



SIENA RESEARCH INSTITUTE SIENA COLLEGE, LOUDONVILLE, NY

www.siena.edu/sri

For Immediate Release: Thursday, December 18, 2008

For information/comment: Professor Tom Kelly at 518-372-7890

For PDF of release or for data summary, visit www.siena.edu/sri/research

Ranking America's First Ladies

Eleanor Roosevelt Still #1

Abigail Adams Regains 2nd Place

Hillary moves from 5th to 4th; Jackie Kennedy from 4th to 3rd

Mary Todd Lincoln Remains in 36th

Loudonville, NY – For the fourth time in twenty-five years, Eleanor Roosevelt receives the top spot in the Siena College Research Institute Expert Survey of American First Ladies released today. Historians and scholars once again see Mrs. Roosevelt best exemplifying the ten characteristics of a First Lady. Abigail Adams finishes second, Jacqueline Kennedy third (up from 4th), Hillary Clinton places fourth (up from 5th) and Lady Bird Johnson (up from 7th) rounds out the top five.

The surveys, conducted over the last quarter of a century, ask American professors of history to rank each First Lady, on a scale of one to five, five being excellent, in ten separate categories.

- **Background**
- **Value to the country**
- **Intelligence**
- **Courage**
- **Accomplishments**
- **Integrity**
- **Leadership**
- **Being her own woman**
- **Public image**
- **Value to the President**

"From a statistician's viewpoint the amazing consistency over 25 years at the top and bottom of the list lend great credibility to our methodology," explains Dr. Douglas Lonnstrom, Siena College professor of statistics and co-director of the First Ladies study with Thomas Kelly, Siena professor-emeritus of History and American studies. "Eleanor Roosevelt has been number one by a landslide in all four surveys, Abigail Adams has been number two or three in each and eight women have always been in the top nine. Much the same is true at the lower end of the list with Mary Lincoln, Jane Pierce and Florence Harding always fighting for last place. When we started this series in 1982 our intent was to track changes over time with regard to expert opinion. The consistency of results validates this tracking study."

Siena Research Institute is well known for its Survey of American Presidents, begun in 1982 during the Reagan Administration and continued during the terms of presidents George H. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. Unlike their Presidents' survey, SRI's First Ladies survey had no similar studies against which they could be measured, and thus they established a benchmark. Results of the three First Ladies surveys have been widely published in newspapers and journals nationwide, and have been included in three books on the subject:

- "First Ladies" by Betty Boyd Caroli
- "American First Ladies" by Lewis L. Gould
- "Rating the First Ladies: The Women Who Influenced the Presidency" by John B. Roberts II

Siena Research Institute's First Ladies Survey				
<i>The Top Ten...</i>				
Rank	1982	1993	2003	2008
1 st	Eleanor Roosevelt	Eleanor Roosevelt	Eleanor Roosevelt	Eleanor Roosevelt
2 nd	Abigail Adams	Hillary Rodham Clinton	Abigail Adams	Abigail Adams
3 rd	Lady Bird Johnson	Abigail Adams	Dolly Madison	Jacqueline Kennedy
4 th	Dolly Madison	Dolly Madison	Jacqueline Kennedy	Hillary Rodham Clinton
5 th	Rosalynn Carter	Rosalynn Carter	Hillary Rodham Clinton	Lady Bird Johnson
6 th	Betty Ford	Lady Bird Johnson	Rosalynn Carter	Dolly Madison
7 th	Edith Wilson	Jacqueline Kennedy	Lady Bird Johnson	Betty Ford
8 th	Jacqueline Kennedy	Barbara Bush	Betty Ford	Rosalynn Carter
9 th	Martha Washington	Betty Ford	Edith Roosevelt	Martha Washington
10 th	Edith Roosevelt	Edith Wilson	Sarah Polk	Edith Wilson

“Few surprises here,” notes Professor Kelly. “Mrs. Roosevelt is the archetypal First Lady. Mrs. Kennedy continues to rise. Five of the ten come from only the last forty-five years. Mrs. Clinton’s slight jump in the standings may be due to time or her run for the White House.”

The bottom of the rankings continues to show consistency with Jane Pierce, Mary Lincoln and Florence Harding as ongoing members of the last five. The greatest notable change in the rankings involves Nancy Reagan, who went from 39th to 36th to 28th and now up to 15th this time around, moving up from the bottom altogether.

