progress for the women's movement (Feminist Chronicles). In addition, the establishment of the Commission served as a way for Kennedy to "pay off his political debt to the women who has supported his campaign but were bitterly disappointed with his dismal record of appointments of women to his Administration" (Feminist Chronicles). Furthermore, in June of 1963, Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act of 1963, a federal law that abolished wage disparity based on gender (Strober and Strober 2003). Although women had been agitated with the slow progress of reform, the Equal Pay Act exemplified huge steps towards gender equality and acceptance of women's place in the labor force.

The onset of the 1960s also brought about a challenge to the norms of femininity and a fundamental redefinition of America's view on womanhood. The 1950s were a decade largely dominated by "political conformity, cultural conservatism, social repressiveness, and female passivity" (Coontz 2012, 59). Although women left the home during the war to fulfill the jobs men left behind, they quickly found themselves back in the home, feeling stifled and unsatisfied (Coontz 2012). As a result, scholar Stephanie

Coontz (2012) believes that during this monotonous time, “revolutionary changes were occurring below the surface in women’s behaviors and opinions” (59). These quiet changes would soon led to the social revolution the women’s movement created in the 1960s.

Sexually, women were becoming more empowered and liberated. The creation of Enovid, the first FDA approved birth control in 1961 (Bloch and Umansky 2005) gave women more freedom over their sexual activities without the greater risk of becoming pregnant. In addition, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), was extremely influential in changing the consciousness of women and is recognized as the beginnings of Second Wave Feminism (Freedman 2007). Friedan believed that,

Over and over women heard the voice of tradition . . . that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity. . . . They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights---the independence and opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists had fought for.

This false perception defines Freidan’s ‘feminine mystique,’ within which women were trapped. As a result, Freidan believed women were victims of the “the problem that has no name” (Friedan 1963, 15). The ‘problem that has no name,’ Friedan believed, was the image of the idealized suburban housewife that many women viewed as their best, if not only, option to living a happy and satisfying life. Friedan challenged the “assumptions about women’s roles in families and society as she questioned the dutiful housewife/mother niche in which many women felt stifled” (Perry 2004, 205). Through *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan encouraged women to defy the societal norms and expectations placed on women under patriarchy. She “unlocked that submerged, unvoiced dissatisfaction [felt by women] and in many cases, prompted women to become advocates of their own growth and achievement” (Freedman 2007). The idea that

happiness and fulfillment could be found outside the home and acquired in roles other than that of wife and mother started to become more realistic and powerful. As Friedan explains, speaking on behalf of women “we stopped defining ourselves merely in sexual relation to men, as objects, mothers, wives, housewives, and we discovered a new joy in ourselves and in other women” (Friedan 1976). As a result, women were able to realize they were not completely dependent on men to construct their own self-identity. This was revolutionary in the ways women’s valued themselves in society and the spheres in which they wanted to participate.

It is important to remember that Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* was not a calling for women to drop their responsibilities and leave the home or give up having children. Rather, Friedan encouraged women to remove the suppressive factors (i.e., societal norms and expectations) that restrained women’s ability to exercise empowerment. Friedan wanted women to recognize their ability to find fulfillment through their *own* definition of happiness and not the standards of a male-dominated culture that made happiness and housewife synonymous. The sexual, social and politically awakening for women occurred just as Jacqueline Kennedy was taking her place as the 35th First Lady of the United States. What is then expected from Jackie as the nations leading female role model? Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* and other agents of change serve as a unique lens through which to view Jacqueline Kennedy’s First Ladyship. The pressing social and political problems during the Kennedy presidency inevitably influenced how Jackie was perceived. As Abigail Adams served to be progressive during a conservative era, would Jackie help redefine societal norms in 1960s society, or only serve to reinforce them? From Jackie Kennedy, what do we learn about female power and the

pressure/possibilities of womanhood? And, how did Jackie influence femininity in America, other by being an icon?

II. Jacqueline Kennedy: An Elaborate Woman at an Intricate Time

Jacqueline Kennedy's 1,000 days as First Lady of the United States came at a moment in history in which the ideals, values, morals and institution that the First Lady of the United States represents were being fundamentally redefined, challenged, and scrutinized. Through literature such as the *Feminine Mystique*, women began to question the very office that Jacqueline Kennedy was responsible for upholding. The Civil Rights Movement, war in Vietnam and other political issues also attributed to the chaotic and turbulent time of the 1960s. Black feminists were becoming energized as Angela Davis made headway and served as the movement's most powerful leader. Similar to Kennedy, Davis also spent time in France during her twenties, which would serve to be influential throughout her activism in the United States. However, the plight of black women in America came at odds with the magnificent and luxurious lifestyle of many mainstream feminists (middle class white women) and more clearly, Jacqueline Kennedy. As a result, the juxtaposition between Davis and Jackie serves as a lens through which to view Jackie's effects on femininity and black women in America.

Jackie's elegance, and beauty are undoubtedly some of the factors that contribute to her iconic image as First Lady. Some may even say that Jackie was the exemplarily First Lady and the perfect image of what the President's spouse should be. While Jackie may have been a good wife and First Lady, she was regarded so under the ideal standards of patriarchy. As a result, the image of fulfillment Jackie upheld soon came to exemplify profound emptiness as exploited through Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*. Jackie

undoubtedly became a standard product of her society and reinforced the constructs of patriarchy from previous generations, causing much tension between the office and the American public. In addition, at a time in which social upheaval and revolution was at an all time high, Jackie failed to use her unique position and elevated power to advance the goals of women and equality. The transformative moment in history, politically and socially, serves as the lens through which the tensions, drama, ambiguities, and complex nature of Jacqueline Kennedy's tenure are uncovered.

During Jackie's time in office she was a mother of two, she supported the advancement of the arts, promoted historic preservation of the White House and was constantly the face of the Kennedy administration through her role as a diplomat and traveling ambassador (Perry 2004). She upheld the very feminized aspects of the institution of First Lady. She was a devoted wife who stood by her husband at a moments notice. She smiled, waved, and never questioned or doubted her husband's decisions (Schnapper 1979), and "she had been almost regal in her refusal to seek redress for his betrayals" (Perry 2004, 177). Her unwavering commitment to her family and husband's career was the very mystique Friedan was attempting to deconstruct. This inevitably created tension between the motivations and goals of the feminist movement, and the image Jackie upheld.

As First Lady, Jackie took on many typical duties of the President's spouse. While she added her own passions and interests such as the arts and culture to these projects, overall, Jackie's accomplishments in the White House remain within the feminized expectations of the office. As Kari Anderson argues, "First Ladies have achieved political agency without violating norms of femininity by cultivating a "social

political style” (in Wertheimer 2004, 265). Jackie’s social political style allowed for her to become an idealized and iconic figure without violating the norms of femininity, and therefore, reinforcing patriarchal constructs. Jackie’s first major task as First Lady was the restoration of the White House. One reason Jackie may have seen the White House restoration as an appropriate project may be that, “presidential household was traditionally the province of the First Lady...and its furnishing and social events were evaluated as an indication of her tastes and interests” (Gould 1996, 481). In addition, Jackie assembled a fine arts committee to help the restoration process in addition to asking well-known American furniture expert, Henry du Pont, to consult the committee (Wertheimer 2004).

Jackie also agreed to “accompany television crews through the White House for a special program that was taped and then broadcast in early 1962” (Gould 1996, 485). CBS News aired the broadcast as journalist Charles Collingwood brought millions of Americans into the home of the First Family. As a result, Jackie was seen as the “first White House chatelaine of the television age” (Gould 1996, 492). Jackie’s use of television in the modern age “helped acquaint a nation with her beauty, her poise, and her genuine interest in her photographic children” (Gould 1996, 492). In addition, the broadcast helped the Kennedy administration in political aspects (Abbott and Rice 1997). At the time, the U.S was seeking international support as they faced the Soviet Union in the Cold War. The administration knew this could be accomplished with the help of Jackie’s celebrity status helping affect public opinion in favor of the United States. As Strober and Strober (2003) acknowledges, “The extreme example of the luster that a wife can shed upon a presidential image is represented by Jacqueline” (21). As a result of the

high demand for the White House restoration video, the tape was distributed to over 106 countries (Abbot and Rice 1997). The positive impact of the White House restoration film took away negative attention from John's administration and instead, used Jackie as a means of gaining allies for the White House (Greer 1995). Although Jackie helped her husband's administration politically, she did so through very traditional, feminized means. By playing the role of dutiful hostess, Jackie helped garner allies for the United States, however, she simultaneously reinforced the constructs of patriarchy and the stereotypes of women's use in society.

However, there are those who believe that Jackie was a representation of a new woman, and different sort of First Lady. As Gail Collins argues, Jackie created a "new a far more thrilling model of wifely success" (Collins 2010, 40). As a result, some advisors to President Kennedy attempted to keep her in the background as, "they didn't believe she fit the image" (Collins 2010, 40). Advisors had hoped Jackie would set forth an image similar to that of Mamie Eisenhower; "the middle-aged army spouse who painted the White House interiors 'Mamie pink,' banned alcohol at social functions, and spent quiet evenings with her husband eating dinner off of trays and watching TV" (Collins 2010, 40). On the contrary, Jackie "made every effort not to make the role of First Lady a series of public appearances to greet visitors to the White House" (Wertheimer 2004, 245). And while most First Ladies begin their tenure choosing a cause of initiative to take on, when Jackie was pressed about her agenda as First Lady, she mentioned getting involved with international education or exchange programs for youth, but was never an adamant martyr for any cause (Gould 1996). Moreover, "she repeatedly focused on what her predecessors had been doing since the founding of the Republic - making their

husbands comfortable and their children happy" (Gould 1996, 485). Jackie's response represents the traditional expectations of mothers and wives in 1960s culture, the very norms a new revolution of women were attempting to defy. As Greer (1995) argues, "She eventually came to enjoy her patronage and power, but she had not actually planned to play such a role and had little interests in the political realities that it sustained" (21). As a result, Jackie did not use her unique position as First Lady to redefine women's role within society or break the constructs placed on women. Rather, Jackie served as a reinforcement of gender stereotypes of the time period.

Black Women and Angela Davis:

In comparison to the status of black women as analyzed under the First Ladyship of Abigail Adams, Angela Davis represents the challenging trajectory black women in America have faced. As one of the most well recognized activists of the time, Davis inspired black women to become part of the revolutions of the 1960s. She gained inspiration from "Kennedy's social justice agenda [which] was addressing the racial divide that existed, and, in particular, [rectifying] the historical exclusion of Black women within the national agenda" (Harris 2009, 59). Davis believed that a socialist system would serve as the best form of government for not only Blacks women's goals to be met, but for all peoples to be liberated (Harris 2009). However, within the socialist movement, racism and sexism needed to be challenged and redefined (Harris 2009). Davis' time in France, involvement with the Communist Party USA, incarceration and inspiration for the "Free Angela Davis" campaign make her one of, if not the most, influential black female activist during the 1960s.

Angela Davis was born in a Birmingham, Alabama into a middle class family that observed the horrific treatment and violence of blacks in the south under Jim Crow Laws (Roberts 2015). Davis and her family lived in an area known a “Dynamite Hill,” as many acts of violence, including bombings, targeted the blacks families living in the neighborhood (Roberts 2015). During the late 1950s, Davis moved to New York City to attend a Quaker high school where she boarded with a white family (Roberts 2015). During this time, Davis began reading many socialist writings including *The Communist Manifesto* and started attending *Advance* meetings, a radical youth group with the likes of many Communist leaders such as Herbert Aptheker (Roberts 2015). Davis continued her education at Brandeis University, during which Neil Roberts states she had many formative experiences, such as attending public speeches given by James Baldwin and Malcolm X and meeting Herbert Marcuse (Roberts 2015). Roberts argues that these experiences largely shaped and influenced the trajectory of Davis’ future. In addition, the rise of the Black Power movement and founding of the Black Panther Party during the early 1960s also greatly impacted and motivated Davis (Roberts 2015).

By the middle of the 1960s, Davis’ political ideologies were molded by “Marcuse’s mentorship and the intellectual currents of Frankfurt School critical theory to which Marcuse was a contributor, the ethical dimensions of Hegelian and Marxist thought, black social movements, and existential phenomenology” (Roberts 2015, 6). During her time in Germany after graduating from Brandeis, Davis felt removed from the grassroots black movements and “new Black militancy” (Roberts 2015) that had formed in response to increased racism towards black men and women. In addition, Davis spent time in France during the bombings in Birmingham, Alabama and felt extremely

removed from the civil rights movement back home (Kaplan 2012). As a result, Davis returned to the United States and enrolled in University of California – San Diego to further study under Marcuse (Roberts 2015). During her time in California, Davis was largely affected by the utopian and political ideas of Marcuse who believed in “one dimensional society, rejection of using socialism as a dirty word, musings on solidarity, [and the] articulation of the relationship between aesthetics and politics” (Roberts 2015, 7). Through these influences, Davis began to think about “resistance to racism, subordination of women, undemocratic orders, and orders of unfreedom . . . and contributed to a stream of intersectional black Marxism that integrated the phenomenology of black women’s existence into its activities” (Roberts 2015, 8). Davis was influential in bringing the plight of black women into the forefront of the Communist Party’s ideology. She went on to further integrate herself in the Communist Party as she joined the Che-Lumumba Chapter and began advocating for political prisoners (Roberts 2015).

Davis herself did not solely advocate for the liberation of Black women. Davis noted the exclusion of “working-class women, immigrants, and other minorities from activist organizations and the detrimental effects of these exclusions” (Aptheker 1999). Davis’ view of all marginalized women led her to adamantly believe that “oppression must be attacked from multiple angles and not exclusively the areas of race or gender” (Aptheker 1999). Overall, Davis advocated for an intersection of class, race and gender to be analyzed and reconstructed at the fundamental levels.

