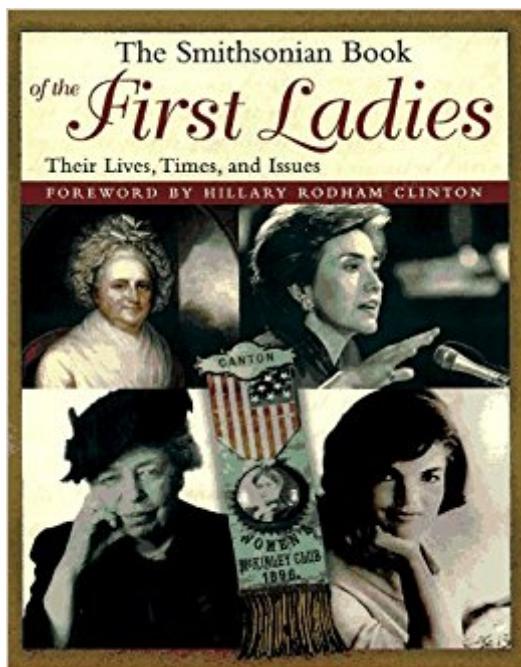


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# The Smithsonian Book Of The First Ladies: Their Lives, Times, And Issues



## **Synopsis**

America's first ladies are forty-three remarkable women whose individual stories and causes reflect the history of all American women. This is the first comprehensive biography of the first ladies for young readers. Edited by Edith P. Mayo, curator of the First Ladies exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution, this essential volume not only documents the lives of the presidents' wives (or official hostesses), it explores the achievements of these significant women in the White House and beyond. Young readers will be especially drawn by the book's eleven highlighted entries about issues important to American women, and by one hundred twenty-seven pieces of art and their captions, which tell a visual history of their own. The Smithsonian Book of the First Ladies draws heavily on original source material. It includes images from the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, and a host of other diverse collections; four general introductions give an overview of the major events of each historical period. Part women's history, social history, and American history, this accessible reference book is important reading not just for young women, but for anyone interested in the story of our country.

## **Book Information**

Age Range: 12 and up

Hardcover: 302 pages

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## **Customer Reviews**

Dolley Madison is Hillary Rodham Clinton's favorite first lady. "She cared about the welfare of children," Ms. Clinton writes in the introduction, "spoke her mind about things, and in her infinite wisdom saved priceless documents and art treasures from the onslaught of British troops who

destroyed the White House during the War of 1812." Young readers will learn about Madison's life and the lives of 42 other remarkable women, through easy-to-read text and many illustrations and photographs. They will also learn the answers to some important questions about women in American history: Did the American Revolution change things for women? Why isn't there more information about women's lives? What was "woman suffrage"? Why was it hard (until the 20th century) for women to get an education? The Smithsonian Book of the First Ladies shows that these women are a lot more than just the wives to the presidents.

With a foreword by Hillary Rodham Clinton, The Smithsonian Book of the First Ladies: Their Lives, Times, and Issues, edited by Edith P. Mayo, presents highlights from the lives of all 43 First Ladies, including the strict Sarah Polk, who allowed no dancing in the White House, to Lucy Hays, who held firm in her belief that even Presidential wives should not try to influence their husbands' politics. This handsome, well-researched volume includes 127 photographs and paintings, as well as 11 entries on such related subjects as "Where Does the Term 'First Lady' Come From?" and "How Have First Ladies Contributed to Campaigning?" (Holt, \$24.95 ISBN 0-8050-1751-8, Mar.)Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book is a good summary to all the First Ladies of our nation. Learned some things I didn't know and really enjoying read this book.

I agree with Mrs. Clinton's foreword that this book gives just a glimpse (and not a full picture) of the lives of the 43 women who have been First Ladies of the U.S. In all cases it is heavy on the patriotic heroics of these women, while subordinating and deemphasizing the role of mother and wife in favor of the more glamorous role of First Lady. But this is to be expected in a "women friendly" book. "Heroics aside, this set of women is an interesting group in almost all cases, including that of Hillary herself. With a great deal of grace and strength all but a few of them seem to have weathered the storm of serving the dual and sometimes triple roles of mother, wife and First Lady quite well. Abigail Adams is difficult to beat given the special relationship, marriage and circumstances of her marriage to John Adams. History is still out on Hillary. But given that she has become a national superstar as Secretary of State and is certainly likely to challenge Obama in 2012, she could very well become not only the first, First Lady President but also the first women to have served as both Secretary of State and President. Stay tuned on that one. Two stars.

I expected more from The Smithsonian. This book contains a total of three paragraphs about Martha Wayles, Thomas Jefferson's wife; four paragraphs about Anna Symmes, William Henry Harrison's wife; five paragraphs about Rachel Donelson, Andrew Jackson's wife; eight paragraphs about Letitia Christian, John Tyler's wife; and only three sentences on Hannah Hoes, Martin Van Buren's wife. A high school research paper based on such a half-hearted attempt would have received a "D".

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