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4

First Lady

NANCY REAGAN

I hope people like me. I think it's been a process of getting to know me, and that took a long time. Probably some of it was my fault, some theirs. It was so new to me. I didn't know quite what to do, and there's no training for this job. When something is new to me, and I'm a little shy about doing something, then I tend to hold back.

The first year was a bad year for lots of reasons. I had all these personal problems that were on my mind and I was holding back.

There wasn't a deliberate sitting down and saying, "Now I've got to turn this around." It wasn't that. I'm no different than I ever was. But as time went on, I became more used to the job, and more used to being here. I got past the first year.

I always knew I wanted to be involved in the drug problem, and then I had more time. I was more ready for it, and it just evolved.

There isn't any clearly defined role for the First Lady. You make of it what you want. I see my role as what I'm doing. I didn't realize that you had such a tremendous platform, if you were interested in one particular thing, to try to advance it and inform people and get your feelings across. I've chosen that way. But then, everybody has their own way.

The term "the right image" seems to me such a phony kind of staged thing—I'm going to carve out this image and that's what I'll be. Now, whatever kind of image that conjures up in people's minds, I don't know. But all I can do is be myself. I'm not going to be like anybody else. I'm going to be Nancy Reagan. So I'll push the things that I'm interested in. That's the way it's been all through history. Every First Lady has her own particular style or her own particular individuality and gets her own particular criticism.

Is it true I can be "relentless"? I think I know what I want. But, actually, I would think that if I were working for somebody, I would rather work for a person who knew what she wanted. The other would be very confusing to me. I wouldn't know if this is what she wanted or if that's what she wanted. We have a lot of laughs, though if I'm upset about something that somebody's done, I tend to just pull back. A curtain comes down. Now I don't know whether that's good or bad, but that's always been so. I don't yell and shout and throw things, I just pull back.

Everybody who's been here knows the job's tough. I would never criticize another First Lady. I never knew that Mary Lincoln was criticized so terribly. Well, she was. Across the hall, there's a painting of Mrs. Coolidge. It's a beautiful painting, her standing with their dog. She was criticized because supposedly there were people who said that her dress was really shorter than it was—it was really kind of a flapper style—and that she had had it painted on and added to and it was not the dress at the Smithsonian. There was a whole big flap about this. Mrs. Lincoln was criticized for spending \$2,000 on her inaugural gown. Criticism comes with the job.

I don't think I'm getting all that bad a press now. I think as things have settled down and people have gotten to know me more, they know that a lot of things were not true.

I hear a lot of times, "Well, Nancy Reagan wants this, or Nancy Reagan wants that," when I've never said anything about it and I don't know what they're talking about.

Does the President sometimes say no to me? Sure. Does his no always end it? Not always. I'll wait a little while; then I'll come back at him again.

It really reaches a point where something's gone much too far, in my opinion. So it seems to me, sometimes, that if you can catch it before it reaches that point where a lot of people are maybe hurt, then it's easier to stop it right in the beginning, rather than let it build up a head of steam.

I don't have as much "clout" as they say I do. I don't get involved in how to balance the budget or how to reduce the deficit or foreign affairs or whatever, but I do get involved in people issues. I think I'm aware of people who are trying to take advantage of my husband, who are trying to end-run him.

Sometimes he'll want to talk about problems and sometimes he won't. Sometimes his mind is so busy and so occupied, he just wants to go right to those papers as soon as he gets his dinner. And then, there's not much conversation about it. Other times, he does want to talk about it.

I didn't think it was fair when I'd pick up the paper and I'd read that he was a warmonger, that he was ready to go to war and so on. I know that that's simply untrue. He's trying to do everything he can to avert war and bring about peace. That concerns me too. I was in favor of a meeting with Gromyko. I thought that was a good idea, and I'm glad he came.

He and my husband were over at the Oval Office alone, and having dismissed everybody else, I was asked to come down to the Red Room and be there to greet them when they got back. They came in, and we said hello, and they came around with the trays. He took some tomato juice or something, I took a Perrier, and he toasted me and I toasted him and then it was just sort of small talk. I think we were talking about the metric system. He turned and looked at me and said, "Is your husband in favor of peace or war?" And I said, "Peace." And he said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "I'm sure." And he said, "Well, then, you whisper 'Peace' in his ear every night." And I said, "I will. I'll also whisper it into your ear."

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I haven't much time to be lonely. We plunged into so many things right away, there isn't time. When we went to church one Sunday, my husband said, "Look at this schedule. It used to be so simple just to go to church. All we're doing is going to church, and look at all these people who are involved." Or, if we go to Camp David, he'll say, "What are all those helicopters doing out there?" You know, he still can't get over it that everything takes so many people around you.

I think he's happy. He enjoys being in the position of being able to try to do the things he feels very strongly about and has for a long time. Yes, I think he's happy.

Sometimes, it's very hard. At this particular time, with what's happening worldwide and certainly in this country, with the deficit and so on. Tremendous.

Being governor of California was very good training for this job, particularly because, as he said often during the campaign, he came in as governor when the state was in almost the same position as the country. It was broke financially and so on. You just multiply that by I don't know how many times. Of course, California didn't have a foreign policy.

It's more work than I thought it would be, for me. I can't speak for him. He brings back stacks of papers that he reads every night, in his study or the living room, whatever, until he falls asleep at eleven-thirty or midnight. And he gets frustrated by the entrenched bureaucracy—because it's an entrenched bureaucracy.

I have moments of accepting that my husband is President, and then moments of thinking I'm not really here. I was interested when Prime Minister Thatcher was here. She said somewhat the same thing to my husband. She said, "Do you ever have times when you think of other heads of state and you think, oh, they must be so brilliant, so marvelous, and so extra special? And then you realize that you're a head of state, and you think, I'm just an ordinary person."

There was a tremendous emotional upheaval that I didn't count on—at leaving our home and our children. I'm sure you saw the picture of Pattie and some others at the house crying. And my crying. There was all this extra in it that I really hadn't counted on. All of it together did get me down for a while. But I'm enjoying it. Yes, I am enjoying it.

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LETITIA BALDRIDGE

The First Lady belongs to the people. She has thousands of letters addressed to her every month, asking for advice, consolation, help. What she does is reflected throughout the entire United States. If she has good posture, mothers say to their daughters, "Stand up straight. Don't you see Mrs. Reagan has good posture?" If she has a good figure, everyone wants to look like her. If she has a beautiful home and has good taste, everyone wants to have the same apricot-color living room that she has, and banana yellow on the walls. Everyone wants to copy the First Lady.

Therefore, if she is intelligent and if she has style and grace, it's pretty nice to copy someone like that. She also is a wonderful helpmate to her husband, a true partner. And although she doesn't make policy decisions, the mere fact that she is the ultimate sympathetic ear at night when the President of the United States returns to his private quarters is very important.

It's impossible to please all the public. But things straighten out through the years and various First Ladies have been criticized for being overly involved in White House affairs. People forget that and remember them for their intelligence. I think Mrs. Reagan is establishing a very classic, wonderful path, lending a supportive ear to her husband but not even pretending to interfere in public policy.

I doubt there's a man alive who is in love with his wife and doesn't trust her intuition. She sees a lot on her own, I'm sure, that the President doesn't. I think it's good to have that kind of advice.

I think she will go down in history as one of the very finest First Ladies because she has gone through bad publicity and surmounted it so beautifully. She has done such wonderful things with her drug program, her foster children program, and so forth. She's been involved in a lot of things. She is working hard on the drug program at a time when drug and alcohol abuse is really a very serious problem in this country. She's right on target. And what she does is very effective. She has influence. She works hard at it. I think she also derives great satisfaction from seeing the good that she does.

There's a growth process in every First Lady. I've seen it in every single one of them. Mrs. Ford went through great personal problems and rose to surmount them. Rosalynn Carter and Lady Bird Johnson, wow, I mean Lady Bird does things to this day. She has power and influence in the whole field of world wildlife and preservation that she never would have had if she hadn't been First Lady and if it hadn't evolved during her years as First Lady.

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Mrs. Reagan has evolved, too. If they are smart, intelligent women, if they have their eyes and ears open, and they don't succumb to prejudices, all First Ladies evolve and become greater people. If nothing else, they don't get any money out of it, and though they get a lot of grief out of it, they also develop inwardly and store up a tremendous amount of knowledge. It must affect their whole lives for ever and ever. Once you're out of the White House, a First Lady has to be very changed and has to be very involved in what's going on around her. Just think of all the newspapers they suddenly start to read.

When you're that busy, you don't have time to give in to grief. You just keep plowing ahead. That's one of the perks of the job. You've so many things you have to do. There's this enormous schedule laid out for you. You don't have time to dwell on grief or sadness or fear. You just push ahead and do your job. And I think that's what she's done. First Ladies have to realize that when they come into the job—Claire Luce had a marvelous expression—"no good deed goes unpunished." They keep doing good deeds for the White House, for their country, and they're constantly criticized for it. But you have to go ahead and keep on anyway.

Both Mrs. Reagan and Mrs. Kennedy are remarkably good-looking, remarkably kind and motherly in many ways. The two of them can be compared a great deal. What makes Mrs. Reagan so unique is the wonderful love affair that she has with her husband. They're like young lovers. It's wonderful to see them walk down the hall hand in hand. I keep reminding my husband that we never hold hands. The Reagans hold hands all the time. And I think America loves that. It's a great, great symbol of marriage.

It's very hard when you're working your utmost to do the right thing in your job, and you're giving it your all, to see it put in the headlines as something negative. It's very frustrating. Of course she was hurt and frustrated in the beginning and, intelligent woman that she is, she learned to accept it, to expect it, and not to be bothered by it. You have a choice in the White House: you either have a complete nervous breakdown or you learn to forget it. And that's what she has done.

