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American First Ladies as Goodwill Ambassadors:

Summaries after studying materials available in Presidential Libraries

By

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Abstract

Quite a few First Ladies took very active moves regarding international interests, and they often weighed in their opinions on their husbands' decisions on related issues. My research was mainly conducted in five Presidential Libraries associated with five well-traveled First Ladies. After studying hundreds of journeys they made, my descriptions were focused on five, one for each lady, of them only. All of these trips shared a common trait, which was under the calling of humanitarian cause.

Key Words

American First Ladies; Goodwill Ambassadors; American Women

Introduction

According to Gallup's poll (2001) for the category of "most admired women", 1948-1961 was Eleanor Roosevelt; 1962-1966 Jacqueline Kennedy; 1971-1973 Pat Nixon; 1977-1980 Rosalynn Carter; 1993-2000 Hillary Clinton. One of the qualifications shared by all these winners is that they were the First Ladies during much of those periods. Another characteristic present among these First Ladies is that they actively participated in activities taking place in foreign lands.

The "position" of American First Lady carries certain "power", and is often considered as one of the most influential non-elected officials in the U.S.A., though elements of *power* have been variably defined and differently utilized from one First Lady to the other.

The target research for this paper is the above five First Ladies' roles on a world stage, outside their home country, during their White House years. By many measures, those missions have been seen in the realm of *power* and also been termed as the President's envoy or, as "a goodwill ambassador".

What kind of missions did they accomplish? What were those missions about? What were the impacts they left for the future of the U.S.A.? The following is my attempt in finding the answers to these questions.

American First Ladies' world travels

It was reported that First Lady Edith Roosevelt's trip to Panama in 1907 was the first time that a First Lady left U.S. soil to accompany the President on official visits to

foreign countries. Subsequently there is a wealth of records in this sector of First Ladies' journeys. The following is just a quick glimpse of them:

1. Edith Wilson's 72-day foreign trip with President Wilson in 1918.
2. Eleanor Roosevelt's visits to Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, Venezuela, Aruba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Antigua, St. Lucia, and Trinidad.
3. Jacqueline Kennedy's trips to London, France, Italy, Greece, Morocco, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, and Afghanistan during a short span of two years in the White House.
4. Pat Nixon's travels to England, Liberia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Venezuela, Brazil, Rhodesia, South Africa, Pakistan, Romania, Guam, India, Vietnam, and China
5. Rosalynn Carter's mission to a dozen Central & South American nations, India, and Poland.
6. Hillary Clinton was reported to have visited over 80 countries during President Clinton's two terms, and some trips, such as to the six African countries of Dakar, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda, and Eritrea in 1997, were accompanied by her daughter, Chelsea Clinton.
7. Laura Bush's journeys to Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Jerusalem, South Africa, China, and Burma

My preliminary literature searching revealed that a great majority of information regarding activities & schedules of first ladies to other countries is only accessible in presidential libraries for on-site researchers. This reality, in addition to their attractions, was a driving force for my visits to those Presidential Libraries.

Research channels and target materials

As of 2009 when my research was carried out, from the Hoover Library to the Clinton Library, there were twelve Presidential Libraries, and all of them were part of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) of the U.S. government. Though they are located in different places, the procedures for requesting materials to be reproduced or doing on-site research are standardized and set by NARA, and identical systems for information arrangement are adopted across the board for all the Libraries. For my research purposes, I visited five of them, and the following is their basic contact information.

1. Franklin Roosevelt Library (4079 Albany Post Road, Hyde Park, NY12538) www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu
2. John Kennedy Library (Columbia Point, Boston, MA02125) www.jfklibrary.org
3. Richard Nixon Library (18001 Yorba Linda Boulevard, Yorba Linda, CA92886) www.nixonlibrary.gov
4. Jimmy Carter Library (441 Freedom Parkway, Atlanta, GA30307) www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov
5. William Clinton Library (1200 President Clinton Avenue, Little Rock, AR72201) www.clintonlibrary.gov

To get access to each library for research purpose, there is no admission charge. However, presenting a photo ID (driver's license or passport) and completing a form

titled Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are mandatory upon entering.

Finding aids, which contain comprehensive information including the total number of pages, background description, the numbering of box and folder title list about the target in question, was my starting point while I was doing on-site research. This tool led me to request particular materials to be pulled by the Library staff from the closed stacks.

After studying those materials of First Ladies' schedules and activities, I came to the realization that while all those foreign travels bear witness to goodwill missions and are worthy of inclusion, they present, unfortunately, a great difficulty in making concise descriptions for all of them in a paper. The process of selection for coverage became imperative.

Therefore, the scope of this publication includes NONE of those trips summarized above. My personal interest has been in humanitarian efforts as fit to my own viewpoints, so another five *solo* journeys made by them falling within this purpose greatly attracted my attention. The influences of those stories are partially depicted in chronological order on this paper.

