

WRITING THE REPUBLIC: *FIRST* FIRST LADIES

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## DEDICATION

For my dad, who would have been so proud to see me finish this. And for all the first-generation college students who think they don't belong in higher education, I'm here to tell you, you do.

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## ABSTRACT

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While much has been written about our nation's first First Ladies, not much attention has been paid to the rhetoric of these women. As the New Republic worked to build and create a democracy, Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, and Dolley Madison had the treacherous task of navigating a new role, that of the First Lady. Each of these women has left behind a sizeable collection of letters, and it is these letters that create the discourse analysis I have conducted. To analyze the many writing of these ladies, I use Kenneth Burke's cluster analysis method to conduct the analysis and answer the question, "Did our First Ladies have a uniquely American rhetoric?" Because this analysis is conducted with a feminist lens, using Burke's cluster analysis requires feminists to recast him for a feminist audience.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On November 13, 2018, an official statement from First Lady Melania Trump was made regarding the White House national security official, Mira R. Ricardel: “It is the position of the Office of the First Lady that she [Ricardel] no longer deserves the honor of serving in this White House” (qtd. in Haberman et al.). The next day, it was widely reported that Ricardel had been removed from her position at the White House by President Trump. Melania Trump’s official statement and its subsequent outcome prove that the First Lady of the United States has power, even if only by proximity. In this case, an official statement was made with a recommendation of someone being removed, and that person was, in fact, removed. Melania used her position for action. However, Melania is not the first First Lady to wield this power; this power has been used since the position’s creation.

The nation’s first First Lady, Martha Washington, felt like a prisoner in her own home due to a rule agreed upon by her husband, James Madison, and John Adams that stated presidents and their wives could not have a personal life, “That any entertainment, any going to visit people, any having people in was, in fact, a public act. And so they couldn’t just go hang out with their friends or have their friends over” (Brady “First Ladies”). After George Washington’s first year in office, the rule changed thanks to Martha’s insistence. Additionally, our nation’s second First Lady, Abigail Adams, is known to have counseled her husband on various occasions regarding everything from

policy to mannerisms, and so boldly insisted that her husband “Remember the ladies” when drafting the Declaration of Independence (Adams 92). Ultimately, her husband did not remember the ladies, but this did not stop Abigail from voicing her opinion to her husband. Also, Dolley Madison, our nation’s third official First Lady, used her position as the President’s wife to highlight issues important to her — founding an orphanage and establishing a relationship with a Catholic school (“First Lady Biography: Dolley”). These three earliest First Ladies used their position as the President’s wife to advance their own interests, demonstrating power-by-proxy similar to that of Melania Trump. This power has always existed, though it can be assumed that the rhetorical moves and choices made by each First Lady were likely different. It is in this area I focus my attention: the rhetoric of our *first* First Ladies.

While there is no definitive job description for a First Lady, as a nation we tend to understand the job by the associations we make with the term: fashion icons, decorators of the White House, social platforms that often address “feminine issues” such as caring for children in some way, to name just a few. The modern First Lady has the platform on which she can verbally speak, publicly, about the things she finds important and the goals she sets forth for her time in the White House. However, knowing our nation’s history, we also know this has not always been the case for First Ladies. How did our earliest First Ladies navigate a new position in a New Republic while still not having the basic rights of men? How did these women speak about and for the new nation being created? What can be learned by looking at the discourse of our *first* First Ladies?



To start to uncover and understand the discourse of the early First Ladies, we have to start at the beginning with Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, and Dolley Madison. If their husbands were the founding fathers of America, it could easily be argued that these three women were the founding mothers. The position of First Lady was brand new not only in the early Republic, but also in the world. A woman married to a man who was voted President meant she was instantly met with distinction, whether welcomed or not. However, women at this time were oppressed by patriarchal culture. The First Lady had direct contact with what has become the most powerful man in the world and still could not vote, let alone speak in public about much of anything. The eighteenth century in the new republic relied heavily on the subordination of women. Because women were primarily seen as “married or to-be married,” they held no clout; they were subservient to their husbands, and thus in society as a whole (Norton 59). A woman’s place was in the home, tending to the house and children, while remaining submissive and compliant to her husband. And, when a woman wandered outside of that prescribed life, she was considered mad as men’s minds were stronger for handling matters outside of the home (Berkin 3). The many historical accounts of men and women’s roles during the eighteenth century demonstrate this hierarchical structure.

This odd position the earliest First Ladies were in — having no power and yet having the ear of a powerful man — led to letters being their main means of discourse, which was true of all women who could read and write in that era. As in the Middle Ages when women took up letter writing in place of the impossibility of oratorical power, women of the New Republic were in the same position, even women seen as privileged

or educated. Subsequently, most of the artifacts we have from these First Ladies are primary documents consisting of letters, diaries, and other written correspondences. In *Worthy Partner: The Papers of Martha Washington*, Fields has compiled a thorough collection of all the Washington papers. In his introduction, Fields claims that she was “The ideal woman for the new American republic [...] during the presidency, she was called both dignified and democratic” (xix). Here, we get a glimpse into the character of Washington while in her official position. A large selection of Abigail Adams’ papers is collected in *Abigail Adams Letters*, a volume containing letters and diaries in chronological order edited by Abigail Adams’ scholar Edith Gelles. Finally, Dolley Madison’s collection is a digital archive called “The Dolley Madison Digital Edition,” edited by Holly C. Schulman. This collection requires a fee to access the archives, and their homepage asserts that “As of August 2018 it is complete through 1849, with a total of 2843 documents” (Schulman). All three of the above-mentioned sources are the most comprehensive collections we have of these three First Ladies’ writings.

Women writing letters became a way for ideas to be safely shared in a private way. However, while these letters were initially meant for private consumption, they are now public. This transformation of private to public proves for a fascinating rhetorical analysis. Additionally, Jeanne Abrams postulates that Washington, Adams, and Madison forged the position of First Lady, attempting to make it uniquely American and wholly distinct from the British monarchy from which they came (111). If we think about their attempt at making this position different from that of a European consort, then a

rhetorical analysis of their writings can illustrate their “uniquely American” discourse and define a new genre of rhetoric: First Lady rhetoric.

Four things are worthy to note here before going further. First, at the time, there was not an official term for First Ladies. While the creation of the term “First Lady” is debatable, it was first used in print in 1860. Frank Leslie’s *Illustrated Newspaper* referenced President James Buchanan’s niece, Harriet Lane (the White House hostess for her bachelor uncle), as “The Lady of the White House, and by courtesy, the First Lady of the Land” (*National First Ladies’ Library*). Second, it is important to highlight that when I speak of women in this project, I am, unfortunately, referring only to white women. Our nation was built on slavery. Each of these First Ladies and their President husbands were enslavers. Each First Lady had different relationships with the people they enslaved, but to be sure they all had them. Thirdly, I use the first names of both the First Ladies and their President husbands. Because their husbands are known by their last names of Washington, Adams, and Madison, I believe using last names could get confusing or tedious to read if I have to clarify each time I am referring to a First Lady or President. Therefore, I use all of the First Ladies’ and Presidents’ first names to avoid any confusion. Lastly, I have chosen to focus my attention on the first three First Ladies of Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, and Dolley Madison. Some may note that the irreverent Martha Jefferson is missing from this list. This is intentional, as her relation to the President is daughter, not wife. My focus is First Ladies as wives of the Presidents, which is typical of the position. There is certainly room for exploring First Ladies that are not wives of the President, but my intention is to focus on the relationship of husband-

wife. It is in this arena that I believe this study to be important and timely for three reasons.

First, there is a surprising lack of attention to these First Ladies, rhetorically speaking. Abrams is a leading scholar in the field of these three earliest First Ladies. Her book *First Ladies of the Republic* chronicles the life, decisions, and goals of Martha, Abigail, and Dolley during their tenure as First Lady. However, in this 312-page book there are only two instances where rhetoric is mentioned, and neither refers to the First Ladies' rhetoric; rather Abrams refers to the "revolutionary rhetoric of the time" (Abrams 1973). Additionally, library searches are unsuccessful when looking for Martha, Abigail, and Dolley's rhetoric. Clearly, more research is needed in this area. Much time has been spent on the rhetoric of the modern First Lady, with countless books, articles, and periodicals devoted to the subject. This research of the modern First Lady is wonderful; however, I would argue that to truly understand the rhetoric of the modern First Lady, you must first understand the rhetoric of our *first* First Ladies. Consequently, research about the rhetoric of the modern First Lady is so plentiful because of technological advances such as databases as well as their having the ability to create platforms and apolitical causes. Modern first Ladies are in the public eye in a way these first First Ladies could not have imagined. To delve into the rhetoric of the earliest First Ladies requires analyzing the discourse in their writings.

Second, our recent First Lady, Melania Trump, seems to be under much scrutiny for her rhetorical choices. From her alleged plagiarized speech of previous First Lady Michelle Obama to her "Be Best" campaign, to the coat she wore to visit the child

detention centers at the border that boasted “I don’t really care do u?” Melania appears to be roughly navigating the waters of First Lady. The few instances she has been in the public eye (most of which I have just mentioned) have been rife with criticism due mostly to her rhetorical choices (or lack thereof). How has the nation’s most notable woman come to this moment in time? How has the position of First Lady evolved into our current First Lady? These questions lead to my final point in the importance of this study: the need for a history of First Lady rhetoric.

Lastly, to understand our modern First Ladies, we must discover and define the rhetoric of First Ladies so that we can see how it has developed, evolved, and/or maintained throughout our nation’s short history. Rhetorically analyzing the documents left by Martha, Abigail, and Dolley will help to establish the beginnings of not only this position but of the country as well, revealing whether or not their rhetoric truly was “uniquely American.” Remember, these women were navigating positions during the birth of our nation. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights were brand new and being ratified when these women were First Lady. The Republic was trying to establish itself as separate from the British Monarchy, creating a democratic society instead.

The late eighteenth century in the New Republic was a time in which the newly formed colonies were attempting to separate themselves not only politically but also ideologically and practically from the British monarchy and monarchies of the ancient regime—to become something new: a democratic, constitutional, republic. As such, Martha, Abigail, and Dolley not only had to navigate the new position into which they

were thrust, but also the first existence of a modern democratic republic as well. Mary Beth Norton asserts that because the New Republic saw family, society, and state as similar institutions, the women's power in the privacy of family life could also be extended to power outside the home in politics (4). Catherine Allgor agrees that the earliest First Ladies used their unofficial roles in society to help build the New Republic and to distinguish it from European institutions (*Parlor Politics* 2).

Additionally, Abrams agrees there is a connection between private and public spheres of these First Ladies:

[There is] a need to reexamine some of our long-held beliefs about an artificial 'binary' division between the private and public spheres during their era [...] the Salon-type events that Martha, Abigail, and Dolley often hosted and guided [...] allowed women to exercise some level of public power; they helped develop a cultural unity and a distinctive American political style. (223)

Abrams vehemently argues that these "salon-type" events, or parlor parties, helped create a unity among politicians while also creating a style different from their European counterparts. These parlor parties were instrumental in creating the rhetoric of First Ladies in the New Republic. So, then, how do we go about rhetorically analyzing these works? How do we decide if their rhetoric truly is "uniquely American?"

Caroline Winterer, Stanford history professor and scholar of political thought in early America, notes that:

Between 1760 and 1800, Americans invented a new political vocabulary that described their kingless republic and its people as being or becoming enlightened.

In a burst of intellectual and lexical creativity, they began to modify a series of political terms with the adjective enlightened. In roughly their order of appearance after about 1760, nation, people, public, opinion, legislatures, statesmen, citizens, and policies all began to be described by American revolutionaries as enlightened or the product of enlightenment. (223)

If the enlightenment denotes these terms above as being “uniquely American” then analyzing the first First Ladies discourse for variations of enlightened would, in fact, prove if their discourse is separate from their European counterparts. Cluster analysis is an excellent way to conduct this discourse analysis.

One of, if not the, most influential thinker in modern rhetoric is Kenneth Burke. Burke’s new rhetoric takes ancient rhetoric of persuasion by any means necessary to identifying with the audience. In “identifying” with your audience, a speaker/writer is able to become consubstantial with them (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 21). Further, Burke applies these concepts of identification and consubstantiality to written works in his *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Burke maintains that the cluster analysis method is a qualitative way to rhetorically study discourse. In *Philosophy*, he asserts “the work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations” or “associational clusters” (20). He explains further:

The motivation out of which [a person] writes is synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values together when he writes; and however, consciously he may go about such work, there is a kind of generalization about these interrelations that he could not have been conscious of, since the

generalization could be made by the kind of inspection that is possible only after the completion of his work. (*Philosophy* 20)

It is out of this assertion that Burke's cluster analysis is created. For one to execute a cluster analysis, one can use a statistical or symbolic analysis (*Philosophy* 33). He encourages fellow cluster users to note "cues" in written works, "It is worth noting [...] a 'cue,' a hunch that puts us vaguely on the track of something" (*Philosophy* 33). Once highlighting these "cues" in a work, one can find associational clusters that can be used for all subsequent works from that author. This method is underused in the field, mostly due to Burke's lack of explicit instructions on how to conduct a cluster analysis.

However, Berthold contends, "Rueckert gives the methods of cluster [...] analysis a more usable form" (302). William Rueckert has been described as "Both student and co-conspirator" of Burke ("Letters from Kenneth Burke"). Therefore, Rueckert's relationship with Burke and subsequent explanation of conducting a cluster analysis is one of the most widely accepted. According to Rueckert, cluster analysis is done by:

Making an index and a concordance for a single work or group of works by the same author. The index is necessarily selective; one is guided by terms that are either of high intensity or high frequency [...] the concordance aims at being exhaustive; every context in which a term either implicitly or explicitly appears is listed. (84)

With Rueckert's straightforward description of cluster analysis, Burke's conception of it becomes clearer.



Burke's deployment of cluster analysis is done in a variety of ways on literary works. In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, he begins with the writings of Coleridge and admits the difficulty in examining his works using associational clusters, but believes there are advantages to using this method. He contends there are two benefits of using cluster analysis on Coleridge's writings: first, the fact that Coleridge left quite a collection of his writings, both literary and otherwise (public and private); and second, because criticism can lead to oversimplification, cluster analysis allows us to obtain an "observable simplification" (*Philosophy* 22). In thinking about these benefits, it becomes clear the use of associational clusters is beneficial. Burke looks at associational equations in Clifford Odets' *Golden Boy*. He finds that there are two symbolic oppositional principles in this play, violin and prizefight (*Philosophy* 33). Burke finds that violin is consistently used to symbolize the protagonist, while prizefight represents the antagonist. He creates associational clusters around these two notions, and in doing so, is able to use the oppositional clusters to look at other works of Odets, creating an eventual subtext of Odets and his works.

Further, Burke also uses his own method to look at the rhetoric of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Using associational clusters, Burke is able to track the path for Hitler's equations of "Aryan 'heroism' and 'sacrifice' vs. Jewish 'cunning' and 'arrogance'" equations that are no surprise to anyone familiar with him (*Philosophy* 208). One such equation is Hitler's use of international in reference to Jewish people and common enemy with Aryans. Because Hitler created Munich as the center to which all roads to an Aryan race led, he was able to label Jewish people as international and, thusly, the common enemy of

the Aryan race. It is through these clusters that Burke is able to take a toxic book like *Mein Kampf* and learn how Hitler was so successful in creating his following with the intent to “[f]ore stall the concocting of similar ‘medicine’ in America” (*Philosophy* 191).

Additionally, cluster analysis has been used by many to create pictures of works outside of the literary world. Carol Berthold uses cluster analysis on John F. Kennedy’s speeches to demonstrate its usefulness in “obtaining a more objective picture of a given speaker’s rhetoric” (302). In her article, Berthold is able to create a lucid picture of Kennedy as President using cluster analysis. Potter’s “Adopting Commodities: A Burkean Cluster Analysis of Adoption Rhetoric” uses cluster analysis to look at the societal ways in which we speak of adoption. Potter believes “Burke created the method of cluster analysis as a means to help critics explain the meaning of a term by uncovering the meanings of the terms surrounding it” (115). Additionally, several dissertations use Burke’s cluster analysis in a variety of ways as well. Elizabeth Riley Avalos uses Burke’s cluster analysis in her dissertation *Concepts of “Power” in Betty Friedan’s Rhetoric: An Application of Burke’s Cluster-Agon Method*. Here she uses Burke’s method to examine Friedan’s discourse “to determine whether her ideology and motivation have changed” (Avalos 1). Avalos’ study confirms that Burke’s method can help to determine a person’s discourse. John Sawtelle’s dissertation looks at the millennial interest of new Calvinists using Burke’s cluster analysis to identify key terms and examine how those words surrounding those terms create nuance in their meaning. These examples show that cluster analysis is a great tool to establish a rhetorical discourse for each First Lady as well as highlight what makes that discourse American.

To see if the rhetoric of Martha, Abigail, and Dolley are uniquely American, we must look at the words that surround each of the political words Winterer asserts as being modified with enlightened (223). As mentioned before, the method's intention of uncovering hidden meanings and motives of a person's words seems a clear choice in looking at the works of our earliest First Ladies. Burke claims that while an author may be "perfectly conscious of the act of writing [...] he cannot possibly be conscious of the interrelationships among" their words and actions (*The Philosophy of Literary Form* 20). Burke believes that there are serious advantages in analyzing both the public and private author because "circumstances alter occasions" (*Philosophy* 23). In other words, private events in a person's life can alter her public persona. First Ladies have the daunting task of balancing their personal and private lives to establish agency. Marilyn Cooper argues that

Agency is an emergent property of embodied individuals. Agents do reflect on their actions consciously; they do have conscious intentions and goals and plans; but their agency does not arise from conscious mental acts, though consciousness does play a role. Agency instead is based on individuals' lived knowledge that their actions are their own. As Jane Bennett suggests, 'agency is the... capacity to make a difference in the world without knowing quite what you are doing.' (451) Cooper's citing of Bennett aptly describes these First Ladies: making a difference without knowing it. For the first First Ladies, these private and public lives are memorialized in both their private correspondences to family and friends and their more public correspondences with other political figures' wives, among others. To truly use the

cluster method on the writings of Martha, Abigail, and Dolley, these writings must be analyzed according to whom they are written. Additionally, Burke's notion of the public and private allows us to discover whether or not their private and public discourses were similar or different. Was there a distinction in their public and private writings? Does one group of writings appear more American than the other? And if so, what does this suggest about the rhetorical choices these ladies made? Identifying these similarities and differences is necessary for understanding and establishing the rhetoric of First Ladies.

Admittedly, Burke may not be the obvious choice when it comes to analyzing the rhetoric of First Ladies. Some feminists find Burke abhorrent, from his exclusive use of male pronouns to his obvious white male privilege that spills from his writings (Condit 350-51). Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin's comparison of Burke's theories to those of feminist activist Starhawk reveal many boundaries and limitations of Burke's rhetorical theories for feminists. For example, Foss and Griffin assert Burke's theories come from a "rhetoric of domination - hierarchical, authoritarian systems that employ power-over [...]" Critical to the functioning of a patriarchy is a hierarchical structure that controls and oppresses the sacred" (343). For Starhawk and many feminists, domination is synonymous with patriarchy and hierarchy, making Burke's rhetorical theories theories of the patriarchy (Foss and Griffin 335). Krista Ratcliffe echoes this same rhetoric of domination when she asserts that Burke's theory: "Perpetuate[s] a centuries-long tradition of gender-blindness. So deeply entrenched in the dominant ideology are such gender biases that they appear as the natural order of things" (402). There is an obvious consensus among Celeste Michell Condit, Foss, Griffin, and Ratcliffe that Burke's

theories come from a position of privilege and male power, creating theories not conducive to feminist readings.

