

# Never the Oval Office? From Eleanor Roosevelt to Michelle Obama—First Ladies and Their Social and Feminist Agenda

ASJ DOI 10.18422/62-07

by Martina Kohl

Prompted by the 2016 elections in the United States, women's prospects in U.S. politics have received renewed attention among scholars and politically interested circles. Hillary Clinton, without any doubt one of the—if not *the* most qualified candidates for the Presidency ever, suffered an unexpected defeat on November 9th. Polls, experts, and the candidates were taken by surprise. Only in hindsight do critics claim to have known all along that Hillary Clinton's defeat might have been foreseeable. As a former First Lady, Hillary Clinton belongs to a group of women in U.S. politics that at least have made it into the White House—though not as an elected representative of the administration. As different as these women have been, they all have one thing in common: the chance to shape policy.

## Introduction

- 1 Prompted by the 2016 elections in the United States, women's prospects in U.S. politics have received renewed attention among scholars and politically interested circles. Hillary Clinton, without any doubt one of the—if not *the* most qualified candidates for the Presidency ever, suffered an unexpected defeat on November 9th. Polls, experts, and the candidates were taken by surprise. Only in hindsight do critics claim to have known all along that Hillary Clinton's defeat might have been foreseeable. As a former First Lady, Hillary Clinton belongs to a group of women in U.S. politics that at least have made it into the White House—though not as an elected representative of the administration. As different as these women have been, they all have one thing in common: the chance to shape policy.
- 2 Via the iconic First Lady, this paper will approach the following questions:
  - Why is it so difficult in the U.S. for a female to become president?
  - What role does gender stereotyping play in keeping the 'glass ceiling'<sup>[1]</sup> in place?
  - How does the question of race add to this already complicated discussion, especially when analyzing the role of Michelle Obama?
- 3 By doing so, I would like to provide a possible model for addressing our own perceptions, hidden biases and expectation of leadership in the classroom. I will concentrate on the modern First Ladies to show what they brought to the White House in terms of skills, connections, and political goals to support their husbands' policies, but also to push their own agenda within certain constraints. This paper will explore the boundaries set for – or by them, boundaries they negotiated and tested.
- 4 The "husband's agenda," negotiating boundaries—all this has negative connotations, and yet here is how Michelle Obama described her understanding of the role of the First Lady in a 2016 interview:

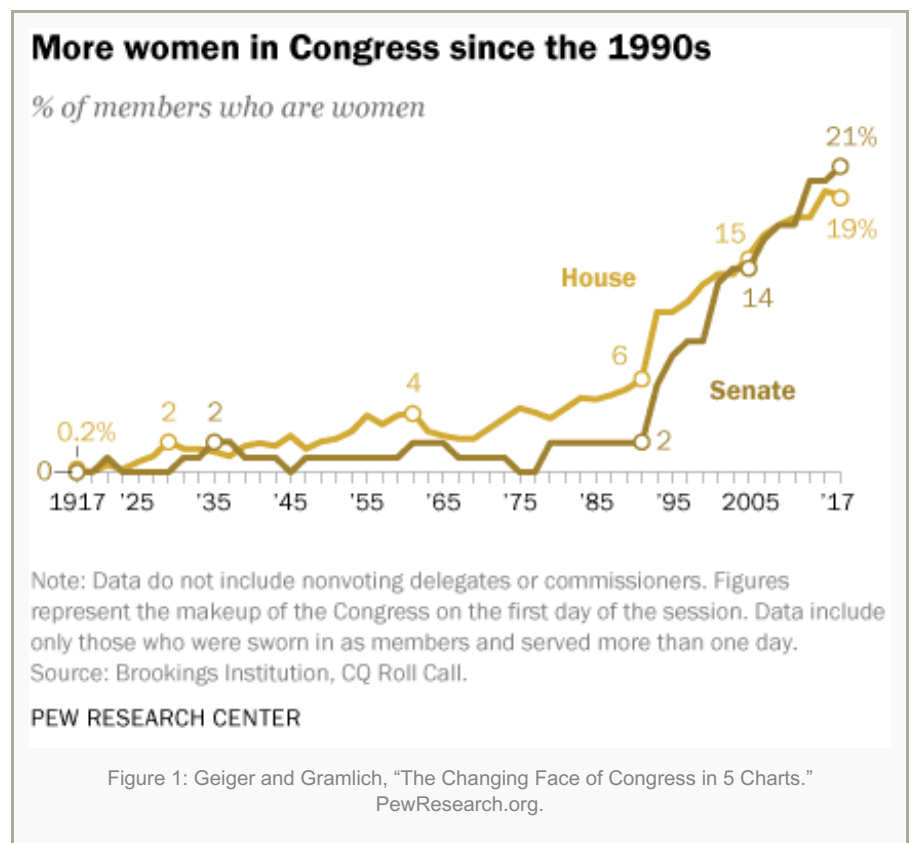
Everything we do is by *choice*, [...] I could have spent eight years doing anything, and *at some level*, it would have been fine. I could have focused on flowers. I could have focused on decor. I could have focused on entertainment. Because any First lady, *rightfully*, gets to define her role. There's no legislative authority; you're not elected. And that's a wonderful *gift of freedom*. (qtd. in Van Meter, emphases mine)