As the general practice throughout this paper, all the descriptions are my own summaries and conclusions, after having examined hundreds of papers, notes, itineraries, and correspondence contained in President Office Files; Trip Files; White House Social File; Correspondence File (File names may vary slightly from one library to the other), which are available and released for public viewing and publication in those Libraries concerned. In so doing, there are hardly exact citations, with exceptions

of some quotations, associated with provided information, and I am responsible for any errors or misinterpretations. Those resources listed in the reference section were consulted for background and general references, unless otherwise indicated.

Eleanor Roosevelt's visit to England (October 21-November 15, 1942)

Contributing factors for making this trip

1. It was an acceptance to Queen Elizabeth's invitation to Mrs. Roosevelt. Meanwhile, she was eager to make contributions to the war effort during that period.
2. President Franklin Roosevelt suggested her going over to London to see what role British women were playing during the war. It was hoped that some of them could be mirrored in the United States.
3. The mission of the North African invasion was imminent, so the President wanted the First Lady to visit American servicemen and relate his message to them.
4. Mrs. Roosevelt felt her visit to armed forces of the U.S.A., before they left for North Africa, might mean something to their mothers, wives and sweethearts in the homeland.

Significant impacts this trip has had on the U.S.A.

1. This trip marked the first journey made by an American First Lady, without the company of a President, to a foreign country.
2. The British press was extremely fond of Mrs. Roosevelt, and hailed her as "war ambassador", so her visit reinforced the relationship between these two countries.
3. Later the Allies scored a victory in North Africa, and her visit with those servicemen before the combat served as a morale booster.

4. During the trip, she collected soldiers' names and addresses from the Armed Forces stationed in England, and she wrote to the troops upon her return home, which meant a lot to the mothers, wives and sweethearts in the U.S.A.
5. She uplifted the spirit of the American people during the War, and made her enthusiasm contagious to men and women for the country.
6. The success of this solo travel paved the way for her subsequent trips during the war period, and made her known as a "war ambassador".

Jacqueline Kennedy's visit to India & Pakistan (March 12-26, 1962)

Contributing factors for making this trip

1. American Ambassador to India John Galbraith arranged this tour with the hope that this gesture could improve the relationship between India and America.
2. This was a non-official visit, so the First Lady paid the travel expenses for her sister and herself, and the Indian Prime Minister, who was captivated by Mrs. Kennedy, insisted they stay in his home.
3. In Pakistan, she drew as much attention as in India, from the President to the tens of thousands of people in the country.

After this visit was announced, the White House was flooded with hundreds of letters from the American public who were opposed to this tour even it was labeled as "private". The following was one of those letters.

"Mr. President: I oppose the coming visit of our First Lady to India. It is incredible that the First Lady will give even unofficial sanction to India's aggression against Goa. It is no wonder to me that so many nations (so-called neutrals) refuse to take a firm

stand against Communist aggression when our own First Lady is visiting a country which has consistently voted for Russia in U.N.”(Lambert, 1962)

In spite of resounding opposition, Mrs. Kennedy had no hesitation in making this landmark tour, which was re-scheduled from November 1961 to March 1962.

Significant impacts this trip has had on the U.S.A.

1. Mrs. Kennedy did manage to be among the people wherever she set foot, and undoubtedly made friends with her unfeigned appreciation of the local cultural treasures, and scenery of Pakistan and India.
2. The diplomatic bonds between the U.S.A. and those two countries were gained by her delight in the culture of another land.
3. In October of 1962, when China invaded India, Prime Minister Nehru requested military aid from the U.S.A. This kind of trust showed that the friendship between these two countries was cemented by Mrs. Kennedy’s visit.
4. She purchased several lavish saris, and since then, the sari appeared in American news. She made a contribution to the trade between these two countries, as well as the fashion world.
5. Mrs. Kennedy’s trip to Asia was an assurance to the world that Asian countries were important allies to the U.S.A.

Pat Nixon’s trip to Peru (June 28-29, 1970)

Contributing factors for making this trip

1. To promote relief work for the survivors of the Western Hemisphere’s worst earthquake, striking the Andean Mountain Valley of Peru, on May 31, 1970, and an

estimated 50,000 persons died.

2. Mrs. Nixon, aboard a presidential jet loaded with blankets, warm clothing and other relief supplies, flew eight thousand miles to Lima. Another military cargo plane trailed along with eight tons of relief supplies.
3. She also wanted to visit people there to give them, besides delivering supplies, her personal condolences for this disaster.
4. She intended, upon her return from the trip, to give a show-and-tell report to the Peruvian Earthquake Voluntary Assistance group, set up by the White House to coordinate private relief efforts.

Significant impacts this trip has had on the U.S.A.

1. That relief mission was the first solo foreign trip Mrs. Nixon made after having accompanied President Nixon to over seventy countries throughout his political career, and it signified the First Lady assumed a new dimension of her own.
2. Peruvians were deeply touched by President Nixon's friendly gesture in sending his wife to carry out the relief mission.
3. Even President Velasco was apparently impressed by Mrs. Nixon's genuine expression of sympathy and concern toward the Peruvian people.
4. In addition to those relief supplies being delivered along with her trip, she had inspired more generous donations to Peru for the next 2 years from government and private sectors in the U.S.
5. Prior to her trip, Peru and the U.S. had a strained relationship since President Velasco took power 6 months before. Mrs. Nixon left Peru as the most successful

diplomat in alleviating this condition.

