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Introduction

Presidential administrations have historically been credited with the shaping of American politics and culture – and rightly so; their programs and policies, with congressional aid, typically reflect popular political sentiment. While the position of chief executive is certainly not unimportant, the president’s persona is not the only figure within the executive branch that merits historical analysis. Because the revered Office of the First Lady now wields significant power within the federal government, it is necessary to examine through a historical lens how the First Ladyship has evolved. The term “First Lady” was initially used in the mid-nineteenth century to describe the role of the woman accompanying the president in the White House who served as his administration’s hostess.\(^1\) Jacqueline Kennedy was particularly notable in her use of and influence on reconfiguring the position during her First Ladyship from 1961 to 1963. Despite that short time, she managed to go beyond the role of hostess that was traditionally a First Lady’s primary responsibility and molded the First Lady into an American symbol that began to parallel that of the presidential persona. Ultimately, as First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy was able to blend traditionally feminine roles with the progressively independent roles of the new woman of the 1960s in ways that constructed her own First Lady media image and simultaneously forever changed the position of First Lady.

Several biographies and short essays that have been dedicated to the life of Jacqueline Kennedy include discussions of her time in the high-profile position of

First Lady. However, they are primarily popular in nature and focus on her private life; in fact, one of the best-known books of this sort is a memoir by her chief Secret Service agent Clint Hill, in which his personal relationship with Kennedy, along with her personality, quirks, and habits, is discussed at length. This thesis will avoid such discourse of gossip and speculation; rather, it will focus on her public performance as First Lady. This sounder, more original historical perspective will provide a deeper understanding of her impact in creating the Office of the First Lady.

In the twentieth century, the role of the First Lady evolved in ways that significantly affected and had important repercussions on the construction of American culture. Culture, in a reciprocal manner, shaped the position as well, particularly in terms of gender practices. Consequently, the history of the position of First Lady is worthy of study in order to understand the gendered and cultural trends of America. Indeed, her public service as a gender role model is seemingly inherent in the title of the position itself as a “Lady.” Any woman occupying this position must be careful to not deviate too strongly from the prescribed gender roles of the period in order to limit the American public’s criticism of her self and, consequently, her husband’s presidency. At the same time, “the criteria for success as a First Lady constantly changes as the public’s view of women evolves and develops,” so a First Lady

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2 This thesis maintains calling Jacqueline Kennedy as either “Jacqueline Kennedy” or “Kennedy,” as opposed to other informalities, unlike many histories of First Ladies, which often refer to a First Lady by her first name only or her married name with the added title “Mrs.” To give First Ladies the same treatment that males have universally been accustomed to receiving throughout history, the First Lady will be referred to by her last name so that the subject matter may be taken seriously. To avoid confusion, her spouse will be referred to as “President Kennedy.”


4 In this thesis, “culture” is defined as the dominant set of values, customs, and beliefs found among the middle and upper classes of mainstream America.
Lady does have some flexibility in terms of the usage of her position. Exploring how a First Lady exercises control within the executive branch of the federal government will thus provide a revealing perspective on gender and power dynamics in the United States in the early 1960s.

Reviewing the history of the role of First Lady reveals how Kennedy was distinctive in her molding of the position. What exactly constitutes a “First Lady”? The position is neither an elected one nor one defined or described in the Constitution, so she is not a representative of the people. Furthermore, the women who assume this role in the executive branch are not paid for their contributions to the functioning of the White House and, by extension, the United States of America. A First Lady is neither an official policymaker nor a politician, yet she enjoys a considerable amount of status, prestige, and respect. Beginning with Jacqueline Kennedy, many First Ladies combined celebrity with benefaction in a way that has fashioned the position to function rather like European royalty in a house – the White House – that could be seen as similar to an imperial palace through platforms and/or the use of symbols. Indeed, a symbol “conveys a larger range of meaning, typically with emotional, moral, or psychological impact. This larger meaning need not be independently or factually true, but will tap ideas people want to believe in as true.” Through the utilization of meaningful symbols, a First Lady can construct and communicate to the public what should become a part of the legacy of a president’s administration in ways that either complement her husband’s goals or project an

6 Barbara A. Perry, Jacqueline Kennedy: First Lady of the New Frontier (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 17.
outstandingly hospitable and uniquely American image of the White House. Furthermore, based on precedents developed over time, the First Lady has become a position in government that allows its holder to enhance the aims of her husband’s presidency and to serve the American people by expertly navigating the boundaries between private household hostess, national public figure, and American icon. A First Lady shapes national expectations of what a woman holding this office should be in the context of a specific time.

Historically, the institution of the First Lady has functioned as an expansion of the domestic role typically assigned to women in most American families. Although the position was not officially designated as “First Lady” until almost one hundred years later, the First Lady would, beginning with Martha Washington’s assumption of the role in 1789, traditionally assist with greeting domestic and international guests, dress elegantly, and overall be “a fine lady.” The women who later fulfilled the position followed Martha Washington’s example and, for the most part, led private lives within the White House. This, of course, mirrored reigning gender roles: women were confined to domestic roles and rarely, if ever, stepped outside of their prescribed feminine spheres. Because of prevailing gender roles, the women occupying this role did not have much opportunity to have a transformative cultural impact.

In fact, the institution did not change much until Eleanor Roosevelt assumed the role in 1933 and took a more active stance as First Lady. Indeed, “focus on the

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First Ladyship specifically began with the active role of Eleanor Roosevelt.”

She devoted much of her time to influencing Franklin Roosevelt in his presidential policies through multiple agendas about which she was passionate. For instance, she arranged the first-ever all-female press conference – a notable successful first – and rallied a women’s network to demand a New Deal that included women’s interests.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt also “joined the NAACP’s crusade to pass a federal anti-lynch law,” thereby demonstrating her active championing and advocacy of minority rights.

Of course, it is important to note that Eleanor Roosevelt’s use of the position differed significantly from Jacqueline Kennedy’s utilization of a special project, dedicated to one particular, achievable goal, in her approach to the role of First Lady.

However, like Kennedy, Roosevelt used the popular media of the day, the press, to distribute her messages to her public audiences. Roosevelt’s syndicated newspaper column, “My Day,” informed millions of Americans about her perspective on topics ranging from prohibition to, in later years, television, Hollywood, and HUAC. By writing almost every day from 1935 to 1962, Eleanor Roosevelt provided a strong foundational model for future First Ladies to communicate with the public; she broke new ground in the functioning of what a First Lady could be. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy would later build off of this template and expand upon it

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11 Ibid., 177.

with innovative techniques that constructed an effective press image and also utilized new media, namely television, to connect more strongly with the American public. Ultimately, both women changed how a First Lady functioned.

Even after Eleanor Roosevelt left the White House, she sustained her involvement with public affairs. She became an international stateswoman when President Harry Truman presented her with an opportunity to continue shaping her legacy as First Lady via the U.S. delegation to the United Nations.\footnote{John F. Sears, “Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum}, 2008, 4.} There, she led efforts towards drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an important cornerstone document in the movement for human rights that, since its adoption in 1948, has inspired several nations to structure their constitutions around its principles.\footnote{Ibid., 8.} Her role on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Drafting Committee afforded Roosevelt the opportunity to maintain the concern for others’ lives that she demonstrated as First Lady. By offering her the position soon after President Roosevelt’s death, President Truman connected her previous interests as First Lady to her future endeavors, as a continuation of her First Lady legacy. Thus, through her efforts on a U.N. committee, Roosevelt laid a framework that emphasized the importance of building and then sustaining the legacy of her First Ladyship.

Jacqueline Kennedy’s work as First Lady made use of her model, since, during her time as First Lady, Kennedy cemented a memorably resplendent image of her husband’s administration. Furthermore, Eleanor Roosevelt’s first-rate leadership as, notably, a woman visibly in power paved the way for other women to assume more
responsibility, especially during the emerging feminist movement that would effectively take shape during the 1960s. Roosevelt’s strikingly authoritative template ultimately provided the foundation for Jacqueline Kennedy to shoulder more responsibility as First Lady in the 1960s and spearhead her own projects.

While Eleanor Roosevelt’s participation in the formation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was truly noteworthy, she fulfilled other public leadership roles as well after her long stint as First Lady. Indeed, she was appointed Chair of John F. Kennedy’s new Presidential Commission on the Status of Women in 1961. This committee was created to advance the aims of women and “to make sure that the available talent which we have in this country... is being used effectively.”

The president’s new focus on the status of women signified that the question of what a woman’s role in society was had significant political clout, indicating that the national feminist movement was emerging in a way that would parallel Jacqueline Kennedy’s concurrent expansion of the role of the First Lady in the executive branch. Additionally, President Kennedy’s selection of Eleanor Roosevelt for the most prominent position on this committee directly connected her First Ladyship with that of Jacqueline Kennedy, officially linking Roosevelt’s precedents in the executive branch to Kennedy’s skillful and organized maneuvering of the role. Thus, Eleanor

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Roosevelt’s legacy as First Lady helped shape First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s activities and abilities while in office.

Despite Eleanor Roosevelt’s masterful use of the position of First Lady, her immediate successors were more reserved in their use of the role, choosing to return the institution of First Lady to one that was far less public. After Bess Truman assumed the role in 1945, she devoted much of her time to housewifely duties and sponsored charities in a manner reminiscent of the conventional social hostess, in lieu of holding press conferences or addressing social concerns of the day. In fact, according to President Truman, she was “not especially interested” in the “formalities and pomp or the artificiality which... inevitably surrounds the family of the President.” Her only civic act was signing a housewife’s voluntary food rationing pledge to advocate for sending excess food to the destitute populations of postwar Europe. This action, designated specifically as in the domain of “housewife,” illustrated her hesitancy to be involved in the public sphere. In essence, Bess Truman’s choices as First Lady reflected the return to domesticity in the immediate post-war era; as men flocked back home from battle abroad, multitudes of women left the workplace and returned to the more confined responsibilities of the home environment, freeing professional roles for men to resume.

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As First Lady during the majority of the 1950s, Mamie Eisenhower continued the retreat to domesticity that her predecessor so meticulously established. Indeed, “few First Ladies seemed to better reflect the general role, priorities, and values of most middle-aged middle-class American women during her White House tenure than did Mamie Eisenhower in the 1950s: family, home, entertaining.”\textsuperscript{21} Even though she was involved in increasing awareness of heart disease and providing benefits to military widows for a brief while towards the end of her First Ladyship, her strict philosophy that women should never pursue careers outside of the household manifested itself in her cheerful attention to her main role of social hostess during an unprecedented number of state dinners that she held in the White House.\textsuperscript{22} Although Eisenhower avoided making public comment, holding only one press conference over the course of eight years, she exercised some authority in deciding who was invited to her social gatherings; for instance, the First Lady refused to include controversial Senator Joseph McCarthy on guest lists for White House events.\textsuperscript{23} However, this influence still occurred in the domestic sphere and did not reference Eleanor Roosevelt’s more public, multifaceted role as First Lady. By embodying the perfect housewife as social hostess of the White House, Mamie Eisenhower ensured that the position of First Lady regressed further from the Eleanor Roosevelt model.

However, by the early 1960s, conventional attitudes towards the role of women in America were starting to change, and the institution of the First Lady

would reflect this cultural shift. In the context of gender roles, Jacqueline Kennedy assumed the position of First Lady at a truly unique time in history: while it was traditional to expect that women stay in the household realm, President Kennedy’s document establishing the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women declared in 1961 that it was time “to demolish prejudices and outmoded customs which act as barriers to the full partnership of women in our democracy,” and Betty Friedan’s highly influential, feminist book, *The Feminine Mystique*, would be published soon after, in 1963.\(^{24}\) First Ladies Bess Truman and Mamie Eisenhower reveled in their private, domestic roles, whereas First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt enjoyed more politically engaged, public responsibilities. As new First Lady and soon-to-be cover girl of the early 1960s, Jacqueline Kennedy would decide which First Lady leadership style she would employ while in office. She ultimately utilized both models.

Many of Jacqueline Kennedy’s life experiences prior to her entrance into the public realm shaped her activities and decisions as First Lady, and, thus, it is important to give a brief overview of her life before John F. Kennedy’s presidential inauguration. Born on July 28, 1929, in Long Island, New York, young Jacqueline Bouvier was raised in a sophisticated East Coast society.\(^ {25}\) In her privileged home environment, she was exposed to elite culture and social graces that would shape her tastes, actions, and fashion sense for the entirety of her life. At an early age, she


\(^{25}\) Hill and McCubbin, 10.
learned to appreciate and sustain interests in art, literature, and foreign languages.\textsuperscript{26} This knowledge of high-end American and, especially, European cultures would prove to be most valuable during her time as First Lady; her skills would foster a refined and cosmopolitan image of the First Ladyship.

Her lifestyle as a young adult continued to lay the foundation for sharpening her understanding of the world and heightening her future achievements. Her impressive education mirrored her elite background; she was an accomplished student at Miss Porter’s School, an exclusive, all-girls’ boarding school in Connecticut, and went on to attend Vassar, one of the selective “seven sisters” women’s colleges.\textsuperscript{27} Kennedy then spent a year studying abroad in France, at the Sorbonne in Paris and the University of Grenoble, where she became fluent in French and proficient in French tastes.\textsuperscript{28} As First Lady, her expertise in European culture would lend credence to her projects that relied on an understanding of taste and sophistication, and to the general credibility of the institution of First Lady. She completed her last year of college at George Washington University and graduated in 1951 with a Bachelor of Arts in French literature, again demonstrating not only her appreciation but also her aptitude for the humanities.\textsuperscript{29} This specialization would influence her work as First Lady in restoring the White House and renewing a sense of pride in American high culture.

Armed with a college degree from one of the finest American institutions of higher learning, Jacqueline Kennedy proceeded to establish herself in the world of journalism that instructed her well in communications and the construction of

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 10-11.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 11.
effective visual imagery. For instance, after winning Vogue’s prestigious Prix de Paris writing competition, she accepted a position at the Washington Times-Herald as an “Inquiring Photographer” [sic]. On the job, “she took pictures of people she encountered, asked them questions on the issues of the day, and wove their answers into her newspaper column.” Her media experience would prove useful in her activities as First Lady, since she often used the press to communicate with the American public. Additionally, her brief experience as a photographer cannot be dismissed as unimportant; she learned from the photographer’s perspective what visuals best supplement a story. Since the appearance of Kennedy and the dignified position she represented during her husband’s administration weighed heavily, the image of the First Lady required continuous maintenance to sustain Americans’ impressions of the role. Indeed, her self-presentation changed the way the national media and the American people viewed her First Ladyship and shaped their subsequent expectations of the women who would later fill the position. Thus, Jacqueline Kennedy’s pre-White House experiences functioned as stepping-stones to success as First Lady, allowing her to change the position permanently.

To better appreciate the distinctiveness and exceptionality of Jacqueline Kennedy’s tenure as First Lady, it is important to briefly discuss American current events of the early 1960s. By the time the Kennedys moved into the White House following John F. Kennedy’s inauguration on January 20, 1961, the country was poised on the brink of the second wave of feminism and remained in the midst of

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30 Donald Spoto, *Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis: A Life* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 90; Perry, 30-1. It was during her time at this job that she met John F. Kennedy.
Cold War conflict with the Soviet Union. In addition, the burgeoning civil rights movement was gathering momentum during the Kennedy administration. In fact, the movement’s efforts garnered more attention and became more ubiquitous after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his iconic “I Have a Dream” speech in August 1963, towards the end of John F. Kennedy’s presidency. The First Lady established a racially integrated kindergarten for her daughter, a subtle, supporting nod to the civil rights movement.\(^{32}\) Of course, Kennedy was not directly involved in the development of the civil rights movement or, for that matter, officially concerned with any movement during her time as First Lady, no matter how her actions affected them, in particular, the next wave of feminism. Still, it is necessary to consider the state of America at that point in time in order to contextualize her work as First Lady.

Jacqueline Kennedy has traditionally been discussed in popular culture as a celebrity and America’s sweetheart during the early 1960s, although her persona later became surrounded with gossip after her controversial marriage to foreign millionaire and businessman Aristotle Onassis in 1968.\(^{33}\) Thus, as fame and glamour have surrounded the character of Jacqueline Kennedy, this thesis will distill popular celebrity from her work as a historical figure so that she may be taken more seriously in the hope that feminine, well-liked women in positions of power are not swept to the wayside in historical analysis of significant American cultural changes. In


examining Jacqueline Kennedy’s activities during her White House years (1961-1963), this thesis will shed light on the changing function of a First Lady.

Unlike other historians who have previously written about First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy by simply listing her accomplishments in office, I will analyze her achievements’ effect on the role of First Ladies in American culture. Additionally, this thesis will offer a gendered perspective on her accomplishments and their impact. In order to do so, I will use a combination of written and visual sources accessed from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library archives to facilitate an emphasis on the communications the Office of the First Lady sent out to the press and, by extension, the American people. Of these primary sources, television, press releases, official statements, fashion in the context of communication, and photographs will be given the most attention to illustrate how public media and visual imagery in particular communicated the aims of the institution of First Lady under Kennedy.

Ultimately, Jacqueline Kennedy’s work melded traditionalism with rising female professionalism to transform the image and position of First Lady. The first chapter will examine Kennedy’s influence on the historical preservation of the White House as a national monument and will explore how she promoted a combination of education, art, and American history. Emphasis will be placed on her national television special, the culmination of this project. Next, the second chapter will discuss her embodiment of highbrow American culture and discuss her influence over national culture and sophistication in the White House setting. The third chapter will explore Kennedy’s influence on fashion and analyze the functions of her clothing choices in the context of her domestic appearances and international trips.
Photographs of gowns and accessories will be analyzed in lieu of actual clothing items, since her real clothes are not on display in any museum archive. Lastly, the fourth chapter will explore her role in the construction of imagery of President Kennedy’s funeral, a moment forever frozen in the national consciousness. All chapters will also consider how Jacqueline Kennedy disseminated an effective media image that enabled her to refashion the cultural role of the First Lady.
Chapter I

A House Preserved: Jacqueline Kennedy’s Restoration of the White House

As the president’s official place of residence, the White House has existed as a symbol of the authority, power, and glory of the federal government’s executive branch since First Lady Abigail Adams and President John Adams first moved into the house in 1800. Once it was rebuilt after it sustained damage from the War of 1812, the White House became a static object that has since been architecturally altered only to accommodate more office space. With over forty First Ladies and their husbands living there over a period of more than 200 years, the building has functioned as a domestic residence as well as an institutional edifice that acts as an exemplification of the American federal administration to both Americans and foreign visitors. As a result, the building itself has garnered huge iconic significance in American history.

When Jacqueline Kennedy arrived at the White House in early 1961, she made it the top priority of her First Lady agenda to restore the house and assign it status as a preserved historical national landmark that Americans could proudly visit. Because of her focus on historical conservation, “she insisted on referring to her White House project as a restoration rather than redecoration;” “redecoration” would have made her project sound trivial and inconsequential, while “restoration,” on the other hand, provided an impetus for her White House project to continually move forward. As a matter of fact, Kennedy herself said in an interview, “It would be

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35 Perry, 102.
sacrilege merely to ‘redecorate’ it – a word I hate. It must be restored – and that has nothing to do with redecoration. That is a question of scholarship.”36 In making this distinction, Kennedy ascribed credence to her project and authority to her position as First Lady. Of course, the highlight of her First Lady agenda took place entirely in the traditionally feminine sphere of the home environment – after all, the White House is, first and foremost, a house. At the same time, Jacqueline Kennedy took on an unprecedented leadership role as First Lady in spearheading this project, devoting considerable time and educated effort to making the building an enduring representation of American history. Her restoration of the White House promoted a sense of patriotism and glorification of American history in terms of its multi-faceted approach of relating art, education, and ever-evolving American culture to the past. In taking a more active role than her immediate predecessors, Jacqueline Kennedy altered the position of First Lady and effectively constructed an image of her own First Ladyship that molded public service with a combination of conventional femininity and a more progressive role, ultimately contributing to the formation of the appearance of both a more professional First Lady and a career-focused woman of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Several historians have written extensively about her main undertaking in the White House, although most did not start to focus on her restoration until the early twenty-first century. In the early 2000s, the historical discussion began acknowledging that Jacqueline Kennedy wanted to upgrade the cultural tastes and appearance of the United States. With this came a more serious consideration of First

36 Hugh Sidey, “The First Lady Beings History and Beauty to the White House,” *Life* (September 1, 1961), 57.
Ladies in general and, in particular, Kennedy’s accomplishments while in office. In fact, Betty Boyd Caroli, a pioneer in First Ladies studies, suggested that Jacqueline Kennedy added refinement to the position in her work with the White House and “signaled the possibility that a president’s wife could bring some of her own interests to the job of First Lady.” Here, Caroli’s discourse attempted to demonstrate how Jacqueline Kennedy harnessed the position to her advantage in terms of molding it to what she wanted to accomplish while in office. Thus, her deviations from her predecessors’ actions, however small, moved the role of First Lady into the public realm, since her White House project affected the nation’s perceived prestige and appearance for both Americans and citizens of countries abroad. Furthermore, biographer Barbara Perry argued that Jacqueline Kennedy used the White House as a stage, rendering the First Lady’s actions not merely ceremonious, but that “her unique contributions to the enterprise [of a First Ladyship] were her meticulous attention to history and the decorative arts.” Whereas Caroli focused on Kennedy’s sophistication as influencing her choice of projects, Perry detailed her knowledge of American history and material culture as the main influence on her hard work in the White House realm. Still, neither of these historians described her famous White House project’s impact on the role of First Lady. Therefore, there was minimal discussion of her White House restoration; the discourse generally viewed her efforts as decorative only.