We will return to this quote.

## Women in Politics

- 5 A quick assessment of women's political engagement beyond U.S. politics shows that over 70 countries have had female heads of State, but never the United States of America. To be fair, Angela Merkel is Germany's first female Chancellor, and the U.K. has only the second female Prime Minister with Theresa May in a long history of parliamentary representation.<sup>[2]</sup> As journalist Ezra Klein pointed out in his June 2016 article, "America has hosted 56 presidential elections—33 of them before women received the right to vote. Exactly zero of those elections featured a female nominee from one of the two major political parties."
- 6 Women, in general, are still underrepresented in the American political landscape. Even the 2016 election has not changed that picture:

A gradual increase in the 1980s promised a more equal representation, and the 1990s actually showed a peak in women seeking political office. Since then the numbers have not increased but remained fairly steady (Lawless and Fox 1). It is interesting that the PEW study almost celebrates these numbers as an all-time high (which they are); yet the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University has a much more somber assessment: stagnation. All in all, representation on all levels in the U.S. seems to vary between 20 and 25 percent ("Current Numbers").



- 7 A much quoted study by Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox for the Women and Politics Institute published in 2012 provides some answers on why these numbers are still relatively low. The study shows that, to the author's own surprise, "women perform as well as men when they run for office. In terms of fundraising and vote totals, the consensus among researchers is the absence of overt gender bias on Election Day" (2). In the voting booth, voters tend to vote the party line, and not so much for a specific candidate. As Lawless and Fox conclude, not enough women run for office in the first place: "There is a substantial gender gap in political ambition; men tend to have it, and women don't. And the gender gap in ambition is persistent and unchanging" (3).
- 8 One of the challenges female candidates encounter is that leadership is still associated with masculinity. Journalist Rebecca Traister, who was shadowing Hillary Clinton on the campaign trail during the primaries in the spring of 2016, tried to figure out what "charisma" or "magnetism" conjure up in the minds of the voters. She asked: "Can a woman appeal to the country in the same way we are used to men doing it?" And if not, what does that mean for our voting behavior? She wonders

[1]f, as in this election, a man who spews hate and vulgarity, with no comprehension of

how government works, can become presidentially plausible because he is magnetic while a capable, workaholic woman who knows policy inside and out struggles because she is not magnetic, perhaps we should reevaluate magnetism's importance. It's worth asking to what degree charisma, as we have defined it, is a masculine trait. [...] Though those on both the right and the left moan about "woman cards," it would be impossible, and dishonest, to not recognize gender as a central, defining, complicated, and often invisible force in this election. It is one of the factors that shaped Hillary Clinton, and it is one of the factors that shapes how we respond to her. Whatever your feelings about Clinton herself, this election raises important questions about how we define leadership in this country, how we feel about women who try to claim it, flawed though they may be.

