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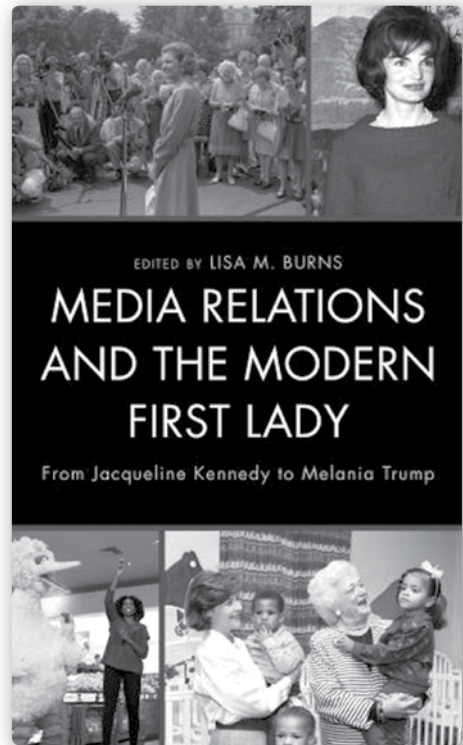
Lisa M. Burns (Ed.)

**MEDIA RELATIONS AND THE MODERN FIRST LADY FROM
JACQUELINE KENNEDY TO MELANIA TRUMP**

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The ability to communicate successfully and effectively was always one of the most desirable competencies of humankind. Successful and effective communication is much more than just talking and listening. A quality dialogue between two or more equal individuals who openly exchange their thoughts, views, emotions, feelings correlates differences or similarities into a different whole. We experience the world in a different light when we capture another opinion. Communication is not possible without mutual respect, honesty, patience, and tolerance.

Throughout American history, the Institution of the First Lady was ever-changing, contributed by various social conditions such as wars, famine, fighting for human rights, press and radio-TV development, technological boom, and digitalization. Every First Lady brought a new way of performing her role. Throughout history, the First Lady was always under the media microscope followed in every step she took and often felt safe inside the White House as that



was the only place where she felt non-prosecuted. Many of them refused to communicate with the media, yet others enjoyed being in the spotlight.

A historical journey that would take a more detailed strategy of the First Lady's communication with media

throughout American history was described by Lisa M. Burns and 15 other authors in *Media Relations and The Modern First Lady*, from Jackie Kennedy to Melania Trump. The strategies varied how the First Lady performed in front of the media and provided information. Some organized tea parties, other invited journalists on yacht sailing, organized trips, others press conferences, and some just withdrew from media life.

With the development of the industry, women began to secure a better position in society. They became more educated and maintained permanent jobs. Their mass involvement in the community provided some turbulent changes, and the role of the First Lady was no exception.

From a static iconic figure, a faithful companion, an implementer of ideas to active political participation. These activities intensified throughout the development of the Institution of the First Lady and general society itself. Each of the First Ladies had their specific characteristics that shaped her unique form and became a role model to women across the globe. However, how the media portrays her uniqueness in public does not depend entirely on herself, but a group of her employees who shape her qualifications and interests into institutional needs. Each of them chose their strategy for public appearance.

Jackie Kennedy was the first who expanded her staff and hired a press

secretary whose field of expertise became the media. Her job was to prepare the First Lady in learning strategies of communication in public to information between the First Lady and journalists. Despite Kennedy's controversial lifestyle, Jackie remained a well-liked media star, radiating Hollywood fame. A historical tragedy that ended her husband's life pushed the role of the First Lady in the hands of Lady Bird Johnson, officially known as Claudia Alta Taylor Johnson.

Lady Bird Johnson set a milestone in the work of the press secretary. She hired journalist Elisabeth Carpenter, a professional person in this position. By the time she served as a second Lady of the United States, she had experience in media exposure. Together with Elizabeth, they developed excellent planning strategies establishing friendly relations with journalists and were very successful in the most turbulent time of her husband's presidency. She put her ideas into environmental projects and restored many parks across America besides fighting against poverty and civil rights programs.