38 Perry, xiv.
In more recent years, scholars have become more interested in Jacqueline Kennedy’s cultivation and projection of a specific image of the position of First Lady that the White House project afforded her. For instance, biographer Maurine Hoffman Beasley discussed how Jacqueline Kennedy molded her First Ladyship to reflect a culturally accessible “Camelot” in her restoration of the White House, thereby tying a glamorous image of the Kennedy administration to American history and artistic culture embodied in the White House itself.\(^\text{39}\) Jon Goodman asserted that image projection was key to advertising her White House renovation to the American people, highlighting Kennedy’s emergence “onto the national scene during an era of monumental change in American media.”\(^\text{40}\) This line of investigation highlighted the fact that Jacqueline Kennedy was looking to expand the institution of the First Lady, at least beyond the private role of a social hostess looking to spruce up her home residence. By exploiting television, the cultural phenomenon that was in the process of taking hold over the typical American family, she was able to publicize her White House transformation and its benefits to the American people. Hence, the interplay of mass media and American history allowed her project to grow. These recently published commentaries thus argued that utilizing new forms of media to communicate with the American people became integral to the success of Jacqueline Kennedy’s historical restoration project. By exploring how Kennedy became a specialist in manipulating television for her own aims as First Lady, the scholars


demonstrated their interest in both media and cultural history of America in the 1960s.

The words used to describe Jacqueline Kennedy’s White House preservation project were essential to its successful completion. President John F. Kennedy, aware of his wife’s taste in fine, expensive décor, did not want her apparent goal of modernization to alienate his voter base. Indeed, he initially opposed her White House plans, since “any alterations or changes could present serious political problems” for his administration, and he believed that a “high-profile redecoration surely would bring about unwanted attention,” possibly alienating constituents who believed that the White House, as highly visible, public property and a testament to the nation’s history, should not be altered by a current First Family.41 However, Jacqueline Kennedy ultimately acquired her husband’s approval through the use of the politically-tuned word “restoration,” which made her project sound more like an intellectual and highbrow venture, rather than just an aesthetic makeover of the White House’s interior by repainting or moving furniture around.42 The term restoration, in clarifying the historical significance of her project, ascribed a new competence to the position of First Lady; the role was expanded from that of homemaker to professional project director. Thus, by enlarging the responsibilities of a First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy was able to proceed with her mission of preserving the nation’s executive mansion.

42 Perry, 102-3.
Of course, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy was not the first to renovate the White House. In the many years between its construction and the Kennedy administration, most of these attempts at refashioning the White House involved redecoration, rather than restoration; in other words, before Jacqueline Kennedy assumed the position of First Lady, the president’s mansion was not treated as a historical artifact during these modifications. In disregarding the historicism of the house, various administrations’ changes to the White House reflected the decoration tastes of the current time period, rendering the White House, a cultural composite of various time periods, an artifact itself.

Historically, it was the concern of the First Lady, operating in the traditionally feminine sphere of the household as social hostess, to update the White House as a way of taking care of the home. However, First Lady Grace Coolidge was somewhat of an exception. After the White House received important structural renovations in the 1920s, she encouraged Congress to pass legislation allowing the donation of appropriate antiques, particularly furniture from the early 1800s, for the decoration of the executive mansion. Despite the ultimate ineffectiveness of her effort, she launched a modern precedent for restoring the antique aesthetic of the interior of the president’s home that would guide First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy in her restoration efforts. Nonetheless, most of Grace Coolidge’s activities revolved around operating as the traditional White House social hostess. Next, First Lady Lou Hoover attempted to continue Grace Coolidge’s stalled redecoration endeavors, but the early environment of the Great Depression was not conducive to collecting funds to buy

43 Perry, 100.
expensive antiques.\textsuperscript{44} Later, First Lady Bess Truman also could not focus on redecoration after the mansion was deemed unsafe for habitation in 1948; the Trumans relocated for a short time while workers made the house more livable, “gutted the interior, and placed [the White House] on a... sturdier foundation,” thereby providing a new, durable structure for the building but not altering it in a way that would contribute to its cultural restoration.\textsuperscript{45} The Truman reconstruction was the last major change to the White House until the Kennedys arrived; First Lady Mamie Eisenhower furnished the Diplomatic Reception Room with period antiques, but otherwise did nothing to improve the executive mansion in the shadow of the high-profile reconstruction completed only a few years earlier.\textsuperscript{46} Thus, with minimal attention previously having been paid to the cultural components of the White House, the stage was set for First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy to fully restore the president’s mansion.

Kennedy fully appreciated how much work needed to be done in order to refurbish the White House from her visits to the building before her days as First Lady. She remembered feeling disappointed as an elementary school student during a class tour of the White House, describing her experience there as “rather bleak. There was nothing in the way of a booklet to take away, nothing to teach one more about the great house and the presidents who lived there.”\textsuperscript{47} Her early impression lamented the lack of informative souvenirs, something she would strive to amend in her vision of

\textsuperscript{44} Caroli, \textit{First Ladies: From Martha Washington to Laura Bush}, 224.
\textsuperscript{45} Perry, 17.
\textsuperscript{47} Sidey, 62.
how the White House should be displayed. Furthermore, shortly before President John F. Kennedy’s inauguration in 1961, First Lady Mamie Eisenhower gave forthcoming First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy a tour of the White House.\textsuperscript{48} Although shocked and disillusioned with its upkeep, Kennedy saw in the shabby space an opportunity to restore the executive mansion and to improve the visiting experiences of, in particular, America’s youth. In essence, her early experiences affected her project goals as First Lady. Following Grace Coolidge’s (failed) experiment with antique collecting, Jacqueline Kennedy set out to restore the White House by blending the First Lady’s traditional position of social hostess in the White House home environment with a more professional, scholarly role.

Equipped with a sophisticated understanding of American and European material cultures, fine taste in furniture, and knowledge of previous White House renovations, Jacqueline Kennedy established the Fine Arts Committee for the White House in order to stimulate her proposed restoration. Indeed, she began working on her project almost immediately after John F. Kennedy’s inauguration; the Fine Arts Committee, of which she was Honorary Chairman, was already functioning by February 28, 1961.\textsuperscript{49} Chaired by prominent museum director Henry F. du Pont, who specialized in the collection of American decorative arts, the committee’s purpose was to collect funds for the permanent accumulation of acceptable period furniture


and antiques for the White House. On April 18, 1961, the Office of the White House Press Secretary announced the appointment of an Advisory Committee to the Fine Arts Committee “to focus national attention as well as stimulate regional interest in the work of the Fine Arts Committee in trying to find historic furniture for the White House.” The desired furniture would realize Kennedy’s vision for an elite depiction of American culture in the White House. By participating in the construction of the foundation for a new, culturally-attuned White House, she demonstrated that a First Lady was not limited to the world of traditional femininity; truly, her initial work in attracting donors was a testament to the fact that a First Lady, and, by extension, any professional woman, could contribute to the functioning of a large project typically perceived as a masculine line of work.

Soon after the inception of the Fine Arts Committee and its complementary Advisory Committee, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy further augmented the legitimacy of the restoration and, thus, her involvement in the professional sphere, when she created the position of White House Curator to assist in her efforts of finding and sorting historically-significant antiques. On March 6, 1961, Lorraine Waxman Pearce was appointed to “study and register all items of interest presently in the White House, as well as any new acquisitions” and “compile a catalogue of these items which will be available to the public.” The significance that a woman, rather than a man, was chosen for this erudite occupation cannot be overstated; in selecting

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50 Hill and McCubbin, 54.
52 Perry, 120.
Pearce as curator, the First Lady further encouraged female professionalism and ensured that women’s perspectives would be included, even integral, to the restoration process. Furthermore, the presence of the position itself indicated the scholarliness of Jacqueline Kennedy’s endeavor. Ultimately, the establishment of the position of White House curator not only conferred clout and validity to her restoration project and her First Ladyship, but it also strengthened the idea of the White House as a historic monument and museum.

In fact, not long after Pearce’s appointment, Kennedy began focusing on how to best declare the White House as a museum for all Americans to enjoy. On July 19, 1961, she requested from Clinton P. Anderson of the Senate’s Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs information regarding protocol for signifying the White House as a national monument.53 He wrote to her in a memo, “There are no precedents for establishing as a national monument a structure in use.”54 As a result, the First Lady was free to approach the issue in any way that suited her. Rather than simply asking her husband to declare the White House a historic monument, Jacqueline Kennedy persuaded Congress to legitimize her project.55 On September 22, 1961, a bill establishing the White House as a national monument became law: “Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress

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54 Ibid., 1.
55 59th United States Congress, “Antiquities Act of 1906,” in Papers of Jacqueline Kennedy (Washington, D.C.: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, June 8, 1906). An Act of Congress approved June 8, 1906, states in part: “The President of the United States is authorized, in his discretion, to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States, to be national monuments.”
assembled, that all of that portion... which is within the President’s park enclosure... is hereby established as a national monument to be known as the White House...

provided, that such designation and administration shall emphasize preservation and interpretation... [and] that articles... of the White House... be of historic and artistic interest.”56 In effect, Congress declared the White House to be a museum, officially recognizing the importance of a historic preservation and restoration for the White House; her project could no longer be construed as a simple redecoration. Public Law 87-286 also ensured that any donation to the White House refurbishment, either monetary or a physical piece of furniture, would be protected from any future administration’s changes “that were not sensitive to the historic fabric of the house” and rendered tax-deductible, which bolstered the effectiveness of her restoration campaign.57 By encouraging donations from the public, the house would become a national shrine of American history. The involvement of the respected Smithsonian guaranteed a continuity of her historical preservation project beyond her years as First Lady: “Articles of furniture, fixtures, and decorative objects of the White House... when not in use or on display in the White House shall be transferred... as a loan to the Smithsonian Institution, for its care, study, or exhibition.”58 Therefore, the law ensured a continuously accurate representation of the United States, even while the nation’s popular material culture changed throughout the years. Although Kennedy’s project was initially confined to the home environment, her success in gaining

58 87th United States Congress, 2.
Congressional approval for giving the White House museum status expanded the realm of her role as First Lady beyond that of the household.

Soon after, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy established the White House Historical Association to aid in her efforts at preserving the White House and educating the public on American culture. In order to serve its mission of “enhancing understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the White House,” this non-profit organization began soliciting financial assistance from private citizens on November 3, 1961, to ensure the timely and appropriate acquisition of furnishings, working in tandem with Kennedy’s other committees, and educating the public on the history of the White House.  

Kennedy suggested its major contribution to her project occurred on July 4, 1962, when it published a 132-page guidebook; this booklet tied the historical development of the United States to the White House and its modern restoration. The First Lady enlisted the National Geographic Society to photograph the White House and create the book’s design, thereby involving a non-profit organization, one exterior to the government, in a government-sanctioned project, further expanding its public scope. Adding National Geographic to her list of restoration collaborators further augmented the scholarliness of the project, given the journal’s esteemed reputation. Additionally, selling for $1.00 apiece as a way to fund Kennedy’s project, the guidebook, named *The White House: An Historic Guide*,

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“traces the history of the White House, describes its historic rooms, and tells of the furnishings and paintings in each room.”  

In essence, it detailed to the American people the First Lady’s exact intentions in preserving American history with material forms, holding her accountable to the public; this was a significant change in the role of First Lady, because, typically, First Ladies did not, in the past, involve the public in their homemaking decisions and activities. In line with this new trend she was setting, Jacqueline Kennedy herself dedicated the book “to all of the people who visit the White House each year,” thereby linking ordinary American citizens to her historically significant restoration. In selling 550,000 copies in its first year of publication, the affordable, informative guidebook proved to be extremely popular and effectively expanded the reach of Kennedy’s project.

Of course, one must consider the dual function of the White House in Jacqueline Kennedy’s preservation project. Certainly, the White House became a national symbol, a public museum and monument to American democracy, and a space for all Americans to enjoy; the First Lady’s mission to preserve the historical quality of the house reflected these functions. However, it is also, by nature, the residence of the President, the First Lady, and, if applicable, their children. As such, in addition to its public functions, the White House is a private home of a notable, highly distinguished American couple or family and contains restricted living quarters for the First Family. During the course of her project, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy

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expertly maneuvered the invisible line between the public and the private by managing the restoration of both areas. As a matter of fact, she spent around $50,000 of congressionally appropriated financial resources to transform and modernize the private living quarters on the second floor. In doing so, she maintained a First Lady’s involvement with private affairs and the traditionally feminine sphere of the home, while also using her visibility and prominence in public spaces, which will be discussed later, to draw attention to those restored areas. Ultimately, Jacqueline Kennedy’s innovative establishment of a press secretary specifically for the First Lady signaled that she would increase her communications with and visibility to the public.

In an effort to communicate how she accomplished her goals and the results of her White House restoration to the public, Jacqueline Kennedy expanded the role of First Lady even further by presenting herself via the new medium of television as a knowledgeable, yet feminine, professional woman who sought to preserve historically significant buildings as a public service. In choosing to lead a highly publicized televised tour of the White House, Kennedy recognized the growing importance of television as both a journalistic instrument and marketing contrivance. The Kennedys lived in the White House during a transformative time when television was changing the way information was distributed. In fact, more than 80% of American households owned a television set by the time Kennedy became First Lady. With the ever-increasing popularity of television as a way to cover news and current events, the First Lady decided to collaborate with reporter Charles Collingwood of CBS to

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63 Perry, 104.
64 Perry, 4.
disseminate information regarding her restoration in terms of changes made to individual rooms and the rationale behind her decisions. Of course, the importance of visual imagery in the construction of a message was not lost on the First Lady, and she utilized the televised images of White House rooms as a publicizing tool to dazzle her audience in a way that captured attention and elicited public support for her project.

Thus, on February 14, 1962, *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy* aired on CBS and NBC simultaneously and was later rebroadcast four days later on ABC, as the culmination of Kennedy’s White House restoration project.\(^6^5\) Despite her alliance with CBS in the production of her television special, the First Lady considered it to be important to grant visual access of the White House, a public space, to all major television networks so as to ensure non-partiality of the administration.\(^6^6\) More than 46 million people viewed the first showing of her hour-long scripted performance, with the average household watching over 50 minutes of the program.\(^6^7\) Following a general script revised at least three times to the First Lady’s liking before the official filming, Kennedy exercised complete control over

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\(^{66}\) Perry Wolff, “CBS News,” in *Pamela Turnure Papers* (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, September 29, 1961). Her decision to partner with CBS in the filming of the show was based in part on an inquiring letter to her press secretary Pamela Turnure, in which producer Perry Wolff implored the office of the First Lady to consider making a short documentary “not only to show a national institution to Americans, but to see some of the change which Mrs. Kennedy has made in the White House... and to show what taste and history combined have done to the most important house in America.” Because of Wolff’s clear admiration for her preservation work and desire to showcase the White House as a historical unit highly important to all Americans, the First Lady chose to associate with CBS for the scripting and taping processes.

how she presented herself, the institution of First Lady, and the outcome of her
restoration project. While the script functioned only as a guideline, planning what she
wanted to say in advance allowed her to manipulate what these many Americans
learned about her project. It must be recognized that the documentary of the White
House’s restoration was staged and, thus, also a performance of the First Lady.
Indeed, Jacqueline Kennedy stressed the historical importance of American material
culture, drawing attention to the style and look of particular furnishings and décor as
a representation of a particular time period of United States history. By relating art
and culture to the history of the White House, she made history more tangible for the
many Americans watching. As President Kennedy said during the program, “I think if
[young students] can come here and see – alive – this building and in a sense touch
the people who have been here, then they’ll go home more interested and... become
better Americans.”

In essence, Jacqueline Kennedy’s White House restoration
program educated the large audience of Americans watching, a task historically out of
the First Lady’s realm of authority. Additionally, Kennedy was highly selective in
choosing which rooms of the White House to show to Collingwood and Americans
countrywide; for instance, while the entirety of the first floor of the White House was
shown in its restored grandiosity, the tour did not expose some sections of the ground
floor used for storage or the First Family’s private living quarters on the second floor.
Therefore, Kennedy not only protected her family’s private life from the press but
also emphasized that her project was a public, rather than personal, service. Despite
the soft-spoken quality of her voice and the home environment setting, Jacqueline

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Kennedy took control of the televised depiction of her project, providing an assertive opportunity to demonstrate her functionality as a professional woman in a role more progressive than that of most previous First Ladies (with the notable exception of Eleanor Roosevelt). Ultimately, Jacqueline Kennedy’s management and activities during *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy*, with its large viewership, inflated the scope of the First Ladyship.

In order to illustrate what changes First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy and her Fine Arts Committee made to the various rooms of the White House, a methodology following the pattern of rooms shown to audiences used in *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy* will be employed. As the First Lady only gave Americans access to the rooms she deemed most worthy of display and attention, this analysis will add the renovated rooms that did not receive televised treatment to the discussion in order to contextualize her choices. By leaving out certain rooms and emphasizing the importance of others, Kennedy exercised considerable power over the images projected on the numerous television sets of Americans tuned in; she manipulated viewers’ impressions of the White House so that the position of the First Lady could instantly communicate with Americans in a way that satisfied Kennedy’s vision for her own public work. Indeed, according to a White House memo dated shortly before the broadcast, she stressed that “all furnishings and paintings which are acquired by the Fine Arts Committee... are gifts to the people of the United States for the permanent White House collection.”

Several organizations and private individuals

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donated furniture after the Fine Arts Committee sent a letter that entreated citizens to make “any gift of furniture,” which would, as an incentive, be “completely deductible for tax purposes.” The highlighted furnishings will be discussed in the context of each individual room.

One aspect of making the role of First Lady more active than it had traditionally been in the past was that Jacqueline Kennedy, in tandem with her Fine Arts Committee, oversaw modifications to the rooms on the lower level of the White House, ensuring that the changes made would be historically appropriate. The ground floor, according to Kennedy, deserved special attention because, although it had historically served as a storage and administration space, it had functioned as a place for introducing visitors to the grandeur of the house since the establishment of the visitors’ entrance there in 1902. Subsequently, one of the basement rooms was converted into a Diplomatic Reception Room in order to provide guests with access to the White House’s magnificence upon their entrance; to mirror this, the First Lady and CBS reporter Charles Collingwood discussed the Diplomatic Reception Room first in the televised tour. Kennedy observed during the televised documentary that the Diplomatic Reception Room “is the room people see first when they come to the White House. Everyone who comes to a State Dinner comes through it and leaves by it, so I think it should be a pretty room.” Since the furniture had to be American-made to qualify for display in the White House, the beauty of the Diplomatic Reception Room glorified American greatness and displayed history with a “living”

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71 Smith, 28.
72 Wolff, A Tour of the White House With Mrs. John F. Kennedy, 7.
quality through the focus on the physicality of objects. Moreover, the First Lady stressed that the furniture of this room had been unified via similarity of time period – a precedent that would be followed in other rooms. For instance, early 19th century wallpaper complemented an array of American Federal tables, chairs, and a sofa from around 1800 in this room.  

