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ELEANOR ROOSEVELT,
HILLARY CLINTON
TOP FIRST LADY POLL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LOUDONVILLE, N.Y. -- Eleanor Roosevelt continues to rule the roost as first lady of the first ladies, while Hillary Rodham Clinton has emerged as the runner-up, according to a national survey by the Siena Research Institute (SRI).

Clinton's predecessor, Barbara Bush, also made it in the top 10, ranking 8th in her first appearance in this survey.

The SRI's survey was sent to history departments at four-year colleges and universities, following up a similar survey done more than 10 years ago. Both are believed to be original surveys of first ladies.

"It's a tracking study," said Siena College History Prof. Tom Kelly, co-director of the SRI with Douglas Lonnstrom, professor of statistics. "What we're trying to see is change."

The top 10 First Ladies list being released today (Jan. 10) is: Roosevelt, Clinton, Abigail Adams, Rosalyn Carter, Ladybird Johnson, Dolly Madison, Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Bush, Betty Ford and Edith Wilson.

Clinton and Bush, newcomers to the list, replace Martha Washington and Edith Roosevelt in the top 10.

The overall ratings for these first ladies were compiled from

ratings in each of the following categories: background (education, family, experience), value to country, integrity, leadership, intelligence, own person, accomplishments, courage, public image and value to president.

The most emotional responses were about Clinton and Reagan, the two "new lightning rods" as Kelly described them.

"Hillary personifies Eleanor Roosevelt's definition of what a First Lady should be," he said. "We haven't had a first lady who's been as much of an activist as Hillary."

Roosevelt netted 93.65 points. Clinton was second with 86.35.

Although she's a relative newcomer to the list, Nancy Reagan was 36th out of 37 first ladies. She ranked last in background, courage, integrity, intelligence and value to the country. Kelly believes that among the reasons people hold her in low regard is because of perceptions about her beliefs and attitudes.

He acknowledged that the survey respondents -- college professors who tend to be more liberal and Democrat than the population as a whole -- subscribe to "presentism." Therefore, women who are recent first ladies tend to generate more emotion since they are the focus of so much attention.

Respondents also tend to be more forgiving as time passes. Patricia Nixon, who died in 1992, moved up to 18th from 30th. However, she still ranked last for being her own person.

Also in the first survey, Kennedy Onassis ranked last for integrity. In this survey, she was 18th in that category.

"It shows you how opinion changes over time," said Kelly. He

believes opinion ran against her when she married the wealthy Aristotle Onassis after her husband was assassinated. Now, since she has been a widow again for some time, and has established her independence with a career in publishing, she's gaining favor, Kelly said.

That same independence is what keeps Roosevelt in the spotlight, he maintains. It was she who first decided that being the president's wife required more than just being a "proper lady." She was active with her own agenda.

She was "light years" ahead of Franklin Delano Roosevelt on civil rights and acted as a liaison to the minority community, Kelly said.

While Roosevelt has captured and held favorable public opinion, Mary Todd Lincoln is her antithesis. She ranked last overall, and Kelly said that's because she is seen as a "hairshirt her husband had to wear."

Lincoln, who probably suffered from mental illness and lost two children while her husband was in office, is seen as disruptive and meddling.

The SRI investigates political, literary, educational and history issues on a regional, statewide and national basis. It has surveyed movies, great books, 20th century women and U.S. Presidents.

Locally, SRI has conducted annual business and government surveys, political polls and public opinion surveys. The Institute also sponsors workshops and conferences.