

Eyes on First Ladies: The Power of the Press

Fine Fashions For The First Lady

By BARBARA BANCROFT
S. F. Call-Bulletin Staff Writer
Thursday, August 23, 1956

With Mamie Eisenhower beaming from a ringside table, any fashion show would become a gala affair. The Republican Fashion Platform show was gala in its own right. A beautiful show, a wonderful turnout, in the Garden Court of the Sheraton-Palace yesterday.

The gracious First Lady, who received a standing ovation before the show started, looked smart and pretty in a black ribbed gabardine suit by her favorite designer, Molly Parnis. It had a gently fitted hip-bone length jacket and pleated skirt. With it Mrs. Eisenhower wore Sally Victor's white ermine берет and ascot, pearl necklace and earrings.

The show started off with a prologue - "Hats in the Ring for Ike," with Hedda Hopper



Here's what
first lady does
with her time
after 2 years
on the job

DESERT NEWS
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WASHINGTON - Lately, Nancy Reagan has been calling the White House, not California, "home." Recent first ladies didn't make it their own, but this one wakes up in a bedroom hung with hand-painted Chinese wallpaper she picked out herself. From her mirror-topped dressing table, she can see the Washington Monument. And her beauty salon is in her chosen colors - salmon, melon and white.

Her life there has always been something of a mystery. Outsiders, and even a lot of White House aides, wonder how she spends her time. Here, culled from staff and friends, is a typical schedule:

7:45 a.m. She's awake, and sometimes has breakfast in bed. She's served whole wheat toast, grapefruit, cold cereal and decaffeinated coffee. She reads the papers, watches the morning news shows, then spends 20 minutes in her exercise room.

9:15 a.m. Elaine Crispin, her secretary, brings up her mail. The first

Fashion groupies cluck at First Lady

The Salt Lake Tribune, Sunday, February 6, 1977

WASHINGTON - Most women feel that what they wear is their own business, but what if the woman is also the First Lady?

Rosalynn Carter has made it clear that she can find more important things to talk about, and many would agree with her. But a lot more people are acting like fashion groupies, eager to savor every detail of the First Lady's wardrobe.

"I've waited six months to get a glimpse of her clothes," said one of many women who called The Post last week, wanting to know more about Mrs. Carter's fashion preferences. "I want to see them all."

The fashion industry wants to know, too. It is already pecking away at Mrs. Carter because she is bringing a sewing machine to the White House, because she wore a vintage dress to the Inaugural parties and because her clothes are not up to the minute, fashionwise.

True, none of the styles in her closets are the ones making headlines in the trade press or on the covers of the fashion slicks. Mrs. Carter's style is conservative; She likes covered up designs with raised necklines and long sleeves. Her clothes aren't particularly youthful but they don't age her either. They reveal her as she is. They are pretty and neat, comfortable and appropriate and always American made.

What she wears is likely to have little effect on the fashion industry, but that has been true of most First Ladies, with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis the obvious exception. Betty Ford was a big booster of Seventh Avenue, she visited wholesale showrooms and participated in industry events - but her style was not influential. Indeed, it was criticized by some of the so-called fashion avant garde.

Mrs. Carter's nonflamboyant style will, of course, determine what others wear to the White House. Extravagant dresses and showy jewels are not in keeping with her ways. Low-key dressing will be more appropriate. And while many of her husband's colleagues respond quickly to style changes, unadventurous fashion will be the rule for White House functions.

Despite the Carters' reluctance to hold white-tie gatherings, there will certainly be some, perhaps for leaders like King Hussein, perhaps not for others. White-tie protocol makes life easier because it eliminates the problem of choosing (i.e. second-guessing) what to wear when dining with the President. But it is clearly at odds with the Carter political image, and probably with the Carters' tastes as well.

Less formal dress has created mini-crises in the past. When French President Valerie Giscard d'Estaing and President Ford met in Martinique in . . .

The Loves of First Lady

By Roxanne Roberts
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Washington Post, Saturday, September 30, 1995

Who knew?
Fabio has a fan club, "Melrose Place" has a fan club.

But who knew Hillary had a fan club?
O ye of little faith. Ask the 11,000 members who wear the red and white "Hillary Rodham Clinton Fan Club" buttons. Ask the 41 chapter coordinators and their families at the White House yesterday afternoon.

Ask Ruth Love, 71, who founded the club three years ago with her husband, Eugene, 81. The Loves like Mrs. Clinton so much that they got teary when the first lady invited them to the podium in the East Room.

"Here we are today," said Ruth. "Men, women, children, Democrats, Republicans, independents for one overriding purpose: to tell you that we support you in your efforts to change America for the better. We admire you. We respect you. We love you."

Next Edition: A look at the use of First Ladies' images in advertising and even by the Federal Government - The Good, The Bad and The Ugly!



First Ladies as Media Celebrities

A First Lady must use the media and all its elements: newsprint, photographs, radio, television and the internet as a vehicle to promote her causes. In return, she hopes for a favorable review from media skeptics who watch her every word, her gestures, her hairstyles and clothing.

Today's media thrives on coverage of the controversial, the deviant and the dramatic. It focuses on the unusual or negative and downplays the ordinary or positive stories setting the stage for extreme criticism of the story's subject. Yet the public has come to expect some form of public activism from the First Lady and also expects the media to cover it. No matter what the cause or event, the media will focus only on what they deem important or newsworthy about the First Lady – if not completely ignoring her. Thus, First Ladies have to “work” the media to get the coverage they – as well as the public – want for their causes. First Ladies have used their fame and influence

in an attempt to make things better for the people of this nation. The contemporary list includes: Barbara Bush and illiteracy; Rosalynn Carter and mental health; Hillary Clinton and healthcare; and currently, Michelle Obama and childhood obesity. But calling attention to social concerns using media has an impressive history with First

racial and ethnic divides. All these women, and more, endured criticism and cynicism over whatever they chose to publicly endorse.