## The Role of the First Lady

- 9 Until this past year, voters in the U.S. were used to seeing women in the presidential campaign mainly as spouses of male candidates, the "supporting actress" role. Journalist Scarlet Neath in the *Atlantic* describes her role as follows:

Serving as First Lady [...] is an unpaid role in which a woman is expected to manage a staff—in recent terms it has been of around 15 people—and perform duties as both the White House hostess and champion of some cause, usually related to women or children. Because there has never been a female president, vice president, or even chief of staff, it's the most prominent and public office in the West Wing that a woman has held. Outlining and acknowledging the work that the presidential spouse is expected to do would help to mitigate the disproportionate criticism faced by any woman who occupies this office.

- 10 Scarlet Neath believes the role of the First Lady should be more clearly defined to counter harsh criticism. This contradicts what Michelle Obama described as the freedom each first lady has, and should have, in defining her role. This also raises a question of what is traditionally expected of a candidate's spouse and eventually of the First Lady herself. Here is a ten-point list (cf. Lowen):

1. Serve as a Supportive Helpmate
2. Tell Her Husband's Story
3. Assume the Traditional Feminine Role
4. Never Put Herself Forward as One Half of a "Two-fer"
5. Emphasize Her Importance as Wife, Mother
6. Appear Warm, Friendly and Approachable
7. Maintain Her Dignity
8. Be Modest in Dress and Behavior
9. Practice Philanthropy and Charity
10. Give Up Her Life to Fulfill Her Husband's Political Destiny

- 11 Compare this to how scholar MaryAnne Borrelli defines attributes of the "commander-in-chief [...] [who] literally embodies the nation's interest" and does so through "traits attributed to masculinity in western European traditions. These include self-reliance, autonomy, competitiveness, and ambition" (pos. 77). Presidential historian Robert Dallek's description of what makes a successful president extends the list of attributes: "While vision, pragmatism, consensus-building, charisma, and trustworthiness may be considered discrete categories, they are in fact inextricably linked: each of these political practices

connects to and builds upon the other.” So, while “self-reliance, autonomy, competitiveness, and ambition” seem to be the prerequisites for becoming elected, they are not enough, according to Dallek’s list, to become a successful president. What Dallek is leaving out in his astute assessment is the one person closest to the president who has a hand in how successful his tenure turns out to be: the First Lady.

- 12 If the role of the First Lady is clearly to support her husband’s hopefully successful presidency without taking up too much of the stage (which she would do if she appeared to be too self-reliant, autonomous, competitive, and ambitious), how does she negotiate the role of the clearly feminine representation of the personal side of the presidency, while being a political wife at the same time who is venturing into the public sphere?

## **Categorizing First Ladies**

- 13 First Ladies are partners who share the president’s private life, raise his children and thus are seen as somebody who can vouch for his character. They give testimony to his credibility and integrity. But First Ladies have also been active policy advisors, campaigners and speech writers. How have they been negotiating these sometimes conflicting roles, especially in the eye of the public? We can divide modern First Ladies roughly into three groups (cf. Borrelli ch. 1).
- 14 First Ladies that saw their public-sphere work as an “extension of the private-sphere commitments,” who campaigned as “loyal wives and mothers, stressing their familial roles and downplaying their partisanship” (Borrelli pos. 102) are, e.g., Nancy Reagan, Barbara Pierce Bush, Laura Bush. All of them were politically engaged trying to effect social change, yet they did not try to affect legislation. Nancy Reagan, e.g., conducted a major media campaign against drug abuse (“Just Say No”).
- 15 On the other side of the spectrum are the First Ladies who affected legislative change, who lobbied actively and forcefully for their goals, among them Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosalyn Carter, and Hillary Clinton. All three decided to leave the private sphere and engage in the public sphere by taking formal positions in their husband’s administrations. They developed and brought to the White House a professional expertise and testified before Congress to achieve their legislative goals. They came prepared. By doing so, they challenged views associated with the “supporting actress” role of the First Lady. Rosalynn Carter, e.g., chaired the President’s Commission on Mental health and testified before Congress in support of its recommendations.
- 16 Finally, there are First Ladies acting somewhat in the middle between the public and private sphere who concentrated on ‘traditional’ social (feminine) issues and took them carefully into the public sphere. These First Ladies are, e.g., Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson, Pat Nixon, Betty Ford and Michelle Obama who lead a media campaign to improve children’s health and nutrition and pushed international girls’ advocacy programs.
- 17 Some of these women have been evaluated in terms of job performance and successfully serving their country. The Siena College Research Institute, C-SPAN and The White House Historical Association issued the fifth comprehensive study (in 31 years) of the First Ladies of the United States in 2014. The survey questions historians (cf. First Lady Study). Eleanor Roosevelt is ranked at the top in six of the categories: Background, Value to the Country, Leadership, Being Her Own Woman, Accomplishments and Courage. Hillary Clinton is the clear choice of scholars as the First Lady they could most imagine serving as President, garnering more than twice the support of Eleanor Roosevelt with Michelle Obama a distant third.
- 18 This list of initiatives is quite diverse, but it shows that First Ladies claim the ‘soft’ issues such as education, health, women’s advancement and communication with the public. ‘Soft,’ of course, does not mean less important than ‘hard’ foreign or economic policy. But that is not the job of the First Lady since, obviously, she is not elected—and not paid. This implies restriction, and at the same time freedom. A few examples of First Ladies and their accomplishments illustrate this point.

