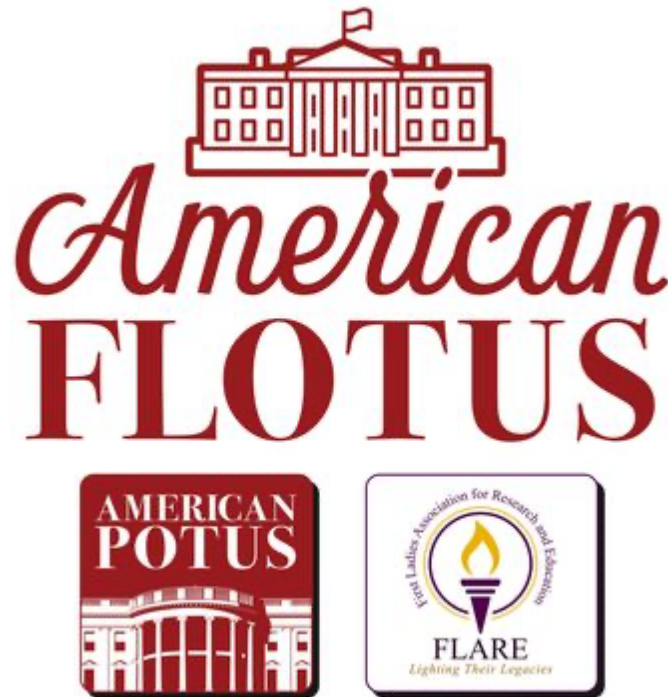




“The Many Roles of a First Lady from the White House to the Big Screen”

with Lisa Burns and Teri Finneman

Alan Lowe: Welcome to *American FLOTUS*, a podcast produced by the partnership of the First Ladies Association for Research and Education, or FLARE, and the *American POTUS* podcast. I'm Alan Lowe, your host. Thanks so much for joining us. I'm very pleased to welcome our guests, Doctors Teri Finneman and Lisa Burns, who are the editors of the book we'll discuss today titled *The Cambridge Companion to US First Ladies*. Lisa Burns is a professor of media studies at Quinnipiac University. Her research is focused on topics like political communications, the media and society, and our favorite topic, the first ladies. She is widely published with books like *Media Relations and the Modern First Lady* and *First Ladies and the Fourth Estate: Press Framing of Presidential Wives*. Teri Finneman serves as an associate professor in the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Kansas. As a journalist and historian, she's focused in her research on the media and, again, on our favorite topic, the first ladies. She is widely published, as well, with books such as *Press Portrayals of Women Politicians* and *Reviving Rural News*, and she's the founder and producer of *The First Ladies* podcast. Teri and Lisa, welcome to *American FLOTUS*.

Lisa Burns: Thanks for having us.

Alan: So many interesting stories in this book. We can only get to a few today. Before we dive into those, can you tell us how the book was organized? When you reached out to these authors, what questions did you pose to them? What did you ask them to contribute?

Lisa: When Cambridge first came to me with the idea, I knew that I wanted to take a thematic approach instead of the typical biographical studies that you often see, and there's some great work that's been done, whether it's individual first ladies or looking at all of the first ladies together. But what I think about a thematic approach is that you really get a chance to look at the institution as well as the individual, political, social, and cultural contributions that these women, at least so far, have made.

Because, the thing about first ladies is that there's no guidebook, it's not in the Constitution, there's nothing that says that these spouses have to do anything, but yet there has always been this public expectation that they perform these different roles and duties. So, by taking this thematic approach what we're able to do is really trace how the institution has evolved, how these traditions have come about, the different roles that these women have played in expanding the institution. And for both of us, we think it's really important to not only talk about the first ladies that everybody knows, the Eleanors, the Jackies, and the Nancys, but we really want to tell the stories of a lot of the first ladies that have been forgotten. So, when you do these thematic chapters, what we asked our authors to do was -- of course, you're gonna mention some of the big names but when you're looking at whether it's advocacy or being a trendsetter -- who else was doing these things? And then for the companion series the idea is really to give people kind of an introduction to the topic. Say someone is interested in fashion or maybe they're interested in Jackie Kennedy, so we're guessing they'll probably open to the trendsetters chapter first, but in that chapter not only are they going to learn about Jackie, but they'll also learn about someone like Frances Cleveland or Mamie Eisenhower, who are also really popular during their eras. So, for us, we really think this was just an interesting way to look at the institution and these women's contributions, and we're excited to talk more about it with you today.

