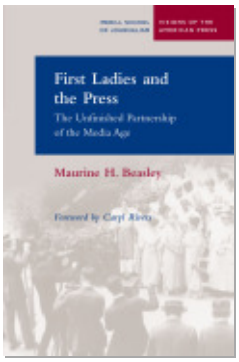
3. Jackie Kennedy and the Construction of Camelot



tivism, either by emulating it or by distancing themselves from it. Sarah McClendon, a journalist who covered the White House for a half century, observed, "[Eleanor Roosevelt] set a standard that all the first ladies who have followed her must measure themselves against."

THREE

JACKIE KENNEDY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CAMELOT

From the time that Eleanor Roosevelt left the White House in 1945 to the time that Jackie Kennedy entered it in 1961, American society underwent a dramatic transformation. Roosevelt's tenure as first lady had been marked by two cataclysmic events: the Depression and World War II, when the nation desperately sought first to stave off economic collapse and then to win the greatest war in history. Eleanor Roosevelt's multifaceted approach to the role of first lady and the voluminous news coverage she generated fit an era of extraordinary events.

In sharp contrast, her immediate successors, Bess Truman and Mamie Eisenhower, offered no challenge to journalistic conventions that confined women to stereotypical activities. They represented their times and provided a frame for the emergence of the glamorous Jackie Kennedy. Coverage of Truman and Eisenhower emphasized that they were traditional wives and mothers, and the public accepted them on those terms as the post–World War II generation moved to the suburbs and sought to glorify family life.

Bess Truman was greatly distressed when Franklin D. Roosevelt's sudden death catapulted Vice President Harry S Truman into the presidency in 1945. Fearing press disclosure of the suicide of her father many years earlier, Bess Truman, in the words of her daughter, Margaret, "underwent a terrific inner struggle to overcome her deep aversion to becoming first lady." Truman preferred living in Independence, Missouri, to living in the White House, which she and her husband called the "Great White Jail." The story of her father's suicide never became public in her lifetime. Journalists of the era, in line with popular views on good manners, were disinclined to probe into the personal lives of White House occupants.

In the wake of Eleanor Roosevelt, Bess Truman first announced she would hold a press conference for women reporters and then canceled it, realizing there was no requirement that she imitate her predecessor. Her attitude, journalist Marianne Means noted, was, "I'm not the one who is elected. I have nothing to say to the public." When press women asked how they would "get to know you," she retorted, "You don't need to know me. I'm only the President's wife and the mother of his daughter."

Press reaction was split, with some columnists upholding her right to her privacy. According to Gil Troy, a scholar of first ladies, "Unwittingly, Bess Truman had tapped into a broad public frustration with Eleanor Roosevelt and with an expanding definition of news that celebrated personality and trivia over politics and substance." Yet in the middle of the twentieth century, it was impossible for a first lady to totally avoid the press, as Truman soon learned.

Advised by her husband's press secretary, Charles Ross,

to maintain a minimal relationship with women journalists, she invited them to tea and attended events sponsored by women's press groups but said little of substance. Edith Helm, her social secretary, and Reathel Odum, a personal aide, both of whom were terrified of saying the wrong thing, were told to see reporters and relay their questions to her. At their first meeting with reporters, Helm wrote later, "Miss Odum and I felt and looked like condemned criminals." Helm handed out mimeographed copies of Truman's social engagements, marking the first use of press releases to record a first lady's comings and goings.

Bess Truman's calendar produced little news. A women's page reporter desperate for any item would be reduced to such inquiries as "What will Mrs. Truman wear to the tea for the United Council of Church Women today?" When this kind of question was relayed to the first lady, she was likely to snap, "It's none of her damn business," leaving her secretary to politely inform the reporter that "Mrs. Truman hasn't quite made up her mind."

A stout matron frequently photographed in a dark suit with a white blouse and gloves, Bess Truman took little interest in fashions. When reporters hinted that she presented a dowdy appearance, her husband retorted, "She looks just like a woman ought to look who's been happily married for a quarter of a century." While passing a billboard advertising the musical *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes,* the president told a columnist that "real gentlemen prefer gray."

His affection for his wife clouded his judgment during what Margaret Truman called "one of the nastiest political crossfires of the Truman presidency," which she blamed on her mother's inability to realize "that she too was a public fig-

ure as much as the President." After Bess Truman agreed to attend a Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) tea at Constitution Hall, the building where Marian Anderson had been banned from singing because of her race, Adam Clayton Powell, an African American congressman, telegraphed her to decline. He said the DAR also had refused to let his wife, pianist Hazel Scott, perform there. The first lady wired Powell back that "acceptance of the hospitality extended is not related to the merits of the issue." President Truman sent a telegram supporting her, even though, according to Margaret Truman, he was inclined to "condemn the DAR."