6. The Ambassador of Peru presented the Grand Cross of the Order of the Sun, the highest decoration of the Peruvian Government, to Mrs. Nixon in a ceremony at the Peruvian Embassy on June 29, 1971. Mrs. Velasco, the First Lady of Peru, came to Washington, D.C. just for the presentation of the award.

Rosalynn Carter's trip to Thailand (November 7-10, 1979)

Contributing factors for making this trip

1. Kampuchea, located at the border of Thailand, once a peaceful nation of seven million people, was devastated by the end of 1979 due to war and brutality, so its people faced annihilation from famine and disease, with images in the news media of mothers cradling in their arms their dying infants and the hopeless stare of both children and adults.
2. There was a worldwide cry of help to end their senseless suffering, but there was a rising concern over delays in the timing of relief efforts to the needy. As a result, there was growing pressure on President Carter to step up diplomatic efforts to deliver food to refugee camps in Thailand and Cambodia.
3. Mrs. Carter, as a special envoy of President Carter, flew to refugee camps in Thailand to personally observe the condition of refugees. Based on her reports, the Carter administration would decide how to mobilize the efforts from the U.S.A. to help the situation over there.

Significant impacts this trip has had on the U.S.A.

The achievements made by Mrs. Carter are best described by nice words in the speech

delivered by Prime Minister Chamanan when he bade farewell to Mrs. Carter in Bangkok airport.

“Although you have been among us for only a short time, we have been touched by your courage, spirit and compassion. We have been overwhelmed by the affection of a wife and mother that you have shown towards the starving, the sick, and the young orphans. You have struck a deep and tender chord in the hearts of all mothers in Thailand and I am sure of human beings all over the world. Your deep emotional experience will focus greater international attention on the tragic plight of the Indochinese refugees in our country....I am confident that your mission will quicken the momentum of the international effort towards securing the Kampuchean people a just and humane existence. As demonstrated by your mission here Mrs. Carter, the conscience of the world has been indeed awakened to the great suffering of the Kampuchean people. The problem has been comprehended; the international expressions of concern have been made....” (Chamanan, 1979)

Hillary Clinton’s trip to Beijing & Mongolia (September 5-8, 1995)

Contributing factors for making this trip

1. In 1995, Mrs. Clinton orchestrated a crusade on a chosen issue—*progress for women & children*, who make up two thirds of the world’s poor and illiterate. As she put in a speech attended by prominent Indian women, she said:

“I have enjoyed greatly the opportunity to visit with women all over the world about the issues that really are in our hearts as to how we can help one another, how we can create more progressive-and moving our societies forward, and I hope that all of us will

have a chance to share some thoughts about how we can build on what each of us is doing and caring about” (as cited in Tyler, 1995)

2. 10-day meeting of the 4th World Conference on Women, with more than four thousand government delegates from 185 countries, was scheduled to take place in Beijing starting from September 5th, 1995.
3. Mrs. Clinton was one of the delegates from the U.S.A. She was eager to attend the Conference, and also made a trip to Mongolia to exchange ideas on how to help women and girls and on the importance of educating them.

Significant impacts this trip has had on the U.S.A.

1. Through her speeches and interviews, Mrs. Clinton was speaking more forcefully on human rights than any American dignitary on Chinese soil.
2. She criticized China for seeking to limit free and open discussion of women’s rights by saying

“It is time for us to say here in Beijing, and the world to hear, that it is no longer acceptable to discuss women’s rights as separate from human rights”(as cited in Tyler, 1995)
3. Her pointed address evoked cheers and resounding applause from the audience, and she called the attention of the world to the issue of women’s rights.

“If there is one message that echoes forth from the conference, let it be that human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights, once and for all”

(as cited in Tyler, 1995)
4. Though she was the American First Lady, she was speaking on behalf of a United

Nations conference and about a global problem. At a news conference, she said

“I think it is important that all governments which in any way infringe on human rights know that this conference takes a strong stand and that this conference is trying to move toward the realization of human rights” (as cited in Tyler, 1995)

5. Since tens of thousands of women around the world were listening to and deeply touched by her speeches, she was considered a world ambassador on women's rights.
6. In Mongolia, Mrs. Clinton gave a speech about the need for democracy and freedom. While she showed strong support for the independence of Mongolia, she stressed the importance of cooperation among countries.

Conclusion

As these examples show, American First Ladies are increasingly taking on the role of goodwill ambassadors as they travel to other countries on various missions representing the U.S.A. The results have been positive ones for both the U.S. and the countries they have visited and it is likely to continue as a role for future First Ladies. They bring a different dimension to how the world sees America and each administration and also demonstrate how American First Ladies can impact the political and social relationships of countries.

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