Alan: I think it succeeded wonderfully. Again, I learned a lot and it was just fascinating. Every chapter, something new to learn. One of your chapters was written by Tammy Vigil, who had been a recent guest on *American FLOTUS*, and she provides a chapter that talks about a bit of what you were just saying in terms of the many roles and the many perspectives on first ladies, so their roles

as a national hostess or as political advisor and so forth. But I'd like to focus with you both on her discussion of first ladies as advocates, and she really noted that they've been publicly engaged with public policy issues, but there've been lines drawn of where the proper extent, the appropriate extent of their involvement is. So, why and where have those lines been drawn over the years?

Lisa: Well, it really seems like as long as these women stick with what are called safe issues or nonpolitical issues, so things that impact women and children, or supporting war veterans, or just kind of the general benevolence, like raising funds for something non-controversial, that's considered okay. But even then, we've seen some of these women criticized whether it was Michelle Obama trying to get involved with school lunches. You would think that that was pretty noncontroversial, and it ended up being a huge issue. So that line is ever shifting. Where we really see questions about them overstepping these sort of invisible boundaries is when they get involved in either kind of taking on an official role within the government or policymaking issues. Eleanor Roosevelt was very active, but when she actually takes on a job during The Depression in World War II with the Office of Civilian Defense, there was huge pushback. When we see Hillary Clinton, probably the most famous example when she's charged with heading up healthcare, we see this huge backlash to that. When Betty Ford and Rosalynn Carter were lobbying lawmakers on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment, they start to get criticism, including the huge number of letters that come to the White House. So, when women are picking these advocacy issues you see that they often try to stay with something safe, but a lot of them have also felt that they have this podium, and they know that they can do some good with it. So even if it comes with some criticism, they're willing to use their voice to advocate for causes they care about.

Alan: Do you think that's gender-based entirely? Is it office-based or is it gender-based? If you had a first gentleman in that role, would there still be that drawing of lines of what's appropriate for that first gentleman to do?

Lisa: Good question. I think it's a bit of both. It's definitely gendered. We've seen a lot of, you know, she's unelected, who elected her. You get sort of in the worst-case scenarios, the power behind the throne, the Lady Macbeth, that she's somehow emasculating her husband by being too powerful. On the flip side, I think we saw when Hillary Clinton was running these questions about Bill. Now, of course, being a former president is a little bit different, but this idea that he would somehow be the power behind the throne. Well, wait a second, people. Didn't you say that that's what Hillary was doing during his administration? You know, you can't really have it both ways. And I do think there will be these sort of gender constraints on the first, first gentleman because

will he be expected to decorate the trees at Christmastime? Will he be expected to pick out china? I don't think so. At least not in the same way. So, for me, I think it does go back to the gender issues.

Alan: So, let's turn to the Mary Stockwell chapter. I really enjoyed it about stand-in first ladies, those who filled the position for a bachelor or widowed president. Really, really interesting. And I have to talk about one of those, Emily Donaldson, who was President Andrew Jackson's niece. I'm based in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, so I have to talk about Andrew Jackson and Emily Donaldson. Why was she serving as a stand-in first lady and why did the president eventually tell her to go back to Tennessee?

Teri: Yeah, I really love our stand-in first ladies chapter because my area of emphasis is the forgotten first ladies, women like Grace Coolidge and Sarah Polk. But the women in this chapter are the forgotten, forgotten first ladies. Like people don't even know these women existed at all. And, so, this chapter is just so interesting and it's so unfortunate how little we do know about some of these women.

So going back to Emily in particular, and how she ended up as first lady. At the time of the election Rachel Jackson was still alive, so she knew that her husband had won the election. However, she ended up dying in December, right around Christmas, and so she didn't end up actually moving into the White House herself.