Mrs. Johnson came along in history at just the right moment because the youth started to revolt and the women's movement began. And women started leaving the home in droves to go to work. She was such an executive, the women related to her and were inspired and encouraged by her. When Mrs. Reagan came into the White House, there was a tremendous need for the whole subject of husband and wife to be seen in a new light. People were putting each other down and the new young woman executive was perhaps too aggressive. All of a sudden, here was an old-fashioned family coming back into the White House. It was a great moment for that to happen because not only was she a fantastic wife but she also developed these programs of her own.

The whole idea of husband and wife plus the woman who does not work but involves herself in the non-profit sector in a very meaningful way, it all came along at the right time in history. The First Lady is always a role model for women, whether she likes it or not, and whether they like it or not, they look up to her. And what she does is very important to all the young women who are getting their MBAs and to women who are trying to save their marriages and all of this. It's of tremendous sociological importance.

I think there were more women who applauded her, coming back with some of the old-fashioned, more conservative values at a time when we needed them. America's feminist movement has taken such great strides and has gone forward so fast that the whole subject of having children and being married needed paying attention to. And she's done it.

NANCY REYNOLDS

Nothing prepares you for being First Lady, nothing. Basically, Washington is not a city that wishes you well. So I think you come in here really unprepared for the onslaught of personal and press criticism. Mother Theresa could be in the White House and within six months there would be some sort of exposé story about something she had done.

In Nancy Reagan's case, she is a woman who always takes things a day at a time. She concentrates entirely on one project, and her own personal concerns about the President's welfare come at the top of the list. Getting settled in the White House, making it a home, not just a public house, was a very important thing for her. So she concentrated on getting the house the way she wanted it and making it a comfortable, warm and welcoming place for the President at the end of the day.

She's always been like that. I think she was just totally unprepared for the fact that people expected, as they often do unrealistically, a kind of First Lady who was going to leap into a project immediately and become something they felt she should be. Now Nancy Reagan has always had a couple of projects in the years I've known her. The Foster Grandparent program and preventing drug abuse have been the two things that she's always been interested in, always put time in on. When she got to Washington, she wanted to continue with the Foster Grandparent program because she knew it, she felt comfortable in it, she had really put her mark on it all those years, and had done extraordinary things for the program.

What happens in Washington is that people try to push projects on you. Nancy Reagan has her own best instincts about what she wants to do, how it's going to work for her, and the kind of time she's going to give it. She felt that, except for the Foster Grandparent program and her interest in the drug program, she wanted to take a little time and see what was ahead. I think she became buried in the details and interests of what to do in the White House, managing a large staff. She had never been a manager before. All of her staff were new people—from her press secretary to her social secretary—people she had just met. I think it was kind of overwhelming at first. So she was unprepared for good old Washington and the immediate criticism that comes your way if you're not conforming to Washington's rules of how they think the First Lady should behave.

Her performance at that Gridiron dinner changed her image; most certainly the President's near death did. The assassination attempt had a tremendous effect on her, as had her own father's death. All of these things coming in the first year. All of them were traumatic, although the Gridiron was fun.

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People always ask, "has Nancy Reagan changed?" She really has not. What has changed is the perception of her. For years and years and years, we had all been saying, here's this wonderful, witty, funny, caring, loyal, intensely dedicated woman, but no one ever wanted to hear it. I attended thousands of press briefings and listened to hundreds of press women interviewing her over the years. In the sixties, in Sacramento, you were dealing with young, sixties reporters, most of them ardent feminists who came in with a chip on their shoulder, already making up their minds, and with a very cynical view of a First Lady who cared about her family first and foremost.

She is not someone who likes to make speeches or public appearances unless it's on behalf of her particular interests. I think she was a nervous wreck, appearing before the Gridiron. You never know how it's going to come off. But it showed the side of her that we've all known for years. You could feel the differences in the audience. You could feel people judging her very differently from this woman they had made casual assumptions about. She turned out to be something quite different.

She's a very complex person sometimes. She has many sides to her, and this was a side no one had ever seen. And when she did the encore, you knew she was having fun. You can sense when people approve of what you're doing. The applause was tremendous. That one incident showed that she basically has excellent instincts about herself and what she feels will be good and what will be natural for her. She never extends those boundaries by trying to do something that isn't natural, that isn't something she would do in ordinary life. Poking fun at herself at the Gridiron dinner was her way of perhaps saying, Well, if I got off to a rocky start, let's have a few laughs about it because I'm going to be around for a while. I think that was the turning point. There's no question about it.

I don't think on substance that you can say Nancy Reagan has influenced policy. She expresses herself as we all do to the President when we have the opportunity. He always listens very intently. Of course, he adores Nancy. Many times she's right and he's not right. At least we feel that way. But sometimes he will accede if he feels that it's something he hasn't thought about. It's more style than substance. She never claims to be an expert. She certainly is knowledgeable and understanding about a lot of things, but Nancy Reagan is a back-to-basics person.

I think she sees her husband as a man of peace. He is a man of peace. To that end, I think she will always offer up solutions and ideas and comments, as we all do any time we're asked, and even sometimes when we're not.

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But Ronald Reagan is his own man. I think she has influence in the general sense, but any wife of all those years is going to have an opinion. And his daughter Maureen, who spends a great deal of time at the White House, most certainly has a lot of influence. He doesn't always agree with her, either. That's what makes it such an interesting family.

When I first met Nancy Reagan, she was a housewife in her forties who had never been on the campaign trail before. Ronald Reagan had done a lot of campaigning for Senator Goldwater, and she had stayed home as most wives do and loved being in that rather protected environment. To be thrust all of a sudden into Sacramento and asked to live in an old mansion that was a firetrap and not near any schools—that was a big story in those days, that Nancy Reagan said the governor's mansion wasn't good enough for her. In fact, it wasn't safe enough. The fire department said there was no way they'd ever get off that second floor if a fire came along. The wood was rotting. It was in an awful neighborhood. Now it's a museum.

So she insisted on moving to a suburb. That sounds a little silly now, but in those days, it was pretty courageous. She took a lot of flak from the press on that. She wanted a normal life for her children, especially for her young son, and in a neighborhood, in a house, that looked just like all the other houses. That was what she wanted. Ultimately, it was the best thing. But you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. I think she found out the hard way. These things all made sense to her. She really couldn't understand that anybody wouldn't agree that it was a sensible thing to do.

Nancy Reagan never held a press conference the whole time she was in Sacramento. She felt it was presumptuous. There were a few incidents where she had press in or something, but she never really called a press conference, except for one time. That was when a man who was a leader of the opposition in California publicly criticized her for trying to solicit furniture for a governor's mansion that wasn't even built. She was trying to get people to donate antiques or old California pieces, and there was a big critical piece in the paper. She called a press conference the next day and just absolutely let him have it. It was the only time I ever saw her do that. She had her dander up and she felt that they had gone far enough. That was the end of the criticism. There was never another article, and she got tremendous donations of furniture and antiques from people who wanted to give them to the state to be used in a governor's mansion in the right way.

DR. BARBARA KELLERMAN

There's no set definition for the role of First Lady. The role as realized at any given moment in time really depends largely on three separate factors. One is the woman who's filling it. Two is the man she's married to. And three, by no means the least important, is the temper of the times. One can predict that a First Lady in the nineteen-eighties will be different from a First Lady in the fifties.

There are lots of common denominators among First Ladies, and in powerful ways the role has stayed remarkably the same as it was twenty and thirty years ago.

There was one First Lady who deviated somewhat from the norm in our recent history and that was Rosalynn Carter. Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were very close before they entered the White House. They were certainly well matched and partners, in effect, during the four years that they were in the White House. But Rosalynn Carter always took a very strong interest in the substance of her husband's political life. If that's your interest as First Lady, then the nature of the relationship and the nature of what you talk about and how you decide to spend your time—literally, how your days are spent—will differ enormously than if you are more like Nancy Reagan, which is to say, less interested in substance and more interested in being protective of her husband, as we know her to be.

Rosalynn Carter was interviewed in the White House by Barbara Walters. She was asked questions on policy matters. She was asked about energy, about health, about the political situation. You will notice that when Nancy Reagan is interviewed, there's rarely a question directed at her about any substantive policy issues.

This is not to say that, in the privacy of their own quarters, they don't discuss these issues. But I think it's safe to guess, from the evidence that we have, that she's not as interested in these matters as her predecessor was. Rather, she sees it all through a political lens of sorts, that is, how it will politically affect the well-being of her husband. That should not be lightly dismissed, because White House life is political life.

I think Nancy plays a large role with regard to personnel matters, though I don't believe she plays a larger role than other First Ladies have—compared, let's say, to Rosalynn Carter, which is the most obvious comparison because they've been the most powerful First Ladies of recent times. Anyone who reads the newspapers knows that Nancy Reagan helps her husband make decisions with regard to who should be around him, and when somebody lets her husband down and gets him into trouble—we have some recent evidence of so-called sloppy staff work—there are immediately reports that Nancy Reagan is furious at this and is doing everything she possibly can to make sure it doesn't happen again.

If you're going to look at the recent First Ladies, they really need to be viewed in their own separate categories. In different ways, they all exerted power.

Jacqueline Kennedy certainly was divorced from the political life of her husband. On the other hand, she was so attractive a figure, such a star in the White House, that her aura by osmosis almost lent him an aura of sorts. To be a media celebrity is to exert a kind of political clout, even if that clout is only in terms of public relations.

Lady Bird Johnson was for many years—in fact, during the entire Johnson marriage—what I call his trusted and indispensable junior business partner. She was junior because she knew or felt herself to be junior and never claimed to be his equal the way Rosalynn and Jimmy would say, "We're partners."

At the same time, she was always engaged in his political life, indispensable to his political life, and remained so in the White House. So her clout during her husband's White House tenure derived from various political activities she undertook on her own. For example, during the 1964 campaign, there was the "Lady Bird Special," which was one of the first efforts by a First Lady to step out on her own, to campaign alone, and to really become a political figure in her own right.