When Bess Truman went to the tea and remained a DAR member herself, Powell publicized the telegrams and called her "the last lady." The incident, which invited invidious comparisons with Eleanor Roosevelt's resignation from the DAR in support of Anderson, embarrassed the Truman administration, which backed civil rights. Bess Truman long had served as an informal political adviser to her husband, but the Powell episode, Margaret Truman wrote, temporarily damaged the "Truman partnership."

After the Powell incident, the first lady showed better political judgment by truncating the normal White House social season, since the ending of World War II had led to soaring prices and food shortages for average Americans. Instead of elaborate dinners, she staged a more informal series of teas and luncheons, and she shook thousands of hands at receptions. Reflecting the middle-class social values of the day, newspapers and magazines gave favorable treatment to her women's Spanish class at the White House and a four-day visit from members of her Independence bridge club. In

1946, Bess Furman, who was then the chief woman reporter in the *New York Times* Washington bureau, described the first lady to *Times* readers as the "Independent Lady from Independence," determined to remain herself and not "give a hoot for the whole goldfish bowl business." Journalist Sarah McClendon, a veteran Washington journalist, pointed out that Bess Truman spent months in Independence but that her husband consulted her, in person or by phone, "whenever he had a decision to make."

When Harry Truman confounded the experts by winning the 1948 presidential election, Bess and Margaret Truman received some of the credit for the victory. Key participants in his whistle-stop campaign tour, they silently smiled and waved when Truman introduced his wife as "the Boss" and his daughter, who was launching a professional singing career, as "the Boss's boss," presenting, as Troy put it, a family scene that "resurrected Americans' idealized past." Marianne Means said the term *boss,* as used in the semirural parts of the United States, was "a good-natured admission that while a man's wife rarely had an opinion in public, she didn't hesitate to push her point of view with her husband in private." Newspaper readers were told that Bess Truman insisted her husband curb his salty language and watch his manners in public.

As the Korean War dragged on, Truman decided not to run in 1952, to his wife's relief. His presidency ended with applause for her performance. As Troy noted, in the tradition of "Republican Motherhood," the term bestowed on exemplary mothers in the era of the founding fathers, Bess Truman had appeared "decent, dignified, and dutiful." The liberal *St. Louis Post Dispatch* proclaimed, "The contrast between

Bess and Eleanor is easy on the eyes, easy on the ears, and easy on the nerve centers." In the middle of the twentieth century, large segments of the press and public still preferred a first lady who had little to say in public, but it was increasingly obvious that a first lady could not escape attention from journalists.

Mamie Eisenhower, first lady from 1953 to 1960, liked living in the White House far more than Bess Truman did, although she had been lukewarm to the prospect initially. As the wife of "Ike," Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme commander of the Allied forces in World War II, Mamie Eisenhower long had been the subject of gossip. Her granddaughter-in-law, Julie Nixon Eisenhower, noted, "When in 1952, Ike chose a way of life that would mean permanent fame and entail constant press attention . . . Mamie was not enthusiastic." Fortunately for the first lady, the mainstream press of the day did not consider it in good taste to print persistent gossip that she was an alcoholic or that Ike had wanted to divorce her after the war to marry Kay Summersby, who had been his wartime driver in Europe.

Only after her husband's death in 1969 did Mamie Eisenhower publicly address these rumors. In 1973, she told Barbara Walters in a television interview that there was no truth to what people had thought for years: that she was "a dipsomaniac." She explained she suffered from Ménière's disease, an inner-ear disorder that affected her balance. Six years later in another television interview with Walters, she discounted the Summersby story, declaring there was "no romance." But during the 1950s, these rumors had circulated by word of mouth rather than by repetition in the media, as they would today.

The press of the 1950s praised Mamie Eisenhower, with her heart-shaped face and friendly manner, as a model wife. When Dwight Eisenhower became the Republican standard-bearer in 1952, she was turned into a campaign asset in part because the Democratic candidate, Adlai Stevenson, was divorced. Eisenhower's supporters, in an effort to court women voters, passed out "I Like Mamie" buttons, and two songs were dedicated to her. The *New York Times* said she was worth "50 electoral votes." Unlike Bess Truman, she enjoyed having her picture taken on the campaign train, even restaging a photo of herself to accommodate photographers who had missed snapping their shutters when she greeted an early morning crowd in her bathrobe and hair curlers.

