

FLOTUS: She has a title, an office, and a paid staff accountable to her. But, she has no pay, no job description, no “official” job, duties, nor power. She is not elected, appointed, nor hired. She performs 24/7 service hours of work with a lot of scrutiny in a high profile existence with strong opposition to paid employment outside the White House. Traditionally, she has been a non-working wife. The office of the First Lady Of The United States is a branch of the Executive Office of the President.

Martha Washington was never called “First Lady” but rather "Lady Washington." According to legend, Dolley Madison was referred to as ‘first lady’ in a eulogy delivered by President Zachary Taylor in 1849. However, no written record exists.

The earliest written evidence of the title is found in a 1863 diary entry of William Howard Russell, a Washington correspondent with the London Times. Mary C. Ames referred to Lucy Webb Hayes as “the First Lady of the land” in 1877 when reporting on the inauguration of Rutherford B. A 1911 Charles Nirdlinger play was titled “The First Lady in the Land” and by the 1930’s the title seemed fixed.

Edith Wilson, the most politically powerful First Lady, has been called the “first female president” of the United States because she handled government affairs when Woodrow Wilson became partly paralyzed by a stroke.

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt devoted her life to FDR’s political career and she changed the role of First Lady. She held press conferences, traveled, gave lectures, radio broadcasts, and opined in her daily column, "My Day." This most active First Lady, was succeeded by the least active of the 20th century, Bess Truman, who said, “her job was to sit quietly on the podium next to her husband and make sure her hat was on straight.”

Mamie Eisenhower set up 27 households in 37 years following Ike’s’ career promotions that brought increased responsibilities for her. An endeared First Lady, she entertained an unprecedented number of foreign government leaders. Jacqueline Kennedy graduated George Washington University and worked as a photographer before marrying JFK. She defined her major role as First Lady, "to take care of the President." She worked to make the White House a museum of American history and decorative arts, as well as an elegant family residence.

Claudia Taylor (Lady Bird) Johnson devoted herself to Lyndon’s political aspirations. She was active in LBJ’s war-on-poverty, specifically the Head Start program. Armed with a BA in arts and journalism, she created a First Lady’s Committee for a More Beautiful Capital. Parentless at an early age, Pat Nixon worked her way through college, graduated cum laude, then worked as a teacher and a government economist. As First Lady, she promoted volunteer service and traveled alone with relief supplies to earthquake victims in Peru. As Personal Representative of Richard Milhouse, she visited Africa and South America.

Betty Ford trained as a dancer, was a member of Martha Graham’s group, and taught dance to handicapped children. As First Lady she openly discussed closeted topics in 1974 such as her breast cancer, her battle against dependency on drugs and alcohol, and controversial issues as the Equal Rights Amendment, which she supported. She helped establish the Betty Ford Center and described the role of First Lady as "much more a 24-hour job than anyone would guess."

Rosalynn Carter, 13 when her father died, worked with her dressmaker mother to help support the family and raise her younger siblings. As First Lady, she attended Cabinet meetings, major briefings, often represented the president at ceremonial occasions, and served as his personal emissary to Latin American countries. She was Honorary Chairperson of the President's Commission on Mental Health and brought national attention to the performing arts.

First Lady Nancy Reagan supported the Foster Grandparent Program and initiated the “just say no” program against drug and alcohol abuse among young people. In 1985 she held a conference at the White House for first ladies of seventeen countries to focus international

attention on this problem. Devoted to the cause of literacy, First Lady Barbara Bush worked for a more literate America.

As Arkansas's First Lady for 12 years, Hillary parented, practiced law, and performed public service with a focus on children. As the nation's First Lady, Clinton chaired the Task Force on National Health Care Reform. Her weekly newspaper column of her First Lady experiences noted the women, children, and families she encountered globally. First Lady Laura Bush is Honorary Ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade and serves as the international spokesperson for efforts to educate people worldwide, especially women and girls in Afghanistan.

Fifty-three white women FLOTUS have held this office. On Inauguration Day, 2009, Barack's CHANGE campaign overflows into this office via Harvard lawyer Michelle Obama, the fifty-fourth and first black woman FLOTUS.

Source: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/firstladies/>