However, to not use Burke would be a grave disservice to modern rhetoric as he is often considered the father of it (McKenzie). Branaman maintains that theorists, “Underestimate Burke's contemporary relevance” (443). Even Foss and Griffin concede Burke has made vast contributions to rhetoric (345). Many scholars agree that Burke’s theories are foundational for new rhetoric; therefore, it is time for feminists to recast Burke to fit the times in which we reside. And a recasting seems especially relevant given that these earliest First Ladies are recasting their identities from their European counterparts.

Further, as previously mentioned, Burke’s key term is identification, and he identified with the thinkers of his time, which were mostly men. Burke’s own beliefs in identification provide an avenue for recasting, something which Phyllis Japp highlights in her own article “Can This Marriage be Saved?”:

Why can there not also be ideas that are unclear simply because we have not yet become familiar enough with the situation to take them adequately into account? Thus, when we see an object at a distance, we do not ordinarily ‘repress’ the knowledge of its identity. We don’t recognize it simply because we must come closer, or use an instrument, before we can see it clearly enough to know precisely what it is. Would not a terminology that features unconscious *repression* of ideas automatically reflect our attention form symbols that are not *repressed* but merely *remote*? (121)

Burke needs to be recast, repurposed, and updated to fit the vastly different world of more social equality we live in today. Our first First Ladies were only in the first wave of feminism at this time: gaining the right to vote. The much more radicalized second wave of feminism happened after most of Burke's seminal texts had already been published — the very texts rhetoricians still use to this day, the sacred texts of New Rhetoric. Therefore, it is time to bring Burke into the feminist sphere.

Finally, the First Lady of the United States is not an elected or paid position. While there is no categorical outline for the expectations of a First Lady mentioned in the Constitution, the role has changed and formalized throughout the years. The first three First Ladies had the arduous task of not only being in the public eye for the first time, but of attempting to define and understand the role that was bestowed on them, while attempting to make it a separate entity from their European counterparts.

## CHAPTER II

### MARTHA WASHINGTON

#### **The Letters Between George and Martha**

The pioneer of First Ladies, the woman to set all expectations of First Ladies after her, Martha Washington began her tenure as First Lady in 1789 and stayed in that position until 1797. Known at first as simply “the President’s wife,” she was beloved by the republic which she served (Washington xix). This popularity among the people is partly attributed to Martha’s support of her husband as she often joined him in the camps of battlefields during the revolution; however, she also desired to keep their relationship private. Theories state that one of George Washington’s letters to Martha was intercepted by the British and used as blackmail, threatening to publish it in the newspaper. This intercepted letter states:

You have hurt me, I know not how much, by the insinuation in your last, that my letters to you have lately been less frequent, because I have less concern for you. The suspicion is most unjust, – may I not add, it is most unkind! Have we lived, now almost a score of years, in the closest and dearest conjugal intimacy to so little purpose, that, on appearance only of inattention to you, and which you might have accounted for in a thousand ways more natural and more probable, you should pitch upon that single motive which alone is injurious to me? (qtd. in Ford 69)

Obviously, this letter does not paint a perfect picture of their marriage. Therefore, it makes sense that once George died, Martha would want to ensure their marriage was protected and private. In an attempt to achieve these things, Martha burned all correspondences between her and her husband; only five letters are known to have survived (Brady, *Martha Washington: An American Life* 1). Despite this desire for privacy, Martha left a catalog of letters for scholars to dissect and study. Joseph E. Field's *Worthy Partner* catalogs nearly all known writings to and from the first First Lady, and it is this resource I use to analyze her written documents.

The Age of Revolutions encapsulated a time when women of varying classes and ethnicities worked to change their oppressive circumstances. Specifically, women of the middle class and elite worked to change the relationships with their husbands from marriages of despotism to marriages of companionship (Moore et al. 19). Whether or not Martha was consciously aware of this desire for spousal change, she and George did have a companionate marriage, as evidenced through the few salvaged letters between them. In the only letter still in existence from Martha to George, she writes:

March 30, 1767

My Dearest

It was with very great pleasure I see in your letter that you got safely down. We are all very well at this time but it still is rainney and wett. I am sorry you will not be at home soon as I expected you. I had reather my sister would not come up so soon as May woud be much plasenter time than April. We wrote you last post as I have nothing new to tell you I must conclude myself.



Your most Affectionate

Martha Washington. (Washington 149)

The companionship between Martha and George is evident with her use of “Dearest” in the salutation and “most Affectionate” in the valediction. Also, the content of her letter expresses her gratitude that her husband is safe and insinuates missing him when she states, “I am sorry you will not be home soon as I expected.” This only known letter from Martha to George demonstrates well her affection and companionship with George. Likewise, George’s affection is reciprocated.

In all three letters from George to Martha catalogued in Fields’ compilation, as well as the more contentious Ford letter not included in Fields’ compilation, George uses the salutation “My Dearest.” This reciprocated salutation between them defines their marriage and relationship as one of love and fondness, not something seen as typical of the time. In a letter from George to Martha dated June 18, 1775, he writes: “I am now set down to write you on a subject which fills me with inexpressible concern - and this concern is greatly aggravated and Increased, when I reflect upon the uneasiness I know it will give you” (159). This awareness of the worry his wife will experience when reading his letter is not lost upon him; he appears sorry to have to deliver this news to his “dearest.” Further, several times throughout George’s letters to Martha, he lovingly refers to her as “My dear Patcy,” a nickname she received as a child (“10 Facts”).

Furthermore, the content of George’s letters also demonstrates this companionable nature of their relationship. In George’s June 18, 1775 letter to Martha, he tells her he will be in charge of the whole army for the American Cause, and that he:

“Used every endeavour in [his] power to avoid it, not only from [his] unwillingness to part with [Martha] and the family” but also from his belief that he was under qualified to do so (Washington 159). This line demonstrates two additional things about their marriage: first, that he will miss his family and Martha specifically, and second, that he showed a vulnerability to his wife in admitting to her he believes he is not qualified to be commander of the entire army; this vulnerability highlights their closeness. In a June 23, 1775 letter, George writes to Martha saying:

As I am within a few minutes of leaving this City, I could not think of departing from it without dropping you a line, especially as I do not know whether it may be in my power to write you again till I get to the Camp at Boston - I go fully trusting in that Providence, which has been more bountiful to me than I deserve, & in full confidence of a happy Meeting with you sometime in the Fall - I have no time to add more, as I am surrounded with Company to take leave of me - I retain an unalterable affection for you, which neither time nor distance can change.

(Washington 161)

In the above excerpt, George again reiterates the admiration for his wife, as he makes certain to write to her on the morning of his leaving for an unknown amount of time. He cannot fathom leaving and not writing to her before doing so. The rhetoric he uses here to show his devotion and “unalterable affection” for Martha only further proves their marriage is a loving one. Unfortunately, the last letter to have survived between them is only a short, business-like memo written October 1, 1782:

If this letter should ever reach your hands, it will be presented by Mr. Brown, - son to a Gentleman of that name in Rhode Island, from whom I have received civilities, & to whom, or his connections I could wish to make returns. - As he has thoughts of going to Virginia I recommend him to your notice and attention.

I am most sincerely & affectionately – Yrs. (Washington 188)

The straightforwardness of this letter can likely be attributed to it being a letter of introduction between Martha and Mr. Brown. However, while this letter is short and formal, George still ends it with “I am most sincerely and affectionately yours,” taking the time to, once again, show his love of Martha.

In looking at the final surviving letters between Martha and George, their rhetoric demonstrates the nature of their relationship, one of mutual respect, love, and admiration for each other. While only five of these letters remain, they provide a unique snapshot of their marriage and indicate that theirs was one of true companionship.

### **Letters from Martha**

Fields’ compilation spans from Martha’s time before becoming First Lady through her husband’s death. The letters differ in content, recipient, and what would be perceived as public and private — public being letters to officials and business-types, and private being letters to family and close friends. Martha’s rhetoric varies depending on who and why she is writing. However, to identify whether her rhetoric is uniquely American, I chose cluster terms based on what was typically seen as significant political terms of the time. From Winterer, two of these terms include *people* and *public*.

### Cluster Term 'People'

When speaking of people in this instance, I am speaking of the men, women, and children of a given nation. There are only two instances in which Martha uses people in this way before becoming First Lady, and in both cases, the term is used when writing a family member. The first instance is in a letter dated August 25, 1776 to her sister, Anna Maria Dandridge Bassett. Martha writes: "Last week our boats made another attempt on the ships up the north river - and had grapp a fire ship with the Phoenix ten muniets but she got clear of her; and is come down the river on satterday last. Our people burnt one of the tenders" (Washington 172). The next instance is in a letter to Martha's niece, Fanny Bassett Washington on February 25, 1788. She writes:

"I was very happy to hear by the Major that you arrived at Eltham without accident and that he left you very well with your friends. I hope you have continued to be so since he came away - as you know that Business is the cause of his leving you. I trust that you will endeavor to reconcile your self to his absence, as you are very sencible that if he does not attend to his affairs he will get nothing done & if his people does not make bread how will he be able to pay the taxes" (Washington 205).

In the first instance she uses our people, in the second his people, both of which refer to the soldiers in battle. Because these two examples come from letters before becoming First Lady, Martha understands the responsibility that she, her husband, and the Major have to their soldiers and armies. She claims that responsibility in the first example with our people, and then stresses the responsibility the Major feels to Fanny with his. While

these are the only two examples from her time before becoming First Lady, they speak volumes in terms of what she valued in the Republic, and how she viewed the men under her husband's command.

While First Lady in 1789, Martha uses the term people much more often. The first instance occurs in a letter to her niece, Fanny. Martha is speaking to Fanny about a head adornment (Manca) and she asserts: "No other kind of cushing are worne hear but the crape cushing, or the Hair draped like one I did not send one to you - all the genteel people say Crape cushing is not proper to send you - but I think in the country where you cannot have a hair dresser they will do very well" (Washington 215). In this example, genteel is used to describe the cluster term people, and indicates not only the people Martha believes surround her in her life as First Lady, but also highlights a tone in her rhetoric that indicates she sees herself as different from those that surround her. Unlike her usage of people in her writings before becoming First Lady, where Martha identifies with and takes responsibility for the people that surround her, here Martha is separate from those around her.

Additionally, Martha's use of people aids readers in understanding her feelings about the caliber of work being performed around her as First Lady. In two separate letters to Fanny, Martha expresses these feelings. In the first letter she writes:

Your letter of the 25th is come to hand with the ruffles - I wish you'd had them whiped - it was but little more trouble for Charlot, they cannot be sewed on the wristbands till they are whiped - she is so indolent that she will doe nothing but what she is told she knows how work should be done, - I cannot find how it is

possible for her and. Caroline to be altogether taken up in making the peoples  
cloths - if you suffer them to goe on so idle they will in a little time doe nothing  
but work for themselves. (Washington 233)

Clearly, Martha thinks very little of the work Charlot and Caroline are doing; this passage is laced with disdain for the work ethic of these women. What is most disappointing about this passage, however, is the likelihood of Charlot and Caroline being part of their enslaved workers. While I cannot know this for sure, Martha's rhetoric here does disappoint me. Further, in the second letter Martha writes: "I shall give your memorandum to the worke man in order that your furniture may be ready to send round Early in the spring that you may not waite for it there has been such a loss in the class of people that it will require some time to get work of any kind done" (Washington 256). This line is another example of how disappointed Martha is with the lack of work she sees, "There has been such a loss in class of people." Both of these passages make use of the cluster term people: the first with clusters of if you suffer and the second with loss in class. In both cases, Martha's dislike of the working people is incredibly obvious. Only when writing to her close confidant (her niece), does she make these admissions, and nowhere else does she do it again with the cluster term people.

After serving as First Lady in 1797, none of Martha's surviving writings mention people again. Often, Martha only spoke of the people when she wrote to family members. Perhaps she felt, as a woman in the early republic, she was not qualified to speak about the people in more public correspondences. Perhaps, too, Martha's interaction with the genteel, as she calls it, is not her taste. Whatever the reason, Martha's focus on the people

becomes non-existent after her time as First Lady; in her surviving writings after being First Lady, she does not talk about people in this way again.

#### Cluster Term 'Public'

Another political term from Winterer is public. In this case, I have decided to define public as doing something in view. Not surprisingly, Martha's use of this term is pretty non-existent before she becomes First Lady, demonstrating her life before becoming First Lady was out of the public eye. However, once her tenure as First Lady begins, the term is found throughout her writings with regularity, and oftentimes, the term is laced with a certain disdain that reaffirms her dislike of having her life in the public eye.

The first instance of public being used in Fields' compilation is in a letter from Martha to her nephew, John Dandridge. Dated April 20th, Martha writes:

I am truly sorry to tell that the General is gone to New York, - Mr. Charles Thompson came express to him, on the 14th - when, or wheather he will ever come home again god only knows, - I think it was much too late for him to go in to publick [sic] life again, but it was not to be avoided, our family will be deranged as I must soon follow him. (Washington 213)

In looking at the words that surround public in this instance, the phrases too late and life again stand out and appear to show Martha's hesitance and reluctance to go into public life; she readily shares this info to someone from her private life, her nephew. Likewise, this dislike of public life is shared quite often with her niece, Fanny Bassett Washington. In a letter to Fanny dated October 23, 1789, Martha speaks of a Mrs. Sims as being an

authority on what is fashionable. She writes: "Mrs. Sims will give you a better account of the fashions than I can - I live a very dull life hear and know nothing that passes in the town - I never goe to the publick [sic] place - indeed I think I am more like a state prisoner than anything else" (Washington 220). Later, in that same letter, Martha goes on to say that much of her happiness in the world is due to her family and that public life will likely not fulfill her: "I do not say this because I feel dissatisfied with my present station - no, God forbid: - for everybody and everything conspire to make me as contented as possible in it; yet I have too much vanity of human affairs to expect felicity from the splendid scenes of public life. - I am still determined to be cheerful" (Washington 224). Martha clearly does not see public life as being inherently cheerful, thus demonstrating her rhetoric to show some dislike of her position. In another letter to Fanny, Martha writes to console her regarding Fanny's husband's death, Major George Augustine Washington. She writes: "[The President] would have written to you by this post but is so pressed at this moment by public business that it is not in his power to do it" (Washington 244). Here, public is surrounded by phrases like so pressed and not in his power; the clusters here reiterate the negative feelings Martha has with her public life. This passage conveys a general loss of time that her husband experiences as President, and likely, a loss of time with her. It makes sense she would be resentful of the public.

In a response to Janet Livingston Montgomery's letter, wife of Revolutionary War General Richard Montgomery (Curtis), Martha writes to apologize for taking so long to write her back, welcome her home after Janet's trip to Europe, and express regret for not seeing her before Martha left for Mount Vernon. Martha writes: "I have been so long



accustomed to conform to events which are governed by the public voice that I hardly dare indulge any personal wishes” (Washington 230). Here, Martha’s use of public is preceded by governed, insinuating a lack of freedom her public persona faces. In her May 25th, 1794 letter to Fanny, Martha writes to tell her she wishes she could help Fanny settle into her new home but that, “The President tells me the Publick [sic] business will keep him in town all summer [...] so I must endeavor to content my self as well as I can Hear” (Washington 265-6). President Washington’s public business, in this case, is yet another thorn in Martha’s side. When looking at the examples to Fanny in the above paragraph, Martha portrays the President and his wife as extensions of the nation, not individuals. And, if you consider the rule made the first year of George’s presidency about the President and his wife having no personal life, we are seeing the after-effects of this firsthand in Martha’s writings. This same public business pops up just a few days later in another letter from Martha to Fanny. She writes: “It would be particularly pleasing to me to come home this summer if it was convenient the President thinks that the public business will keep him in this place all summer - and it would not be agreeable to me to stay at mount Vernon without him” (Washington 267). Clustering around public in this example is not agreeable and keep him in place, two phrases that use public in a negative light. In looking at the several instances Martha shares her dislike of being in the public view, she readily states this, often, to her close family members; but does she express this dislike to people outside the sphere of personal contacts?

Martha’s letter to Mercy Otis Warren, a political writer of the time among other things, on December 26, 1789 echoes this idea of being surprised her husband is going

into public life so late, as mentioned above in her letter to her nephew John Dandridge. She writes: "I little thought when the war was finished, that any circumstances could possible have happened which would call the General into public life again. I had anticipated, that from this moment we should have been left to grow old in solitude and tranquility together" (Washington 223). In this passage, Martha does not blatantly state her contempt for public life, but the undertones of the phrase, left to grow old in solitude and tranquility suggests to Mercy Otis Warren she sees public life as crowded and noisy.

Further, Martha's letter to Catherine Littlefield Greene Miller, the wife of American Revolutionary War general Nathanael Greene, begins Martha's realization that public life as she knows it may be coming to an end, "The winter has been very severe here, and upon the whole;" Martha wrote: "but it is now moderating and drawing to a close, with which the curtain will fall on our public life, and place us on a more tranquil theater" (Washington 297). Martha's aptly used theater metaphor simply paints public life as a chapter of her life that is to end, much like a theatrical performance; this example does not illustrate her disdain of public life as do her previous letters to family members. Additionally, she uses tranquil again to describe life outside of the public eye, reiterating her preference for a private life. Typically, Martha is very careful in her use of words when describing public life to public cohorts and less so with private ones. However, not until George Washington's death in 1799, does she bring up, in a letter to John Adams, public life to a public official and for the last time. As you can imagine, this grieving widow was not any fonder of public life during that trying time.

John Adams writes Martha a letter on behalf of Congress (Washington 328) where he expresses Congress's desire to place George's remains under a marble monument at the City of Washington. Knowing Martha and her probable hope for returning George to Mt. Vernon, her reply to John Adams solidifies her contempt for public life:

While I feel with keenest anguish the late Disposition of Divine Providence I cannot be insensible to the mournful tributes of respect and veneration which are paid to the memory of my dear deceased Husband - and as his best services and most anxious wishes were always devoted to the welfare and happiness of his country- to know that they were truly appreciated and gratefully remembered affords no inconsiderable consolation. Taught by the great example which I have so long had before me never to oppose my private wishes to the public will - I must consent to the request made by congress - which you have had the goodness to transmit to me- and in doing this I need not - I cannot say what a sacrifice of individual feeling I make to a sense of public duty. (Washington 332)

Martha's use of private wishes and public will show the dueling forces she always had to navigate. Further, her use of sacrifice and public duty work to drive home her incredible dislike of having to deal with her public life while enduring the loss of her husband. This letter to John Adams may be the first real instance of Martha revealing to a more public figure her utter hatred for public life. I think it is safe to say, in this instance, Martha's grief overtook her sense of public duty but only in her tone and word usage; she still acquiesced to Congress' wishes.

Public life is thrust upon Martha without much say because women during this period did not have a voice against their husbands' wishes. For Martha, the result is a life she appears to tolerate, though only to her most trusted. This resistance against public life is barely noticeable to outsiders and just another example of how Martha maintains decorum as First Lady. Revered by the public she wishes to hide from, Martha understands that in her position, duty to country comes before personal preference.