In August of 1970, an armed 17 year-old African American took control of a courtroom in California, armed the black defendants and took Judge Harold Haley and

three female prosecutors hostage (Aptheker 1999). As the convicts attempted to escape, police began shooting at the vehicle, resulting in the death of Judge Haley and the three black men (Aptheker 1999). In the following days, Angela Davis was accused of aggravated kidnapping and first degree murder in the death of Judge Harold Haley. Prosecutors argued that Davis was responsible since the weapons that were used were purchased under her name (Aptheker 1999). Davis was then placed on the FBI's Most Wanted List and fled California. During her time as a fugitive, Davis lived in her friend's homes and traveled across the country at night (Aptheker 1999). In October of 1970, Davis was found in New York City and brought back to California to face trial on the false charges (Aptheker 1999). Davis' sixteen-month incarceration sparked a tremendous national campaign known as "Free Angela Davis" until her acquittal in 1972 (Aptheker 1999). The campaign included songs written by famous celebrities such as Yoko Ono and John Lennon titled 'Angela,' and protests from over 200 local communities in the U.S and 67 foreign countries working to help liberate Angela from prison (Aptheker 1999). Individuals across the nation were outraged by the Davis trial and believed that Davis' only crime was being an outspoken, black feminist leader.

Perhaps surprisingly, Angela Davis and Jackie Kennedy can be placed within the same intellectual and political space as Alice Kaplan presents in *Dreaming in French* (2012). While they may seem to be diametrically opposing figures, Davis and Kennedy both spent time in France during their twenties. As chronicled through Alice Kaplan's book, their experiences abroad and immersion into French culture became hugely important and influential upon their return to the United States. However, the effects France had on each woman were drastically different. As a result, the comparison

between Davis and Kennedy represents the juxtaposition of two predominate and powerful female role models during the 1960s.

When Jackie immersed herself in French culture 1949, she began reading French novels, watching avant-garde films, and of course, embracing French fashion. She embraced French language as it “constituted a thread through her life from her grandfather’s early stories to the books she edited, to her everyday life in the early 1990s” (Kaplan 2012, 77). Jackie enjoyed the elite and social environment she found and spent much of her time in cafes and museums. However, while Jackie was there on a study program, Kaplan (2012) writes that her time was also occupied with “a rush of chateaus, hunts and parties” (34). Jackie’s time in France had remarkable influence on her life back in the United States, especially as First Lady. At times, advisors argued that Jackie and Jack were becoming ‘too frenchy’ as Jackie “faced a constant challenge of staying connected to French things she loved without appearing to have abandoned American design during her White House years” (Kaplan 2012, 62). It is clear the Jackie’s interest and love of French culture largely influenced her image and as First Lady.

Angela Davis’ time in France in 1963 served to be drastically different than Jackie’s and in turn, had an extremely different effect on her when she returned home. When Davis first went to France, she did not quite understand and realize that racism was international (Kaplan 2012). Rather, she believed France to be a place of refuge to escape from the racism in America. However, the Algerian War made many blacks fleeing to France realize that French society had its own racist structures. As a result, Davis began seeing hints of racism in France. After witnessing a pro-Algerian demonstration she saw on the Place de la Sorbonne, Davis wrote, “when the flics broke it

up with their high-power water hoses, they were as vicious as the redneck cops in Birmingham” (Kaplan 2012, 151). The Algerian War served as a workshop for Davis in international labor forces, decolonization and other factors that nourished her sense of politics. Davis’ time in France made her realize that racism did not only exist in Birmingham, Alabama. As a result, France served to be very important for Davis in her fight for freedom (Kaplan 2012). In addition, the beginning of identity politics for the French left greatly affected Davis.

Upon their return home, Kennedy and Davis used their time in France to explore extremely different interests and causes. While Jackie used her love of French décor to help restore the White House furniture and interior, Davis’ time in France fueled her activism in bringing an end to racial injustice and inequalities. The comparison between Kennedy and Davis is complex politically, socially, and personally. The different means by which France affected and influenced them represent the competing role models they exemplified for women in America.

During the time in which Jacqueline Kennedy served as the First Lady of the United States, Angela Davis made headway as a radical activist, feminist and strong advocate of the Communist Party USA. As competing role models, Jackie appealed to the middle-class white woman who envied Jackie’s beauty, elegance and elite status. The ‘Feminine Mystique’ Friedan attempted to uncover was everything Jackie stood for. As Kennedy did not use her platform as First Lady to advance the political goals for *any* women, black women continued to feel marginalized without any support from the Civil Rights Movement or the most powerful woman in the world. Davis’ activism and intelligence and appeal welcomed the likes of many women who longed for greater rights and civil

liberties. Although Angela Davis' trial came almost 10 years after the Kennedy White House, her influence on black femininity throughout the 1960s was extremely influential. While Jackie failed to disrupt the gender stereotypes for women in 1960s society, Davis served as one of the decade's most influential pioneers for women's liberation. While Davis laid a remarkable platform for the advancement of black women in society, the upcoming First Lady, Hillary Clinton, would serve to be a disappointment for black women through welfare reform and would soon undermine much of the struggle and hard work Davis fought for.

III. Conclusion

The end of Jacqueline Kennedy's time in the White House came to an abrupt end. On the morning of November 21, 1963, Jackie and John left D.C to make a political trip to Dallas, Texas (Perry 2004). Although Jackie was never really interested in accompanying her husband on these types of political trips, Jackie "consented to add her own popular image to her husband's attempt to mend a rift that had developed among Texas Democrats" (Gould 1996, 489). At the time, Jackie was wearing what has come to be known as the "famous pink Chanel suit (Craughwell-Varda 1999). The First Lady was sitting next to her husband as the limousine made its way around Dealey Plaza (Perry 2004). As the motorcade turned the corner onto Elm Street of the Dealey Plaza, the First Lady heard noises, which she had believed to be a motorcycle that had been backfiring (Schlesinger 2002). However, within 8.4 seconds, two more shots were fired and the President of the United States had been struck in both the head and neck (Schlesinger 2002).

After being brought to the trauma room at Dallas' Parkland Hospital, the First Lady in her blood-splattered suit insisted she be with her husband as he died. Only hours later, Jackie stood beside Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson as he took the oath of the office (Schlesinger 2002). At this historic moment in history, Jackie refused to take off her pink Chanel suit, which was covered in her husband's blood (Schlesinger 2002). It is said that Jackie was adamant about keeping the blood-splattered suit on because she wanted the world to see what they did to her husband (Schlesinger 2002).

Jackie insisted that the funeral be replicated after that of Abraham Lincoln's (Perry 2004). She led the ceremony and is remembered for lighting an eternal flame at the gravesite at Arlington cemetery (Perry 2004). The day after the funeral, the *London Evening Standard* reported that it was at this moment that "Jacqueline Kennedy [gave] the American people...one thing they have always liked: Majesty" (Bradford 2000). The tragic death of President Kennedy solidifies the dramatic life of Jacqueline Kennedy and the portrayal of her life as Camelot. Her 1,000 days as First Lady of the United States were wrapped in a blanket of tension, drama, and tragedy. Jackie's ability to create a lasting legacy through her fashion, elegance, beauty, work in the White House, and perseverance after the death of her husband is what makes her one of the most fascinating and majestic First Ladies in American history. However, as First Lady, Jackie failed to challenge the constructs of patriarchy. Jackie's moment in history comes at a time in which female activists, such as Angela Davis, represent the powerful influence women were capable of attaining. As competing role models, Davis' activism and the revolution of the women's movement in the 1960s, only further solidifies Jackie's failure

to us the unique power granted to her as First Lady to advance the position of women within society.

Chapter 3: Hillary Rodham Clinton A Divisive First Lady 1993-2000

"When a woman fights for power, as all women would like to, quietly or loudly, it is questioned. And yet, there must be freedom, if we are to speak. And yes, there must be power, if we are to be heard. And when we have both (freedom and power), let us not be misunderstood" - Hillary Rodham Clinton

Hillary Rodham was born in the affluent town of Park Ridge, Illinois on October 26, 1947 to Hugh and Dorothy Rodham. The Rodham family was extremely religious and raised Hillary and her siblings in a Methodist household (Clinton 2004). Hillary was greatly influence by the turbulent society of the 1960s and sought guidance in her Reverend, Don Jones. Jones exposed Hillary to writers and Christian philosophers such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr who greatly impacted Hillary's views of society as they preached social improvement and responsibility (Clinton 2004).

In the classroom, Hillary exuded a strong sense of independence and thirst for knowledge throughout her academic years (Brock 1998). The Rodham's emphasized high standards, education and determination while Hillary's father, Hugh, actively ingrained in her a sense that gender norms should never restrict her from achieving success (Clinton 2004). Hillary took these lessons to heart as she decided to run for President of her High School class and requested information regarding astronaut training from NASA (Brock 1998). Despite her determination, Hillary lost the election to a student in her class because of his achievements on the football field. In addition, upon her request for information, NASA informed Hillary that women were not welcome into the program (Clinton 2004). Hillary was appalled by both NASA's reply and her defeat in the class government election (Brock 1998). Both of these instances serve as rare

occasions during Hillary's upbringing in which she faced gender discrimination. They prove to have only encouraged her to defy the expectations people of the time had for women.

Hillary went on to attend Wellesley College where she had an extremely successful undergraduate career during which she became very politically involved (Clinton 2004). Hillary served as the president of the Wellesley Young Republicans but found herself believing in the more moderate views of John Lindsay and Nelson Rockefeller (Brock 1998). During her time at Wellesley, Hillary served as President of her class government at the end of her junior year and found herself moving further away from the conservative Republican roots from which she came (Clinton 2004).

As graduation approached, Hillary was encouraged by many of her peers to deliver the Wellesley graduation commencement speech (Clinton 2004). Hillary Rodham became the first student at Wellesley College to deliver the commencement speech and received a standing ovation after delivering a 7-minute speech speaking to the complexities surrounding 1960s society and education (Radcliffe 2009). It is clear that from an early age Hillary had great determination, courage, wit and dreams of being a successful leader.

After graduating from Wellesley College, Hillary Rodham decided to attend law school. Although she first had her eyes set on Harvard Law School, she was turned off by the comment of a Harvard Law Professor who mentioned that Harvard Law School was not in need of any more women (Radcliffe 2009). As a result, Hillary Rodham attended Yale Law School. Unbeknown to her, Hillary's decision to attend Yale would forever change the course of her life and politics in America.

William (Bill) Jefferson Blythe was born August 9th, 1946 to Virginia and Bill Blythe (Chafe 2012). After his biological father, Bill, died in a car accident, William was left in the care of his grandparents while his mother moved to New Orleans to be trained as a nurse anesthetist (Chafe 2012). While in New Orleans, Virginia met her second husband, Roger Clinton. Unfortunately, Roger had a history of various marriages and an alcohol problem (B. Clinton 2005). William Clinton was soon being raised in a household filled with spousal abuse and aggression (B. Clinton 2005). William Clinton went on to attend Georgetown University through the help of many scholarships (Takiff 2010). After Georgetown, William became a Rhodes Scholar and went on to study at Oxford University in the United Kingdom (Chafe 2012). Early on in his life, Bill found a passion for the law (Chafe 2012). This was this basis for his decision to attend Yale Law School in 1970 where he went on to meet Hillary Rodham.

After attending Georgetown, acquiring a Rhodes Scholarships and attending Yale Law School, Clinton eventually went on to be the Governor of his home state of Arkansas. Clinton was not unfamiliar with failure. His perseverance is clearly exemplified through his many failed campaigns as Governor of Arkansas (Smith 1994). After the first campaign he lost, Clinton went out on the streets of Arkansas the day after the election, knocking on doors and asking people why they did not vote for him, and what he could have done better to gain their support (B. Clinton 2005). His ambition kept him going, even after much failure and adversity, eventually landing him in the oval office.

I. Historical Context

At the start of his political career, Clinton was an outsider to Washington politics (Chafe 2012). As Bob Woodward explains in *The Agenda* (2007), Hilary strongly pushed for Clinton to run for President as she believed, “it was a rare meeting of a man and history” (Woodward 2007, 1). Clinton decided to acquire the necessary experiences and present himself as a “leader in the movement of self-styled “New Democrats”” (Woodward 2007, 3). As a New Democrat, Clinton believed in neoliberal economic policies and a “third-way” of government in America. Clinton’s “third-way” signified a reconciliation of polarized politics through implementing left-wing social policies with right-wing economic policies (Campbell and Rockman 2000). During his 1992 campaign, Clinton strongly advocated for welfare reform, middle-class tax cuts and an increase in the earned income tax credit for the working poor (Campbell and Rockman 2000). In addition, as a “New Democrat,” Clinton supported deregulation more than previous Democratic candidates.

The political climate at the time in which Bill and Hillary moved into the White House was not an easy one. At the end of the 1980s, America was facing economic difficulties and complexities of the post-Cold War era (Johnson 2001). President George H.W. Bush found himself in a vulnerable position in the 1992 elections as America’s economy was mired in recession and his conservative base was angered at his failure to uphold his 1988 campaign promise against raising taxes (Johnson 2001). Clinton also benefited from the faction within the Republican Party represented by Ross Perot and George H.W. Bush. While many viewed Bush’s foreign policy as his greatest strength, it did not carry much weight heading into the new decade with the recent dissolution of the

Soviet Union and the relatively peaceful climate in the Middle East after Iraq had been defeated in the Gulf War. Therefore, what was next for America in the upcoming decade?

Clinton's centrist platform used the economy as its focal point. "It's the economy, stupid," a slogan created by Bill's political strategist, James Carville, went on to help perpetuate Clinton's popularity for his fiscal policy (Johnson and Broder 2009). While Clinton found himself as President during the time of the technology boom and other positive driving forces behind the strength of the economy, Clinton did inherit the tail end of a recession and was far from experiencing economic stability at the time he took over the office.