Although some controversy arose over these expensive purchases, both First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy and Fine Arts Committee Chairman Henry F. du Pont believed that the expenses were justified; finding a less historically relevant wallpaper would have been detrimental to showcasing American material history, the goal of the restoration. By ensuring an all-American origin to the furnishings from a similar time period, Kennedy demonstrated her functionality as a historian in collecting and exhibiting material culture as a representation of the United States during a specified time period.

Although Jacqueline Kennedy decided against showing the then-unfinished Library of the White House on the televised tour, its reestablishment was one of her greatest triumphs in restoring the White House due to her dynamic involvement in reviving the room’s functioning. Previously, the space had operated as a laundry area, then a servant locker room, and finally, in 1935, a library, its current purpose. Kennedy oversaw Henry du Pont’s choices in refurbishing the interior to fit a nineteenth-century style. In terms of architecture, a wood floor replaced tiles from the Truman administration, while a recovered mantelpiece from Salem,

73 Smith, 31.
74 Wolff, A Tour of the White House With Mrs. John F. Kennedy, 8.
75 Although the room had not been a library space in the 19th century, her choice to continue using the room as a library is justified because she wanted to show off American excellence from that time period, rather than reconvert it to a space used for functionality only.
76 Smith, 34.
Massachusetts, was mounted in lieu of the previous, less historically appropriate one.\textsuperscript{77} This illustrated Kennedy’s dedication to making the White House a structure that reflected the rich history of America rather than the current time period’s decorative fads. The First Lady also decided to embellish the room with paintings that portrayed important historical occasions. In collaboration with du Pont, Kennedy selected a nineteenth-century oil painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence to be placed over the mantel as the library’s centerpiece and, for the other walls, chose a collection of five paintings of Native Americans visiting the White House in 1821, all by American artists.\textsuperscript{78} She accepted a glass chandelier from American author James Fennimore Cooper’s estate to further the atmosphere of literary culture.\textsuperscript{79} However, most importantly, at least in the setting of a library, Kennedy set out to acquire classic American literature “most essential to an understanding of our National experience.”\textsuperscript{80} By advancing the cultural character of the White House through an emphasis on American literary tradition, Jacqueline Kennedy strengthened her role as a more intellectual and hands-on First Lady. Furthermore, she commented, “all libraries must grow and so must this one if it was truly to reflect our national experience.”\textsuperscript{81} Because the compilation of White House library books would not be merely a static collection, the First Lady ensured that the library would continue to expand as time went on, to exhibit the ever-expanding literature of America. Therefore, Jacqueline Kennedy used the refurbishment of the

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{80} Perry, 153.
\textsuperscript{81} Perry, 153.
White House library as a basis for expanding the role of First Lady into a more multifaceted one that could concern itself with active decision-making in constructing an image of American literature and high culture.

Her modifications to the other rooms on the lower level of the White House, although less extensive and therefore not covered during the televised tour, also enlarged the realm of First Lady by maintaining the historical significance of furnishings as appropriate ornaments in White House rooms. Indeed, the Gold Room, historically a ladies’ formal sitting room, originally displayed a collection of vermeil silverware, so the First Lady decided to conserve an assortment of gilt silver as the primary focus of the room in order to uphold her standard for historical accuracy in the restoration.\(^82\) Retaining its use as exhibition room for this silverware emphasized her aim to preserve the room’s earliest functioning. Additionally, in the China Room, which showcased the expanding collection of White House china, Kennedy’s insistence on creating an image of truthful history through American material culture triumphed over interior designer Stephane Boudin’s wish for inserting a more contemporary banquette as the room’s centerpiece.\(^83\) This, of course, not only showed that the First Lady was thoroughly committed to the mission of her conservancy project, but it also demonstrated that the position of First Lady was powerful enough to override the professional opinions of a respected interior designer; through its expanded scope, the role of First Lady had accumulated a great deal of influence in this restorative undertaking. As such, it was especially significant that the educated opinion of Kennedy, a woman, prevailed over that of a man in a high-ranking

\(^82\) Smith, 38.
\(^83\) Ibid., 38.
leadership position. In fact, this symbolized the changing tide in American gender politics toward equality for the sexes. Thus, even Jacqueline Kennedy’s smallest adjustments on the ground floor of the White House contributed to the creation of a role of a more active First Lady.

In the next leg of the tour, Jacqueline Kennedy led the reporter and American viewers upstairs, to the first floor of the White House, in order to show off more of her work directly to Americans. The first room on this floor to be shown on the tour was the East Room. Because she believed that the East Room “gradually became associated in the American mind as the place for the grand events in the White House,” the First Lady decided to restore the room to maintain its historic purpose as a setting for presidential events of great consequence.84 Indeed, according to Kennedy, it was “originally intended as an audience room – something like the throne room in European palaces.”85 To accentuate its grandeur in a subtler, less European way, the First Lady conducted research in collaboration with the White House curator to return the room to its original state with appropriate American antiques. Through their collaborative efforts, Jacqueline Kennedy reinstalled four early nineteenth-century candelabras used during the Monroe administration and selected new window treatments that incorporated the existing 1902 gilt wood cornices, “which she thought to be of great value to the historic character of the room.”86 In the tour, she also discussed the famous Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington with CBS’ Charles Collingwood and highlighted it as the oldest furnishing in the White House,

84 Wolff, A Tour of the White House With Mrs. John F. Kennedy, 10.
85 Ibid., 10.
86 Smith, 43.
in an effort to illustrate her expert knowledge of each individual item. By dedicating extensive time and educated research to making the East Room an enduring representation of American stateliness, Kennedy expanded the public role of First Lady by paying careful, scholarly attention to the cultural components of the East Room. Although these few modifications were quite expensive—altogether, more than $26,000 in 1962—Kennedy’s guidebook for the White House funded them completely. Instead of restoring every facet of the East Room, Jacqueline Kennedy did not completely transform the space, opting to keep most of the room as it was. Nevertheless, she related American artistic culture to history such that her commitment to public service constructed an enlarged role for the nation’s First Lady while effectively shaping her own image as a competent, professional woman.

In a similar vein, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy appreciated the existing style of the State Dining Room so much that she changed it as little as possible, upholding her project’s mission to preserve and restore, rather than replace and redecorate. In fact, she told both Collingwood and American viewers alike that “no one has made any basic changes in this room since 1902” and, because of that, “it has the most architectural unity of any room in the White House.” As a matter of fact, the only truly notable modifications she made to the State Dining Room were that it was painted an off-white color and that a mantelpiece from the Truman renovation was replaced with a reproduction of the original 1902 mantelpiece. Consequently,

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87 Wolff, A Tour of the White House With Mrs. John F. Kennedy, 12.
88 Smith, 43.
89 Wolff, A Tour of the White House With Mrs. John F. Kennedy, 11.
90 Ibid., 15; Ibid. 17.
91 Smith, 45.
Kennedy devoted most of the televised time in this room to explaining the rationale behind choosing the table décor, especially the china. In fact, she emphasized that only the Truman and Eisenhower china survived intact to the early 1960s.\(^2\) By highlighting the lack of available goods for her to display, the First Lady indirectly underscored the importance of a historical preservation project such as her own as a way to keep history “alive.” Ultimately, Jacqueline Kennedy demonstrated that the public could trust the First Lady to understand how to best contribute to the historical preservation of such an important national monument as the White House.

Moreover, Jacqueline Kennedy also selected the style of the Red Room, illustrating that the First Lady could properly understand American culture and skillfully evaluate suitable antiques. She soon discovered that taking a more active stance in public service opened her position up to more criticism. For instance, the Red Room had been traditionally furnished with furniture from the Empire period to complement the neoclassical architecture, and Kennedy, respecting the history of the room, followed this precedent in her restoration of the room. She encouraged both American and French Empire pieces to be donated for consideration for display in the Red Room, but unfortunately her inclusion of and, according to some observers, preference for French finery in this room produced some criticism, charging that the room, and even the White House, was “‘too Frenchified’ to be either appropriate for an American chief executive or an accurate representation of the building’s history.”\(^3\)

As a result, most of the antiques in the Red Room were highlighted on the tour as profoundly American: a sofa that once belonged to former First Lady Dolley


\(^3\) Caroli, *Jacqueline (Lee Bouvier) Kennedy (Onassis)*, 484.
Madison, a chaise longue that previously belonged to former First Lady Martha Washington’s granddaughter, and a set of chairs dating from before the Van Buren era. In this way, Kennedy was able to control the broadcast image of her restoration to the whole of the American populace – at least those who were watching on their television sets – thereby manipulating how her audience perceived her restoration project. In addition to the Red Room, the Blue Room, the most formal reception room in the White House, attracted some controversy with claims that her French decorator Stephane Boudin was destroying timeless American antiques with his avant-garde, European tastes. While Jacqueline Kennedy researched furniture from the Monroe era to set the tone for this room’s preservation, Boudin covered a rare mahogany table with gold silk damask, garnering criticism for seemingly annihilating its history. Even though her interior designer’s actions attracted criticism, the restored Blue Room ultimately was similar to that of the original Monroe era and was considered by critics to be historically correct and, therefore, a success. The visualization of American history through collections of antiques in these two rooms allowed the First Lady to maneuver the management of her restoration project so that she could lead a more active role in preserving cultural aspects of the White House and its history.

During her explanation of the details of the Green Room, Jacqueline Kennedy emerged as an educated executive who could readily engage the Fine Arts Committee in finding acceptable furnishings to adorn the space in the style of an American

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94 Wolff, A Tour of the White House With Mrs. John F. Kennedy, 22.
95 Smith, 49.
96 Ibid., 49.
97 Ibid., 50.
Federal parlor from around 1800. Initially, the only pieces of furniture in the Green Room were two Federal-style card tables, and, as she explained during the televised tour, “as we hate to change, we decided that we would let them dictate the style of the room.” In particular, she drew viewers’ attention to her favorite finds: a sofa once belonging to Daniel Webster and a mirror once belonging to George Washington during his stay in the presidential estate in Philadelphia on loan from the Mount Vernon estate. The display of Washington’s mirror lent credibility to her project, which she acknowledged on the tour: “When Mount Vernon, which is probably the most revered house in this country, lends something to the White House, you know they have confidence that it will be taken care of.” In this way, she made it clear that her mission to restore the White House was a scholarly, rather than lowbrow, pursuit since historical substance was associated with her work. Moreover, for the centerpiece of the room, Kennedy displayed a historically significant writing desk from a prominent Baltimore lady. Unbeknownst to the First Lady at the time of the tour, the writing desk was only a copy of the original and, as such, would later become the source of yet another scandal surrounding her project. The public dissemination of the discovery was especially embarrassing for the First Lady, since critics questioned the legitimacy of the White House restoration on the whole as well as her leadership capacities in general. As a result, she tightened access to the project

99 Wolff, A Tour of the White House With Mrs. John F. Kennedy, 27.
100 Ibid., 27.
101 Ibid., 28.
102 Ibid., 28.
103 Smith, 52.
and told her staff not to speak to the press regarding details of the restoration.\textsuperscript{104}

Regardless of whether this was the right response to the exposure of an unfortunate cataloguing error, Jacqueline Kennedy ensured her legacy as First Lady would be more controlled. Despite the future controversy, from which her project later recovered, her proficiency in the history of objects in the Green Room and her dedication to ensuring their preservation shone through during the tour with Collingwood, thereby circulating information about her White House restoration in a professional, media-savvy manner.

Next, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy led the CBS camera crew upstairs to the second floor of the White House in an effort to illustrate more of her restorative work in the public rooms while regulating Americans’ access to the private quarters of the First Lady and her family.\textsuperscript{105} The focus of her second floor tour was the Lincoln Bedroom and accompanying Sitting Room. Notably, she continued President Truman’s idea of making Lincoln’s former Cabinet room into a sort of shrine for Lincoln by exhibiting much of former First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln’s furniture purchases in conjunction with her own early Victorian finds.\textsuperscript{106} It is worth noting that Jacqueline Kennedy disliked the Victorian style in furnishings, yet she did not allow her own personal preference to override the model that had been established in this

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\begin{footnote}[	extsuperscript{*}]
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{105} Wolff, \textit{A Tour of the White House With Mrs. John F. Kennedy}, 29. During the televised tour, Collingwood explained that the second floor “is reserved for the private living of the president and his family.” Highly protective of her own and her family’s privacy during her First Ladyship, Kennedy only showed two out of the fifteen total rooms on this floor to the American public; these were the Lincoln Bedroom and Sitting Room. Because the rest of the chambers are private rather than public in nature and, consequently, not as heavily documented, the changes made in these rooms will not be discussed in this paper, which is concerned with her public role.
\textsuperscript{106} Smith, 54.
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room, maintaining that its presence in the White House emphasized the restoration’s goal of showing the entire history of the executive mansion. In addition, during this part of the tour she highlighted one of the original copies of the Gettysburg Address on a desk – keeping it underneath yellow paper “so it won’t fade” – in order to interweave the political importance of the momentous speech with the culture of the time period while at the same time demonstrating her determination to preserve the American history the antiques symbolized. Furthermore, Kennedy’s work in the Treaty Room reflected similar preservation goals; in an effort to augment the room’s historic function as the space for signing agreements, Kennedy sought copies of all the treaties signed in the room “to frame and have them all around the walls so that you can really see this is such a historic room.” Finally, a guest appearance by her husband President John F. Kennedy, who applauded the First Lady’s efforts in “dramatizing the great story of the United States” and giving “this center... a sense of American historical life” at the end of her tour, emphasized that this small touch of adding the products of the Treaty Room’s functioning contributed significantly to the fashioning of American history. Accordingly, Jacqueline Kennedy’s efforts to educate the American public on some of the most famous rooms in the White House reinvented the role of First Lady.

From this television special, every American watching could see that First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy paid great attention to the individual furnishings, such as the paintings, wallpaper, and furniture, of each room, so that artistic and cultural

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107 Ibid., 55.
109 Ibid., 35.
110 Ibid., 39

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elements of American history could be emphasized in the restoration. However, it must be recognized that the documentary of the White House’s restoration functioned as a tightly controlled public presentation. Although the televised tour and the majority of her work in restoring the White House took place in the home environment, the traditional dominion of a First Lady, Kennedy showed her competency in taking on more public, active, and educated roles as First Lady in addition to demonstrating her professional abilities in becoming an expert and making sound decisions in overseeing the historical preservation and restoration of the White House, one of the most iconic centers of public life at the federal level. By employing television in an effort to communicate more directly with the American people, her primary project extended her First Ladyship further into the public arena, and the glamorous version of the White House developed during President John F. Kennedy’s administration became more culturally accessible to the American people. Truly, Jacqueline Kennedy adapted her First Ladyship to current media developments by using television to immediately bring regular American families into the sophisticated, historic realm of the White House and by explaining the history of the executive mansion in a way that was easily understandable to the typical American citizen.

Of course, her ready availability to the American people on the television screen let the institution of First Lady become more easily available to the press, opening her position to criticism. Since the televised tour attracted such a large audience, the program was not only a popular success but also received much critical attention. Fortunately for the First Lady and the future of her role and project, the
media reviews were overwhelmingly positive. She received the highly prestigious honorary Emmy Award statuette from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy*, in recognition of her work using television to engage audiences in learning about her historical restoration project.\[^{111}\] Critics in the press also applauded her televised tour in many national publications. For instance, *Variety* called the show a “remarkable” depiction of a “vibrant dedication to her project,” describing the First Lady herself as “a sophisticated, warm video hostess.”\[^{112}\] Critic Nona B. Brown of the *New York Times* named Kennedy an “innovator” and noted that she had “gone far toward making the public areas of the White House a historic showplace for fine and authentic furnishings of earlier presidential eras.”\[^{113}\] Meanwhile, another *New York Times* television reviewer, Jack Gould, labeled her a “virtuoso” in her multiple roles as art critic, antiquarian, historian, and TV narrator; he also praised her “effortless familiarity” with the subject matter.\[^{114}\] He declared *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy* “rich in detail and diversity” and “a distinctive contribution of the electronic era: an unusual feminine personality imparting her own kind of excitement to national history and national taste.”\[^{115}\] Even international reviewers, such as those from British newspaper *The Sunday Times*, published positive remarks regarding Jacqueline Kennedy’s televised tour of the White House: “You don’t often

\[^{115}\] Ibid., 18.
get a conducted tour of a stately home with a guide so charming and so obviously absorbed in the scholarship of her subject.”

These numerous commendations portrayed Kennedy as a modernizer for the institution of First Lady in that her professionalism and ability to instantly and effectively communicate information to national, even global, populations via new media constructed a new image of women. These reviews demonstrate that audiences in the United States – and abroad – were receptive to her televised performance, and thus she successfully showed that a woman could manage a historic project in a work environment. Similarly, even though her work took place entirely in her home, still the female’s customary realm in the early 1960s, the positive critical response illustrated that the First Lady could concern herself with less traditional activities in a more progressive role. As a representative of the American woman, Kennedy was able to indirectly denounce public service – and professional workplaces in general – as a male-only pursuit.

The popular domestic response to her television special was also overwhelmingly positive. Notably, her restoration drew bipartisan support in the nation’s capitol, and individual citizens, both men and women alike, wrote to the White House via telegram to inform the Office of the First Lady of their opinions on A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy. James Argodales wrote that her telecast was “culturally and historically spellbinding,” while the entire faculty of a


117 These positive reviews from abroad functioned as a cornerstone that laid the foundation of her future international trips and reflected the success of her previous, pre-1962 visits abroad.

St. Joseph Academy said the program was “truly inspirational, cultural, and informative.” The common approval went further, crossing political party divisions: Republican Betty Rockwell expressed her belief that the First Lady deserved “many accolades for a [splendid] job that has long been overdue,” and Republican Joseph L. Tonetti penned the hope that “your broadcast tonight is something... every person in our country heard.” Widespread Republican support of the work of a First Lady of a Democratic presidential administration demonstrated that her promotion of a glorification of American history and patriotism for American culture appealed across party lines. Indeed, Variety later noted that virtually everyone adored her special that it became “the most popular American pubaffairs [sic] vehicle” through its regular repetition on television. Its popularity was seen as a contributing factor to the increase in tourists physically visiting the White House, from fewer than one million in 1960 to two million in 1963. In general, Jacqueline

121 Of course, while the majority of the responses to her televised presentation of her restoration were positive, the praise was not unanimous. Some noticed how Kennedy sidestepped reporter Charles Collingwood’s politically-loaded question about the relationship between the arts and the government. The First Lady merely replied, “That’s so complicated. I don’t know. I just think that everything in the White House should be the best.” Although she demonstrated expert knowledge of the history of the objects she and the Fine Arts Committee had chosen to be on display in the White House rooms during the tour, she faltered on the political implications of her project, alluding to her unconcern for political affairs, since it was not a focus of her project.
123 Perry, 118.
Kennedy controlled her presentation on the screen to foster a more open, positive relationship between the public, new media, and the institution of First Lady.

Ultimately, Jacqueline Kennedy changed the institution of First Lady using innovative leadership and novel communication approaches in order to strengthen her position’s relationship with the American public. Combining history, scholarship, education, and culture into the goals of the main project of her First Lady tenure, Kennedy demonstrated that the role could acquire new meaning in the latter half of the twentieth century. With the White House as her temporary home, and, more importantly, as she so heavily stressed, a historic house belonging to all Americans, changing the status of the White House to that of museum ensured that her project would continue after her time as First Lady was over. Furthermore, by altering the manner in which the press interacted with a First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy tied television to her restoration efforts as a way to more immediately and directly communicate with citizens about the importance of preserving the history and legacy of such a high-profile building. Thus, as the United States emerged from the traditional 1950s, she blended the conventional femininity of the home environment with a more active role in engaging in public service, guiding the women of America into the professional world of the more progressive 1960s.
Chapter II

Jacqueline Kennedy’s Influence on Cultural Taste and Sophistication

While Jacqueline Kennedy’s White House restoration was certainly the most publicized project of her career as First Lady, it was only a small part of her general agenda. Making the White House into a living museum enabled her to preserve historically significant pieces of American visual art, which aligned with her primary goal as First Lady: promoting fine art and highbrow culture to the nation’s citizens. As her daughter Caroline Kennedy wrote, “She celebrated American arts... believing, as my father did, that America’s artistic achievements were equal to her political and military power, and that American civilization had come of age.”124 First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy fostered an appreciation for the humanities – namely, the arts, music, and literature – in a way that enlarged the domain of the First Lady. By supporting the arts and changing the presentation of American sophistication and taste in the sphere of the White House, Kennedy actively fashioned the position of First Lady into a public persona that championed a set mission. Even though her activities in the public realm were still confined to the sphere of a traditional social hostess and a subject of interest – art – conventionally appropriate for respectable ladies, she opened the role of First Lady to more public pursuits and purposes than it had been previously through her own interests in elite art and culture. Moreover, using the media as a tool for communicating her undertakings to Americans allowed for the publication of her advancement of American artistic life and cultural taste in a

124 Perry, 132-3.
more engaged way than former First Ladies. Under Jacqueline Kennedy’s influence, the First Lady became a transitional symbol for American professional women of the burgeoning second-wave feminist movement with her combination of conventional femininity and unprecedented professionalized activities.

