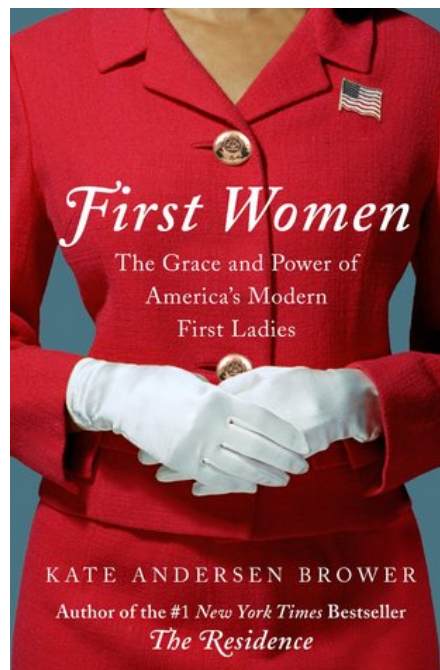




First Women: The Grace and Power of America's Modern First Ladies

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From the #1 New York Times bestselling author of the groundbreaking backstairs look at the White House, *The Residence*, comes an intimate, news-making look at the true modern power brokers at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue: the First Ladies, from Jackie Kennedy to Michelle Obama.

One of the most underestimated—and challenging—positions in the world, the First Lady of the United States must be many things: an inspiring leader with a forward-thinking agenda of her own; a savvy politician, skilled at navigating the treacherous rapids of Washington; a wife and mother operating under constant scrutiny; and an able CEO responsible for the smooth operation of countless services and special events at the White House. Now, as she did in her smash #1 bestseller *The Residence*, former White House correspondent Kate Andersen Brower draws on a wide array of untapped, candid sources—from residence staff and social secretaries to friends and political advisers—to tell the stories of the ten remarkable women who have defined that role since 1960.

Brower offers new insights into this privileged group of remarkable women, including Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson, Patricia Nixon, Betty Ford, Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush, and Michelle Obama. The stories she shares range from the heartwarming to the shocking and tragic, exploring everything from the first ladies' political crusades to their rivalries with Washington figures; from their friendships with other first ladies to their public and private relationships with their husbands. She also offers a detailed and insightful new portrait of one of the most-watched first ladies of all time, Hillary Clinton, asking what her tumultuous years in the White House may tell us about her own historic presidential run . . . and what life could be like with the nation's first First Husband.

Candid and illuminating, this first group biography of the modern first ladies provides a revealing look at life upstairs and downstairs at the world's most powerful address.

First Women: The Grace and Power of America's Modern First Ladies Details

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Ladies Kate Andersen Brower

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Jill says

I had a hard time with this book at first. It seemed really chaotic and unstructured. I still can't figure out the organizing principle from one chapter to the next and the abrupt transitions didn't help either. I think that might largely be because I listened to this book. And as I've learned, I'm a visual person, so if I read it with my eyes, I likely would have had more success understanding what the theme was from one chapter to the next. (Plus, I likely would have loved the no doubt, awesome pictures included in this book!)

My second criticism is that it seemed a bit "uncool" in that a lot of the sources for this book were staff members in the residence, former staff members during campaigns, etc. I felt a little bit like some of those people might have betrayed the confidence of the first families in sharing some of these "behind the scenes" stories of our first ladies. It was a little too Kitty Kelley and a little less David McCullough than I like in my histories.

BUT--it did cause me to think. There is no more powerful role in our nations' governance that ISN'T part of our Constitution than that of the President's spouse. And no matter how this current election cycle unfolds, no doubt the power of the First Lady (Or Spouse) will continue to evolve based on the time and the character of the person who holds the role.

I found that the role of a the First lady at times could serve as a microcosm of the issues facing women in America: working mom, stay at home mom, sitting at the table, staying behind the scenes, issues in marriages, issues with children; all of those things have and do come up. Many of the women profiled never wanted that role. Some dreamed of nothing better. All tried to put their unique stamp on it and at times found themselves damned if they did and damned if they didn't. And in this day and age, It was interesting to learn that how much of the First Lady's role is still truly like a traditional housewife who plans state dinners, menus, flowers, parties.

But make no mistake, behind every great man is a woman. And each one of these women (no matter what biases towards or against each that the author snuck in) did their best with the hand and husband they were dealt. And our country should be grateful for their sacrifices and service.