Clintonomics is quite unique in its manifestation compared to that of other president's fiscal policies. The root of this uniqueness stems from the individuals Clinton chose to surround himself with and the sheer *amount* of opinions that were being taken into account during the formation, proposal, and implementation of the policy (Woodward 2007). The nature of Clinton's economic policy was quite controversial. Proposals from the campaign included a stimulus for the short-term (such as a Middle Class tax cut) while engaging in investments such as infrastructure, education, and science for the long-term (Johnson and Broder 2009). Clinton's Vice President, Al Gore, was also adamant about an Energy Tax that was included in the policy and later removed. At the top of the priority list for Clinton's campaign team and the economy was deficit reduction (Johnson and Broder 2009). Unfortunately, for Clinton, once he entered the White House, there was a bit of disconnect between what he promised his constituents and what, realistically, he would be able to achieve through his economic policy (Woodward 2007). In the end, Clinton's economic legislation would serve to be the focal

point and most successful legacy of his eight years as President as the United States witness unprecedented growth and prosperity between 1993 – 2001.

During this time, health care also became a growing issue. Throughout the 1980s, there was a large shift towards privatization and corporatization of health care across America (Johnson 2001). Insurance companies felt that the traditional fee-for-service method of paying doctors was being exploited while capitation payments became increasingly more common (Johnson 2001). Heading into the 1990s, health care rates began to rise at double the rate of inflation (Johnson 2001). In June of 1990, it was reported that 139,765 people living in the United States were infected with HIV/AIDS, carrying a 60% mortality rate. Yet, many Americans remained uninsured and were denied access to treatment.

Health care, as we will soon see, is an issue that both Bill and Hillary felt needed to be a priority during the administration's first term. Hillary took on an unprecedented and polarizing role as First Lady when she quickly became the chair of the task force on the health care. Hillary proposed the 'Health Security Act,' which had a controversial component mandating that all employers across the nation to provide health insurance to all employees (Waddan 2002). While Republicans did not want health care reform at all, Democrats wants a policy that implemented single-payer policies. The overarching goal of the policy was to devise a comprehensive plan that would provide universal health care coverage for all Americans. Unfortunately, Hillary's health care reform became an utter disaster for the Clinton White House, to be discussed later one. In addition, Hillary became largely involved with welfare reform which manifested as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). Hillary's

involvement in the welfare reform debate also contributed to her divisive legacy as it largely proved to be harmful to black women in the nation.

Women in America were also undergoing a radical transformation during this era. The 1980s brought many firsts for women. The 1980 Presidential election witnessed more women than men in the voting booths and in 1981, Sandra Day O'Connor became the first female Supreme Court Justice. 1983 and 1984 saw the first female astronaut in Sally Ride and the first female to be nominated for the vice presidency in Geraldine Ferraro. Lastly, in 1987, Congress declared March as the official National Women's History Month. The momentous accomplishments of women in the decade prior to the Clinton White House would have immense influence on the women's movement leading into the 1990s. In addition, 1992 is distinguished as the "Year of the Woman" as more women than ever before were elected to hold political office (women now held 47 seats in the House of Representatives and seven seats in the Senate), including the first black female Senator, Carol Moseley Braun (Harris 2009). A very controversial sexual assault case captivated the nation in 1991. Anita Hill came forward with accusations of sexual harassment against Clarence Thomas (who had been nominated for the U.S. Supreme Court). To the dismay of Hill and other women across the nation, the U.S Senate went on to confirm Thomas in a 52-48 vote despite the accusations against him (Harris 2009). However, in 1993 a law was passed making marital rape a charge in all 50 states and Ruth Bader Ginsburg became the second woman to hold a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court (Harris 2009).

Black women also experienced great transformation in the United States during the 1990s. For many decades, black women had trouble finding their place in both the

feminist movement and the civil rights movement (Harris 2009). As black feminist scholar Kimberley Crenshaw describes, "black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender" (Crenshaw, 209). As a result, where did black women belong within society? Being discriminated based on both gender and race left black women as pariahs.

Black feminism argued that black women were a representation of the means by which class, race and gender oppression work together to cause the inferiority and treatment of black women (Collins 2002). As a result, black women were marginalized by every structure of power around them. In 1979, Alice Walker coined what it known as "womanism," a theory that evolved out of the black feminist movement (Boisnier 2003). Alice Walker's 'womanism,' and its followers, worked hard to highlight the fact that black women experienced a fundamentally different and more intense oppression than that of white women (Boisnier 2003). As a result, the goals of mainstream feminism and black feminism were inherently different, as the issues facing black women and white women were contrastive. Anita Hill represented the "double disadvantage hypothesis, which contends that Black women are politically disadvantaged by both gender and race" (Harris 2009, 92). As a result, in a case such as Thomas-Hill and the political arena in general, "[black women] are forced to make a choice between being black and being female, deciding where to align their loyalties when social conflicts arise that make both identities salient" (Harris 2009, 93). In the Thomas-Hill case, the issue was not of race (it was intra-racial) but rather, gender. Unfortunately for Hill, she had trouble owning the gender narrative as typically, white feminists claimed a

stake to it (Collins 2002). Hill represents the crossroads at which Black women find themselves and the structure reinforcing their oppression.

However, Third Wave feminism was on the rise and sought to resolve many issues of the Second Wave, including its exclusivity. Third Wave feminists emphasized a new consciousness for the plight of black women and worked towards integrating their hopes, fears, and concerns with that of mainstream feminism (Freedman 2007).

In addition, 90s feminists also worked to change the perception, stereotype, media portrayals and language associated with women (Snyder-Hall 2010). Gender discrimination broadened to include LGBT populations, and several new areas of feminist inquiry were launched including queer theory, cyberfeminism, transgender politics and women-of-color consciousness (Freedman 2007). A point of contention within the growing feminist movement was that of the ‘sex-wars’ (Freedman 2007). Feminists were polarized by the topic of pornography, sexuality and sexual activity in the 1990s. Two camps emerged within this ‘war,’ one side believing that pornography served as a method of free-speech and female empowerment, while the other attempted to limit the porn industry as they felt it represented a reinforcement of patriarchal sexual relations (Freedman 2007). The tensions, issues and controversies regarding women in society in the 1990s will have a profound impact on Hillary’s role within the feminist movement as the most watched, scrutinized and powerful woman in America.

II. The Office of the First Lady of the United States – Bill & Hillary in the White House

Despite of the fact that the 1990s witnessed remarkable economic growth under the Clinton administration in addition to a technology boom and small advancements in

women's, homosexual's and minorities rights, Bill and Hillary represent the most polarizing figures of the decade. Politically and socially, the country was caught between those who loved the Clintons, and those who loved to hate them (Chafe 2012).

Politically, the Clinton's faced scrutiny from both the left and right wings. As a young politician campaigning on a "New Democrat" platform, Bill alienated far-left politicians, as they detested his support of deregulation and welfare reform (Woodward 2007). The left disliked Clinton for obvious reasons including his economic policy (placing high taxes on the rich), support for gays in the military, and of course, "Hillarycare". Socially, the scandals revolving around the Clinton's did not help their reputation either.

Watergate, Filegate and Travelgate exacerbated the flurry of negative attention surrounding the Clinton's personal investments and financial endeavors. Meanwhile Bill's sexual wrongdoings and accusations in relation to Paula Jones, Gennifer Flowers and Monica Lewinsky brought the Clinton's personal life under public scrutiny greater than ever before.

Hillary, herself, was an even more polarizing figure than her husband. At the very onset of Hillary's tenure as First Lady, Hillary immediately redefined and changed the traditional relationship between the nation and the First Lady. The discomfort the nation felt towards Hillary "centered around Mrs. Clinton's apparent hunger for power, her disingenuousness, and her active assault on the gender roles millions of Americans still wanted reinforced in the White House, even as change threatened the mores of Main Street" (Troy 2006, 165). She shifted the power dynamic by moving her office into the West Wing, "the male preserve of the White House in earlier administrations" (Gould 1996, 641), and taking on an unprecedented role as top policy-maker in, mainly, health

care and the welfare debate. In addition, Hillary's actions in the midst of her husband's infidelities largely contributed to her divisive legacy. Women in the nation grappled between supporting her decisions to stay with Bill and condemning her for not leaving him. Others believed Hillary was nothing but a scheming politician who only stayed with Bill to salvage her own power, political career and legacy. Although there are many theories regarding Hillary's decisions, we do not truly know the motivations behind her actions. There are three main matters during her time as First Lady in which Hillary proves to be one of the most divisive political spouses our nation has ever witnessed; her role in the health care debate, involvement in welfare reform and decisions to support and stay with Bill in midst of multiple scandals and sexual accusations.

Hillarycare

The Clinton administration's failed health care reform stands in stark contrast to Bill's involvement in his successful economic policy. Bill campaigned on health care reform to an audience that was experiencing a great change in the political climate and were well aware that the health care system was broken and reform was imperative (Waddan 2002). However, that same audience was simultaneously skeptical of the government due to the legacy left behind by the Reagan years (Johnson 2001). As a result, government was moving towards a greater sense of polarization, which served as a foreshadowing to the 1994 elections. In addition to the tough political climate, Clinton himself had a very weak electoral mandate on health care (Woodward 2007). His decision to use up a majority of political capital towards the budget fight did not help him either. Clinton's decision to commit to health care reform during the 1992 campaign brought in the involvement of many interest groups, advisors, and competing ideologies

(Johnson and Broder 2009). In addition, Clinton's decision to appoint Hillary as head of the task force was controversial in it of itself. Never before had a First Lady wielded so much political power and influence in policy making. First ladies typically sat behind the scenes and advised their husbands through closed doors. However, it was clear from the beginning that the First Ladyship of Hillary Rodham Clinton would be very controversial and divisive.

From the beginning, Hillary's task force on health care looked poor. While Borrelli (2002) suggests, "[Hillary] had credentials as a political and policy advisor, which supported her claim to formal power," many critics of Clinton place failure of the health care policy on Bill's decision to appoint Hillary as chair of the task force. The task force developed bad habits such as a sense of secrecy, which served highly counterproductive to the overall success, presentation, and implementation of the health care reform (Johnson and Broder 2009). This secrecy led to selective leaks so that bad features put out before counter-veiling good ones would be the representation of the legislation to the American public (Woodward 2007). In addition, the secrecy and isolation of the task force led to a lack of input from important actors including interests groups, Congress, federal agencies, and White House political advisors (Johnson and Broder 2009). As a result, Hillary's task force infuriated many lobbyists, media outlets, and interests groups.

The political climate of the time also did not help in promotion of the legislation. During the early 1990s, Presidents were experiencing a decline in credibility and trust. In Clinton's specific health care case, Hillary's team missed their first 100-day deadline, placing much hesitation in the minds of the public. Not only did Hillary's team run into

much trouble, but Bill himself struggled in advertising support for the program, while his competitors were experiencing much success in mobilizing against it (Woodward 2007). The Democrats and Clinton did not understand the changing political climate in which the health care reform was being pitched (Johnson and Broder 2009). This may have also led to the failure in promoting the plan to Congress. Congress was experiencing a decline of central party leadership and as a result, was less functional. The Congressional Democratic Leadership demanded a key role in the process and failed in acquiring it. Other aspects of party leadership that were changing included weakening of committee chairs (probably somewhat due to the fragmentation and disconnect of committees/subcommittees and staffs) and the increase of member's independent power bases, lobbyists. A decline in party loyalty also did not help the Democrats as it was being replaced by ideology.

One controversial moment during the healthcare debate nicely highlights the complexity associated with Hillary's role as policy-maker *and* presidential spouse. In 1993, opponents of the legislation charged Hillary's task force for violating the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 by holding deliberations in secret (Woodward). In response, the Department of Justice (DOJ) argued that as First Lady, Hillary served as a *de facto* government employee, and therefore she was not covered by the provisions of the law (Radcliffe 2009). In June 1993, after the case made its way to the Federal Court of Appeals, the court upheld the DOJ's defense and confirmed that Hillary was indeed a government official as the DOJ previously argued (Radcliffe 2009). The ruling had profound impact on the institutional history of the Office of the First Lady as "it set out for the first time the basis for the position of the president's wife in American

government” (Gould 1996, 643). Hillary’s role as policy-maker during the health care debate was much more than just a change in the symbolism of the office. It represented a transformation in the ways in which the non-institutionalized office itself had the ability to effect the American government and American people beyond the scope of the traditional responsibilities associated with the role of First Lady.

By the end of the century, 44 million Americans, which make up 16% of the United States, were still without any health insurance (Starr). Although Hillary’s legislation itself was a failure, Hillary’s role on the health care debate expanded the expectations and roles of First Lady greater than ever before. As Lewis Gould (1996) argues, through health care, Hillary “fused the ceremonial and the policy roles of the president’s wife with dignity and power” (Gould 1996, 648). Although Hillary’s unprecedented role as policy maker may have been a catastrophe in the political realm, in the realm of female leadership and power, Hillary set a new standard. She used her resources and influence in a sphere untouched by previous First Ladies to expand the expectations associated with that of presidential spouse and in turn, the perception of female leadership in America. While Hillary’s work on health care positively affected the perception of women in America, her work on a welfare policy dramatically harmed black women in America.

Hillary Clinton and Black Women – Welfare Reform Act of 1996

Health care was not the only controversial policy that Hillary was tremendously involved in. During her time in office, Hillary also influenced welfare reform during the second term of her husband’s administration. The mainstream feminist movement and black feminists were experiencing a time of great divide in the 1990s. If Hillary Clinton

is supposed to serve as a role model and mentor for the *all* women across the nation, how did she address or fail to address the issues facing black women during her time as First Lady? Was Hillary representing a female figure that black women in America could relate to? There is no denying that Hillary greatly attributed to the goals of the feminist movement. However, she failed in addressing the fundamental issues affecting black women during this time and rather than help, she harmed them through her support of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA).