Described by Means as "extremely feminine, in a rather sweet, clinging-vine way," the grandmother of four was said to adore "flowered hats, colored gloves, full-skirted, fluffy dresses and anything done up in pink." She made no pretense of either advising her husband or being interested in women's issues. She even avoided mention of Oveta Culp Hobby, the former head of the Women's Army Corps whom Eisenhower appointed to the cabinet post of secretary of health, education, and welfare, because, according to daughter-in-law Barbara Eisenhower, she "thought that women who had jobs like that were very unfeminine."

Wearing a pink bed jacket, Mamie Eisenhower stayed in bed until noon in her pink bedroom, which she used as a personal command center for White House management. With years of experience as a military wife, she gave detailed orders to the staff, spent money cautiously, and symbolized Middle America in her cultural and clothing tastes. Journalists could have pictured her as a ruling matriarch; instead,

they portrayed her as the prototype of a congenial suburban housewife.

Less than two months after the inauguration, Mamie Eisenhower held her first and only press conference. It was attended by thirty-seven women reporters and forty-one men reporters, with the Secret Service requiring the men to let the women precede them into the room. Only one of the men asked a question. Video cameras recorded the event for possible showing on the new media of television, but little news resulted from the first lady's reading of her schedule, listing what one reporter called "tea by inexorable tea." Other press conferences were vetoed by Jim Hagerty, President Eisenhower's press secretary, who feared she would be asked controversial questions she could not answer.

Mary Jane McCaffree Monroe, Mamie Eisenhower's secretary, said the first lady did not enjoy her press conference and, moreover, had been warned by her mother, a frequent White House guest, that it was unladylike to be a public figure apart from her husband. Mamie Eisenhower maintained cordial relationships with women journalists by attending their social events, and she cooperated with the impersonation of the president at a Women's National Press Club stunt party by lending Ike's golf apparel for costume needs. Still, press contacts were curtailed, with the first lady's secretary giving out news, Isabelle Shelton of the *Washington Evening Star* said, "as sort of a catch-as-catch-can thing in which you had to ask the right questions or lose the game."

According to Maxine Cheshire, a *Washington Post* reporter, "no first lady was ever as gently treated in print as Mamie Eisenhower," due to what Cheshire called the 1950s' "Emily Post approach to reporting about the occupants of

the White House." Cheshire said her biggest *Post* "scoop" was to find out where the first lady bought discounted evening slippers to dye to match her gowns. Both Cheshire and Jack Anderson, who assisted Drew Pearson in writing a Washington investigative column, faulted the press for failing to raise questions about Mamie Eisenhower's acceptance of gifts from foreign governments. Anderson noted, "When Drew made so bold as to tweak Mamie Eisenhower for latching on to a diamond necklace so heavy she could hardly carry it around, the stories died the quick death of press neglect."

In general, Mamie Eisenhower enjoyed excellent media coverage because her appearance and values resonated with those of Middle America. With her trademark bangs, pearl chokers, charm bracelets, and pink evening gowns that resembled strapless dresses worn at senior proms, the first lady set the style for fashion in the 1950s. It was, Betty Caroli contended, fashion that emphasized a folksy separation of spheres for men and women and encouraged women to value a youthful appearance more than their intelligence. Eisenhower's celebrated shirtwaist outfits—featuring flared skirts, pleats, and ruffles topped off with mink coats and eye-catching hats—put her on the annual lists of the world's best-dressed women. She and Pat Nixon, the wife of Vice President Richard Nixon, were photographed together attending the popular charity luncheon fashion shows that the first lady liked.

In an as-told-to article for *Today's Woman* magazine, Mamie Eisenhower made short work of feminism, declaring, "Being a wife is the best career that life has to offer a woman." She said she had "only one career, and his name is Ike." Advertisers capitalized on her popularity. Macy's sold copies of her tight-fitting headwear, and a chocolate manu-

facturer featured the recipe for "Mamie's Million Dollar Fudge." Mass-circulation magazines publicized the first lady's pursuits. Millions learned that she loved to play canasta and that the Eisenhowers, like many other Americans, sometimes ate dinner on tray tables in front of the television set, a staple in a growing number of American homes.

When President Eisenhower suffered a heart attack in 1955, the public was fully informed on his medical condition. But in Mamie Eisenhower's case, details of her physical condition were not released even when she had to have a hysterectomy, which the White House referred to vaguely as a problem of older women. A more forthright description of her health might have forestalled some comments in the *Washington Post* and other quarters that she was not sufficiently active as first lady. Her physical condition, which also included a heart ailment and asthma, somewhat curtailed her role as a hostess.

In Eisenhower's reelection campaign of 1956, Mamie Eisenhower made history as the first president's wife to appear on television to support her husband in campaign ads. A month before the election, she joined Ike for a televised "chat" with seven women voters, remarking that on voter registration rolls, she listed her occupation as "First Lady." For the most part during the campaign, she merely posed by her husband's side and lent her name to magazine articles written for her, such as one in *Good Housekeeping* that called on women to "vote for my husband" or for his opponent, Adlai Stevenson, but "please vote."