#### Martha's Terms for George Washington

As husband and wife, and as a couple that was extremely devoted with a companionable relationship, Martha's terminology for George is not as one might expect. Interestingly, Martha's terms for her husband only change when his position within the republic changes; there is no distinction made in correspondences considered private correspondences and others considered more public figures. Before becoming President, Martha refers to George as the General to everyone she writes. To sister Anna Maria Dandridge Basset, Martha writes, "The General myself and Jack are very well" (Washington 167). To friend Mercy Otis Warren, she states, "The General joins me in offering our respectfull compliments" (Washington 178). To brother Bartholomew Dandridge, Martha writes, "The pore General is not likely to come see us" (Washington 180). To Doctor David Stuart, "The General has had a letter sometime agoe from Brussels" (Washington 197). Each of these examples represent correspondence to men and women, as well as correspondences classified as public and private, and in each case, Martha calls her husband General. In many ways, this choice to call her husband by his societal role is very similar to how royals address each other in public. Therefore, this

decision to call him General could be an indicator of a rhetoric that is not separate from their European counterparts.

Further, once George Washington is elected President in 1789, Martha refers to him as such to every person she writes. In addition, President is one of Martha's most commonly used words in all of her writings, alluding to a focus of her letter content to be on her husband. For example, Martha writes to Fanny, "I set out on Monday with Mrs. Morris and her two daughters and was met on Wednesday morning by the President Mr. Morris and Colonel H at Elizabethtown" (Washington 215). Here, the key term of *President* is used for her husband George. Presumably, a letter to a family member would be less formal. However, Martha not only uses President, but she uses President with a capital 'P'. In both cases, her use of General and President appears to set a standard of her husband to whomever she is writing; in using this consistent terminology for her husband, Martha sets a societal, albeit patriarchal, norm for how men in power should be referenced.

Only after George's death in 1799 (and after her term as First Lady) does Martha refer to him as her husband. Specifically, in letters written to men she references him as her "dear *deceased* husband" (Washington 332 and 339) and in letters written to women, she refers to him as her "dear *departed* husband" (Washington 336). The euphemistic use of departed for her dead husband assumes a more palatable delivery to women. Martha's use of departed reiterates the gender normative language of the time. Unfortunately, Martha reinforces this belief with her rhetoric. At no other point in this collection of writings does Martha refer to him as her husband. Additionally, nowhere in the collection

does she call him George, either. While the choice of terms Martha chooses to call George are both consistent in usage and odd by today's standards, Martha's focus to call him by his position or title to every person she writes solidifies and reminds people of his position and power. Also, choosing to call him by his position reinforces the new democratic language emerging from the New Republic.

### **Terms NOT Found in Martha's Writings**

The revolutionary rhetoric of the time included terms like "reason, liberty, and justice" (Moore et al. 4). These revolutionary terms often found in the feminist writings of Mary Collier, Susanna Wright, and Mercy Otis Warren are not found anywhere in the writings of Martha Washington. Further, terms dubbed as political such as nation, opinion, legislatures, citizens, and policies are not only found sparsely throughout her works but are also not tied with any variation of enlightened (Winterer 223).

Interestingly, Tobias Lear served as George Washington's personal secretary during his presidency, and after George's death, Lear served Martha in a similar capacity, as many of her letters at this time are penned by Lear himself. This change in authorship becomes obvious as Lear (a man) uses terms Martha (a woman) never did. For example, none of Martha's penned letters makes use of the term nation regarding the United States. However, Lear's letters written for Martha do. One such example exists in a letter to Reverend Samuel Miller, a reverend who delivered a sermon inspired by the late George Washington, on January 27, 1800. Lear writes:

Mrs. Washington has received your letter of the 14th [...] she requests me to present her best thanks for your goodness in sending her a copy of your

performance, which she shall read with great Satisfaction. - And while she sees, with grateful sensibility, the numerous evidences of the warm affection and high veneration in which the dear deceased partner of her heart was held by our nation, she receives, with a feeling heart, the offerings of sympathy made to herself.

(Washington 345)

Lear's use of nation demonstrates the male advantage of being concerned with the nation as a whole. Martha never refers to the United States as a nation, reaffirming her matriarchal position in a patriarchal society; Martha's letters show a woman concerned with women's work and issues: family, home, devotion to partner. Martha is not concerned with (or, more likely, not allowed to be concerned with) the nation; therefore, nation is not in her vocabulary. Furthermore, Martha's term for nation appears to be people, a word that personalizes the population while Lear's term depersonalizes the population. Martha may have detested public life, but she did see individuals rather than a general whole.

Other republican and political terms Winterer identifies simply do not exist in Martha's letters. These include:

Policy	Rights
Equal	Politics
Republic	Represent
Independence	Civil
Legislature	

The terms above could arguably be viewed as outside of a woman's scope. Maybe the absence of these terms in Martha's writings show she was not interested in policy and the republic. However, the likely answer is that the absence of these words shows how little she was involved and a subsequent gap in the female representation in the New Republic. Further, the lack of representation of these typically republican words also shows Martha's complacency in her position as a woman, as a partner and helpmate to George whom she wants to be near; she does not challenge the status quo by inserting herself into issues deemed men's work, such as creating the practices of a new nation.

### **Closing**

While women were working to make their writing incredibly public during this time (Moore et al. 26), Martha worked to make hers as private as possible, and unknowingly started this idea of First Lady decorum in an age of revolution. While most of Martha's writings demonstrate a clear line of what she offered to family and close friends and what she offered to more public officials, this ability to edit for her distant audiences created a normative rhetoric of not only the position of First Lady, but of Washington federals as a whole. Amidst war and chaos, Martha's rhetoric created the First Lady rhetoric of civility and stability, as civil life was seen as a given and normal.

Martha's letters show a woman who was resistant to the public life into which she was thrust. She had no role model as First Lady; rather, she created the position and laid the foundation on which all First Ladies after her would follow. Martha's restraint in her letter writing created a restrictive rhetoric that further demonstrates the patriarchal standards by which she had to abide. Further, Martha's surviving letters show little



rhetorical differentiation among who she wrote and what she shared. In sum, Martha was a private person whose rhetoric reveals the way she resisted the public position she held. Further, Martha's rhetoric also does not appear to be overtly "uniquely American," and this could most likely be due to the republic as a whole trying to establish themselves as a democratic government. Just as Martha worked to understand her role as the republic's first First Lady, so, too, was the republic trying to establish what their democracy would look like.

Martha's resistance to her public life as First Lady leads to questions for other First Ladies — do First Ladies after her suffer from this same dislike of public life? Do other First Ladies have a consistent rhetoric like Martha? Does the First Lady after her, Abigail Adams, follow Martha's lead in a rhetoric of decorum and civility? Luckily, analyzing documents left by First Ladies immediately following Martha can be done in a similar manner, as the next two First Ladies mostly left behind letters, too. Therefore, to establish a First Lady rhetoric, the next two First Ladies are analyzed in the same manner.

## CHAPTER III

### ABIGAIL ADAMS

Abigail Adams, our nation's second First Lady from 1797 to 1801, was undoubtedly influenced by her predecessor, Martha Washington. Edith Gelles comments that "Abigail loved Martha [...] when she wrote about Martha, it was in the most glowing terms" (Gelles "First Ladies"). While these two women had very different personalities both strove to distinguish themselves from the Queen (Allgor, *Parlor Politics* 74). While the office was thrust upon Martha, Abigail had the differing experience of having been the Second Lady while her husband was Vice President. Because of her time as Second Lady, Abigail was not a complete novice when she became First Lady (Abrams 1723).

#### **The Letters Between Abigail and John**

While Martha and George Washington's letters did not survive Martha's need for privacy, Abigail and John's letters did, though, there are many instances when Abigail asks John to destroy her letter, to which he replied: "The Conclusion of your Letter makes my Heart throb, more than a Cannonade would. You bid me burn your Letters. But I must forget you first" (qtd. in Hogan). Thankfully, John did not follow Abigail's wishes, and now the 1,160 letters reside at the Massachusetts Historical Society (Hogan).

If women of the middle and elite class from the time were working to change their marriages from despotism to companionship (Moore et al. 19), Abigail and John exemplified this notion. During their courtship, John often referred to Abigail as "Miss Adorable" (Hogan and Taylor 4), while she frequently used the salutations "My Dear"

and “My Friend.” Additionally, the content of their letters often shows a real love and friendship between the two. In an early letter dated October 4, 1762 to Abigail, John writes:

By the same Token that the Bearer hereof satt up with you last night I hereby order you to give him, as many Kisses, and as many Hours of your Company after 9 OClock as he shall please to Demand and charge them to my Account [...] I presume I have good Right to draw upon you for the Kisses as I have given two or three Millions at least. (qtd. in Hogan 4)

This letter, dripping with adoration and admiration, shows John’s desire for Abigail. Abigail reciprocates this feeling in a letter dated April 16, 1764: “Adieu, evermore remember me with the tenderest affection, which is also borne unto you by your - A Smith” (Adams 17). However, Abigail and John’s letters not only show an intimate companionship, but they also demonstrate John’s regard of Abigail as one of his most trusted confidants (Gelles “First Ladies”).

In what is probably Abigail’s best-known letter, “Remember the Ladies,” she writes a letter to husband John on March 31, 1776, 13 years before she would hold the Second Lady office. This infamous text of Abigail’s demonstrates well the relationship between Abigail and John. She writes:

In the new Code of Laws [Declaration of Independence] which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such limited power into the hands of Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if

they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion [sic], and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation. That your sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. (qtd. in Hogan 92).

Gelles asserts that this letter not only shows the honesty in John and Abigail's relationship but also her ability to take such a controversial issue and joke about it when she says, "the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion [sic]" (Gelles "First Ladies"). Abigail's rhetorical awareness is astounding in this piece: she gets her "remember the ladies" in the Declaration of Independence point across, while also still understanding her position as a woman in revolutionary times. And, while we know the Declaration of Independence, in fact, did not remember the ladies, Abigail did let her position be known to her husband. This letter illustrates the kind of close relationship Abigail and John had.

As John's presidency looms, and even into his tenure, John and Abigail still refer to each as "My Dearest Friend." However, the content of these letters changes to a tone of conflict they both feel about the possibility of holding the highest offices in the land. On January 5, 1796, John writes to disclose the news of George Washington leaving the office:

I have this day however heard News that is of some Importance. It must be kept a Secret wholly to yourself. One of the Ministry told me to day that the President

was solemnly determined to serve no longer that the End of his present Period [...] Mrs. W. said one thing to me lately which seemed to imply as much [...] You know the Consequence of this, to me and to yourself. Either We must enter upon Ardours more trying than any ever yet experienced; or retire to Quincy Farms for Life [...] I will not be frightened out of the public service nor will I be disgraced in it. (qtd. in Hogan 398)

This passage shows two things: first, the conflict John is feeling about the office as he states he will not be driven by fear, but that he also will not be disgraced either. Second, this passage also shows the trust John has in his wife while he tells her this secretive news and trusts her to keep it “wholly to herself.” Abigail’s response to John shares his concern:

Some communications in your Letters are a source of much anxiety to me [...] the Event you request me to contemplate is of so serious a Nature that it requires much reflection and deliberation to determine upon it. There is not a beam of Light, nor a shadow of comfort or pleasure in the contemplation of the object. If personal considerations alone were to weigh, I should immediately say retire. (Adams 401)

In this letter, Abigail appears to be on the same page as John, as she understands that “personal considerations alone” are not all that can be factored into the decision of running for office. The many more letters that follow as John and Abigail work to discuss becoming President and First Lady show a rhetoric of consistency toward each other: that of a couple who are close, loving, and respectful of each other’s opinions and endeavors.

Interestingly, no letters between John and Abigail exist after their time as President and First Lady; once their service was over in 1801, they were together for the remainder of their lives. And even as Abigail became sick and died in 1818, John was by her side. His reverence and love for her never wavered as noted in a letter to son John Quincy Adams: “Your Letter of the Second is all and no more than all that I expected. Never was a more dutifull Son. Never a more Affectionate Mother. Love to your Wife. May you never experience her Loss. So prays your Aged and afflicted Father” (Adams 479).

### **Letters from Abigail**

Edith Gelles has edited an extensive collection of Abigail’s letters in *Abigail Adams: Letters*. In this compilation, Gelles selected 900 of Abigail's letters, deciding to show varied contexts in which Abigail writes (Abigail and John: Portrait of a Marriage). Similar to Fields’ compilation of Martha’s letters, Gelles has organized these letters into four sections: Courtship and Marriage, Vice President’s Lady, First Lady, and Retirement. For this collection, I have categorized the letters as letters to private women, letters to public women, letters to private men, and letters to public men. Oftentimes, the letters to private women include her sisters, daughter, daughter-in-law, etc. Letters to public women include more public figures like Mercy Otis Warren (poet, playwright, and activist) and Martha Washington. Letters to private men are mostly to her husband and sons, while letters to public men include politicians and officials like Thomas Jefferson and Richard Rush, running mate of her son John Quincy. With these varied audiences it makes sense, then, that Abigail’s rhetoric varies, too. This rhetoric not only varies

according to her audience but also according to her position at the time as well. Abigail, unlike Martha, has an additional category to look at: being the Vice President's Lady, or Second Lady as I refer to it here.

#### Cluster Term 'People'

Like people in Martha's chapter, people here are defined as the men, women, and children of a particular nation. In this collection of letters, Abigail uses people roughly 250 times; therefore, it would be impossible to cite every instance in which she uses it. Instead, this analysis covers the correspondents (that fit in the categories of private female, private male, public female, and public male) in which she most often uses the term.

Throughout most of Abigail's life, she frequently writes to her sister, Mary Smith Cranch. Before becoming Second Lady, when Abigail wrote to Mary, she often referred to "this people" or "that people." Examples include:

Letter dated July 26, 1784: "We were admitted with a ticket, this assembly was very full and crowded. Yet no Children or Servants are admitted. In Short I begin to hope that this people are more Serious and religious than I feared [sic] they were" (Adams 294).

Letter dated July 28, 1784: "This is a magnificent Building belonging to a company of that people, to which is attached a most Beautiful! Garden, to walk" (Adams 298).

Letter dated September 12, 1786: "I have been led to a more particular reflection upon this subject from my late visit to that Country. The respect, attention civility

and politeness which we received from that people, where ever we went, was a striking proof not only of their personal esteem, but of the Ideas they entertain with respect to the Revolution” (Adams 400).

The use of this and that demonstrates to readers that before becoming Second Lady in 1789, Abigail spent some of her time speaking of societies other than America, which makes sense given the revolution that was happening. Additionally, her choice to pick out “this group” or “that group” comes off a little uncouth (at least by today’s standards) and unedited. However, once Abigail becomes Second Lady, her rhetoric to Mary changes.

Oftentimes in her letters to Mary as Second Lady, Abigail speaks of “the people”:  
Letter dated January 5, 1790: “The common people who are very ready to abuse Liberty, on this day are apt to take rather too freely of the good things of this Life” (Adams 477).

Letter dated August 29, 1790: “I will hope that I may come next summer, and be a Border with you for some months if we should let our House if the people you mention are responsible and worthy people I should have no objection to letting it to them with the furniture the best carpet & china & Glass tho not much excepted” (Adams 486).

Letter dated April 20, 1972: “I hope we shall reach Home safe [...] from the failure of many of the richest people there [...] I was mortified to See our worthy Friend stand so low on the list of senators who I had been accustomed to see stand foremost, but such is the Instability of the people” (Adams 508).



In these letter excerpts above, people is often tied to adjectives like common, responsible, worthy, and richest. Abigail's use of the implies her not taking “ownership” of them as their Second Lady; if so, she would use “our people.” This shows a lot about Abigail's subconscious feelings of navigating the never-seen-before position of Second Lady, because let us not forget, Martha Washington was the first First Lady, but Abigail Adams was the first Second Lady. Nevertheless, Abigail did not yet see herself as someone leading her people.

As First Lady in 1797, Abigail's rhetoric about people does not seem to change in the passages below:

Letter dated May 24, 1797: “Speculation in Property, in politicks [sic] and in Religion have gone very far in depraving the morals of the higher classes of the people of our Country” (Adams 571).

Letter dated June 6, 1797: “The Man must have lost his senses. I cannot say that I did not utter the expression, because it has always been my opinion that the people would not be wilting to support two ministers” (Adams 573).

Letter dated November 15, 1797: “Ben Bache is as usual abusing the President for forceing the respect from the people [...] That it is a corrupt mass of Jacobinism, Quakerism and abominationism, I will most readily admit, but at the same time there are many worthy and respectable people here. (Adams 589)

The numerous instances of the people (many of which are not mentioned here) insinuate Abigail, as First Lady, is still of the same mindset with regard to the people of the U.S. as she was as Second Lady. There are no letters to Mary where people are mentioned during

Abigail's retirement. Therefore, in looking at the transition from before becoming Second Lady to her time as First Lady, Abigail's rhetoric only slightly changes from this/that people to the people.

Abigail also wrote her other sister, Elizabeth Smith Shaw, and frequently mentioned people in those letters, too. However, her use of it to Elizabeth is quite different before becoming Second Lady:

Letter dated July 29, 1784: "They are Buisness folk, worthy good people, make no pretentions to fine living, but are of the obligeing Hospitable kind" (sic, Adams 302).

Letter dated December 14, 1784: "As to the Regimin for people of weak lungs; he advices to Milk light food fruits &c and to riding even long journeys to a voyage at sea" (sic, 327).

Letter dated August 15, 1785: "I shall never have much society with these kind of people, for they would not like me, any more than I do them. They think much more of their titles here than in France. It is nor unusual to find people of the highest rank there, the best bred and the politest people" (362).

In the above passages, people is not associated to any one thing, with words like good, for, kind of, find, and politest all used directly before it. Because of this, it seems that before becoming Second Lady, Abigail shared differently with Elizabeth. Not to mention, all of these words preceding people do not appear to have much of a negative connotation tied to them. In some cases, her references are positive. In others, negative.

Abigail does not mention people to Elizabeth again until she becomes First Lady.

In a single letter, Abigail mentions people three times:

Mr. Marshal whose arival you will have learnt, Says that the Directory have been deceived with respect to the people of this Country. not from any regard to our Rights and Liberties would they have restrained their Hands but from Interest. Interest, as they want our trade, they would have acted a different part, but swain with pride at their victories, imperious, haughty, and vindictive, they hold us in too much contempt to retract from a single demand which they have made, or receed a single Step, the pomp, expence and parade which the Directory assume and exact, is much greater than that, of any crownd Head and more oppressive to the people ten fold than the Court of Verssails ever was [...] The President you may easily Suppose has a very arduous task, nor is it probable that it will be lighter. he has had an accumulation of Buisness in replying to the numerous addresses which have kept him at his pen three Hours in a day, upon an average for 5 or 6 weeks past. He has more than 30 at this moment unanswerd. Tho a gratefull and pleasing employment as it assures him of the approbation, confidence and Satisfaction of the people in his conduct and administration. (sic, Adams 636-7)

Each time, Abigail refers to “the people,” much like she did when she wrote to Mary as Second and First Lady. This rhetoric appears to stay consistent when Abigail writes to private females during her time with official titles like Second and First Lady.

