

# Jacqueline Kennedy's White House Tour: The Political Dimensions of a First Lady<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The office of the First Lady of the United States is not inscribed in the Constitution. Nevertheless, as an institution it plays a significant role for the President of the United States (Stooksbury and Edgemon 97). This article examines *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy* (1962), the documentary about First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's restoration project, analyzing it as a cultural text. It seems controversial that—despite her major appearances in national media—Jacqueline Kennedy lacked political action during her first ladyship (Caroli 226; cf. Frey 179). The analysis exposes direct as well as indirect allusions that can be related to her husband's administration's domestic political agenda. Therefore, the CBS program about First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's supposedly apolitical cultural project of restoring the White House appears to be a platform for subtle social, cultural, and historical argumentation, supporting the president's domestic policies and reinforcing the political importance of the first ladyship in the United States.

During the 2012 presidential election campaigns in the United States, Christine Haughney observes in her *New York Times* article that “[a]s the candidates for president debate in the press over weighty topics like taxes and health care, their wives are waging their own campaigns in women’s and celebrity magazines to show voters their spouses’ softer sides.” The importance of the first lady for the success of the president, however, is not only reflected in the high media coverage of twentieth-century and twenty-first-century first ladies but is also deeply rooted in the foundation and history of the United States. Considering the public

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<sup>1</sup> At this point I would like to express a special word of gratitude to my colleague, fellow student, and dear friend Claudia Trotzke for having reviewed this article before submission.

presence of first ladies as portrayed in print and broadcast media, Jacqueline Kennedy's time as First Lady of the United States has created an ongoing interest in her public persona.<sup>2</sup> In line with Kennedy's own statements that she had no political opinion, first lady scholars stress that "Jackie's political interest remained very low" (Caroli 226; cf. Frey 179). However, it is questionable whether Jacqueline Kennedy's supposed political inaction in her role as First Lady of the United States did not have political determinants, especially in the contexts of her ongoing popularity since her husband's time in office, her multifaceted national and international cultural projects, and her professional appearance on media platforms (Natalle 63-64).

For a deeper understanding of Jacqueline Kennedy, a first lady who professionally handled her own depiction in the media (Koestenbaum 122), an approach focusing on the media attention in terms of Kennedy's self-representation and initiated societal influence as the first lady seems profitable. Due to the broad audience of its media broadcast ("Jacqueline Kennedy"), the most influential of her projects as first lady was probably her restoration of the White House. Televised as *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy*<sup>3</sup> the first lady presented her work to the public in a staged interview.

The cultural analysis this article performs focuses on the significance of the White House Tour in its historical, social, cultural, and political context. As Shelley Fisher Fishkin states in her presidential address to the American Studies Association in 2004, "[i]t is up to us, as scholars of American studies, to provide the nuance, complexity, and historical context to correct reductive visions of America" (20). According to Stephen Greenblatt, "a full cultural analysis will need to push beyond the boundaries of the text, to establish links between the text and values, institutions, and practices elsewhere in the culture. But these links cannot be a substitute for close reading" (226-27). For the purpose of cultural analysis, Greenblatt moreover outlines how "[t]he ensemble of beliefs and practices that form a given culture function as a pervasive technology of control, a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained, a repertoire of models to which individuals must conform" (225). Taking into account this concept of cultural analysis, the close reading of the White House Tour as a cultural text reveals the project's political dimensions and displays the representation and utilization of the institution of the first lady.

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2 Jacqueline Kennedy was married a second time after John F. Kennedy's death (cf. Frey 191). A more correct naming would be Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. However, as this article is concerned with her time and role as the First Lady of the United States exclusively—thus referring to a time before her second marriage—I will continue to refer to her as Jacqueline Kennedy or Mrs. Kennedy.

3 Henceforth, I will refer to *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy* as White House Tour in the continuous text and as *Tour* in parenthetical references.