She also had her own projects. She had highway beautification and conservation and so forth and so on. Through Lyndon Johnson's dependence on her, through her long historical ties to his political career, and through her own projects—in at least three ways—she played a political role.

Pat Nixon's political clout was perhaps less than that of any of the other recent First Ladies. Basically, there are two ways to be politically powerful in the White House or to have some political impact there. One is through your tie to your husband, like Nancy Reagan's; and the other is to be such an attractive, imposing, or impressive figure in your own right that you get media attention and political attention the way Jacqueline Kennedy did. Pat Nixon, although she was attentive politically, and played her role capably and well, simply didn't have that strong a relationship with her husband. Nor was she so attractive, to those interested in political life and political culture, that she derived any clout from that. So she had less of an impact than other First Ladies.

Betty Ford is a separate story. The Fords entered the White House in a very unusual way. There was no campaign. Virtually overnight, they were catapulted from relative obscurity into the White House. She played a very important role in those early months, making him better known, attracting attention in her own right. Shortly after they entered the White House, she developed breast cancer. She was very open about her breast cancer, which other women in public life had not been up to that moment. From that point on, she became rather a loved figure. When he ran for President, for what really amounted to the first time, in 1976, buttons began appearing: "Betty's Husband in the White House" or "Betty for President." She really became a very popular First Lady, and in many ways deservedly so.

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What the public expects from a First Lady depends on the temper of the times. It's a difficult balancing act nowadays because we all live in a very different time with regard to women and what women are supposed to do and what we expect.

Nancy Reagan's experience as First Lady is somewhat atypical. The more conventional pattern for First Ladies, and indeed for presidential families and presidents, is for everyone associated with a new administration to have something of a honeymoon, and this extends to the President's wife. People are usually withholding judgment. For whatever reason, Nancy Reagan's career as a First Lady has been reversed. She was under much more attack during the first year than she has been since, and appears to be in much better shape now with regard to her public appearances and her appreciation by the public than she was in the beginning.

The interesting question to ask about Nancy Reagan is exactly how she reversed the trend. I think you have to look at the three critical factors, the three pieces of the "First Lady Puzzle." One is Nancy herself. She is much more comfortable now as First Lady than she was in the beginning. She's more relaxed. She's less defensive, less self-protective and has simply gotten accustomed to the role in a way she was not at the very beginning. Second, there's the trajectory of her husband's career. In the very beginning, the Reagans were an unknown quantity, Washington outsiders. No one knew how this so-called B movie actor from Hollywood would fare in the White House. I think the evidence has been that he has had in many ways a remarkably successful presidency. And his 1984 electoral victory is evidence of the fact that he is widely admired, liked, respected. People enjoy having him in the White House. If you enjoy having a particular President in the White House, you are also enjoying having the First Lady in the White House.

Finally, it has to do with the times. The Reagans succeeded the Carters. In the beginning, the Carters were much admired for their relatively simple style. Jimmy Carter would go on camera sitting by the fireplace in a cardigan sweater. In the beginning of his administration that was regarded as an asset. A little later on, people began to hunger for a bit more glamour in the White House.

When Nancy Reagan first came on the scene, she was something of a culture shock. Virtually overnight, we had gone from the relatively simple peanut farmer from Georgia to a Hollywood couple. And this was perhaps too rapid a movement for the American public to take to. It was one thing to have too simple a White House. It was another thing to have a White House that appeared to us to be run more like a monarchy than a democratic republic. So for all three reasons—her own comfort with the situation, her husband's popularity, and the fact that we've now gotten used to and rather fond of a more glamorous lifestyle—she's doing so much better now than she did in the beginning.

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The reason First Ladies are such easy targets is that they're so exposed. The combination of being out front and associated inevitably with the policies, ideology, and attitudes of their presidential mate makes them vulnerable on multiple levels. The trick is for them to find a line between seeming to be politically appropriate and yet personally supportive. That's not easy, as we've seen, in presidents' wives and in candidates' wives.

Some, like Jacqueline Kennedy and Nancy Reagan, do feel a fairly strong need to keep themselves out of the public limelight. Some, like Lady Bird Johnson and Rosalynn Carter, however shy they may both have been to begin with—and there's ample testimony to suggest that they both began as very shy ladies—somehow overcame this and became public personas.

If you look at a book such as *Lady Bird Johnson's White House Diary*, which is a big, fat tome about her activities in the White House, you will see that there was very little time in those years that was kept to herself. Whenever she had a private minute or two, she almost wrote about it apologetically, as if she were indulging herself. Rosalynn Carter, too, was a workaholic, and most of that work life was political life.

Nancy Reagan is a more private figure than her predecessor, a more private figure than Lady Bird Johnson. But with the passage of time, we're seeing her increasingly comfortable with those moments when she is in public.

Most First Ladies end up taking on the aura of their husbands. As much as we would like to say, "Let's look at the First Lady in isolation from her presidential mate," I think finally the way history will remember them, except for the few students of the subject of First Ladies, is the way their husbands are remembered. Successful presidents will tend to be accompanied in the mind's eye by successful First Ladies. The reverse is also true.

This is not to say that there are no distinctions made. Lyndon Johnson is known as a very complicated man. His presidency was in some ways very great, in others tragically flawed, while Lady Bird Johnson is almost universally admired.

If Nancy Reagan goes down in history favorably, as a good First Lady, then I think she is good in the ways that matter—she is supportive of her husband, she is appropriate in public. But finally she will be remembered in relationship to Ronald Reagan's presidency.

She understands it very well, and I think she's extremely happy.

SHEILA TATE

I remember one day when there was an inconsequential story in the press. A reference attributed something happening in the West Wing to her influence. It was something she didn't even know about, didn't have any idea what they were talking about. She said, "You know, some days, I feel like if it rains, it must be my fault." And I remember thinking that she must feel so powerless sometimes to control some of these events because if someone wants to attribute something to you via an unnamed source, what can you do? She's not able to defend herself constantly. She was deeply upset about it and concerned that there should be some way to change it.

How did she turn it around? She got on an airplane and hardly ever came back to the White House. She was on the road month after month after month. She visited treatment centers where she asked kids, "Tell me what happened? Why did this happen to you? What could you have done?" She said, "You know, you can't learn unless you listen."

She would have been on the road four months earlier had it not been for the Libyan terrorist threat, which constrained us from traveling for a while. So we went out as soon in the new year as we could. That first trip heartened her so much because she saw kids responding to her. She saw that, in just visiting one-on-one, she was having an impact, and she got so immersed in that subject that I think she forgot about herself.

If you don't set an agenda, it is set for you. If Nancy Reagan, in that first year, is meeting privately and it's not making an impact on the perception in the media, then, obviously, we're not setting our own agenda, even though we're doing the work.

We set our own agenda. And it was visibly done. She went out on the road. She invited the press to come with her. She took the camera that you were shining on her and turned it around and focused it on a cause—one she could do something about.

We're talking about, probably, a thirty-point rise in the polls, what Dick Wirthlin calls a thermometer rating. Dick explained to me that it's very unusual for a known public figure to change much on that rating, more than three or four points, and hers changed twenty-five, thirty points. I think people got a better idea of who she really was, that she's an interesting, vulnerable, multi-faceted person who certainly does care about people.

I don't think there's anything she's afraid of. She still has very good judgment about herself, what she's good at and what she would shy away from and what suits her. She has a very keen focus. If some great event presented itself, and I went to her and said, "I think you ought to get involved in this, what do you think?", she would know what questions to ask to assess whether it was right for her. She's always had that good sense.

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I only wish that Gridiron dinner appearance had been televised. It was the most stellar moment of the single events burned in my memory. Here were six hundred publishers, major political columnists, writers in Washington, who were believing what they had been writing and reading. They thought of her as sort of a brittle, unfeeling person. There was a skit about Mrs. Reagan, making fun of her, called "Second-Hand Clothes." All of a sudden, onto the stage comes a rack of clothes—Seventh Avenue—and the clothes part and this character comes between the clothing and it's Nancy Reagan dressed in the most outrageous outfit:—a skirt that didn't match, the blouse with the feather boa, a big floppy hat, and yellow rain boots, and she takes over and sings the song that, basically, makes fun of her. She was saying, "I did some really colorful things last year that you all have ribbed me about and I have a sense of humor about it. I can put it in perspective."

When I was sitting there, waiting for her to come on, it was the only time I've ever experienced what I'm sure was high blood pressure. I had these poundings in the back of my head. One publisher sitting next to me looked back at the head table and noticed that Nancy Reagan wasn't there. He leaned to another guy and said, "Nancy Reagan isn't up there. I'll bet she's tied."

She walked on that stage and people were so astonished, they just rose from their seats and started screaming. And when she sang this song and took this plate that represented the china and smashed it on the floor, it didn't break, so they screamed for an encore. You could feel the attitude change.

She stuck her neck out so far to do that. I think what got her through it was that she kept it a secret from the President. She had her clothes sent over secretly that afternoon. She went over and rehearsed very quietly. It's the only major story I know of that never got leaked in advance. Nobody knew about it except two or three people at the Gridiron and two or three people on the staff. She kept thinking, "I'm going to do this. The President's going to fall off his chair." And he darn well almost did. I think she got a lot of enjoyment out of that.

She has a very endearing, gentle sense of humor. When we first went to her, the Gridiron people suggested that she make fun of the press. She recognized right away that Nancy Reagan can't do that. She said, "I'll make fun of myself." And that turned the whole thing around.

I think a fainter heart would have shriveled up and never left the third floor of the White House. But she cared about what people thought. She never stopped caring.

I remember on a recent summer day she had three speeches in a row to groups like the P.T.A. and Lions to thank them for helping her on this big project she was involved in. It occurred to us as an afterthought, afterward, talking on the plane, that she had addressed in just ten days something like fifty thousand people. She was so self-confident she would walk in there with a couple of cards in her hand and get up and speak extemporaneously for fifteen or twenty minutes. She had a message.