Unlike her letters to Mary, Abigail writes to Elizabeth and speaks of people during her retirement in the excerpts below:

Letter dated July 10, 1811: “She is frail feble and panting, recovers very slowly, is Short breathd, and cannot walk or move without loosing her Breath. her Mouth is better, her appetite was good as we could expect, and as fancyfull as sick people usually are” (sic, Adams 825).

Letter dated November 8, 1811: “Here they would find too much time for play and my Family is not calculated to keep Such Children in. various work people with whom they will occasionally mix, and learn what is improper, cannot be avoided” (845).

Letter dated February 26, 1815: “The intelligence from new orleans, of the total defeat of the British forces, with the circumstance of Such Slaughter amongst the assailants, and Such unheard of protection of our Troops, ought Surely, by every Moral and Religious people, to be ascribed unto that Being, unto whom we pray” (sic, 891).

Abigail’s rhetoric in these letters appears to revert to how she wrote Elizabeth during her time before becoming Second Lady. This reversion signals Abigail’s leaving the position of First Lady behind her.

After looking at Abigail’s rhetoric to private women, her rhetoric to men who would be deemed private is also necessary. The first and most obvious place to start in this regard is with her husband. We know that Abigail wrote to John quite often, so it

stands to reason that she references people many times in her letters to him. Before becoming Second Lady, Abigail writes:

Letter dated September 14, 1774: “The people are much allarmed” (sic, Adams 31-2).

Letter dated September 16, 1774: You have heard no doubt of the peoples preventing the court from setting in various counties [...] The People in the Country begin to be very anxious for the congress to rise” (34-5).

Letter dated June 18, 1775: “The Spirits of the people are very good” (49).

Letter dated July 12, 1775: “The people have the highest opinion of Lees [sic] abilities, but you know the continuation of the popular Breath, depends much upon favorable events” (57).

Letter dated October 21, 1775: “The people are already slaves, and have neither virtue or spirit to help themselves or us” (74).

As with the letters to her sisters, Abigail’s use of the people to John shows how Abigail feels separate from the people to which she refers. With the letters being written before becoming Second Lady, it makes sense for her to feel somewhat disassociated. The distinction she makes is clear, as there are a couple times Abigail refers to people as our people:

Letter dated May 24, 1775: “Our people landed upon the Island, and in an instant set fire to the Hay which with the Barn was soon consumed” (Adams 45).

Letter dated June 25, 1775: “When we consider all the circumstances attending this action we stand astonished that our people were not all cut of” (sic, 50).

It is interesting to see when Abigail decides to show the people of the Republic as her people with our. In the above passages, she uses our to take ownership of those to which she refers. However, she uses the much more often than our. Further, before becoming Second Lady, Abigail also uses valiant to describe people to John a couple of times:

Letter dated July 5, 1775: "Danger they say makes people valient" (Adams 53).

Letter dated October 21, 1775: "I hope by degrees we shall be innured to hardships and become a virtuous valient people" (74).

Abigail does not use valiant until writing to John, never using the word in letters to her sisters. In considering the meaning of valiant (showing courage or determination), she clearly alters her rhetoric to appeal to a male in this case, as courage and determination are considered more manly attributes, especially at this time in history. Abigail slightly changes her rhetoric for her male audience in other instances as well.

As Second Lady, Abigail continues her use of the people in her letters to John:

Letter dated May 1, 1789: "I think there is much of the old leaven in the New Loaf 'I dare not lay a duty upon salt, the people will not bear it, I dread the consequences to the people' is a language to teach the people to rise up in opposition to Government, the people would bear a 5 pr ct duty upon every article imported, & expect as much, but will grumble perhaps at the duty upon molasses" (Adams 462).

Letter dated March 26, 1794: "The body of the people are decidedly against War, and if a War is madly or foolishly precipitated upon us, without the union of the people, we shall neither find Men or Money to prosecute it" (519-20). "The

people without are willing to wait the result of Negotiation as far as I can learn, and in the mean time we ought to prepare for the worst” (520).

Her abundant use of the people to John during her time as Second Lady demonstrates a focus on society while simultaneously dissociating herself from them, as, in many of these instances she could have just as easily used our people. As Second Lady, Abigail only uses our to John once, and it is in regard to the weather:

Letter dated January 4, 1795: “An inclement week we have not much to relate in the way of Buisness- getting wood, and some attentions at home, have occupied our people this week we want Snow. to day we have a heavy Rain mixt with sleight & snow” (sic, Adams 525).

Abigail’s use of our in this case almost comes off as motherly; she tells John they are each experiencing very different business. Because she only writes letters to him when he is away, she reports back to him with a connection and understanding of their collected people by using our.

Additionally, Abigail's use of the people seems to filter over into her time as First Lady as well. She writes:

Letter dated January 28, 1797: “It is my firm belief that if the people had not been imposed upon by false report, and misrepresentations, the vote would have been nearly unanimous” (Adams 558).

Letter dated February 8, 1797: “And now O Lord my God thou hast made thy servant Ruler over the people” (561).

Letter dated March 12, 1797: “They are ready to think that the President is more impartial Man than they were taught to believe, and that the opposition and Secret machinations and intrigues of certain Character arose altogether from knowing that the Man whom a majority of the people wishd to succeed the President, was too independent in his Sentiments to receive controul” (sic, 566).

Letter dated February 21, 1801: “The People of this city have evidently been in terror” (726).

This persistent and consistent use of the solidifies Abigail's feelings about the body she represents: she is separate from them and takes no ownership of them. She does not see them as her people, ever. However, this fact does not mean Abigail thinks little of the people of the republic. And, in fact, in a letter to John once he has been elected President, Abigail writes a prayer for John's time as President:

Letter dated February 8, 1797: “Give unto him an understanding Heart, that he may know how to go out, and come in before this great people, that he may discern between good and bad, for who is able to judge this, thy so great People? That you may be enabled to Discharge them with Honour to yourself, with justice and impartiality to Your Country, and with satisfaction to this Great People Shall be The Daily prayer of your A Adams” (Adams 561).

At no other point in her letters to John does Abigail refer to great people. Her choice in words here leads me to two conclusions: first, that she wants to reassure her husband that the body of people he presides over are great, and second, that she only really speaks about people in this way when speaking to God after an election her husband won.



Generally speaking, at least to private people in her life, Abigail does not often speak of the people as great.

Because Abigail and John spent the remainder of their days together after leaving their posts as the First Couple in 1801, there are no letters to him in their retirement. It would be interesting to see how she refers to society to her husband in retirement. We could probably assume it would be similar to how she referred to it in her letters to Elizabeth; however, Abigail's letters to her son John Quincy gives us a look at her letter writing of society in retirement to a private male.

Abigail's letters to John Quincy span each major era of her life: before becoming Second Lady, her time as Second lady and First lady, and in her retirement. This vast time span of letter writing gives a clear picture of Abigail's rhetoric when writing about people to her son. Before becoming Second Lady, Abigail writes:

Letter dated January 19, 1780: "Yet it is your Lot my Son to be an Eve witness of these Calimities in your own Native land, and at the same time to owe your existence among a people who have made a glorious defence of their invaded Liberties" (Adams 163)!

Letter dated November 13, 1782: "You cannot reside amongst a people, without learning Something of their Laws customs and Manners" (237).

Letter dated November 28, 1786: "Common sense and plain reason will ever have some general influence upon a free people" (406).

Here, Abigail uses a people when writing to John Quincy. This use of a with people is new in her writings to private people and comes off as almost theoretical in nature.

Abigail speaks to her son not of a certain group of people but an imagined group.

However, there is a drastic change in her rhetoric when she officially takes office as Second and First Lady.

As Second and First Lady, Abigail almost exclusively uses the people when writing to her son, though something seen as “uniquely American” does finally appear in a writing by a First Lady. As Second Lady, Abigail writes:

Letter dated September 15, 1795: “The President by a wise and cool and judicious reply to the Boston committee, appeared to allay the Ferment for a Time. several Learned and able pens have been engaged to vindicate the Treaty & enlighten the people” (sic, Adams 536).

Letter dated May 20, 1796: “8 or 9 weeks were spent in this poor business untill the people took the alarm, and in the course of a few weeks the table of Congress was covered with petitions from all parts of the union [...] Now the people have with one voice call'd upon the Representatives to fulfill the Treaty [...] The feelings of the people were wrought up to a crisis” (sic, 538-9).

Here, Abigail writes about a specific group of people, the people, to John Quincy. In switching her rhetoric to focus on a specific group of which she takes no ownership, Abigail is clear about her feelings of this group, not to mention, using the sounds much more formal, which makes sense given her new position as Second Lady. However, with regard to a “uniquely American” rhetoric, Abigail also uses enlighten when speaking about the people. As Second Lady, her choice to use enlighten instead of something like

inform or tell demonstrates a possible subconscious move on her part to align with the revolutionary rhetoric of the time.

As First Lady, Abigail's rhetoric is similar when writing to her son in the examples below:

Letter dated November 3, 1797: "It is the allarm [sic] the Jacobins took at it, but this did not lessen the confidence of the people who value and esteem you for what they know you are [...] The taste and inclination, of one, who through Life, has avoided every kind of show and parade; is now obliged to submit to the *Will of the people*" (Adams 585). "Where the sincerity of the Actors rendered it peculiarly interesting, and proved to me that the people will Love & respect their Chief Majestrate [...] That Nation will find itself deceived if they consider the nearly equal divission [sic] of votes at the Election of Chief Majestrate. as a criterion of the voice of the people the people wish for peace" (586).

Letter dated March 29, 1798: "The people are daily becomeing more firmly decided, and united" (608).

Letter dated April 21, 1798: "Real Americans who have been deceived, and beiray'd [sic] by falshood, and deception, are the mass of the lowerclass of the people" (617)

Letter dated May 26, 1798: "The people are much higher toned than their Representatives in the National Legislature" (626).

It is clear when looking at the passages from her letters to John Quincy as Second and First Lady that Abigail is consistent in her rhetoric about people. She considers society the people a group with which she appears to be disassociated.

In her retirement from public service, Abigail's rhetoric in regard to people is inconsistent when writing to John Quincy:

Letter dated September 13, 1801: "Mrs Adams is going to a place different from all she has ever yet visited, and amongst a people, where it will be impossible for her to be too gaurded" (sic, Adams 737).

Letter dated January 5, 1812: "I confide in the good sense and intelligence of our people to support the National Government" (854).

Letter dated December 30, 1812: "Altho a great Clamour has been excited, and British Partizens have been active in fomenting it, yet the great Body of the people are united (sic, 860).

Letter dated February 10, 1816: "Good people cannot think alike, even upon importent Subjects" (sic, 919).

Here she uses a, our, the, and good with people. This inconsistency does not appear anywhere else and is a testament to Abigail's guard being down when writing to her son and her many feelings about her connection to the society she represented for so long. She is clearly less aware of how she writes to John Quincy, making this set of passages from her letters appear almost as a stream of consciousness, a version in which she is candid in her thinking.

Abigail's rhetoric appears to alter slightly throughout her letters to private figures like her sisters, husband, and son. When it comes to public women and men, her rhetoric is similar to that of private people. Abigail writes political writer Mercy Otis Warren before becoming Second Lady and as First Lady. She states:

Letter dated February 25, 1774: "When I consider the Spirit which at present prevails throughout this continent I really detest that restless ambition of those artfull [sic] and designing men which has thus broken this people into factions" (Adams 29).

Letter dated February 3, 1775: "She who has been the envy of nations will now become an object of their Scorn and abhorance, and as it was said of Rome that she governd other people by her will but her own by Law, they now behold her governd herself by will, by the Arbitrary Will of the worst of her own citizens, and arrived at that period which has been foretold when the people co-operateing with the Enimies of the constitution by Electing those to represent them who are hired to betray them" (sic, 40).

Letter dated January 1776: "The Eyes of every one are more perticularly upon that assembly, and every notion of every member is inspected, so that he can neither be dropped nor resign without creating a thousand Jealousies in the minds of the people" (sic, 81).

Letter dated May 10, 1785: "But no Man or body of Men can Merit the sacrifice of the Liberties of a people for the aggrandizement of them or their families" (351).

Using this, other, the, and a to describe people shows an inconsistency in how she refers to people when writing to a public female. This observation could signify a closer relationship with Mercy than I previously assumed, as we saw this kind of inconsistent pattern with her son John Quincy, too. As First Lady, Abigail writes:

Letter dated March 4, 1797: “For your Congratulations upon a late important event, accept my acknowledgments, considering it as the voluntary and unsolicited Gift of a Free and enlightned [sic] people” (Adams 564).

This marks the only time Abigail identifies people as enlightened, the term that Winterer asserts is used to modify political terms to create a “uniquely American” rhetoric (223). This term also solidified what the New Republic was doing at the time (breaking from tradition to form individualism). This choice of term from Abigail as First Lady to a public female like Mercy promotes this agenda and rhetoric of the New Republic.

As Second Lady, it seems appropriate to include a letter from Abigail to First Lady Martha Washington. In this letter she writes:

Letter dated June 25, 1791: “The people instead of murmers & complaints, expresst [sic] themselves happy and satisfied under the administration of their Government” (Adams 499).

Here, Abigail uses a formal the people to the First Lady. Knowing how often Abigail uses the with people, it makes sense that she would continue this separateness from the larger population in her letter to Martha.

There are few public men to which Abigail writes about people. One of the few is Elbridge Gerry, a diplomat to John Adams. She writes and says:

Letter dated January 20, 1781: “When I looked for your Name among those who form the Representative Body of the people this year I could not find it” (Adams 202).

Not surprisingly, Abigail uses a simple the people to Elbridge. To a public male figure, it makes sense she would indicate the separateness between herself and the people. Another very public male figure Abigail pens is Thomas Jefferson. Before becoming Second Lady, she writes:

Letter dated June 6, 1785: “The celebration of Handles Musick had drawn together such a Number of people” (Adams 352).

Letter dated January 29, 1787: “Instead of that laudible Spirit which you approve, which makes a people watchfull [sic] over their Liberties and alert in the defence of them, these Mobish insurgents are for sapping the foundation” (416-7).

In both cases she uses a people for the same kind of imagined group of people she creates for son John Quincy. Before becoming Second Lady, Abigail consistently uses a before people to men, though she does not seem to discern its use among private and public men. However, she does not use a with women, no matter their relation to her. This could signify her desire to unknowledgeable of an actual group of people to men before becoming Second Lady. In her retirement, Abigail writes about people to Thomas Jefferson one more time:

Letter dated October 25, 1804: “Time Sir must determine, and posterity will judge with more candour, and impartiality, I hope than the conflicting parties of our day, what measures have best promoted the happiness of the people” (Adams 756).

True to form, she uses a simple “the people” when referencing the people of the republic once her tenure as First Lady is over.

#### Cluster Term ‘Public’

Of the terms searched for this cluster analysis, public is one of Abigail's most commonly used terms in her letters being found roughly 200 times. Although Abigail would not serve in an official public capacity until her husband became Vice President in 1789, because of his work as a constitutional lawyer, revolutionary, and his many appointments to diplomatic matters, Abigail experienced being in the public eye from the start of their relationship. Therefore, while Martha Washington was propelled into public life when she became First Lady in 1789, Abigail was accustomed to it. Chapter 2's analysis of Martha Washington's use of “public” uncovers Martha's negative feelings associated with the word. So, then, the questions arise: Did Abigail share these feelings about public life, and if so, how and when did she share those feelings? Were her feelings conscious or subconscious about public life?

Not surprisingly, Abigail's letters do not use public until after her marriage to John in 1764. Because scholars tell us that Abigail was probably most candid with John than anyone else in her life, to uncover her true feelings about public life, analyzing her letters to him will be the most telling. In August of 1774 she writes, “I wish you every Publick [sic] as well, as private blessing” (Adams 31). The clustered terms around public here are wish and blessing. Obviously, in this instance, we read Abigail's use of public as positive and hopeful. However, in a letter dated just two months later, Abigail writes:



Many have been the anxious hours I have spent since that day-the threatenng aspect of our publick affairs, the complicated distress of this province, the Arduous and perplexed Buisness in which you are engaged, have all conspired to agitate my bosom, with fears and apprehensions to which I have heretofore been a stranger, and far from thinking the Scene closed, it looks as tho the curtain was but just drawn and only the first Scene of the infernal plot disclosed and whether the end will be tragical Heaven alone knows. (sic, Adams 35-6)

As if the content of this passage was not enough to read negatively, words like anxious, threatening, and complicated distress make her feelings in this case glaringly obvious, that public life for Abigail is menacing, at least at this moment in time.

In her 1775 letter titled “Meeting General Washington,” Abigail writes: “I have seen your Letters to Col. Palmer and Warren. I pity your Embaresments. How difficult the task to quench out the fire and the pride of private ambition, and to sacrifice ourselves and all our hopes and expectations to the publick weal” (sic, Adams 57), using sacrifice to demonstrate what she and John have to do for the public. In Abigail’s “Our House is an Hospital” she states: “Tis a melancholy time with us. I hope you will not think me in the dismals, but publick [sic] and private judgments ought to be noticed by every one” (65) using private and public together alongside judgements. In “Benjamin Franklin” she writes: “I have been led to think from a late Defection that he who neglects his duty to his Maker, may well be expected to be deficient and insincere in his duty towards the public” (77). While the content of this appears pleasant enough toward public, cluster analysis tells us that looking at deficient, insincere, and duty tell us something about Abigail's

subconscious with regard to the public. Further, her writings to husband John go on to use terms like weight, risk, immersed, burden, and hazards (sic, Adams 109, 138, 154, 205, 214) when referring to the public. While there are a few instances of more positive, affirming words associated with the public, such as a letter she writes to John in August of 1774: “I wish you every Publick [sic] as well, as private blessing,” overall, Abigail’s honest and private writings to John before becoming Second Lady show a woman who, similar to Martha, did not enjoy the pressures of public life (29). This trend carries throughout Abigail’s writings as her position in the public eye advances.

In May of 1789, Abigail’s letter to John while he is in New York talks about how she believes John must be missing his “own bed & pillows, [his] hot coffee and full portion of kien” (Adams 466). Understanding his missing the comforts of home, she goes on to say: “How many of these little matters, make up a large portion of our happiness & content, and the more of publick [sic] cares & perplexities that you are surrounded with, the more necessary these alleviations our blessings are sometimes enhanced to us, by feeling the want of them” (466). Here: “public cares and perplexities” insinuate a heaviness Abigail associates with public life. Then, just days after becoming First Lady she admits to John: “My mind has ever been interested in publick [sic] affairs I now find, that my Heart and Soul are, for all that I hold dearest on Earth is embarked on the wide ocean, and in a hazardous voyage” (567). Likening her husband's Presidency to a “hazardous voyage” very clearly indicates Abigail’s thoughts on public life: a risky and unsafe journey.

Throughout the collection of Abigail's letters to John, she remains consistent and steadfast in her rhetoric of and toward public life; she found it hard, taxing, and (mostly) undesirable. We can deduce this because these letters to John, herself appointed closest confidant, never waiver in these sentiments. Performing this cluster analysis of public among the letters of Abigail and John show a hesitant Abigail, and her other letters solidify this hesitancy toward public life.