## The President's *Ears, Eyes and Legs*: Eleanor Roosevelt (1933–1945)

- 19 One First Lady stands out as probably the most progressive in a way, emancipated, and successful of all: Eleanor Roosevelt, the niece of former president Teddy Roosevelt and wife of Franklin D. Roosevelt, a distant cousin.
- 20 A prolific writer, author of several books, a daily column, and a radio show host before her husband even started his famous fireplace talks, Eleanor Roosevelt is the measure of all who have come after her. In 1933, she was the first First Lady to hold her own press conference. In an attempt to afford equal time to women, who were traditionally barred from presidential press conferences, she allowed only female reporters to attend. When in 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused to allow Marion Anderson, an African American opera singer, to perform in their auditorium, Ms. Roosevelt publicly resigned her membership in the DAR. During the war years, she served as Assistant Director of Civilian Defense from 1941 to 1942. She visited England and the South Pacific in support of the troops and the Allies.
- 21 Eleanor Roosevelt had a full career after her husband's death in 1945 and continued her public life. President Truman appointed her to the United States delegation for the first United Nations assembly in London, where she helped write the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1953, Ms. Roosevelt resigned from this post so that incoming Republican President Dwight Eisenhower could fill the position with an appointee of his own choosing. She volunteered her services to the American Association for the U.N., and became an American representative to the World Federation of the U.N. Associations and later the chair of the Associations' Board of Directors. In 1961, President Kennedy reappointed Ms. Roosevelt to the United States Delegation to the U.N. and later to the National Advisory Committee of the Peace Corps and chair of the President's Commission on the Status of Women.<sup>[3]</sup>

- 22 But how do we



Eleanor Roosevelt and President John F. Kennedy, March 1, 1961. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum. Photo ID 63116.

remember this powerful woman? The President's *Ears, Eyes and Legs* is what even admirers remember

first and the title of this chapter alludes to. And, yet, it suggests the First Lady simply to be an extension of her husband, Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose movements were limited due to having attracted polio at the age of 39.