And what's interesting about this circumstance is that people today think that our presidential campaigns are so vicious. But that's really nothing new, as those of us who study history know. And Rachel Jackson was very much part of this vicious campaigning of the time. She had been married before she married Andrew Jackson, and she thought that she was divorced before she married him, but it turns out that she wasn't. And so this spurred just all kinds of nasty comments about her basically being an immoral woman, and questioning her purity, basically. And so when she died of a heart attack after the election, people, and Andrew in particular, blamed the unfair stress that she was under for causing her death. And so therefore, since she died, there needed to be a stand-in first lady, and her niece Emily ends up taking on that role. Now history has lots of moments of irony, and this is definitely one of those cases, because despite what happened to her aunt, Emily would turn around and be vicious to another woman for basically the exact same reason. I mean, you can't make this up. Andrew Jackson was not pleased about this, hence why she ended up getting the boot. But basically what happened is there was a woman named Peggy Eaton and she was the wife of the Secretary of War, and like Rachel Jackson

she had been previously married. And so, therefore, there ended up being all these nasty rumors about her and how she was very sexually immoral. And so all of the cabinet wives, with very few exceptions, and then Emily as the first lady, wanted nothing to do with her. They didn't want to invite her to events, they didn't want her at teas, they wanted nothing to do with her, and it was just becoming an enormous distraction to the men trying to run the government that all these women were quarreling with each other and leaving this woman out of all of their parties. So unlike Emily, Andrew Jackson saw the mass hypocrisy in this and was very offended after what happened to his own wife and got tired of the crap, basically, to put it frankly. Now, Jackson had known Peggy for a long time. He had stayed at her parents' boarding house, so he had a long-time relationship, and he felt that Peggy was being treated very unfairly. So, ultimately, he ended up choosing Peggy over his own niece, and it was basically an equivalent of standing up for his wife's honor in a different way. And that's how Emily ended up getting shipped back to Tennessee.

Alan: When I first moved to Tennessee years ago, I worked with Senator Howard Baker. I was director of his public policy center at the University of Tennessee, and he had been part of the Baker Donaldson law firm, so it's still a very big name here in Tennessee. Yeah, you don't mess around with Andrew Jackson, either. I wouldn't wanna be on the wrong side of an argument or a fight with him. I was intrigued. Also, I knew a little bit about Emily Donaldson. I didn't know anything about Margaret Woodrow Wilson. Can you tell us about her?

Teri: Yeah, so it's interesting. Of course her mother Ellen died in the White House from illness and so, therefore, she stepped up to help her dad who was in just tremendous grief, obviously, that his wife had died. And you have to remember that World War I had literally just started. And so this was a pretty bad time for the head of the United States to be in grief and be struggling. And so she ended up stepping up to help her father and she did in the most significant way by introducing him to his next wife. She first -- Margaret -- befriended Edith and invited her over to the White House. And then while she was there, she ended up meeting her father and then they got married not long after. And so Margaret was very relieved that her father was feeling better and that she didn't have to do this first lady business and she was free to go her own way. And so, after she kinda stepped back from these duties, she had a singing career and so she sang to the troops. But her life took quite a turn after her father died. She got into a quarrel with Edith about her inheritance, no surprise you know, fighting about family money. Then she kinda went from job to job for a while until she discovered a Hindu mystic and ended up moving to India, where she ultimately died. And people of the time in the United States found

that to be quite odd. Therefore, it's not surprising that she kind of vanished from history.

Alan: It sounds like a movie ready to be made. I'll be honest with you. Really, really an interesting woman and what a fascinating story. You spoke of wartime, the First World War. Let's talk about Thomas Balcerski's chapter that examines the role of first ladies in wartime, going from Martha Washington all the way up to Jill Biden. Did he find, looking at that long range of first ladies, did he find any commonalities in how they approached their duties during wartime, or did it depend upon the war and the first lady?

Teri: Yeah, throughout history, the wars that we've been involved with obviously don't just affect the president. The first lady has always been brought into the equation here. Most recently we just saw this with Melania Trump stepping in to write a letter to Putin to consider the impact of children during the Ukraine war. And so, she is taking a role of some kind into the present, and you really see this dating back to Martha Washington. Of course, she wasn't first lady at the time of the Revolution. Eventually would become one, but she very much took on that first lady responsibility. She was out there camping with George Washington, out in the terrible conditions, trying to help improve morale for the troops and provide that sort of 'comforter in chief' that we continue to think of US first ladies performing that role today. And they're also a tremendous source of strength and comfort to their husbands who have this tremendous toll that they are under. So they are comforter in chief, both for the public as well as for their husbands, obviously spending time with troops who are in the hospital and trying to cheer them up and thanking them for their service.

