

POLA6960 America's First Ladies

Course Syllabus

Spring 2012

This seminar explores American first ladies as political and social actors. Our primary question is: what does American history and politics look like when told through the stories of women with great access to power but with little formal power of their own. We will both trace the evolution of the role of first lady and explore how individual women who have held this role have understood it and adapted it. This is an upper level course. Every student is required to read all assignments and be prepared for a class discussion each week. You will be expected to write, read, and analyze regularly. There will be no lectures. This is a seminar and reading course based on a graduate education model.

Assessment

Class leadership during one week and regular class participation (15%)

Each week one (in a few cases two) students are responsible for formulating discussion questions, posting them to Blackboard by 7pm on Tuesday evening before class, and leading the class in discussion. Students are encouraged, but not required, to use power point, video, and other online resources during the class presentation.

Students are expected to be active participants every week in class.

Three Short Papers (60%)

You **MUST** complete **THREE (3)** short papers. Each paper is to be 4-6 pages long. Each one must be about a different first lady. The paper should not be simply a summary of what we have read in class. Instead each paper should critically and analytically engage the story of the first lady it explores. The short paper should tell a bit about the first lady's biography, her historical epoch and the tone and quality of her role as first lady. You ***must*** develop an original thesis of some kind in each paper and provide evidence from the readings to support your thesis. Each paper is worth 20% of your grade for a total of 60%

Final Exam (25%)

The final exam is a take-home essay exam. The exam will be comprehensive and will ask you to compare and contrast several of the first ladies we have studied.

Required Texts

Readings marked with a * are available as links from the course Blackboard website. Books are all available through the university bookstore.

Watson and Esterowicz (editors) *The Presidential Companion: Readings on the First Ladies*

Betty Boyd Caroli, *First Ladies: From Martha Washington to Michelle Obama*

James Benze, *Nancy Reagan on the White House Stage*

Allida Black, *Casting her own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism*

Jason Emerson, *The Madness of Mary Lincoln*

Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*

Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams*.

Katherine Sibley, *First Lady Florence Harding: Behind the Tragedy*

INTRODUCTION

Week 1: Introduction

January 18

Readings:

The Presidential Companion (*TPC*), Introduction

*Robert Watson. Source Material: Toward the Study of the First Lady: The State of the Scholarship. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Volume 33, Number 2. June 2003.

Week 2: Abigail Adams, 1797-1801

January 25

Readings

Woody Holton. *Abigail Adams*. This is a huge book. Don't be afraid of it. You only need to read a few of the early chapters then focus on the end.

Chapters 4, 9, 12, 25-end

Week 3: Sally Hemings, 1801-1809

February 1

Readings:

Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings*

Chapters TBA

Week 4: Mary Todd Lincoln, 1861-1865

February 8

Readings

First Ladies, Chapter 3

*Jean Baker. Mary Todd Lincoln: Managing Home, Husband and Children. *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*. Volume 11. 1990.

Jason Emerson, *The Madness of Mary Lincoln*

Week 5: Edith Wilson, 1915-1921

February 15

Readings

TPC, Chapter 5

First Ladies, Chapter 5

*Judith Weaver. Edith Bolling Wilson as First Lady: A Study in the Power of Personality, 1919-1920. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Volume 15, Number 1

*Edith Wilson, Chapter 27 of *The First Ladies Fact Book*

*Edith Bolling Galt Wilson Actions Speak Louder than Words, Chapter 6 of *Inventing a Voice: the Rhetoric of American First Ladies*

WEEK 6:

February 22

This is the day after Mardi Gras. Why do I think class attendance will be low? I am cancelling class. See you next week.