Melanie says

3.5 stars. Super interesting look at the First Ladies from Jackie Kennedy to Michelle Obama. A couple of things stood out. 1) The author makes it very clear that Michelle Obama DOES NOT like being First Lady. 2) Jackie Kennedy basically created the image of Camelot; it was a very manufactured image. 3) It seems like many of the women who were the most dedicated to their husbands were wives who were treated most disrespectfully by them (Jackie Kennedy, Pat Nixon, Lady Bird Johnson). I guess it makes sense, these women tried to ingratiate themselves to their husbands so that they would be needed. On the other hand, the Fords had a strong marriage, and Betty Ford would publicly disagree with her husband's policies.

Lynn says

2.5 stars but I rounded down. I was really disappointed in this book, given how much I enjoyed her first book, *The Residence*. This was just a lot of gossip with very little insight. The author clearly has her favorites among the women she profiles and she lets this affect how she portrays them. Based on this book, Lady Bird Johnson is destined for sainthood, with Jackie Kennedy and Betty Ford close behind. Pat Nixon is a sympathetic martyr. She seems to be a bit ambiguous or ambivalent about Barbara and Laura Bush: she runs hot and cold on Barbara especially. She is almost savage about Nancy Reagan; she seems confused about Hillary although she digs up all the tired old dirt; and the only thing that she keeps repeating about Michelle Obama is that she didn't want to be First Lady and she found living in the White House confining. Really. 8 years as the first African-American First Lady and that's all she's got to say about her. SMDH. Although she repeatedly refers to the First Ladies as a "sisterhood", there is one chapter that is titled "Bad Blood" which recounts the feuds between some of the women. I felt like I needed to take a shower after reading it. So unnecessary.

If I want to read a trashy biography, I'll pick up a Kitty Kelly book. The author needed to be way more balanced and unbiased in her writing. It felt like she found every nasty thing she could find about some of these women, no matter how petty, and put it in her book. There is very little about their "grace and power" as the book's subtitle states.

I doubt that I will read another book by this author. She has really turned me off.

Heather says

Though politics evokes a great deal of anxiety in me, I am constantly listening to and reading about it as I find it endlessly fascinating. However, given my constant immersion in the topic and discussion of American Politics, it becomes easy to assume that those who are part of opposing parties or political beliefs are inherently antagonistic with and towards one another. This book provides a peek behind the veil and demonstrates that respect and even friendship can exist among those who politically oppose one another.

I loved learning about the traditions, friendships, quarrels and life experiences and characteristics shared by these women. Such an interesting read that prompted me to re-think how I viewed the role of First Lady.

Kate says

I wanted to love this book. Unfortunately it was just on much information for me. It dragged and the chapters were long. It was very interesting but it was just a lot. I'd love to see a condensed version.

Debbie says

This book was so interesting and put together well. I enjoy that the author did not separate the women by the years they served but told their stories together. This is not a history book but the stories of living breathing people. As stated in the book this is a group of very extraordinary women.

Teri says

This book details the White House lives of modern First Ladies from Jackie Kennedy through Michelle Obama. Each woman is profiled from the time their husbands became involved in politics and continues through their time as a "Former First Lady". The book shows the good, the bad, and the ugliness of the job and on the attitudes of each lady. Some of the women became quite close, while others seem to simply tolerate their peers. Each woman brings their own attitude and charm to the White House and each has her own triumphs and hurdles. Ultimately, they all belong to a special "sisterhood" that no one else could completely understand. This book gives the rest of us a glimpse into what it really means to be the First Lady of the White House.

Brower gives the reader a no-holds bar look at these ladies. None of them are without fault. Indeed, all of them have some not so great moments. It is at times scandalous and at times you are humored with some of their antics. My perception of all of them has changed, mostly not for the better. However, for some, I have a better appreciation of them. I'm not sure how much the author's own political ideals were coming through. There were some women she seemed harder on than others, but none of them were shown as flawless and often quite the opposite. Being the wife of a President cannot be an easy job and after all, these women are human. Most did not ask or want to be a First Lady, but they have all handled the job with their heads held high. It will be interesting to see what the future holds and to see if there some day might be a First Husband's edition of this book. The book could also have been a little more cohesive. It did bounce around some and was not always chronological as you would expect it to be. I still enjoyed it thoroughly.