She is a woman of substance and deserves to be seen that way.

LYN NOFZIGER

I suspect that Nancy has about as much as she wants to have. Nancy is not Rosalynn Carter. She doesn't view herself as the Deputy President. She doesn't want to sit in on Cabinet meetings or those sorts of things. But she certainly has a strong interest in the things that the President does. She has an interest in the people around him, and judges them on the basis of whether they serve him well. But can Nancy get someone fired? I don't think so. Ronald Reagan makes those decisions. Can Nancy get somebody hired? Probably at some levels, and maybe at some very high levels, but not totally. She's not the President, and I don't think anybody at the White House thinks she is, nor does she. There may be some people who are afraid of her, but I don't think that there's a sense of fear in the White House about Nancy. I've not seen that ever.

You take the call. Of course, you take the call. But that doesn't mean that you get on the phone and say, "Yes, Mrs. Reagan. Yes, Mrs. Reagan. Yes, Mrs. Reagan." If you take the call, then you listen. She's a very smart woman, and her opinion is worth listening to.

How much trouble are you in if she's down on you? I suspect it depends on who you are. I think you can make too much of that. I don't know of anybody, on the White House staff, on the governor's staff, who has not continued to function if Nancy was upset. The President makes the final decisions. And they're not always the decisions she thinks he ought to make. But certainly her view is taken into serious consideration, as it should be.

ED ROLLINS

*W*hen Mrs. Reagan is concerned about something, we know that her concern always relates directly to the President. So when she's concerned about something, we respond to her, and respond to her very quickly.

He's an awfully nice man, and I think that she sometimes feels that he may be a little taken advantage of by either his staff or members of the Cabinet or what have you, and she certainly wants to make sure that doesn't happen.

She certainly gets concerned about rhetoric sometimes. She's probably the one person who's always looking out for his long-term image. The two of them have made a very heavy commitment to spend a significant portion of their life here, and I think that she's very concerned about his place in history.

There's no question there've been certain members of the Cabinet she thought were becoming negative to the President and she probably weighed in pretty heavily on some of those. As far as the White House staff itself, I don't know of anyone that she's ever gone out and tried to get fired or anyone in particular that she's tried to get hired. I do believe that she has expressed opinions. There's been a time or two in which I've made statements that have caused her some concern.

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I don't think anybody ever wants to be in trouble with the First Lady. She's not a petty or vindictive sort of person, but if she doesn't think that you're particularly competent, you've got to remember that she's the one who gets to talk to him first every morning and last every night. My predecessor in this job, Lyn Nofziger, and she had good periods and bad periods. The First Lady had some concerns about some of the things I've said, but certainly has backed me fully.

It's very important as the White House team moves forward with its agenda that it realize the warning signals when Mrs. Reagan is concerned about something. It's a concern that either is bothering the President or that better get some attention. When my secretary walks in and says, "Mrs. Reagan's on the line," I certainly take the call very quickly. After my heart starts beating again, I certainly listen very attentively.

RICHARD ALLEN

She makes her influence felt directly to a circle of intimates who convey her views on matters. I think that this is wholly within bounds for a First Lady. She's a strong-willed First Lady. I think good presidents are served by strong-willed ladies—that is, good assertive presidents who know where they're going, know where they've come from.

She can make her influence felt with a range of actions, from a telephone call expressing concern to perhaps making a contribution to the solution of a given problem.

This is not a case in which a strong-willed and very capable First Lady is reaching over her husband's shoulder to try to control the ship of state. But in questions that she has an instinctive feel for, she makes her views known. I think that's utterly welcomed. My wife does it, everyone's wife does it. We find as the years accumulate that our wives gather more wisdom and their reaction becomes very important to us.

Nancy Reagan obviously has high regard for certain individuals whose fortunes she would push. It's only natural that she should do that. I'm sure she talks to the President about it. I've seen it in pre-White House days when she would address him very directly and begin to persuade him and then lay out a case. It was always very interesting for me to watch that. I was rather amused by it at first, and then I began to take it more seriously, not because I thought being on Nancy Reagan's good side was important. I don't believe one ought to operate that way, although there are others who may feel that this is an important operating methodology. I just went about doing my job as I saw fit. She never happened to be at cross-purposes with me. Let's say that it's infinitely preferable working for President Reagan and having Nancy Reagan on your side than having her on the other side of the street.

Without making invidious comparisons, I would say that Nancy Reagan will rate as one of the best and most effective—certainly most influential for a good cause—First Ladies in modern history.

MICHAEL DEAVER

*Y*ou know, you sit over here in the West Wing of the White House and you start out here at six-thirty in the morning and end up at eight or nine o'clock at night, and your entire life is consumed by his schedule and the priorities of that day or the priorities of the week or the foreign visitors or the legislative schedule or whatever it is, and you forget that half a block away, you've got a very integral part of what makes this man tick. Nancy is in many respects as much a part of what people think about this presidency as any First Lady in a long, long time.

I don't think she spends a lot of time on the issues. Nancy would agree with George Shultz and with Ronald Reagan and with George Bush that it's better to be talking to the Soviets than not talking to the Soviets. I think that would be her position. And I believe that's a very smart position. But it isn't the kind of thing that she would come over here and spend a lot of time on. She might have dinner with the Shultzes or with the Bushes, and something like that might be discussed, but that's not the kind of thing she'd make a big issue of over here in the West Wing of the White House.

I think she's more confident about going out on trips and making speeches. Anybody, once they begin doing that sort of thing, develops a confidence. She takes an extraordinary amount of time in the preparation of those remarks. There's a lot of people about whom you can say, "I've got to go over to the whatchamajiggers association. Write me ten minutes, will you?" And they get it and look at it in the ear on the way over. Not Nancy Reagan. She goes over the dotting of every *i* and every crossing of every *t* and works very hard to be sure that that's something that really is her own statement. That's what being a First Lady is all about.

JAMES ROSEBUSH

*I*f you can trust the polls, they say that she is respected and loved by the American people. In fact, she has a rating that indicates she's the most popular First Lady of the past seven administrations.

The people like her. She's certainly comfortable in her role. I think she sees that there's a job to be done that she can do, and she's very happy about that. She's pleased she can contribute to a major social problem, and she's seeing results on that. She's comfortable, and I think the American people are comfortable with her, too.

We know that as a result of the First Ladies coming here from seventeen different countries we're getting reports pouring in that these First Ladies are starting media campaigns to alert young people to the dangers of drug abuse. They're more knowledgeable about it. They're working with their own governments to step up efforts to cut the production of drugs. The conference was very successful.

As to those stories that Mrs. Reagan was the "star" of that big trip to Europe, I think you have to take the word "star" and look at it carefully. Certainly, the President was tackling the tough issues, and he showed the kind of leadership that people were looking for from the President of the United States. She, on the other hand, had a chance to play a starring role with the people of those countries. She had a chance to get out and talk with them, and dance the flamenco with them, and show interest in their culture. In that sense, she played a starring role, but I think they starred in their own individual ways.

I don't think we've ever faced a situation where we've overshadowed the President; we've complemented him. It's exciting when she does something important—gets prominent play and people know about it. That's what we want to do. We want to communicate those things, but I don't think we've ever gotten into a situation where we've ever seriously competed with the President.

This has been the first administration in which the chief of staff to the First Lady also works for the President. I've had one foot in both wings and both their interests at heart.

I think it's a first that people in the West Wing are sitting there and saying, "Nancy Reagan is a plus. She's helping the President, politically." I expect they recognize that, so there's a degree of respect that wasn't here in previous administrations. Before, it was, "Well, let the East Wing do what they think is best. Let the First Lady get involved in charitable programs or, you know, garden parties." Which is not to denigrate what other First Ladies have done, but there's a degree of importance here, and I think it's a key point.

RICHARD WIRTHLIN

Right from the beginning, Nancy Reagan was viewed as a dignified, strong, capable woman, but the public's perceptions have changed. That is, not only do people still articulate those as reasons why they like Nancy Reagan, but, in addition, four out of ten Americans say that they like Nancy Reagan because of her work with young people, the work she's doing fighting drugs, and her sensitivity to people.

In 1981 and 1982, she was still viewed favorably, but it wasn't as strong a feeling as it is now. About five or six out of ten said they were favorably impressed with Nancy Reagan. Those first two years in the White House were pretty rough ones for the First Lady. Since that time, she has developed a confidence and brought to her public image, if you will, a "likeableness" that wasn't there early on. This plus her dedication to a cause she feels very, very deeply about made Nancy Reagan probably one of the most positively supported First Ladies in many years.

I think hers is an unusual case. It's not unusual to see someone who has a favorable rating initially have that rating erode as time goes on. I can't name a major public figure whose job rating or whose positive impressions improved as dramatically over two or three years as has Nancy Reagan's.

DONNIE RADCLIFFE

She projected the image of a very well-to-do woman socialite who really had little concern or interest in anyone who wasn't a part of her particular social milieu. She was someone who cared about clothes and furnishings and parties and people who were her sort. The real person didn't come across at first—that she was concerned about the average person. I'm not saying she wasn't, but it never came across.

She's riding very high these days. She was very successful in Europe. She has good press. She makes no mistakes. She's very professional. She's an actress who performs her role well. She follows directions and her staff works closely with her. I think she's very successful right now. She's at the top.

I would like to see more specifics in her drug-abuse message. By that I mean, when she is meeting with people from other countries, if she could be more specific about what sort of things have been successful here in her own crusade.

I think she is too general; she should be more specific and say, "We did this. We had a publisher do comic books for us with a message on the dangers of drug abuse. We went to the National Pharmacists and had them start a campaign."

Does she enjoy all the attention? It would be very difficult for any human being not to enjoy it.

