

Mrs.

# President from Martha to Laura

*Illinois Gallery  
May 13-Oct. 29,  
2006*

**A**merica's First Ladies: Homemaker? Policymaker? Troublemaker?

Who are they? Where did they come from? What role have they played in our government's development? Who did they become, these First Ladies of the Land?

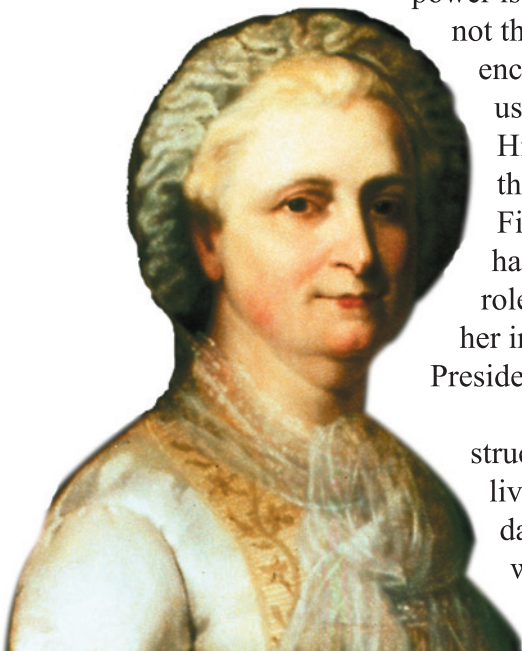
Most of America's First Ladies are crowned with this title by default through the ties that bind in marriage to the President of the United States. Their power is based on a wedding ring, not the electorate. Their influence is wielded in private and usually behind the scenes.

History demonstrates that there have been no two First Ladies alike; each has carved out her own role based on her personality, her interests, her popularity with the public, and her influence on the President. Each First Lady has her own story.

This resource guide was developed to aid in student instruction about America's First Ladies, their public and private lives, their accomplishments as well as their tragedies and scandals while in the White House. It can be used in conjunction with a tour of the special temporary exhibit open from May 13 to October 29, 2006 at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum or, it can be used on its own in the classroom.



*First Lady Laura Bush*



*Martha Washington*

# Dining like a president

**Grade Level:** K-3

**Materials:**

- white paper plates
- colored markers
- crayons
- stickers or other artwork
- photos of national symbols

**Objectives:**

As a result of this lesson, students will:

- use their individual artistic creativity to understand the historical process of presidential china selection for the White House
- study national emblems for their symbolic representation
- create their own presidential china

**Illinois Learning Standards:**

*English/Language Arts*

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

- A. Listen effectively in formal and informal situations.
- B. Speak effectively using language appropriate to the situation and audience

*Social Science*

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

- A. Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.

*Fine Arts*

State Goal 25: Know the language of the arts.

- A. Understand the sensory elements, organizational principles and expressive qualities of the arts.
- State Goal 26: Through creating and performing, understand how works of art are produced.

- B. Apply skills and knowledge necessary to create and perform in one or more of the arts.

Although most homeowners keep their best dishes or china in the kitchen or the dining room, there is a very special room in the White House that is specifically for china. It's not the kitchen or the dining room. "The Presidential Collection Room", often referred to as the "China Room", displays the collection of White House china – china that was designed for a sitting President – in cabinets lined with red velvet.

There are many department stores that sell plates, cups and saucers, but the First Family does not purchase their White House china from a store. They usually have a special pattern designed and made especially for them. Because china manufactured abroad was deemed to be far superior to American pottery, all White House china up through the Taft administration (1909 – 1913) was purchased from a foreign country, usually England, France or China. Mrs. Woodrow Wilson (Edith) was the first to purchase china made in America. Walter Scott Lenox was the first American to create porcelain fit for a president. Although there are many people and companies famous for designing official china used by a President and First Lady, five presidents have commissioned Lenox to create their particular contribution to the State table service.

Historically, many of the china patterns include a symbol of the United States government – a bald eagle, the Great Seal, stars and stripes or an olive branch; however, some presidents have personalized their china with flowers, animals, and images of the White House.