A First Ladies historian wrote, “Unless a first lady stays in the attic, she cannot win.” It is fair to say that for contemporary First Ladies even the attic cannot serve as a haven during their White House tenure. The title of “First Lady” carries a heavy symbolic burden that transcends the individual woman. From this privileged position, a First Lady can bring media attention to social injustices and causes. But

“Lying in the hospital, thinking of all those women going for cancer checkups because of me, I’d come to recognize more clearly the power of the woman in the White House. Not my power, but the power of the position, a power which could be used to help.”

First Lady Betty Ford

Ladies: Florence Harding and war veterans; Grace Coolidge and people with disabilities; Lou Hoover and women’s physical fitness; and the remarkable Eleanor Roosevelt and the

to get the attention she wants, a First Lady has to do all that she can to garner the media’s favor – not an easy task in today’s highly competitive, “do anything for the scoop” media world.

What is in a Name?

We all know that calling people names is hurtful. Public awareness of the devastating effect bullying has on children receives much media attention today. Yet Americans have a long tradition of attaching nicknames to people that can be either affectionate or derogatory.

Presidential nicknames are historically more amicable than those attached to First Ladies. George Washington will always be the “Father of Our Country.” Bravery in military service helped the winning political campaigns of “Old Tippecanoe” William Henry Harrison and “Old Rough and Ready” Zachary Taylor.

First Ladies have not been given many kind tag names through the years. “Sahara” Sara Polk and “Lemonade” Lucy Hayes were dubbed for their stance on refusing to serve alcohol at the White House. Jane Pierce, aka “The Shadow



“Lemonade Lucy” cartoon

in the White House,” was criticized by the press for her excessive mourning of her only son shortly before her First Lady tenure began. Pat Nixon’s stoic and dignified support of her husband through the Watergate scandal labeled her as “Plastic Pat.”

In more recent times, a First Lady who demonstrated power or influence over the president seemed to threaten the media’s unwritten rules regarding how much authority a First Lady should possess in her husband’s administration. Rosalynn Carter was christened the “Steel Magnolia,” Nancy Reagan was marked as the “Iron Dragon,” and Hillary Clinton was portrayed as “Lady Macbeth.” If name calling is a form of bullying, it is not only found in schools, but also in the workplace and attached to people in media headlines. First Ladies are not immune to the stigma attached to a name, nor to the public pain it can bring.

All Dressed Up as First Lady

If “the clothes make the woman,” then First Ladies rank at the top. Media has a long history of commenting on the First Lady’s appearance. Last year, during the second televised presidential debates both candidates’ wives, First Lady Michelle Obama and Ann Romney, sat in the audience listening to their husbands. They both looked lovely wearing bright pink outfits. The media had a field day comparing “who wore it better?” and “who



accessorized it better?”

A First Lady’s fashion-sense and style has always been seen as fair game for the media. The color of Martha Washington’s gowns held significance to the newly democratic country.

No color or manner of dress that suggested royalty would be tolerated. As the country went through the Victorian Age when a woman was rarely seen and definitely not heard, the description of the First Lady’s outfit was often the only acknowledgement of her presence in the press. The invention of the photograph captured the eye-candy of beautiful details on a First Lady’s formal gown and made it even more noteworthy.

First Ladies can set the style for the country. Michelle Obama’s toned bare arms might raise eyebrows, but the bright color-block dresses, crop-sweaters and flashy accessories she’s made popular are all the rage in clothing stores. As the young and wildly admired First Lady of the 19th century, Frances Cleveland’s fashions were copied throughout the country. In the summer of 1888, a newspaper reported that Mrs. Cleveland no longer wore the fashionable bustle under her skirts. The following fall, the

unsuspecting First Lady went to her dressmaker and requested a skirt with a bustle. The dressmaker informed Frances of the report that she no longer wore one, leaving the First Lady to feel she had no choice but to bow to the press’s pressure. Another First Lady and fashion icon,



Jacqueline Kennedy, turned the fashion industry upside down throughout the world. No well-heeled American woman could be seen without her pill-box hat. Jackie had the rare magic of making any style of clothing look good, no matter how dressed up or down she appeared in photographs.

There is no getting away from the comments made about a First Lady and her wardrobe and it seems everyone has an opinion. But the First Lady’s clothes are as individual as the woman; an outward expression of how she views herself and how the world sees her.

This exhibit is made possible by the following institutions:

“60 Minutes” Courtesy BBC Motion Gallery - Education

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TOURS

All tours are guided and include both the changing exhibits at the Education & Research Center and the Saxton McKinley House, the restored Victorian home of First Lady Ida McKinley. Tours begin at the Education & Research Center and last approximately 1 1/2 hours.

Tour Hours: Tuesday - Saturday at 9:30 & 10:30 a.m. and 12:30, 1:30 & 2:30 p.m. plus Sundays in June, July & August at 12:30, 1:30 & 2:30 p.m.

Reservations are required for groups of six or more, recommended for all others. Admission: \$7 adults, \$6 seniors, \$5 children under 18 - includes both buildings; \$3 Education & Research Center only.

Free parking. Buses welcome!



First Ladies National Historic Site

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205 Market Avenue S

Saxton McKinley House
331 Market Avenue S
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