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY

People didn't go around saying Mrs. Truman was a disappointment, but Mrs. Truman was a domestic in her husband's household. She wanted really no external visage. Nancy Reagan has a background as an actress, as a performer. And it is inconceivable that she would lead so inconspicuous a life as Mrs. Truman. On the other hand, if her successor were a Mrs. Truman type, I don't think people would rush forward and say what a disappointment she is. They would simply accept the fact that the temperament of the First Lady dominates the question of how she's going to behave.

You ask, What is *her* vision of the role of First Lady, not our vision? If you accept that distinction, I would say Nancy Reagan's vision of the role of First Lady is, number one, to do everything her husband wants her to do and, number two, to identify herself publicly with the idealism and social concern of a chief of state. She simply wants to be an exemplary First Lady. The idea of what constitutes an exemplary First Lady is not set in concrete. It depends completely on the personality of the individual.

NANCY REAGAN

*M*y meeting with the Pope was one of the most moving, wonderful experiences I've ever had. I've met with him twice before but this was the first time alone.

What was so special? Being alone. Talking about something that concerns me very much and concerns him, and hearing his views on it—and his comments about what I'm doing.

Yes, he thought what we're doing is important. You can't ask for anything more. How could you not be moved?

We discussed the seriousness of the drug problem. I believe very strongly in the family, getting parents' groups and families involved. He believes just as strongly that it's necessary for these young people who are trying to work their way back—which is a very difficult thing for them to do—to have some kind of spiritual help, religious help.

He's such a marvelous man. Number one, a very strong man, but he has a gentleness at the same time. The attempted assassinations came very closely together, so I feel a special affinity with him.

I just hope whatever I say or do can be of help to people. It's special to be here on my own, but on those terms—only on those terms. That I can be of help.

RON REAGAN

I've never sat down and tried to rate First Ladies. I'd say that, in terms of what she's done for the White House, she'd have to be way up there at the top. The place was a mess when she got there, really a mess. It looked, you know, real low rent, kind of Holiday Inn—as much as the White House can look like a Holiday Inn. She's really fixed it up. She took a beating because of the china. Well, nobody talked about the fact that they didn't have a whole set of china any more. The last person, I think, who actually bought a set for the White House was Lady Bird—maybe it goes back to Jackie Kennedy. When they have state dinners there, people swipe plates and stuff. Little plates disappear into handbags and coat pockets, so they couldn't have a dinner and have a complete setting of china for everybody. She thought it was kind of tacky, so she went out and got some of her friends to donate the money for it.

Eleanor Roosevelt is a kind of an icon now. She's really “big time.” As far as Jackie and Lady Bird go, in terms of style, I'd rate my mother with them, sure. If Jackie had come when my mother did, when society wasn't quite amenable to a stylish First Lady, she'd have gotten a beating, too. You know, my mom can dress with the best of 'em—even Jackie. And she has beautified the White House. There's no question about that.

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MAUREEN REAGAN

Before they came to Washington, she always had a good deal of control over their lives, over how they spent their time. All of a sudden, she came into a house that wasn't hers, trying to make it into the home she wanted it to be. She was suddenly giving dinner parties and luncheons that she had not been there to plan, that were suddenly thrust upon her. I talked to her one day about two weeks after the inauguration and I said, "Well, how is it going?" And she said, "Well, it's okay. I'm giving my fourth luncheon tomorrow afternoon and they didn't tell me till twenty minutes ago."

Well, you can't be an expert at giving state dinners till you've given two or three of them; but once you have, if you learn from what goes on, and you learn the mix of people and what makes them a good event, a good state event, then you say, "Well, good, now I can do that, so now I don't have to worry about the state dinner that's going to be held in April because I know these are the things that work." In other words, you can't be an expert on living in the White House until you've lived in the White House for a while.

Everything she has done has given her another level of confidence. Instead of going back and starting at "A" every time, she has gone from "A" to "B" to "C" to "D" to "E" to "F" until now she's up around "X," "Y," and "Z."

The job of the First Lady of the United States is being the ultimate corporate wife, and I am not a big fan of the whole system that creates this corporate structure in which we have these non-paid people on whom we depend to do much of the work that goes on. It seems to me that there should be a salary for the First Lady of the United States, because certainly it's somebody who is on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, doing a lot of jobs that most of us wouldn't want to do.

There is a definition of a First Lady. It would be the same if it was a First Gentleman. There is a job description. The First Spouse of the United States has the responsibility for the residence of the White House, for the social events, for the tours, for all that comes under that particular bailiwick. That is a massive corporation to be running, and that alone—without the social functions, without looking for the thing that you want to use your office to help people with, without the fact that you also have a family, and that you have brought your own way of life with you to the White House—is a massive job. And it's a job that has to be dealt with every day. It's something people have to understand—that house doesn't just run by itself.

The First Lady of the United States is a powerful woman. She's obviously got an awful lot of influence over what goes on in her domain, which is that house, though I don't know how that translates into policy decisions.

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If I have ideas on programs that I'm going to present, as part of what I do, to the chairman of the Republican National Committee, I sit and talk to my husband over dinner, and I say, "I'm thinking of doing this" and he says, "Well, listen, why don't you take that and go one step further, or why don't you back up and move in that direction, and if you consolidated this particular plan, you wouldn't use as much effort and you'd get much more progress on it," and I get all this refined. Now I take my plan in and everybody thinks I'm brilliant, because I've got this other brilliant person to come along and help me.

Well, the President doesn't just sit there and wait for people to bring him things. He has ideas. He sees things unfolding. He reads. He gathers ideas. So he goes into a meeting of the economic advisers and he's got an idea about something. Well, he's not going to just throw it out there. No human being would do that. He might sit at dinner the night before and say, "I was reading about this and thinking about this and I was thinking we can move in this direction." And she says, "Well, that's kind of interesting, Yeah, that sounds good to me. But wait a minute. What if you did such-and-such?" And so he goes down the next day and it all gets into the mix and everybody gets into it, so it's not her idea. It's not her influencing policy, but it's his sounding-board. He has to refine his thinking before he goes into the melee and make it all come together.

But it's like playing telephone when you're a kid. I say it to you, somebody else hears it, and the next thing you know, you have the *National Enquirer* writing a piece called "Nancy Reagan Creates White House Policy." She doesn't need that. The President doesn't need that. It's not good for the political dynamics of the country. So she's very uncomfortable, because she's afraid that people will not listen to what it is indeed that she does do.

I did not know Eleanor Roosevelt. Unfortunately, she was just a wee tad before my time. The first First Lady that I can remember knowing anything about was Bess Truman. I've know about Bess Truman and Mamie Eisenhower and Jackie Kennedy and Lady Bird Johnson and Pat Nixon and Betty Ford and Rosalynn Carter and Nancy Reagan. That's eight. She's the best.

5

The Nancy Reagan Style

NANCY REAGAN

I want more pomp, though I'm not going to criticize any other administration. I think the White House and any function that takes place at the White House should have a certain sense of dignity about it. I think the public wants it. I don't believe the public wants a man to just walk into the room. They want to know that it's the President.

Do I like "Hail to the Chief"? Yes. It's traditional. It's always been traditional and I think it's important to keep that tradition up. After all, this is a very special place. I keep saying that, but it is. The White House is where all of our history emanated from. All of our presidents, everything happened right here where we are. When you look out the window at the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial, it's a wonderful feeling.

I was unprepared for the condition of the second and third floors. I didn't realize they hadn't really been tended to, maintained. They hadn't been painted in something like fifteen or twenty years. The floors hadn't been done. All the varnish was peeling off the wooden doors. And this, after all, is the White House, which should look right.

I do not spend that much money on clothes. I do not buy that many clothes. What clothes I buy, I wear forever. My husband teases me and says I still have my gym bloomers from school.

It's not true about spending twenty-five thousand dollars on a wardrobe. Now we get back to all the other First Ladies who have had the exact same problem. I don't know why it always happens since it's not true at all. I never paid sixteen hundred dollars for any kind of a handbag. That's just untrue.

If I were spending that kind of money, I would think she would have a right to say, What in the world is she doing? But I'm not. I suppose there's a point at which, if it's yours and you want to spend it the way you want to, spend it, but I just would never spend that kind of money on my clothes. They were very wrong about a handbag or whatever. Anybody can say anything they want to say and you have no recourse, really.

We had a party for my husband's birthday and I wore a dress that I've had for twelve years. The one I wore to Mrs. Thatcher's dinner I've had for fifteen years.

LETITIA BALDRIDGE

She received a lot of flak for buying beautiful clothes and looking so wonderful. There was so much interest in the designers of her clothes, she was made absolutely furious and for a while had only one designer, Oleg Cassini, do everything just to keep away all the press interest. It used to be that way in all administrations, a very fashionable First Lady. I'm sure it was true in Dolley Madison's day—the whole world could be falling apart but still the questions would be coming into the White House, What is she going to wear and who made that dress?

The public would be very sad and very disappointed if our First Lady were dowdy and badly dressed. She does represent American fashion. She does look like a million dollars. As a matter of fact, all of our First Ladies have looked like a million dollars recently. We've been very lucky, and that helps the American fashion industry.

There was a lot of flak about Mrs. Kennedy's clothes. That finally disappeared, as it has with Mrs. Reagan.

They both share an equal sense of style, an equal ease at entertaining, a wonderful sense of rightness. When Mrs. Kennedy came into the White House, it was in terrible shape, and she put it into good shape, thanks to the Fine Arts Committee. Every First Lady thereafter added to the White House and made it better and better, as has Mrs. Reagan. It's been an evolution of style in that house—acquisitions of beautiful historic items and things of beauty in that house. It used to look like a bargain basement on sale day. Now it looks great.

It's fascinating to look at the First Ladies we've had. When you look back in history, the ones who emerge are Abigail Adams, who was sort of a feminist, and Dolley Madison, who was criticized for her beautiful clothes from Paris. James Madison was roundly criticized in the press for bringing back the Vermeil service of flatware—the forks, knives, and spoons that are used at some of the state dinner functions.