After the failure of Hillarycare and the passage of Clintonomics came a second policy initiative in which Hillary was involved (more behind the scenes than with Hillarycare), welfare reform. During the 1992 campaign, President Clinton promised to end welfare “as we know it” (Johnson 2001, 32). However, after the 1994 elections and the “Republican Revolution,” the Republicans now controlled the House of Representatives and as a result, welfare reform became largely shaped by Clinton’s Republican enemies in Congress (Harris 2009). In addition, many individuals such as Nancy Fraser believed that Clinton’s electoral strategy revolved around “muting so-called claims of so-called special interests, especially Blacks and organized labor” (Harris 2009, 128) in order to appeal to the left. By distancing himself from these special interests and other liberal interest groups such as “minorities, feminists, and labor [it] was a blatant attempt to appeal to the disenchanting working-class Party as part of the backlash against liberalism in past Presidential elections (Harris 2009, 128). As a result, President Clinton’s Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, largely crafted by conservative politicians, was an extremely polarizing piece of legislation between political parties, and Hillary and black women across the nation.

The program before PRWORA most associated with the welfare system was that of Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) (Johnson 2001). PRWORA dismantled AFDC and replaced it with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (Harris 2009). The policy had three main goals: (1) to increase employment and reduce welfare dependency; (2) reduce child poverty; and (3) to reduce illegitimacy and strengthen marriages (Johnson 2001). Through PRWORA, welfare as an entitlement program came to an end, state governments acquired more autonomy over welfare delivery and the federal government's responsibilities were greatly reduced (Woodward 2007). In addition, time limits were placed on welfare recipients (five years) and stricter regulations regarding eligibility for food stamps, immigrant welfare assistance and work requirements for recipients were implemented (recipients were required to begin working two years after receiving benefits) (Woodward 2007). Attitudes towards women's roles were also addressed in the legislation as PRWORA itself was designed to increase the labor market competition among recipients (Johnson 2001). Due to the fact that this was a dramatic shift away from 'mother's pensions' and other protectionist provisions in previous social welfare policies, the message regarding women's roles in PRWORA came to be that being a full-time mother was a luxury, available to only married and middle class women (Johnson 2001). In addition, a distinction between the 'deserving poor' and 'undeserving poor' in the nation came to be more apparent (Johnson 2001). As a result, those who were seen as 'undeserving' and dependent of welfare due to laziness and convince received less sympathy and exacerbated Republican attacks on the more liberal ideas of welfare reform (Johnson 2001).

Before PRWORA came to be, President Clinton had previously vetoed two Republican welfare reform bills and was under great pressure to pass the third, especially as he neared reelection season (Johnson 2001). There were White House staff and cabinet members who advised the President to hold out for a better plan, as they had successfully done so after the first two (Woodward 2007). Others, such as close friends and advisors Dick Morris, Robert Reich and Hillary herself, felt that signing the third bill was pivotal to Clinton's reelection (Woodward 2007). Although his fellow advisors encouraged Clinton to sign the bill, mainly for the short-term political gain, they recognized the detrimental effects the bill would have in the long run on poor immigrants, minorities and single individuals (Woodward 2007). Congressional Republicans endorsed the Act itself as it ended "six decades of the government safety net that had served as the fundamental basis for social welfare programs" (Harris 2009, 123) and a dependency on such great aid from the government.

PRWORA served to be harmful to black women across the nation as it "helped solidify the contemporary political discourse on social welfare reform that prioritized race and depicted black women according to the 'welfare queen' narrative" previously created by the Reagan administration (Harris 2009). A welfare queen is seen as the epitome of black women. She is a:

lazy, promiscuous, single Black mother living off the sole of society. She poses a threat to the Protestant work ethic that drives America and the American Dream of social advancement and acceptability. The welfare queen trope is a complicated social narrative in which race, gender, and class are interlocked. The welfare queen metaphor does not simply embody images of Black women; it's broad-ranging scope is deeply imbedded in almost every facet of our social and political discourse (Harris 2009, 123).

Conservatives used the welfare queen narrative to exacerbate the problem of dependency on welfare and the damages it was causing to the nation. In addition, Clinton's emphasis of "third-way" politics and "New Democrat" platform "exposed his acceptance of the conservatives' negative construction of welfare and welfare recipients and allowed the president himself to endorse and perpetuate...the welfare queen narrative" (Harris 2009, 129). Through his "third-way," Clinton also upheld a political discourse in which there was a large amount of exploitation of racial stereotypes and marginalization of disadvantaged minority groups (Harris 2009). Lastly, Clinton's welfare slogan that "welfare should be a second chance, not a way of life" (Harris 2009, 132) also implied that those benefitting from the system were misusing, abusing, or undeserving of the advantages (Harris 2009). Clinton pursued his "New Democrat" platform and friendship with the Republicans at the expense of minorities and blacks across the U.S. in order to ensure political success, and Hillary supported these decisions (Klein 2003).

This signing of PRWORA came as a tremendous upset to blacks and other minority groups. As Clinton entered office in 1993, many Blacks felt they could relate to Clinton as "Clinton [displayed] almost every trope of Blackness: single-parent household, born poor, working-class, saxophone playing, McDonald's loving boy from Arkansas" (Harris 2009, 133). In addition, Black women believed that Hillary herself would encourage her husband to protect the interests of all women in the White House rather than harm them (Harris 2009). Clinton represented his support of Black women through his inauguration of Maya Angelou as his inaugural poet and his attempt to place Black women in his cabinet (Harris 2009). While Clinton nominated Lani Guinier as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights and Dr. Jocelyn Elders as Surgeon General, both

women came under attack from the right and media, being labeled “Clinton’s Quota Queens” (similar to a welfare queen) (Harris 2009). At this very moment, Clinton failed to defend his nominees and rather, appeased the right by withdrawing the nominations (Harris 2009).

While Blacks and more specifically, black women, have been extremely loyal to the Democratic party, this has only led to “disappointment at best, and mistreatment at worst” (Harris 2009, 132). What black women were most concerned with about neoliberal Clintonism was that minority and ethnic groups continued to be “shortchanged within the political process as their interests were sacrificed in appeals to the ‘swing’ Reagan Democrats, namely, working-class Whites” (Harris 2009, 132). This exposed Clinton’s true priorities and made many think how “ironic and paradoxical that this convergence of the passage of welfare reform and continued manipulation of racist caricatures (especially Black women) occurred within a “Democratic” administration” (Harris 2009, 132). It became very clear through the passage of PRWORA that “welfare reform a la Clinton [would] continue to target and stigmatize the poor” (Harris 2009, 129). Democrats such as Senator Daniel Moynihan from New York proclaimed that the law was “the most brutal act of social policy since reconstruction” (Harris 2009, 129). As a result, many Blacks and minority groups lost trust in Clinton’s administration and questioned his priorities and loyalty to the, traditionally democratic, special interests groups discussed earlier.

Hillary’s work on PRWORA was detrimental as it ruined the relationship between Hillary and black women across the nation, in addition to relationships with former friends and colleagues she had known since her time in law school and Arkansas. Black

women felt frustrated that Hillary worked extensively to combat women's rights abroad but failed to protect the interests of black women in the White House (Harris 2009). Hillary supported her husband's signing of the third bill, as her focus was aimed towards his reelection, rather than the protection of women in the U.S (Troy 2006). Rather than voice the shortcomings of the bill and the ways in which it was harmful to many demographics, especially black women and children, Hillary urged Bill to sign the law for the short-term political gain that would follow.

In addition, during her time as a lawyer in Arkansas, Hillary was the head of the board for the Children's Defense Fund, an organization that works to advocate on behalf of children. Founder, Marian Wright Edelman, a longtime friend of Hillary greatly opposed PRWORA and believed the new law to be an "outrage...that will hurt and impoverish millions of American children. [It] [would] leave a moral blot on Clinton's presidency and on our nation that will never be forgotten" (Goodman 2009). In addition, Patricia Ireland (1997), then president of the National Organization for Women, stated that the new welfare law would place "2.8 million people on welfare at risk of sinking further into poverty and homelessness." Peter Edelman, husband of Marian Wright Edelman, resigned from his position as Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the Department of Health and Human Services over the bill. Mr. Edelman believed PRWORA was the worst piece of legislation that could have been passed and posed great harm to American children and families (Goodman 2009). In addition, Mr. Edelman argued that PRWORA would not drive millions more of Americans into poverty, but rather, would worsen an already existing social problem (Goodman 2009). In his opinion, with PRWORA, "there [would] be more malnutrition and more crime...increased family

violence and abuse against children and women” (Goodman 2009). It is clear that many of Hillary’s friends and most loyal supporters did not hesitate in voicing their opposition towards the bill. However, Hillary’s moral integrity was nowhere to be found in the welfare reform debate. Hillary and the Edelman’s relationship was significantly diminished after the passage of PRWORA in addition to many of the other alliances the Clinton’s had built during their political careers (Troy 2006).

While Hillary and Bill both struggled (ethically) with passage of the bill, they found themselves listening to the rhetoric of advisors such as Dick Morris screaming, “if he vetoes, he’ll lose” (Troy 2006, 162). As Hillary found herself caught between doing what was right and what was necessary, “she shrank from the whole passionate debate” (Troy 2006, 162). Unlike any other policy initiative before welfare, Hillary now spoke of “the president’s decision” (Troy 2006, 162), representing her less outwardly vocal behavior towards the bill. In order to console and justify her support of PRWORA, Hillary proclaimed, “we have to do what we have to do, and I hope our friends understand it” (Troy 2006, 162). Those who knew Hillary best attributed her “uncharacteristic passivity” (Troy 2006, 162) to the failure of her health care legislation and the controversies surrounding the Whitewater affair (Troy 2006). As close friend and advisor George Stephanopolous noted, “political prudence and the balance of power in their marriage weighed against a decisive Hillary intervention. She couldn’t be positioned – publically or privately – to take the fall if he vetoed the bill and the race went south” (Troy 2006, 162). Due to the delicate political climate and public failures of her first few years as First Lady, Hillary decided to take a backseat when it came to further policy initiatives, especially welfare. Although she played a less visible role, her support of an

extremely conservative welfare reform policy came at the expense of many friendships and constituents. In addition, she seemed to prioritize her husband's reelection above fighting a policy that would be extremely harmful to black women, children, and struggling families. Hillary's work on welfare reform contributes to her polarizing image as many detested her support of such a detrimental piece of legislation. Through welfare, Hillary alienated allies, enemies, supporters, and fellow women in America.

Liberal Feminism, Hillary & Black Women

Politically, it is clear Hillary failed black women. How about socially? In addition to her support of a very detrimental welfare reform act, Hillary worked well within the framework of what is recognized as a "liberal feminist". Liberal feminists have the goals of social, economic and political equality (Freedman 2007). According to Rosemarie Tong (2013), liberal feminists no longer want to be restricted to the occupations defined for them through patriarchal society. As a result, they emphasize increasing women's presence as professionals and political figures as opposed to attempting to break down class or race structures. With this focus, liberal feminism often comes under the critique of being a movement for "bourgeois, white, middle-class" women and being too ingrained in the hierarchal systems of class and power (Tong 2013). Therefore, liberal feminists fail in challenging such systems and operate within already existing power structures while attempting to bring about legal and economic equality for women.

Much of the liberal feminists rhetoric is grounded in work such as Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique." Friedan focuses her analysis on white middle-class housewives and their unhappiness with the ideology that women should be fulfilled by their domestic work and child-rearing (Friedan 1963). While Friedan proposes a solution

to “the problem that has no name” (Friedan 1963), (to find fulfillment both within the home and outside the home) she largely fails to address the issues affecting women outside of the Western, white, educated middle-class, the demographic in which Hillary Clinton falls nicely. However, Friedan's solution to “the problem” airs on the side of impossible due to the fact that our patriarchal society has shaped the workplace into an area that is not conducive to the needs of a mom, wife, and professional (Freedman 2007). The public sphere is traditionally constructed to serve the needs of men. Therefore, even with privilege and resource, a woman finds great difficulty in achieving mastery of both the public and private spheres (Freedman 2007). The false sense of hope that liberal feminists, such as Hillary Clinton, promote is one of its major criticisms.

In addition, while liberal feminists are important activists, they work well within the status quo, meaning, they attempt to increase women’s presence in existing power structures, rather than *challenging* those very same structures (Schwartzman 2006). The issue here is that the structures in which liberal feminists work, are the very same structures that implicitly enforce racism, classism and in some ways, reinforce the system of patriarchy by failing to challenge the institutions (Harris 2009). By leaving out the struggles of women that are oppressed by systems of racial and class discrimination, capitalism, and Western imperialism, liberal feminists sacrifice true equality for power and self-aggrandizement (Boisnier 2003). Due to the means by which liberal feminism is already profoundly invested and ingrained in systems of western patriarchy and hegemonic structures, it is unable to challenge these very systems and as a result, their ultimate goals of social, political and economic equality are not attainable for all women.

Lastly, liberal feminism encourages women to find success in multiple dimensions. Meaning, liberal feminists believe that women can and should find fulfillment by achieving both in the workplace and in the home (Schwartzman 2006). As a result, a true liberal feminist is inspired and energized by a woman such as Hillary Rodham Clinton. Hillary is able to be successful in patriarchal terms (in the political workplace, a sphere traditionally left for men), but also in her ability to fulfill traditional stereotypes of femininity such as mother and devoted spouse. While Hillary exemplifies a liberal feminist success story, the reality is that the resources and experience Hillary acquired throughout the years is not available to most women. Even when it is, women find difficulty in achieving at high levels in both the workplace and the home (Schwartzman 2006). As a result, the institutionalized system of patriarchy, in which liberal feminism is grounded, further oppresses women as they realize that it is nearly impossible to be both a perfect career woman, mother and wife all at the same time.