**Procedure:**

Discuss with students the definition of table china and the idea of pattern and design. Display some examples of china pieces (paper will work) that exhibit colorful artwork. Explain

to students that each President has the opportunity to design his own china to be used in the White House. Show pictures and discuss past Presidential china patterns, pointing out and discussing particular patriotic symbols in the designs.

Define "symbol" for students. Display photos and discuss symbolism of national emblems accompanying this activity.

Each student should imagine he/she is the President of the United States or the First Lady. One of their new duties is to design the new china for the White House. Using a white paper plate and markers, each student designs a plate and adds his signature to the back.

When students have completed their designs, they should sit in a circle and share their design ideas with the group. Create a bulletin board "cabinet" to "exhibit" the newly designed china. Remember to "line" your cabinet in RED!

For photos of presidential china, go to <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/whtour/china-samples.html>

For photos and explanations of U.S. symbols, go to: <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/symbols/index.html>



# First Kids

*We're moving where? Which white house? President of what?*

**T**he family of the President of the United States is called the First Family. Children of the First Family are referred to as “First Kids”. From President and Mrs. John Adams to President and Mrs. George W. Bush, history tells us there have been 151 First Kids in the White House, moving in at various ages and stages in their lives. When President and Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt moved to the White House, their children ranged in age from 3-17; President and Mrs. Grover Cleveland had 6 children, including their daughter, Esther, who was the first child born to a sitting president. Presidents Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton’s daughters spent their teenage years in the White House.

Not only do these families move into a new house, but they move into the White House where they find many new faces, activities and special events – some including kings, queens, and movie stars.

What would it be like to live in the there? Most of us will never know. We can only imagine.

## Procedure:

Begin the activity by showing students a photo of the White House and discussing its size – 132 rooms, including 35 bathrooms, four kitchens, and a bowling alley! Ask students to compare these numbers to their home. Briefly discuss what it might be like to live in such a large house.

Students will imagine they will soon be moving to the White House to live there for the next four years as a First Kid. What will life be like? How will life change? Will there be new rules?

Students will write a two-page “how to” instruction guide for moving into and living in the White House based, not on research of other First Kids, but on what students perceive, imagine and dream their lives would be like moving to the White House. Students should address and incorporate their “imagined” responses to the following questions in this essay entitled: “JOHN DOE (student’s name) GOES TO THE WHITE HOUSE”

## Questions to consider:

- . When will I be moving?
- . How will people know I’m living there?
- . What will happen to my other house?
- . How will we get our furniture to the White House?
- . Where will I play? Can I take my bike?
- . How will my friends call me and come to visit me?
- . Can I get snacks there?
- . Can I take my pet?
- . What will my room look like?
- . What will my school be like? How will I get there?
- . What will I do in the summer when there’s no school?
- . What kinds of things will I do for fun?
- . How do kids have birthday parties in the White House?
- . Why are there guards in the White House?
- . Who will wash my clothes?
- . What if I get sick? Is there a doctor?
- . How long will I live there?
- . Will I still have a home when I leave the White House?

All students should read their “instructions” to the class.

**Extension 1:** Before the end of the school day, have students reflect on their day. They should think about the things they’ve done and said, as well as the influence they may have had on others. Discuss the idea of private life and public figures. How different might their lives be if they lived in the White House?

**Extension 2:** No doubt there are some “house rules” for kids in the White House. Who makes the rules and what happens when a rule is broken? Create a list of 5-10 rules for kids in the White House. As a class, compare lists and determine one official list of rules. Compose a letter to the current First Lady, describing this project and enclosing a copy of these rules.

*Want to tour the White House before making your rules?* Go to: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/whtour/> or [http://whitehousehistory.org/02/subs\\_house/01.html](http://whitehousehistory.org/02/subs_house/01.html)

**Grade Level:** 3-6

## Materials:

Photo and descriptive information about the White House

## Objectives:

As a result of this activity students will:

- imagine life in the White House and as a First Kid
- be able to read a series of questions and write answers in a story form.

## Illinois Learning Standards

*English/Language Arts*

State Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency.

