

**For Immediate Release: Monday, September 29, 2003**

## **Ranking America's First Ladies**

**Eleanor Roosevelt Still #1**

**Abigail Adams Regains 2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

**Hillary moves from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>; Jackie Kennedy from 7<sup>th</sup>  
to 4<sup>th</sup>**

**Mary Todd Lincoln Up From Usual Last Place**

**Loudonville, NY** - After the scrutiny of three expert opinion surveys over twenty years, Eleanor Roosevelt is still ranked first among all other women who have served as America's First Ladies, according to a recent expert opinion poll conducted by the Siena (College) Research Institute (SRI). In other news, Mary Todd Lincoln (36<sup>th</sup>) has been bumped up from last place by Jane Pierce (38<sup>th</sup>) and Florence Harding (37<sup>th</sup>).

The Siena Research Institute survey, conducted at approximate ten year intervals, asks history professors at America's colleges and universities to rank each woman who has been a First Lady, on a scale of 1-5, five being excellent, in ten separate categories:

<b>*Background</b>	<b>*Integrity</b>	<b>*Intelligence</b>	<b>*Courage</b>
<b>*Value to the country</b>	<b>*Leadership</b>	<b>*Being her own woman</b>	<b>*Public image</b>
		<b>*Accomplishments</b>	<b>*Value to the President</b>

"It's a tracking study," explains Dr. Douglas Lonnstrom, Siena College professor of statistics and co-director of the First Ladies study with Thomas Kelly, Siena professor-emeritus of American studies. "This is our third run, and we can chart change over time."

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 (<http://www.siena.edu/sri/results/02AugPresidentsSurvey.htm>). 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
- and the recently-released, "Rating the First Ladies: The Women Who Influenced the Presidency" by John B. Roberts II

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

In the decade since the last SRI poll, Hillary Rodham Clinton has declined from second to fifth place with Abigail Adams reclaiming second place, Dolly Madison in third and Jacqueline Kennedy fourth. The rest of the top ten is rounded out by Rosalynn Carter, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Edith Roosevelt and Sarah Polk.

"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 four decades. Mrs. Clinton's decline, while not precipitous, is certainly interesting."

The low end of the list has remained fairly consistent as well, with Lincoln, Pierce, and Harding appearing in the final five each time. Ida McKinley went up from 40<sup>th</sup> to 32<sup>nd</sup> but remains in the final ten. The greatest change in that cadre involves Nancy Reagan, who went from 39<sup>th</sup> to 36<sup>th</sup> and then to 28<sup>th</sup> this time around, moving up from the bottom altogether.

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

“Mary Lincoln and Jane Pierce are perceived by historians as neurotic women whose attitudes 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.”

This most recent expert poll surveyed the expert opinions of 90 history and political science professors from colleges and universities throughout the United States. 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/surveys.asp](http://www.siena.edu/sri/surveys.asp).

For comment, please contact Professor Tom Kelly at 518-372-7890.

**Appendices: (found at [www.siena.edu/sri/surveys.asp](http://www.siena.edu/sri/surveys.asp))**

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

B: The 2003 Poll: Top Five and Last in each Category

C-1: 20<sup>th</sup> Century First Ladies in chronological order

C-2: 20<sup>th</sup> Century First Ladies in rank order

D: A closer look at some of the Top Ten and why they rate

## Appendix A: Siena Research Institute's First Ladies Survey

(20<sup>th</sup> Century *Republicans* in Italics, **Democrats** in Bold)