What is sad to see is that the great Vermaise flatware service is subtracted from every year as White House guests pocket forks, knives, and spoons to take home as souvenirs. They're taking priceless museum treasures out of the White House, but they don't seem to mind.

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DR. BARBARA KELLERMAN

*W*hen she first entered the White House, there was a tremendous tendency to jump on her for her attention to clothes, to china in the White House, to what was considered frivolous, trivial, and somehow not worthy of the contemporary American woman. Naney Reagan held up with good grace under those early attacks. Women in general are dressing up more than they did in the sixties and seventies. There is a new attention to manners. There's a new attention to propriety.

Jacqueline Kennedy spent a lot of money. When one looks at First Ladies, one really needs to look at them in the context of the entire presidential family and the political impact of the presidential family in their day and age.

RON REAGAN

*M*ost movie people are fairly well off. I think it's unreasonable to think she's going to go out and hang out at truck stops or something. Most of their friends are pretty well off. That's just the way it is.

I don't see her a nouveau riche, in terms of sensibilities, at least. In her present position, it's important for her to put the presidency and the White House in as good a light as she can, and she wants everything to be right. She wants everything to be first class.

MARY JANE WICK

*N*aney is a very gracious person, and a person with exquisite taste. She always has had that. She's a very private person and sometimes can be shy. Her friends are involved in the community and have lived very full lives. Naney looks lovely in whatever she's wearing. She also looks marvelous in blue jeans and tennis shoes up at the ranch.

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY

*I*t has been suggested that the Buckleys and Jerry Zipkin and Brooke Astor represented a kind of New York society crowd that she wants to be accepted by. What do I think of that? Well, I don't think the First Lady has difficulty being accepted in any crowd. At a social level, she's pretty much at the head of the table wherever she goes. I think she gravitates to certain people for reasons obvious, some of them eccentric. Jerry Zipkin is a very unusual human being and she is devoted to him. Brooke Astor she didn't know much before the President was elected. She's known us for twenty-five years. So there's a sort of mix there.

The First Lady has no problems of that sort. I suppose if she decides that she wanted to be accepted by the fellows at All Souls College in Oxford, she'd have certain problems. But the kind of life she has, she has no difficulty whatever in making out.

BILL BLASS

I've made clothes for Nancy Reagan for years. There is something special about the lady in that she literally cannot look bad in anything. It's amazing because she's small and, in theory, we make clothes for mannequins that are quite tall. Yet she can really adapt almost any style to her own particular way of wearing clothes. She's an extremely easy gal to dress.

She's also extremely easy to work with because she has very definite ideas about what she looks well in and what is appropriate to her role as First Lady. That's her total awareness of the role she's playing. This applies to daytime as well as evening.

I suspect that Mrs. Reagan is not really a trend setter in the sense we in fashion relate to it. What she does it adopt the best from several designers. She wears clothes for her own way of life and for what is becoming to her. She has a marvelous awareness of what is appropriate for her as First Lady.

I think Nancy Reagan already has had a tremendous impact on fashion in that she has a sureness of taste that relates to a great many women across the country. Pretty clothes, feminine clothes—she obviously dresses to please the President. Therefore, a lot of women follow suit and dress to please men. Chauvinistic remark, I know.

Nancy Reagan also has had an effect on people's appreciation not only of fashion but of entertaining and running a house. She takes a vital interest in not just clothes but in running a very beautiful house, one of the most beautiful houses in the world, and doing it superbly.

How often do I design something for Nancy Reagan? We send her videos of the shows. Obviously, she can't come to the shows herself and, seasonally, maybe twice a year, we plan things that she needs. It's not done on any planned basis. It just depends entirely on her travel plans, entertainment plans, her public plans. We'll talk on the phone about it. If I'm in Washington, I'll go over and lunch with her and we'll discuss it then.

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Disk 740
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It certainly isn't at all evident that she's demanding in the role we play together as one of her designers. The special-occasion dresses that I best remember I made for her are the ones she wore to the galas preceding the inaugurations. The first time she was in black, which we thought was appropriate because she was not going to wear black for any of the other ceremonies. The second time she wore red. As you know, she loves red. But I'm always amazed. She'll drag out a dress that's five or six years old, even older, and wear it.

She is partial, of course, to certain styles and colors. And I think she very wisely chooses red, white, and black very often. She's amazingly good at colors. Strange colors, an odd shade of green or something of that sort, she looks well in. But she does rather restrict it to black, white, and red.

Without really being conscious of it, I must have made clothes for her under a different label than I have now. Even before she was the First Lady of California, she had purchased clothes of mine. I've seen, of course, a great deal of concern on her part, not only for her husband but for the nation, which is perfectly obvious. It's very difficult for me to judge whether she seems more assertive or ambitious because she has never seemed that way to me and she doesn't seem that way now. She's sure of herself, which is a damned important thing to be.

It's always very difficult to make comparisons between a First Lady and any of the First Ladies who preceded her. I suspect that since Mrs. Onassis, there has been no one who's had an impact in fashion as much as Mrs. Reagan. But that's because she has always dressed well and has always been interested in clothes, just as Mrs. Onassis was, too.

I suspect quite honestly that the things she's happiest in are the things she wears in Santa Barbara on the ranch. Obviously, jeans and a cotton shirt are her favorite.

Of course, she enjoys dressing up. But show me a woman who doesn't. There are special occasions, special times, when any gal wants to look great. She's not an exception.

I think one of the things that Nancy Reagan has tried to emphasize from the first is that the role of First Lady does demand a certain dignity and a certain style, not only in dressing but in attitude. She's a master at that. She's, well, representing our nation. And for that, I think, bravo for looking well.

6

Nancy and Controversy

NANCY REAGAN

*A*s I look back on it, I'm sure I'd probably do things differently.

Since no money came from the taxpayers, nothing seemed wrong to me about redoing the White House. Nothing had been done on the third floor in thirty years. There were cracks in the walls. It needed painting. It needed maintenance. It needed furniture taken out of storage. I'm a nester, I like to fix things up. But nothing was being taken out of the taxpayers' pocket, so it didn't seem wrong. The china was donated to the White House. I didn't buy china. The people who donated the china have often thought of it. They never got the credit they really were due.

We've tightened our belts in many ways. We're not spending as much money. We're just pulling in. You have to.

Was the 1982 Gridiron dinner the turning point? Yes. I remember being scared to death. My husband didn't know anything about it. We had rehearsed up here without his knowing anything about it. We had two rehearsals, as I remember. The outfit was unbelievable. It was every crazy thing you could possibly think of, rubber boots, mangy. It was something. At the end of the dinner, while the entertainment was going on, I excused myself from the table and went backstage to change. I'm sure he must have thought, "Where in the world is she? She's gone for such a long time." And when I came out, I was scared. But then it seemed to go well, and I thought to myself, "I hope he thinks it's going well."

I'd hoped to blunt all of this stuff that had been said that was not me, to put in more in perspective and get people back on the right track. They applauded.

I have opinions of different people. If I feel they're hurting my husband, or if I feel that they're trying to end-run him or use him or whatever, then I'll say something.

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Client Folio Graphics
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Dress File 758
Format File 20644f
Fonts deVenne 150,151
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I never asked the Carters to move out. I mean, never! How would I? Never. The only thing that I can think of is that we were at dinner, during the inauguration. We started from Blair House, as is customary. During the actual swearing in, the White House staff moves the First Family—the Carters, in this case—out of the White House and us in. And I was saying, “I don’t know how they do it. It must be a tremendous task to perform in a few hours.” Everybody was agreeing and I just said that I really don’t know how they do it. Maybe a good idea would be for us, when we move out, to move into Blair House and make it a little bit easier.

The “tiny little gun” that was written about disappeared quite a long time ago. I had the tiny little gun when my husband was away a great deal of the time and I was alone. I was advised to have it.

Am I fudging two years in age? I might. I haven’t made up my mind yet. That’s a pretty good answer, isn’t it? In Hollywood, you were never over twenty-five. At least I progressed beyond twenty-five.

BETTY FRIEDAN

Unfortunately, I do not think that Nancy Reagan has done anything to advance the cause of women, which is a very pointed fault or bad mark against her, regardless of specific politics—Republican, Democrat. Women in the last twenty years have made this great breakthrough in America. We broke through the feminine mystique. We said, “We are people.” We fought for the personhood of women, and the control of our own lives, our own voice. We demanded and fought for equal opportunity. We aren’t finished yet, and there’s even a backlash against it.

We were at college together, at Smith. I was editor of the paper and literary magazine and she was an actress. She had the spirit to go to Broadway, to go to Hollywood. As I said to her when I went on the press bus at several conventions before she actually became First Lady, “Nancy, you are a Smith person, and how can you not be for equal rights for women? You were one of the career women before it was even popular.” And she said, “Oh, well, I’m for equal treatment, and so is Ronnie, and I’m for rights, but I’m not for the amendment.”

Well, that's just specious. When he was elected President and she became First Lady, I went up to her at the Gridiron dinner and I shook her hand and I said, "Use your power. Be a good role model now for women, and use your power to keep the door open, or open it wide for women."

It just seems to me that's her obligation as a woman of her generation, at this time in history, and she hasn't done it. She has not raised her voice. They say she is now one of the most powerful influences in the Reagan Administration or on the President. Why has she not tried to stop him from this war on the right of women to control their own bodies and the safe, legal, medical access to abortion? Why has she not tried to stop him when the Reagan Administration has given the word that the laws now on the books on sex discrimination in employment and education shouldn't be enforced, or that affirmative action should now be used to restore the supremacy of the white male?