During Eisenhower's second term, she drew some criticism for taking trips partially subsidized by taxpayers to a Phoenix spa to lose weight. The rumors of her drinking fi-

nally found their way into print when a columnist charged that the purpose of one Phoenix trip had been to "dry out." The White House did not dignify the story by denying it, and it faded from the public agenda.

When it was time for the Eisenhowers to vacate the White House in 1961, Mamie Eisenhower, more than other presidents' wives, "hated to leave," according to J. B. West, the head usher. Perhaps, at the age of sixty-four, she sensed an eclipse of her own performance as first lady by a youthful successor whose sophisticated ideas on both fashion and interior decorating would soon impel journalists to sneer at what Cheshire called Mamie's Eisenhower's "smalltown dowdiness." By that time, modern mass communications had made the personal style of the president's wife an object of intense media scrutiny.

The statuesque Jacqueline "Jackie" Bouvier Kennedy, known for her chic wardrobe and good looks, was only thirty-one years old and had a small daughter and a baby on the way when her husband, John F. Kennedy, narrowly defeated Richard Nixon for the presidency in 1960. After he was assassinated on November 22, 1963, she presented a picture of regal dignity. It was she who persuaded journalist Theodore H. White to eulogize the Kennedy years in *Life* magazine with the term *Camelot,* which captured her own—and the nation's—belief in an elite administration of eloquent heroes who attempted noble deeds. She wanted her husband's presidency to be remembered as a time when the White House attracted the brilliant and the best to bring a new vigor—a "New Frontier," as Kennedy called it—to the American dream of democratic glory. Subsequent disclosures of John Kennedy's insatiable appetite for sexual conquests,

other tragedies involving the Kennedy family, and her own strained second marriage to Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis tarnished that bright image. Yet Jackie Kennedy, shown on television throughout the world as a majestic widow grieving at her husband's funeral, cemented her place in history as a first lady who understood the importance of ceremony and the consolations of ritual. In addition, by restoring the White House to its original early nineteenth-century appearance, she left the legacy of a living museum to the American people.

Neither the reality of the Kennedy political world, based in Boston's Irish Catholic machine, nor the large, competitive Kennedy family itself initially appealed to the aristocratic Jackie Kennedy. Perhaps to exercise personal independence, she constructed her own media presence. While pregnancy kept her from having a very active role in the 1960 campaign, she was photographed in trendsetting maternity clothes, which emphasized her expanding figure rather than hiding it. Like her wardrobe in general, her maternity outfits drew raves from fashion writers and the public, who applauded her bright pink slacks and oversized T-shirts.

Playing the role of a supportive spouse, she met with reporters and gave interviews, although her primary media activity was writing an informal column that appeared in newspapers. Jackie Kennedy's "Campaign Wife," an Eleanor Roosevelt–type of daily column released by the Democratic National Committee in 1960, predictably urged women to vote for "my husband" and declared that "Jack has always believed that women are vital to a campaign." Long on chitchat and short on issues, the column gave her latitude to respond to criticism of her fondness for high fashion. "All the talk

over what I wear and how I fix my hair has amused and puzzled me," she wrote. "What does my hairdo have to do with my husband's ability to be President?"

When *Women's Wear Daily* claimed she spent $30,000 a year on her clothes and bought them in Paris, she retorted, "I couldn't spend that much unless I wore sable underwear." Instead of giving exact figures, she snidely remarked, "I'm sure I spend less than Mrs. Nixon on clothes." Jack Kennedy, who feared adverse political fallout, did not share her enormous pleasure when her name topped the list of the world's twelve best-dressed women shortly before his inauguration in 1961. To abate criticism of her thirst for French couturiers, her social secretary, Letitia Baldrige, announced that the first lady had selected an American designer, Oleg Cassini; intended to avoid "extravagance"; and planned to buy outfits "made in America."

In actuality, Jackie Kennedy spent more than $40,000 a year on her wardrobe while in the White House, and contrary to a statement that the public would see her in the same clothes repeatedly, she was, according to one journalist, "never photographed wearing the same outfit twice." Her total personal expenditures, which included charges for food, liquor, furnishings, art objects, and other items as well as her clothing, came to more than the president's annual salary of $100,000. In 1962, she spent $121,461.61. Information of this type was not reported until years later.