B. Apply reading strategies to improve understanding and fluency.

C. Comprehend a broad range of reading materials

State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

A. Use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and structure.

B. Compose well organized and coherent writing for specific purposes and audiences.

C. Communicate ideas in writing to accomplish a variety of purposes.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

B. Speak effectively using language appropriate to the situation and audience.

C. Apply acquired information, concepts, and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats.

*Social Science*

State Goal 14: Understand political systems with an emphasis on the United States.

A. Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.

D. Understand the roles and influences of individuals and interest groups in the political systems of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

# Design a first lady



Hillary Clinton

*There is no training manual for First Ladies. You get the job because the man you married becomes President. --Hillary Clinton*

In order to be President of the United States there are various requirements that must be met. A candidate must:

1. be a natural born citizen of the United States
2. be at least 35 years of age
3. have lived in the U.S. for at least 14 years

In contrast, there are no official requirements of a First Lady. There are no constitutional guidelines, there is no template, there is no agreed upon criteria for those wanting to rate an existing or potential First Lady.

Former First Ladies have come from entirely different backgrounds – some were highly educated, while others had no formal education; some had been reared in wealth, others came from very modest means. Many expressed interests in the arts and boasted literary accomplishments. Numerous First Ladies proved to be very astute politically; others focused their White House days on their families and domestic issues.

Although the role of First Lady is full of opportunities to see and be seen, most First Ladies married to the President find their power is based on a wedding band and not the electorate; the First Lady's power is limited by her relationship to the President, often functioning as his eyes and ears. She has influence, but no legal authority.

Even though she is neither elected nor appointed to her position, the job requires that the First Lady be on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a

week, 365 days a year. She receives no salary or other monetary compensations for her work. She has to be willing to accept that everything she says, everything she wears, every action she takes will be closely monitored, reported, and commented on by the media. Every thing she does in her role as First Lady will be criticized and praised. Her life before her time in the White House will be closely scrutinized and it will be necessary for her to build a relationship with the American public that is based primarily on how the media portrays her.

More than 40 women have attained the position of First Lady and each has defined the job to her own personality, talents, interests and family responsibilities. Following their term in the White House, Ladies have gone on to become authors, artists, and advocates.

## **Procedure:**

In small groups, students should develop a “job description” for First Lady of the Land based on students' expected role of First Lady, as well as accounts on life in the White House by former First Ladies. Include such vocabulary as job duties, tasks, function, role, and benefits.

## **Suggested Criteria Template:**

The following four categories may help students organize their job description criteria:

- Duties and Responsibilities
- Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
- Credentials and Experience
- Special Requirements

Include traditional roles as well as any creative non-traditional roles deemed important to students.

Each group should then conduct an interview with one student from the group selected to act as the potential First Lady, the other group members act as interviewers. The interviewers should use the four categories listed above to develop interview questions; the candidate's replies should include the recommended qualifications composed by the group. Each group should develop a written resume for their named "candidate". Copies of these resumes should be passed out to all class members for review and discussion.



Mary Todd Lincoln

**Extension:** One student from each group is selected to form a panel of First Lady candidates. Acting as media representatives, the rest of the class questions the panelists as to their specific qualifications for First Lady. The teacher should act as the moderator. The "media" should refer to each candidate's resume (referred to in activity above) for personal information. Each candidate should use the job description criteria developed by his/her group in response to interview questions.

Following this panel discussion, a vote should be taken by the class as to the most qualified First Lady candidate.

## Needed:

### First Lady of America

#### Must be able to:

- Charm foreign dignitaries
- Oversee maintenance of large home
- Entertain on a moment's notice
- Please all the people, all the time!

Send resume to citizens of the  
United States of America

*Sorry, no job description available*

## Grade Level: 6-12

### Materials:

- books
- CDs
- Internet sites for research on First Ladies

### Objectives:

As a result of this activity, students will:

- understand that there are no legal requirements to become or to carry out the duties of First Lady of America
- understand that each First Lady represents a different background and must fill the role of First Lady according to her own interests and capabilities
- personally design official duties for First Lady based on their research, personal opinions and class discussion.

### Illinois Learning Standards:

#### English/Language Arts

State Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency.