She's not a star in the soap opera, she is the First Lady. And we expect in America that our First Lady somehow embody the values of where women are at this time. When you think, fifty years ago, of Eleanor Roosevelt, you realize what a role model she would still be, even today. You think of Betty Ford—who really was gutsy, not only in behalf of equal rights for women but very honest on the question of abortion and what she would do about her own daughter if there were such a need—being brutally honest about her own problems with alcoholism and so on. She was a fine role model.

Breathes there a woman with a soul so dead, an educated woman in the eighties that cannot identify with this great liberation of women to be people? Maybe deep down, she does. Maybe that's what this supposed new change in image is all about. Maybe she just, somehow, has to be a person, and that's why she's moving more, being more serious about matters like drug abuse.

I'm not that much of an expert on the life and personal history of Nancy Reagan, but I do recall that her own stepfather was arch-conservative, arch-reactionary, and she might have had a reactionary influence on Ronald Reagan politically.

She was a career woman before it was fashionable, when most of our classmates were in condominiums, making a career out of marriage and four children and baking their own bread. She went to Hollywood and she went to Broadway, but now, as First Lady, she is an anachronism. She is somehow not only denying her earlier reality but the reality of American women today—what they want to be and what they need to be and what I think they would like represented in the First Lady, who should represent the highest standards and values for women, Republican and Democrat.

There is an expectation today that a woman can be and should be all the person she is capable of being. She wants and values the choice to have children. She will be her husband's wife if she chooses to marry. But she will be a person, seriously committed to her own voice in society. We are not finished yet in this great massive revolution of women to full personhood and full equality. So I say to Nancy Reagan, "Why have you not used your role in the White House to give a fuller role model for younger women?"

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I wouldn't fault her if she's not the same kind of feminist I am. She doesn't have to be a card-carrying NOW member. Nobody would expect that of a Republican woman. But Betty Ford, who's a Republican, was courageous and outspoken on behalf of the basic move of women to equality. Here, Nancy Reagan, whose husband's administration is mounting a backlash against women's rights, is not raising her voice against it. Have her advisers told her, "Look, American women really didn't vote for your husband in numbers"?

The Madame Chiang Kai-shek role—that's where her press has been lately, that she is propping him up or manipulating him or controlling him. If that is so, so be it. American women have a great hunger for more power. They have been too powerless, and they'll get it whatever way they can. If you're lucky enough to be First Lady, you should use that role for all it's worth. For good things.

I remember in the turbulent days of China, it came out that Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who was Wellesley-educated, I believe, was sort of like a Dragon Lady. She really was pulling the strings. It's coming out that Nancy Reagan is one of the most influential people in the administration. Well, then, in what direction is this influence going?

I don't think anybody would have criticized Nancy Reagan forty years ago for just being a clothes horse, for the china that she is buying, or whether she's wearing the clothes of this designer or that designer. Even now, as a feminist, I am interested in fashion and I think women are still interested in fashion. She can be as fashionable as she pleases. But there's got to be something more than that. I mean, Eleanor Roosevelt was a giant among women. We don't have that kind of image of Mrs. Eisenhower, but that was in the fifties when the whole country was pulling back from the American adventure.

Lady Bird Johnson, there was quite a woman there. Jacqueline Kennedy, everybody went ga-ga over her fashion and her decorative style, but there was a mind there that brought poetry and art to the White House. I remember thinking at the time, if she would only stop using that whispery voice. You wanted her to be more.

Betty Ford was a very interesting example of a woman who started out in a very conventional way but lived up to the demands and the expectation of women. Is there something really going to emerge in Nancy Reagan where she senses that she could use her power on issues today where women's future is in jeopardy?

DR. BARBARA KELLERMAN

*T*he position of the Reagan Administration on women's issues such as abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment has been somewhat hard to determine. They have had a house feminist in that family, but it has not really been Nancy, but the President's eldest daughter, Maureen Reagan.

This has been very carefully done. It was more articulated in the '84 campaign than in '80. Nancy Reagan's role with regard to equal rights and abortion has been relatively quiescent. Intermittently, she has given slightly mixed signals on the subject, but she is a far cry from her two predecessors, Betty Ford and Rosalynn Carter, who both came out very strongly for the Equal Rights Amendment. In that sense, if you are a feminist, if you believe in the Equal Rights Amendment, you would see the Reagan Administration, and Nancy Reagan in particular, as a step back.

NANCY REYNOLDS

Nancy Reagan was considered a very old-fashioned, anachronistic wife in the sixties in California. I think a lot of the feminists are now wives and mothers, and they may have softened a little. Nancy Reagan hasn't changed, basically. But you know, she's always felt that people should do what they have to do and she would hope that people would respect how she feels.

Isn't it interesting that so many feminists today are saying, "Look, it's fine if women don't want to work and stay home for kids." That's okay. But it has taken the feminists—and I'm a feminist—a long time to come around to saying there is a lot to be said for women who have no interest in a career and who feel that their career is their family and their husbands, when they can financially manage to make it that full time.

So I think that it has moved on the other side a little. Nancy Reagan hasn't personally changed at all. After all, she has two very feminist daughters and she was like all of us with our children during the sixties. We had a lot of confrontations and Nancy Reagan stuck by her guns about how she felt about things. I bet if you interview the children, you will find that they have mellowed a great deal.

RICHARD ALLEN

I would say that the President has a tendency not to be engaged in staff difficulties and dustups. And hers is not the opposite tendency to get involved, but certainly she's not reluctant to voice her views.

I think she addresses the unpleasant tasks, though ultimately the decisions are his and he must take the responsibility for them.

She played no role at all in the political infighting. There was a decided campaign to have Haig and me engage. Al Haig and I have analyzed this. There wasn't nearly as much substance to the fabled Allen-Haig battles as has met the eye. There was a very well-orchestrated campaign by colleagues in the White House to make it appear that we were constantly embattled.

Al has a steel-spring personality, and I'm not reluctant to engage, from time to time, on issues or even on procedures. But this was exacerbated deliberately by some individuals in the White House. And I think the reflection of that as it played in the newspaper came back to Mrs. Reagan.

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Obviously, she couldn't be happy about discord and disharmony in the administration under any circumstances. On top of that, we had an administration that was trying to devote its exclusive attention to domestic affairs for the first year. The Secretary of State, Al, wanted foreign policy issues to get a share of attention. I share the President's agenda in trying to keep foreign policy—national security—not inconsequential but on a low key, on the back burner. And that led to further misunderstandings. Nancy Reagan, I think, was influential, but it wasn't because she came to all of the judgments that she made by herself unassisted. She didn't do that unaided.

I think it was very clear at the time, while I was on a leave of absence and the canard and innuendo that surrounded my case were being investigated by the Department of Justice—there were messages that I should resign, and my answer was that I certainly would not resign until I knew what the outcome would be. Until such time, I wouldn't address the question of my future—until such time as I was cleared, as I knew, inevitably, I would be cleared.

Then I was repeatedly cleared of these really trumped-up innuendos and allegations. I gather that, at one point, she joined some colleagues in the White House apart from those who were defending me and thought it would be best if I left.

But I wouldn't do it. My reputation was at stake, my family, my future, my integrity, my character. And until that was cleared, there wasn't anything that would cause me to leave.

I have no tangible evidence of her role except what I would read in the newspapers. Now, Nancy Reagan was not talking to newspapers, but there were those in her circle who were. And you couldn't distinguish between them. This is part of the problem in Washington, the great anonymous source.

I maintained a cordial relationship with Nancy Reagan in the years after my departure from the White House. I see her from time to time, talk to her, and there isn't the slightest hint of bitterness or anything else. I happen to support the President's agenda. I don't support people, I support ideas. I think she and the President know that. Perhaps that has led to a more understanding relationship between us.

MICHAEL DEAVER

None of us really realized the public security or the media scrutiny that would be put on every little thing we did and said. There were some nasty articles. I don't think it was really a lot of anti-Nancy personal press in California. I don't think there's been that here, really.

Some of those people basically disagreed with her husband's philosophy. And so they might have used her to get back at Ronald Reagan and what his policies represented.

Nancy is a very direct person. She is not one who likes to sit around and brood about an issue. She'd just as soon get it on the table.

LYN NOFZIGER

All the criticism of her fixing up the living quarters was just outrageous because, one, she didn't use tax money, and two, the living quarters hadn't been fixed up in years. The floors, for instance, had not been done since Harry Truman's time. To jump on her for that, for the new dishes that were contributed by a foundation, it just seemed to me that there were people out there looking to get her.

STUART SPENCER

She was, to a degree, insecure, and you could see it. The media could see it, definitely. But I have another theory. Ronald Reagan came in with a mandate. Ronald Reagan was hot property. Ronald Reagan had a lot of successes, and when you look at Washington, you look at the system we have here, where you have the government and the press and they're in basically adversarial positions. There was no way the media could get at Ronald Reagan. He wasn't vulnerable; he was very successful. My theory is that the media decided that every day can't be puff-piece day, and a job was done on Nancy Reagan. She was more vulnerable.

She wasn't prepared for that sort of thing. She was in a state of shock. Being governor of California is a wonderful thing, but it's the minor leagues compared to the presidency of the United States. The capital press in Sacramento is not the capital press in Washington.

RICHARD WIRTHLIN

When Nancy Reagan first came into the White House, there was a spate of stories that highlighted her spending. Republicans, whether they're coming to the White House in 1980 or 1972 or in the fifties, are always viewed as the party of the more wealthy and affluent.

The press took the china issue and made it symbolic—this would be a regal presidency. They used Nancy Reagan very much as that symbol. When we asked people what they liked and disliked about Nancy, her perceived penchant for liking expensive surroundings was much more prominent than it is today.

The attack had a chilling effect on Nancy. She tended to retreat, to be more defensive, to be more guarded. That provided in itself some reinforcement perhaps, at least perceptually, for some of the charges that were made.

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But she's a tough, strong person. She was not at all happy or satisfied with the way she was being portrayed. She recognized that she could help both the President and a lot of other people by taking a more active or a more public role on some things that she'd always felt very concerned about.