Moving beyond letters to John, yet still staying within what would typically be considered private letters to family and close friends, Abigail speaks often of public life and expectations. The first instance of a letter written to a private female family member before she becomes Second Lady in which Abigail writes about public life is to her cousin, Hannah Quincy Lincoln Storer in March of 1778: "I have sacrificed my own personal happiness and must look for my Satisfaction in the consciousness of having discharged my duty to the publick" (sic, Adams 133). Here is the cluster term of duty, once again, attached to public. Not only does the cluster analysis uncover this sense of obligation Abigail feels about public life, but the content reads very honest about the burden Abigail feels regarding public life, even before officially becoming a public figure like Second and First Lady. Interestingly, most uses of public to women whom she was close before becoming Second Lady describe buildings, service, and entertainment. For example, she tells her sister, Mary Smith Cranch: "We spend no evening abroad, make no suppers attend very few public entertainments or spectacles [...] and avoid every expence which is not indispensable" (320-1). Here, public appears to be a simple descriptor with

no insinuated commentary attached. This use of public is seen many, many times to close female family members before becoming Second Lady.

As Second Lady, Abigail's use of public to female family members does not change much. In a letter to daughter Abigail Adams Smith, she writes:

A powerful motive for me to remain here during the absence of your Father is the necessity there is that such care and attention should be paid to our affairs at home as will enable us to live in an humble state of independence whenever your father quits public life which he daily becomes more and more anxious to do. You, my dear daughter, must know that nearly thirty years of the most active part of your father's life have been devoted to the service of his Country- the pecuniary emoluments of which have never permitted him to live equal to the stations in which he has been placed nor by any means equal to what as a private gentleman with his professional abilities he would have attained if he had not been called into public life. (Adams 533)

Here, both uses of public insinuate an exhaustion with public life with cluster terms such as anxious and called into; additionally, called into creates a feeling of being in the public eye as unavoidable or not freely chosen. Further, Abigail's admission to her daughter that her husband, the Vice President of the United States, is anxious to quit public life is eye opening. Overall, as Second Lady, there appears to be less commentary to private females about her dislike for public life.

Shortly after becoming First Lady in 1797, Abigail writes Mary, her sister, about journalist Benjamin Bache and his newspapers. Bache often attacked the administrations

with conspiratorial ideologies of George Washington and John Adams with the British (Hogan). Understandably, Abigail detested the papers, and in this letter to Mary wrote: “For a long time they [the newspapers] seem as if they were now desperate-The wrath of the public ought to fall upon their devoted Heads” (Adams 620). Here, public is clustered to wrath and provides a subconscious commentary of what Abigail sees is capable of the general public — wrath. This one line is telling, and one of the most honest accounts of public life to a female family member since before becoming Second Lady. This strong feeling about the public while First Lady does not seem to be an isolated case either. In a letter to her other sister, Elizabeth Smith Shaw Peabody, Abigail speaks of her children and future grandchildren’s lives and believes they will be “Encompassed with innumerable public Care’s” (677). The content of this passage is one of public support and reads favorably. However, simply analyzing her use of “encompassed” is quite revealing of her feelings about the public, feeling surrounded by them. There are numerous examples of Abigail’s using public in similar ways throughout her service as First Lady to females close to her.

In her retirement, overall, public is not as regularly used by Abigail in her letters, and understandably so. She mentions public affairs in a letter to her daughter-in-law, Louisa, when speaking of her worries about her son, Louisa’s husband: “I am not a little concernd for the Health of my dear son. The cold weather used to brace him up-but I learn from his Friends at Washington that he looks pale, thin, and slender. - I know his anxiety upon the State of our public affairs will wear him, and harrass his mind I wish he had less reason for it” (sic, Adams 766). Once again, even in retirement, Abigail views

the public as wearing and harassing. Similarly, in another letter to Louisa, Abigail states: “We are all in pretty good Health. I cannot add Spirits. The aspect of public affairs throughs a gloom over the approaching Spring” (779). She likens public affairs to gloom, a very obvious dislike of the public life from which she still suffers. Later, Abigail writes to Louisa’s mother, Catherine Nuth Johnson, and says: “My old Friend judge Cushing is dead. he is happily released from infirmities which were increasing upon him, and which had deprived him of his public usefulness and personal comfort,” clustering deprived and useful with public (803). Abigail appears to have an evolution where she is fairly honest before becoming Second Lady, then seems to shy away from honesty as Second Lady and ends as if she is almost empowered as First Lady to be honest to those female family members again. In retirement, she does not appear to have many inhibitions when it comes to her feelings about the public and public life.

With regard to her use of public to female figures outside of her family and friends before becoming Second Lady, Abigail, like Martha Washington, wrote poet and playwright Mercy Otis Warren. Additionally, Mercy appears to be the only public female figure Abigail writes before becoming Second Lady. In one instance Abigail writes: “I had it in my heart to dissuade him from going and I know I could have prevailed, but our publick affairs at that time wore so gloomy” (sic, Adams 111). Clustering terms of prevailed and gloomy, two words seemingly at odds with one another, are present. Later, Abigail continues: “Many unfortunate and prosperous events have taken place in our publick [sic] affairs since I had the pleasure of seeing or writing you” (111). With unfortunate and prosperous clustered around public, there are again two words that

appear to be competing with each other. This kind of duality in her rhetoric appears to even out her feelings of public life and is not really as present in her writings to female family members, so one could assume she is being cautious to a degree with her more public audience of Mercy. It is not until a later letter written in 1777 to Mercy that Abigail appears a little more open and honest: “O my dear Friend when I bring Home to my own Dwelling these tragical Scenes which are every week presented in the publick papers to us, and only in Idea realize them, my whole Soul is distress'd” (sic, 125). The use of tragic and distressed demonstrates a heavier feeling towards the public from Abigail to Mercy, with no competing word to even out these feelings. While a handful of letters exist in which Abigail wrote to Mercy as the First Lady and even into retirement, those letters do not mention public anywhere in them. It appears, at least when it came to Mercy Otis Warren, that Abigail was not interested in speaking about public life to a non-family member female once she became prominent in the public eye.

While Second Lady, the only female non-family member Abigail writes mentioning the public is First Lady, Martha Washington. Abigail says: “I am happy to learn by your Letter as well as by the publick accounts that the President has enjoyd his Health during his Arduous Southern Tour” (sic, Adams 499). Here there appears to be a more jovial tone associated with public, with happy and enjoyed, even though arduous can be found later in the sentence.

During her time as First Lady, Abigail writes to her daughter-in-law’s mother, Catherine Nuth Johnson. Catherine teeters on the line of a private family member and a

public friend, as she and Abigail are not technically related, but could still be seen as family. In a letter dated January 19, 1800, Abigail writes:

I have to acknowledge the receipt of Letters from you; and I have mentiond to the president your communications. It would give him pleasure to aid or assist your family by any means in his power, consistant with the public trust which he holds. The late president laid it down as a rule that during his administration he would not appoint any person to office connected with him by the ties of Blood, from this rule I believe he never departed. I could not however think it one of his best rules-very great delicacy ought undoubtedly to be preserved by every person holding a public trust. (Adams 675)

Public is used twice in this passage, and in similar ways, with trust following right after in both instances, and terms such as consistent, undoubtedly, and preserved preceding. As First Lady, Abigail uses these affirming terms tied to public when speaking to Catherine. In her retirement, Abigail writes to Catherine several times. In a letter written in 1810, she says: "My old Friend judge Cushing is dead. he is happily released from infirmities which were increasing upon him, and which had deprived him of his public usefulness and personal comfort. he leaves behind him a fair and honorable Character" (803). With deprived being used before competing terms usefulness and comfort the subconscious message of public here is a less positive one as the previously mentioned use. Abigail's more forthcoming feelings about the public come to Catherine after her time as First Lady. This observation reflects Abigail's guarded nature as First Lady, and her more honest feelings in retirement.



The only other instance worth mentioning in which Abigail references public to non-family and friendly females happens before becoming Second Lady, in a response to Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay, an English Whig republican historian who wanted to talk about the revolution in 1774. Abigail speaks of the inaccurate belief that there is “confusion and disorder” among the people of American during this time and writes:

Tho there are but a few who are unfeeling or insensible to the general calamity, by far the greater part support it with that firmness, that fortitude, that undaunted resolution [...] that they are engaged in a righteous cause in which they fear not to ‘bare their bold Breasts’ [...] Altho by the obstruction of publick justice, each individual is left at a loose, to do that which is right in his own Eyes. (sic, Adams 38-9)

Interestingly, the term public is surrounded by both obstruction and justice. To properly analyze this use, it appears the entire phrase “obstruction of public justice” must be clustered together. Since an obstruction of justice is a crime in a federal court, public in this case seems to have a negative connotation, and to a woman to whom Abigail had no family or private ties. Overall, in looking at public versus private females, Abigail appears to be more comfortable speaking frankly with private females and less so with public.

As mentioned earlier, Abigail is very forthcoming with her negative feelings toward public life to husband John. So far, John appears to be the only person in her life with whom she is honest. Following her husband with regard to males to whom she is close, the next logical analysis should be done on her son and future President of the

United States, John Quincy Adams. While there are several letters from Abigail to John Quincy before she becomes Second Lady, none of them mention the public or public life. As Second Lady, she writes him a letter in 1790 and states: “You will see by the publick papers that we are destined to Philadelphia, a Grievous affair to me I assure you” (sic, Adams 482). Not only is the content of this passage laden with dislike, but her use of grievous asserts the same sentiment. Later, in 1792 she writes to John Quincy that: “We ought to considering our publick [sic] Character, yet it is much of an Egyptian task, and fall some times much heavier upon me than my state of health will bear” (501). This passage rings familiar with the passage preceding it; the content of this sentence refers to the burden of public life, but she also uses heavy to explain the weight of the burden. Later in the same letter, Abigail says: “When we are to meet again, is in the Bosom of futurity The col & Family embark for England in the March Packet, not in a Publick capacity, but under such advantageous private contracts” (sic, 502). The most fascinating part of this passage is not her use of public, though she still insinuates her dislike for public life. Abigail’s use of private and the term advantageous connected to it. This is the first instance in which she clearly identifies the preference of privacy; she infers this throughout, but here it is very clearly stated.

As First Lady, Abigail writes to her son a lot and oftentimes mentions the public. While some of her mentions of public involve using it simply as a descriptor (e.g., public papers or public securities), there are several instances in which it goes beyond descriptor. In 1798, Abigail writes to her son: “You judge and think so accurately respecting the affairs of your Country, the conduct it ought to take, preserve and mantain,

that every Syllable you write, ought to be made publick. I hope and trust that you will not be dissappointed in the final result” (sic, Adams 650). Abigail’s use of hope alludes to her uncertainty about the public reaction to her son’s words; however, she also adds trust which actually gives the public the benefit of the doubt. This excerpt reads a little more favorably to the public, but that change is due less to the public’s comprehension and more to do with how amazing she finds her son. Later in that same letter, Abigail speaks about the distance between her and John Quincy’s father. She remarks: “The Seperation from your Father this Winter is a trial to me more severe I think than formerly [...] we wish the few years remaining to us might be Spent together, but I early learnt the lesson of sacrificing to the publick” (sic, 652). Abigail’s use of sacrifice here is not the first time she has used it. It appears Abigail truly believes their service to country and, subsequently, the public is a sacrifice; this belief clearly shows Abigail’s dislike for life in the public eye. This is not to say she does not find the service important, but she does find it disagreeable as it seems to cost her things she enjoys. Further, in a letter to John Quincy in 1799, Abigail states:

I relinquish the prospect of speedily folding him [his brother Thomas] to my Bosom, in the hope of his being able to solace and entertain his Father, deprived as he is, of every other branch of his Family, he will experience a double pleasure from his Society, he wants that comfort, and relief encompassed as he is with public cares and perplexities as well as a share of private anxiety for the Health of your Mother, which is still feeble. (656)

This passage about Abigail's other son Thomas to John Quincy not only has negative words clustered around public, such as cares and perplexities, but also shows to infiltration of the burden public life has on her children as well. Here, Abigail describes a child of hers as fighting public cares and private anxiety demonstrating the true duality of their public and private personas. This kind of revelation is uncovered by Abigail to her son, creating a very honest and frank statement about public life to a male close to her. She briefly refers to this idea of public versus private life to John Quincy again in 1800: "As I then advised you to go, I now advise you to return Six years is a period full long enough for a Man at your age to remain separated from all those with whom he is here after to take a part, whether in private, or public Life, It is too long to be parted from those who have but a short lease [sic] of Life remaining to them" (Adams 696). While there is less of a commentary on public and private life here, it still shows Abigail's acknowledgement and openness to her son that these two different worlds exist for him. Additionally, later in this same letter, Abigail refers to her husband's health: "Your Father enjoys good Health and bears all this bustle with that calm Philosophy which conscious integrity imparts; he will not voluntarily quit his Station at this critical time. if he is releasd the concequences to the public will not lie at his door" (700). Although consequences is clustered with public, in this instance Abigail demonstrates a worry for the public, as she still found public service important. The commentary this excerpt provides is that Abigail cares about the public people, even though she is resistant to public life.

A year later, in 1801, John Quincy receives another letter from mother, Abigail, this time concerning Brother Charles. She writes: "I came to this city with a heavy Heart; in daily expectation of his death, which took place on the first of december; my Residence in this City, has not Served to endear the World to me, to private and domestick Sorrow, is added a prospect of publick Calamity for our Country. the Spirit of party has overpowerd the Spirit of Patriotism" (sic, Adams 721). First, Abigail's admittance that she is left to private and domestic sorrow shows us, once again, the disparity of her public and private discourse. Also, Abigail's choice of calamity immediately following public demonstrates two things: first, that she subconsciously connects these two words together, and second, that she fears the public will encounter a disaster. However, what follows, "Spirit of party has overpowered Spirit of Patriotism" is another commentary of what she sees transpiring among the public with obvious major dislike of it. This entire passage reads as someone who feels it is necessary to cast herself in solitude as she mourns while also worrying about the public. It is later in this same letter that Abigail reveals a truth to her son, a close male. She writes: "I expect to take a final leave of this City next week, and I turn to Quincy; could I be assured that the remainder of my days might be passed in Peace and quietness, I should have reason to rejoice in a liberation from public Life" (722-3). Never was a sentiment clearer than Abigail's hope for "liberation from public life." Abigail's rhetorical choice of liberation, a word that literally means being free from imprisonment, and not some other watered-down verb shows the magnitude of her feelings about public life.

In her retirement, Abigail's letters to her son take a similar tone as her time as First Lady. In 1801 she writes: "Think not that I view the aspect of public affairs through the medium of dissapointment [sic] unhappily for our Country, you will find it all too true" (Adams 737). Interestingly, the content of this passage reassures John Quincy that she does not find public affairs a disappointment. Here, those clusters would include disappointment and unhappy. Her intent with this example is to sort of praise public service, while her hidden feelings show her dislike of it. Later, in 1804, she says:

You observe in a Letter to your Father, that you had an apparent Stiffness of temper [...] I have accounted for it from Several causes one your having resided abroad during such critical periods as you witnessd both in Holland and England. you were obliged in your public capacity to be constantly upon your gaurd, that nothing improper escaped you either in words or looks. (Adams 759)

Here, terms such as obliged and guard, as well as the general content of this passage, speak to Abigail's feelings about public life and the demands it creates on a person's temperament. This excerpt shows she believes her son's short temper is due to having to be restrained in public; this fact is shared privately with her son and, again, reiterates this burden she feels about public service.

Later in her retirement, Abigail writes to John Quincy about the burning of Washington, and says the "general destruction of the public-I cannot enumerate--to the sons of the Fathers who fought & Bled to obtain independence it belongs to inquire" (Adams 886). The content of this passage comes off as concern, but in looking at the cluster term of destruction tied to public, it is easy to see with Burke's assertion of

looking at subconscious thoughts how this could have double meaning and be construed as negative. This is especially true when thinking about all the previous evidence about Abigail's feelings of public life. In one of the last instances in which Abigail writes to John Quincy and mentions public, she writes, "I will not add to your anxieties, enough of which you must experience, both public & domestic" (946). The cluster term of anxiety is tied to public, but what is more interesting about this passage is that Abigail, once again, recognizes the duality of public versus private life for her son. After looking through all of Abigail's correspondences to her son throughout her time in the public eye, she clearly trusts her son with a similar brevity as her husband; her rhetoric and discourse does not change much throughout her time as Second Lady, First Lady, and even into her retirement. Abigail appears open, honest, genuine, and relatable with her son, understanding his plights in politics as well as public and private life.

Before becoming Second Lady, there are a few instances in which she writes to men of a more public nature about public life. James Lovell, a statesman, is one of those men. In one of the first instances where Abigail writes to James, she says: "I know Sir by this appointment you mean the publick [sic] good, or you would not thus call upon me to sacrifice my tranquility and happiness" (Adams 129). The cluster term of good is attached to public, so it would be easy to infer she is attaching positive sentiments with public. However, the content of this message is clear, when she later mentions he calls upon her to sacrifice her tranquility and happiness. It would be easy to cluster the term, in this case, sacrifice with public to show her true feelings. And what is more interesting, is Abigail's willingness to outright state to a man of a more public nature her honest

feelings toward public life. Later she writes James about her husband and says, “God grant him a safe return, and that in future he may retire from publick life” (sic, Adams 157). Clustering retire with public does not necessarily have any kind of underlying connotation; however, in just reading the content of this passage, Abigail is clear about being ready to be out of the public eye. In a final instance of a letter from Abigail to James, she writes: “You Query why Portia has not written to you as usual. The real reason was that she was perplexed. The character which she supposed she had in former times corresponded with, was that of a Man of Honour in publick and in private Life” (sic, 215-6). This is yet another example of Abigail's highlighting public versus public life. Clearly, when writing to James, she made this distinction often, though not with as much candor as she does with her husband and son.

There are only two other public men she writes and mentions the public to. In a letter to Elbridge Gerry, diplomat to John Adams, she says: “In a publick [sic] Society where they mean to Confer an Honorary Distinction, such things as these ought to be attended to” (169). Clustered terms such as honorary and distinction appear to shine no negative light on public life in this instance. Later, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, she writes, “Whilst I am writing the papers of this day are handed me from the publick [sic] Advertiser” (353). Again, this passage is devoid of any kind of commentary from Abigail about the public and public life.

Once Abigail becomes Second Lady, there is only one instance where she mentions public in a letter to a male outside of the family, and that is to statesman



Elbridge Gerry again. In this particular letter, Abigail references public a staggering four times. The letter reads in part:

You Sir have been too long conversant in publick Life and full well know ‘the pangs and Heart acks’ to which it is subject not personally to mix commissiration with your congratulations, at my Time of Life, the desire or wish to Shine in publick Life is wholly extinguishd, [...] I fully agree with you in Sentiment as it respects the Election of mr Jefferson [...] I presume he would conduct with wisdom and prudence, and the Jarring parties become harmonized the union Strengthened & cemented more firmly than if mr Pinckney Should be Elected whose pretentions as a publick Man certainly will not balance those of mr Jeffersons The Gentleman you alluded to as an active Agent in the Elections, has no doubt his views and designs [...] a Gentleman not heard of beyond the State which gave him Birth untill sent upon a publick embassy, and certainly not particularly distinguishd by any Series of Services to his Country. (sic, Adams 547-8)

Here, words like pangs, heartaches, extinguished, pretention, and distinguished can be found in clusters around public. None of these terms show favorability to public life. To the contrary, they suggest Abigail's insistence that “the desire or wish to Shine in publick [sic] Life is wholly extinguishd” sending the clear message that any desire she had to be in the public was now completely gone. This is especially ironic considering her time in the public eye at this time had really only begun.