Martha would sew clothes for the troops, she would help cook for her husband and his officers, really showing that she was out there on the lines and cared about this and wasn't living in some mansion someplace on her own. But what's interesting to think about too is the personal tests that these women had to undergo. And by that, I mean the service of their own children. And so Martha did not want her sole surviving son to be out on the front lines and risk being killed. She said no. But then he ended up dying of disease anyway during the war and she lost him anyway. And then you see that happen with Mary Lincoln, as well, during the Civil War and how she had already lost young boys, and she just couldn't bear to have Robert out there on the active lines. So this has been a struggle. But more recent first ladies, of course, have realized the bad optics of this. And so you see Eleanor Roosevelt's sons enlist during World War II and Lady Bird Johnson's sons-in-law served during the Vietnam War. So this fine line of like personal sacrifice and all the stresses they have to deal with, but yet

wanting to prove that they aren't special, and they send their boys out there. That's an enormous stressor these women have to deal with. But then, since Martha Washington, of course, and as Lisa mentioned too, you really have all of these first ladies in wartime trying to show that they're supporting the troops. You have Eleanor going out to the South Pacific, you have Laura Bush going to Afghanistan. And so they know that they have this role to perform, to show the nation the sign of strength. Certainly, first ladies have taken up a lot of controversial stances in their roles, as Lisa talked about as well, but supporting troops and military families is one that's really universally supported by the American public, even as Lady Bird Johnson, of course, took more heat for the Vietnam War. So those are really the key commonalities.

Alan: Yeah, I saw that firsthand at the Bush Library when I got to know Laura and Barbara Bush, and certainly they had that story of supporting troops during wartime. You have a very important chapter in this book, by Sarah Fling, about first ladies, slavery, and civil rights. And again, I wish we had three or four hours to talk. There's so much to dive into there. But I found it really interesting; she draws a direct connection between Lady Bird Johnson's beautification campaign and civil rights. So can you tell us what that connection was and how did Mrs. Johnson advance it?

Lisa: What I love about Lady Bird's work with beautification is that, and what a lot of people didn't know, she hated that term. She thought it was too prissy and feminine. And I think in many ways it did really devalue the important work that she was doing. She was doing work on conservation and environmentalism at a time when that was really kind of an up-and-coming thing, as she was sort of an early adopter of really thinking about our planet, and yeah, you might not think that that relates to the issue of civil rights. So when most people think about the beautification work, if they know anything about it, they think about the Highway Beautification Act that was nationwide and planting the wildflowers. But an important component of that really started right in DC, and it was local leaders that came to her and said, you know we think this is a great idea you have, but we could use your help in DC. And one of the people she worked with really closely that Sarah talks about in the chapter is Walter Washington, who went on to become the first Black mayor of DC. He was elected in 1967. And so what they looked at was this idea of a more beautiful capital. He said to her, please don't make it just about the monuments. Yeah, we always think about the tourist areas, but what about our neighborhoods? A lot of people forget, and we even see this in the news today, DC isn't just about the tourist spaces. There are communities that live there. They're communities who have very rich histories, and a lot of those communities are people of color. With the idea of beautifying the capital, what they were focusing on was playgrounds, green spaces, small parks. There were studies that had shown,

dating back to the turn of the century with things like the tenement house movements, that people need that little bit of nature, that beauty in their lives.

They need a place where, really, just the dignity of being able to go out into a community garden or to be able to take your children to a playground where you know that they're safe. So, for Lady Bird and for the people on the committee, they really did see this go hand in hand with the idea of improving the cities, particularly improving neighborhoods for Black communities, for Latino communities. This is something that Lady Bird grew up with and saw firsthand living in Texas. Unfortunately, again, kind of like the name beautification it was really easy to dismiss this work and say that it was just cosmetic. Oh, you're planting a few trees, you're planting some flowers. And by the way she did get criticized. Eartha Kitt famously went to one of her "Women Doers Lunches." The actress called her out for saying that you're planting flowers while especially Black boys are dying in Vietnam. You know, what are you really doing to help crime? But for Lady Bird it really was about if people care about their communities, they will want to make their community safer. They'll want to create safe spaces and beautiful spaces for their children, for their families. And even though it was dismissed, the work that she and her committee did is still very evident in DC. In the years that I lived around the capital, when you drive through the neighborhoods and you see the parks, the green spaces, those really are the work and the lasting legacy of Lady Bird.