## Two for One—or Not? Hillary Rodham Clinton 1992–2000

- 23 Hillary Clinton has volunteered or served in public offices her entire adult life. She is a graduate of Wellesley College, where she was part of the school government and became known to a wider public when she delivered the graduation speech in which she said: “The challenge now is to practice politics as the art of making what appears to be impossible, possible.”<sup>[4]</sup>
- 24 She served on the Board of Editors of Yale Law Review and Social Action. Her interest in children’s advocacy has been part of her life ever since. She advised the Children’s Defense Fund in Cambridge and joined the Nixon impeachment inquiry staff advising the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives. After marrying Bill Clinton in 1975, she joined the faculty of the University of Arkansas Law School and the Rose Law Firm in 1976. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter appointed her to the board of the Legal Services Corporation. Hillary served as Arkansas’s First Lady for twelve years, balancing family, law, and public service. In Arkansas, she chaired the Educational Standards Committee, co-founded the Advocates for Children and Families, and served on the boards of the Children’s Hospital, Legal Services, and the Children’s Defense Fund. She, too, was an expert with explicit political agenda when her husband was elected president in 1992.
- 25 As First Lady, the first action she took was a symbolic one, following in the footsteps of Rosalynn Carter who had moved the First Lady’s office from the private quarters into the office space in the East Wing. She
- established an office in the West Wing which provides closer access to the center of power
  - connected her work closely and visibly with the President’s: her Chief of Staff additional/new title is also Assistant to the President who attends President’s senior staff meetings
  - headed the President’s Task Force on Health Care Reform (fails in 1995, but raises consciousness)
  - initiated the Children’s Health Insurance Program in 1997
  - strongly supports issues of women’s health and equality;
  - stressed that “women’s rights are human rights”: Locally and globally advocates gender equity in economics, employment, health care and education (U.N. Conf. 1995)
  - initiated the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997
- 26 Just like Eleanor Roosevelt, Hillary Clinton continued public life after the two-term Clinton presidency, became a two-time Senator of the State of New York, Secretary of State in the first Obama administration and eventually ran for her party’s nomination losing to Obama in 2008, got nominated in 2016 and ran a very close race against Donald Trump. She won the popular vote by almost three million votes. And, yet, she did not make it into the Oval Office. We can debate various reasons like: her time would have been in 2008; not another Clinton (or Bush), approval ratings, etc. but this would go way beyond the scope of what this paper can address. Instead, let’s draw attention to how Clinton was perceived as a politician, how language shaped that perception, and how this might have influenced voters on November 8. There are numerous examples, but late night show host Jimmy Kimmel’s “mansplaining” presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s supposed shortcomings captures it very well:
- “Jimmy Kimmel Mansplains to Hillary Clinton.” *Jimmy Kimmel Live*. Youtube. 24 Mar. 2016.

Maybe Hillary Clinton’s handicap was that she distributed traits such as “self-reliance, autonomy, competitiveness, and ambition” (Dallek) which critics interpreted as arrogance and aloofness.

# Negotiating First Lady Expectations and Race: Michelle Obama 2008–2016

27 Let's return to Michelle Obama's quote from the beginning:

Everything we do is by choice, [...] I could have spent eight years doing anything, and at some level, it would have been fine. I could have focused on flowers. I could have focused on decor. I could have focused on entertainment. Because any First lady, rightfully, gets to define her role. There's no legislative authority; you're not elected. And that's a wonderful gift of freedom. (qtd. in Van Meter)

28 She knew whatever she would do, some people would criticize her. Michelle Obama was a reluctant First Lady in the beginning. She fully understood the meaning of the first black president and the first black family in the White House. A descendent of slaves, she even commented on the historic implications for her family, her children, and black Americans, drawing a lot of criticism throughout her eight years as First Ladies, especially from conservative sources citing "the growing list of unpatriotic sentiments she has uttered since she first began campaigning for her husband during the 2008 presidential election" (qtd. in Borchers).

29 Michelle Obama, the Harvard trained lawyer, raised expectations, especially among women. White feminists looked toward her as a self-assured, professional woman who would further women's agenda. Yet, she became, predominantly, the "Mom-in-Chief"—a fall back to the 1950s or 60s? Black women and the feminists among them saw this role in a different light. As Melanye Price, Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University stressed: "What black woman, ever, had had the choice; the choice to be a stay-home mom; to concentrate on social and philanthropic engagements; to counter numerous stereotypes associated with black womanhood?"

30 Coincidence or not, stereotypes associated with the black woman have been recently featured and annotated by female artists at the Alexandria Museum of Art.

Since the antebellum era, the concept of Black female strength has posed a challenge to ideas of femininity and race. While certainly providing an image of power, the Strong Black Woman role model demands an impossible standard of female behavior; she must eternally be hard-working, long-suffering, ethical, sassy, sexy, and self-reliant. Stories of Black women's limitless capacity to nurture others, their willingness to sacrifice for family, their unswerving loyalty, and boundless Earth Mother sexuality abound within historical and contemporary cultural lore. ("Beyond Mammy")

31 Michelle Obama transcended these stereotypes by being herself: smart, warm, funny, sexy, supportive, caring, active, strong, a woman who never lost touch with where she came from, with the historical significance of her being in the White House, but not accepting it as a burden (which would have been suffering), but as an opportunity. A long and in-depth interview Ms. Obama gave for Vogue in November 2016 describes how she grew into her role as First Lady:

She declared herself "Mom in chief" and "took on issues like support for military families and healthy eating."