Rank	1982	1993	2003
1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Eleanor Roosevelt</b>	<b>Eleanor Roosevelt</b>	<b>Eleanor Roosevelt</b> 1933-1945
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Abigail Adams	<b>Hillary Rodham Clinton</b>	Abigail Adams 1797-1801
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>Lady Bird Johnson</b>	Abigail Adams	Dolly Madison 1809-1817
4 <sup>th</sup>	Dolly Madison	Dolly Madison	<b>Jacqueline Kennedy</b> 1961-1963
5 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Rosalynn Carter</b>	<b>Rosalynn Carter</b>	<b>Hillary Rodham Clinton</b> 1993-2001
6 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Betty Ford</i>	<b>Lady Bird Johnson</b>	<b>Rosalynn Carter</b> 1977-1981
7 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Edith Wilson</i>	<b>Jacqueline Kennedy</b>	<b>Lady Bird Johnson</b> 1963-1969
8 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Jacqueline Kennedy</b>	<i>Barbara Bush</i>	<i>Betty Ford</i> 1974-1977
9 <sup>th</sup>	Martha Washington	<i>Betty Ford</i>	<i>Edith Roosevelt</i> 1901-1909
10 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Edith Roosevelt</i>	<i>Edith Wilson</i>	Sarah Polk 1845-1849
11 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Lou Hoover</i>	<b>Bess Truman</b>	<i>Edith Wilson</i> 1915-1921
12 <sup>th</sup>	Lucy Hayes	Martha Washington	Louisa Adams 1825-1829
13 <sup>th</sup>	Frances Cleveland	<i>Lou Hoover</i>	Martha Washington 1789-1797
14 <sup>th</sup>	Louisa Adams	<i>Edith Roosevelt</i>	Lucy Hayes 1877-1881
15 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Bess Truman</b>	Lucy Hayes	<i>Barbara Bush</i> 1989-1993
16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Ellen Wilson</b>	Louisa Adams	<i>Lou Hoover</i> 1929-1933
17 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Grace Coolidge</i>	<i>Mamie Eisenhower</i>	<i>Grace Coolidge</i> 1923-1929
18 <sup>th</sup>	M. Jefferson Randolph*	<i>Pat Nixon</i>	Julia Grant 1869- 1877
19 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Helen Taft</i>	<i>Grace Coolidge</i>	<b>Ellen Wilson</b> 1913-1914
20 <sup>th</sup>	Julia Grant	Sarah Polk	<b>Bess Truman</b> 1945-1953

21 <sup>st</sup>	Eliza Johnson	<b>Ellen Wilson</b>	<i>Helen Taft</i> 1909-1913
22 <sup>nd</sup>	Sarah Polk	Frances Cleveland	Eliza Johnson 1865-1869
23 <sup>rd</sup>	Anna Harrison*	Elizabeth Monroe	Frances Cleveland 1886-89, 1893-97
24 <sup>th</sup>	Elizabeth Monroe	Eliza Johnson	<i>Laura Welch Bush</i> 2001-
25 <sup>th</sup>	Mary Arthur McElroy*	<i>Helen Taft</i>	Caroline Harrison 1889-1892
26 <sup>th</sup>	Emily Donelson*	Julia Grant	Julia Tyler 1844-1845
27 <sup>th</sup>	Julia Tyler	Julia Tyler	<i>Mamie Eisenhower</i> 1953-1961
28 <sup>th</sup>	Abigail Fillmore	Lucretia Garfield	<i>Nancy Reagan</i> 1981-1989
29 <sup>th</sup>	Harriet Lane*	Caroline Harrison	Abigail Fillmore 1850-1853
30 <sup>th</sup>	Lucretia Garfield	Letitia Tyler	Lucretia Garfield 1881
31 <sup>st</sup>	<i>Mamie Eisenhower</i>	Abigail Fillmore	Elizabeth Monroe 1817-1825
32 <sup>nd</sup>	Martha Patterson*	<i>Ida McKinley</i>	<i>Ida McKinley</i> 1897-1901
33 <sup>rd</sup>	Margaret Taylor	Margaret Taylor	<i>Pat Nixon</i> 1969-1974
34 <sup>th</sup>	Caroline Harrison	Jane Pierce	Letitia Tyler 1841-1842
35 <sup>th</sup>	Letitia Tyler	<i>Florence Harding</i>	Margaret Taylor 1849-1850
36 <sup>th</sup>	Angelica Van Buren*	<i>Nancy Reagan</i>	Mary Lincoln 1861 - 1865
37 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Pat Nixon</i>	Mary Lincoln	<i>Florence Harding</i> 1921-1923
38 <sup>th</sup>	Jane Pierce		Jane Pierce 1853-1857
39 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Nancy Reagan</i>		
40 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Ida McKinley</i>		
41 <sup>st</sup>	<i>Florence Harding</i>		
42 <sup>nd</sup>	Mary Lincoln		

\*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 2003 Poll

#### The First and Last in...

Background:	Intelligence:	Courage:
1) Kennedy	1) Eleanor Roosevelt	1) Eleanor Roosevelt
2) Eleanor Roosevelt	2) Clinton	2) Abigail Adams

3) Clinton 4) Abigail Adams 5) Edith Roosevelt <b>Last:</b> Harding	3) Abigail Adams 4) Carter 5) Kennedy <b>Last:</b> Letitia Tyler	3) Madison 4) Kennedy 5) Ford <b>Last:</b> Pierce
<b>Value to Country:</b> 1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Abigail Adams 3) Madison 4) Kennedy 5) L.B. Johnson <b>Last:</b> Pierce	<b>“Own Woman”</b> 1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Clinton 3) Abigail Adams 4) Madison 5) Edith Wilson <b>Last:</b> Nixon	<b>Public Image:</b> 1) Kennedy 2) Eleanor Roosevelt 3) Madison 4) Washington 5) Barbara Bush <b>Last:</b> Lincoln
<b>Integrity:</b> Eleanor Roosevelt Abigail Adams Carter Washington Madison <b>Last:</b> Harding	<b>Accomplishments:</b> 1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Abigail Adams 3) L.B. Johnson 4) Clinton 5) Madison <b>Last:</b> Pierce	<b>Value to the President:</b> 1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Abigail Adams 3) Madison 4) Carter 5) Reagan <b>Last:</b> Pierce
<b>Leadership:</b> 1) Eleanor Roosevelt 2) Abigail Adams 3) Clinton 4) Madison		