Although Hillary has never placed a label on herself or referred to herself as any sort of feminist, Hillary Rodham Clinton is undoubtedly one of the greatest testaments to liberal feminism and its goals. However, the sphere in which Hillary has achieved success and the terms in which her success has been defined continues to be in a man's world (Boyer 2006). During her regression to a more "traditional" First Lady in 1995, Hillary traveled to third world countries and preached ideals of Western beliefs of capitalism and democracy on women who were fighting to survive under oppressive regimes. As Hillary exuded a positive image of Western femininity, strength and resolve, she reinforced Western styles of power without much regard for other cultures. Hillary challenged the structures of patriarchy and oppression for women abroad in culturally

imperialistic terms. She critiqued other societies along with the policies and norms that oppressed women in those cultures while failing to address the fundamental structures oppressing *all* women in the United States.

As a result, Hillary Clinton fails to challenge the very patriarchal structures that continue to oppress women, mainly those outside of the demographic of well educated, white, middle-class women in America. Black feminists of the time were surely gaining momentum in grassroots movements and national attention in instances such as the Thomas-Hill case. In addition, Third Wave feminists were working hard to bridge the gap between all women in the nation and remedy the shortcomings of the Second Wave. During this time, there were many changes in the political and cultural landscape and in the relationship between black and white women. Though Hillary Rodham Clinton is a feminist success story, she truly demonstrates the inadequacies of liberal feminism in addressing the concerns of all women. Therefore, in the First Ladyship of Hillary Rodham Clinton, black women of the 1990s were unable to find a relatable figure and role model.

Sex, Scandals and Controversy

Less than a month before the New Hampshire primary, Hillary and Bill came under a flurry of scandal that jeopardized many aspects of their public and personal lives. Hillary's actions throughout these critical moments divided women across the nation and cemented her as one of the most divisive First Ladies of all time. On January 23, 1992, *Star* tabloid released a headline claiming Jennifer Flowers, a lounge singer in Arkansas who previously denied having any sexual relations with President Clinton, was now changing her story (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). Rozell and Wilcox (2000) argue that this

allegation, if true, would not come as a surprise to Hillary. She was well aware of Bill's wondering eye and knew that this was not a completely unimaginable situation (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). However, it was not until the affairs became politically explosive that Hillary had to strategically navigate her position and image, both publically and personally, as the First Lady and role model to the nation's women.

Three days after the Star tabloid released the headline, both Bill and Hillary appeared for an interview on *60 Minutes* with Steve Kroft (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). Throughout the interview, Hillary stood by her husband as he admitted to "cause[ing] pain" in his marriage, but adamantly claimed to never have engaged in sexual activity with Ms. Flowers (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). Hillary stated that Ms. Flowers was "trailer trash," and was seeking nothing but publicity and money (Bernstein 2008). In addition, it is said that Hillary worked tirelessly to discredit Flowers' accusations and attempted to "persuade horrified campaign aides to bring out rumors that Poppy Bush had not always been faithful to Barbara" (Chotiner 2014). Political scientist Darell M. West believes that when the Jennifer Flowers scandal became a media and political nightmare, and especially detrimental to the Clinton's run at the White House, Hillary "saved her husband's candidacy in 1992" by announcing that they had worked through their marital problems in the wake of the scandal. Some scholars, such as West, believe that Hillary's decision to save Bill during the Flowers scandal was strategic. They argue that Hillary knew exactly what her decision meant in terms of garnering political power if Bill ever made it to the White House (Klein 2003). Perhaps Hillary knew that by sacrificing her integrity, at that moment, to save Bill and his campaign, he now largely owed her (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). That debt would be repaid by Bill upon entering the White House by

giving Hillary more ability to exercise power, authority, and influence decision making to a greater extent than any First Lady before her. Bill moved Hillary's office into the West Wing of the White House and made it very clear to his advisors and constituents that by nominating him as President, they would be receiving 'two [President's] for the price of one' (Gould 1996).

Between the Jennifer Flowers scandal and allegations that Bill intentionally avoided the draft for Vietnam in 1969, January and February of 1992 were turbulent months for the Clinton's. In addition to an already decreasing approval rate in the polls, on March 16 of 1992, Hillary created another media frenzy over and controversial comment (Gould 1996). While answering questions regarding her profits at Rose Law Firm in Arkansas in relation to a state business, Hillary commented, "you know, I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was to fulfill my profession, which I entered before my husband was in public life" (Gould 1996). Hillary's comments went on to spark the nerves of many individuals in the nation, including housewives. She had previously claimed the feminism was all about the choice to work in or outside of the home, and yet she seemed to vilify those who did not assume a career of their husband's or the home. After Hillary's comment, author Patricia O'Brien noted that with a new generation of political candidates, "[came] an entire new generation of candidates' wives. And they are not the traditional women people have been used to seeing on the campaign trail and in the White House, and they have - they come with different lives, their own lives. They are not necessarily formed by their husbands' careers, and this is causing all sorts of problems" (Troy 2006). O'Brien's comment demonstrates the difficulty that the nation had with Hillary, her career, her

decisions and her comments. Individuals were not used to such an independent First Lady who lived outside of her husband's shadow, and this was the basis of much scrutiny and discomfort. In addition, Hillary angered many women who chose to stay within the home and found a role model in the more "traditional, dutiful hostess First Lady" (Gould 1996, 638).

After Bill was elected President of the United States and the Clinton's moved into the White House in January of 1993, there would be more scandal and controversy to come. On May 6, 1994 a former Arkansas state employee by the name of Paula Jones, filed a sexual harassment lawsuit against Bill Clinton (two days prior to the statute of limitations), (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). She claimed that on May 8, 1991, Clinton lured her into a hotel room in Arkansas and exposed himself to her, "sexually assaulting and harassing her, and then defaming her with denials" (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). As a result, Jones sued Clinton in civil court and seeking \$700,000 in damages (Washington Post). On August 10, 1994, Clinton decided to file a motion dismissing the Jones suit arguing that a sitting President is immune from being tried in civil court as a lawsuit would distract him from more important matters (Johnson 2001). However, an 8th Circuit U.S Court of Appeals ruled that the Constitution did not grant any sitting President such immunity (Johnson 2001). As a result, Judge Susan Wright set the trial for May 27, 1998 (Johnson 2001). In December of 1997, Paula Jones reduced the damages sought in her lawsuit to \$525,000 and dropped the defamation claims (Johnson 2001). In February Clinton's team requested Judge Wright to throw out the case as Jones and her legal team had failed to prove Ms. Jones suffered any serious harm and emotional distress (Johnson 2001). Although Jones' legal team attempted to prove otherwise, Judge Wright granted

Clinton his request for summary judgment and dismissed the case (Johnson 2001).

Following Jones' appeal of the dismissal, in November of 1998, Clinton settled the case out of court, agreeing to pay Jones \$850,000 while acknowledging no wrongdoing (Johnson 2001).

During the midst of the Jones case (1998), new allegations came about pertaining to the President and a White House intern by the name of Monica Lewinsky. Lewinsky, a 22-year old recent college graduate was hired to work in the White House during the President's first term in office (Johnson 2001). During this time, Monica began an intimate relationship with President Clinton, the details of which she confided to friend and co-worker, Linda Tripp (Berlant and Duggan 2001). Tripp, an employee in the Defense Department, became a key player in the unraveling of the scandal and eventual impeachment trials of the President. Tripp convinced Lewinsky to keep the gifts the President gave her and of course, the famous semen-stained blue dress (Johnson 2001). Tripp also began recording her conversations with Lewinsky, which became key evidence in the President's impeachment trials (Berlant and Duggan 2001). Once Tripp found out that Lewinsky had submitted an affidavit in the Jones case denying any physical relationship with the President, Tripp turned over all tapes of her recorded conversations with Lewinsky to Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel investigating Whitewater and other scandalous Clinton matters (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). On January 21, 1998, news of the Lewinsky scandal broke in *The Washington Post* (Berlant and Duggan 2001). For the next several months, the media frenzy debated whether or not the affair had occurred and whether or not the President of the United States, lied and obstructed justice (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). Due to the fact that Lewinsky refused to

discuss the affair and testify, there was no substantial evidence beyond the tape recordings Tripp had given to Starr (Johnson 2001). On July 28, 1998, sometime after news of the scandal originally broke, Monica Lewinsky received transactional immunity in exchange for a grand jury testimony regarding her affair with the President (Berlant and Duggan 2001). In addition, Lewinsky handed over the semen-stained blue dress that Tripp convinced her not to dry clean, providing unambiguous DNA evidence linking the President to Lewinsky (Branch 2010). On August 17, 1998, President Clinton admitted to having an “improper physical relationship” (Clinton, 1998) with Lewinsky.

Where was Hillary during the unraveling of this national affair? Not only was it confirmed that Hillary had been present in the White House during at least two of President Clinton’s interactions with Lewinsky, but Hillary’s response to the accusations and eventual admission of the inappropriate relationship, divided the country. Once again, Hillary stood by her husband through this extremely turbulent and difficult time. However, not only did Hillary stay by her husband, she accused the victim, Monica, and the GOP of fabricating such a ridiculous accusation (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). On January 27, 1998, Hillary appeared on an interview with Matt Lauer stating that the entire scandal was a “vast right-wing conspiracy” against her husband (Branch 2010). In addition, Diane Blair, a close friend of Hillary, reported that Hillary believed Lewinsky to be a “narcissist loony toon” (Chotiner 2014) and used various other measures to undermine the legitimacy of her accusation (similar to Hillary’s name-calling of Flowers as “trailer trash”) (Rozell and Wilcox 2000). While Hillary always stood by her husband in the wake of such scandal, the nation grappled with Hillary’s response this time around. While there is no right side of the gender bias, Hillary consistently seem to protect and

stand with the oppressors in the gender wars, not the victims (Chotiner 2014). Through this response, Hillary placed her husband as the victim, preyed on by various female aggressors (Flowers, Jones, Lewinsky) (Chotiner 2014). Hillary even blamed herself and her own “emotional unavailability” (Chafe 2012) as the root of Bill’s indiscretions. It seemed Hillary was willing to go to extreme means to protect her husband, his administration and legacy (including her own).

As mentioned by Carl Bernstein (2008), there had been rumors during the 1992 campaign that Hilary attempted to get sworn statements from multiple women Bill had been accused of being involved with. In these statements, the women were asked to state they had never had a relationship with the President (Bernstein 2008). Between the Flowers, Lewinsky and other controversial accusations surrounding the President’s extra activities, Hillary seemed to consistently and ruthlessly attack the accusers, go to extreme extents to undermine the accusations and even place blame on herself, rather than hold Bill accountable for his shortcomings. As a result, Hillary faced extreme scrutiny from the American public and media. She became accused of of “being perversely drawn to the rejection implied by Bill’s philandering” (Kipnis 1998) and a “victimizer who actually enabled her husband’s predation” (Kipnis 1998). Due to her ‘lack of action’ during this tumultuous time, Hillary became absolutely vilified for her response to Bill’s affairs.

The way in which Hillary handled herself through these various scandals was extremely important and polarizing for the nation, especially women. Hillary portrayed the familiar role of the ‘abandoned woman’. Many felt sorry for Hillary and supported her decision to stay with Bill, seeing her as the overarching victim of the media’s vicious

attacks and Bill's inappropriate affairs (Branch 2010). As a result, they understood Hillary's decision to stay and try to salvage her family, especially for Chelsea's sake (Berlant and Duggan 2001). One factor contributing to Hillary's decision may have been the influence that Hillary's mother played in her life (Clinton 2004). From a young age, Hillary was taught that the most important thing was to always place the family first (Clinton 2004). Hillary truly took this to heart and knew that regardless of Bill's shortcomings, they were a family and it was her duty to protect Chelsea and the image of the First Family. Time after time, Hillary "blamed the women" for every affair her husband had, always protecting him and refusing to see him as the perpetrator (Klein 2003). Hillary also knew that her success as First Lady would be defined by the success of her husband's administration (Klein 2003). As a result, Hillary did everything she could to ensure that Bill left a positive impact on the American people.

Although the Lewinsky scandal was a very difficult time, this may have been a liberating force in Hillary's life. While defending Bill regarding the Lewinsky scandal, Hillary began to commit herself to become a candidate for the Senate seat in New York State (Brock 1998). During her shift to a more "traditional" First Lady, Hillary simultaneously created a niche for herself inside of Washington. During this time, she garnered a large support base and continued influencing policy domestically and internationally (Radcliffe 2009). Her more traditional roles can be seen in writing a newspaper column (similar to that of Eleanor Roosevelt) and advocating for women and children abroad. However, she never stopped in gaining political capital, power and respect within the Democratic Party and its voters (Gerth and Van Natta 2007). As a result, there were those who viewed Hillary's decision to stay with Bill as a

representation of her own scheming tactics and as a means of salvaging her own political career and power.

Overall, no one can truly ever say why Hillary acted and made the decisions she did. However, women across the nation were torn between feeling sorry for Hillary and supporting her decision to stay, and those who viewed her actions as nothing but a political game. As a result, Hillary's behavior through these various scandals solidified another aspect of her important and divisive legacy as First Lady.