The Final Five...			
1982	1993	2003	2008
38 th : Jane Pierce	33 rd : Margaret Taylor	34 th : Letitia Tyler	34 th : Margaret Taylor
39 th : Nancy Reagan	34 th : Jane Pierce	35 th : Margaret Taylor	35 th : Letitia Tyler
40 th : Ida McKinley	35 th : Florence Harding	36 th : Mary Todd Lincoln	36 th : Mary Todd Lincoln
41 st : Florence Harding	36 th : Nancy Reagan	37 th : Florence Harding	37 th : Florence Harding
42 nd : Mary Lincoln	37 th : Mary Lincoln	38 th : Jane Pierce	38 th : Jane Pierce

“Mary Lincoln and Jane Pierce are perceived by historians as psychologically troubled women whose conditions tended to make the president’s life more difficult,” Professor Kelly explains. “Florence Harding is often blamed for pushing Warren into the presidency for which he was unqualified. Some modern scholarship would question significant portions of such interpretations. Nonetheless the impression persists.”

For more information about the survey, including background, variations and interpretations of the rankings, charts and other data see the SRI website at www.siena.edu/sri/research.

For comment, please contact Professor Tom Kelly at 518-372-7890 or Dr. Don Levy, SRI Director at 518-783-2901.

Appendices: (found at www.siena.edu/sri/research)

A: Overall Survey Results (1982, 1993, 2003, 2008), by rank and political affiliation

B: The 2008 Poll: Top Five and Last in each Category

C-1: 20th Century First Ladies in chronological order

C-2: 20th Century First Ladies in rank order

Appendix A: Siena Research Institute's First Ladies Survey (20th and 21st century <i>Republicans</i> in Italics, <i>Democrats</i> in Bold)				
First Ladies in chronological order	Rank			
	1982	1993	2003	2008
Martha Washington 1789-1797	9 th	12 th	13 th	9 th
Abigail Adams 1797-1801	2 nd	3 rd	2 nd	2 nd
Dolly Madison 1809-1817	4 th	4 th	3 rd	6 th
Elizabeth Monroe 1817-1825	24 th	23 rd	31 st	29 th
Louisa Adams 1825-1829	14 th	16 th	12 th	21 st
Letitia Tyler 1841-1842	35 th	30 th	34 th	35 th
Julia Tyler 1844-1845	27 th	27 th	26 th	28 th
Sarah Polk 1845-1849	22 nd	20 th	10 th	26 th
Margaret Taylor 1849-1850	33 rd	33 rd	35 th	34 th
Abigail Fillmore 1850-1853	28 th	31 st	29 th	32 nd
Jane Pierce 1853-1857	38 th	34 th	38 th	38 th
Mary Lincoln 1861 - 1865	42 nd	37 th	36 th	36 th
Eliza Johnson 1865-1869	21 st	24 th	22 nd	33 rd
Julia Grant 1869- 1877	20 th	26 th	18 th	24 th
Lucy Hayes 1877-1881	12 th	15 th	14 th	18 th
Lucretia Garfield 1881	30 th	28 th	30 th	27 th
Frances Cleveland 1886-89, 1893-97	13 th	22 nd	23 rd	20 th
Caroline Harrison 1889-1892	34 th	29 th	25 th	30 th
<i>Ida McKinley</i> 1897-1901	40 th	32 nd	32 nd	31 st
<i>Edith Roosevelt</i> 1901-1909	10 th	14 th	9 th	11 th
<i>Helen Taft</i> 1909-1913	19 th	25 th	21 st	22 nd
Ellen Wilson 1913-1914	16 th	21 st	19 th	13 th
Edith Wilson 1915-1921	7 th	10 th	11 th	10 th
<i>Florence Harding</i> 1921-1923	41 st	35 th	37 th	37 th
<i>Grace Coolidge</i> 1923-1929	17 th	19 th	17 th	17 th
<i>Lou Hoover</i> 1929-1933	11 th	13 th	16 th	14 th
Eleanor Roosevelt 1933-1945	1 st	1 st	1 st	1 st
Bess Truman 1945-1953	15 th	11 th	20 th	16 th
<i>Mamie Eisenhower</i> 1953-1961	31 st	17 th	27 th	19 th
Jacqueline Kennedy 1961-1963	8 th	7 th	4 th	3 rd
Lady Bird Johnson 1963-1969	3 rd	6 th	7 th	5 th
<i>Pat Nixon</i> 1969-1974	37 th	18 th	33 rd	25 th
<i>Betty Ford</i> 1974-1977	6 th	9 th	8 th	7 th
Rosalynn Carter 1977-1981	5 th	5 th	6 th	8 th
<i>Nancy Reagan</i> 1981-1989	39 th	36 th	28 th	15 th
<i>Barbara Bush</i> 1989-1993		8 th	15 th	12 th
Hillary Rodham Clinton 1993-2001		2 nd	5 th	4 th
<i>Laura Welch Bush</i> 2001- 2008			24 th	23 rd
Emily Donelson*	26 th			
Anna Harrison*	23 rd			
Harriet Lane*	29 th			
Mary Arthur McElroy*	25 th			
Martha Patterson*	32 nd			
M. Jefferson Randolph*	18 th			
Angelica Van Buren*	36 th			

*The 1982 survey lists 42 First Ladies, including six women who are not spouses but rather a niece, sister or daughter fulfilling the role of First Lady and a seventh, Anna Harrison, whose husband died a month after becoming President. Using feedback from the first survey, the survey directors decided this information made the survey confusing, and so decided only to include actual spouses of presidents, and to exclude Mrs. Harrison, who did not have the opportunity to fulfill the role.