Since First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy devoted the majority of her energies to the advocacy of highbrow American culture, it is surprising that the scholarly community initially did not dedicate its literature to the discussion of the significance of her support for the arts. For instance, although biographer Betty Boyd Caroli noted that “within a week of the inauguration, she had begun her campaign to upgrade the taste of the nation,” Caroli focused on Kennedy’s White House restoration as the only instrument supporting her aims for increasing American artistic recognition. By ignoring all of her other accomplishments in this line of work, Caroli diminished the significance of most of Kennedy’s work as First Lady. In a comparable vein, Tina Santi Flaherty discussed how the First Lady’s “unwavering support of the arts” was best illustrated through her preservation of individual White House rooms and her subsequent search for suitable antiques that would refresh Americans’ ardor for their cultural heritage. Interestingly, while the language essential to the examination of Jacqueline Kennedy’s precedent-breaking backing of cultural heritage was, in fact, present in the historical narrative, the subject matter – or, at least, a focus on more than just her White House restoration – was not. Therefore, in focusing on her best-known achievement in office rather than placing her White House restoration in the

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125 As previously discussed, the exception is, of course, Eleanor Roosevelt.
127 Flaherty, 69.
context of her overall mission to favor the preservation and upkeep of America’s
cultural tradition, scholars’ initial discussion regarding her First Lady agenda was, in
a sense, non-existent.

The historical discourse shifted somewhat towards the end of the first decade
of the twenty-first century, when writers began recognizing that as First Lady
Jacqueline Kennedy embraced a definite agenda that thoroughly enhanced America’s
taste and appreciation of the national art scene.\textsuperscript{128} As MaryAnne Borrelli observed,
“Jacqueline Kennedy seized upon... opportunities to place her husband’s
administration at the center of cultural and artistic networks.”\textsuperscript{129} Borrelli insinuated
that, by shaping the Kennedy White House to champion highbrow cultural
achievements, Jacqueline Kennedy was able to set an example for Americans who
looked up to the glamorous First Lady and her husband and valued sophistication in
the form of art, entertainment, and culture. Furthermore, Clint Hill, former bodyguard
to First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, detailed how she emphasized a specific agenda in
the planning and hosting of particular White House events in his memoir: “Being able
to showcase the very best talent... to emphasize the importance of the arts was one of
Mrs. Kennedy’s favorite things to do” during special occasions.\textsuperscript{130} Hill was right to
identify the fact that highlighting extraordinary Americans in the artistic and cultural
spheres dominated Kennedy’s vision as First Lady. However, neither Borrelli nor Hill

\textsuperscript{128} This is notably similar to when the discourse surrounding First Lady Jacqueline
Kennedy’s efforts in the White House renovation changed from seeing her activities as
merely decorative to crediting her with the cultivation of a specific image that would give
credence to her restoration.
\textsuperscript{129} MaryAnne Borrelli, \textit{The Politics of the President’s Wife} (College Station: Texas A&M
\textsuperscript{130} Hill and McCubbin, 104.
discussed the significance of her mission’s impact on the institution of First Lady or ascribed impact on the role of First Lady to her work. Although these scholars identified an overarching principle – supporting the arts and refining the taste of the nation – as Jacqueline Kennedy’s First Lady agenda, they failed to consider her influence on the position of First Lady and its newly public reach.

As First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy did much to alter cultural taste through changing ways of entertainment at the White House, but in order to appreciate the significance of her modifications, it is necessary to briefly illustrate previous First Ladies’ efforts in perfecting White House entertainment. Entertainment in the White House had always been considered to be the responsibility of the social hostess, and each woman fulfilling the role of First Lady followed a ritualistic tradition of executing fine dinners featuring excellent food and polite conversation. However, several First Ladies deviated in their approach to state dinners and special occasions, shaping White House entertainment protocol in small ways. For instance, in the early nineteenth century, rather than hosting exclusive events for only the political elite, First Lady Dolley Madison held weekly gatherings for politicians, diplomats, and local residents alike in order to bridge unrelated social groups in the nation’s capital. While this unprecedented practice was later abandoned as the United States’ international reputation grew, Dolley Madison demonstrated that First Ladies could control guest lists to shape the atmosphere and tone of their events. Several years later, First Lady Mary Lincoln began the practice of selecting White House

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china that would be representative of the country’s social status, allowing a First Lady to use state dinners as a venue to reinforce the country’s image in a positive way. In the twentieth century, First Lady Mamie Eisenhower chose to use E-shaped banquet tables, rather than the traditional oval- and U-shaped banquet tables, to face her guests while still formally accommodating the Eisenhowers’ 6-course meals and white-tie galas. This minor change gave the First Lady the ability to adjust seating arrangements in a more welcoming way. These modifications set the stage for First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy to establish national sophistication and cultural taste in a public yet personalized way at presidential social gatherings.

By making changes in modes of entertainment in the White House a cornerstone of her First Lady agenda, Jacqueline Kennedy re-shaped the conventional role of First Lady as a leader, converting national taste to reflect chic and elegant glamour while simultaneously preserving the traditional notions of entertainment at the executive mansion. Indeed, her elite background as a young sophisticate on the East Coast gave her the potential to develop charming social graces and observe the hosting of formal events that she would later make use of as First Lady: “The quiet-mannered, publicity-shy, socially-bred Jacqueline turns out to have all the benefits and all the qualifications necessary for the most brilliant and most active era to date in

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the president’s residence.”134 The first major event she hosted as First Lady, Kennedy’s first state dinner on July 11, 1961, provided her with the opportunity to illustrate to the public for the first time the groundbreaking changes she would implement in existing entertainment practices at the White House. Held for Pakistan’s President Mohammad Ayub Khan, the dinner’s setting was Mount Vernon, the historic home of the United States’ first president, George Washington.135 This was an obvious departure from the tradition of hosting such dignified events at the White House, but Kennedy purposefully chose Mount Vernon, almost 20 miles south of the executive mansion, to present her country in a certain way to her guests, the nation’s citizens, and the world in order to connect America’s past to its present culture while maintaining the exceptional grandeur associated with such dinners. The first house to be historically preserved in America, Mount Vernon offered the perfect venue for emphasizing her preservation agenda as well as her mission to upgrade the taste of the nation.136 With the reputation of the president known as the father of the country embodied in his old home supporting her vision of acculturated entertaining, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy sought to impress Washington society and the entirety of America in showing off her competency as a social hostess who would subsequently transform the First Lady model of entertaining.

135 Hill and McCubbin, 95.
Her successful orchestration of the event integrated several changes in the overall presentation of American highbrow culture in order to cultivate an image of American opulence and affluence. The First Lady, her husband, and their almost 140 guests proceeded down the Potomac River in four boats to arrive at the site of the state dinner, generating a sense of excitement among the company as they approached their destination. From the port, limousines drove them to the historic house.\textsuperscript{137} Both the yachts and limousines functioned as a way of displaying the nation’s high sophistication and status. Despite this rather unusual way of arriving at the destination that purposefully drew attention to American spectacle and pageantry, Jacqueline Kennedy emphasized, through the inclusion of the historic military drill, that traditional overtones of state dinners were not forgotten in her planning.\textsuperscript{138} Thus, combining spectacle with tradition allowed Kennedy to transcend entertainment precedents and affect cultural taste. Notwithstanding the ostentation the First Lady elevated in the execution of the event, Kennedy designed this state dinner – as well as the ones that followed – as a black-tie affair, a change from the previous white-tie requirement.\textsuperscript{139} While this could be seen as a reduction in classiness, this small modification made the environment less formal and, thus, more enjoyable while still maintaining a certain level of formality in the protocol required for these special occasions. This deviation fit into her First Lady agenda because it effectively molded


\textsuperscript{138} Letitia Baldrige, \textit{Of Diamonds and Diplomats: An Autobiography of a Happy Life} (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), 173. As Kennedy’s social secretary Letitia Baldrige wrote, “There was no one more respectful of history and tradition... but there was also no one more ready to change customs that had no historic value.”

\textsuperscript{139} Borrelli, 78-9.
her image as a stylish, distinguished First Lady while increasing the refinement of American culture during a public event. Ultimately, even before the state dinner officially began at Mount Vernon, Jacqueline Kennedy was already making changes in the event schedule and plans that expanded her influence as social hostess.

During the state dinner at Mount Vernon, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy continued to elevate the presentation of American highbrow culture. In terms of décor, she decided to abandon the U-shaped banquet table in favor of using smaller, circular tables under a tent decorated by the famous American company Tiffany’s.140 Indeed, her social secretary Letitia Baldrige proclaimed that Kennedy “violently disliked using the traditional U-shaped table,” but noted that when the occasion absolutely merited their use, she employed small and simple flower displays – rather than utilizing, in the style of the Eisenhower era, the large floral arrangements that blocked conversation – “to keep it from appearing overly... formal.”141 Additionally, Kennedy switched the menu from six courses of 21 items to a simpler four-course supper of eight items, and modified the style of music during dinner from that of the Eisenhowers’ garish choice of Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians to that of her own preference, the National Symphony Orchestra.142 Her efforts thus facilitated a refined yet friendly and fun formal atmosphere. Honing her expertise in hosting events, she molded the traditional position of First Lady as social hostess into that of event

142 Borrelli, 78-9; Thomas, 8.
planner, acquiring a more active role and cosmopolitan image for the First Lady as a public figure.

As with her restoration of the White House, her guests’ reception of her work as social hostess was exceptionally acclamatory. For instance, Mohammad Ayub Khan, President of Pakistan, thanked the First Lady for “a rare evening” at Mount Vernon and her “tireless efforts to make the dinner the success it was.”143 Such praise from the guest of honor revealed that Kennedy’s efforts in cultivating an elegant yet comfortable entertainment design for the state dinner successfully enhanced the image of elite American culture. Moreover, chairman of the board of Tiffany and Company, Walter Hoving, wrote to Kennedy, saying, “I heard from all sides of seasoned government people that never have they been to a better party in Washington,” drawing attention to bipartisan support of her activities in the public realm, and journalist Hazel Markel said that the First Lady’s “imagination and artistry have given new excitement and glamour to state entertaining.”144 Thus, Kennedy provided a vibrant display of America to citizens and international guests alike in following her mission to shape elite cultural taste.

Furthermore, the general media coverage of the state dinner at Mount Vernon publicized the details of the event to the American public, offering a way for the First Lady to simultaneously communicate her work and advertise highbrow cultural taste to other Americans. Critical reviewers of her orchestrations were generally impressed

with her masterful manipulation of the highly controlled visual environment and the accompanying symbolism of her strategy. According to seasoned Washington Post reporters Marie Smith and Maxine Cheshire, the state dinner “was a flawless spectacle Hollywood couldn’t surpass.”145 By likening her first state dinner to an event Hollywood would orchestrate, these writers drew a parallel between the celebrity of Hollywood and the glamour and glorified Americana at the state dinner, a significant change from the formal, “overly stiff” state dinners held previously.146 Recognizing her modifications as influential emphasized her usefulness as First Lady by ascribing action, rather than passivity, to the role and highlighted the existence of Kennedy’s mission to engage her audience of interested Americans in the upgrading of popular cultural taste. Additionally, several writers like Helen Thomas of the Chicago Tribune and Doris Fleeson of the Boston Globe, generated positive reviews of the state dinner at Mount Vernon solely to describe Kennedy’s public agenda of changing the presentation of state entertainment, demonstrating that the First Lady could control the evening’s program to shape the atmosphere and tone of these events; in Kennedy’s case, she molded this state dinner to reflect the sophistication and charm associated with highbrow American culture.147 Controlling the information distributed to reporters through carefully constructed press releases, Jacqueline Kennedy employed press secretary Pamela Turnure to use the press as an essential tool for disseminating the First Lady’s interpretation of elegance to the entire country.

146 Baldrige, “The Tish Touch at White House Parties,” 2.
While this was done in an effort to control her image and amass positive reviews, some members of the press, though not a significant number, found grounds on which to criticize her work as First Lady. For instance, Jack Anderson of the *Boston Globe* noted that the food at the social event was French, rather than American.\(^{148}\) It was well known that Jacqueline Kennedy was fond of the French, and so her modeling of her entertainment scheme after the French style was more or less unsurprising.\(^{149}\) Even so, her straying from the expectation that American public figures would underscore the greatness of America merited the media’s condemnation. Despite the occasional critique, the press proved to be a valuable ally in communicating the First Lady’s activities to the American people.

Ultimately, the press emphasized that, with her novel additions to the traditional framework of entertainment, Jacqueline Kennedy progressively expanded the role of First Lady by advancing the aims of her own cultural agenda through their descriptions. The media’s praise of her work as First Lady engendered a large following of Americans, particularly women, hoping to imitate the First Lady’s successful presentation of this state dinner in their own households. Kennedy’s social secretary Letitia Baldrige wrote in the *Chicago Tribune*, “If a young housewife were to follow Mrs. Kennedy’s setting theme at [the] state dinner, she could emulate the entire theme at a very low cost.”\(^{150}\) This accessibility of elite culture spoke to the public nature of the First Lady’s role as well as her propagation of highbrow cultural taste to other classes in America. However, the large number of female journalists,

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\(^{149}\) Keogh, 14.

\(^{150}\) Baldrige, “The Tish Touch at White House Parties,” 2.
homemakers, and hostesses of events around the country who followed her activities with a passion illustrated that entertainment was still considered to be a female-only pursuit. Thus, while Jacqueline Kennedy enlarged the role of social hostess in the public realm by making important, unprecedented changes to the predominant entertainment model and then communicating her activities through the press, she still functioned within the conventional role of the First Lady.

This glamorous, precedent-shattering state dinner set the stage for the First Lady’s future events, many of which centered on the arts. While the arts had long been considered to be a field appropriate for women’s involvement, Jacqueline Kennedy’s encouragement and support for the arts in 1960s American highbrow society transformed the role of First Lady into a more public position concerned with the promotion of a particular agenda. In this case, that agenda was championing the arts, including music, fine visual art, and literature.

As First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy encouraged the performance of music in order to engage Americans, especially America’s youth, in understanding, participating in, and advancing the artistic culture of the United States. As the First Lady said in American Weekly, “It’s never too soon to help the child to an appreciation of good... music.”

Her philosophy took its form in her program, entitled “Concerts for Young People by Young People,” which was announced via a press release on August 9, 1961: on the South Lawn of the White House, youth musical groups would perform at the bi-yearly outdoor concert series to delight audiences of children “in the interest of stimulating the study and performance of

music by the youth of America.” By directly engaging children in music, Kennedy articulated an original plan for espousing the arts as a way of enriching their lives. In focusing her initial appeal for increased music appreciation on youngsters, she communicated not only through the press release but also her actions that she was interested in cultivating the erudition of the future of America. Ultimately aiding in the image formation of the First Lady was the youthful quality of her linkage of the arts to children. As one of the youngest women to occupy the role of First Lady, stressing the importance of the arts to children while surrounding herself in the White House environment with the country’s youth allowed Jacqueline Kennedy, by association, to construct an appearance of youthfulness for the position of First Lady; thus, linking the arts to youth allowed her to promote an appreciation of American musical culture as an innovative development in the shaping of national taste. Of course, her platforms for promoting her agenda of increasing cultural appreciation were not limited entirely to children; indeed, the First Lady sponsored the Inter-American Music Festival, several national symphony orchestras, and performances by American musicians at White House events. Her patronage of these sorts of sophisticated, highbrow musical acts combined her mission to promote great American music with her agenda to upgrade national taste.

153 Her role as a mother to two young children in the White House setting also contributed to the image formation of her First Ladyship as youthful and culturally attuned.
First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy also brought over high-end European culture to mainstream America in 1963 when she expertly persuaded French Minister of State for Cultural Affairs André Malraux to lend the famous *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci to America for a short time. Essentially functioning as an ambassador, the First Lady supplied what is widely considered to be the “ultimate artistic accomplishment” to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City for two months in total.\(^\text{155}\) This was an unheard-of accomplishment, since the painting had never been loaned to another country for display due to its incredible cultural, and subsequent economic, value as well as its history of recurrent theft.\(^\text{156}\) However, Kennedy’s charming, powerful communication skills and proficiency in the French language at a state dinner held especially for guest of honor Minister Malraux persuaded him to lend the painting to the United States for its first public loan. Her activities in expediting the public display of the painting consequently boosted the public role of the First Lady in that she made prized art more accessible to many ordinary Americans. Despite initial concerns articulated in the press about its fragility and estimates that individuals would only secure about three to five seconds in front of the painting, the public display of the *Mona Lisa* drew over a million and a half visitors in total, and nearly 10,000 within the first day on display at the National Gallery.\(^\text{157}\) As a matter of fact, newsreels

\(^\text{155}\) Perry, 129; Ibid., 130.


depicted the long lines that Americans endured in order to get a glimpse of the celebrated image: “Everybody wants to meet the new girl in town,” one newsreel broadcaster proclaimed.\textsuperscript{158} The tremendous attention to the \textit{Mona Lisa} is noteworthy in that the First Lady piqued so much national interest in an explicitly female image, highlighting the authority of women in sustaining cultural life. Although the painting was not American, Jacqueline Kennedy effectively focused the United States’ attention on fine art through her mission to upgrade the nation’s cultural taste and to increase government involvement in pursuing artistic life by enabling any American, regardless of race or gender, to view da Vinci’s \textit{Mona Lisa}.\textsuperscript{159}

To further celebrate fine art and culture, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy hosted a White House dinner party for Western hemisphere winners of the 1962 Nobel Prize in the arts.\textsuperscript{160} However, according to the \textit{U.S. News and World Report}, the event was more than an ordinary party: “It was a deliberate tribute to Americans who have distinguished themselves in cultural ways – outside the practical fields of business and politics,” and President John F. Kennedy declared that the dinner housed “the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House.”\textsuperscript{161} While he paid special attention to Nobel Prize-winning author Pearl S. Buck, Jacqueline Kennedy drew attention to Nobel Prize-winning poet Robert Frost, illustrating that the propulsion of literary culture

\textsuperscript{158} Herlihy, “Priceless Smile: President Leads Mona Lisa Tribute.”
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} Although all who won Nobel Prizes in the arts were honored, the First Lady focused in particularly on literary prizewinners.
was central to the goal of this event.\textsuperscript{162} Thus, Jacqueline Kennedy’s recognition of these inspiring individuals in the White House setting demonstrated that the First Lady could manage guest lists in order to shape how culturally attuned a presidential administration and the accompanying national culture would be. Additionally, this special occasion honoring the newly distinguished artists and writers featured readings of several deceased Nobel Prize winners, infusing the humanities with entertainment and the present with the past.\textsuperscript{163} With this choice, Kennedy enriched the presentation of American culture in tandem with her support of the arts, thereby diversifying the functions of the position of the First Lady.

Jacqueline Kennedy’s agenda as First Lady, to advance highbrow artistic and cultural life in America, was incredibly significant in the context of the ongoing Cold War. By proudly showing off America’s breadth of talent in the humanities, Kennedy illustrated that the United States excelled in all facets of the arts and, further, that the country was rich enough to support the arts in the midst of international political turmoil. In celebrating the vitality of the nation and augmenting the vibrancy of the existing cultural scene, she drew attention to her own special interests in elite art and taste while illustrating how the First Lady could manipulate the presentation of Americana in a way that made the United States appear more viable than the Soviet Union. After using historically significant buildings, mainly the White House, as the setting for the majority of special occasions that she extensively planned, Kennedy molded the executive mansion into the ultimate representation and showcase of

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American highbrow art and culture; the White House, rather than the Kremlin, would embody the cultural capital of the world and therefore demonstrate that America was superior. Because of the implications of her cultural agenda, President John F. Kennedy made it a point to highlight his support for her mission of “[believing] in the artist,” and American historian Arthur Schlesinger expressed his conviction that the new image of a culturally-vibrant America would “confound Communist propaganda and increase our appeal to the intellectuals of both old and new nations.”