A. Apply word analysis and vocabulary skills to comprehend selections.

B. Apply reading strategies to improve understanding and fluency

C. Comprehend a broad range of reading materials.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

A. Listen effectively in formal and informal situations

B. Speak effectively using language appropriate to the situation and audience.

State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.

A. Locate, organize, and use information from the various sources to answer questions, solve problems and communicate ideas.

B. Analyze and evaluate information acquired from various sources.

C. Apply acquired information, concepts and ideas to communicate a variety of formats.

#### Social Science

State Goal 14: Understand political systems with an emphasis on the United States

C. Understand election processes and responsibilities of citizens.

D. Understand the roles and influences of individuals and interest groups in the political systems of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

A. Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.

# How do they compare?

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Materials:**

- books and/or CDs
- Internet sites
- Comparison Chart (page 7)

**Objectives:**

- As a result of this activity, students will:
- use research and discussion skills
  - identify similarities among First Ladies
  - compare and contrast information to find common ground
  - listen, discuss and debate to come to a consensus

**Illinois Learning Standards:**

*English/Language Arts*

State Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency.

B. Apply reading strategies to improve understanding and fluency.

C. Comprehend a broad range of reading materials.

State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

A. Use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization and structure.

B. Compose well-organized and coherent writing for specific purposes and audiences.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

A. Listen effectively in formal and informal situations.

B. Speak effectively using language appropriate to the situation and audience.

State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.

A. Locate, organize, and use information from various sources to answer questions, solve problems and communicate ideas.

B. Analyze and evaluate information acquired from various sources.

C. Apply acquired information, concepts and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats.

*Social Science*

State Goal 14: Understand political systems with an emphasis on the United States.

D. Understand the roles and influences of individuals and interest groups in the political systems of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

A. Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.

D. Understand Illinois, United States and world social history.

When comparing former First Ladies as women, mothers and personalities, numerous differences are quickly recognized. Mary Lincoln hailed from a prominent family in Kentucky; Laura Bush grew up in middle-class Midland, Texas. Eleanor Roosevelt cared little for clothes and her friends grew accustomed to seeing her in \$10 dresses; in contrast, Jacqueline Kennedy's designer wardrobe contributed highly to her influence on popular fashion. Anna Harrison had ten children and Lucy Hayes had eight. However, both Dolley Madison and Elizabeth Monroe lived their lives with no children. While Martha Washington's great concern was the comfort and happiness of her husband and children and she did not entirely enjoy her role as the first First Lady, Julia Grant recalled her White House years as "a bright and beautiful dream."

Despite their differences, being First Lady of the Land presents many shared commonalities to all those stepping into the role – areas where each Lady is scrutinized and judged by the public – American and foreign, resulting in an image and impression lasting long after each Lady exits the White House.

**Procedure:**

Teacher and students should read and discuss together the following six categories that will be used to compare and contrast First Ladies.

- |                                   |                       |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Activity in social causes      | d. Tragedies          |
| b. Restoration of the White House | e. Personal criticism |
| c. Scandals                       | f. Popularity         |

Students should research America's First Ladies, reading for associations to any of the six categories. On the Comparison Chart, students will note specific information gathered on the First Ladies that falls into any of the listed categories.

Students will use their comparison chart as talking points in a group discussion of First Ladies and categories a-f. Seated in a circle, the following questions should be discussed by the group based on their research. All students should participate in the discussion.

1. Were the majority of First Lady scandals based on personal/family factors or outside influences or events?
2. How was each First Lady's personal criticism addressed by the President? Give specific examples. How did this criticism affect the behavior?
3. At what point in their lives, - before, during, or after the White House - did each First Lady develop a social cause and what were some contributing factors?
4. What common methods or approaches were used by First Ladies to secure funding for restoration of the White House? What made some more successful than others?
5. Many First Ladies experienced personal tragedy while in the White House. How did this adversity affect their role as First Lady? Give specific examples.
6. How do Americans judge their First Lady? In what ways might her popularity rating affect the President personally as well as his own ratings?

After questions are discussed, have students choose one First Lady whom the class agrees best personifies each of the six categories; i.e., Mary Todd Lincoln best represents the category of tragedies.