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During her time as First Lady of the United States, Jacqueline Kennedy represented two major roles: the caring family mother and the culturally engaged, independent female (Frey 179; cf. Frey 187). “[R]efus[ing] to concern herself with important national and international issues” (Caroli 231) and announcing that her main task would be caring for her children and husband (Black), Kennedy, from the start, withdrew herself from any possible pressure to appear in public (Caroli 230). Therefore, she had the freedom to create her own agenda of public self-representation and to organize official cultural events (Spoto 159; Natalie 44). When Kennedy did appear in public, she preferred to talk about the arts (Caroli 226), a supposedly ‘feminine’ subject. Despite her official support for the president, Jacqueline Kennedy’s unaccompanied travels abroad and her self-determined organization of White House receptions demonstrate her role as a public persona independent from her husband’s office (Caroli 230-31; Frey 186-87). Although explicitly focusing on the cultural and artistic significance of this project and trying to avoid political implications, the television broadcast of *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy* became political in itself due to its setting in the president’s official home. Moreover, it can be argued that the allusions made by the First Lady of the United States in this staged presentation of her restoration of the White House served as a subtle political influence on US society. This is achieved by Jacqueline Kennedy putting contemporary social struggles into a historical framework, thereby supporting the president and his administration’s domestic agenda.

### FIRST LADY STUDIES

Looking at the roles of first ladies in the history of the United States, an overall definition of the office of the first ladyship seems unfeasible. However, when analyzing the degree of presence a first lady shows in the public sphere, certain features and the evolution thereof become evident; these characteristics frame the first ladyship and accordingly the criteria for a successful public image of the First Lady and the President of the United States. Despite not being defined as an office in the Constitution and in spite of the various differing personalities of the women who have acted as First Lady of the United States, criteria for a publicly accepted and therefore successful first ladyship have emerged.

Starting with Martha Washington, the first ladyship from the beginning of the United States as a nation has been an integral part of the office of the president (Stooksbury and Edgemon 97). Mrs. Washington’s main role was what Kara E. Stooksbury and Lori Maxwell Edgemon call the “social hostess” (99). This

representational function has remained significant for the image of the president's administration. Supporting the president with representational events in their official home and also in public, first ladies have contributed to determine the president's societal acceptance and his public reputation in terms of personal eligibility for his office. In addition, the position of the First Lady of the United States has served as a manifestation and embodiment of American virtues like family values (Stooksbury and Edgemon 99). These values include the notion of Republican Motherhood, the "republican duty of mothers to inculcate these values [of liberty and independence] in their sons [...] as well as their daughters" in order to "strengthen virtue in the new nation" (Boyer et al. 220-21), "[giving] women an important political role" (Phillips). Although not all first ladies stated personal political convictions, the mere necessity of having a first lady demonstrates the political power within this position.<sup>4</sup> Regarding the development of the roles that the presidents' wives have held and the manifestation of their recurring tasks, "[t]he first ladyship is an institution" and "has become an office" (Watson 424). Especially because of new media possibilities and the resulting increase of media coverage in the twentieth century, a greater focus of public attention on the first family has become possible. This focus on the first ladyship specifically began with the active role of Eleanor Roosevelt (Stooksbury and Edgemon 101). The media interest significantly shaped Jacqueline Kennedy's first ladyship and, as Haughney observes in her article on Michelle Obama's and Ann Romney's role in the 2012 elections, has continued to influence public perceptions of presidents and presidential candidates in the twenty-first century.

Along with the societal interest in the first lady as "a symbol for American women" (Stooksbury and Edgemon 98), which functions to complete the president's public image, academic considerations of the first ladyship as a vital point in the analysis of US culture, society, and politics have increased. Scholars like Christine Sadler, in her article "America's First Ladies," already recognizes the importance of the first ladyship in the mid-twentieth century (101). Major scholarship on the first ladyship as an institution, detecting developments and patterns within this office and its influence on the presidency and on society, however, has significantly emerged only during the last two decades (Gassert and Mauch, "Über" 289). Sources and material used to detect and analyze the convictions and interests of these women are letters, autobiographies, and—since the emergence of new media—radio, television, and Internet platforms. The pictures published in the forms of paintings, photographs, and

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<sup>4</sup> Even though not all presidents were married when entering the White House, the substitution of this position by a female family member (Watson 433) proves the indispensability of a first lady. This was the case with President van Buren, whose daughter-in-law executed the role of the hostess in the White House (*Tour* 0:40:13).

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motion pictures also provide information on the image and persona created by each first lady. Since there is no overall theoretical and methodological approach to the academic examination of the first ladyship, the analyses of roles created by first ladies are highly diverse. This diversity can be attributed to the complexity of the institution and its various possible relations toward culture, society, and politics as well as to the variety of material available.