Admittedly, the First Lady did not explicitly or directly involve herself, her staff, or her activities in the political realm, but her involvement in the public sphere suggested that her actions, aided by the media, fashioned an image of the First Lady as a political figure, regardless of the purpose behind her actions. Thus, it is important to consider the ramifications of a First Lady’s agenda in the context of the times in order to grasp how her objectives affected the image of the United States both domestically and on an international diplomatic stage.

Ultimately, through her steadfast support of the arts, highbrow culture, and elite entertainment, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy was able to refashion the position of First Lady. By enacting a particular agenda, one that pertained to her own interests, the First Lady engaged in creating a new, multifaceted attribute to the functioning of the position. Additionally, through glamour, style, and the cultivation of a youthful image, Kennedy enhanced her own role as First Lady and made American history and

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culture seem more sophisticated than it had been considered previously. The media became an asset in supporting her public goals as First Lady, allowing Kennedy to communicate her aims more effectively to the American public while engaging more directly with them in the hope that the populace would grow to appreciate elite taste and culture as well. Consequently, she transformed the institution of First Lady by embodying and encouraging artistic and cultural trends, and she merged the conventional femininity associated with fine art and the traditional role of social hostess with a more individualistic, active approach, thereby functioning as an intermediary in steering the position of First Lady into the progressive 1960s.

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165 Schlesinger, 1.
Chapter III

Jacqueline Kennedy and Her Fashion

Of course, while the majority of her efforts lay in the restoration, preservation, and advancement of American material and highbrow culture, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy did not focus solely on one specific agenda. As a matter of fact, she was incredibly well known for her sense of fashion and style as well. From the inception of her public role as First Lady, “everyone agreed that Jacqueline Kennedy’s career as a major fashion influence was beginning impressively,” and her clothing continued to capture headlines throughout her First Ladyship. As national – and international – attention became centered on her clothing choices, Kennedy cultivated an image of a more visible First Lady that subsequently expanded the public reach of the role, with particular influence over American women. By making clothing and appearance an issue for a First Lady to consider, Kennedy used her refined sense of fashion to communicate as First Lady her goals of changing American taste and subtly advancing female professionalism. In this way, she fashioned the First Lady into a more accessible yet sophisticated figure by highlighting the importance of self-presentation in the occupation of such a public position while demonstrating her own competence as First Lady, enhanced through her individualized mode of dress. Although clothes and fashion have been conventionally seen as a frivolous and feminine pursuit, the implications of her dress at events she attended simultaneously engaged the First Lady with more public concerns, rather than just those of a social hostess, and rendered a tangible cultural impact on aesthetics, gender, and the

position of the First Lady itself in the early 1960s. Indeed, the media’s wide dissemination of images of her clothing offered Kennedy an opportunity to engage Americans with the role of First Lady in a more involving way than previously done in order to publicize the “Jackie look” and its elite, stylish connotations. Thus, through her fashionable clothes, Jacqueline Kennedy expanded the role of First Lady to encompass traditional aspects of femininity as well as progressive characteristics of the roles of professional women more typical of the forthcoming second wave of feminism.

Despite the high profile of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s style and the multitude of photographs distributed by the press of her clothing, there is astonishingly little examination of her impact on fashion in the scholarly literature of twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In fact, in 1983, scholar Lois Banner briefly mentioned Jacqueline Kennedy as “the acknowledged leader of the beautiful people” in the context of beauty standards in the 1960s, ascribing her influence to her genetics and physicality that were out of her control.167 Although she mentioned the First Lady’s looks rather than clothing choices, Banner notably pioneered discussions about Kennedy’s outward appearance. However, this emphasis on the First Lady’s exteriority fell by the wayside for several years. Writers like Valerie Steele in 1997 and John Peacock in 1998 independently created anthologies of twentieth-century and, more specifically, 1960s American fashion that did not even mention the First Lady; this is quite staggering, considering Jacqueline Kennedy’s contributions to fashion and its shaping of the position of the First Lady. Nevertheless, Banner’s idea

for analyzing her appearance was revived in 1999, when Christine Remirez discussed Kennedy’s “aesthetically pleasing” style and how it constructed a “compelling mystique” about the persona of the First Lady. In focusing on Kennedy’s appearance’s relationship to her popularity and celebrity, this writer overlooked the impact of the First Lady’s fashion choices and, as such, reduced the historical significance of her clothing and the message she communicated in support of high sophistication and taste through her style of dress. In a similar vein, historian Maurine Hoffman Beasley brought attention to her captivation of American audiences through her “chic wardrobe.” According to Beasley, “fan magazines featured her alongside celebrities such as Elizabeth Taylor, equating the First Lady with Hollywood superstars” due to her clothing choices. Similar to Remirez’s portrayal of her style’s impact, Beasley’s aligning of the First Lady with such stars through fashion merely equated Kennedy with celebrity. Ultimately, by excluding the First Lady from the cultural narrative or including her fashion efforts only in terms of beauty and fame, these analyses thoroughly misrepresented Jacqueline Kennedy’s success in enlarging the functional realm of the role of the First Lady through her fashion sense.

The tide changed a few years later, when the scholarly community began taking note of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s fashion as a means of forming an elevated and refined image of herself. According to noted twenty-first-century fashion historian Cally Blackman, “Jacqueline Kennedy shaped her own image as the epitome of American chic,” and the National Museum of American History

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168 Christine Marie Ramirez, “Fashion as Communication: Jacqueline Kennedy’s Rhetoric of Style” (Florida Atlantic University, 1999), iv.
169 Beasley, 71.
170 Ibid., 74.
redesigned its exhibit on Kennedy’s inaugural gown by emphasizing how her style epitomized modern glamour. Recognizing that the First Lady’s taste in clothing had a purpose beyond increasing her celebrity was noteworthy, although neither the Museum nor Blackman designated her wardrobe as something that affected the public role of the First Lady. Interestingly, Barbara Brown commented that the influence and visibility of Jacqueline Kennedy’s sophisticated taste in clothes functioned as “a major political asset for [President John F. Kennedy’s] New Frontier” and presidency, rather than an advantage for her own position of First Lady. Consequently, analysis of how Jacqueline Kennedy’s fashion choices impacted her public role as First Lady as well as national fashion production and sales has been entirely absent from the literature; this analysis will fill these gaps.

As First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy not only shaped cultural taste in mainstream American clothing style but also expectations of a First Lady – that she should dress a certain way in order to maintain both an image of sophisticated femininity and of conservative professionalism. Indeed, as a public figure during the coming of age of visual media, the First Lady, under tremendous press scrutiny, decided to take control of her semblance and dress in a way that suited her own tastes while also complementing the times. Thus, the search for an appropriate designer became key to the manipulation of her own image as First Lady. As a public figure, it was important that the First Lady’s choice for her official clothing designer be

171 Cally Blackman, 100 Years of Fashion (London: Laurence King Pub, 2012), 374.
173 Ibid., 31. Kennedy wrote to her future designer, “One reason I am so happy to be working with you is that I have some control over my fashion publicity.”
American, despite her personal love for European, and especially French, fashion, in an effort to limit criticism over any possible lack of patriotism or support for American products.\(^{174}\) To combine her desire to wear French-inspired clothing with the obligation to patronize American goods, Kennedy settled on American-based, French designer Oleg Cassini after he declared that “the message that her clothes would send [would be] simple, youthful, elegant.”\(^{175}\) With this choice, she subtly linked French fashion to American culture. Furthermore, by appointing an official clothing designer for the First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy singlehandedly enlarged the office of First Lady, enhancing the subtly professional nature of her First Ladyship. Her creation of this position thus drew more of the public’s attention to the self-presentation and public appearance of a First Lady, and her collaboration with Oleg Cassini would launch the role of First Lady into the public realm in a way that would impact cultural aesthetics and preconceived notions of gender.

For her husband’s inauguration on January 20, 1961, her first public event as First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy molded an image of sophistication and glamour to communicate a new era of greatness in America when she wowed onlookers and the press alike with her now-famous inaugural gown and complementary cape.\(^{176}\) The evening gown was white, a dramatic, ceremonial color that emphasized the stateliness

\(^{174}\) Blackman, 374.

\(^{175}\) Blackman, 374; Perry, 64.

\(^{176}\) Jay Mulvaney, *Jackie: The Clothes of Camelot* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 11. Bergdorf Goodman designed her inaugural gown, as he was commissioned to do so before Oleg Cassini’s appointment as her official designer. Cassini would, however, fabricate her coat and less imposing day dress that she wore to her husband’s inauguration.
of the occasion. Its simple, clean lines created a regal sensibility about the persona of the new First Lady. With its distinctive look, she practically glowed in the warmth of the promise of new beginnings in the executive branch with a floor-length dress’ embroidered with “silver and brilliants.” This extreme visibility placed Kennedy at the center of attention as she basked in the promise of the New Frontier; indeed, as

![First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s Inaugural Gown](Image)

**Figure 1: First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s Inaugural Gown (Source: The National Museum of American History).**

previously mentioned, the *Washington Post* noted that her “career as a major fashion influence was beginning impressively,” thanks to this specific ensemble. To add to that, *Newsweek* also praised the dress in a similar way, claiming, “Jacqueline

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178 Mulvaney, 10.

179 “First Lady Sets the Fashion,” *The Washington Post-Times Herald* January 21, 1961, B9. Interestingly, this comment demonstrated that this newspaper was assuming she would have an influence over mainstream fashion, perhaps due to her predecessor First Lady Mamie Eisenhower’s liking for the color pink, in line with the mainstream, traditional 1950s standard for conventional gender roles, and signature short bangs that only somewhat caught on amongst American women. Unlike Jacqueline Kennedy, her trademarks did not spark a cultural change in American fashion or even a general style.
Kennedy had sparked a revolution in fashion.”\textsuperscript{180} A \textit{New York Times} article entitled, “Mrs. Kennedy Leads Inaugural Ball Fashion,” also praised the dress, labeling it “chic,” and described the First Lady’s fashion as inspiring “a new fashion spirit.”\textsuperscript{181} Such positive reviews peppered other papers as well, demonstrating a universal approval, or at least recognition, of her efforts to alter the fashion of a First Lady. By showcasing elegant simplicity in the form of clothes at such a pivotal, first event, Jacqueline Kennedy demonstrated her commitment to public image formation from the outset of her career as First Lady.

The inaugural gown was just the first in a wide array of clothing First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy wore that impressed public audiences and stunned the media alike.\textsuperscript{182} The colorful clothes that Kennedy sported were different from those of previous First Ladies and those of other world leaders’ wives of the time. Indeed, during the high-tension periods of the Cold War, the First Lady’s professional wardrobe communicated femininity and glamour, which sustained a contrast to “the dull grayness... of communist leaders in the 1960s.”\textsuperscript{183} Additionally, emerging from the traditional 1950s, America itself was fascinated with the First Lady’s preference for understated vogue and body-fitting A-line skirts, rather than the previously-mainstream longer circle skirts and dresses. Thus, the outfits to be addressed in this

\textsuperscript{180} Perry, 68.


\textsuperscript{182} Naturally, as with all public figures, the First Lady did receive some criticism about her fashion in the press because of her clothes’ uneconomical price tag. Although critics were in the minority, to generalize universal approval of her clothing would be a historical fallacy, so this consequence of the visibility of her public role will be discussed at length. See the discussion about criticisms regarding her fashion later in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{183} Perry, 6.
analysis will be a selection of ensembles from domestic public events that had important repercussions on the aesthetics of American fashion and women’s wardrobes.

For her first state dinner as First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy modeled a white organza and lace evening gown, with a chartreuse silk sash added for dramatic flair, at the historical Mount Vernon estate.\(^{184}\) The First Lady’s garb not only subtly complemented her guest of honor’s white dinner jacket as a gesture of welcome, but it also appeared to be coordinated with the colors of the house’s façade as a restrained nod to the past. Her clothes, in essence, communicated both a First Lady’s traditional

\[\text{Figure 2: First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy poses with Pakistani President Mohammad Ayub Khan (source: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives).}\]

\(^{184}\) As previously noted, this dinner, one of the most celebrated state dinners of the Kennedy administration, was held in honor of President Mohammad Ayub Khan of Pakistan on July 11, 1961.
function as social hostess as well as her new, more progressive role as facilitator of linking the past to the present in order to project a resounding image of American excellence. Although most of the press commentary was directed toward her display of distinctly highbrow American culture at this event, a couple of reporters in the media paid attention to her fashion choices, saying that her “high-style matters... has all Washington a-dazzle and most of the world’s sophisticates a-twitter.”185 Indeed, while this (unidentified) reporter did not explicitly write about the purpose of her wardrobe choices, Kennedy’s impact upon impressing people through her fashion at this momentous event certainly did not go unnoticed. Jacqueline Kennedy thus expanded the role of First Lady into the public sphere as her evening gown projected a public image of a sophisticated, stylish First Lady who understood the cultural undertones of certain outfits.

Another ensemble to make an impression upon a public audience was the red woolen jacket and knee-length skirt worn during First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s televised tour of the White House on February 14, 1962.186 Television provided her with the opportunity to communicate directly with a significantly large portion of the American public, and her fashion choices were carefully chosen to send a particular message about the role of First Lady to her viewers. With its straight lines and lack of frill, the short-jacket suit exuded a quality of professionalism on screen. Performing

186 Keogh, 42. Due to the absence of color television in early 1962, her suit appeared dark grey on the television screen, despite its saturated color “made to stand out in the lineup of men in dark suits.”
in an environment in which she functioned as an educated tour guide, Kennedy sent an image that she was a competent, knowledgeable woman capable of explaining the significance of selected antiques. Many journalists included a description of her “handsome” outfit with accompanying photographs to illustrate the First Lady’s style in newspapers across the country, but discourse regarding the particular purpose of her clothing was missing from the media’s discussion of her suit. Ultimately, the First Lady’s televised clothing became a transitional symbol for American professional women of the burgeoning second-wave feminist movement.

On April 29, 1962, Jacqueline Kennedy further increased the visibility of the role of First Lady by wearing an impressive evening gown, designed by Oleg Cassini, to the dinner she hosted for the Western hemisphere’s Nobel Prize laureates. The dress was celadon in color and draped over her figure to produce a pleated skirt and

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bust line.\(^{188}\) The dress effectively created an image of demure femininity, while simultaneously generating, thanks to its light coloring, a noticeable appearance that contrasted with the sea of dark colors of everyone else’s clothing. In this way, Jacqueline Kennedy put forth an image that combined a conventional female role with expressions of independence more typical of the second-wave feminist movement. Furthermore, the gown’s creases and light green color brought to mind ancient effigies and molded an image similar to that of the Statue of Liberty; in fact, *Vogue* described the First Lady as “the dynamic modern embodiment of an ancient muse” often depicted in art and literature.\(^{189}\) Therefore, the ensemble complemented her agenda as First Lady as well as the main purpose of the event: celebrating highbrow American culture and intellectual prowess. Moreover, Kennedy’s fashion at this formal event was highly praised, significantly more so than her previous outfits.


\(^{189}\) Perry, 85.
As guest and author William Styron wrote, “Jackie actually shimmered,” and guest Diana Trilling penned in *The New Yorker* that Kennedy “carried her clothes exquisitely.” 190 Additionally, the *Washington Post-Times Herald* noted that the First Lady’s dress, which was “beautifully draped over one shoulder,” set the “style note” of the event. 191 The media emphasized the First Lady’s eye for refined, stylish apparel, increasing her influence and enhancing the visibility of the public role of a First Lady. Thus, Jacqueline Kennedy’s fashion at the Nobel Prize dinner not only augmented her cultural engagement agenda but also constructed an image of herself complementary to her goals as First Lady.

Similarly, when First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy hosted a black-tie dinner in honor of French Minister of Culture André Malraux on May 11, 1962, she chose to wear a light pink, strapless gown, an antique diamond hairpiece, and long, white gloves in order to supplement the tone she wanted to establish that evening. With Malraux in attendance, the First Lady wanted to present an image of America as elegant, sophisticated, and cultured so that her efforts of persuasion to borrow the *Mona Lisa* for viewing in America would seem legitimate and result in a tangible outcome; her ensemble effectively communicated those qualities. Indeed, the pale pink color, traditionally worn by females, showcased First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s soft, feminine side while evoking both glamour and youth, but, as seen previously, its lighter color, in addition to the shiny quality of the silk fabric and hairpiece, contributed to her person being more noticeable than her guests, many of

190 Ibid., 85; Mulvaney, 43.
whom were wearing dark-colored suits; in fact, with her glittering hairpiece, she seemed to glow in comparison to her guests. The simplicity of the dress did not

distract from her message of supporting the arts; this strategy allowed her to actively use fashion as a means to bring attention to her goals. This proved to be successful, since she secured Malraux’s promise for the loan of the *Mona Lisa* to the United States at this dinner. That said, the First Lady’s social secretary Letitia Balridge recalled that, thanks to the gown’s eye-catching quality, Kennedy was the “center of attention” at the Malraux dinner; this only further projected the First Lady and her cultural agenda further into the spotlight at this public event. Although several newspapers praised the style of the gown to their readers, as usual, some journalists

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192 Anne Yates Clarke, “All Lines to Focus on Her ‘Exquisite’ Face,” (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, 1; Goodman, 129. As designer Oleg Cassini said, “[Her] clothes will have fluid, cool lines, understated and uncluttered. The focal point of all designs will be Mrs. Kennedy’s exquisite face.”

criticized its lack of sleeves and disparaged its “revealing nature.” That said, while the press reviews were not all positive, as had been in previous cases, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy still made headlines from her wardrobe, ultimately still extending her position’s public reach and visibility.

The importance of Jacqueline Kennedy’s clothing choices continued to be a crucial part of the First Lady’s self-presentation, altering the public function and prominence of the role. As one of the notable dresses that First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy modeled on two different occasions, the dress embodied a dual function that the role of First Lady itself was likewise beginning to represent in her activities as social hostess and public figure. Kennedy wore a light pink silk dress beaded with porcelain and rhinestones, as well as long white gloves, to the ceremonious unveiling of the *Mona Lisa* at the National Gallery of Art on January 8, 1963, in addition to the White House state dinner honoring President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan of India on June 3, 1963. Since most of the publicity of the dress surrounded the event honoring the *Mona Lisa* due to its more public nature, more emphasis on that event will be similarly placed in this analysis. In the context of the unveiling of the *Mona Lisa* in America, the pink color of the dress appropriately called to mind the similar shade of the dress that the First Lady wore to the state dinner at which she convinced French Minister of Culture André Malraux to lend the painting to America. By wearing the same color to both functions linked thematically through the presence of Malraux and her interest in the *Mona Lisa*, Jacqueline Kennedy connected the two

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194 Mini Rhea, “The First Lady is Elegant Wherever She Goes – Her Understated Costumes Fit the Occasion,” *The Atlanta Constitution* May 1962, 19; Perry 129.
events visually, engaging the institution of First Lady in a role that widened the public understanding of her part in bringing the *Mona Lisa* to America. Furthermore, its elegant, decorated aesthetic presented an image of the role of First Lady as one in tune with the artistic importance of such an influential piece of gendered decorative art, since the gown’s sophisticated clothing aesthetic paralleled the *Mona Lisa*’s own cultural refinement. As a matter of fact, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* described her pink evening gown as “dazzling,” and the *New York Amsterdam News* made an announcement soon after she modeled this ensemble that she was the leader of the “best dressed women” in America.\(^{196}\) Her visibility as a public figure also increased during this event, as her dependable strategy of wearing lighter colors amongst

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individuals wearing darker colors worked yet again to project her more fully into the attention of the public. On the other hand, at the state dinner for the president of India, this dress acted as a tribute to Indian culture; with its sari-inspired inclusion of an overskirt in its design, her fashion put a Western spin on the ensemble traditionally worn by Indian women and subtly celebrated their culture.\textsuperscript{197} In this way, Kennedy, as social hostess, fashioned a welcoming and appreciative atmosphere for her guest. Moreover, when the First Lady donned this pink dress more than once, she demonstrated cost-consciousness; as a public figure, it became important to recycle costumes in an effort to diminish popular disdain for a lack of economic morality. By doing so, she expertly embraced the public implications of her clothing.