"It was pooh-poohed as a sort of soft swing at the ball," she says .

She launched two ambitious education initiatives during the second term of Obama's presidency "Reach Higher and Let Girls Learn—and over the past year and a half finding

her métier, turning herself into the First lady of Popular Culture, mastering social media. [...] Somewhere along the way, she became the greatest political communicator of our time—better than Bill Clinton, better than her husband—someone whose speeches actually start national conversations. (Van Meter)

32 Michelle Obama masterfully made use of popular culture to reach a young audience and interest them in her campaign for *Let Girls Learn*. She joined James Corden in a car karaoke and, as the *Vogue* interview stated, “basically charming the pants off of everyone.” But she was using the medium to send a message: boys and girls—get involved.

“First Lady Michelle Obama Carpool Karaoke.” *The Late Late Show with James Corden*. Youtube. 20 July 2016.

33 The Obama years were eight years in the White House without any scandals. Michelle Obama was instrumental in creating eight years full of dignity, respect for the office of the President, the White House as the symbolic heart and home of the American nation open to all Americans, and eight years of fun as well. As Melanye Price pointed out: “The Obamas are still young! They have teenage daughters.”

34 Michelle Obama strongly guarded the privacy of her family, yet, like Eleanor Roosevelt, she knew how to make use of the media to further her political goals. She encountered criticism, of course, in her advocacy on behalf of children’s health and education, and yet, she left the White House with approval ratings of 68 percent. Her strong speeches on behalf of Hillary Clinton’s candidacy (“I’m With Her”) have become legendary and made quite a number of Democrats entertain the idea of ‘Michelle Obama 2020’!

## Application to Classroom Work: A Few Thoughts

35 To sum it all up: Why talk about the First Ladies when their role has been and still is so unique? What do we do with this material?

36 By training the eye and the ears to look at the portrayal of female politicians or leaders more critically, we help students reflect on gender roles as well as their own choices when running or voting for student representation, analyzing texts, applying for a job, discussing politics. Campaign videos, interviews, speeches, social media clips all offer brief, authentic materials for classroom analysis and discussion.

37 Role play depicting a scene set in politics or, a bit closer to home, classroom interaction, could result from that.

38 March is Women’s History Month: Why not take the current (or past) President’s proclamation and research the occasion and the women mentioned, find out who they are, what their impact has been, and how they have been viewed and described in the media. There is one First Lady mentioned in the 2017 proclamation: Abigail Adams, the wife of John Adams, second U.S. President.

39 Social media postings and tweets reflecting racial slurs especially referring to Michelle Obama or any other celebrity can serve as a Basis for discussion of students’ social media behavior. It empowers boys and girls if we understand our own hidden biases, those displayed in the media or displayed in everyday encounters, impact our daily lives. Looking at the First Ladies, how the way we see them has changed over the decades, how media are judging them (sometimes censoring them), and what that tells us about how we see women in public life: all this opens up possibilities to address stereotyping and gender biases.

40 Talking about first ladies enables us to

- analyze power structures
- evaluate the portrayal of women in the public sphere



- reflect upon gender roles and hidden biases
- develop media literacy/using multiple sources and text types
- empower girls and boys to challenge gender (and race) stereotyping

## Notes

[1] A metaphor coined by feminists in reference to barriers in the careers of women.

[2] For a full list, see [Wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org).

[3] For biographical detail on Roosevelt and other first ladies, see the [National First Ladies' Library](https://www.nationalfirstladieslibrary.org), Web 26 Feb. 2017.

[4] For a transcript and video of the speech, see [Wellesley College's website](https://www.wellesley.edu), Web 26 Feb. 2017.

## Works Cited

"Beyond Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire: Reclaiming Images of Black Women." Alexandria Museum of Art. [Exhibit Announcement](#). 2 Dec. 2016–18 Feb 2017. Web. 5 July 2017.

Borchers, Callum. "How the Media Covered Michelle Obama's 'House That Was Built by Slaves' Line." [Washington Post](#). 26 July 2016. Web. 5 July 2017.