### JACQUELINE KENNEDY'S WHITE HOUSE TOUR AS FIRST LADY OF THE UNITED STATES

In her role as First Lady of the United States, Jacqueline Kennedy's personal background in the liberal arts and her status as an independent young woman provided her with the academic and international experience necessary for a sophisticated and well-balanced execution of her office.<sup>5</sup> These characteristics fulfilled both the traditional expectations of society as well as the modern anticipations of many women in the United States at the time (Frey 185; cf. Caroli 228). Kennedy's statements that "if you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do well matters very much" and that the major task as the first lady is to "take care of the President" (qtd. in Black) reflect her awareness of the necessity of traditional family values. Thus, exemplifying these values was important for Jacqueline Kennedy in order to be accepted and respected by major parts of US society. This rhetoric prevented potential criticism of the fulfillment of her tasks as mother, wife, and role model for American women and provided the possibility for Kennedy to pursue her own projects such as the restoration of the White House. As opposed to most former first ladies, Jacqueline Kennedy undertook international travels and excursions without her husband in order to visit other international representatives like Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (Natalle 57). Accordingly, the JFK Library refers to her as the "Traveling Ambassador" ("Jacqueline Kennedy"). In summary, by emphasizing her role as mother and wife, the public was more willing to accept Jacqueline Kennedy's independence in areas outside the household.

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5 Having grown up in a prestigious New England family, Jacqueline Bouvier (Kennedy's maiden name) had the opportunity of visiting well-established schools and attended Vassar College, NY; Paris-Sorbonne University; and George Washington University, Washington, DC, where she focused her studies on the arts and humanities (Frey 179-80). Before becoming Senator John F. Kennedy's wife, Jacqueline Bouvier worked as a journalist and photographer and traveled abroad independently (Frey 181).

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Kennedy also combined the traditional expectations of the American public with modern developments in her role as a fashion icon, which probably remains the most well-known of her various roles. The image of the fashion icon introduces another aspect of modernity to the public perception of the institution of the first lady. In this context, Kennedy once stated to the press that the American Oleg Cassini, her style and fashion adviser, was also her first-choice designer; however, she tended to almost exclusively wear French designs (Koestenbaum 114). Although it is difficult to prove Kennedy's actual favorite, the tendency to rhetorically create the image of a first lady praising American over European options makes even the choice of clothes and designers a political act (Koestenbaum 114). Along these lines, Kennedy's ability to appear modest and humble despite the excessive costs of her fashion unites her image as a modern fashion icon with her embodiment of the virtues demanded by American society (Koestenbaum 114-16). This balance between her roles as the first lady, the fulfillment of public expectations—both traditional as well as modern—and the subtle promotion of the president's political agenda is particularly evident in how she depicts the restoration of the White House in the television broadcast *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy*.

The film of the White House Tour starring First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy leads viewers through the history of the White House as well as through several of its rooms. After a short appearance of Mrs. Kennedy in a hallway, she presents the history of the White House along with former presidents' and first ladies' efforts in the construction, design, and restoration of the building. This introduction is accompanied by historical photographs and sketches. Following this overview, CBS correspondent Charles Collingwood and the audience are introduced to the working procedures of the first lady's restoration project before being welcomed to the White House in the Diplomatic Reception Room, where the tour begins. Here as well as in the subsequently visited East Room, great attention is directed to the artistic and historical decoration of the rooms, including paintings, photographs, and furniture. While presenting the State Dining Room, Mrs. Kennedy emphasizes the historical developments and efforts in the construction of this room and elaborates on the contemporary restoration efforts. After the subsequent presentation of White House state rooms, Collingwood and Kennedy move to President Lincoln's former office rooms, which at the time of the tour were, as Collingwood explains, "reserved for the private living of the president's family" (0:40:55). In the concluding segment of the White House Tour, President Kennedy joins the first lady and Collingwood, presenting the presidential perspective on the first lady's project.