Of course, the most harrowing event of Jacqueline Kennedy’s First Ladyship was the assassination of her husband President John F. Kennedy, and the clothing she wore when he was killed has become an iconic representation of this tragic event ingrained in the American consciousness. On November 22, 1963, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy disembarked from a plane in Dallas wearing a bright pink, double-breasted Chanel suit, trimmed with navy blue accents, and her signature pillbox hat, ready to greet and persuade potential voters in Texas to support President John F. Kennedy in the upcoming election.\textsuperscript{198} Even though her sophisticated suit was unabashedly traditionally feminine in its bold use of pink, it effectively

\textsuperscript{197} Mulvaney, 47.
\textsuperscript{198} Perry, 176; CBS News, “JFK Coverage 1:30-2:40pm 11/22/63,” in \textit{CBS News Bulletin} (November 22, 1963). This suit had been previously used on a 1962 outing in London, during a welcoming ceremony at the White House, and during a photo opportunity with the maharajah and maharani of Jaipur. On another note, Texan votes were considered crucial to President Kennedy’s campaign; the voice of a reporter from the CBS News Bulletin from the live broadcast of his assassination’s initial coverage said, “Dallas has been a hotbed of
communicated her more progressive, professional goal of securing these elusive votes; according to biographer Barbara Perry, “the president had told her to look particularly stylish in Dallas to impress ‘the rich Republican women’” at an impending lunch.¹⁹⁹ After the President was shot, all existing television news outlets began reporting on the assassination, but, due to the seriousness of the issue, little attention was paid to the First Lady’s clothing. CBS News anchorman Walter Cronkite showed viewers a black-and-white image of the Kennedys riding in the open-top car “split moments before the assassination attempt” that included a view of her jacket and hat, but Cronkite appropriately did not draw attention to her fashion criticism of President Kennedy and his administration by outspoken rightist groups.” This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.

¹⁹⁹ Perry, 176.
The next day, newspapers across the country began disseminating black-and-white photos of the First Lady in her now-famous outfit, and some reporters commented on her clothes. Indeed, as an expression of sympathy, the *Chicago Tribune* labeled Kennedy’s “trademark” style as “vivacious,” and the *Atlanta Daily World* noted that her clothing conjured a “striking” image; meanwhile, the *New York Times* chose to simply describe her outfit as “pink” to its readers, an important detail the black-and-white images could not convey. The *Los Angeles Times* informed readers that the First Lady “still wore the pink suit she had on in Dallas, stained with the life-blood of her dying husband” until she returned to Washington, D.C., the next day. The media’s wide dissemination of images and upbeat descriptions of her suit engaged Americans with the role of First Lady in a more public and involving way than previously done in an effort to cast their shared grief onto a tangible person and object in a manageable way. Thus, her iconic pink suit acted as a conduit for national sorrow.

Jacqueline Kennedy’s first outfit to be worn as a widowed First Lady that the press reported on consisted of a black, long-sleeved jacket; a black, knee-length skirt; black gloves; a black lace veil; and black shoes during President John F. Kennedy’s funeral on November 25, 1963. Wearing the color traditionally used to express

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202 Lady Bird Johnson, “Selections from Lady Bird’s Diary on the Assassination,” PBS, http://www.pbs.org/ladybird/epicenter_doc_diary.html, 1. For an explanation as to why she refused to change clothes, Jacqueline Kennedy famously said, “I want them to see what they have done to Jack.”
mourning, the First Lady used black to communicate her own personal grief for John F. Kennedy’s passing in a public way. Furthermore, the suit delicately recalled the iconic pink suit she had worn in Dallas; since most people had only seen televised and print images of a suit darkened by the lack of colorized television and photographs within the first three days of the assassination, her all-black ensemble at the funeral more directly resonated with the public, allowing the role of First Lady to more publicly communicate with the “untold millions” of viewers, both in person and on television. Walking behind her husband’s coffin in the funeral procession,

Figure 8: Left: First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, center, stands solemnly at her late husband’s funeral with her two children, Caroline Kennedy and John F. Kennedy, Jr. (source: The Atlantic). Right: Jacqueline Kennedy’s face covered by her black veil (source: Library of Congress).

Kennedy conveyed a very traditional image of a widow, with the majority of her body, including her face, covered in black fabric. This conventional display of

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203 In fact, because the funeral was televised, it allowed the nation – and the world – a view of the proceedings and access to her demonstrated psychology in real time. See Chapter IV for more details.
dignified and graceful femininity indicated her preference for traditional funeral attire in such a public, solemn setting. The *New York Times* called her outfit “simple,” while the *Chicago Tribune*, rather insensitively, wrote, “The black lace mantilla on her head and the black wool suit she wears accentuate her pallor and the dark circles under her tired eyes. She appears aged by grief as she walks.” Clearly, the media’s focus was not on the clothes themselves, but rather on how her wardrobe emphasized the solemnity of the event and the First Lady’s new position as a widow. Ultimately, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s black suit served as a final attempt to create an accessible, sophisticated image of a First Lady by engaging her own self-presentation with America at a very public event.

Needless to say, Kennedy’s influential fashion choices were not exclusive to domestic venues; her international travels also presented her with opportunities to show off garments that illustrated her involvement in public affairs as well as her sophisticated cultural aesthetic. She made more international trips than any of her predecessors, but this analysis will focus on three major tours abroad that received significant attention in regards to both her achievements and clothing in order to more comprehensively focus on her impact on the position of First Lady.  

When First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy arrived in Paris, France, with her spouse President John F. Kennedy for a visit from May 31, 1961 to June 2, 1961, they were greeted with cheers of “Vive Jacqui!” from the at least a half million French spectators who turned out to catch a glimpse of the First Lady dressed in a pale

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yellow day suit, matching pillbox hat, and triple-stranded pearl necklace. By choosing this look for her initial appearance in France as First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy expressed her new role as charismatic public figure and unofficial “goodwill ambassador” for the United States. This role would be particularly important, as the purpose of this trip to France was to demonstrate the Kennedys’ substance on a world stage. Indeed, the outfit’s crisp lines, stiff silk-and-wool Alaskine fabric, boxy jacket, and A-line skirt contributed to an emblematic image formation of a skilled, professional First Lady who was intent on securing good relations with the French. Additionally, its warm, colorful character denoted her intentions for benevolence towards the French, thereby involving the First Lady’s refined fashion with an

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207 Flaherty, 53; “Yellow Day Suit,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/12k6CQ8f9UCHVvH85LVKYA.aspx, 4. She would also wear this ensemble to a luncheon with British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan on June 5, 1961 and at a ceremony celebrating the publication of the White House guidebook on June 28, 1962, in an effort to appear economical.
209 Keogh, 111.
expansion of the position of First Lady in public matters. While her success in winning over the French people cannot entirely be attributed to this suit, the ensemble certainly was an important factor in this accomplishment.\textsuperscript{210} This dress, of course, was not the only outfit she wore during her three-day engagement in France. For a special dinner with the French president on June 1, 1961, at Versailles, the First Lady wore an ivory evening gown, its bodice embroidered with silk and seed pearls in a pattern of lilies of the valley and roses.\textsuperscript{211} For this particular dress, the First Lady employed French designer Hubert de Givenchy, rather than Oleg Cassini, to fabricate the dress.\textsuperscript{212} An effort to conform to the circumstances, this variation in designer was a subtle gesture of gratitude and approval of French culture, as well as a manifestation

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\caption{Left: The dress itself. Right: French President Charles de Gaulle escorts First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy to a dinner at the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, France (source for both: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives).}
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\textsuperscript{210} Keogh, 30. The First Lady was also popular amongst the French thanks to her own ancestral background and her ability to converse in French fluently. \\
\textsuperscript{211} “Ivory Embroidered Evening Dress,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/f2k6CQ8f9UCHVvH85LVKYA.a spx, 2. It would be worn again during a Congressional reception at the White on April 10, 1962. \\
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 2.
of her taste for French fashion. The glamorous gown’s white color complemented the dinner’s setting in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles in its radiant reflectivity, and its stylish opulence fashioned a youthful appearance for the First Lady that increased her visibility and accompanying accomplishments in advancing French-American relations while abroad. In this way, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s clothing choices during her trip to France not only contributed to her elegant, international image as a fashion superstar but also her role’s expansion through her progressive activities as amiable ambassador.

The media reviewed the suite of clothing, as a whole, that she wore in France positively. The Atlanta Daily World described her wardrobe as “buoyantly lovely,” while proclaiming the First Lady herself “a knockout,” and The Washington Post-Times Herald asserted that her attire was “enchanting.” Meanwhile, the Boston Globe suggested that “Jacqueline Kennedy and France were made for each other,” thanks to her instant popularity and the enthusiasm over her “lovely” apparel, particularly among French women. “Small wonder that French crowds waiting despite pouring rain gasped with admiration” upon seeing her white evening gown, wrote a reporter for the Chicago Tribune; the journalist continued, “the ‘Jackie Style’... is fine by the Paris fashion houses” and, as such, her style, choice of colors, and preference for elegant simplicity “will be faithfully noted and acted on,” indicating that the First Lady already was holding an influence over fashion trends.

worldwide thanks to this short visit.\textsuperscript{215} Even President John F. Kennedy acknowledged the impressive reaction to the First Lady and her fashion; at a luncheon with French President Charles de Gaulle, he famously declared, “I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris, and I have enjoyed it.”\textsuperscript{216} As the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} noted, “Because of her, President Kennedy will get a warmer welcome than he might have expected. In fact, he can expect the French to lay everything at her feet except their national honor.”\textsuperscript{217} This widespread, practically worshipful tone in regards to the First Lady’s style demonstrated that Jacqueline Kennedy’s influence in the public realm led to a more noticeable, competent version of the role of First Lady. 

However, not all media outlets praised the First Lady’s efforts in fashion while in France. Often criticized for functioning as a clotheshorse, Jacqueline Kennedy attracted disapproval for her French tastes and expensive clothing preferences throughout her career as First Lady; the case of her visit to France in 1961 most clearly illustrates critics’ condemning arguments and, thus, will be the focus of this exploration of critiques on Kennedy’s fashion.\textsuperscript{218} Her taste for French clothing was perhaps the most controversial, as there was a prevailing opinion that First Ladies should wear American clothing and patronize American designers.\textsuperscript{219} Indeed, newspapers ran headlines dramatizing the implications of Kennedy’s “surreptitious” shopping preferences for French clothes: “Paris-U.S. Crisis: First

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\textsuperscript{215} “New Hair-Do for Mrs. Kennedy,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} June 1, 1961, B5.
\textsuperscript{218} Mulvaney, 33.
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Lady’s Gowns” and “Words Fly in Fashion Cold War.” Additionally, one newspaper, the New York Amsterdam News, speculated that the First Lady “spends a minimum of $20,000 and may spend as much as $100,000 a year on her wardrobe.” Although far off the mark from the actual number, these claims were not entirely unfounded. Despite her need for new clothing suitable for a First Lady during the first few months of her First Ladyship, “records indicate that she spent more than $15,000 on clothes in three months, with a $4,000 bill to Givenchy alone,” and, although her designer Oleg Cassini affirmed that “she will buy what is necessary, without extravagance,” her expenses for 1961 totaled $40,000, which would amount to about $317,080 today. While the media was quick to applaud her re-use of certain costumes, this did not diminish the amount of criticism regarding her clothes. Still, praise of her clothing far outweighed the number of negative comments.

On March 11, 1962, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy wore a black, full-length, long-sleeved silk dress for her own private audience with Pope John XXIII at the Vatican, in an effort to show the utmost respect to the head of the Catholic church. As a Catholic herself, the First Lady’s dignified black dress and veil completely

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221 Norford, 1-2.
224 “Pope Warmly Receives Mrs. Kennedy, Grants Unusual 32-Minute Audience,” The Hartford Courant March 12, 1962), 1. Although the meeting was just thirty-two minutes long, a then-record for a meeting between the Pope and a head of state, its significance cannot be understated.
covered her body and hair, respectively, an appropriate choice that fit papal protocol and communicated respect and veneration for the Pope.\textsuperscript{225} As usual, the American press distributed images of Kennedy alone with the Pope. In particular, the \textit{Hartford Courant} noted, “Mrs. Kennedy drew admiring comments from bystanders” for her classic outfit.\textsuperscript{226} Similarly, the \textit{Boston Globe} labeled her fashion as “magnificent” and, rather outstandingly, reported that “so much of her charm lies in the compliment she pays her hosts by suiting her dress to their traditional patterns.”\textsuperscript{227} In saying so, the press at last identified a functional purpose behind her clothing; it was recognized that her wardrobe did not exist merely to decorate the person of the First Lady. By prescribing a more active role to her traditional clothes, the press branded the First Ladyship as a more politically powerful position than it had been recognized as previously, thereby demonstrating that Jacqueline Kennedy had become a transitional

\textsuperscript{226} “Pope Warmly Receives Mrs. Kennedy, Grants Unusual 32-Minute Audience,” \textit{The Hartford Courant} March 12, 1962, 1.
\textsuperscript{227} “President’s Wife During Audience With Pope,” \textit{Boston Globe} March 23, 1962, 23.
figure between the passivity of the 1950s and the more progressive femininity of the later 1960s. Thus, as a result of her papal visit, the role of First Lady expanded further into the public sphere, since the meeting verified that the position of First Lady was important enough to meet the Pope one-on-one.

The next day, on March 12, 1962, Jacqueline Kennedy arrived in New Delhi to launch her two-week, semi-official, solo tour of India and Pakistan as First Lady, and the suite of dresses that she wore throughout her state visit illustrated her function as unofficial goodwill ambassador, a role she initially occupied during her time in France in 1961. Disembarking from the plane, she showed off a coat and hat memorably described by John Kenneth Galbraith, the U.S. Ambassador to India, as “radioactive pink,” a color that complemented the colorful landscape of India and its clothing. Its bright color made the First Lady easily identifiable by the masses that

![Figure 12](source: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives)

**Figure 12:** Left: The coat itself. Right: First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy arrives in New Delhi, India, with a Secret Service agent closely behind her (source: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives).

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came to see her, and its “Nehru” collar generated an image of a First Lady who understood how to pay fashionable, yet reverential, tribute to the traditional Indian rajah coat. Therefore, Kennedy shaped an image of herself as a First Lady who advanced appreciation of different cultures. In a similar vein, the sleeveless, apricot silk ziberline dress that she wore on a boat ride on Lake Pichola in Udaipur, India, on March 17, 1962, also communicated an analogous agenda. Although lighter in shade than the bright pink coat she wore a few days earlier, it still was eye-catching enough to attract attention to the First Lady due to its silky sheen, giving the dress a bit of feminine flair. Furthermore, while this piece did not reference conventional Indian apparel, Cassini designed the dress with a rigid fabric so that it would keep its form in the intense Indian heat, thereby showing that the First Lady was glad to adjust to the region’s climate in a gracious manner. The press reported on her ensembles throughout her travels; of note, the Chicago Tribune called her wardrobe “resplendent,” while the Los Angeles Times accurately described her fashion choices.
as “colorful.”\textsuperscript{229} Along with photographs in newspapers, a documentary was also internationally distributed, visually detailing her activities and showing her clothing choices that were crucial in cementing an image of the First Lady as an independent, professional public figure capable of functioning as a dignitary and of using clothes as a form of rhetoric to communicate her aim to embrace other cultures.\textsuperscript{230} Ultimately, by disseminating images of the clothing she wore during her time in the Far East, media – both print and video – played a key role in expanding the institution of First Lady in the sense that it promoted her corresponding activity and qualifications for leadership in office.

American women in particular were especially entranced with First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s clothing, thanks to the imagery distributed by the press that allowed the First Lady to connect with women. As a rich, fashionable, young woman, Kennedy was their role model and therefore imitated in every aspect of her public appearance during her time as First Lady in the early 1960s. Indeed, Kennedy popularized the bouffant hairstyle, the pillbox hat, and an overall more streamlined look, which differed greatly from the fuller, more rounded skirts of the previous decade.\textsuperscript{231} According to historian Maurine Hoffman Beasley, “Women rushed to... buy sleeveless, off-the-rack dresses with simple lines and brilliant colors that

\textsuperscript{229} Gwen Morgan, “Mrs. Kennedy Tour Widened: Feted by President and Prime Minister MRS. KENNEDY TOUR WIDENED; INDIA PLEASED She’s Glistening Star of Palace Banquet,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} March 14, 1962, 1; “Colorful Welcome Given First Lady in Pink City,” \textit{The Hartford Courant} March 19, 1962, 8.

\textsuperscript{230} Beasley, 78. The U.S. Information Agency produced the documentary.

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 74. The bouffant hairstyle was characterized by chin-length hair teased to appear puffed on the top of the head and then combed down on the sides to frame the face.
resembled designer originals.” Oleg Cassini wrote, “Sometimes it seems every girl in America is trying to capture the Jacqueline Kennedy look: the intangible qualities of breeding, education, sensitivity, and poise that add up to ‘class’.” Newspapers began publishing stories, entitled, “A Peek in Jackie’s Closet,” “The ‘Jacqueline Kennedy Look,’” and “Lines of the Future,” that explained how exactly to best mimic the First Lady’s elegant style. In fact, the “Jacqueline Kennedy fashion phenomenon” was so widespread across America that a popular spoken word record from the time, The First Family, parodied this cultural sensation: After the Jacqueline Kennedy character asks her designer to remove a top button from a dress, he yells to his assistant, “Rip the top button off those 5,000 First Ladies, and put ‘em on the rack!” This joke was met with raucous laughter. The parody, of course, made fun of how less expensive designers instantly imitated anything Kennedy wore and how hordes of women who strongly desired to emulate the First Lady in all aspects immediately consumed the copies. By making fashion visible and accessible to a public audience, Jacqueline Kennedy, in tandem with the media and fashion industry, expanded the role of First Lady to one that was more open with its constituents. Thus, the refined sophistication purported by her clothing had a tangible cultural impact on the aesthetics of fashion in the United States, showing that a woman occupying the

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232 Ibid., 74.
233 Cassini, 2.
position of First Lady could influence trends outside of the setting of a conventional elite social hostess.

Ultimately, Jacqueline Kennedy transformed the role of First Lady through her clothing choices and signature style so that she could augment the purpose of each event she attended while simultaneously communicating to the American public the importance of cultural appreciation. By modeling a consistent, innovative style, Kennedy fashioned an elegant image of a more visible First Lady that was made more available to the American – and international – public through the press’ overwhelming distribution of iconography depicting her outfits and their (mostly) positive reviews of her clothing. In perceptibly changing the face of fashion through her domestic and international engagements, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy exhibited evidence of her elite education and background; her exquisite tastes and expertise in navigating such cultural social events allowed her to present herself in a charmingly sophisticated way that appealed to international leaders and public audiences alike. Furthermore, through the cultivation of a stylish, glamorous image, Kennedy made the appearance of a First Lady an issue that had cultural – and sometimes political – connotations that enlarged the sphere of activity in which a First Lady was traditionally. By capturing media attention with her fashion preferences, Jacqueline Kennedy merged the conventionally feminine interest in clothing with a more active role on a public stage, thereby shaping expectations of a First Lady in 1960s America and beyond.
Chapter IV

Constructing Camelot: Jacqueline Kennedy’s Involvement in President John F. Kennedy’s Funeral

Don’t let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief, shining moment, that was known as Camelot.

Alan Jay Lerner, Camelot

On November 22, 1963, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy and President John F. Kennedy arrived in Dallas, Texas, on a politically motivated mission: to court the Democratic vote in Texas in order to maintain the president’s support in the South for his upcoming re-election in 1964. Indeed, the Wall Street Journal maintained that President Kennedy’s fight for the Lone Star State would be an “uphill battle,” and the Los Angeles Times considered the campaign for his re-election to be “extremely troublesome to Democrats” in Texas.236 While the First Lady had little experience to offer from the 1960 campaign trail and was not considered to be “a formidable campaigner in any aggressive political sense,” her presence as a public figure during the trip to Texas was expected to draw crowds and substantially increase President Kennedy’s campaign energy, evidence of the larger, more politically influential role that she had come to occupy as First Lady.237 Clad in a (now infamous) pink suit, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy sat next to President John F. Kennedy in an open-top

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limousine as part of the presidential motorcade for a drive through the streets of Dallas in order to achieve maximum public viewership and accessibility.