Not surprisingly, as First Lady, Abigail does not mention the public or public life to men of a public nature. Once in retirement, Abigail writes to Thomas Jefferson again: “The two Gentlemen who held the offices of secretaries, when you became president were not of this Character. They were appointed by your predecessor nearly two years previous to his retirement. They were Gentlemen who had cordially co-operated with him, and enjoyed the public confidence” (sic, Adams 750). Later in this same letter she writes: “If the chief Majistrate of a Nation [...] permits his public conduct to be influenced by private Resentment [...] is he not answerable for the influence which his example has upon the manners and morals of the community?” (751). Here, Abigail comments on the dichotomy of public and private life to Jefferson. In another letter to Jefferson regarding Abigail’s son, John Quincy’s, appointment, she states:

“Party spirit is blind malevolent uncandid, ungenerous, unjust and unforgiving. It is equally so under federal as under democratic Banners, yet upon both sides are Characters, who possess honest views, and act from honorable motives, who disdain to be led blindfold, and who tho entertaining different opinions, have for their object the public welfare and happiness” (Adams 753).

In this case, clustered terms such as welfare and happiness surround public. These clustered terms do not appear to demonstrate the loathsome feeling she has toward public life.

There are two more instances of Abigail referring to public to public men in her retirement. In a letter to James Madison, she writes: “The outfit and sallery allowed by Congress, for a public Minister; is altogether so inadequate to the Stile, and Manner of

living, required” (Adams 801). The term inadequate is clustered here with public, an unfavorable subconscious opinion made by Abigail. In one of her final letters to a public man, Abigail writes to Richard Rush, the 8th Attorney General, and running mate of John Quincy. She says:

“Mr Adams is now subjected to the mortification of being obliged to take a small house in a Country Village, near the City [...] he cannot receive, nor notice his own Country Men, who carry introductory Letters to him from all parts of the United States, with that hospitality which a public Minister ought to Sustain and be able to offer” (Adams 920).

The almost derogatory use of sustain with public speaks for itself. In her final letter to Rush she writes in a postscript: “Since I finishd this Letter I have Seen the correspondence between mr Barbour and mr Clay, and the debate in Senate I have no further observation to make. it is before the public. they must judge” (934). Here, *judge* is used with *public*, and as such, clearly articulates Abigail’s feelings about what the public does: judge.

## **Closing**

After considering Abigail's correspondences among private persons, such as her husband and son, and public persons, Abigail divulged honestly and openly to her husband and son. She pulls no punches in speaking about her dislike and discomfort with the public and public life. Mind you, she does not come off as unfeeling and uncaring toward the public. Quite the contrary in fact. However, she is clear about her dislike for being in the public eye, both consciously and subconsciously. For the most part, though,

when it came to writing to men of a public nature, she seemed to stifle this distaste a little more, though not entirely. Overall, as expected, Abigail was more forthcoming in her private correspondence with both men and women than she was with her public correspondences. Additionally, her two-time use of enlightened with political terms also suggests a start to a uniquely American rhetoric for First Ladies.

## CHAPTER IV

### DOLLEY MADISON

In her most notable letter to her sister, written while British forces were descending upon Washington, Dolley Madison informs her sister of the things she is packed so she can flee Washington when the troops arrive, among those things, the portrait of President George Washington:

Will you believe it, my Sister? We have had a battle or skirmish near Bladensburg, and I am still here within sound of the cannon! Mr. Madison comes not; may God protect him! Two messengers covered with dust, come to bid me fly; but I wait for him. . . . At this late hour a wagon has been procured, I have had it filled with the plate and most valuable portable articles belonging to the house; whether it will reach its destination [...] Our kind friend, Mr. Carroll, has come to hasten my departure, and is in a very bad humor with me because I insist on waiting until the large picture of Gen. Washington is secured, and it requires to be unscrewed from the wall. This process was found too tedious for these perilous moments; I have ordered the frame to be broken, and the canvass taken out it is done [...] And now, dear sister, I must leave this house, or the retreating army will make me a prisoner in it, by filling up the road I am directed to take. When I shall again write you, or where I shall be tomorrow, I cannot tell!! (Madison "August 23, 1814")

First Lady scholar and historian Edith Mayo asserts that Dolley is aware of her legacy and place in history; informing her sister of saving Washington's beloved portrait is a conscious decision on her part to make sure people know she saved it (Mayo "First Ladies"). Undoubtedly, Dolley Madison's recognition of her place in history affects all of her writings, and it is for these reasons her rhetoric is a complex but important item to analyze to understand First Lady rhetoric.

While typically considered the nation's fourth First Lady from 1809 to 1817, Dolley Madison is the third First Lady to actually be married to the President, as Martha Jefferson, who filled the role during the nation's third President, was the daughter of President Thomas Jefferson. As it happened, with James Madison as his Secretary of State, President Jefferson often called upon Dolley to aid Martha with First Lady duties in the White House. Therefore, Dolley was not entirely new to the position when the official title was bestowed upon her. When the Madisons moved into the President's House, they were tasked with balancing a national capital that Anti-Federalists were beginning to view as a "rising monarchy" with a republic for and by the people (Allgor *Parlor Politics* 56). For Dolley, it was important to her to find her own unique style that blended "ideological and abstract ideals" into a working reality for the people of the New Republic (54). As such, Dolley's efforts in creating a house that could both host government business and national dignitaries while also being a home in which families could live was successful, "The White House became a focus for visitors of all nationalities and all classes. This period marks the beginning of the American people's identification with 'their' house" (Allgor *Parlor Politics* 63). Dolley's awareness of this

balance for a physical space like the President's House demonstrates the likely awareness she had with her own position as First Lady, resulting in a rhetoric that had not yet been seen from other First Ladies.

While Martha Washington set the standard as a social partner to George Washington, and Abigail Adams set the standard as the political partner of John Adams, Dolley is the first to bring these two standards together to become both the social and political partner of President James Madison (Mayo "First Ladies"). Dolley is the first First Lady to set the standard for the modern First Lady in terms of charitable causes and organizations that were important to her ("First Lady Biography: Dolley Madison").

### **Letters Between Dolley and James**

Similar to the previous two First Ladies, Dolley had a close loving and companionable relationship with her husband, James. In the first extant letter to James from Dolley on October 23, 1805, when James is Secretary of State, she writes, "A few hours only have passed since you left me my beloved" and later closing with "Adieu, my beloved, our hearts understand each other - In fond affection thine" (Madison). This repetition of "my beloved" can be found in many of her letters to her husband, denoting a marriage of not only love but fondness, too. Likewise, James reciprocates this sentiment in a letter dated October 28, 1805 where he refers to her as "my dearest" and ends with "With unalterable love I remain [yours]" (qtd in Shulman). Oftentimes, James' letters to Dolley refer to her as his "dearest" and end with a statement of his unwavering love for her. Not only do these letters between them use tender names and demonstrate fondness, but the content also shows a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

In the same letter from James to Dolley, James writes:

Dr. Willis has signified to Gooch, that he wishes if we should not load the waggon ourselves on its return from Washington, to provide a conveyance for some of his furniture and will with that view contribute a pair of horses to the team. May I not assent to this arrangement, without inconvenience to our own plans? (Madison “October 28, 1805”)

James’ checking in with Dolley regarding their plans shows the respect he has for his wife, their marriage, and their life together. In Dolley’s reply she says: “You consult me on the subject of Dr. Willis’s request, which I should assuredly comply with—I do not know as yet what we have to send home, but I shall be ever desirous to oblige Nelly and every other of our connexions” (Madison “October 31, 1805”). Dolley’s mention of “You consult me” demonstrates a respect that the two shares with regards to life in government. The second half of that quote above speaks volumes of Dolley’s attitude as First Lady, but this is discussed in further detail later. However, the letters between the two of them throughout his time as Secretary of State demonstrate a love, respect, and trust both in their rhetoric toward each other, and the openness and honesty they share.

After James’ time as Secretary of State, he became President and, subsequently, Dolley became First Lady. In looking at their collection of letters, only a few exist during her time as First Lady, and they are all from James to her. In the first letter dated August 7, 1809 he begins with “My dearest” and ends with “Be assured of My constant affection” (Madison). Then in another letter, dated just two days later, he uses “My dearest” again (Madison “August 9, 1809”). These examples demonstrate that their



relationship is still affectionate. However, not having letters from Dolley to James during her time as First Lady is unfortunate. In a private correspondence with Dolley Madison scholar Holly Schulman, I asked about the lack of letters during this time. She responded: “The answer is simply that they were never apart.” Here is where these First Ladies start to have a departure in their First Lady experience. While Martha and Abigail have letters to their husbands during their tenure, Dolley does not, showing the political climate of the time. Presidents before Madison often led business elsewhere without their wives while James and Dolley often were not apart. Even in retirement, the letters between them are sparse, indicating their desire to still be with each other. In the few letters that do exist, Dolley and James continued the salutations and closings with “My dearest,” “My beloved,” “Yours most affectionately” among other, similar things.

The letters that exist between the 4th President and First Lady of the United States further prove the plight of women creating marriages of companionship (Moore et al. 19). The rhetoric between these two mirrors and echoes that of each of the previous First marriages.

### **Letters from Dolley**

Holly Shulman edits the most comprehensive collection of Dolley Madison documents in “The Dolley Madison Digital Edition.” Much like the editors of Martha Washington’s and Abigail Adams’ collections, Shulman has broken down Dolley’s letters into six categories: The Early Years, Secretary of State Years, Presidential Years, Retirement Years, Widowhood, and Posthumous. For my purposes here, I have categorized her letters into 4 eras: before her husband’s time in official government

capacities, her time as wife of the Secretary of State, her time as First Lady, and everything after being First Lady. In creating the aforementioned categories, I can trace how her rhetoric transforms with each new position.

#### Cluster Term ‘Country’

Dolley Madison shows the first shift in First Lady rhetoric. While Martha and Abigail oftentimes used the term people to denote the men and women of a given population, people is simply a term not used much by Dolley. As such, I was tasked with finding a word that closely relates to people that Dolley frequently uses. The result for this cluster analysis is country. Here I define country by the *OED* definition of, “An area of land of defined extent characterized by its human occupants or boundaries” (“Country”). As such, Dolley uses country both as a way to describe land and people. Because I am looking at the term in every capacity, I have chosen to include her different uses in this analysis, while paying special attention to her use as it pertains to “human occupants.” Dolley does not use the term before her husband becomes Secretary of State, but she does use it almost 100 times in her letters thereafter.

Dolley often writes to Anna Payne Cutts, her younger sister, making her a private female correspondent. As the wife of the Secretary of State, Dolley speaks of country with possessive cluster terms. Dolley writes to Anna:

Letter dated May 22, 1805: “Oh Anna I am dying to come to your Country—if I could be with you now how glad it would make me” (Madison).

Letter dated June 4, 1805: “I have heared sad things of Turreau—that he whiped his wife & abused her before all his servants—dont breath it in your country, as it will make them all so odious as he deserves to be” (sic, Madison).

In the first passage, Dolley uses country in the geographical sense, but speaks of Anna’s country as your country. The subconscious decision to assign ownership gives an indicator as to how Dolley talks about country with a female considered to be close to her; she tells her sister she wants to be with her and is dying to come to her country. Dolley often uses “language of emotion and family to make political requests or express opinions” (Allgor *A Perfect Union* 215). So, in this first passage Dolley shows emotive language by expressing an opinion while in the second passage she makes a political request. Both passages use your with cluster term country; however, each passage is accomplishing something different.

Further, not until after her time as First Lady does Dolley write to Anna and mention country again, this time in reference to a nation. Dolley writes to Anna:

Letter dated April 23, 1827: “I’m affraid the licence people take with their tongues & pens, will blast the good of the country— & display all sorts of evil traits of character that can mark a selfish & Savage Race— under the cloak of Politicks our Country Men come out” (Madison).

Letter dated June 6, 1829: “The conduct of the P—— & his Cabinet, is indeed astonishing, & exhibits a melancholy perspective, as well as re-trospect to our country [...] his ability to command mony in this country, is not greater than that of others” (Madison).

The cluster terms vary greatly (possibly due to her varied use of the term) surrounding Dolley's use of country in these instances. She uses terms like the, our, and this when referring to country. This variance in cluster terms and uses shows her varied uses of country. In the first passage she speaks of country in both instances as a body of people. In the second passage, Dolley speaks of country in context of a nation or landmass. Since her first passage relates to a body of people, looking at the terms the and our show a varied mentality of Dolley in relation to people of a country in the same letter; first, separating herself with the, and then taking ownership with our. However, a letter from April 23rd also equates good with country, while the June 6th letter mentions melancholy and command. These cluster terms show a woman who is varied in her thinking about the country in which she and her husband have served. Furthermore, in one of the only few instances Dolley uses the term people (the term used often with the preceding First Ladies), the clustered words around it are afraid and evil. While Dolley's use of people is quite limited, this single example reveals a rather negative subconscious feeling toward them.

Dolley's rhetoric to private females does not seem to change much amongst the other private women to which she writes. Close friend Phoebe Pemberton Morris received letters from First Lady Dolley:

Letter dated October 17, 1812: "We spent one week at our Seat in Orange, this Summer, the rest, where you left us—in the midst of business & anxiety—anxious for the fate of the War, only—knowing that if success crowned our arms, prosperity & happiness would attend our Country" (Madison).

Letter dated April 24, 1813: “Be of good cheer [sic] beloved friends Heaven will restore you to health & your country when we shall meet” (Madison).

Much like with Anna, Dolley writes to Phoebe and refers to the country with possessives like our and your. However, the additional terms of prosperity, happiness, and heaven all signify a favorable feeling toward country. First Lady Dolley’s exclusive use of positive terms is a departure from how she speaks of the country with her sister as the wife of the Secretary of State and after being First Lady. It is possible that even though Anna and Phoebe are both close with Dolley, Dolley saw a line between her sister and her close friend. However, it is also possible that First Lady Dolley was very aware of her position and chose to speak of the country favorably.

Moreover, Dolley’s close friend Hannah Nicholson Gallatin received letters referring to the country from the First Lady as well:

Letter dated August 13, 1813: “I am constantly cheered [sic] with the sweet hope of their safe & early return, when you will find your dear Husband standing higher than ever in his countrys estimation & attachment [...] I was greaved to hear of the death of Colo. Chrystie! he was an honor to his country & is lamented by it” (Madison).

Letter dated December 29, 1814: “Oh no my dear friend you must not think of it, but strive to fortify your heart with hope & entire confidence in the Allmighty who will restore your amiable Husband to his family & Country. We look for another arrival with great anxiety, having nothing new since the Chauncy & then no more than you are acquainted with. I will yet hope we may have no more

war—if we do alas—alass we are not making ready, as we aught to do. Congress trifle away the most precious of their days—days that aught to be devoted to the Defence of their devided country” (Madison).

Letter dated March 19, 1815: “The Dispatches, which woud have given him the earliest inteligence & might have saved him the voage home—ware sent too late for the Favorite & I beleive are still in this country, if not in the Office of State” (Madison).

When speaking to her friend, Dolley speaks of her country with terms like estimation (esteem), honor, family, favorite, and this. All of these cluster terms have favorable ties with the country in which Dolley refers. However, when speaking of his or their country, Dolley uses divided, a term quite different from the previous ones used to Hannah.

Conversely, when Dolley writes as First Lady to close friend and correspondent Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst Latrobe, for the first time she takes ownership of the country to which she refers:

Letter dated December 3, 1814: “I confess that I was so unfeminine as to be free from fear, and willing to remain in the Castle! if I could have had a cannon through every window; but, alas! those who should have placed them there fled before me, and my whole heart mourned for my country!” (Madison).

This is the only instance as First Lady Dolley writes to a private female in her life and uses the cluster term my. For the first time, she takes ownership of the country her husband leads; she identifies it as my country. Additionally, she uses the cluster term heart, which indicates the closeness to which she feels with her country in that moment.

The content of this letter passage also demonstrates an incredibly prideful message, which Dolley describes as “so unfeminine.” While this example continues with Dolley’s clear desire to show the country favorably as First Lady, it also shows her in an incredibly honest and somewhat unedited version of herself. In no previous letters as First Lady when she mentions country does she refer to it as *my country*, and the contents of this letter show the pride she feels in that moment.

Once Dolley leaves her position as First Lady, her mentions of country to private females almost exclusively utilizes the cluster term the:

Letter to Sarah (Sally) Coles Stevenson, Dolley’s second cousin and lifelong friend dated February 1820: “I cannot help rejoicing with you, that your brothers decline going to the Western country” (Madison).

Letter to Dolley Payne Madison Cutts, Dolley’s niece dated July 30, 1826: “She has had troubles in her family to seclude her for a time, and I understand her sister is now very ill, at her seat in the country where her mother has gone to see her” (Madison).

Letter to Mary Estelle Elizabeth Cutts, Dolley’s niece dated September 16, 1831: “I have notes that tomorrow will bring with it, to me, a large party from Richmond. and the lower country” (Madison).

Letter to Mary Elizabeth Payne Jackson Allen, Dolley’s niece dated February 25, 1834: “I think he was very fortunate in obtaining so fine a woman; for whom, it is likely he will abandon the Western country” (Madison).

Dolley's use of the with country shows the subconscious separation she feels and maturation she experiences after her tenure. No longer "your country" or "my country," no longer "this country" or "that country," instead, she simply speaks of the country, as if to say there is only one that matters.

Among her close female correspondents, this cluster analysis shows the evolution of her feelings about the country. As wife of the Secretary of State, her use of country is varied. As First Lady, her use of country is mostly done in a positive light. After being First Lady, her use of country has moved to only one country, the country. Is this evolution be present in her correspondences with private men?

Interestingly, Dolley's letters to men, in general, are few. While both Martha and Abigail wrote to private men like their husbands, sons, brothers, etc., often, Dolley does not. However, there are a few instances to look at with regard to the cluster term country. Dolley's cousin and life-long friend, Edward Coles, received letters from Dolley while she is First Lady. She writes:

Letter dated May 13, 1813: "We indulge this pleasing hope, in addition to that of your remaining with us, to the last—not that I would, for the World, retard any plan for your prosperity; but that I flatter myself the Western country may be given up for something more consonant with your happiness & that of your connections" (Madison).

Letter dated March 6, 1816: "Govr Tompkins too, devotes the republican interest but, I think, however the storm may rage for a time our estimable countryman will gain the prize" (Madison).



These two examples appear to be at odds with one another. While the first example talks of “The Western country may be given up” clustering country with Western and given up, the second example ties country with estimable and man. It appears Dolley may be unknowingly making a rather negative comment about the Western portion of the country, while showing the countrymen in general in a more positive light. As far as private correspondences go between men and women, Dolley shows a little more brevity in her letter as First Lady to a private male recipient.

The only other examples of Dolley’s use of country to private men are after her tenure as First Lady, and similarly to her letters to private women after her time as First Lady, Dolley follows the same pattern to private men. Dolley’s brother-in-law, John George Jackson, was close to his sister-in-law, calling her Dorah (Shulman). In a letter dated November 27, 1824, she writes “He has promised to spend some time with us again, before he leaves this country” (Madison). To her beloved nephew, Richard Dominicus Cutts she writes:

Letter dated 1824: “[H]e wants to know whether you’ll have it shipped or sold in the country” (sic, Madison).