According to Wayne Koestenbaum's analysis in *Jackie under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon*, Kennedy knew how to stage herself in the diverse roles of the first lady in front

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of the cameras (122), indicating a professional handling of the media. Moreover, “she was the first [first lady in the history of the United States] to appoint her own press secretary” (Natalle 44). This innovation in the office of the first lady contributed to the further institutionalization of the first ladyship in the United States and, additionally, signifies Kennedy’s emphasis on a professional public representation of her office. However, due to the masses of pictures and the lack of interviews, it is particularly Kennedy’s appearance that has shaped her public image and that has emphasized her individuality (cf. Natalle 63). Therefore, it is important to explicitly analyze the role Jacqueline Kennedy plays when guiding Collingwood through the White House, explaining her efforts and plans for the restoration of the White House in this one-hour documentary that was broadcast on February 14, 1962, on national television. Although estimations about the exact number of viewers who toured the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy in front of their TVs vary from forty-six million citizens, as assessed by Maurine Beasley (75), to eighty million, as stated by the JFK library (“Jacqueline Kennedy”), all of these records show that a significant percentage of the US population at the time watched the program.<sup>6</sup>

Essential for the analysis of this film as a cultural text is the recognition of its staged nature. This documentary was not a live program but a recording choreographed and performed with great attention to detail.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the inclusion and exclusion of facts, pictures, and rhetorical indications were consciously planned before the broadcast. Although it is not possible to prove the intention of the political allusions created, the extensive planning, the carefulness of the performance, and the purposeful expressions of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy in the White House Tour provide strong indications for their deliberateness.

The declaration in the film’s title that “Mrs. John F. Kennedy” (*Tour* 0:00:33) is presenting the restoration of the White House immediately indicates the role Jacqueline Kennedy utilizes for the presentation of herself and her work to the American public. Although it was common in the United States to refer to married women by their husbands’ full names, Jacqueline Kennedy’s usual emphasis on her individuality and her independence from her husband resulted in the public calling her by her first name, thus recognizing her as an individual person.<sup>8</sup> Regarding this in

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6 In his monograph *Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis: A Life*, Donald Spoto states that, in the United States, “80 percent of those who owned a television” watched the documentary (187).

7 The nature of the film as a recording and not a live program can be identified especially by the cuts between single scenes (e.g., *Tour* 0:10:00). Moreover, the first lady’s detailed explanations of the facts surrounding single pieces included in the restoration process suggest a careful preparation of the material presented.

8 For example, Spoto writes that “Jackie led CBS news correspondent Charles Collingwood [...] on a tour of the White House” (187). Despite the explicit introduction of “Mrs. John F. Kennedy”

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combination with the entrance scene and her rhetorical construction of placing herself within the history of the White House, the title indicates Jacqueline Kennedy's formal role of the First Lady of the United States, representing the White House and, thereby, the President of the United States and his administration.

Kennedy's interpretation of the official role of the first lady is indicated several times throughout the beginning of the White House Tour. The introductory scene (0:00:25) as well as Jacqueline Kennedy's entrance scene at the beginning of the guided tour (0:07:10) show the first lady walking through a hallway of the White House toward the camera. Kennedy's strong walk, her friendly yet determined facial expressions, and her overall appearance within this television broadcast stand in contrast to her usual overtly feminine self-representation. Therefore, the image constructed in the beginning of this tour differentiates the individual Jacqueline Kennedy from the official White House representative as staged in these scenes. In addition, Kennedy's introduction of the history of the White House includes references to the work of former presidents and also to particular first ladies, such as "Mrs. Harrison [who] complained that she had no privacy" and "Mrs. Coolidge [who] redid the interior" (0:04:24, 0:05:31). These references contribute to the ostensive positioning of Kennedy within the first ladyship, moving away from her individual persona. This positioning is also manifested in Collingwood's announcement of "Mrs. John F. Kennedy, [the] third youngest of the twenty-nine wives to live in the White House" (0:07:20). By discussing the ability of future presidents and first ladies to personalize the official home, Jacqueline Kennedy closes the circle of continuity for the viewer (0:09:30), leaving no doubt about her role as a representative of the overall administration. Throughout the whole program, scenes and statements remind the viewer of Kennedy's representative role, for instance her orchestrated welcoming of Collingwood in the Diplomatic Reception Room (0:12:29). Kennedy's position as a White House official as well as the illusion for the viewers to be personally and officially invited into the president's house remain throughout the film. These instances demonstrate the creation of Kennedy's function as a representative of the institution of the first ladyship in its role as an inalienable component of the president's administration.