II. Women in Leadership

Is Hillary Rodham Clinton a feminist icon? As made clear, the feminist movement and the onset of Third Wave Feminism was causing much change in ideology and perspective. These possibilities and adjustments were occurring just as Hillary was taking office. As a result, it is important to analyze the means by which Hillary represented these changing ideals or reinforced patriarchal constructs. Hillary's style as First Lady was a combination of highlighting both the private and public spheres as a means by which to draw attention to a greater social political issue. According to Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (1992), "feminist deconstruction of political discourse requires the rethinking and reuse of the primary terms of political discourse in order to include women and reposition them within history, the law, and the greater political discourse of society" (xiv). Hillary, and all First Ladies, are given the unique opportunity to deconstruct political discourse as their role is inherently *both* public and private. Hillary used her platform at First Lady to bring women's rights to the forefront of the nation's affairs, "women's rights as human rights" (Clinton 2004), and in turn, successfully deconstructed this political discourse. According to Burrell (2001), the First Lady is a

cultural position that has become institutionalized). Hillary is a perfect example of a First Lady who has used her unique position within society and government to create a space in which the public and private spheres of women could be discussed and improved.

The first two years of Hillary's tenure as First Lady are marked by her activism and prominence on the forefront of the nation's affairs. The co-presidency that Bill and Hillary engaged in was most exemplified in Bill's decision to give Hillary complete control of the "President's Task Force of National Health Reform". Unarguably Clinton's second most important domestic reform initiative, behind his economic policy, many criticized Clinton for giving Hillary this role (Waddan 2002). On the one hand, individuals felt that Hillary was garnering too much power and that she did not quite understand the 'traditional' roles associated with the position of First Lady (Troy 2006). As a result, Hillary's role on the health care task force and her style as First Lady "were the subject of extensive attention in the national press" (Gould 1996, 642). Hillary's decision to take a prominent role in policy-making issues, including the controversial welfare act, in addition the traditional roles of The Office helped define and further solidify the expanding influence the Office of the First Lady held.

While Hillary may have contributed to the changing societal perception of female leadership, she too fell victim to the patriarchal expectations of women. After the failure of Hillary's health care legislation, Hillary worked on refining her role in the White House and began the year 1995 "with a less visible public presence" (Gould 1996, 646). While Hillary's first two years as First Lady are marked by her role as political advisor, the rest of Hillary's tenure shows a stark regression back to the 'traditional' roles of the

President's spouse as her "focus was now on the older model of an activist First Lady" (Gould 1996, 646).

At this time, Hillary was utterly confused about what type of woman, wife, and First Lady she wanted to represent. She gave up her post as co-president and "intended to be an advocate for specific causes rather than a legislative manager as she had been in the health care debate" (Gould 1996, 646). During the second presidential campaign, Hillary's staff declared that Hillary would shift her focus to "expanding opportunities for women and children" (Gould 1996, 646), especially abroad. In addition, Hillary made statements declaring her utmost loyalty to Bill and that she was there to serve him, to do whatever he thought was right and most beneficial (Chafe 2012). Although Dick Morris had given Hillary advice to carve a new role for herself and become something more than just the First Lady, Hillary seemed to be accepting a perspective of her role as Bill's wife that she had dedicated so much of her life to avoiding. During "this second phase of her White House tenure, Mrs. Clinton placed less emphasis on her backstage activity as a presidential advisor" (Gould 1996, 646) and more emphasis on the expected roles of First Lady. She came out of the 1994 election a more chastened person who worked tirelessly to ensure she was emphasizing the 'proper' message to the public.

She traveled much more in the second half of the term, began addressing conferences on women's issues in New York and Copenhagen, and wrote articles for magazines and newspapers on issues relating to women and children (Gould 1996). In addition, Hillary's book, *It takes a Village*, was published in 1995, which many believe allowed Hillary to highlight her softer, more motherly side (Borrelli 2002). At this time, Hillary looked much more towards improving education and the lives of women in Asia

(Troy 2006). This newfound passion led Hillary on a 12-day tour of Asia in March of 1995 to explore the issues affecting the lives of women in children in various countries. Upon return from Asia, a *New York Times* headline published on April 6, 1995, proclaimed “Hillary Clinton a Traditional First Lady Now” (Purdum 1995, B4). In this article, Todd Purdum predicted that for the rest of Bill’s time as President, Hillary would “have to continue to walk a fine line between pretending she wields no influence and being seen as too powerful” (Purdum 1995, B4). Purdum’s analysis of Hillary’s role in the latter half of the administration represents the contentions surrounding Hillary’s ability to garner influence and power in a traditionally feminized post.

Due to her activism in the first two years of the Clinton administration, Hillary became absolutely vilified in the media as a radical feminist (Burrell 2001). As a result, “after two years as First lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton had stretched the limits of what the wife of a president could do and found that boundaries of public acceptance were less flexible than she had believed in 1993” (Gould 1996, 648). Even before entering the White House, Burrell points out that the media, Republican leaders and right-wing fanatics accused the Clinton’s of being “non-traditional and too leftist” (30) during the 1992 campaign. Republicans detested Hillary because her new status and activism threatened the patriarchal norms rooted in American tradition (Burrell 2001). Simultaneously, they were criticizing the idea of women actively participating in political discourse and an end to gender discrimination (Burrell 2001). As Clinton herself acknowledges in her book *Living History*, Republicans coined her as a “radical feminist” and alerted the American public that a “Clinton-Clinton Administration” would inevitably push a radical feminist agenda. The backlash Hillary faced is a representation

of the rigid and often uncompromising societal expectations women faced. Although Hillary was ready to redefine the role of First Lady, American society was not ready for such profound change.

It is clear to see that the failure of her health care task force, her controversial support of PRWORA, the scandals surrounding the Clinton's both personally and publicly, and the social-political climate of the era had a profound impact on Hillary's legacy. There is no denying "[Hillary] was a formidable presence and important force in the Clinton White House" (Gould 1996, 647). However, the power that manifested in the way in which Hillary held office witnessed criticism and as a result, underwent much modification and adjustment.

Although she began to exude the traditional paradigm of the First Lady, Hillary undermined the patriarchal ideology that a wife's success was solely based on supporting her husband. Through her tireless work ethic and activism, Hillary forced society to analyze the role of women both economically and politically through a new lens. American society would soon realize that it was possible to be a wife, a mother, and an important contributor in the workplace. As the first modern and working mother to serve as First Lady, Hillary undoubtedly represented a liberal feminist image and demonstrated the power of a modern American professional woman. Hillary expanded the role of First Lady to represent much more than just a symbolic figure. Simultaneously, she used her unique platform to launch her own political endeavors and encouraged society to redefine traditional expectations of the post. Through Hillary's turbulent eight years at First Lady, first as a policy advisor and then as a traditional activist First Lady, she emerged as an independent, strong and inspirational role model for women across the nation.

As Hillary would demonstrate, she was also a trusted political advisor and asset. Hillary's tenure as First Lady revealed an element of political power in the personal realm, and that indeed, the "personal is political" (Anderson 1997). Although Hillary defied expectations and norms associated with her position, she too, succumbed to the more traditional (albeit activist) social responsibilities of the First Lady during her time in office as a result of policy failure, societal expectations and scrutiny.

IV. Conclusion

While many may have expected the Clinton's to go off the radar after their two, very controversial and scandalous terms in the White House, Hillary did just the opposite. It is at this point in which we see the motivated, independent, decisive Hillary that was present during her years at Yale Law School reemerge again. Hillary truly underwent a real growth experience during her time in the White House that allowed for her to go on to be quite a successful politician. Hillary defeated Rick Lazio in the 2000 NYS Senate Race, making her the first First Lady of the United States to be elected to a government office (Chafe 2012). During her time as Senator, Hillary created close bonds with other Senators and Representatives that allowed her to exercise great influence in Congress. Her success as Senator led to support and encouragement for a presidential campaign in 2008 and eventual appointment as Secretary of State under the Obama Administration. Although Hillary failed to obtain the Democratic bid in 2008, her campaign deconstructed the powerful notion that men are not the only sex able to attain the most powerful position in the world.

In the beginning, Hillary's marriage to Bill gave her the platform and publicity to make great accomplishments, personally and professionally. Being wife and playing an

active political role when she was First Lady (not necessarily successful) served as sufficient credentialing to get her experience and trustworthiness out there. At the end of Bill's second term as President, Hillary's decision to go into the political sphere and become both a Senator and cabinet member represent her ability to stand on her own two feet and on her own merits, without the institution of marriage serving as the backbone to her success. After leaving the White House in 2000, most of the experiences Hillary has had, have been major "non-Bill" endeavors. This aspect of her career highlights Hillary's ability to break away from her husband's shadow and defy societal expectations revolving around wives, mothers and First Ladies of the United States.

One of Hillary's greatest contributions to the Office of First Lady is that of visibility. During her unprecedented activism and involvement in the Clinton White House, Hillary transformed the political visibility of the First Lady. Unlike any First Lady before her, Hillary then used the visibility to become a legitimate political actor in America's complex government. Clinton took the role of First Lady from hostess and homemaker to policy-advisor and politician. She demonstrated that although the First Ladyship is accorded through marriage, it is a position that can wield political influence and be both accountable and susceptible to the shortcomings of the American public. Through her transformation of the office, Hillary represents the ability for women to successfully engage in both the public and private spheres. Unlike any First Lady before her, Hillary fundamentally challenged the structure and traditions of patriarchal society. Although Hillary is undoubtedly one of the most polarizing and controversial political figures, she represents one of the greatest female role models in American history.

However, Hillary failed in breaking down the structures that oppress women outside of liberal feminists and mainstream feminist's perspective. In addition, her support of PRWORA exploited her priorities of political gain over moral action. Perhaps if Hillary runs, and wins the 2016 Presidential election, women's issues, from every demographic would be brought to the table, and more seriously considered. If Hillary wins the presidency, the balance and perception of power will inevitably shift. That is not to say that President Hillary Clinton would be able to sufficiently meet the needs of every minority in our nation. The domination imbedded in our government is perhaps too strong. However, this would be an extremely powerful stepping stone in changing the perception of female leadership, power and influence on the American political stage.

Overall, Hillary undoubtedly used the power she wielded as First Lady of the United States to exercise her own agenda and change the traditional perception of female leadership in America. Hillary used the latter half of her First Ladyship wisely and simultaneously continued to exercise her influence in Washington and abroad to garner her own political support. She is undoubtedly the most controversial First Lady since Eleanor Roosevelt and made unprecedented strides in breaking the conventions and presumed roles of the Office. Through her groundbreaking eight years at First Lady, Hillary simultaneously disrupted gendered norms and societal expectations of women, created a conversation and space in which women's issues could be discussed and opened up greater opportunities for women in American society than ever before. She continues to make remarkable and unprecedented strides as the American public is left wondering if she will make a race for the Oval in 2016.

Chapter 4: Postlude – Michelle Obama Black Womanhood 2008 –

You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve all of the world's problems at once but don't ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own.
– Michelle Obama

As the first Black First Lady in the history of the United States, Michelle Obama stands as complex and inspirational figure. From the days of Abigail Adams and slavery, to the activists and radicals of the 1960s social revolutions, and the negative effect of the Clinton welfare reform, Michelle is a representation of the trajectory of Black in American society. For Black women, what does it mean to have Michelle Obama as the current First Lady? Due to her position as the first Black First Lady, Michelle has the opportunity to not only break down gendered norms, but also dispel theories of black womanhood. For example, by having Michelle in the spotlight as First Lady, the opportunity to deconstruct many of the racial stereotypes such as the “welfare queen,” discussed under Clinton, is presented. Michelle is anything but a welfare queen. She is an Ivy League educated, successful attorney with the merits to have a successful career aside from the presidency of her husband. By virtue of her race *and* gender, Michelle Obama has challenged the norms associated with the office greater than any First Lady before.

However, these very virtues are the same ones that cause Michelle Obama to be the most constricted First Lady to ever hold office. Since the First Lady is a representation of American culture, the racist backlash Michelle Obama has witnessed during her time in office has shed light on the deeply imbedded racist sentiment still present within our nation. As Conservative attacks have demonstrated, many individuals were not and are

still not comfortable with the First Family being Black, and the First Lady exemplifying Black womanhood. While both Michelle and Barack have handled themselves with the utmost elegance in the face of racist comments, these various attacks have forced Michelle to regress back to a more ‘traditional’ First Lady. Therefore, while Michelle Obama’s First Ladyship represents how far Black women have come, she also exemplifies how far they have left to go.

I. Historical Context

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson was born on January 17, 1964 in Chicago, Illinois. Her mother, Marian, was a homemaker until Michelle entered high school while her father, Fraser, worked as a city water plan employee. As Michelle describes, she grew up in a very “conventional home... the mother at home, the father works [and] you have dinner on the table” (Bennetts 2007). The Robinson family is able to trace their roots back to slavery in the South, work on the plantations and the Civil War. In addition, Michelle was raised religiously as her family belonged to a Methodist church in the South Shore community area of Chicago (Bennetts 2007). Michelle was extremely accomplished during her time at Whitney Young High School, Chicago’s first magnet school (Brill 2008). During her time there, Michelle was on honor roll all four years, served as the class secretary, participated in advanced placement courses, National Honors Society, and graduated as salutatorian of her class (Brill 2008).

After leaving Chicago and Whitney High, Michelle followed her older brother, Craig, to Princeton University in New Jersey. Here, Michelle majored in Sociology and minored in African Studies. She wrote her controversial thesis, to be discussed in detail later on, on *Princeton-Educated Blacks and the Black Community* (Taylor in Henry,

Allen and Chrisman 2011, 236). Upon graduating cum laude from Princeton in 1985, Michelle went on to receive her law degree from Harvard Law School. During the fulfillment of her post-graduate degree, Michelle worked for the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau and advocated for the University to hire professors from minority backgrounds (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 236). After earning her law degree, Michelle moved back to Chicago where she became an associate at the prestigious Chicago law firm of Sidley Austin (Brill 2008). She was assigned to mentor a summer associate by the name of Barack Obama, and here is where Michelle and Barack first met. After leaving Sidley Austin, Michelle worked in various public sector and government posts (Brill 2008). She eventually landed a position as Associate Dean of Student Services at the University of Chicago and then as Vice President for Community and External Affairs at the University of Chicago Hospitals (Brill 2008).