In an apparent effort to identify with Middle American voters, Jackie Kennedy downplayed the Kennedy wealth in public statements during the 1960 presidential campaign. One way she did this was to minimize the presence of the employees who assisted her. In a preelection picture spread,

Life, then an influential weekly magazine with a huge circulation, showed her answering 225 daily letters to her husband at her Georgetown home while lamenting the lack of a full-time secretary. Another shot showed her tucking her daughter in for a nap because she "does not have a nurse for Caroline." Yet Jackie Kennedy actually had both a live-in nurse for Caroline and a personal secretary, Mary Gallagher, who said in a memoir that her days "couldn't possibly have been more full-time."

As it turned out, President Kennedy had no need to worry about the public response to his photogenic wife. "Yes, a tremendous amount of money was spent on her wardrobe," Baldrige said, "but the public loved it. If she had been dowdy or disinterested in fashion, JFK's place in history would never have been so secure."

In fact, the public could not get enough of her, as the new first lady's image was turned into salable commodities. Women rushed to adopt Jackie Kennedy's bouffant hairstyles, pillbox hats, and low-heeled shoes and to buy sleeveless, off-the-rack dresses with simple lines and brilliant colors that resembled her designer originals. Waterskiing became popular because she did it. Her photograph on magazine covers boosted the sale of both high- and lowbrow publications and captivated millions of admirers. Fan magazines featured her alongside celebrities such as Elizabeth Taylor, equating the first lady with Hollywood superstars. Photographs focused on her arresting features and perfect posture; although she chain-smoked, no picture showing her doing so ever was printed.

Just as Jackie Kennedy wished to wear beautiful clothes, she wanted to live in a historical mansion full of

beautiful objects. Taking the traditional preinauguration tour of the White House with the outgoing first lady, Mamie Eisenhower, she had been appalled at its shabby, hodgepodge look. Clark Clifford, a Washington insider and adviser to her husband, said she told him, "'I wish to make the White House into the First House in the land'—from the standpoint of its furnishings, its painting, the rugs on the floor. . . . Nobody had ever approached it that way before. At that time it was really pretty drab."

Although he feared the restoration would backfire politically, Clifford set up the White House Fine Arts Committee to track down historical objects and raise money for their purchase. Jackie Kennedy did not hesitate to spend liberally to achieve her goal, obtaining funds through private donations and the sale of White House guidebooks published by the newly formed White House Historical Association. When Maxine Cheshire of the *Washington Post* wrote an investigative series on the restoration, pointing out that some newly purchased items were fake antiques, the first lady became incensed.

Fears that the public would not approve died down, however, after she presented the fruits of the restoration to a record audience of forty-six million Americans who watched a special color television program on Valentine's Day in 1962. Speaking in her whispery, Marilyn Monroe–like voice, she took CBS viewers on an hour-long tour of the White House, describing its recently acquired historical treasures. The president appeared briefly at the end of the program. Norman Mailer did not like the show, comparing Jackie Kennedy's voice to that of a breathless weather girl. Critics noted that she sidestepped questions about federal policy toward the arts

as too "complicated" to answer. But most viewers loved the program.

Both Jack and Jackie Kennedy, who moved so gracefully in the midst of Cold War tensions, seemed made for television. The audience had no idea of the president's recurrent back pain and other ailments or of his wife's frustrations with his philandering. Gil Troy noted, "Good-looking couples like the Kennedys, who emphasized vague appearances rather than specific accomplishments or passionate commitments, prospered in America's cool, TV-oriented culture." Television projected style, if not substance, and the Kennedys excelled in style.

Any lingering doubt that Jack Kennedy may have had about his wife's political appeal had been laid to rest the previous year when she accompanied him on official trips abroad. At high-level meetings in Europe in the early summer of 1961, she created a sensation. Looking like a queen in a white satin gown, she dazzled dignitaries, including the contentious French president Charles de Gaulle, who was impressed with her knowledge of his language and culture. President Kennedy wryly told a crowd of journalists, "I do not feel it inappropriate for me to introduce myself. I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris."

In Vienna, her breeding and good manners won praise. She insisted the overlooked Nina Khrushchev, wife of the Soviet Communist leader Nikita Khrushchev, stand beside her and wave to a huge crowd, prompting the people to shift from chanting "Jac-kie" to "Jac-kie—Ni-na." Beguiling Nikita Khrushchev himself with her wit at a state dinner, Jackie Kennedy outshone her husband's lackluster performance at his first superpower summit.

A few weeks earlier, she had been a hit in Canada when the Kennedys paid their first state visit, with local crowds shouting, "Jack-ie, Jack-ie." On trips to South America in late 1961 and to Mexico the following summer, she excited audiences when she spoke in Spanish.