For biographies of First Ladies, click on: <http://www.alplm.org> or <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/firstladies/ml16.html>



# First Ladies and the Media:



Jackie Kennedy

## Public Image and Private Influence

**T**he relationship between the First Lady's portrayal in the media and her influence on political action is symbiotic. Her image and public persona can directly impact her role in the White House, in both negative and positive ways.

The First Lady's role has no formal definition. The role has developed over the years evolving from each First Lady's success, or changing because of a previous First Lady's mistakes. Because there is no formal job description, the attitudes of the public toward First Ladies is elusive, ever-changing and often contradictory. We alternately applaud social graces and disapprove of involvement in political and policy affairs. And when the next First Lady comes along, we reserve the right to reverse these very same attitudes. Moreover, we make our opinions known. The First Ladies receive thousands of letters, advice, consolation, and criticisms from the public. Most of these opinions are shaped by the media's portrayal of the woman in the White House.

From Martha Washington to Laura Bush, the press has been interested in the president's wife. The media's view of the First Lady has ranged from "heroine in chief" to "villainess in waiting". They immediately recognized the influence these women had on fashion and politics. Indeed, First Ladies were used in advertising all kinds of products, from soap and perfume in the 19th century to paint colors and automobiles in the 20th century. As a result, First Ladies are often more popular than their husbands.

Media coverage of the First Lady in the 19th century was what one historian called "pedestal reporting", or placing an emphasis on her social and ceremonial role rather than her influence on the president. This coverage still exists today. The press and the White House often work together controlling the public's perception of a First Lady. When President Clinton ran for office, for example, he often spoke of getting "two for one", referring to his wife's knowledge of politics,

national and world affairs as an asset to the administration. But after his election and the failure of the health initiative she had been appointed to head, Mrs. Clinton retreated to more traditional duties. The press, helpfully, began to emphasize this facet of her role, thus alleviating some of the criticism of the public who viewed her negatively as a "co-president" they did not elect.

Sometimes, however, the media is not so gracious. During the 1824 presidential campaign, the rumors of bigotry and adultery associated with Rachel Jackson's first marriage became front page headlines, resulting in nasty and negative attacks on her character and questions about her ability to serve as First Lady. When she died of a heart attack before Jackson's inauguration, the President blamed the press and their vicious attacks for her death. Mary Lincoln was also lampooned in the press. Upon the success of her first large reception in February 1862 to showcase her restoration of the White House and to redeem herself in the eyes of the Washington elite who thought her a country bumpkin, one newspaper commented only on her dress as an attempt to "display her milking apparatus" before the crowds.

It is in order to avoid such a controversy that many First Ladies have viewed traditional roles as more desirable and offering more privacy. Yet the media portrayal of the First Lady is not always an accurate reflection of her influence on the White House administration. First Ladies have always had more influence in affairs of state, political campaigns, and presidential appointments than revealed in public media. Ironically, the media's influence on more traditional roles, often results in a more popular First Lady, who in turn can garner greater political power and influence over the president and the administration.



## Procedure

1. Define and discuss the word symbiotic.
2. Invite students to discuss their impression of current First Lady Laura Bush and, if their current governor is a man, his wife.
3. Working in groups, have students choose (or assign them) three First Ladies, one from each era (1800 to 1870, 1871 to 1945, and 1946 to the present). Discuss the following questions:
  - a. How was the First Lady able to influence her husband?
  - b. How did the media portray the First Lady?
  - c. Did the media help or hurt her attempts at influencing political action?
4. In their classroom journal, have students answer the following writing prompts:
  - a. Does history reveal that First Ladies who appear in the media to take on a more traditional role, in reality have greater popularity and/or power? Support your answer with concrete examples.
  - b. Does history reveal that we as a culture prefer our First Ladies to hold a more traditional role? Support your answer with examples.
  - c. How are more active First Ladies treated in the media and by the public?
5. Have students examine national polls online, in newspapers and in news magazines to find how first ladies' ratings can often exceed those of their husbands.
6. Following the examples of national polls, invite students to poll their school mates regarding the current First Lady.
7. View the chart on page 10 and make a similar chart for First Ladies using the same criteria.