During her husband's first campaign to the House of Representatives in 2000, Michelle Obama was not a fan of the campaign life (Klein 2009). She was worried about the affects her husband's political career would have on their family, especially their two daughters, Malia and Sasha. However, Michelle came to use the campaign trail as a platform to discuss education and race through the framework of motherhood (Klein 2009). Throughout the presidential campaign of 2008, Michelle played an interesting and unique role. Her presentation went from strong, educated, knowledgeable female, to a softer, more traditional image of a First Lady. Many critics and scholars believe this change in persona to be a direct reflection of the Conservative attacks labeling Michelle as "too strong" or depicting her as an "angry black woman" (Powell and Kantor 2008) – both racially charged accusations. These depictions are the lens through which Michelle

Obama exposes the shortcomings and limitations of racist sentiments still harbored in the nation's view.

II. Barack Obama and Black Women

When Barack Obama first entered the oval office, black women around the nation were inspired and uplifted by his historic victory, and of course, the first black President, First Lady and family. They were motivated by the many female appointments to his cabinet, and the creation of the White House Council on Women and Girls. However, as author Duchess Harris (2009) argues, the promising campaign that Obama ran in 2008 has yet to meet the satisfaction of women, especially black women, to date. Although President Obama has emphasized the importance of women in society, and passed legislation such as the Lily Ledbetter Act, President Obama has failed to appoint black women to the highest, most powerful positions in the government. Harris argues that yes, the cabinet nominations are a great step forward, and a representation of the progress President Obama, and the nation, has made. However, many cabinet positions are merely symbolic, Harris argues. What about attorney general? Or say a Supreme Court Justice (of which President Obama has nominated two females, neither black women). As a result, many black women still question whether or not President Obama has advocated for their rights as much as much and he promised to during the 2008 campaign.

Obama's cabinet was one of the most diverse cabinets in the history of the United States government. Filled with 30% women and 39% of those women being Latino, Asian and Black, President Obama seemed to be ushering in a new sense of support and advocacy for *all* minority women (Harris 2009). During his first few months in Office, President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act (Harris 2009). The

Ledbetter Act made it easier for female employees to sue their employers up to three months after discovery of discriminatory pay practices (Harris 2009). Two months later, Obama went on to sign an executive order creating the White House Council on Women and Girls (Harris 2009). This council consists of cabinet members and cabinet-level agency members to, “ensure that each of the agencies in which they’re charged takes into account the needs of women and girls in the policies they draft, the programs they create, [and] the legislation they support” (Harris 2009, 158). Furthermore, in 2010, President Obama went on to declare August 26th as ‘Women’s Equality Day,’ in remembrance of the passage of the 19th amendment and women gaining the right to vote (Harris 2009, 158). At the very least, it is clear the President Obama “keeps women, black women included, in mind” (Harris 2009, 159). However, is keeping them in mind enough?

While there is definitely clear evidence that President Obama values black women in positions of power, Harris argues that, “Travel Aide to the First Lady and Ambassador to the UN [in comparison to] Surgeon General, are very different positions” (Harris 2009, 158). Of course, there are almost 20 black women in the Obama *administration*, including Michelle’s staff, however, when looking at cabinet level positions, the number of black women goes from 20 to two (Harris 2009). As a result, although Obama put together quite a diverse staff and cabinet, “there is still a telling lack of black women at the head of the administration and in positions of *true* power” (Harris 2009, 159). The assumption that Obama would elevate black women into positions of high power, and the inspiration black women felt at the election of the nation’s First Black President, has yet to fulfill the needs and wants of many black women across the country. As a result, Harris concludes her argument by stating that the acts at the beginning of the Obama

presidency – the declaration, council, and appointments – “were merely token gestures made to appease those who bought into the hope and change promised by the Obama campaign” (Harris 2009, 159). Due to this lack of fulfillment and dissatisfaction, Harris believes that the Obama presidency has left many black women feeling frustrated and defeated.

Instead of helping black women, Harris sees “a president who is paralyzed at the very mention of race, [who is] more concerned about appearing partial than providing leadership to a still racially divided nation, and ... someone who is unable to even defend himself in the face of egregious racist slurs, preferring to be ‘above it all’” (Harris 2009, 175). Since Obama has not voluntarily elevated the status of black women in high ranking government positions, Dr. Julianne Malveaux argues that, “he’s our brother, and he gets it, but we’re not his only constituency. He is not the President of Black America. We have to make him do right. He’s not going to do right just ‘cause. We’ve got to make him” (Harris 2009, 174). Malveaux’s assertion demonstrates that just because America has a black President, it does not mean black women are automatically being brought to the forefront of the conversation, perhaps an expectation that was held during the 2008 campaign. There is still much work to be done to ultimately advance the place of black women in society, government, and all different spheres. As a result, President Obama demonstrates the great achievements of black peoples throughout the history of our nation, and yet, also exposes how once again, black women are still a step behind.

III. Michelle as First Lady

Michelle Obama serves as an exemplar to the possibilities for black women and how far they have come, while simultaneously exposing the limitations of American’s

deeply imbedded racist culture and discomfort with a black First Lady. In some ways, black femininity, black womanhood and the movement itself has built been built towards Michelle Obama. The Angela Davis' and the Alice Walker's of the black feminist movement worked tirelessly to expose the needs and rights of black women into mainstream dialogue. They wanted to show how black women, along with black men and white women are competent, confident, intelligent individuals. What better figurehead to have representing the cause and the perseverance of black woman than Michelle Obama? An Ivy League graduate, with a prestigious law degree from Harvard and quite the impressive career both professionally and personally. Michelle Obama is the woman the black feminist movement has been waiting for all along. As First Lady, Michelle has obtained the ultimate platform to help change the negative perceptions associated with black women in America.

Michelle Obama has become a *new* kind of role model for women of the twenty-first century. Especially for black women, Michelle Obama is using her spotlight as First Lady to slowly break down the myths and constructs associated with black womanhood and help redefine how black women view themselves within American society. Sophia Nelson (2011), a contributor to MSNBC and a guest analyst for CNN, BET, FOX and NPR, recently published her book, *Black Woman Redefined: Dispelling Myths and Discovering Fulfillment in the Age of Michelle Obama*. The title of Nelson's book speaks for itself, the *Age of Michelle Obama* is truly one in which black women are feeling more a part of the conversation than ever before. When they look at the White House, they finally see a relatable figure (Nelson 2011) and perhaps acceptance, something that black women have longed for. In her book, Nelson asks, "How is it that an entire race of

[black] women, so successful, so intelligent and so powerful - can be so devalued, vilified, neglected, unwanted, disliked, misused, increasingly misunderstood, and abused?" (Nelson 2001, 5). Nelson uses Michelle Obama as the exemplar of the possibilities of black femininity. Why does Nelson hold Michelle in such high regard? It is the effect that Michelle has had on the black community and the beneficial change in perception she is creating, without even knowing it. In the book's prologue, Nelson, a black woman herself, writes about Michelle, "You humanize us. You soften us. You make us approachable, feminine, sexy, warm, compassionate, smart, affirmed, accomplished, and full-filled all at once" (Nelson 2001, 1). Although it is an enduring struggle, and one that is not yet over, having Michelle as First Lady is more than symbolic, it is a means by which a complete race of women in America are continuing to redefine and conceptualize their meaning in society.

While Michelle Obama has been a positive role model, deconstructing the myths associated with black womanhood in America, her position as First Lady has simultaneously exposed the fundamental discomfort and racist sentiment still imbedded in the American people. Throughout her husband's campaign and subsequent 7 years in office, Michelle Obama has been depicted, mostly by conservatives, as anything from Sojourner Truth, Angela Davis, a black radical, 'not a real woman,' and a 'Baby Mama,' to a welfare queen, terrorist and other derogatory terms. As a result, it is clear that while Michelle Obama represents how far black woman in American society have come, she also exposes how far they have left to go.

From the very beginnings of the 2008 campaign, Michelle Obama became fair game for mounting attacks and racial slurs coming from the conservative right.

Principally, Michelle was perceived as being the matriarch of the family, running the show while emasculating her husband Barack (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 236). For example, when journalist Mark Leibovich polled undecided voters right before 2008 campaign, he asked who they were voting for? Many responses indicated that voters were unsure of whether or not to vote for Barack as, “Michelle Obama comes off too strong” (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 236). Traditionally, black women are depicted as obtaining much more of the power in black households (Harris 2009). Take for example, Patrick Moynihan’s 1965 study (known as the 1965 Moynihan report), concluding that black families represent a “tangle of pathology” (Moynihan 1965). This is due to the fact that “men are allegedly not patriarchal heads of households because women emasculate them” (Moynihan 1965). Depicting Michelle Obama as “too strong,” came as an attempt to depict the Obama Family as the traditional perception of black families in America, and therefore, not worthy of being in the White House. This perception attempted to expose an image of Michelle as a radical who would take over all decision making once in the White House. This impression is a problem in it of itself, as Taylor argues, “The idea that a woman would have a ‘radical’ disposition simply by being a thoughtful working black mother says a lot about Americans perceptions of political spouses, and it helps us better understand why Michelle Obama is perceived as too strong to be First Lady” (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 246).

In addition, conservatives used the fact that Barack consistently refers to Michelle as the “boss” and as the “rock” – “underscore[ing] Michelle’s strength and stabilizing force in their family (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 238) to exacerbate the myth of Michelle as a radical matriarch. If Michelle Obama was perceived

as running the show, ultimately Barack was perceived as a ‘mama’s boy,’ lacking masculinity and decisiveness, and who would want a President like that, conservatives would ask. However, this was just a means of devaluing the first potential black family in the White House using racist and deeply imbedded and powerful perceptions of black families.

Furthermore, at a fundraising event during the 2008 campaign, Michelle commented:

“I have some difficulty reconciling the two images I have of Barack Obama. There’s Barack Obama the phenomenon. He’s an amazing orator, Harvard Law Review, or whatever it was, law professor, best-selling author, Grammy winner. Pretty amazing, right? And then there’s the Barack Obama that lives with me in my house, and that guy’s a little less impressive. For some reason this guy still can’t manage to put the butter up when he makes his toast, secure the bread so that it doesn’t get stale, and his 5-year old is still better at making the bed than he is” (Dowd 2007).

After her comment, Michelle received criticism from *New York Times* journalist Maureen Dowd, for referring to Barack as a mere mortal, rather than the Barack Obama: the Phenomenon figure spoken so much about in the media. Dowd argues that through this message, Michelle was “emasculating, casting her – [already] under fire for lacking [sufficient political] experience – as an undisciplined child” (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 238). Dowd believed that Michelle “conveys the idea that she will tell her husband when he’s puffed up or out of line” (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2007, 239). For a woman to have such influence and authority within the family was labeled as threatening and untraditional. As a result, it seemed as though, “[Michelle’s] humor is viewed as lethal and her tongue needs to be controlled ... [as] loud-mouthed black women are outrageously out of order, goes the racist lore” (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 238).

Moreover, after Barack's victory at the Iowa caucuses, Michelle made a controversial comment stating, "this is the first time in [her] whole life she has been proud of her country" (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 240). Immediately following her statement, Fox News released a segment vilifying Michelle as Barack "Obama's Baby Mama" (Harris 2009). The term itself, is an urban slang expression meaning an unwed mother, often a minority unwed mother. This term has been historically used to "defeminize African American women and instead frame them as threatening to conservative hegemonic notions of womanhood" (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 236). In addition, the use of the derogatory term serves as an "attempt by racist media to 'ghettoize' the Obama Family" (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 238). As Taylor argues, "For years, conservatives have targeted black families as a scapegoat for America's social ills. In scenarios like that implied by Fox News, unwed mothers are linked to welfare queens and irresponsible fathers are associated with street thugs and other criminal elements" (Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 238). It is clear that the Obama's presence became extremely threatening to a portion of the American public, and as a result, Michelle became an immediate target in depicting the Obama family as a stereotypical black family in America.

Immediately following Michelle's statement, conservatives further seized the opportunity to paint Michelle as an unpatriotic wife. Cindy McCain, wife of Obama's opponent in the race, came out with a statement declaring, "[She] [has] always been extremely proud of [her] country" (Taylor Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 241). Well, of course Cindy McCain has always been proud of her country – "her elite family and access to unlimited resources is diametrically opposite to those opportunities available to

the majority of African Americans [such as Michelle Obama]” (Taylor Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 241), but yet – Michelle was depicted as the unpatriotic, unworthy spouse.

Lastly, the cover of *The New Yorker* magazine on July 21, 2009 represented the most radical, racist and prejudiced characterizations of the Obama’s to date. The cover titled, “*The Politics of Fear,*” by Barry Blitt, depicts Michelle Obama as a radical revolutionary, compared to the likes of Angela Davis, packed with an AK-47 and ammunition with a large afro and flower in her hair; President Obama is dressed in Muslim garb (as many have attacked him for practicing the religion). Both of them stand in the Oval Office, with a portrait of Osama Bin Laden over the fireplace, where George Washington is supposed to be, and an America flag burning behind them (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011). While many have defended the magazine’s cover as satire, meant to “target distortions and misconceptions and prejudices about Obama” (Sklar 2008), the cover only exacerbates these myths, and calls attention to the need for them to be dispelled. The notion of Michelle as a radical black feminist was also depicted in the media’s attack on Michelle’s thesis while she was an undergraduate at Princeton University. Conservatives stated that her thesis, *Princeton-Educated Blacks and the Black Community*, argued that America was founded on "crime and hatred" and that whites in America are "ineradicably racist" (Holan 2008). However, in reality, Michelle was attempting to “quantify how the attitudes of black Princeton alumni changed after graduation in regard to race relations and social change. Obama was especially interested in the attitudes of Princeton alumni in regard to improving the lives of lower-income blacks” (Holan 2009). The idea that Michelle’s thesis was

fundamentally racist towards whites in America was completely fabricated and developed in the midst of aggressive Anti-Obama propaganda.