The perception that she was somewhat snobbish, that she was aloof, that she was more interested in putting on a state dinner than anything else, that she was pushing for expensive china was much more dominant, and, I think, was clearly a bum rap. But there were reasons, far beyond Nancy Reagan, for those impressions to be reinforced.

Queen Nancy was the image that was being portrayed. She took the charge of being Queen Nancy and said, "How ridiculous." She borrowed a page from the President's book and used humor to defuse the charges: "I would never be anointed. It would mess up my hair." She had the ability and the grace under pressure, if you will, to rise above those kinds of charges.

DONNIE RADCLIFFE

Little things that might not have seemed so important or monumental when he was governor, they felt were blown out of proportion. I think there were several things, several ways in which they got off to a bad start. One of them, before he even became President, was a flurry over the choice of her press secretary. Mrs. Reagan also made some unthinking remarks about having a gun at her bedside table. There were reports that the Reagans wanted the Carters out of the White House so that they could do the redecorating. Whether or not any of that was true, it started them off on the wrong foot.

The problem was that people felt that Mrs. Reagan was not concerned about what the problems of the day were, the economic hardships of certain groups in this country. For a lavish decorating program to be undertaken almost immediately after the Reagans entered the White House seemed so frivolous. I don't think their friends helped them very much.

There's a popular view that there has to be a lightning rod for Ronald. Sorry. I know that's a popular view and I think it really isn't an accurate one. I think she generated those stories and those opinions by her own actions and her own attitudes.

Ronald Reagan did come in as an extremely popular man. He came in to establishment Washington and immediately was acceptable, something Jimmy Carter was not. But in Nancy Reagan's case, I don't really understand the thinking that has her taking the flak for things that couldn't be said about him. It just doesn't make any sense.

Galley No. 20644-63
Proof 1P
Date 5-21-86
Client Folio Graphics
Disk 740
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Format File 20644f
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BONITA GRANVILLE WRATHER

I think the criticism of her lifestyle is erroneous. She's always been a lady who is well dressed, has grace and style, and she brings that to the White House. And that's very important. After all, we have all the other countries in the world looking at us.

LETITIA BALDRIDGE

*S*he was the governor's wife. I've watched people who have been very big fishes in the small ponds that are their home towns deal with the press. There's nothing like the White House. Everything changes. Every single movement you make, every flick of an eyelash, is scrutinized. It is the classic goldfish bowl. I remember in the Kennedy years, Mrs. Kennedy used to devise every route possible to get out of the White House grounds without being seen by the press and the public.

SHEILA TATE

*I*t was the day ketchup was declared a vegetable for school lunch programs that the White House china story broke. I haven't thought the same of ketchup since.

MAUREEN REAGAN

I've always told her that if she was married to anybody in the world but Ronald Reagan, she would not be against the Equal Rights Amendment. Nancy Reynolds and I told her that years ago, back in the seventies. You have to understand. Here's a woman in this particular relationship who has had all of the freedom that you can have to make all of the choices. I just feel that if she had not had that kind of freedom, perhaps she would be out on the street matching with the rest of us.

What do I say to the Betty Friedans and other feminists who criticize? I suggest that they go back and read their own books.

7

*The
First Lady's
Causes*

NANCY REAGAN

*D*rug abuse is a very serious problem—among the youth, among the working people. It's the most democratic problem that I know of. It crosses all lines. There are no social, economic, political, or color lines. It crosses everything.

I feel very strongly about marijuana. I think it's a good deal more harmful than most children realize. I've been to Day Top Village in New York a few times, which is doing a wonderful job. All those young people in there started on marijuana. I asked them if they were for the legalization of marijuana. Every one of them said no, which is interesting. I didn't really expect them to say no.

When it first started out in the sixties, this was all a brand-new thing, and a frightening thing. Nobody knew quite how to handle it, and they were embarrassed. They thought their child was the only child on drugs. And some of them were too busy with their own lives and didn't get involved with their children's lives. They weren't wise enough to notice the little tell-tale signs. As we've progressed more into the seventies and eighties, we're more aware. Parents are more aware, more scared, as well they should be.

You can't be pessimistic about anything. You always have to be optimistic that you can solve something, anything in life. I think the fact that these parents' groups have sprung up voluntarily, all over, is a great sign that parents are getting involved, are becoming more knowledgeable. They're not only becoming more knowledgeable, but it brings their families closer together. There's been a tendency for families to split apart. Now they're pulling together.

The drug program can sustain itself. It hasn't been cut off from all funds. It has funds, but the most important thing is that parents and corporations, business people, all become involved, all know what's happening to the people who are working for them, or their children, and do something about it.

Am I really committed to this issue? Of course I am. Because it's so dangerous. Because we do stand a chance of losing a whole generation to drugs. It's a very, very dangerous problem we're all facing.

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It's not just our country that has this problem. On almost every state visit at the White House I will have coffee with other First Ladies and they always bring up the drug problem. At first I thought, maybe, it was just because they knew I was interested in the drug situation, but then it became obvious that they were aware that this was happening in their own countries. They wanted to know. They were asking for advice. So that was the next logical step. If you could catch it right at the beginning, then, maybe, you could do a lot of good.

I hope I made them aware of the whole global aspect of this and gave them some suggestions and ideas. We've been at it longer than many have and I hope I was able to help.

Nobody wanted me to do it, the drug issue. I guess they thought it was kind of a downer. It's not a cheery subject. But I think I've brought it to a level of awareness that wasn't there before. I hope more people are aware of how bad the drug problem is and how widespread it is and how dangerous it is. I don't see as many comedians, now, making jokes about it, thank goodness. It's not a funny thing. I see more programs on television about it, hear more people coming forward and talking about what it's done to their lives, to their relationships, to their jobs.

It's my understanding that there was no money cut. There was money given to the states in block grants, but money was not cut. That's number one. Number two, I don't believe with any problem that money is the whole answer. Money doesn't buy love or affection or attention or involvement, all those things that have to be there. Only people provide those things, and, particularly, parents.

BARBARA KELLERMAN

*I*t's a volunteer work of a particular kind. It tends to fall into categories that, for lack of a better word, I would describe as being of a feminine nature. They have to do with health. They have to do with beautification. They have to do with young children. They're the kinds of supportive, nurturing, prettifying tasks and roles that have, historically, been associated with the woman's role in this particular culture.

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Nancy Reagan's interest originally was in the Foster Grandparents' program. It's now in drug abuse. Rosalynn Carter, who was interested in hard policy, still made it a point to become involved with mental health. Lady Bird Johnson was very involved with highway beautification. Jacqueline Kennedy redid the White House. These tend very much to be the same kinds of roles, women's roles more than anything else. It's not just a question of volunteerism.

On the issue of the relationship with and the support of their husbands, the nature of that support really differs enormously from First Lady to First Lady, and the nature of that support depends on nothing as much as their relationship to the President.

First Ladies in general have not been strikingly successful in lobbying for their causes. I have to be careful when I say that because, in many ways, they have drawn attention to their causes, and attention breeds success in a way that could never happen unless they had focused their attention on these particular issues.

By the same token, when people look back on First Ladies, they don't particularly associate them with their causes any longer. Perhaps Lady Bird Johnson and her beautification, conservation, and wildflowers is an exception to this. My prediction is that unless Nancy Reagan becomes much bolder in her approach to her very genuine interest in drug abuse, and does more for it, she will not finally be remembered for that. She will be remembered for her tie to her husband.

DONNIE RADCLIFFE

*I*t was a serious effort on the part of her aides because they felt that it was necessary for her to have a significant and meaningful project. And I do believe that she has had a longstanding interest in drug abuse. But I think it sort of grew without them realizing how successful it was going to become.

I don't believe she had her project well defined when she first came to the White House, because she was talking more about Foster Grandparents than she was about drug abuse. By the time a year had gone by, though, it became apparent that there had to be something more startling, more significant, for her to be involved in, and her aides realized that it could well be accomplished through a project on drug abuse.

SHEILA TATE

She sits there and those big eyes focus on a kid and the kid finds himself telling his whole life story to her, and they both sit there and cry, but when she leaves, the kid can say, "You know, here's someone so important, and she cares about me." And that's the feeling they got from that. That started building. She would go to prevention programs where she'd learn what the problems were that they were spotting in five-, six-, seven-year-old kids—basically self-esteem problems—and how they were dealing with it. And she was taking that camera, that media spotlight, and turning it around and focusing it on the issue, which is something she cared about.

That's another thing I can't emphasize enough. Her staff didn't want her involved in that issue. We dragged our feet. We looked for alternative programs. We said, "This is depressing. How will she make an impact?" So we came up with some upbeat things, things she could affiliate with, and she'd say, "This is nice, but drug abuse is important and I want to get involved in fighting it. When's our next meeting with so-and-so?"

She kept putting in back on course during that whole first year, and the smart thing was, she recognized that if she was going to spend four or eight years involved in an issue, it was going to be something she cared about.

MARY JANE WICK

She's always had a great concern about drug abuse in the world, not just in this country. And she feels what's happened is a great tragedy. She has compassion for individuals, great compassion.

Imagine how terrible it is to be older in life and feel you still have something to give but you have nobody to give it to. And to be able to share that with somebody young and also have the young person be helped at the same time. It's really a wonderful program that started during the time her husband was governor of California.

She opened the eyes of people all over the world to the drug abuse of young people, because they are the future of our country and many lives have been ruined. I'm so proud of her. I really am.

MICHAEL DEAVER

All I can tell you is that I can remember coming back here on an airplane with Nancy Reagan during the transition period and I said, "Have you ever thought about what you're going to do back here?" And she said, "Yeah, I've always wanted to get into the whole teenage drug-abuse problem." It was not a last-minute thing. It was not an attempt to simply recoup her popularity ratings. It was something she felt very strongly about and still feels very strongly about. All you have to do is go to one of those conferences.