This article detects both direct and indirect references to specific issues in John F. Kennedy's presidency made throughout Jacqueline Kennedy's White House Tour. Therefore, after analyzing Jacqueline Kennedy's various roles as First Lady of the United States as well as her public image, this article will look at the connection between major domestic political notions in her husband's presidency and in *A Tour of*

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in the title of the television program, many continued to refer to her by her first name.



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*the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy*, displaying allusions to concrete issues. The explanation of the president's pursuit of excellence, the notion of the New Frontier, and the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement provide the basis for an investigation of the first lady's allusions toward these issues in the Kennedy administration's political agenda.

### THE FIRST LADY'S ALLUSIONS TO THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

A central paradox in the image of Jacqueline Kennedy's first ladyship is her often-stated apolitical attitude in contrast to her societal action and support of her husband's presidency through cultural projects. She claims that she did not have a plan for the restoration of the White House (*Tour* 0:08:17). She also avoids a clear answer to Collingwood's question: "Mrs. Kennedy, this administration has shown a particular affinity for artists, musicians, writers, poets. Is this because you and your husband just feel that way or do you think that there is a relationship between the government and the arts?" (0:16:45). Jacqueline Kennedy answers, "[t]hat's so complicated, I don't know" (0:17:01), thereby devaluing her strong abilities in the assessment of social conventions. Although she denies any political plans or objectives in the interview, many references in this documentary support the political agenda proclaimed by her husband's administration.

Jacqueline Kennedy's restoration of the White House and the resulting television program combine cultural and artistic elements with presidential elements and, thus, with the political history of the United States. Kennedy frames her project by making references to her husband's predecessors as well as to former first ladies. She mentions not only the predecessors' heritage in the form of art and furniture but also their objectives and achievements, which are symbolically brought back into the White House. Considering John F. Kennedy's inaugural address on January 20, 1961, outlining his political agenda, the references to previous US presidents—in whose light he positioned his upcoming presidency—framed his own targeted policies. He claimed that he had not only "sworn [...] the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed" but that even though "[t]he world is very different now [...] the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue" and that "we are the heirs of that first revolution" (Kennedy, "Inaugural Address"). At the beginning of the film, Collingwood praises Jacqueline Kennedy's tour of the White House by emphasizing that "it's a good thing to preserve such buildings which keep alive our sense of continuity with the nation's past" (0:01:30); this links the first lady's restoration project

to the national common good and to the president's strategy of legitimization.<sup>9</sup> The White House Tour positions her work of the restoration of the White House as well as the president's policies within the achievements accomplished by presidents and first ladies throughout the history of the nation.

The political allusions made in the first lady's presentation of her project become even more apparent when put in context with President Kennedy's overtly expressed endeavor to accomplish "excellence in every phase of American life" (Carleton 297). While the president rhetorically connected this concept to one of the nation's founding fathers and first presidents, Thomas Jefferson, the first lady also supports this notion during the White House Tour. In his address at the inaugural gala on January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy, while thanking his supporters and being celebrated by them, stated that he was "proud to be a Democrat [...] because since the time of Thomas Jefferson, the Democratic party has been identified with the pursuit of excellence" (qtd. in Schutzer). By referring to Jefferson, President Kennedy relates one of his main domestic political ambitions to an already heroized national figure, thus legitimizing his agenda. Most crucial here, however, is the fact that Jacqueline Kennedy as First Lady of the United States sets her project of the restoration of the White House into exactly this context. After responding to Collingwood's aforementioned question asking for the first lady's opinion about a possible connection between the government and the arts, she adds that she "just think[s] that everything in the White House should be the best" (*Tour* 0:17:04). This statement appears to be directed at both her own cultural work as well as her husband's political endeavors as the question not only refers to art but also to the administration (cf. Caroli 227). Interestingly, in contrast to First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's vague answer, President Kennedy, at the inaugural gala, praised "[t]he happy relationship between the arts and politics which has characterized our long history" (qtd. in Schutzer). Considering the criticism that overtly political first ladies have experienced,<sup>10</sup> it seems reasonable that Jacqueline Kennedy

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9 John F. Kennedy faced many challenges as president in terms of public perception. His strikingly narrow victory over his opponent Richard Nixon in the presidential election of 1960 and his reputation among conservatives, who publicly voiced their skepticism about his young age and Irish Catholic background, contributed to these challenges (LaFeber, Polenberg, and Woloch 132; Steigerwald 9). Thus, it was necessary for John F. Kennedy to adopt a strategy of legitimization in order to improve his standing in the people's esteem and to ensure the political success of his administration.