Heather says

Very interesting! The only thing that really kept it from being 4 stars was the jumping back and forth in time. I sometimes found it slightly hard to follow.

Heather says

This was a great read! I enjoyed so much getting to know more about who these ladies were/are and what their lives as first ladies looked like behind the scenes. They all are amazingly strong women who each brought their own unique talents and strengths to the role of first lady. They are all so very different from one another and I loved getting to see how they interacted with each other, how they approached the role of first lady, how they felt about being in the spotlight and living in the White House, their relationships with their husbands, and how they dealt with the challenges they each faced. Kate Andersen Brower did a great job of portraying these women honestly but respectfully. I came away with an admiration for each of them. You couldn't pay me enough to be the wife of a politician, but I'm so thankful to those who are willing to put their own lives aside in order to serve our country.

Neri. says

3.5. It was quite an interesting read about first ladies of the US, a lot of information that people may not realise is published in this book. It's hard to talk about this book without spoiling it but it is a compilation about classy women.

Lois R. Gross says

Since I am always interested in historical books, this collective biography of was my cup of tea. These are the post-war first ladies. Mamie Eisenhower was mentioned but not in a good way. She was boorish and actually cruel to Jackie Kennedy, forcing her to walk the White House two weeks after a cesarean section. From Jackie forward, the women's personalities are distinct and defined. All were much stronger than their public persona. Each endured unfair public scrutiny. Surprisingly, Lady Bird Johnson emerges as a star, a true Steel Magnolia during a very troubled time in our country. Her predecessor, Jackie O, was eternally damaged by her husband's death. Her strongest bond was with Hillary Clinton in part because the two shared brilliant and openly philandering husbands. Roslyn Carter was a real powerhouse as was Nancy Reagan. But of them all, Betty Ford remains my favorite, a real modern woman who shared her deepest secrets to help other Americans deal with their personal problems. The one fault in the book is that it seems to have been written as a term paper. Passages repeat as if they were copied from 3x5 cards. That problem aside, this is an informative and engrossing book about some mostly unsung women of the political scene.

Susan says

I just read the ratings info and some reviews for this book. Every review I read rated it 4 or 5 stars, then commented on all the things I disliked: lack of organizing principles, extreme repetitiveness, gossip, etc. I found the sources and notes also were not well documented. The book seems to purport to be serious reporting, but many other reviewers describe it as entertaining. I can't call it entertaining as it seems too disingenuous for that. I'm sorry I was stuck with it for holiday weekend.

LemonLinda says

This was a glimpse into the lives of 10 former First Ladies from a unique perspective. It did not give us their history chronologically. Rather it delved into these ladies and their relationships with their husbands, with the people in their administration, with White House staff, with their own families, and with each other. It showed glimpses of some more than others and was done from a political perspective, a public persona, their imprint on the White House, etc. I learned so much about these ladies even though I have read previously about most of them. It seems they draw on shared experiences to forge unlikely friendships which often cross party lines and are based on personalities rather than political party. Lady Bird Johnson and Betty Ford, Michelle Obama and Laura Bush, Hillary Clinton and Jackie Kennedy seemed to connect. Lady Bird seemed to be the gracious Southern lady reaching out to all who came before and after her.

Very informative and very readable which is important for me in a non-fiction.

Alisa says

Insights into the modern era First Ladies from Jackie Kennedy through Michelle Obama. The role of the First Lady is not precast, but rather something that is shaped by each woman who has occupied the White House. The book offers really interesting insights about the relationship between this elite group of women,

their motivations, orientation to and challenges with life as a public figure not of their own choosing, and the enormous pressure which each endured.

Becky says

An interesting book about the relationships between the First Ladies from Mamie Eisenhower to Michelle Obama. Like those relationships between former presidents, the book provides thoughtful insight on how they supported each other, their generational differences, their commitment to their husband's political ambitions, and the various personality quirks that impacted those relationships. It is a small, but unique look at history through the eyes of these women. The book, at time, seems unfocused. The writer provides numerous examples, some no doubt taken from her earlier book, *Residence*. But often the examples or anecdotes do not connect in any focused or readable fashion even though she breaks it down into chapters. There were times too that I felt like I was reading a gossip column on the First Ladies. Overall I liked this book but would have preferred a history like that written by Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy in their book, *The President's Club*.