Week 7: Florence Harding, 1921-1923

February 29

Readings

First Ladies, Chapter 6

Katherine Sibley. *First Lady Florence Harding: Behind the Tragedy*

Week 8: Eleanor Roosevelt, 1933-1945

March 7

Readings

TPC, Chapter 7

First Ladies, Chapter 7

Allida Black, *Casting her own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism*

****SPRING BREAK****

Week 9: Theories of Modern First Ladies

March 21

TPC, Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12

* Wives in the White House: The Political Influence of First Ladies

Karen O'Connor, Bernadette Nye and Laura Van Assendelft

Presidential Studies Quarterly Vol. 26, No. 3, Reassessments of Presidents and First Ladies (Summer, 1996), pp. 835-853

Week 10: Jacqueline Kennedy and Lady Bird Johnson

March 28

First Ladies, Chapter 8

*Chapters 34 and 35 of *The First Ladies Factbook*

*Jacqueline Kennedy and Cold War Propaganda. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*. Volume 49, Issue 1. 2005

*First Lady as Catalyst: Lady Bird Johnson and Highway Beautification in the 1960s

Lewis L. Gould *Environmental Review: ER*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer, 1986), pp. 76-92

*Jacqueline Kennedy: The Rhetorical Construction of Camelot by Elizabeth J. Natalle from *Inventing a Voice*

*Lady Bird Johnson: The Making of a Public First Lady with Private Influence by Diana B. Carlin, from *Inventing a Voice*.

Week 11: Betty Ford

April 4

TPC, Chapter 14

First Ladies, Chapter 9

*Chapter 37, *First Ladies Fact Book*

*Betty Ford: A Certain Comfort from a Candid First Lady by Nichola D. Gutgold, Linda B. Hobgood, from *Inventing a Voice*

*Competing Conceptions of the First Ladyship: Public Responses to Betty Ford's "60 Minutes" Interview. Maryanne Borrelli. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Sep., 2001), pp. 397-414

*Betty Ford as First Lady: A Woman for Women. Leesa Tobin. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Modern First Ladies White House Organization (FALL 1990), pp. 761-767

Week 12: Nancy Reagan

April 11

James Benze. *Nancy Reagan on the White House Stage*

*Nancy Reagan Wears a Hat: Feminism and Its Cultural Consensus. Catharine R. Stimpson *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Winter, 1988), pp. 223-243

Week 13: Hillary Clinton

April 18

First Ladies, Chapter 10

TPC, Chapter 13

*Women's Rights Are Human Rights. Hillary Rodham Clinton

Women's Studies Quarterly, Vol. 24, No. 1/2, Beijing and Beyond: Toward the Twenty-First Century of Women (Spring - Summer, 1996), pp. 98-101

*Security and Opportunity for the Twenty-First Century. Hillary Rodham Clinton

Foreign Affairs, Vol. 86, No. 6 (Nov. - Dec., 2007), pp. 2-18

*Hillary Rodham Clinton's Orient: Cosmopolitan Travel and Global Feminist Subjects

Caren Kaplan. *Meridians*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2001), pp. 219-240

*Chapter 20 of *Inventing a Voice*. Hillary Rodham Clinton: Using Her Voice. By Anne F. Mattina

*Chapters 1, 2, 3 *Big Girls Don't Cry*

Week 14: Michelle Obama

April 25

First Ladies, Chapter 11

*Chapter 43, *First Ladies Fact Book*

*Chapter 7, Michelle in *Sister Citizen*, Melissa Harris-Perry

*She Ain't Oprah, Angela, or Your Baby Mama: The Michelle O Enigma
Gina Athena Ulysse. *Meridians*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2009), pp. 174-176

*Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Michelle Obama: Performng Gender, Race and Calss on the Campaign Trail. Ann. McGinley. *Denver University Law Review*, Vol. 86, p. 709, 2009

Joan McAlister. _____ Trash in the White House: Michelle Obama, Post-Racism, and the Pre-Class Politics of Domestic Style *Communication and Critical/ Cultural Studies*. Volume 6, Issue 3, 2009

* GS Parks. Michelle Obama: A Contemporary Analysis of Race and Gender Discrimination Through the Lens of Title VII. *Hastings Women's Law Journal.*, 2009 - HeinOnline

Week 15: Conclusion

May 2

TPC, Conclusion