10 Stooksbury and Edgemon state that "First Ladies Ford, Carter, and Clinton were accused of exerting policy influence" (100). In the late 1960s, Sadler explains that the "[m]ost political of all First Ladies [...] was Eleanor Roosevelt" while she also "was the most controversial First Lady in modern times" (100). Assessing specifically Hillary Rodham Clinton's role as first lady, Karrin Vasby Anderson emphasizes the public resentment toward first ladies who "depart from the traditional roles played by United States first ladies" (1). Thus, throughout the twentieth century, a positive public perception of the first lady has remained bound to the representation of

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would avoid political implications in her answer to Collingwood's question about a possible connection between the arts and government. Nevertheless, the first lady supports the central approach of the president's administration on domestic policies with her remarks on the quality of the White House's interior.

As previously analyzed, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's references connect her cultural project with the political agenda of the president's administration. However, the subtlety of these allusions provides the first lady with the opportunity to support the public perception of the president without affecting her own public perception as first lady. By being successful in establishing her image as a supposedly ideal American woman, Jacqueline Kennedy in her role as first lady gains the credibility necessary to achieve indirect political influence.

### THE FIRST LADY'S CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE NEW FRONTIER

During his presidency, John F. Kennedy's main focus was on international policies and relations and less on domestic problems; Petra Dolata-Kreutzkamp even argues that President Kennedy had a "seeming disinterest in domestic matters" (243). This central role of international relations for the president's agenda seems to be on the one hand reflected in and on the other hand compensated for in the first lady's White House Tour. The first restored room presented to interviewer Collingwood and the American public is the Diplomatic Reception Room. Kennedy guides the viewers through the White House on the path that official guests would follow, emphasizing the importance of receiving and negotiating with international representatives. Within this setting, Kennedy also stresses American self-representation by drawing attention to the walls, which are completely covered by paintings on wallpaper showing "all scenes of America" (0:11:25). Although it is difficult for the viewer to recognize details of these paintings due to the poor quality of the footage, Kennedy explains that they show the "Niagara Falls, New York Harbor, Indians, [and] West Point" and that all were printed in the early nineteenth century (0:11:27). These paintings are presented as depictions of national identity, which, through the allusion to national sites and myths, is furthermore reflected in the first lady's adoption of the president's frontier terminology.

During his time in office, President Kennedy's domestic political ambitions included the theme of the New Frontier (Kennedy, "Democratic National Convention"), to which Jacqueline Kennedy alludes at various points throughout the

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traditional female roles and has required the rejection of overt political power.

program.<sup>11</sup> President Kennedy's rhetorical promotion of his social projects and policies resulted in the clustering of various problems and proposed solutions in one single program. The Kennedy administration combined its interests in social welfare concerning the public areas of schools, hospitals, housing, and wages with the president's call upon the American people not to resign but to stand up for social well-being in the theme of the New Frontier. In his acceptance speech for the nomination for the 1960 presidential election at the Democratic National Convention, Kennedy connected his targeted domestic social policies with the historical and mythical image of the frontier. By linking his upcoming administration's policies and the implementation thereof with the deeply traditional ideal of the frontier, Kennedy thus drew a connection between these policy plans and the success that the heroized citizens and politicians of the historical 'old' frontier had already achieved. Therefore, President Kennedy's domestic focus in terms of social policy changes was mainly promoted by his association of these changes with the concrete as well as the mythical elements of the traditional frontier image. These elements include the quest for new territory and new achievements, despite the uncertainty about actual outcomes, as well as the need for all people to work together in order to succeed in the accomplishment of their endeavors.