Letter dated October 23, 1835: “I feel melancholy at the idea of your departure for a country so far from us” (Madison).

And, to troubled son John Payne Todd, Dolley writes: “My dearest Son, I have not heard from yourself the state of your health, and hurt—tho Mr. M had a short letter from Ed. Coles of the 13th. in which he says, you had nearly recovered your strength, but was still in the country” (Madison “April 27, 1828”). The terms clustered around country in these

examples include this, the, melancholy, and a. Much like her letters to female correspondences, this and the are used in a similar context. However, the biggest departure here is her use of a with melancholy. Having never used the vague a to describe country before with private letter recipients, this cluster uncovers a subconscious feeling of melancholy when it comes to any other country outside her own.

Furthermore, the most telling part of this portion of the analysis is what is not present in her letters to private men: Dolley never refers to it as our country, as she does with some of her female correspondents. This omission made by Dolley demonstrates she is very aware of her place when it comes to government and politics. In a time when women still could not vote and women were subservient to their husbands, whether or not Dolley believes this to be right, she follows the protocol expected of her by never claiming the country with private men. Does this fact change among sexes or type of recipient?

As the wife of the Secretary of State, Dolley refers to country with two different women deemed more public recipients: Martha (Maria) Wood Southall Van Zandt, a cousin with whom she was not close, and Anna Marie Brodeau Thornton, a person Shulman labels simply as “an acquaintance”:

Letter to Van Zandt dated August 29, 1807: “I will hope however, that even the short visit to their Native Country has disipated all tendency to sickness, which I observed with so much sorrow” (Madison).

First letter to Thornton dated May 18, 1808: “I have a letter from my Sister at New Haven, half way home, she writes in good health & spirits—she saw the

poor Marchioness, within one day of embarking greaved beyond measure at leaving her country & friends” (Madison).

Second letter to Thornton dated September 1, 1808: “We have some company lately arrived; from the upper Country” (Madison).

In these examples, the terms clustered around country include their, her, and the. Of these, the most intriguing term she uses is her, as she has never labeled country with a strictly female pronoun before. Her assigning ownership of the country to a woman seems brazen and almost out of character for the normally reserved Dolley. However, her use of the female pronoun to a public female correspondent also indicates a solidarity she appears to have with women in general. Her two most surprising terms used with country (my and her) are used in letters to women. The only differences here are that Dolley uses my in a letter to a private female while she’s First Lady and her during her time as wife of Secretary of State to a public female.

As First Lady, there are two instances in which Dolley refers to country to public women: Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte, Baltimore socialite and short-lived wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, and Susan Palfrey Lee, a friend of Dolley’s:

Letter to Bonaparte dated December 31, 1814: “It would add to my happiness to promote yours, in any degree—you will judge then, how readily I obey your wishes in writeing to Doctr. & Mrs. Eustis. If they feel as I do, they would rejoice at haveing such a companion—such an acquisition, on their voage—& on their arrival, in any country, as yourself” (Madison).

Letter to Lee dated December 5, 1816: “We trust they will terminate in the sunshine of your own country, where you are beloved” (Madison).

The first example makes use of any, the first time Dolley uses such a term with country. While the tone and content of the letter is complimentary, any insinuates a vague notion of country. Similar to her use of a, any reads in a similar fashion. However, the letter to Lee, with its use of your own with country shows a double ownership, something Dolley has not yet done in her letters referring to country. Along with your own, Dolley also uses terms like sunshine and beloved, unquestionably very flattering and positive terms. As First Lady writing these letters, Dolley uses such flattering terms and content with public women to appear likable to them and favorable to the country.

In her retirement, Dolley writes to Anne-Marguérite-Henriette Rouillé de Marigny Hyde de Neuville, wife of the French minister to the United States:

Letter dated October 25, 1818: “It was a gratification to us all, that your journey to Washington was so fortunate, and we hope it will encourage you to visit again our rugged country on your way to the Springs, that celebrated panacea” (Madison).

Letter dated July 28, 1830: “My Sister Cutts and her daughters are in good health, and at present on a visit to the upper country” (Madison).

The terms our and the are typical terms Dolley uses with country. However, in both of the examples above she also uses visit for the first time. It is interesting she uses visit in her retirement and not during her time as First Lady, which would indicate a more inviting

tone. However, even though she uses it in her retirement, she still conveys an inviting tone with country.

Dolley also writes to friend, Ann Maury, during her retirement:

Letter dated July 8, 1833: “Be assured my dear Miss Maury that your friendship, and that of your Father, is highly appreciated by us—and that your visits have been a gratification, of which we hope for a continuance during your sojourn in this country” (Madison).

Letter dated January 23, 1835: “We are gratified to find you are still happy in your residence at N. York where the best society is combined with the good things of your country and ours” (Madison).

Letter dated March 31, 1835: “Our Spring is very backward and our country less beautiful than usual” (Madison).

Dolley’s patterned use of this, your, and our with country work in a similar fashion as they do in her writings to private women. However, her use of good and beautiful with country actually indicates her favorable feelings of the country in her retirement.

Additionally, she uses sojourn with country, resulting in another example of her mentioning visiting the country. Therefore, Dolley’s rhetoric to more public females in her life appears to stay consistent regardless of her position. Is this be the case in her writing to public men?

Ultimately, Dolley does not spend a lot of time writing to men of a public nature. In fact, the only times Dolley mentions country with public men is during her retirement. Perhaps this indicates a less edited version of Dolley and a freedom she may have felt in

her time after being in the public eye and a restraint she felt as First Lady. Dolley uses country only three times with men classified as public: Thomas Loraine McKenney, Peter Stephen Duponceau, and Christopher Hughes:

Letter to McKenny dated November 17, 1826: “Your having found and conferred on me a native Amethyst, is not the only proof, that our country contains precious jewels” (Madison).

Letter to Duponceau dated November 12, 1827: “The beautiful Essay of our valued friend has been perused with great pleasure by Mr. Madison and myself; and I especially beg to assure him of my thanks and gratification, in being remembered by one whose talents I have so long regarded among the first in our country, and whose friendship I consider a very precious possession” (Madison).

Letter to Hughes dated March 20, 1828: “In politicks you know, I was never an Adept—I therefore will only observe, that our Country seems now to be entirely of Mr Laws opinion that ‘Agitation and excitement are happiness’” (Madison).

Quite unexpectedly, and a departure from her use of country with private men, each reference to country with a public man includes our. Dolley’s claiming joint ownership with a man to indicate our country is perplexing as she does not refer to our country with the private men in her life. It is possible Dolley felt the need to remind public men of the joint nature of men and women in building the country whereas that reminder was not necessary with private men. Either way, considering the time and climate for women in the new republic, Dolley’s use of our country with public men in her retirement shows a

fearless side to her personality as well as a demand that these men acknowledge her ownership of the country, too.

#### Cluster Term ‘Society’

Whereas Martha and Abigail used the term “public” quite often, Dolley does not. Instead, Dolley uses the signifier “society” instead of public, as defined by the *OED*, “Senses relating to the state or condition of living or associating with others” (“Society”). Dolley’s choice of using society instead of public shows a more conceptual use of the term instead of Martha and Abigail’s more concrete use of “public.” However, both terms are used in a similar fashion.

Dolley’s longest-standing female friend, Eliza Collins Lee, receives several letters in which the First Lady uses the term *society*. Before becoming the wife of a government official, Dolley writes:

Letter dated January 12, 1800: “I have found the place, however, to my surprise, a most agreeable one—the society is delightful” (Madison).

In this excerpt, Dolley uses the society, pointing to a specific one. Further, she also mentions the society is delightful. The first introduction into Dolley’s use of society to private females is a positive one, where she remarks on how much she likes the population of people in which she finds herself. Once Dolley finds herself as the wife of the Secretary of State, she sends another letter to Eliza:

Letter dated April 9, 1803: “Mrs. de Yroja & Husband (the Spanish Minister) are a pleasant addition to our society, with many others more transient visitors, from Phia” (Madison).

In her official capacity as the wife of a government official, Dolley takes ownership of the society by using our with it. During her time as First Lady, Dolley does not write to Eliza and reference the society; however, in her retirement, Dolley writes to Eliza:

Letter dated April 21, 1819: “Our amusements in this region, are confined to books and rural occupations—our society strangers all” (Madison).

This reference to society is the oddest one to Eliza. While still claiming ownership of the society with our, immediately following she uses strangers as well. This is very telling about Dolley’s subconscious when it comes to her feelings toward the society of which she is a part. Although she finds herself surrounded by strangers, she still views herself and the society as a collective whole. Dolley sees the republic as a united group. Does this theme carry throughout her writings to other private females?

Dolley’s frequent letters to Anna Payne Cutts do not stop with her use of country; Dolley also writes to Anna and refers to society as well. No letters to Anna are written before Dolley’s time as the wife of the Secretary of State. However, as wife of the Secretary of State, Dolley writes:

Letter dated August 19, 1805: “This lecture made me recollect the times when our Society used to controle me entirely & debar me from so many advantages & pleasures” (Madison).

Dolley uses the ownership our again, but in this case also mentions control. This is the first instance of a peek into Dolley’s possible true feelings about her society. Claiming “our society used to control me” is quite an admission to a private female. However, considering this letter is written while her husband is in an official capacity, it can be



assumed she speaks on society outside of the official government appointment.

Considering both the content of this excerpt and when it is written, it would appear

Dolley finds society as a government official preferable to life outside of it. Further,

while Dolley is First Lady she writes to Anna:

Letter dated December 22, 1811: "I have dressed him & forced him to change bad for good society." (Madison).

Letter dated March 20, 1812: "There is fine society good schools for her Children" (Madison).

Here Dolley uses good and fine clustered around society. This would make sense for her to have favorable feelings about the society she is in while First Lady, as the previous section highlights an excerpt that demonstrates how she feels when outside of that role. In her retirement, however, Dolley uses different cluster terms when writing to Anna:

Letter dated June 6, 1829: "A pretty state of society" (Madison).

Letter dated January 25, 1830: "We had a very pleasant visit of 3 months & more & in the present state of society in W—— n" (Madison).

In this case, retired Dolley writes to Anna and only references pretty, present, and state with society. Here there is no ownership with the term *our*, only a direct commentary on the literal state of the society, being both pretty and present. Up to this point, Dolley does not really comment on the state of things in the society, at least not in terms of clusters and this analysis. Therefore, I think we could construe it is easier for her to be more forthcoming, and she finds herself more comfortable to actually comment on society

itself. Suffice it to say, Dolley is open with her sister in their letters whether intentional or not.

Sarah Coles Stevenson, another lifelong friend of Dolley's, received letters from First Lady Dolley referring to society as well:

Letter dated December 15, 1812: "I some times wish myself with you for a while, for I love Richmond, because there is so much soul, so much real kindness in its enlighten'd society" (sic, Madison).

Dolley's use of enlightened with society is incredibly significant here because Winterer believes the term with other political terms (like society) denotes this discourse as "uniquely American." Furthermore, she uses enlightenment in a favorable way by mentioning the "soul" and "real kindness" of the society and wishing she were with her friend there. In all of Dolley's mentions of society, this is one of two times she uses enlightened with the term; here she uses it in a correspondence with a private female, a close lifelong friend. Later, we see her use it to a public female acquaintance. Dolley's rhetoric here suggests a belief, at least in her mind, of old and new, of tradition and individualism.

Further, in two additional letters to Sarah after her tenure, Dolley writes:

Letter dated February 1820: "I recce. letters every week from my sister Cutts— she is in a round of pleasant society, and tho devoted as ever, to her children, takes time to enjoy a dance" (sic, Madison).

Letter dated May 12, 1842: "Forgive my silence it has not been from forgetfulness or the interruptions of society, but from inflamed eyes" (Madison).

Above Dolley uses pleasant and the interruptions with society, two seemingly contrasting words. Her use of pleasant seems in line with her previous letters to private females; however, Dolley's use of interruptions admits a fault in the otherwise pleasantly described societies she speaks of above; admitting society as intrusive is believable given her previous position. But it is important to note here that she only makes this admittance in her retirement to a private female. In her younger years while her husband is in office, she does not refer to society as an intrusion or disturbance. It is in her retirement from being First Lady that she admits to a private female any kind of issue with the society to which she belongs.

The only other letters Dolley writes to private females referring to society are in her retirement. Frances (Fanny) Dandridge Henley Lear, longtime friend of Dolley and niece to Martha Washington, is one of those recipients:

Letter dated February 14, 1832: "We cherish the hope of enjoying your society in the summer" (Madison).

Letter dated March 1832: "Now my precious friend I would express my deep regret that any obstacle should exist to our enjoyment of your society this Summer" (Madison).

Letter dated April 27, 1833: "I suppose you are now quietly enjoying your small, but excellent society in Washington, where lately so much excitement was manifested" (Madison).

Letter dated October 27, 1835: “Your last kind letter tells me of your determination to remain in your own Domicil this winter; having good neighbours and near society, I hope you will be well & happy there” (Madison).

Not since her time as the wife of Secretary of State has Dolley implied any kind of ownership with her use of society, but she does here in her retirement with her longtime friend and uses your to describe it. This choice of description obviously delineates between Dolley’s society and that of Fanny’s. However, using your also implies Fanny’s claim to her society. Given that Fanny is the niece of a former President of the United States, Dolley may see her as having some kind of real claim or ownership of the society to which she belongs, an interesting inference if we consider a woman at this time having claim over anything.

Finally, the last of private females to receive letters that also refer to society include Dolley’s beloved nieces, Mary Estelle Elizabeth Cutts and Dolley Payne Madison Cutts:

Letter to Mary Estelle Elizabeth Cutts: “I have no idea of the new dance or its motions but approve of your declining to learn it, if disapproved of by society—Our sex are ever losers, when they stem the torrent of public opinion” (March 10, 1835).

Letter to Dolley Payne Madison Cutts: “We were much pleased with his society as well as with the account he gave of you and Mary” (May 11, 1835).

Dolley uses disapproved and his to talk about society to her nieces. His appears clear and simple as she is laying ownership of a society to a man. However, her use of disapproved

is somewhat interesting, especially if you consider the entire passage in which it is included. Dolley speaks of a dance that her niece has declined to learn, and Dolley supports this decision because, essentially, since society does not approve of it, then it will be wiser for her niece to avoid it altogether. The dichotomy of his and disapproved is incredibly symbolic of the times in which Dolley writes; men can “own” things, while women have to avoid scrutiny from the public. Does Dolley’s rhetoric change at all when writing women of a public nature?

Before becoming the wife of a government official, Dolley writes to Judith Richardson Smith, a woman whose grandmother was supposed friends with Dolley’s grandmother:

Letter dated March 1, 1800: “I told you how delighted I had been with the society of Richmond and how I wished you to partake of the Party’s given to your Bridal friends” (Madison).

Here, in her only correspondence before being in the public eye where she mentions society, Dolley uses a very generic the with it. Placing no kind of ownership with society to a public woman, Dolley assumes no ties to society before becoming the wife of a government official.

As the wife of the Secretary of State, Dolley writes several letters to public women and mentions society:

Letter to Elizabeth Franklin Bache Harwood dated September 17, 1805: “I wish you ware [sic] added to our society” (Madison).

Letter to Ruth Hooper Dalton Debois dated April-May 1807: “We have a precious addition [sic] to our society in Mrs. Erskine” (Madison).

Letter to Eliza Caile Scott Rankin dated 1805-1807: “I must scold you my dear for doing such injustice to the interesting little party of last eve., as well, as for supposing me unable to appreciate such society —during 5 hours I did not breath a wish for a single addition to it, so lern to think better of your friend another time.” (sic, Madison).

Letter to Anna Marie Brodeau Thornton dated May 18, 1808: “I am very sorry that Mrs. Erskine has left the city for the Summer as we shall miss her charming society.” (Madison).

Here, in Dolley’s (un)official role, she uses our, appreciate, and charming with society. It appears that when Dolley transitions from somewhat private life to one in the public, she uses the more likeable terms of appreciate and charming to describe society.

Additionally, now that Dolley has a vested interest in the government that is being established as wife of the Secretary of State, she takes ownership of that society by using our not once, but twice. Dolley’s rhetorical shift is an obvious one here, as it moves from generic to positive and personal.

As First Lady, Dolley writes one letter to a public female wherein she uses society. That letter is to none other than Martha Jefferson Randolph, daughter of the third President of the United States and First Lady substitute for President Jefferson during his time in office. Dolley writes:

Letter dated January 9, 1814: “If [...] you could possibly spare Ellen, it would delight us to receive her—S. Coles (who is a lovely girl) would be her companion, & together they would enjoy a large & enlighten’d society” (Madison).

Here, Dolley uses enlightened to describe society for the second and last time. As mentioned above, Dolley first uses enlightened to a private female, Sarah Coles Stevenson, and here she uses it again with a more public female. In both cases, she uses the term the same, to denote a society that is modern and rational. There are two significant takeaways from this use of enlightened. First, Dolley’s word choice here is only used when speaking to females, and second, there is a possibility Dolley saw Martha Jefferson as more than simply an acquaintance. Because the two spent quite a lot of time together while Martha stepped in as First Lady and Dolley aided her, even though the two are not historically seen as close or lifelong friends (as with other females in Dolley’s life), they are something more than mere associates. Dolley’s use of enlightened with the political term society to both a public and a private female reiterates the start of a uniquely American rhetoric of the nation’s first First Ladies.

In her retirement, Dolley writes a few more letters to public females where she talks about the society:

Letter to Caroline Langdon Eustis dated January 22, 1819: “So highly do we value your friendship and society” (Madison).

Letter to Ella Rives dated May 24, 1832: “We passed three months in the agreeable [sic] society of that place” (Madison).

Letter to Eliza Susan Morton Quincy dated June 16, 1833: “It would have afforded Mr. Madison and myself real pleasure, to have had them and Mr Green repose with us, after their long and fatiguing journey, and to have enjoyed their society for some days” (Madison).

Letter to Ellen Elizabeth O’Neale Cutts dated January 25, 1834: “Before this, I trust my dearest Ellen has recovered from her cold, and is in the enjoymt. of all the agreeable [sic] society around he” (Madison).

Letter to Margaret Bayard Smith dated August 31, 1834: “Their families on both sides, were among the most respectable and they, becoming members of the society of friends soon after their Marriage manumitted their Slaves, and left this state for that of Pennsylvania, bearing with them their children to be educated in their religion” (Madison).

Letter to Lucy Hartwell Macon Conway dated February 2, 1839: “I regretted much that I could see so little of her whilst I was at home, but the time was short and my business so oppressive that the enjoyment of my friends society was denied me” (Madison).

Dolley uses your, agreeable, their, the, and my friend’s with society, which demonstrates a more frequent mention of society, first, and second, shows her varied thoughts on society in her retirement. Her ownership descriptions of your, their, and my friend’s show the mentality to which she feels about society, in that she is a part “owner” of it, while her two time use of agreeable shows her favorable mindset about it. To round all of this out, she also uses the generic the to describe society. It would seem that all of Dolley's



rhetorical moves when speaking of society to females, both public and private, culminate in a retirement rhetoric of being more blasé about how she speaks of societies as a whole. Dolley's rhetoric does not seem to show a significant change when writing to females; but what about her writings to men?