## Grade Level: 9-12

### Materials:

Enclosed chart (page 10)  
Books  
CDs  
Newspapers  
Newsmagazines  
Internet for reference.

### Objectives:

As a result of this activity, students will:

- Use research and discussion skills to enhance their understanding of America's First Ladies.
- Identify both the traditional and non-traditional roles First Ladies have played.
- Provide three written examples of how the culture of an era affects the role of women in history.
- Explore and question how the media's view of the President and First Lady is received by the public.
- Compare and contrast ratings from national polling organizations.

### Illinois Learning Standards:

#### *English/Language Arts*

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State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.

- A. Locate, organize, and use information from various sources to answer questions, solve problems and communicate ideas.
- B. Analyze and evaluate information acquired from various sources.
- C. Apply acquired information, concepts and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats.

#### *Social Science*

State Goal 14: Understand political systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

- D. Understand the roles and influences of individuals and interest groups in the political systems of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

State Goal 16: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

- A. Compare characteristics of culture as reflected in language, literature, the arts, traditions and institutions,

## Influential First Ladies

• Much is known about **Abigail Adams'** influence on John Adams, and had she lived in the 20th century, she would certainly compare with Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Clinton.

• A young first lady, only 24, **Julia Tyler** likened her role to royalty by receiving guests seated on a raised platform. However, she had a say in political matters and presidential appointments. In fact, she was the first First Lady in a political cartoon, which highlighted her support of the annexation of Texas.

• **Edith Wilson** wielded considerable power after President Wilson's stroke. She also used her influence during World War I, asking the public for shared sacrifices, such as meatless meals to save money.

• **Helen Taft** and **Rosalynn Carter** sat in on Cabinet meetings.

• **Florence Harding** utilized backstage political maneuvers to assist her husband in his White House bid in 1920.

• **Bess Truman**, known for her reluctance to continue Eleanor Roosevelt's public role as First Lady, still carried a great deal of power behind the scenes and Harry Truman welcomed her input.

• **Betty Ford**, known for her openness in helping women face cancer, urged her husband to appoint more women to high positions in the executive branch.

• **Barbara Bush**, making the most of her "grandmotherly" image, was a shrewd political operator who often was instrumental in political campaign operations.

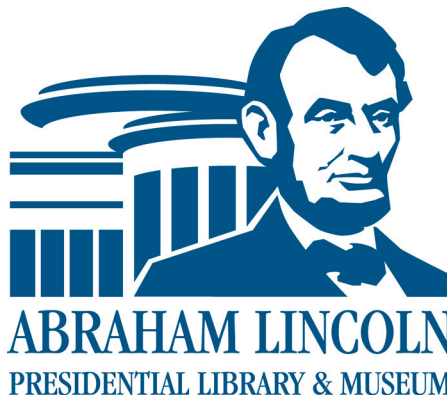
• **Nancy Reagan's** image of an adoring wife belied her strong influence on her husband. She often prompted his comments in unscheduled press opportunities, voiced opinions on political and governmental appointments, influenced foreign policy, and urged Reagan to meet with Russian premier Mikhail Gorbachev.

• **Laura Bush's** low-key approach to her role of First Lady stands in sharp contrast to her predecessor Hillary Clinton. However, as history has shown, events often intrude resulting in a reversal of how a First Lady views her job. Since Sept. 11 and the war in Iraq, Laura Bush's role has evolved. These events prompted her to step forward in a more public way. She has met with much success, often having higher approval ratings than her husband.

*The Harris Poll* ® #41, June 9, 2004  
 --[http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris\\_poll](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll)

## BEST FIRST LADIES ON FOUR CRITERIA

(For example:)	Jackie Kennedy '61-63	Lady Bird Johnson '63-69	Pat Nixon '69-'74	Betty Ford '74-'77	Rosalynn Carter '77 - '81	Nancy Reagan '81 - '89	Barbara Bush '89 - '93	Hillary Rodham Clinton '93 - '01	Laura Bush 2001	Not Sure At All
Will be viewed as the best First Lady in history										
Best represented the United States with the rest of the world										
Was the best role model for women in America										
Was most intelligent										



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