In the beginnings of the 2008 campaign, Michelle represented a very informed, and involved campaign spouse. For her adversaries, Michelle's confidence, knowledge and opinions about America were extremely threatening (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 236). How did Michelle respond to these attacks and did her response help strengthen the plight of black women or further hurt their goals? During the start of the 2008 campaign, Michelle gave little tidbits about the Obama's home life, and daily routine (the butter and toast comment discussed earlier). Unfortunately, when Michelle showed aspects of her 'real' self, "she became a target for the insidious forces of racism and lumped into a category of unappreciative angry black woman" (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 240). As a result, once these critiques began gaining popularity, there was a clear shift in Michelle's rhetoric (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 238).

In response to the "Obama's Baby Mama" campaign led by conservatives, Michelle turned up her motherhood, in what is known as Michelle's "momification" (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 239). At the center of this "momification" was the idea that Michelle should make the American public more comfortable with the Obama family by using her role as mother and wife, rather than black female and Ivy League educated attorney. After these brutal attacks from conservatives, Michelle was forced to downplay her elite educate, for the sake of her husband's campaign. As Taylor argues, "Michelle's campaign speech was aimed at the souls of whites, and thus she had to keep her high achievements dormant so as not to alienate undecided voters further"

(Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 239). In addition, Michelle used her experience, growing up as a black female in the south side of Chicago, to help soften her rhetoric and ease the American peoples. “As Americans looked at her, Michelle Obama had already seen through them, with the old eyes of slavery and Jim Crow. She knew how to put them at ease” (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 239). In addition, Michelle was aware “of her privilege and of the dynamics of race and class in America... [she] had figured out long before her Democratic convention speech how not to offend” (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 239). Unfortunately, Michelle succumbed not only to the traditional expectations of black women in America, but also to the gender stereotypical expectations of the President’s spouse. These images created by radical conservatives “pushed Michelle, a high-achieving professional woman, to trade in her resume for exclusive mother and wife roles, or as she puts it “mom-in-chief” (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 243).

IV. Conclusion

Michelle Obama represents a black woman’s ability to hold the most powerful feminized post in America and yet she must also work hard to show the appropriateness of an African American First Family to ease the tensions of American society. As simply put by Taylor, “Michelle does not have to prove her womanhood by showing her breast to a white heckling audience.... She has to prove that she is not only like *us* [black women], with a blackness that cannot be made visible, but like *all* women” (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011, 245). The element of race that Michelle Obama must work with, adds to the already mounting challenges of being First Lady. Who and what

she represents is so much more complex because of the negative perceptions of black race in American culture mounted on top of the traditional expectations of the First Lady.

If so many of society's ills are blamed upon black families, and therefore the Obama's *are the problem*, how can they simultaneously be the catalyst for change? This is the very narrow, tight and strict framework within which Michelle Obama must work in order to expand and disrupt both *gender* and *racial* stereotypes in America. Can this ever be done? For Conservatives who uphold such deeply imbedded racist assumptions that "hold so much historical power... the Obama's will always be 'too black' to be in the White House" (Taylor in Henry, Allen and Chrisman 2011,238). While Jacqueline Kennedy served as a direct product of 1960s society, and Hillary Clinton regressed to a more tradition First Lady after failure on Health Care reform, Michelle succumbed to the traditional perceptions of the First Lady after coming under attack for being too strong and too black. This is the first time a First Lady has regressed to this representation due to perceptions and myths associated with race. Michelle Obama has thus far only deconstructed racial and gender stereotypes to an extent. Although Conservative attacks forced Michelle to regress to a more traditional image of a First Lady, ultimately, Michelle Obama *has* redefined what it means to be a black woman in American society. As a result, she has encouraged other black women to continue dispelling the negative depictions and myths associated with black womanhood in America.

Conclusion

Once made equal to man, woman becomes his superior.
- Socrates

Through analyzing the work of four controversial First Ladies, the ambiguities, challenges and intricacies associated with the office of the First Lady are highlighted. In addition, the power imbedded in the institution and the ability for each First Lady to largely influence the perception of powerful women and leadership in American is exemplified. Beginning with Abigail Adams, the second First Lady in this nation's history, we see a sense of activism and progressiveness within a very conservative framework. Although within this narrative, Abigail used to her post as First Lady to influence her husbands rhetoric on the issues that were important to her including, female education, economic independence and child rearing. Her greatest assets were her words and her pen, as the correspondences she left behind serve as the greatest sources of insight we have into the mind and work of Abigail as First Lady. Through these findings and the analysis of her work as a politician's spouse, Abigail could potentially serve as the first female suffragist and feminist in the history of the United States.

In addition, the trajectory of the changing conceptualizations in femininity, mainly between white women and black women is something this dissertation has worked hard to provide a road map for. In Abigail's case, she detested the institution of slavery and held it responsible for all the ills facing the new nation. While Abigail did not speak toward the plight of black women directly, her sympathy for black people of the time exemplified her desires for equality for all people. An unheard notion at the time, Abigail was a First Lady way ahead of her years in many respects. Although Abigail had great ideas, desires and hopes for women and society as a whole, Abigail failed to turn

her ideas into *action*. Her hopes for female education and greater participation in society came as second priority to her work as a mother and wife. Abigail Adams serves as a perfect exemplar to the extreme limitations placed on women since the early years of our nation. While Abigail herself laid down the groundwork for all future First Ladies to advocate on behalf of women, I believe that if Abigail turned her words into actions, her influence on the American people and on women in eighteenth century society would have been even greater.

Secondly, through her First Ladyship, Jacqueline Kennedy serves as a product of 1960s society and in turn, a reinforcement of traditional gendered norms. Although Jackie influenced femininity through being a fashion icon and the construct of her life and marriage as Camelot, Jackie failed to use the office and unique power associated within it to create a progressive agenda for women. For many, Jackie was the perfect representation of what a First Lady should be during the era in which she served. She came from an elite background, was smart, beautiful, and willing to play dutiful hostess. She smiled and waved at cameras while seeking no justice for her husband's indiscretions. Her biggest interest was the care of her children and unwavering commitment to her husband's political career. She was a helpmate, a companion, and a traditional First Lady and non-threatening at a time in which social chaos and upheaval was at an all time high. She did not in any sense become involved in the political affairs of the nation and had no interest in stepping foot into the West Wing of the White House. Jackie did not even really take on a 'cause', other than the restoration of the White House, to work on during her time in office, a responsibility taken on by almost all First Ladies. Rather, Jackie reinforced gender constructs and further feminized the role of First

Lady. This comes as a regression from the activism Abigail Adams and First Ladies before Jackie, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, laid out for her.

The juxtaposition between Jackie and Angela Davis represents the extent to which women at the time were able to advocate on behalf of women's rights. Although Angela and Jackie were two women, of different race and background, they were both influenced and immersed in French culture, as discussed in Alice Kaplan's book. Both Jackie and Angela came back to the United States and had a profound impact on society, and women, in very different ways and for very different reasons. Davis represents that activist, even radical, stance of some women during the 1960s. While Jackie serves as her polar opposite, failing to use her spotlight and influence to shed light on the plight women faced. Due to the context and historical moment in which Jackie assumed the office, the fundamental institution of First Lady was being challenged. Marriage, womanhood and femininity were being redefined. With the help of extremely influential writings such as Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, Jackie could have seized this opportunity to help dramatically redefine the constructs of a traditional First Lady and the expectations of women in society. However, she failed to do so and as a result, Jackie did not contribute much to the Office other than reinforcing the limitations and constraints already placed on women.

Although Jackie failed to help advance the role of women in society through her position as First Lady, the third First Lady analyzed, Hillary Clinton, took the involvement, expected role and the traditional responsibilities of the Office to a whole new level. Hillary Clinton ameliorated the Office of First Lady in terms of using the platform to help disrupt the traditional constructs of femininity in the United States.

Hillary Clinton politicized the office unlike any other First Lady before her. She successfully accomplished this task early on by stating she would take an active role in her husband's administration, a 'two for the price of one' deal. Hillary became a lead policy maker as witnessed through Health Care and Welfare reform. No other First Lady before Hillary had the merits or audacity to confidently assume these roles, move into the West Wing of the White House, and challenge the traditional responsibilities of the office. Hillary's unprecedented approach towards the office affected the ideals of femininity all across the nation. As the leading role model for women in America, Hillary shed light on the greater possibilities and achievements for women including greater political involvement and success in being a mother, wife and businesswoman.

Although Hillary serves as the most formative and transformational First Lady analyzed, there is no hiding the fact that during the latter half of her tenure, Hillary took a stark regression back to the customary responsibilities associated with the office. Perhaps this was the direct result of the intense media scrutiny Hillary received for her active role in the Clinton Administration. Hillary forced American society to challenge norms and long held standards, causing discomfort and inconvenience in the minds of many. This created much backlash and aggressive attacks on Hillary and her goals as First Lady. Coupled with failure in Health Care policy and a myriad of scandals surrounding her husband's administration (Lewinsky, Flowers, Jones), Hillary Clinton reverted from involved political spouse to a behind the scenes, uninvolved, dutiful hostess. It is during this time that Hillary's involvement with Welfare Reform drastically and negatively impacted black women in America. While many women looked up to Hillary as a role model, her support of the Clinton Welfare Reform legislation disproportionately hurt

black women. As a liberal feminist, Hillary undoubtedly reshaped the perception of women in leadership and First Ladies in America, however, the extent of her breakthrough failed to reach women of color and minorities. Although Hillary was not as influential during the latter half of her tenure, she reshaped the Office and used the unique power she accorded through marriage to not only help advance the perception of powerful women in society, but to also advance her own political career. Hillary's trajectory from lawyer to First Lady to Senator to top cabinet member in the Obama Administration exemplifies the great opportunities held within the Office of First Lady. If Hillary chooses to run for the office of the Presidency in 2016 and wins, it will only further solidify just how influential of a platform the Office of the First Lady has become. The potential she has in redefining a position accorded to men for over 200 years would exemplify the ultimate role reversal and disruption of gendered expectations. Who knows, the next dissertation may be written about the influence of the First Man? First Gentleman?

Lastly, Michelle Obama, the current First Lady, has taken on more of a traditional role during her time in the White House in comparison to Hillary Clinton. She has left behind her own career as a successful lawyer to acclimate her family into the White House and work on the traditional responsibilities as First Lady she has taken on. *Let's Move!*, Michelle's initiative to combat childhood obesity has been her greatest contribution and responsibility thus far in the White House. We have yet, and probably will never, witness Michelle taking on a more political role during her tenure, as did Hillary. As a matter of fact, Michelle has stayed far away from politics during her time in the White House and views her role as a 'Mom-in-Chief.' Unfortunately, the negative

controversies associated with Hillary's active role and policy maker have cautioned her successors in becoming as involved. As a result, we see less activism and progressivism in the First Ladyships of Laura Bush and Michelle Obama than we witnessed in Clinton.

However, there is one aspect of Michelle's First Ladyship that no other First Lady before her has had to deal with, that is, *race*. Michelle being a black woman constrains her in more ways than any other First Lady. Not only must Michelle use her role as First Lady to redefine women in leadership, she is also entrusted with the responsibility of redefining black women's role within society. As an exemplar to how far black women have come since the days of Abigail Adams and Angela Davis, Michelle also represents the discomfort associated with a black womanhood that still exists today. *The New Yorker* depiction of Michelle as a radical with an Afro and ammunition, the connotation of her being Barack's Baby Mama, and the multiple perceptions of Michelle emasculating Barack through black matriarchy all demonstrate the negative perception of black women in twenty-first century society. Both in terms of race and gender, Michelle has added constraints to her role then her predecessors. As First Lady, Michelle is a public figure, and a role model, a well educated, intelligent and attractive woman. However, in Michelle, we witness an extremely constrained First Lady with limitations placed on her through both gendered and racial stereotypes, ultimately stripping her of the impact and influence she could have exercised in the White House.

After analyzing a First Lady in the eighteenth century, two in the twentieth century, and one in the twenty-first century, it is clear that the changing societal norms and expectations associated with both race and gender have affected the Office of the First Lady. Each First Lady has proven to represent a shifting ideal of femininity as

constructed through the era in which they served. However, through her unique influence and position of power, the First Lady is able to go beyond the typical societal constructs to help disrupt gender, and racial norms in order to advance the role and participation of women in everyday life. The question is, will each First Lady, either every four or eight years, take advantage of those unique abilities? Dependent upon their predecessor and the moment at which each First Lady assumes the role, we have witnessed either very progressive First Ladies (such as Clinton) or very standard products of society (such as Kennedy). After looking at Abigail Adams, Jacqueline Kennedy, Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama, it is clearer than ever that each First Lady has the ability to mold, shape and construct their image and the effort they devote towards the feminist cause.

What is next for the office of the First Lady? While Hillary brought hope that the outdated sexist norms of the office would soon be eliminated, eight years later we seem to have regressed back into the traditional, gendered expectations of American First Ladies. How are we supposed to redefine the ingrained gendered constructs in American society when the highest political office promotes these very institutions? Many women may feel that the feminist cause has come a long way, and women are finally seen as equals with men. While the feminist movement and First Ladies such as Hillary Clinton have made much progress in expanding the Office and in turn, the perception of female leadership and power, there is still a long way to go. It is only the hope that future First Ladies approach the office with a keen sense of awareness of the unique power they acquire and use it positively towards redefining gendered norms and breaking the constraints placed on women everywhere.

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