For the first time in this chapter, no writings where she speaks of the cluster term exist before her retirement to men, public or private. Dolley's utterances of society only occur to men once she leaves the White House. Obviously, this could be a good indication of the comfort level she had when speaking to men about the society. However, it is still worth it to see if there are differences among the different categories of men.

As with the cluster term of country above, Dolley writes to her private male correspondents of John George Jackson and Edward Coles:

Letter John George Jackson dated November 27, 1824: "I was charmed with his society" (Madison).

Letter to Edward Coles dated May 26, 1838: "I always intended to time my journey as to enjoy her society" (Madison).

Letter to Edward Coles dated March 2, 1840: I could not believe in its continuance for more than a few days, until weeks elapsed of snow storms and rain, making our roads impassable, so that P Anna and I, in the spirit of Philosophy determined to content ourselves in the calm of Montpellier, rather than indulge in vain resentment against the elements, or regrets for a communion with the interesting society of Washington, and now that the "incense breathing

spring" has broken in upon us, we would fain [sic] enjoy it here still longer”

(Madison).

Additionally, Dolley writes to one more private male correspondent, Anthony Morris, a dear old friend:

Letter dated September 3, 1838: “I often wish that there should be no winter to hurry us away—that this loved habitation was on the next high hill to your dear daughter where I might convince her that the society of herself and darlings, would be a treasure I should aim at deserving” (Madison).

These four letters to three private men in Dolley’s life show a similar pattern to her writings to women in that she uses similar words to describe society; she uses the ownership identifying his and her, the favorable descriptor of interesting, and the generic the. The only slight difference is Dolley’s use of her, as giving ownership to a woman of a society at this time (and in looking through the rest of Dolley's writings) is an odd, and possibly brave, choice. However, since this term is used with a private man, Dolley’s use of it, as she probably very well knew, would likely not be an issue. The more interesting thing about Dolley’s letters to private men is the fact that only these four exist where she references the society. The small number itself is noteworthy. Perhaps women were more interested in society? Perhaps she only felt comfortable referencing to women? These are questions that will be further explored in the last chapter.

Dolley writes to her aide, Richard Smith, in her retirement, and I saw his classification as a sort of bridge between personal and private. It is probably safe to

assume Richard knew Dolley in a more intimate way than most men deemed public, but also that he probably did not know her as well as her brother-in-law, husband, and sons:

Letter dated December 25, 1839: “Anna and I are contenting ourselves in the calm of Montpellier, rather than in vain resentment against the elements, and regrets for a communion with the interesting society of Washington” (Madison).

Dolley’s simple use of interesting with society might tell us exactly what their relationship was, as interesting is another favorable descriptor of society. However, only having one letter to analyze in this case makes clearly distinguishing this relationship between them difficult.

Finally, in probably the most telling aspect of Dolley’s letter writing are the letters to public men that do not exist where she speaks of the society. To be sure, a simple search will uncover many instances where Dolley uses society in letters to public men; however, in almost every instance, those mentions are tied to proper names of things like The Philosophical Society and The American Colonization Society. Therefore, all that can be surmised in this instance is that Dolley had no interest in discussing the society with public men.

## **Closing**

Dolley Madison’s legacy is left to us in her letters. Known to use a “language of friendship” in them, her attunement to whom she was writing and why she was writing creates carefully regarded writing from her that is “emotional, personal, and ultimately irresistible” (Allgor *A Perfect Union* 231). The cluster analysis of her use of country and society not only reiterates this notion of being friendly but also of her constant work to

create a unity among government and the people of the republic. This coupled with her use of enlighten with these political terms creates a First Lady rhetoric that ultimately becomes uniquely American and separate from her British monarchy counterparts.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

On the morning of January 20, 2021, Melania Trump left the White House for the final time and, subsequently, her official role as First Lady. As First Lady, some of her legacy consists of her “Be Best” campaign and her many renovation projects on the White House grounds. However, as First Lady, Melania was rather quiet in terms of her public speaking engagements and other public appearances. One cannot help but wonder if her quiet nature can be attributed to one of her early RNC speeches where she was accused of plagiarizing Michelle Obama's speech from just a couple years earlier. This thought is speculative of course, but whatever her reason, Melania simply did not spend a lot of time in the public eye as First Lady. In this way, she has a lot in common with our first three First Ladies, as Martha, Abigail, and Dolley were all somewhat quiet partners of their husbands as well. However, the first three First Ladies were also products of their era, a time when women were not afforded the ability to speak publicly, something that separates them from Melania.

On October 1, 2020, CNN reported about leaked audio footage from 2018 recorded by Melania's former advisor Stephanie Watson. The transcript of the recorded clip is as follows:

Melania Trump: They say I'm complicit, I'm the same like him, I support him. I don't say enough. I don't do enough.

Stephanie Winston Wolkoff: Nope. It's, it —

Trump: Where I am. I put — I'm working like a ass — my ass off at Christmas stuff that, you know, who gives a fuck about Christmas stuff and decoration, but I need to do it right?

Wolkoff: Yeah, but —

Trump: Correct?

Wolkoff: 100%, you had no choice.

Trump: And OK. And then I do it. And I said I'm working on Christmas planning for the Christmas. And they said, oh, what about the children, that they were separated. Give me a fucking break. Where they were saying anything when Obama did that. (qtd. in Liles)

With just over a month until the election that would determine if her tenure as First Lady would be extended for another four years, and about three and a half months until her tenure would ultimately end, this is probably one of the most damning insights we have of her as First Lady. Most media outlets were relentless in their attacks of her words here. Even though Melania had been met with controversy before, this audio recording and transcript really demonstrates the expectations of First Ladies and the tradition of the role. Unfortunately, the newest First Lady would also experience the pains of the expected traditions of the role.

Dr. Jill Biden had not even made it into her official role yet before a media firestorm surrounded her and her title of Doctor. On December 11, 2020, Joseph Epstein published an opinion piece with *The Wall Street Journal* titled, "Is There a Doctor in the

House? Not if You Need an M.D.” with the tagline, “Jill Biden should think about dropping the honorific, which feels fraudulent, even comic.” Epstein writes:

Madame First Lady -- Mrs. Biden -- Jill -- kiddo: a bit of advice on what may seem like a small but I think is a not unimportant matter. Any chance you might drop the "Dr." before your name? "Dr. Jill Biden" sounds and feels fraudulent, not to say a touch comic. Your degree is [...] a doctor of education, earned at the University of Delaware through a dissertation with the unpromising title "Student Retention at the Community College Level: Meeting Students' Needs." A wise man once said that no one should call himself "Dr." unless he has delivered a child. Think about it, Dr. Jill, and forthwith drop the doc [...] your Ed.D., Madame First Lady, hard-earned though it may have been, please consider stowing it, at least in public, at least for now. Forget the small thrill of being Dr. Jill, and settle for the larger thrill of living for the next four years in the best public housing in the world as First Lady Jill Biden.

Unfortunately, even in 2021, this kind of misogyny is alive and well. While early First Ladies would not have imagined having the title “Doctor,” these women were typically still educated as most could read and write and grew up in well-to-do families of at least moderate wealth. In other words, it is not uncommon for First Ladies to be educated, then or now. The earliest First Ladies had no formal education, but they were well-read, and some had private tutors. Later, First Ladies would have secondary educations or go to boarding schools or finishing schools. It was not until 1831 that the first women in the US would obtain college degrees (Cooper, Forrest 23). Lucy Hayes was the first First

Lady to have a college degree (“First Lady Biography: Lucy Hayes”). Most of the First Ladies that followed her did as well. Hillary Clinton’s law degree from Yale made her the first with a graduate degree, with Laura Bush and Michelle Obama having graduate degrees as well (*National First Ladies’ Library*). Dr. Jill Biden marks the start of a First Lady holding a doctoral degree. Only one other person from a First Couple has ever held a doctorate, and that was President Woodrow Wilson.

However, what both Melania Trump and Dr. Jill Biden’s experiences tell us is that the institution of the First Lady is still very much stifled under a patriarchal system. Melania’s media controversy mostly focused on the vulgarity of her word choice. But, moving past that shows a First Lady who was completely uninterested in her expected First Lady duty of decorating the White House for Christmas. Ultimately, though, she did her duty and decorated it. Not many people would consider Melania Trump to be a nonconformist to the role of First Lady, but it appears that behind closed doors at least, she was. For Dr. Jill Biden, having the title “Dr.” was a break from the tradition of First Ladies, and therefore she was not upholding the tradition of the role. However, she has not dropped the title, still proudly calling herself Dr. Could this be a signal that First Lady roles are changing?

Through my entire analysis of our first three First Ladies, I was able to conclude that this position had some early standards set in terms of what was expected of these women while in the White House. Outwardly, these women were expected to throw parties, decorate the home, and stand by their presidential husbands. Privately, the letters left behind by Martha, Abigail, and Dolley paint a somewhat different picture. Martha did



not find the role enjoyable, though the public loved her. Abigail accepted her role, but often spoke honestly with her husband. Dolley may have been the start of the perfect partner, as her writings seem to indicate a woman who fully took on the expectations of the role. Although Dolley is the first to take up the now long-established tradition of apolitical endeavors, the apoliticalness of these causes further demonstrates the society's need and expectation that the First Lady be pleasing to the public.

It is a long-standing tradition dating back to Dolley Madison that First Ladies take on apolitical causes; these types of causes create no real controversy with the general public and have not changed much by way of general societal expectations. In terms of more modern First Ladies, Nancy Regan created the "Just Say No to Drugs" campaign. Barbara Bush focused on literacy and creating literacy programs. Laura Bush focused on advancing education and promoting the well-being of women and families. Melania Trump set up her "Be Best" campaign that addressed cyber-bullying. Hillary Clinton was an advocate for expanding healthcare so children, women, and families would be covered and is the first First Lady of modern times to challenge the role of a First Lady, though, ultimately, she also succumbed to the weight of the patriarchal stifled position as well.

Bill and Hillary Clinton had many attributes of the same kind of marriage that Martha, Abigail, and Dolley had as well. Bernard Nussbaum, counsel to President Bill Clinton, states, "He would not have been President without [Hillary]" (qtd. in Baker and Chozick). Baker and Chozick go on to say, "Mrs. Clinton was considered the liberal whispering in her husband's ear" sounding eerily similar to the relationship Abigail Adams had with her presidential husband." However, as First Lady, Hillary was called a

different kind of First Lady (Baker and Chozick). At an early campaign rally for her husband's presidential run, Bill asserted that his real campaign slogan was, "Buy one get one free" insinuating that if Americans voted for him, they would also be getting the expertise of his wife as well, an unprecedented campaign move ("Hillary Clinton"). Hillary would be the first First Lady to have her own career outside of her husband, spurring a new women's movement of the times and setting a new standard for First Ladies. Progressive and fearless, Hillary was seen to be unlike any First Lady before her. However, while this notion is true to a large extent, she often met resistance with the liberties she took with the position, "First Lady is not a job. Hillary Clinton learned that when she turned it into a job" ("Hillary Clinton"). Because of the Republican rule for 12 years preceding Bill Clinton's presidency, right wing journalists and pundits worked to uncover any and every scandal with regard to the Clintons that they could. Scandal after scandal was reported, and even though none of these scandals turned out to be true, the attacks on Hillary were relentless, and as a result the healthcare initiative she was in charge of was struck down. Instead of focusing on healthcare for all, she took a more apolitical stance and fought for healthcare for all children, which was passed and is still the rule of law today. Keeping her rhetoric set on the children of our country put her in a more traditional, and therefore acceptable, position as First Lady.

Further, probably the most popular First Lady of modern times, Michelle Obama's apolitical cause was the "Let's Move!" campaign, where she worked to help children become active and eat healthier. Some would argue that Michelle Obama was one of the most modern First Ladies, as she was the first Black woman to hold the

position. However, I would argue she was one of the most traditional First Ladies our country has ever seen. Not only did her “Let’s Move!” campaign focus on health and children (a pretty non-polarizing issue), when she moved into the White House, her motherly side took over when she “begged” housekeepers to let her daughters clean their own rooms, make their own beds, and do their own laundry (*Becoming*). Her time in the role uncovered no scandals. Michelle was a supportive wife to Barack Obama while he was President. She decorated the White House for holidays, sent holiday cards, and entertained the wives of politicians and foreign dignitaries. These types of things are what Americans have expected from the First Lady since Martha Washington.

However, before becoming First Lady, Michelle’s time on the campaign trail was rife with criticism and likely led to her demeanor as First Lady. After a few campaign speeches in different cities, Michelle was becoming effective in her role in the campaign, and the media began to see her as fair game. Everything she said and did became scrutinized; one particular speech she gave in Madison, Wisconsin in February 2008. In her speech she states, “Hope is making a comeback. It is making a comeback, and for the first time in my adult lifetime, I’m really proud of my country, and not just because Barack has done well but because I think people are hungry for change” (“Michelle Obama”). The media portrayed outrage, arguing sacrilege for not being proud of her country until now. As a result of this incident, and so many others, Michelle says, “I stopped talking off the cuff, I stopped talking freely. I used teleprompters. I had to be much more scripted than I’d ever been before” (*Becoming*). Once she was no longer the wife of a Presidential nominee but the wife of the President of the United States, she

began to have new revelations about how she needed to present herself, “As First Lady, I was slowly watching myself being exposed to the world. I had to become more strategic in how I presented myself because it had the potential of defining me for the rest of my life” (*Becoming*). In a CNN interview shortly after becoming First Lady, she was asked, “How would you define your role as First Lady?” Michelle replies, “My first job is going to be Mom-in-Chief” (“Michelle Obama”). Journalists see this response as her way of becoming apolitical at the beginning of her tenure, assuring Americans she was not in the role to make policy, establishing herself as traditional immediately (“Michelle Obama”). Both in the year leading up to the election of 2008 and the following 8 years of her time in the White House, Michelle Obama had a heightened sense of her role in the position, carefully maneuvering being a woman and a person of color in the White House. Because Americans have set very traditional expectations on our First Ladies, expectations that succumb to a patriarchal system, Michelle appeared to be aware of the necessity in her fulfilling that role, even though everything else about her demonstrated an incredibly modern and progressive woman. And, because she was a Black woman holding the position of First Lady, it was even more imperative she be as traditional as possible.

### **Recasting Kenneth Burke for Feminists**

As mentioned previously, feminists typically do not find the ideas and writings of Kenneth Burke to be conducive when looking at the works of women. However, with the hope of recasting some of the traditions of First Ladies, Burke also deserves a recasting of sorts. Not to mention, if the argument is that Burke is not a feminist, that his use of masculine pronouns and his obvious male privilege make his works unusable for feminist

works, then the still patriarchal position of First Lady fits well with Burke, as both the role and this man's works are defined in patriarchal terms. To recast Burke, scholars need to work in increments taking his writings piece by piece to update them for the times. Burke's cluster analysis is a good place to start. A mostly underutilized tool, cluster analysis analyzes both the public and the private author, and it is because of this view that cluster analysis is an excellent tool to study the writings of women. Who else has more history with their public and private personas? Further, this is especially true of women in the early republic, as well as the role of First Ladies. This is true for Martha, a beloved First Lady in public while privately hating the attention, all the way to Melania Trump, who outwardly performed her First Lady duties happily while really disliking it behind closed doors. As my dissertation demonstrates, cluster analysis can and should be used to study the writings of women, as the works of women deserve to be looked at with every tool in the toolbox. The more varied ways we look at the writings of women, the better understanding we will have of them.

### **Uniquely American First Ladies and First Lady Rhetoric**

It is easy to see that, overall, First Lady rhetoric has not changed much since Martha became the nation's first First Lady. And, if a First Lady challenged her prescribed role, she was met with resistance and insistence on following the traditions of the role. Martha Washington's rhetoric changed often according to who she was writing. More evidence of this is her decision to burn the letters between her and George; there were things in those letters she never wanted to see the light of day, making Martha an incredibly private First Lady. Abigail Adams' vast collection of letters shows a woman

who was open and forthcoming in her writings, appearing to not fear who may come in contact with those letters. Dolley Madison is our first First Lady whose writings appear calculated, as her rhetoric does not shift much whether she was writing to women or men, private or public correspondents. She often refers to everyone as “friend” and does not overly share in her letters. Further, while Martha’s surviving letters do not indicate a necessarily “uniquely American” rhetoric as defined by Winterer, we can see the rumblings of it in Abigail’s and Dolley’s discourse. Much like the birth of American democracy, so too were the first First Ladies birthing a new First Lady rhetoric that began to shape the “uniquely American” discourse Americans have come to know, as well as the long-standing traditions we expect from First Ladies. Ironically, the literal definition of enlightenment is to emphasize reason and individualism rather than tradition. The earliest First Ladies set out to make the position individualistic, but today the position could not be further from unconventional. Further research would be needed on First Ladies immediately following Dolley to decide if this was a continuing trend, but based on the research here, I believe it is pretty safe to say it was. It only took two First Ladies for the third one to be acutely aware of her position, both as First Lady at the time and with her place in history.

Americans believe that as time has moved on so has equality in the position of First Lady. While America has come a long way in terms of gender equality, there is still such a long way to go. The role of First Lady is almost exactly as it was when Martha Washington started the role. Yes, there have been attempts to change the position, and maybe even some small strides have happened, but, ultimately, Americans' expectations

of the role have not changed, keeping this position steeped in tradition. For example, take the term “lady” in First Lady. Although this term appears to have made a comeback in the 21st century, second wave feminists found the term dated and believed “woman” should replace it (Boyd 36). In early times, “Lady” typically showed nobility, but as Boyd points out, “Lady is a courtesy title, one conferred by tradition, not by right” (36). “Lady” in First Lady proves, once again, how the role is steeped in tradition. Therefore, by establishing a baseline for First Lady rhetoric, Americans can see how far we have and have not come. If a woman like the First Lady is forced to conform to the patriarchal system, what chance do other women have?

In the end, while women in general have come much farther in equality overall since Martha, Abigail, and Dolley’s era, the patriarchal system is still thriving, and the institution of the First Lady may be the most obvious source to show this. Even in 2009, when Michelle Obama became First Lady, she acknowledged this fact, “Barack was now surrounded by people whose job was to treat him like a precious gem. It sometimes felt like a throwback to some lost era, when a household revolved solely around the man’s needs” (Obama 306). The many steadfast traditions of the First Lady role are unchanged. America expects the First Lady to be the hostess of the White House and the thrower of parties. America expects the First Lady to dress and carry herself in a certain way. America also expects the First Lady to support her husband and take up causes that are not too controversial. The First Lady should be smart but not too smart, and maybe this is why Mr. Epstein has such a problem with Dr. Jill Biden not dropping her title, as the title shows her to be more educated than her President husband. The fact that the 46th First

Lady has not dropped her title, I hope, shows a possible new path being forged for our future First Ladies, one that does not require the traditional expectations Americans have placed on them for so long. Dr. Jill Biden keeping her title, though small as it may seem, does give a tiny glimmer of hope. That coupled with the very real possibility of a woman becoming President, as Hillary Clinton showed us in 2016, would change the role from First Lady to First Gentleman and likely some long held traditions of that position. There has already been a turn in the tide of our White House traditions, with the first female as Vice President resulting in the country's first Second Gentleman. It will be interesting to see what Doug Emhoff makes of the position and how the media will speak about him in a role that has been held exclusively by women; this could be an indication of what might happen, too, when the position of First Lady becomes First Gentleman...because it is coming.



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