Subsequent trips abroad without her husband also brought extensive press coverage and widened precedents for first ladies to travel independently. Following the summit in 1961, she went on a vacation to Greece with her sister, Lee Radziwill. The two women backed off from an official schedule featuring Greek history, drama, and art to cruise surreptitiously on a yacht. Nevertheless, a shot of the tanned first lady watching a Greek tragedy "was the leading international photograph of the summer." The following summer, Italian photographers—the aggressive paparazzi—rushed to the Italian Riviera when she vacationed there with four-year-old Caroline. Press photographs of the first lady swimming with Gianni Agnelli, the wealthy head of Fiat, led her husband, conscious of his administration's image in the 1962 elections, to send her a pointed telegram: "A LITTLE MORE CAROLINE AND LESS AGNELLI."

A month after the successful television tour of the White House in 1962, she went with her sister on a semi-official trip to India and Pakistan, with a stop in Rome for an audience with the pope. Some one hundred journalists covered her arrival in New Delhi as the guest of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The *New York Times* reported in a front-page story her "gay and glowing welcome" punctuated "with a splash of Asian splendor." Picture magazines showed her riding on a spangled elephant in India and viewing the shimmering Taj Mahal. Stopping in Pakistan to show U.S.

neutrality in the rivalry between the two countries, she eagerly accepted a valuable gelding that was trained for the foxhunting she loved to pursue (over objections from animal rights activists) in the Virginia countryside.

The *Times* reported that on her way back to the United States, she was "greeted with cheers and wolf whistles when she drove to Buckingham Palace for lunch with Queen Elizabeth II." Having said little of note to the journalists who accompanied her, she issued a discreet statement when she returned to Washington, saying simply, "I have missed my family and have no desire to be a public personality on my own." It was obvious to most, however, that she was.

Not all press coverage was positive. The socially conscious members of the media complained that "illiterate masses" had been overlooked due to her misplaced emphasis on visits with "maharajas and titular leaders." A Republican congressman claimed the cost of a documentary on the trip made by the U.S. Information Agency was "exorbitant." His protest had little impact. Eventually shown all over the globe, the documentary provided the opportunity for millions to vicariously experience her exotic itinerary and marvel at her colorful outfits. The film also accustomed the public to seeing a president's wife as a diplomatic presence in her own right—a Cold War symbol of the success of American capitalism as contrasted with Communist society.

Long before she moved into the White House, Jackie Kennedy had become acquainted with the media spotlight. Her picture had appeared in newspapers when she bowed to society as "debutante of the year" in 1947. When she became the bride of the rich, handsome, and up-and-coming Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts in 1953, a bevy of news pho-

tographers recorded the lavish wedding that united two of the nation's most eligible Roman Catholics. Before her marriage, she worked as an inquiring photographer for the *Washington Times-Herald,* posing different questions each day to randomly chosen individuals and publishing their answers along with their pictures. Most questions were innocuous ("Do you think a wife should pick out her husband's suits for him?"), but on November 7, 1952, she had asked Tricia Nixon what she thought of her father's election as vice president, leaving the six-year-old to respond, "He's always away. If he's so famous, why can't he stay home?"

By the time Kennedy was inaugurated as president, his wife had developed a strong resentment against any effort to publicize her own children except by releasing photographs of her choosing. She battled repeatedly with Pierre Salinger, President Kennedy's press secretary, to limit press access to Caroline and baby John-John, wanting them to grow up as unaffected as possible by the limelight surrounding them. According to a White House photographer, "The President understood the political advantages of having the children photographed, whereas Jackie saw it as an invasion of their privacy. Pierre would schedule photo sessions for the children when Jackie was out of town, then blame the President when Jackie went after him."

Baldrige saw the issue as part of an ongoing battle of the sexes between the West Wing, where the president's advisers were, and the East Wing, which housed the first lady's staff. When the West Wing gave orders affecting the first lady without consulting her, Baldrige fought back. She recalled, "If Pierre went against the specific instructions of JBK [Jacqueline Kennedy] I would get hell from Jackie, I'd tattle

on Pierre to the President, and the President went to bat for me against Pierre. Jackie, in other words, had great power in ceremonial matters and press coverage of the family." Such reprimands on Kennedy's part may well have been disingenuous. His wife's first cousin, John Davis, said the president had no hesitancy in using the media to create an appealing political image by exploiting his family with merciless calculation.

Slim, elegant, and somewhat shy, the first lady, who spoke in a very soft, childlike voice, adhered to what *Newsweek* said seemed to be "a silent and private oath of her own." The magazine reported she apparently had resolved the following: "(1) I shall be seen and not heard, at least not heard much; (2) I shall discourage fashion stories in every way except by the clothes I wear; (3) I shall restore the White House, to the way it ought to have been." She also had vowed, *Newsweek* continued, to entertain "distinguished artists," to bring up "my children myself, in privacy," and to carry out only "projects I have time for, but I shall get very involved in those." Her silent manifesto revealed her ambivalence toward the role she was expected to play.