Alan: I, too, was a resident there for many years. I know what you're speaking of. And, at my current job at the American Museum of Science and Energy, we talk quite a bit about the importance of external spaces, that impact on communities, on individuals, from a psychological point of view, from a spiritual point of view. However you want to approach it, it's very important and you can't downplay it. So let's turn from civil rights in that regard to the issue of women's rights, which Melody Lehn talks about, about the successful amendment to provide women's suffrage and the unsuccessful Equal Rights Amendment. So, on the former, on suffrage, who were some of the most vocal first lady supporters of women's suffrage?

Teri: Well, Ida McKinley is certainly a good one to start with. Most people know little to nothing about her. If they know anything at all they might know that she was often sickly during her time as first lady, but they probably know very little else. But she was actually a really big supporter of suffrage and of Susan B. Anthony, and she allowed her name to be used as an influencer, right? I tell my students absolutely nothing is new. So she used her name to be an influencer during that time, with fundraising for the suffrage cause, and she invited suffragists to the White House and she refused to meet with anti-

suffragists, which is a pretty strong statement to make of where she stood. So Ida McKinley is the one that comes to mind the most. As far as some other first ladies, Edith Roosevelt was active, but after she was first lady, in advocating for women to vote. And then you have Florence Harding, before and after she was first lady, really being a strong supporter of women getting the right to vote.

Alan: And some actually were against women's suffrage and came out pretty strongly against that. Why? Why was that the case?

Teri: Yeah, so I've done a lot of work studying the suffrage, and specifically the anti-suffrage movement, and women's rights has been controversial in this country forever. And we have to remember that people are a product of the time period that they live in. And so even women today have differences on women's rights. And so that really isn't any different than it was back then. And there's really a lot of reasons for why this is. And it's interesting to think about some of the hypocritical first ladies like Sarah Polk and Edith Wilson, who had major power themselves as women, but didn't want other women to have this kind of power. And so you have that narrative going on. But there were so many reasons for women as well as men to be against women's rights. Religious reasons, sticking strictly to the Bible and what the role of men and women should be. There were beliefs that women weren't smart enough, that only men should be in the public sphere and women should be in the home.

Certainly racism played a major role in this and not thinking that Black women should be allowed to vote. Some thought it would be too much of a burden and women had enough to do. So it's not surprising that some of the first ladies would take on this attitude, as well, because there were actually thousands of members of these anti-suffrage clubs of women saying they shouldn't have the right to vote.

And I mean, you find that even with Frances Cleveland. This is the one, even though I understand the historical context, this is the one that I have the hardest time understanding because Frances Cleveland was 22 when she became first lady, and we tend to think of people who are college age -- and she did attend college herself -- as being more liberal and more activist, and yet she was an anti-suffragist and belonged to an anti-suffrage club. And she believed, I have this quote, that "women's virtue would be sullied if they were given the right to vote." And so even women thinking that they should have these very virtuous and proper roles played a role in some of the first ladies' thinking.

Alan: You saw that variety of opinion on the Equal Rights Amendment, but really with some of the first ladies it crossed political boundaries in terms of their support. Who were some of the more vocal supporters of the ERA?

Teri: You see Lady Bird Johnson, Pat Nixon, Betty Ford, and Rosalynn Carter, like right in a row. Those first ladies really playing more of an active role. Now with Lady Bird, again like some of these other first ladies, more apt to be vocal after her time as first lady. This is why I am such a proponent of having more research done on the lives of first ladies after they leave the White House. So much of research focuses on what they did while they were in the White House, but I think what they did after, because I think that more so shows their real personalities. And so Grace Coolidge has the famous quote of, "This was I, this was not I, this was the wife of the president." And knowing they have to take on this role of what they think people want the first lady to be.

And so they really downplay their own thoughts, and it's really after they leave that you see, I think, who these women really are and what they care about. And so it's really Pat Nixon, which again may surprise some people because Pat Nixon has, unfortunately, been forgotten and she did a tremendous amount as first lady. She was really the first one to go out on a ledge and support the ERA during her time as first lady. Although it's really Betty Ford who I think most people think of when they think about the ERA, because she was a rare first lady who spoke her mind about a lot of controversial issues and did not mind the heat that she took. You know, she wore the big button. She was doing public speaking; she was calling up legislators. Rosalynn Carter would do a lot of those same things. Of course, there was also a substantial amount of backlash to them doing this, which is why you don't tend to see some of the first ladies going out on a ledge like that.