Pat Nixon assumed the position of Lady Bird Johnson. She hired three women responsible for media relations and the development of communication strategies. At the beginning, the media defined Mrs. Nixon as Lady of handshakes and hugs. During her time, she made documentaries from her solo trips and visited the wounded in Vietnam

nourishing the awareness of the importance of volunteering. Granted that she assumed this role during the sexual revolution, the media described her as too passive because she didn't interfere in her husband's political agenda and received the ungrateful nickname the "Plastic Lady".

After the Watergate affair, Betty Ford replaced Pat Nixon, who had no pre-planned agenda, no staff, and without a roll-out of a White House initiative. Betty Ford employed Helen Smith, the former First Lady's secretary. Betty soon went to the hospital and publicly spoke about her breast cancer. Betty Ford was known for her direct, reckless, but honest answers. She advocated for the Equal Rights Amendment but was not successful in lobbying for its ratification. Betty gained a great deal of respect from the media as they have never reported her alcohol issues. She earned that by acting sincerely and honestly, even if it was against her husband's political agenda.

Rosalyn Carter inherited the position of First Lady and was named "Steel Magnolia", and was a close confidante advisor of her husband. Before hiring Marry Finch Hoyt as her press secretary, she performed in front of the reporters in her cold presence without a sense of humor and was far away from the traditional role. She would bring a list of questions to the reporters and provide answers if they considered interviewing her. The media didn't know where to find a place for her in the news.

They portrayed Rosalyn as torn by the ambiguity of politics. After hiring Hoyt, things changed. Together they developed a strategy showing the media her gentle side, feminine warmth, and affection and continued advising her husband on political agendas. Her projects focused on mental care issues that weren't popular enough for the media to report. She and her husband didn't receive enough media attention to win the next election.

Nancy Reagan replaced Rosalyn as the First Lady and assumed the role of First Lady during the recession, in which she endured a difficult time as the country was struggling. The first time around, she was nicknamed "Queen Nancy", in her second mandate, she was known as the "Bosses Wife". Nancy Reagan had no previous media experience connected to Washington. The media described Nancy as a shallow, money-spending First Lady. Over time, her relationship with the reporters vastly improved. However, she got criticized for over influencing the establishment. Her press secretary helped Nancy to show her sense of humor, thus allowing the media to humanize her. Nancy showed great passion in her project of involving grandparents in fostering children with special needs. She also fought against drug consumption amongst children. However, she dramatically changed shortly after the suffering of her husband. Nancy brought an astrologer to the White House as an advisor and got in conflict with Ron-

ald's administration. She demanded Ronald fire them. However, the astrologer left the White House.

Barbara Bush replaced Nancy as the First Lady after the media brought to light the scandal in which the US government was involved and selling weapons to Iran in exchange for prisoner release. Barbara instilled a new, postmodern wind to the White House. She hired the first African American press secretary Ana Perez. Soon after, Barbara became a famous "super granny" with a great sense of humor. She fought for American literacy, supported her husband, but didn't interfere in his political agenda.

Hillary Clinton was the polar opposite, she got entangled in numerous scandals, and her press secretary Lisa Caputo had a tremendous amount of work. Hillary kept pushing the boundaries of the First Lady Institution and allowed successors to be involved in the political agenda.

After the 9/11 attack, Laura Bush placed herself in a position where she had to take the media role herself instead of her husband as she was more suitable for this role. Although she already had many literacy programs, she engaged in the literacy of Afghan women and enjoyed a great deal of success for her work, and received positive media attention.

Michelle Obama is a historical figure in the First Lady Institution. It was the first time that an African American woman was in this position. As the author stated, media praised and welcomed very educated Michelle. She named herself "Mom in Chief". In cooperation with her press secretary she popularizes the role of the first lady through the social network and other media and connects with the followers.

On the other hand, Melania Trump was the first migrant assuming this position. Melania was at war with journalists and the media itself. She was known by the nickname "Bullied Pulpit" and "The Eye of a Tiger". In the view of the author Melania was more concerned about her public appearance, rather than her communication skills and the message that she was supposed to communicate to the audience.

Each of the First Ladies had their strategies how to connect with the media. Some of them gained the attention they required and deserved, and some did not. This book describes the principles and strategies that developed their communication skills. I would recommend it to anyone involved in political and international diplomacy as it contains valuable examples and good practices.