“The Legacies of America’s First Ladies conference series is an inside view into the lives of our first ladies. The series showcases how these women used their official role to the benefit of American citizens. Congratulations to Anita McBride, my former chief of staff, who conceived of this program and brought together historians, White House photographers, presidential advisers, and social secretaries to tell the stories through personal accounts of life in the White House. The presidency is about all of the people who join with that president in service to our remarkable nation, from their first lady to their staff. I appreciate American University and the White House Historical Association for their support of this fascinating series.”

—Laura Bush, former first lady of the United States

“I cannot imagine a better way to promote understanding and interest in the experiences of our first ladies.”

—Doris Kearns Goodwin, presidential historian

About Anita McBride

Anita B. McBride is executive in residence at the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies at American University’s School of Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. She directs programming on the legacies of America’s first ladies and their influence on politics, policy, and global diplomacy. Prior to this appointment, she served as assistant to former president George W. Bush and chief of staff to former first lady Laura Bush. In the latter role, McBride advised the first lady on a diverse platform of domestic and international initiatives, and she directed the first lady’s foreign travel to nearly 70 countries in four years, including historic trips to Afghanistan, the Middle East, and the border of Thailand and Burma.

McBride’s public service spans two decades and three U.S. presidential administrations, with positions at the White House, the U.S. Information Agency, and the U.S. Department of State. She currently is a senior advisor to the George W. Bush Institute and an advisor to several global nonprofit organizations. McBride co-founded the RAND African First Ladies Initiative and Fellowship to strengthen the offices of first ladies across the continent of Africa.

McBride also serves on the board of several organizations, including the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, the U.S.—Afghan Women’s Council, and the White House Historical Association.

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Dear friends,

Throughout our nation’s history, America’s first ladies have influenced our politics, domestic policy, and global diplomacy. American University has a proud history of hosting first ladies on campus and of recognizing their valuable role.

In March 2011, American University held the inaugural Legacies of America’s First Ladies conference to honor the significant contributions these women have made, and continue to make, toward promoting change and improving our society. That event led to a partnership with the White House Historical Association and the National Archives and its Presidential Libraries, launching the Legacies of America’s First Ladies conference series. This important series features distinguished guests—White House staff, historians, authors, national media personalities, former presidents and first families, and current and former first ladies—who reveal firsthand accounts and historical perspectives on the work and lives of our nation’s first ladies.

Texas—the only state that is home to three presidential libraries and two living former first ladies—provided the perfect place to start. In November 2011, the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum at Texas A&M University hosted the first of three conferences in that state. The George W. Bush Presidential Center at Southern Methodist University hosted us in March 2012, and the final conference of the Texas series took place in November 2012 at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum.

The conference series continued at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on April 8, 2013. It is my honor to lead this important initiative for American University and to take these conferences to presidential libraries and academic and historical institutions around the country.

This brochure highlights some of the fascinating insights gleaned from this historic series. I hope you will find it enjoyable and inspiring. And I hope, too, that you can join us at a future conference in honor of these remarkable women.

Anita B. McBride
CONFERENCE CHAIR EXECUTIVE IN RESIDENCE, CENTER FOR CONGRESSIONAL AND PRESIDENTIAL STUDIES SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

What people are saying

“I applaud American University for bringing together former White House staff, smart historians, journalists, children of presidents, and my favorite former first lady, Laura Bush, to help educate people about the role of first ladies.”

—Susan Ford Bales, daughter of former first lady Betty Ford and former president Gerald R. Ford

“The conference at the LBJ Presidential Library proved to be one of the most substantive and popular programs in the institution’s 40-year history.”

—Mark K. Updegrove, director, LBJ Presidential Library

“I am a proud supporter of and participant in the series.”

—David Ferriero, archivist of the United States

Past conferences

★ April 8, 2013
GERALD R. FORD PRESIDENTIAL MUSEUM
Grand Rapids, MI


★ November 12, 2012
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
University of Texas–Austin
Austin, TX

This conference featured historians, advisors to former first ladies and presidents, a veteran White House photographer, representatives from the LBJ and American University libraries, former first children, and former first ladies Barbara Bush and Laura Bush, who offered personal reflections on Lady Bird Johnson to mark her centennial birthday. The panelists offered perspectives on the legacies of these women and on family life in the White House.

★ March 1, 2011
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
Washington, D.C.

This conference launched a national dialogue on America’s first ladies in partnership with the National Archives, Presidential Libraries, the White House Historical Association, and academic institutions. Participants included renowned historians, former presidential advisors, first ladies’ chiefs of staff, veteran members of the White House press corps, and American University faculty. They offered insiders’ perspectives on first ladies throughout our history, their private lives and public roles, and the impact they have had on politics, policy, and global diplomacy.

Sampling of conference panelists

★ Catherine Allgor
★ Susan Ford Bales
★ Alida Black
★ Former first lady Barbara Bush
★ Former president George W. Bush
★ Former first lady Laura Bush
★ Steve Ford
★ Domn Kearns Goodwin
★ Jenna Bush Hager
★ David Hume Kennedy
★ Dee Dee Myers
★ Lynda Johnson Robb
★ Cokie Roberts
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Who Shaped Our Nation

Ladies of Liberty: The Women and Founding Mothers: The Women—Cokie Roberts, political entertainingly presented.”

“Legacies of America’s First Ladies conferences are filling a cavernous hole in American politics and history. No place else has the crucial role of presidential wives been so thoroughly and entertainingly presented.”

—Laura Bush, former first lady of the United States

“I cannot imagine a better way to promote understanding and interest in the experiences of our first ladies.”

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