Alan: I'm curious as you look at the more modern first ladies, particularly starting, let's say, with the Carters and the more almost formal role after the presidency with the Carter Center, and you see this more active role in policy issues. I wonder if that would affect your analysis of those, versus, let's say, a Mamie Eisenhower or Lou Hoover or someone like that post-presidency.

Teri: Yeah. I mean, that's interesting to think of because certainly, yeah, the role of the first lady has changed substantially since Eleanor when she broke the ground of having these more active first ladies, and you do see them more involved. Well, I mean, you also have to think of, too, that a lot of the first ladies we've had recently have had tremendous educational backgrounds. I mean, they've gone to major universities. They're much more educated. They're having their own careers. And so they are more involved about finding things

that they're passionate about and promoting legacies afterwards. So the role of women today has shifted significantly that they now are able to do those kinds of things that earlier first ladies never would've dreamed of.

Alan: You have a chapter in the book by Courtney Caudle Travers about first ladies as influential trendsetters and that they most definitely are. How have first ladies used fashion to relate to the public, but also to make broader statements?

Lisa: As in most things, first ladies are expected to balance being relatable on one hand and being celebrities on the other, which oftentimes is very contradictory and we definitely see this in their fashion. As Teri mentioned before, being an influencer is nothing new, but in fact, I think there's an argument to be made of first ladies as some of the first influencers in the US. You go back to Dolley Madison being featured in her turbans, which were very sort of European fashion. And she had this, the famous sort of engraving on a magazine, and then all of a sudden turbans became all the rage in the United States. Frances Cleveland, who was also talked about. She dropped the bustle which, you know, she might not have been an activist with suffrage, but she was doing some of sort of the fashion activism, because that was considered a big deal at the time. She also wore sleeveless gowns, which were considered sort of risqué. And you even have like trendsetters where, I think, people forget about someone like Mamie Eisenhower. She was so incredibly popular and very much kind of embodied that typical sort of 1950s housewife with the flared Dior-style dresses, but the charm bracelets, the “Mamie pink” which was a thing, like “Mamie pink” everything, that you could get because she was that popular. You know, we think about Jackie Kennedy. People don't know that Jackie Kennedy was actually criticized during the campaign for her fashion, that she spent too much money on her fashion, that she was wearing French designers. Which, by the way, she told the press that that was untrue, that actually Pat Nixon spent more of her money at Elizabeth Arden. She wore capris in public and she had the bouffant hair, which was shocking. Yet, right after the election, of course, we see this sort of public emulation of the Jackie look. One of my favorite moments in the movie *Jackie* is when you see her riding down the street in a car and looking at all of the mannequins in the store windows that are designed to look like her, with sort of the knockoff Chanel suits and the pillbox hats. But I think the best example of kind of bridging that gap between the high and low style is Michelle Obama, who of course is very much, and even says now, she's very into fashion, is really thoughtful about it in a way that a lot of the other first ladies haven't been. So when she especially mixed things, like she's wearing her J. Crew cardigans to visit Queen Elizabeth. She's wearing her White House Black Market [WHBM] dress that flies off the shelves and is sold out online. And then when she knew she had to dress up she focused on not

only American designers, but a lot of younger designers and designers of color. So, people like Jason Wu, who really got their big national break because of her. At the first inaugural, he designed her inaugural gown. At the inauguration itself, she wore an outfit by Isabel Toledo, who is a Cuban American. For her it really was always about elevating these designers and focusing on what Courtney talks about as the philosophy of inclusivity, that that was what Obama's campaign was built on and then Michelle was reflecting that through fashion, which I think is a really interesting way to be relatable, but then also use your celebrity status.

Alan: Let's shift from the world of fashion to a very related world of film. Maryanne Borrelli examines first ladies in film, looking at relatively recent movies like *Air Force One* and *Independence Day* and *Lincoln*. Some of my favorites. What were some of her findings about the roles and influence of first ladies as they were depicted in those films?