Unfortunately, this high level of visibility positioned John F. Kennedy in line of fire from the gun of Lee Harvey Oswald; the president was shot at least twice and slumped onto the First Lady’s lap.238 “I kept holding the top of his head down, trying to keep the brains in,” Jacqueline Kennedy later said in an interview with the Associated Press, describing her active attempts to keep her husband alive on the way to Parkland Memorial Hospital.239 Pronounced dead at the hospital, President John F. Kennedy became the youngest president to be assassinated in office; his death produced a jarring effect on the national consciousness. As the presidential widow, Kennedy witnessed Lyndon B. Johnson’s inauguration, her presence ensuring a “legitimate” passing of power between presidents.240 She refused to change out of her bloodstained outfit for Johnson’s swearing-in ceremony: “I want them to see what they have done to Jack.”241

Following this, the First Lady242 was left without her president to determine the next best course of action for her role and its historical legacy. In a matter of days, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy shouldered the enormous responsibility of crafting a legacy for the Kennedy administration in planning the details of her husband’s

238 Abraham Zapruder, “Zapruder Film Slow Motion” (1963).
240 Caroli, Jacqueline (Lee Bouvier) Kennedy (Onassis), 489.
242 For all intents and purposes, Jacqueline Kennedy will still be referred to as the First Lady, rather than the former First Lady, because regardless of her husband’s life status, she was still engaging her role in the realm of obligation to the public as a First Lady. Although Lady Bird Johnson was technically the new First Lady, she did not move into the executive mansion or conduct public responsibilities until Jacqueline Kennedy left the White House on December 6, 1963.
funeral. Through her conscious use of symbolic imagery, she orchestrated the enlargement of the public role of her own position as First Lady through the execution of President John F. Kennedy’s funeral on November 25, 1963. By relying on historical conventions for presidential funerals yet also employing her own innovative methods to more fully visualize the meaning of the proceedings, Jacqueline Kennedy communicated a glorified version of her husband’s presidency in addition to her own First Ladyship – something that, due to her work in fashioning a golden image of the early 1960s, would become known as “Camelot” – that the American public would be inundated with, thanks to the exhaustive televised media coverage of the state funeral.243 As a result, the portrayals of the First Lady functioned as a conduit through which Americans could channel their collective grief and sorrow about the loss of such an influential figure. A powerful public persona in her own right, she utilized the role of First Lady to combine tradition with more modern modifications for a presidential funeral. Ultimately, the wide visual dissemination of her efforts in facilitating imagery echoes her previously demonstrated interest in maneuvering historic convention to fit modes of modernity.

While most historians dedicate their scholarship to facets of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s cultural agenda, several writers have recognized the importance of her organization of President John F. Kennedy’s funeral and noted her masterful use of symbolic images during the ceremonial proceedings. However, the discourse about this topic did not begin until the late twentieth century, more than

forty years after the solemn proceedings. In 1996, biographer Betty Boyd Caroli initiated the discussion of Jacqueline Kennedy’s grounding of the funeral in historical tradition, drawing particular attention to parallels between the state services for President Kennedy and President Abraham Lincoln, who was assassinated nearly a century earlier.244 Despite her mention of Kennedy’s use of historical tradition, Caroli failed to analyze its purpose in the context of the 1963 funeral. Similarly, in 2003, cultural historian Gary Laderman described the details of the presidential funeral and the “dramatic... outpouring of grief and sorrow across the country” that he argued was a result of the presence of the media, not the efforts of the First Lady.245 While it is certain that the funeral’s live broadcast functioned as a conduit for the expression of public grief across America, this perspective largely diminished the importance of the First Lady’s role in the orchestration of the somber imagery that so affected the American public. A few years later, however, historians like Jon Goodman understood that First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy combined history, pageantry, and patriotism for the funeral in order to present iconic memories of the Kennedy administration to the public.246 By insinuating that the First Lady’s use of symbolic imagery in her husband’s funeral had a specific purpose, Goodman observed that Kennedy played a significant role in planning the ceremonial nature of the funeral and its public perception. Still, it is worth noting that the historical discourse noticeably did not take into consideration Jacqueline Kennedy’s impact on the role of First Lady.

244 Caroli, *Jacqueline (Lee Bouvier) Kennedy (Onassis)*, 490.
Within the next few years, even though historians continued to ignore her role in changing the reach of the First Ladyship, the scholarly discussion became more attuned to First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s active role in the construction of the Camelot myth surrounding her husband’s presidency. For instance, historian Maurine Hoffman Beasley ascribed professionalism to the position of the First Lady when she labeled Jacqueline Kennedy as “the director and stage manager,” as well as her own “image-maker,” for the president’s funeral, illustrating the public importance and persona that Kennedy embodied through her activity as First Lady during this period of incipient second-wave feminism. On a related note, cultural historian James Pierson argued that the First Lady changed the perception of the presidency – specifically, the presidency of John F. Kennedy – because “the four-day process of mourning transformed the late president into a figure of myth and legend.” In a similar vein, Janette Muir also remarked that the images the First Lady disseminated by television produced “long-lasting impressions” and created the “Kennedy ‘Camelot’ myth” of his presidency in the early 1960s. Accordingly, Jacqueline Kennedy’s role as a leader in the conceptualization of the legacy of her husband’s presidency dominated the scholarly discussion. However, this thesis contends that, as acting First Lady, Kennedy also further enlarged the domain of a First Lady while taking on an involved, powerful managing position characteristic of roles that women would more typically soon occupy in the later 1960s as a result of second-wave feminism.

247 Beasley, 87.
249 Muir, 522.
In order to comprehend the significance of her enhancements to the presentation of a presidential funeral, it is important to discuss the historical precedents and traditions for such events by analyzing the services for Presidents William Henry Harrison, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Serving a mere thirty days in office, William Henry Harrison was the first president to die while carrying out presidential responsibilities, providing an opportunity for determining the official procedure for honoring his public service. After his death in 1841, the White House was draped in black, harking to funerary models of European royalty, and President Harrison’s fairly simple, private funeral was held in the East Room of the executive mansion. While the United States Marine Band performed dirges, his casket was transported to the Congressional Cemetery via an upholstered funeral car; later, his body would be finally buried in Ohio, his home state. His wife Anna Harrison, who was, at the time, ill in Ohio and expected to function as First Lady after she recovered, was not present at his funeral. The recognition of the need for honoring an American head of state led to the establishment of important precedents, including burial in his home state, the incorporation of the military in the funerary

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250 This thesis is selectively inclusive of these specific funerals because each state funeral represents a milestone in the development of cultural remembrances of presidents: President William Henry Harrison was the first to die in office, President Abraham Lincoln was the first president to be assassinated in office, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt died most recently, relative to President John F. Kennedy, in office.


252 “Anna Harrison,” National Cable Satellite Corporation, http://firstladies.c-span.org/FirstLady/10/Anna-Harrison.aspx; “Presidential Funerals,” The White House Historical Association, https://www.whitehousehistory.org/presidential-funerals. President Harrison’s wife Anna Harrison, who was planning on functioning as First Lady after she recovered from an illness in Ohio, was not present at his funeral.

procession, and the private display of the casket in the East Room of the White House. Thus, with the first death of a president while in office, the preliminary standards for a presidential funeral were set, laying the groundwork for future services.

The sudden assassination of President Abraham Lincoln in 1865 enlarged the scope of national mourning and simultaneously changed the presentation of presidential funerals, and, because of its groundbreaking nature, Jacqueline Kennedy drew most of her inspiration from President Lincoln’s funeral. It is worth noting that many of the details, such as draping the White House in black and including a military escort along the official funeral procession, were continued from the Harrison funerary tradition, but the calamitous nature of the event increased the state funeral’s scale. For instance, although a private funeral took place in the East Room of the White House, Americans were able to view Lincoln’s body lying in state on several separate occasions: in a darkened East Room, at the Capitol building after a procession through Washington, D.C., and at selected cities between the nation’s capitol and his final resting place, his hometown Springfield, Illinois, on a funeral train. Moreover, during the funeral procession to the Capitol, the casket was raised high on a platform above street level in order to provide a view for all mourners. As

256 “President Lincoln’s White House Funeral,” Abraham Lincoln Online, http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/education/whfuneral.htm; “The Funeral Train of Abraham Lincoln,” The Lehrman Institute, http://abrahamlincolnsclassroom.org/abraham-lincoln-in-depth/the-funeral-train-of-abraham-lincoln/. First Lady Mary Lincoln was noticeably absent from the proceedings, refusing to join her family walking behind the hearse because she was so stricken with grief.
a result of this innovative accessibility, millions of Americans were able to partake in a nationalized, cathartic event that fully memorialized him in the American consciousness.\textsuperscript{257} The availability of an assassinated president’s body to the American people established a new American tradition that First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy drew inspiration from when planning President John F. Kennedy’s funeral almost one hundred years in the future.

It is also worth considering the more private services for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who died from a stroke in 1945, in relation to those of President John F. Kennedy’s funeral. President Roosevelt’s shockingly unexpected death affected the American people in a way similar to President Lincoln’s assassination, but Roosevelt’s funeral proceedings differed in several ways, in part because President Roosevelt died in Georgia, rather than Washington, D.C., and so had to be transported to the capital by train.\textsuperscript{258} The American public in Washington, D.C., witnessed the funeral procession from the train station to the White House, his casket, aloft, draped in the colors of the American flag and escorted by the military with, according to short newsreels, “stately ceremony.”\textsuperscript{259} Like previous presidents, President Roosevelt’s body was taken to the darkened East Room for a private funeral, and then transported by train to his hometown in New York for his burial.\textsuperscript{260} Although his body

\textsuperscript{259} Ed Thorgersen, “Rest in Peace: Franklin Delano Roosevelt,” (Movietone News, 1945).
did not lie in state, limiting access to the American public, newspapers covered the proceedings thoroughly, and reporters praised First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, dressed in black as a figure of mourning, for her composure and stateliness as she walked behind the hearse. Thus, the funeral for President Roosevelt demonstrated that while protocols for presidential funerals were highly valued, some deviation from tradition was acceptable if executed tastefully, establishing a new convention for standardizing change.

Until Jacqueline Kennedy expanded the First Ladyship to encompass the public nature of the responsibilities for planning a presidential funeral, First Ladies were not significantly involved in planning their husbands’ funerary services. Indeed, through her efforts, the funeral became a memorialization of the president and functioned as an instrument for how she wanted the nation to remember President John F. Kennedy’s administration. Historically, First Ladies did not even attend presidential funerals until 1881, a stark contrast to First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s active role in the presidential funeral in 1963. Even after 1881, only two First Ladies, Florence Harding and Eleanor Roosevelt, “made important decisions about the services,” ensuring that their husbands’ wishes be properly honored. However, neither elevated the role of First Lady on such a public scale nor etched the legacy of her presidential mate symbolically into the national consciousness through the funerary event to such an extent as Jacqueline Kennedy. Of course, Kennedy did not

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plan everything for the funeral; the military assisted in the preparation and execution of President John F. Kennedy’s funeral as well. Even so, the work she did accomplish was significant, not only because she was more involved than previous First Ladies, expanding the public reach of the position of First Lady, but also because her efforts were fraught with symbolism that made the president’s funeral a meaningful, historically significant event.

As First Lady, Kennedy bridged tradition with modernity through the preservation of conventions established with President Abraham Lincoln’s funeral and the dissemination of representational imagery via television. This will be discussed in more depth as this thesis progresses, but it is important to note here that the First Lady’s general purpose for preserving direct connections between Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy was to use the public memorialization to mythologize the figure of her husband as one who was as great as Lincoln. In the context of the civil rights movement, by subtly restaging elements of the Lincoln funeral in a twentieth-century version, she broadcast to Americans that John F. Kennedy was the modern-day equivalent of Abraham Lincoln, especially in terms of President Kennedy’s (marginal) efforts to legalize the equality of black Americans. Furthermore, the presence of television allowed the Lincoln-Kennedy similarities to be transmitted to a much larger audience; indeed, while sections of the American public had been physically involved in President Abraham Lincoln’s funeral, thanks to his funeral train tour, the public scope of television more fully included Americans across the nation in all of the services honoring President John F. Kennedy’s life. As a result, Jacqueline Kennedy’s memorialization of her husband as a modern-day
Lincoln tangibly affected “untold millions” emotionally and shaped the way the collective nation conceived of his memory. However, her own highly visible presence also gave a new importance to the role of First Lady, too.

After the abrupt tragedy in Dallas, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy flew back to Washington, D.C., with the remains of her husband and arrived at the White House on the morning of November 23, 1963, ready to make preparations for the next three days. At the First Lady’s request, President John F. Kennedy’s casket was to lie in repose atop the catafalque used for President Abraham Lincoln in the East Room, which, on her orders, was to be decorated in a manner reflective of the mournful décor from the Lincoln period. By drawing specific parallels to the initial preparatory stages of Lincoln’s services, the First Lady connected historically significant tradition to modernity and emphasized the similarities between the administrations of the two presidents. However, unlike the precedents set with the funeral of Lincoln, she protected the remains of her husband from the public gaze by mandating a closed casket throughout all of the ceremonies honoring his life and presidency, starting with his lying in repose in the East Room. While several governmental officials, most notably Secretary of State Robert McNamara, met this rather controversial decision with resistance due to the public nature of a president’s role, the First Lady’s decision to deviate from tradition established with the Lincoln

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265 Laderman, xxxi; Senate Historical Office, “Memorial or Funeral Services in the Capitol Rotunda,” United States Senate, http://www.senate.gov/history/MemorialFuneralServicesCapitolRotunda.htm. The slain President William McKinley, who, in 1901, was also assassinated, was placed on the Lincoln catafalque as well during his funerary services. With the bier’s use as a monument to dead presidents, this connected historical tradition to presidential funerals.
funeral was nevertheless honored. By minimizing focus on President John F. Kennedy’s mutilated body, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy ensured that Americans would, as she put it, “remember Jack alive” and recall his youthful presidential administration as a substantial portion of his legacy. Despite withdrawing visibility of his body from the public, she allowed the president’s funeral to be public; contrasting with previous presidential funerals, there was no private funeral in the East Room for President John F. Kennedy. In doing this, she increased public access to John F. Kennedy, but in a different way than had been traditionally done. Thus, just one day after her husband’s death, Kennedy shouldered more responsibility than previous First Ladies had done in similar circumstances while managing to maneuver her public role to link her interest in historical preservation with her own innovative decisions. Ultimately, she was able to enlarge the role of First Lady by functioning as a director of the funerary arrangements, providing a professional quality to her activities.

On November 24, 1963, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s actions as the casket was taken to the Capitol building’s rotunda to lie in state, seen by the majority of America, further shaped the legacy of John F. Kennedy’s presidency. On this morning, hundreds of Americans lined Pennsylvania Avenue and millions more turned on their television sets to watch the president’s flag-covered casket be moved

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266 Ibid., xxxvi.
267 Ibid., xxxvi.
268 “Television,” Federal Communications Commission, https://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/INoC-3-TV.pdf, 72. In 1963, 93% of American homes tuned in during the continuous broadcast of his funeral and burial, with the average home keeping the television on for 13 hours per day over the course of the coverage from November 22, 1963, to November 25, 1963.
from the White House to the Capitol Rotunda via the same horse-drawn caisson that transported the body of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with the muffled drum corps as the only sound reverberating through the streets, a nod to military convention and its importance in American state funerals.\footnote{Stephen Smith, “A Nation Says Goodbye to President Kennedy,” (CBS News, 2013).} Once the cortege had arrived at the destination, Kennedy took the hands of her two children, Caroline and John, Jr., and solemnly waited for the casket to be taken up the Capitol steps. The navy band then began playing the traditional tune “Hail to the Chief” — “the only music he likes,” Jacqueline Kennedy quipped — at which point broadcasts began showing images of the First Lady breaking her poise; she cried briefly, but openly, and bowed her head.\footnote{Donna M. Binkiewicz, Federalizing the Muse: United States Arts Policy and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1965-1980 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 49; “Jacqueline Kennedy at the Capital [sic] on November 24, 1963,” (CBS News, 1963).} The emotional impact was resounding; performing a “scene that [brought] a nation to its knees,” the First Lady functioned as a public figure through which Americans could visually channel their own grief.\footnote{Vincent Bugliosi, The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 287.} Therefore, through her decisions about the procession’s presentation and her own actions that shaped the tone and perception of the event itself, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy utilized her public role to fashion a legacy not only of her husband’s presidency, but also of her own First Ladyship.

Jacqueline Kennedy also facilitated the imagery of President John F. Kennedy’s lying in state in the Capitol Rotunda. Indeed, at the request of the First Lady, President John F. Kennedy’s casket was placed in the center of the Capitol...
Rotunda on the same catafalque used for President Abraham Lincoln’s casket, conjuring an image of President Kennedy that directly related his public persona and subsequent presidential administration to those of President Lincoln. Furthermore, about 250,000 people viewed President John F. Kennedy’s closed casket in the Capitol to pay their respects, also resembling a practice of expressing grief that occurred during President Lincoln’s lying in state as well. A key difference, however, was that images of President Kennedy’s mourners were broadcast to Americans across the country, as television cameras were placed within the rotunda to capture the proceedings. In essence, Jacqueline Kennedy’s reinterpretation of her husband’s accomplishments took form in the visual parallels she orchestrated between the two figureheads, and the symbolism was not lost on her 1963 audience. In fact, the New York Times reported, “The analogy to Lincoln’s death must have been poignantly apparent to most of those who passed the flag-draped coffin.”

Prior to this, it is important to note that the first person to approach President John F. Kennedy’s coffin in the Capitol Rotunda was First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy herself, collected in composure, with daughter Caroline; the First Lady knelt by the coffin and kissed the American flag covering it as “her last goodbye” to her husband.

Cognizant of the presence of television cameras and the eyes of the nation upon her,

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272 Pierson, 99.
Kennedy executed a controlled image of grace and poise, giving the public a moving tribute to the slain president that satisfied the national need for catharsis. In this way, she gracefully synthesized a picture of composure, equanimity, and family that influenced the way the nation understood and empathized concerning the national tragedy. Without a doubt, Jacqueline Kennedy increased the visibility of the role of First Lady through her choices in the setting of the Capitol Rotunda, and, aided by the media’s endless television coverage, she broadened the scope of the institution of First Lady through the use of meaningful symbols as well as a more involved stance in such a public event.277

The following day, November 25, 1963, Jacqueline Kennedy again prepared to shape the national consciousness in her portrayal of dignified sorrow and influence over the arrangement of President John F. Kennedy’s funeral in her final public performance as First Lady. She accompanied his remains from the Capitol to the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle and then finally to Arlington National Cemetery as many people watched from the “thickly lined sidewalks” in the nation’s capital or from the glowing screens of their television sets.278 One of the most memorable images of the march to the Cathedral was that of the lone, black riderless, or caparisoned, horse that walked behind President John F. Kennedy’s casket.

277 Vincent Bugliosi, The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 294). “For the millions watching television at home... there is little relief from the images of people streaming into the rotunda. As has been the situation with all three networks since the assassination, there are no breaks for commercials or indeed for any of the television’s routine news, weather, or sports reports.... There is little but endless replays of earlier events, although by now many viewers have seen the clips several times.”

Historically, horses had been included in American state funerals since the 1780s to lend a sense of soldierly order to the proceedings, but the First Lady was credited for the addition of a riderless horse, one named Black Jack, in John F. Kennedy’s presidential funerary procession. The First Lady employed a caparisoned horse to symbolize a leader lost in battle, never to ride again, in order to signal the weight of this national tragedy. As President Richard Nixon wrote a few years later of Black Jack, “Citizens in mourning felt dignity and purpose conveyed, a simpler yet deeper tribute to the memory of those heroic ‘riders’ who have given so much for our nation.” Thus, the use of a riderless horse in President John F. Kennedy’s funeral procession allowed the American people to project their grief upon its largely disseminated image, and, by controlling the imagery used in media broadcasts, the First Lady played a significant role in shaping how the United States dealt with the emotional blow of the president’s assassination. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the claim that Jacqueline Kennedy was the figure to make the decision to employ Black Jack in the procession is somewhat dubious, as only a few scholars mention her leadership in this domain; however, even if she did not make the final decision, the inclusion of a caparisoned horse still references the Lincoln funeral procession, which pioneered the use of such a horse. This symbol, of course, would complement what she had emphasized earlier through images that connected both presidencies. Therefore, the inclusion of a riderless horse in the funeral procession

280 Faulker, 7.
281 Of course, the practice of using a caparisoned horse fell to the wayside until President John F. Kennedy’s funeral in 1963.
augmented Jacqueline Kennedy’s mission to enhance President John F. Kennedy’s legacy.