5) Edith Wilson		
<b>Last:</b> Pierce		

<b>Appendix C-1</b>	
<b>2003 Rank</b>	<b>20<sup>th</sup> Century First Ladies</b>  <b>In Chronological Order</b>  ( <i>Republicans</i> in Italics, <b>Democrats</b> in Bold)
32 <sup>nd</sup>	<i>Ida McKinley</i> 1897-1901
9 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Edith Roosevelt</i> 1901-1909
21 <sup>st</sup>	<i>Helen Taft</i> 1909-1913
19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Ellen Wilson</b> 1913-1914
11 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Edith Wilson</b> 1915-1921
37 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Florence Harding</i> 1921-1923
17 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Grace Coolidge</i> 1923-1929
16 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Lou Hoover</i> 1929-1933
1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Eleanor Roosevelt</b> 1933-1945
20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Bess Truman</b> 1945-1953
27 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Mamie Eisenhower</i> 1953-1961
4 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Jacqueline Kennedy</b> 1961-1963
7 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Lady Bird Johnson</b> 1963-1969
33 <sup>rd</sup>	<i>Pat Nixon</i> 1969-1974
8 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Betty Ford</i> 1974-1977
6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Rosalynn Carter</b> 1977-1981
28 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Nancy Reagan</i> 1981-1989
15 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Barbara Bush</i> 1989-1993
5 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Hillary Rodham Clinton</b> 1993-2001
24 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Laura Welch Bush</i> 2001-

<b>Appendix C-2</b>	
<b>2003 Rank</b>	<b>20<sup>th</sup> Century First Ladies</b>  <b>In 2003 Rank Order</b>  ( <i>Republicans</i> in Italics,

	<b>Democrats in Bold)</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Eleanor Roosevelt</b> 1933-1945
4 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Jacqueline Kennedy</b> 1961-1963
5 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Hillary Rodham Clinton</b> 1993-2001
6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Rosalynn Carter</b> 1977-1981
7 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Lady Bird Johnson</b> 1963-1969
8 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Betty Ford</i> 1974-1977
9 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Edith Roosevelt</i> 1901-1909
11 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Edith Wilson</b> 1915-1921
15 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Barbara Bush</i> 1989-1993
16 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Lou Hoover</i> 1929-1933
17 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Grace Coolidge</i> 1923-1929
19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Ellen Wilson</b> 1913-1914
20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Bess Truman</b> 1945-1953
21 <sup>st</sup>	<i>Helen Taft</i> 1909-1913
24 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Laura Welch Bush</i> 2001-
27 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Mamie Eisenhower</i> 1953-1961
28 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Nancy Reagan</i> 1981-1989
32 <sup>nd</sup>	<i>Ida McKinley</i> 1897-1901
33 <sup>rd</sup>	<i>Pat Nixon</i> 1969-1974
37 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Florence Harding</i> 1921-1923





## **Appendix D:**

### **Why do they rate? A closer look at some of the “Top Ten”:**

***Eleanor Roosevelt (1933-1945)***, the longest-serving first lady who saw the nation through a world war and an economic depression, came in first in nine of the ten categories in 2002 and first overall in all three surveys. Her only second place finish in the latest survey was to Jacqueline Kennedy in “Public Image.” Eleanor’s legendary public stature, her empathy for the American people in their darkest hours and continued leadership on a world stage even after her husband’s death set a new standard for the “First Lady.” She defines the position for college professors.

***Abigail Adams (1797-1801)***, the nation’s second First Lady and first occupant of the White House, is one of the few early First Ladies to merit high praise in this survey. She came in second in seven of ten categories, and is well-known for her counsel to her husband during the Revolutionary years and beyond. Mrs. Adams is, perhaps, foremost among the founding mothers.

***Hillary Rodham Clinton (1993-2001)***, who set up offices in the White House and set about attempting to revise the nation’s health care policy seemed to offer the country a “two-fer” upon the election of her husband. She continues to impress the professoriate, though her overall ranking has declined slightly in the past decade.

***Sarah Polk*** (1845-1849), Now often overlooked, she was her husband's confidant and, in modern terms, may have functioned as something of an advisor/confidential secretary.