Samantha says

This was an impulsive audiobook listen & probably not something I would normally choose. It had some interesting bits but skipped back and forth in time enough to be annoying. While I felt more sympathy for some presidents and their wives after reading this, my opinion of others actually decreased.

Beginning with Jackie Kennedy - I mean it's impossible to say anything negative about Jackie - this book looks at the 'elite sorority' of first ladies. I was shocked by Lady Bird Johnson's unfailing loyalty and devotion regardless of what her husband did, surprisingly impressed by Pat Nixon, and felt a sympathetic connection with Betty Ford. Rosalynn Carter left less of an impression on me than the women she was surrounded by.

And then we got to the ladies that I actually remember being in the White House. Every time Michelle Obama is mentioned, the writer reminds us that she hates being there. Instead of creating any sympathy for her, I felt like this just made her seem whiny. The reader is also encouraged to think of the Clintons and Obamas as 'working class'. Ummmm...sure. All my friends make \$275k/yr - Michelle's salary before entering the White House. I just can't connect with either of these ladies.

Anyway, it was an interesting listen that made me wonder, not for the first time, why anyone would want to be a politician - or one of their wives.

Belle says

4.50. A great look at the "modern" first ladies starting with Jackie and moving straight through to Michelle. The book has a great flow of information often weaving one woman's legacy or experience with another first lady's experience. I enjoyed this very much.

Jean says

In 2015 I started a project of reading biographies and memoirs about first ladies. I have managed to read most of the biographies except a few hard to find ones. I also learned that the rule book says first ladies is not to be capitalized. This book about the first ladies covers the first ladies from Kennedy to Obama and was published in 2017.

The book does not cover the first ladies chronologically but by topic. Under that topic the author may tell about each of the first ladies or only a few. At times I felt I was being yanked around and some information was repeated. Brower made a point that the majority of the first ladies did not want the position or to be in the spotlight. The author states the role is difficult, hard to quantify and often viewed through a lens of sexism. Brower noted that most of the first ladies became friends transcending political party differences. One of the examples given was that of Betty Ford and Lady Bird Johnson.

The book is well written and researched. The author appeared to be unbiased. Brower provides antidotes to make her points. Brower's research included interviews of political advisors, friends, family and staff as well as letters, diaries and memoirs. The book provides general information. For those wanting more in-depth information, I suggest reading their biographies or memoirs.

I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. The book is twelve and half hours. Karen White does a good job narrating the book. White is an actress and was an AudioFile Best Voice Award winner. She also has won multiple Earphone Awards and was an Audie Award finalist.

LynnDee (The Library Lush) says

I liked the content of the book, for the most part. I didn't know much about former First Ladies Lady Bird Johnson, Pat Nixon, Rosalynn Carter, and Betty Ford, so it was interesting to learn about their times in the White House. However, I felt this book had a kind of gossipy and catty tone at times that I did not really appreciate. A lot was mentioned about "well this First Lady didn't like that one" which I just did not find necessary to tell the story. I also felt that the writing had a bit of a bias to it. I'm still interested in checking out the author's other book, The Residence, but overall I found this one lacking.

Also, I listened to this on audio and the narrator was not great. Sounded a bit too robotic for my taste.

Kelly ... says

I read the audio book and first I want to mention the narrator because so many of the reviewers disliked her. I do not agree with those reviewers. I liked Ms. White's conversational manner. I felt as though we were sitting over beverages sharing knowledge. It was a simple, quiet and intimate conversation about the first ladies. I loved it. One caveat: I listen (always) at 1.5 speed or faster so perhaps that helped.

This book was a lovely introduction into a subject I knew little about and has inspired me to seek out more reading material about some of these women. I have always believed that our First Ladies are far more important and influential than most Americans want to believe. Policy is in my opinion always influenced by the families of the President because that is what families do with any human being. I loved learning a little

more about these women who stood side by side with the most important men of the last 50 years. The book was a very easy read despite the fact that it advances and retreats through time. I enjoyed learning about how these women interacted with one another and with the staff of the White House. I liked seeing how they sometimes liked and respected each other and sometimes snubbed one another. It felt real and true to life because we all act similarly at various times of our lives.