After the legions of black limousines arrived at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy produced more touching imagery by drawing attention to her status as a youthful, motherly figure. Obviously, she functioned as a mother to her young children throughout the ceremonies spanning over a course of three days, but the symmetric imagery manufactured as she ascended the steps of the church, holding the hand of each child on either side of herself, was particularly poignant. Even now, the image of a widow attempting to reassure her newly fatherless children elicits an emotional reaction. Thus, Kennedy emphasized that the public funeral was first and foremost a First Family affair through her simple, maternal actions. By highlighting the importance of the American family unit to the nation via television, she also elevated the national tragedy to an event that enveloped viewers into her family’s private experience, making it seem as if Americans were participating with the Kennedy clan in expressing their grief. By giving viewers access to her family’s personal psychology, Jacqueline Kennedy increased the public nature of her role as First Lady in fashioning an image of a concerned mother. Moreover, her decision to include her children in a high-profile display of national mourning further enhanced the Kennedy administration’s distinctive legacy of youthfulness. Although the televised, black-and-white picture did not capture the children’s matching red, white, and blue ensembles, Jacqueline Kennedy’s effort to style Caroline Kennedy and John Kennedy, Jr., as figurines of America did not go unnoticed by those attending the funeral and those who later saw color photographs in
magazines. As a fashionista, it is not accidental that Kennedy complemented her mournful black dress with her children’s ensembles in order to better communicate that President John F. Kennedy’s death was a tragedy that not only affected the First Family but also one that upset the entire nation. Ultimately, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy made the funerary procession a more public experience and her role as First Lady a more accessible persona through expressive, visual symbolism that created a reflective medium upon which Americans could articulate their shared grief.

Once inside the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle, Jacqueline Kennedy relinquished some control over President John F. Kennedy’s funeral itself, due to the inherently ritualistic and traditional nature of the Catholic Mass, but the First Lady still made key decisions about the setting in her overall orchestration of the ceremony. For instance, since the Kennedys attended church at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy ensured that there would be an overtly personal tone to the space shared publicly through television with the nation when she chose it as the location for the president’s funeral instead of the recommended, more traditional Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.\footnote{Thomas Maier, \textit{The Kennedys: America’s Emerald Kings} (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 456-7.} In a similar vein, she further bridged the private sphere with that of the public when she requested Archbishop of Boston Richard Cardinal Cushing, the Kennedys’ family friend who officiated the First Couple’s wedding and baptized several Kennedy children, to preside over the president’s funeral.\footnote{Dora Jane Hamblin, “Mrs. Kennedy’s Decisions Shaped All the Solemn Pageantry,” \textit{Life} December 20, 1963, 249.} Consequently, the 1,100 invited guests, as well as the millions watching at home, were incorporated into a shared
national experience that felt personal to each individual participating in the presentation of the tragedy. In lieu of the conventional private presidential funeral, she bridged the separation between the private and the public through her decision to bring more personal elements into the televised funeral. At the request of the First Lady, Americans witnessed a low requiem Mass, or a shortened Mass without song. As such, her decisions strongly influenced the proceedings. Performed in Latin, the rituals of the Catholic Church were disseminated via television to a large audience, one that had expressed fear over the secular leadership capabilities of a Catholic president during the 1960 election. By portraying conventional Catholicism in such a setting, Jacqueline Kennedy ensured that Americans would appreciate John F. Kennedy’s presidency and its accomplishments regardless of his religion, rendering the position of First Lady more politically powerful. Thus, the First Lady’s decisions for the funeral Mass affected how the nation interpreted the legacy of John F. Kennedy’s presidency.

After the presidential funeral was completed and President John F. Kennedy’s casket carried down the front steps of the Cathedral, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy regained full control over how the tragedy was perceived across the nation in her expert navigation of memorable imagery. As the casket was placed back on its caisson, newscasts focused their cameras of the First Lady and showed how she leaned down and whispered to her son; moments later, John F. Kennedy, Jr.,

284 Maier, 456.
saluted.\footnote{286}{CBS News, “John John Salutes the Coffin of His Father,” (CBS News, 1963).} Photographers captured the five-second pose of the president’s only son, providing the nation – and the world – with an image of one of the most touching, lasting tributes to the president from the day’s events. As such, the First Lady orchestrated one of the most famously striking images to be produced from the lengthy media affair. However, the image does not show how Jacqueline Kennedy apparently told her son to salute, illustrating the different realities of film and photography in the construction of the legacy of the Kennedy administration. Certainly, without the First Lady’s instruction, one of the most symbolic gestures would never have been generated, demonstrating the essentiality of her role in the formation of the slain president’s legacy. Moreover, her role in producing meaningful symbolism was amplified further when she lit an eternal flame at the president’s gravesite at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.\footnote{287}{Pierson, 99. The eternal flame functioned as a symbol that would continuously burn over his grave.} Commemorating the ideals of President John F. Kennedy’s administration at a site that she specifically chose so that the president could always “belong to the nation,” Kennedy’s invention of the eternal flame offered peace and solace to the grieving nation watching from their television sets.\footnote{288}{CBS Sunday Morning, “JFK’s Eternal Flame Still Burns,” (CBS News, 2013).} In breaking the tradition of burying a president privately in his home state, the First Lady created an image that would perpetually remind Americans of the Kennedy administration and the role she played within it, thereby making the public nature of the burial more meaningful. Therefore, by acting as a public relations specialist and facilitating the production of symbolic imagery, Jacqueline Kennedy expanded the public reach and professional impact of the role of First Lady.
Of course, without the media’s constant, instrumental dissemination of President John F. Kennedy’s funeral services, the First Lady’s emphasis on visual symbols would not have been as effective in memorializing her husband’s presidency or in shaping the way the nation experienced grief. According to the *New York Times*, more than 50 cameras were shared among the three major networks, providing continuous coverage so that viewers could watch the First Lady’s activities and the ceremonies honoring the president’s life “without missing a moment.”\(^{289}\) Not only did the media provide constant information and spectacle to the public on the course of events in the nation’s capital, but in doing so the news also shaped the national consciousness in relaying expressive, emotional images to the American people. With its gripping broadcast of ever-changing imagery, television offered catharsis to a country in shock and in mourning. In doing so, television made First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s orchestration of President John F. Kennedy’s funeral more public than any previous presidential funeral. Because the First Lady was aware of the presence of the many Americans watching her actions at home, she ensured that the millions tuning in to the presidential funeral would remember the Kennedy administration in a glorified way.

Ultimately, as the nation’s mourner-in-chief, Jacqueline Kennedy expanded the role of First Lady through her skillful use of impactful imagery that symbolized her interpretation of John F. Kennedy’s presidency. By combining historical tradition with new, innovative techniques to celebrate a president’s life, the First Lady fashioned the legacy of “Camelot,” a representation of what, in her opinion, was best

about the Kennedy administration as a whole.\textsuperscript{290} “Camelot,” of course, included her First Ladyship, and the media’s widespread diffusion of images of both her own persona and the physical images of her decisions strengthened her role as a captivating public figure. Even so, it should be noted that her intense staging of the funeral does not lessen the authenticity of her display of grief; rather, her public presentation of grief and sorrow contained an additional function, to affect the national consciousness and shape the legacy of President John F. Kennedy and her own role as First Lady in years to come. Barely any criticism exists of her orchestration of public sentiment because the president’s assassination was so shocking that her graceful handling of the excruciatingly public affair offered a great relief from sorrow. Thus, in constructing “Camelot,” Jacqueline Kennedy molded the position of First Lady into a role akin to a stage manager, engaging tradition and innovation to communicate a venerated version of the Kennedy administration.

Conclusion

Without a doubt, Jacqueline Kennedy was integral to the shaping of the contemporary position of First Lady. Through her efforts and activities, she fashioned a public persona for the role of First Lady that was not only more visible and accessible to the public but also more active, professionally pursuing an agenda, than previous expectations of the role of First Lady had demanded. Although she declared that she desired to be “a wife and mother first, then First Lady,” First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy achieved notable success between 1961 and 1963 in molding her position to take on more responsibility, thereby expanding the role of First Lady. Indeed, her influence on the historical preservation of the White House led to the creation of its status as a museum, and her work on restoring the executive mansion, which promoted a combination of education, material culture, and American history, culminated in an informative television special that thousands of Americans viewed. She also contributed to a transformation of cultural taste through her efforts to support fine art and highbrow culture, enhancing her public agenda and reach as First Lady. Additionally, the stylish ensembles she chose to wear at state occasions and significant events, both cultural and political, visually illustrated the new importance of the self-presentation of a First Lady in tailoring a particular message to national audiences. Finally, her expert staging of her husband President John F. Kennedy’s funeral proceedings allowed her to craft a resounding image of his presidency’s legacy as a way to provide emotional catharsis for a nation in grief. Therefore, by

opening the position of First Lady to the public and playing an active role in the
shaping of the United States’ cultural history in the early 1960s, Jacqueline Kennedy
reconfigured and enlarged the institution of First Lady during her time in office.

Kennedy assumed the position during a period in which television and visual
media was coming of age, and, because of its widespread nature, she more directly
and meaningfully communicated to a larger audience than any previous First Lady. In
fact, the media was essential to completing her agenda’s goals; without the
dissemination of images and videography of her restorative efforts in the White
House, her portrayals of elite culture, fashionable clothing, and presentation of the
somber funeral, Jacqueline Kennedy’s work during her First Ladyship would have
been, generally, less effective. Thanks to the involvement of the media, Kennedy was
able to more thoroughly accomplish her goals, providing a noticeable impact on the
cultural interpretation of gender, aesthetics, and sophistication. Indeed, the press and
visual modes of communication were crucial to her First Ladyship because they
allowed her an influence, albeit somewhat indirect, over the American people and, in
particular, American women.292 Through this distribution of images, she was able to
construct a role using the position of First Lady that encompassed both conventional
displays of femininity and skilled, progressive portrayals of female professionalism
typical of the impending second wave of feminism.

Despite arriving at the White House during a time of traditional female
subservience that might have limited her activities, Jacqueline Kennedy accomplished

292 George Gallup, “Eleanor Roosevelt Still Most Admired,” Chicago Sun-Times, December
28, 1961. According to the Sun-Times, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy was the most admired
woman in the world in 1961, second only to former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, to
Americans.
much within the public realm. Ultimately, her activities shifted the role of First Lady to one that held more emphasis on public performances and the undertaking of a specific project. Her most recognizable, primary project with achievable, tangible aims was, of course, the restoration of the White House, but it is also worth noting that her agenda incorporated support of cultural cornerstones, including, but certainly not limited to, fashion, museums, and entertainment, of 1960s American society. In this sense, Kennedy was unique in her maneuvering of the First Ladyship, and in doing so she set a precedent for future First Ladies to follow in their occupation of the position.

Her immediate successor, Claudia “Lady Bird” Johnson, used Jacqueline Kennedy’s example of a successful First Ladyship as a model for her own. Like Kennedy, Johnson championed an official primary project: a beautification platform that would confer a natural look to American cities and highways. In fact, while her initial focus was on the nation’s capital, she enlarged the scope of her project after persuading Congress to pass the Highway Beautification Act that she strongly and directly advocated for. Lady Bird Johnson demonstrated a level of public involvement with Congress similar to Jacqueline Kennedy’s extensive efforts to encourage congressional approval for designating the White House as an official national monument. Furthermore, this continuation of Kennedy’s model for a public, primary project persisted with the production of a televised film, *A Visit to Washington with Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson*, advertising the success of her beautification efforts in a way that referenced Kennedy’s own television special and emphasis on female

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professionalism. On that note, as First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson also hosted a series of luncheons, named “Women Do-ers,” at the White House to spotlight American women in professional roles, maintaining a cultural, gendered theme developing under Jacqueline Kennedy’s First Ladyship. Thus, the next First Lady maneuvered her new role in a way that built off of the Kennedy model, embracing her innovative integration with media and reacting positively to her changes, which contributed to the lasting legacy of Kennedy; because of Johnson’s loyalty to her model of a successful First Ladyship, Kennedy’s reshaping of the role was not merely an anomaly that occurred for a few short years in the early 1960s.

The next batch of First Ladies followed suit, demonstrating how influential Jacqueline Kennedy’s leading example as First Lady truly was for years to come. For instance, Pat Nixon, the first Republican First Lady since Mamie Eisenhower’s First Ladyship in the 1950s, not only advocated for female professionalism by appealing for a female Supreme Court justice but also constructed a project, a “national recruitment program,” in order to recruit volunteers for community service. Following Kennedy’s example, Pat Nixon increased the public activity of the position. Likewise, Betty Ford committed her First Ladyship to supporting equal rights for women and to drawing public attention to women’s health issues, continuing the tradition of advocating the goals of a specific agenda in a public way.

that Jacqueline Kennedy previously instigated. Next, First Lady Rosalynn Carter began working on more political issues in tandem with Cabinet members and President Jimmy Carter while raising awareness on mental health concerns, her main project as First Lady; in effect, she molded the position of First Lady to be more politically powerful in a manner similar to how First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy previously shaped the role during her visit to the Pope to one that held political credence. First Lady Nancy Reagan also kept Kennedy’s legacy of a First Lady’s primary project alive with her promotion of drug education and establishment of prevention programs for the youth of the nation, while First Ladies Barbara and Laura Bush individually did emphasized the importance of literacy in the public school setting. Thus, each woman occupying the position of First Lady increased the public nature of the role through, at the very least, individual projects, a tribute to Jacqueline Kennedy’s most visible legacy as First Lady. With every subsequent First Ladyship, media became more integrated with the sphere a First Lady operated within and advertised each project to the public. By choosing to incorporate aspects of her model for First Lady, future First Ladies conveyed the significance of Kennedy’s First Ladyship by constructing a purposeful image of their shared role.

When Hillary Clinton assumed the role of First Lady in 1993, she not only referenced Jacqueline Kennedy’s model in her own First Ladyship but also built upon

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it in ways that further expanded the position. Indeed, First Lady Hillary Clinton
directed the President’s Task Force on Health Care Reform, and while her proposed
bill on health care ultimately failed to pass in Congress, her primary project shed light
on the issue of health insurance in America as well as the importance of medical
research and funding. While she maintained the legacy of First Lady Jacqueline
Kennedy in leading such a large-scale project, First Lady Hillary Clinton’s political
efforts as head of this program marked an explicit shift in the capabilities of what a
First Lady could accomplish; Hillary Clinton occupied “a more overtly political role
than any of her predecessors,” including Jacqueline Kennedy, who functioned as a
transitional figure between the conventional nature of the housewife in the 1950s and
the progressive, independent roles women undertook in the later 1960s. Even so,
Hillary Clinton also referenced Kennedy’s work as First Lady in her historical
restoration and preservation efforts with the Save America’s Treasures program as
well as her introduction of selections of fine art in the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden at
the White House, thereby demonstrating an appreciation for Kennedy’s prior
fashioning of the position of First Lady. Thus, with her actions, First Lady Hillary
Clinton used Jacqueline Kennedy’s model of a First Ladyship as a cornerstone to
expand upon in her own public career some thirty years later.

Most recently, America’s current First Lady, Michelle Obama, reacted most
positively to Jacqueline Kennedy’s changes to the role of First Lady through both her

use of media and fashion to bring national attention to issues she believed most important to national culture. Like Jacqueline Kennedy, Michelle Obama occupied the position of First Lady during a time of cultural transformation in regards to the way people consumed information and news: social media became the most effective method with which to communicate to the American public. Through social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter, First Lady Michelle Obama has promoted her primary project “Let’s Move!” of supporting and encouraging healthy eating and active lifestyles to decrease the national obesity epidemic. Additionally, she has employed such platforms to encourage young Americans, especially women, to complete an education. Notably, First Lady Michelle Obama appeared in a music video on the standard video sharing platform YouTube to inspire America’s youth to attend college, rapping, “Everyone could really make their dream true. Hey, kid, listenin’ in Michigan, that could be you!” In this way, Michelle Obama utilized the popular media forms of the day to communicate more directly with a target audience about her agenda as First Lady, thereby expanding the role in a way similar to Jacqueline Kennedy. First Lady Michelle Obama also used social media to announce via video that the ban on cameras and photography on public tours at the White House was lifted, making the executive mansion more accessible to the public than

303 However, this is not to say that the press and broadcast media have not played a large role in disseminating news to the American public.
305 College Humor, “Go To College Music Video (with FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA!),” YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1yAOKOnSb0. Released in December 2015, the video has amassed almost four and a half million views on YouTube.
ever before. This was subtly similar to Jacqueline Kennedy’s televised special during which she visually opened the White House to her thousands of American viewers. As a result, Michelle Obama’s First Ladyship was rooted strongly the model that Jacqueline Kennedy provided in the early 1960s as First Lady.

Like First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, First Lady Michelle Obama was also commended for her fashion. Indeed, the New York Times labeled her wardrobe as “diplomatic” in its function – “femininity with a point” – because at many events Michelle Obama made an effort to match not only the tone of the occasion, similar to Kennedy, but also the designer of the dress to the particularity of public affairs. For instance, to pay tribute to guest of honor Manmohan Singh at her first state dinner in 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama wore a gold-colored dress designed by Indian American Naeem Khan, and in 2011 she notably donned a purple gown by Korean American designer Doo-Ri Chung to reflect the culture of South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak. Most recently, Michelle Obama wore an optimistically marigold dress to President Barack Obama’s last State of the Union on January 12, 2016; she recruited a Cuban-American named Narciso Rodriguez design the dress as an effort to punctuate the “resumption of diplomatic relations” between the United States and

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Cuba during such a public, widely broadcasted event.\footnote{Vanessa Friedman, “At State of the Union, Michelle Obama Wears Her Optimism for All to See,” \textit{New York Times} January 13, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/14/fashion/michelle-obama-fashion-state-of-the-union.html.} While the current First Lady has not always aligned her wardrobe with a political meaning, she has made a habit of hiring designers “whose background and culture reflect the country being honored,” and these dresses serve to illustrate that purpose.\footnote{Joanna Nikas, “Michelle Obama’s Diplomatic Wardrobe,” \textit{New York Times} April 29, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/29/fashion/michelle-obamas-diplomatic-wardrobe.html?_r=0.} Like the style of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, the fashion of Michelle Obama during her First Ladyship received much public attention for its style as well as its function, and her choice of designers influenced the reputation and popularity of those designers in a positive way.\footnote{Vanessa Friedman, “At State of the Union, Michelle Obama Wears Her Optimism for All to See,” \textit{New York Times} January 13, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/14/fashion/michelle-obama-fashion-state-of-the-union.html.} In essence, Jacqueline Kennedy fashioned the fabric of First Lady style in terms of how it could communicate particular goals or messages about her agenda, but Michelle Obama enlarged its political role by employing a diverse array of designers to more explicitly publicize her functional role as a diplomatic aide to the president.

Without a doubt, all of Jacqueline Kennedy’s successors to the position of First Lady referenced in some way, big or small, the impact of her work in enlarging the sphere of influence of a First Lady. Furthermore, many utilized her model for using the media as an asset in advertising their goals and projects as First Lady, and all gradually expanded the professional qualities embodied in the public figure of a First Lady as American culture became more progressive in terms of gender roles. In effect, she clearly affected the position in a way that shaped the way her successors
maneuvered the unofficial responsibilities of the role. As such, Jacqueline Kennedy’s distinctive work as First Lady was highly influential and shaped the way the American public would view Kennedy as a public figure after she left the White House environment. With her status as full-fledged fashionista in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as her work to restore the historical Grand Central Station in New York City in 1975, Jacqueline Kennedy referenced and, thusly, emphasized her own efforts as First Lady in the later years of her life. Ultimately, while Jacqueline Kennedy may be most well-known for her White House restoration, her cultural taste, her fashion, and her ability to shape imagery within the national consciousness, her strongest, most notable project as First Lady was her refashioning of the role of First Lady of the United States of America.

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