Lisa: Well, I have to admit that as a media studies professor, Maryanne's chapter was one of my favorites. And it might seem, again, if we were doing the more kind of biological approach, obviously Maryanne's chapter wouldn't have fit in this work. But I think that what she found, she looks at 31 films between, she decided to start with kind of more modern, so 1993 through 2016, and really was looking at did they reflect changing attitudes about how we view the first lady, what the first lady's role is. What she found is that 23 of those movies did include a first lady character but that also meant that in 4 films they were only mentioned, like they were on a phone or off camera, and in 4 they weren't included at all. In the movies where they were included, it was mainly in these more sort of supportive wife and mother. They were less frequently portrayed as doing something political, being an advisor or an advocate or a surrogate. In terms of the movies that focused on real first ladies, I do think that it's really interesting to see kind of the more political side of [unclear] Mary Lincoln. The movie *Lincoln*, again, is fantastic especially if you haven't even watched it in a while. Sally Fields's performance and just the subtlety of Mary was thinking about the political positioning, 'the optics' we call it today, of the White House. And of course, she got criticized for that. They went after her with like how much money she spent during wartime, but she really thought it was sort of portraying them as presidential and keeping up this image. And she isn't afraid to go toe-to-toe with some of Lincoln's foes. And then Pat Nixon, I think. In *Nixon* the movie, Joan Allen's performance is so nuanced in terms of being that advisor for her husband, where she's saying, "You want them to love you, and they won't, they never will. But you know, sometimes you forget that there are people who love you standing right in front of you." With the fictional movies, like I said, most of them were the supportive roles. My favorite is *Air Force One*. Wendy Crewson, an underrated actress, gives a great performance as the

first lady Grace Marshall. You know, people forget that here's her husband fighting off a terrorist. She spends most of the movie being held hostage by Gary Oldman. She talks back to him, she's protecting her daughter, she's basically repeating her husband's policy stances about how we don't negotiate with terrorists. And in the famous final scenes -- spoilers for anybody who hasn't seen a movie from back then. But, you know, while Harrison Ford is fighting with Gary Oldman, she's holding a gun on him and ready to take that shot. But what do we remember? We remember Harrison Ford saying, "Get off my plane!" So even she gets overlooked. And my favorite example that Maryanne gave was, there were two movies that came out, *Chasing Liberty* and *First Daughter*. They were both released in 2004, which of course is during George W. Bush's administration when we had the Bush twins in the White House. And both of these movies, although they focus on a singular daughter as opposed to twins, they were both like these sort of slightly rebellious, you know, young women who now they have to deal with their dad being in the White House. They're both kind of comedies, but in one of them, we see in *First Daughter*, the mother, the first lady character, really sitting her daughter down and saying, listen, your father's up for reelection, you need to kind of get your act together, you need to go out on the campaign trail, you need to do this for the family. And so, we see, even though it's kind of the supportive mother role it's a very sort of we're a political family, these are the things we need to do. And I had seen that movie years ago, kind of didn't really think again about it. I went back and watched it and I'm like, you know, it's really interesting to see how these women have been portrayed on screen, whether it's fictional or real-life figures.

Alan: I will have to go back and take a fresh look myself. I'm a huge movie fan. I will say, in *Independence Day*, I'm still quite upset they killed the first lady in that. Again, spoiler alert, there's no reason for it, I'll just say. I'll make a protest for that.

Lisa: But you know what, it gets him really motivated and she even has, there's sort of a tribute to her that you see that comes up in the second *Independence Day*.

Alan: I haven't watched that because I refuse to think there's a follow-up, but I will do that. I'll do that. So, Barbara Perry has a chapter and she was just a guest on *American POTUS* recently. She has a chapter about first lady legacies. So, what did she find out about the legacies, how those legacies evolve after first ladies leave the White House?

Teri: Yeah, so kind of continuing off of the conversation you were just having. For one, if you have a TV show or a movie made about you, it can certainly make a difference whether that be for good or for bad. There's some good as far as Abigail Adams is concerned. The HBO series that was done certainly brought her back into the limelight and made people talk about the contributions that she made to the country.