Educated at Vassar and the Sorbonne, the product of a broken, upper-class marriage, Jackie Kennedy long had traveled in elite circles as the stepdaughter of a wealthy stockbroker. As first lady, she showed little interest in women's causes, including her husband's Commission on the Status of Women, or in meeting large groups from women's organizations. Carrying out many of the routine social duties traditionally performed by presidents' wives bored her, so she called on Lady Bird Johnson, wife of Vice President Lyndon Johnson, to take her place more than fifty times. President

Kennedy's mother, Rose, and his sisters also filled in when the first lady canceled "because of sudden ill health." Her disinclination to appear led to embarrassing situations. For example, when she gave what she called a "PBO" (polite brush-off) to the president of a South American nation because she preferred to go waterskiing with astronaut John Glenn, a State Department representative was forced into an awkward conversation with the aggrieved head of state in a stumbling effort to explain the situation.

"The one thing I do not want to be called is first lady," she told an aide after the inauguration. "It sounds like a saddle horse." Unable to keep the term from being used, she finally gave up efforts to be known simply as Mrs. Kennedy and accepted the title. She sought to stay at arm's length from her admiring public, treating it, one biographer said, like an "admiring escort at a Princeton prom: politely, pleasantly, aloofly." The air of mystery only added to her appeal; the more remote she seemed, the more the public wanted to know about her.

The administration "fed the ravenous journalists gallons of hogwash," Davis contended, picturing her as "the most beautiful, the most charming, the most brilliant, the most aristocratic, the most adoring wife and mother who ever lived." Much of the press willingly accepted her on those terms. However, her stardom denigrated her immediate predecessors, who seemed old and frumpy by comparison, and created an unrealistic media expectation for first ladies that would challenge her successors.

The first president's wife to name a press secretary, Jackie Kennedy selected an inexperienced young woman, Pamela Turnure, rumored to have been one of Jack

Kennedy's romantic interests. Helen Thomas, the veteran White House reporter for United Press International, said Turnure had "about as much business being press secretary as I would have directing the Space Agency." Baldrige said Turnure was instructed to tell reporters "nothing ever, except for occasional spoon-fed bits of information when she was given the signal." In a memo, the first lady informed Turnure, "My press relations will be minimum information given with maximum politeness."

With news organizations still limiting most White House assignments for women reporters to those involving the first lady, Jackie Kennedy was a godsend to the female Washington press corps. Her travels, her elaborate White House entertaining and redecorating, her fashions, her children and their pets, her nursery school for Caroline, her jet-set lifestyle, her boating and horseback riding, and her visits to Kennedy homes at Hyannis Point, Massachusetts, and Palm Beach all made news—and not necessarily just for the women's pages.

Thomas recalled, "The irony is that Jackie Kennedy unwittingly gave a tremendous lift to me and many other women reporters in Washington by escalating our beat . . . to instantaneous front-page news." Eleanor Roosevelt's concern for liberal causes had put her on the front page, too, but the public, conditioned by the middle of the twentieth century to idolize celebrities, had an even more unquenchable thirst for news about the glamorous Jackie Kennedy twenty-four hours a day. Thomas said, "One biting quip from Jackie or a spill from a horse could launch a thousand headlines."

Unlike her witty and eloquent husband, who enjoyed a humorous give-and-take with journalists, Jackie Kennedy

had relatively little interaction with reporters. Her press corps, which called itself the "Jackie watch" or the "diaper detail" in reference to her children, would not be daunted. If reporters could not interview her, they interviewed those she did business with—shopkeepers, hairdressers, caterers, even the owner of the diaper service the family used.

Experienced White House social reporters such as Winzola McLendon of the *Washington Post* found that Jackie Kennedy's "attitude toward the press ran hot and cold." McLendon nevertheless credited the first lady for making the White House such a magnet for female journalists that "a lot of women started going there every day learning on the job what to do." Thomas observed that when Jackie Kennedy "was creating the image of a concerned first lady, she wanted press coverage. When she was flying off on her Friday-to-Tuesday weekend trips, she wanted to pull the velvet curtain closed."

In private memos, Jackie Kennedy referred to female reporters as "harpies." She looked down on women journalists as unstylish, unmannerly, and intrusive, trying unsuccessfully to limit their access to White House dinners and suggesting that they "be kept out of sight behind the pillars and potted palms." The president was much more receptive to the journalists. According to columnist Esther Van Wagoner Tufty, when he watched his wife give "dirty looks" to women reporters, "he took hold of her very hard" and told her to "'say hello to the girls, darling,'" leaving "the imprint of his hand in her flesh." Tufty saw a memo in which the first lady facetiously suggested "keeping the harpies at bay by stationing a couple of guards with bayonets near them."