Appendix B:

America's First Ladies: The 2008 Poll The First and Last in...	
<p style="text-align: center;">Background:</p> <p>1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Jackie Kennedy 3) Abigail Adams 4) Hillary Clinton 5) Lady Bird Johnson</p> <p>Last: Eliza Johnson</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Intelligence:</p> <p>1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Abigail Adams 3) Hillary Clinton 4) Jackie Kennedy 5) Lady Bird Johnson</p> <p>Last: Florence Harding</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Value to Country:</p> <p>1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Jackie Kennedy 3) Abigail Adams 4) Dolly Madison 5) Lady Bird Johnson</p> <p>Last: Mary Lincoln</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"Own Woman"</p> <p>1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Hillary Clinton 3) Abigail Adams 4) Jackie Kennedy 5) Betty Ford</p> <p>Last: Laura Bush</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Integrity:</p> <p>1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Abigail Adams 3) Rosalynn Carter 4) Jackie Kennedy 5) Lady Bird Johnson</p> <p>Last: Nancy Reagan</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Accomplishments:</p> <p>1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Hillary Clinton 3) Abigail Adams 4) Lady Bird Johnson 5) Jackie Kennedy</p> <p>Last: Mary Lincoln</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Courage:</p> <p>1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Jackie Kennedy 3) Abigail Adams 4) Hillary Clinton 5) Betty Ford</p> <p>Last: Laura Bush</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Leadership:</p> <p>1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Abigail Adams 3) Hillary Clinton 4) Jackie Kennedy 5) Lady Bird Johnson</p> <p>Last: Mary Lincoln</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Public Image:</p> <p>1) Jackie Kennedy 2) Eleanor Roosevelt 3) Martha Washington 4) Abigail Adams 5) Dolly Madison</p> <p>Last: Mary Lincoln</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Value to the President:</p> <p>1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Abigail Adams 3) Jackie Kennedy 4) Nancy Reagan 5) Hillary Clinton</p> <p>Last: Jane Pierce</p>

Appendix C-1	
2008 Rank	20th Century First Ladies In Chronological Order <i>(Republicans in Italics, Democrats in Bold)</i>
31 st	<i>Ida McKinley</i> 1897-1901
11 th	<i>Edith Roosevelt</i> 1901-1909
22 nd	<i>Helen Taft</i> 1909-1913
13 th	Ellen Wilson 1913-1914
10 th	Edith Wilson 1915-1921
37 th	<i>Florence Harding</i> 1921-1923
17 th	<i>Grace Coolidge</i> 1923-1929
14 th	<i>Lou Hoover</i> 1929-1933
1 st	Eleanor Roosevelt 1933-1945
16 th	Bess Truman 1945-1953
19 th	<i>Mamie Eisenhower</i> 1953-1961
3 rd	Jacqueline Kennedy 1961-1963
5 th	Lady Bird Johnson 1963-1969
25 th	<i>Pat Nixon</i> 1969-1974
7 th	<i>Betty Ford</i> 1974-1977
8 th	Rosalynn Carter 1977-1981
15 th	<i>Nancy Reagan</i> 1981-1989
12 th	<i>Barbara Bush</i> 1989-1993
4 th	Hillary Rodham Clinton 1993-2001
23 rd	<i>Laura Welch Bush</i> 2001-2008

Appendix C-2	
2008 Rank	20th Century First Ladies In 2008 Rank Order <i>(Republicans in Italics, Democrats in Bold)</i>
1 st	Eleanor Roosevelt 1933-1945
3 rd	Jacqueline Kennedy 1961-1963
4 th	Hillary Rodham Clinton 1993-2001
5 th	Lady Bird Johnson 1963-1969
7 th	<i>Betty Ford</i> 1974-1977
8 th	Rosalynn Carter 1977-1981
10 th	Edith Wilson 1915-1921
11 th	<i>Edith Roosevelt</i> 1901-1909
12 th	<i>Barbara Bush</i> 1989-1993
13 th	Ellen Wilson 1913-1914
14 th	<i>Lou Hoover</i> 1929-1933
15 th	<i>Nancy Reagan</i> 1981-1989
16 th	Bess Truman 1945-1953
17 th	<i>Grace Coolidge</i> 1923-1929
19 st	<i>Mamie Eisenhower</i> 1953-1961
22 nd	<i>Helen Taft</i> 1909-1913
23 rd	<i>Laura Welch Bush</i> 2001-2008
25 th	<i>Pat Nixon</i> 1969-1974
31 st	<i>Ida McKinley</i> 1897-1901
37 th	<i>Florence Harding</i> 1921-1923