Borrelli, MaryAnne. *The Politics of the President's Wife*. Joseph V. Hughes Jr. and Holly O. Hughes Series on the Presidency and Leadership. Texas A & M University Press. August 15, 2011. Kindle edition. Joseph V. Hughes Jr. and Holly O. Hughes Ser. on the Presidency and Leadership.

"Current Numbers. Women in Elective Office 2017." [Center for American Women and Politics \(CAWP\)](#). Rutgers Eagleton Institute of Politics. Web. 5 July 2017.

Dallek, Robert. "Hail to the Chief: The Making and Unmaking of American President." What Makes A Good President. [Frontline](#). Pbs.org. 12 Oct. 2004. Web. 5 July 2017.

"Eleanor Roosevelt." [National First Ladies' Library](#). n.d. Web. 5 July 2017.

"The First Ladies Study." [Siena College Research Institute](#). Siena College. n.d. Web. 5 July 2017.

"First Lady Michelle Obama Carpool Karaoke." [The Late Late Show with James Corden](#). Youtube. 20 July 2016. Web. 5 July 2017.

Geiger, Abigail, and John Gramlich. "The Changing Face of Congress in 5 Charts." [Pew Research Center](#). 2 Feb. 2017. Web. 5 July 2017.

"Hillary D. Rodham's 1969 Student Commencement Speech." [Wellesley College](#). n.d. Web. 5 July 2017.

"Jimmy Kimmel Mansplains to Hillary Clinton." [Jimmy Kimmel Live](#). Youtube. 24 Mar. 2016 Web. 5 July 2017.

Klein, Ezra. "It's Time to Admit Hillary Clinton Is an Extraordinarily Talented Politician." [Vox](#). 7 June 2016. Web. 5 July 2017.

Lawless, Jennifer L., and Richard L. Fox. "Men Rule. The Continued Under-Representation of Women in U.S. Politics." Washington, DC: Women & Politics Institute. Jan. 2012. PDF.

Lowen, Linda. "What Do We Want in the Candidate's Wife? How a First Lady Should Look and Act: He May Be Running, But She's Scrutinized, Burdened by Expectations and Criticism." *ThoughtCo*. 16 Feb. 2016. Web. 5 July 2017.

McCarthy, Justin. "President Obama Leaves White House With 58% Favorable Rating." *Gallup*. 16 Jan. 2017. Web. 5 July 2017.

Neath, Scarlet. "What's the Point of a First Lady?" *The Atlantic*. 6 Oct. 2014. Web. 5 July 2017.

Price, Melanye. Personal interview. Berlin. 9 Feb. 2017.

Traister, Rebecca. "Hillary Clinton vs. Herself. There's nothing Simple about This Candidacy—or Candidate." *New York Magazine*. 30 May 2016. Web. 5 July 2017.

Van Meter, Jonathan. "Michelle Obama: A Candid Conversation with America's Champion and Mother in Chief." *Vogue Magazine*. 11 Nov. 2016. Web. 5 July 2017.

## Author

Dr. **Martina Kohl** is a Cultural Affairs Specialist at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin, Germany, where she coordinates a Germany-wide speaker and curriculum development program in American Studies. She holds an M.A. and a Dr. Phil. in American Studies, English Studies and History from Johannes-Gutenberg University Mainz. Dr. Kohl studied at Florida Southern College (1980-81) and taught and conducted research at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (1985-90). In 2013, she received the Hans Eberhard Piepho Prize for the U.S. Embassy School Election Project and the "Ausgezeichnete Orte – Land der Ideen" Award for the Going Green – Education for Sustainability Project in 2015. Dr. Kohl frequently teaches in the American Studies program at Humboldt University Berlin. She serves on the advisory board of the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association (SSASA) and is Deputy Executive Editor of the American Studies Journal (ASJ).

## Suggested Citation

Kohl, Martina. "Never the Oval Office? From Eleanor Roosevelt to Michelle Obama—First Ladies and Their Social and Feminist Agenda." *American Studies Journal* 62 (2017). Web. 15 July 2017.  
DOI 10.18422/62-07.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/).