Jackie Kennedy was particularly irritated by Helen

Thomas and by Fran Lewine of the Associated Press, whose assignments called for keeping close watch on the first lady's activities. One Sunday when the two correspondents stood outside a church she attended, Jackie Kennedy retaliated by reporting to the Secret Service that she was being followed by "two strange Spanish-looking women." As a result, the journalists were promptly but briefly arrested. Thomas called the incident "a brilliant carom shot since Fran is Jewish and I'm of Arab descent."

The confrontation was an attack on two of the most outstanding Washington women journalists, both of whom served as president of the Women's National Press Club, a leading organization for Washington newswomen in the mid-twentieth century. Thomas parodied Jackie Kennedy's travels in 1961 at the newswomen's annual show spoofing politicians; Vice President Johnson was on hand for the event, but the first lady declined to attend. Both Thomas and Lewine profited professionally from turning out reams of copy about the first lady. Each moved up the wire service ladder and became one of the first women reporters to cover the president as well as his wife.

Jackie Kennedy's dislike of the press stemmed from an inability to come to terms with the intense public interest in her and her family because they lived in the White House. She considered herself treated unjustly as women journalists watched her through their long-range binoculars as she vacationed outside Washington; she watched them back through her own. When journalists asked what she planned to feed a new puppy, she shot back, "Reporters."

The press corps did not think the first lady's attitude was justified. Lewine, who covered Jackie Kennedy on her

trips at home and abroad and even followed her on a press yacht when she cruised in the Aegean Sea, had no qualms about a possible invasion of privacy. In an oral history interview, Lewine said, "If she went out in public, then we figured that was fair game. And if she didn't want that covered, she should have stayed home." She added that the first lady could have avoided some of her difficulties by having a more professional press relations staff so that the press "wouldn't have been quite as intrusive as it became."

Lem Billings, a close friend of John Kennedy, said it was understandable that the first lady disliked the press because "no matter what she did it crucified her." He listed news stories that reported such things as "using a government helicopter to fly to Glen Ora [the Kennedy weekend home in Virginia], swimming in shark-infested waters off Florida . . . dancing the twist . . . subverting White House tradition by doing away with tails and top hats at formal banquets." Yet, he said, the first lady "exceeded permissible bounds" to escape press censure because she refused to attend events such as a congressional wives' luncheon in her honor at the White House, instead ducking out to go to a ballet in New York. Her husband, unwilling to offend the wives of key legislators, showed up instead, marking the first time a president attended an official event as the first lady's representative.

Jackie Kennedy projected herself as a regal wife and mother intent on rearing her children while bringing culture, refinement, and American antiques to the president's mansion. Determined to make the White House a showcase for American civilization, she hired a French chef and planned dinners that epitomized elegant sophistication, inviting performances from classical musicians such as cellist

Pablo Casals and enthralling André Malraux, the French minister of culture, with her knowledge of art and literature. In April 1962, the Kennedys hosted a White House dinner party for Nobel Prize winners, prompting the president to say, "I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone." All of this material made marvelous copy for women reporters.

On August 7, 1963, Jackie Kennedy gave birth prematurely to a third child, Patrick Bouvier, who lived less than two days. Two months later, she went back to Greece for a vacation without her husband. She cruised to Turkey on Aristotle Onassis's yacht, *The Christina,* where she was photographed dining and dancing late at night, and she also visited Morocco before returning to Washington. This time, *Newsweek* said her "immunity" from political criticism had worn off, as Republicans raised questions about her acceptance of hospitality from Onassis (whose business practices had figured in two congressional inquiries) and "all-night parties in foreign lands." The Kennedys did not respond to attacks on the trip, but a columnist for the Republican-leaning *New York Daily News* defended the first lady on grounds the death of her baby entitled her to "a change of scene."

Only a month after her return from Greece, Jackie Kennedy went with her husband on the ill-fated political fence-mending trip to Texas that resulted in his assassination on November 22, 1963. Troy speculated she agreed to go to repair her marriage as well as her reputation. After the assassin's bullet abruptly ended John Kennedy's life, her poise and

dignity as she planned his funeral left an enduring mark on American history. Her private grief was expressed in a media-rich spectacle that lingered in a nation's collective memory. Even at her husband's funeral, she was the director and stage manager, perhaps the last of the first ladies to do what she wanted without reliance on professional image-makers. She had orchestrated her own Camelot. After her, the position of the first lady would be a more scripted entity.