So, there's some potential there, but, okay. And I wasn't sure whether to go here, but I'm gonna do it, and I'm gonna get hate mail, but we have to talk about *Oh, Mary!* the Broadway show. Now I know it's very popular and people are loving it, but as a historian I can't help but cringe a little bit, because I'm somebody who has a lot of empathy for Mary Lincoln, and I feel like she has really been treated unfairly by history, especially by early male biographers who are quite mean, I think, to her and inaccurate and lacking in total empathy. And so I do have concerns about her collective memory. Something that I worry about is that even though the play itself obviously knows it's fictional and is having fun, I do worry that when people watch things like that and go away, if they have no other understanding of Mary Lincoln, that's what they actually think of her. Even if they somehow know 'oh, that was just fun,' on another level I worry they think some of it is real. And so I know I'm overthinking this as a historian but it plays into the legacy. Like, how do we think of these women today, and the ethical lines of how to talk about them?

But, returning to Barbara's chapter, of course it's interesting to think the difference that time can make on legacies. And starting with Dolley Madison, you have this woman who for a long time portrayed in K-12 textbooks as this great hero, this great first lady, and now in more recent times we're having more complex discussions about her and her role in slavery, and how she would not have been able to do what she did without slaves supporting her, helping dress her, helping earn money, helping her save items that were burned from the White House.

And so there's this rethinking and recontextualizing of history that happens. And then you have Eleanor Roosevelt who today is very widely beloved, often is at the top of first lady lists, but people tend to forget how much she was criticized when she was actually first lady, for how active she was. People did not like this active first lady. They thought she should be at home and be a wife to Franklin, and so it's very interesting and to see this evolution that happens.

One of the things that Barbara talked about in her chapter, that I'm expanding upon in my own work, relates to Mamie Eisenhower, who for a long time had this collective memory of just being this dowdy housewife who loved pink. But

I think this really needs to be reconsidered, how crucial she was for Ike to be who Ike was and to do what he did for the country. And so, as I mentioned earlier, this is the part of first ladies studies that I would really like to see examined more because I think there's a lot to dive into, because a lot of these first ladies, like Sarah Polk, for example, and Frances Cleveland, they lived for decades after they left the White House. They did a lot of things afterwards, and what did they do?

But to wrap this up, a more modern phenomenon that we're seeing is a lot of these first ladies are writing their own biographies. So they are trying to set the framing of their own stories and how they want history to remember them. So that's a whole other field of studies to examine. How do they consider their contributions compared to how other people think about their contributions? So there's just so many areas of research to look into here.

Alan: That's an interesting and important topic. And I will say, just briefly, I'm on your side with Mary Lincoln.

Teri: Yay!

Alan: I think a lot of people have made a lot of assumptions and bad judgements about Mary, given what she went through in her life. I think she was a brilliant woman, and I think still there's some historians today who make a living off of trashing Mary, and I don't like it. I'm just gonna put myself on record there to say that.

Teri: Absolutely, absolutely.

Alan: So, great conversation, both of you. What's next for both of you?

Lisa: Well, I have a very full plate. I know Teri does as well. I will mention, since it was brought up about first lady autobiographies, there is a book in the works. I co-authored a chapter on Eleanor Roosevelt's autobiographies in it. But that is currently in the process of being put together.

Unfortunately, we recently lost the editor; Molly Wertheimer passed away. But there is someone else who's stepping in to take over the project, hopefully. We're looking forward to having that published because, I think, looking at the chapters and how these women presented themselves is really important research that just hasn't been done yet. I'm also co-authoring a chapter on White House media relations. The history of it for a history of public relations handbook, which I think it's sort of an understudied area of PR history. And I

have two other book projects. I am doing an edited collection on media history and memory that includes some presidents and first ladies, particularly how Jackie Kennedy helped shape the collective memory of her husband. And another book on popular culture and public memory.

Alan: Busy. My goodness.

Teri: And then I split my time between trying to save local news and my work on first ladies. More recently, trying to save local news has been the more urgent of the areas to focus on, so I'm just wrapping up my book, *News Desert U*, that's taking a look at examples of universities trying to save local news. But once that's wrapped up, I'll be moving back into some first ladies work, particularly looking at how Frances Cleveland was portrayed in the media, and then also doing some work related to Mamie Eisenhower and Bess Truman.

Alan: I look forward to all the work you're doing. Thank you both so much for joining us on *American FLOTUS*. I really enjoyed our conversation.

Lisa: Thank you.

Alan: And thanks to all of you for joining us. Please make sure you check out all of our terrific *American FLOTUS* episodes at flare-net.org, at americanpotus.org, or on your favorite podcast platform. So thanks for listening. I'll see you next time on *American FLOTUS*.