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy introduces a range of allusions to political concerns of her husband's administration, and the most explicit reference to the New Frontier is made during the description of the history of the State Dining Room. Discussing how early presidents organized state dinners, she explains that "the men who came from the old frontier often found it all too elaborate" (*Tour* 0:20:52) and adds explanations about the changes and simplifications made by earlier administrations (*Tour* 0:21:08). Kennedy's summary of the room's history consequently includes two important messages. On the one hand, the theme of the New Frontier is inserted into the history and restoration of the White House by distinctly referring to the old frontier, which implies the necessity of a new frontier. On the other hand, the following explanation that "the room has been simplified" and "the capacity of the room was more than doubled" implies the administration's response to the people's requests while still

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11 The frontier thesis was authored by Frederick Jackson Turner in the late nineteenth century, declaring the westward movement and territorial acquisition to have fundamentally shaped the national identity of the United States (Steiner). Although Turner announced the end of the American frontier, its vision and establishment as a national myth "continues to shape America's collective identity and image throughout the world" (Steiner). However, the Kennedy administration's application of the frontier terminology contained an approach toward proposing and implementing policies on social issues (cf. LaFeber, Polenberg, and Woloch 132-34). Although these two concepts of the frontier differ as to their content, they both seek to unite the American people on behalf of the nation's advancement (cf. LaFeber, Polenberg, and Woloch 131).

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ensuring the room's practicability for the purpose of hosting guests (*Tour* 0:21:17, 0:21:57). Aligning her own efforts of restoring the State Dining Room with the line of historical adjustments, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy shows that her husband's administration is also able to combine practicability with the needs of the people.

Regarding these allusions to the historical and contemporary architectural restoration of the State Dining Room, the upcoming statements of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy about the choice of glasses in the State Dining Room also reveal a deeper meaning. She "wanted a very simple design" for these glasses and "looked all over, and the prettiest ones [she] found came from West Virginia" (*Tour* 0:23:23). The suggested simplicity of the arranged state dinners by the Kennedy administration is due to the old frontiersmen's request for a less elaborate organization of these events in favor of a more intense focus on the real duties of the presidency. As the first lady is able to consciously include and exclude facts about the furniture and pictures she presents, her mentioning the glasses' origin but neither their designer nor any other fact about them creates the impression of a conscious reference. Thus, the origin of the glasses purchased by the first lady appears relevant in the context of President Kennedy's domestic policies. Interestingly, President Kennedy's specific focus on the West Virginia area for a victory in the primaries enabled him to initiate his social programs, especially concerning poverty (cf. Dolata-Kreutzkamp 247-48). Moreover, this region became the key area in President Kennedy's subsequent Area Redevelopment Act, signed in 1961, representing "the first major legislative product of the New Frontier" (qtd. in Dolata-Kreutzkamp 250). In light of President Kennedy's social policies in West Virginia, it is remarkable that Jacqueline Kennedy acknowledges a product from that area in the State Dining Room.

The allusions to certain parts of the Kennedy administration's so-called attack on poverty<sup>12</sup> as part of the overall theme of the New Frontier continue with First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's reference to job seekers during Abraham Lincoln's presidency. Referring to the stairway that leads to the upper level, the first lady explains that "[i]n Lincoln's time, the stairway to his office was always crowded with friends, job seekers, [and] cronies. They climbed the stairs and came down the stairs, having had their moment with the president" (*Tour* 0:41:16). Although the term "job seekers" seemingly refers to candidates seeking offices in the Lincoln administration, its conscious inclusion in the description of Lincoln's primary concerns points the viewers toward

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12 As Dolata-Kreutzkamp assesses, the Kennedy administration's attack on poverty focused primarily on "the commonly held belief that through provision of employment opportunities, poverty would disappear," and "[o]nly in 1963[,] the Kennedy administration began reacting in earnest to increasing reports on poverty" (254). Thus, the policies known as the attack on poverty during the Kennedy presidency especially promoted an increase in employment opportunities in order to reduce domestic poverty.

the topic of unemployment during President Kennedy's administration. The first lady, referring to the usage of these rooms by job seekers in the time of Lincoln, emphasizes that she is "glad they're not now" (*Tour* 0:41:11), reflecting that this necessity has been diminished. This allusion thus mirrors the efforts taken by the Kennedy administration in 1962 to reduce unemployment in order to decrease poverty (Dolata-Kreutzkamp 254). The fact that President Kennedy advertised the resulting Manpower Development and Training Act as "perhaps the most significant legislation in the area of employment since [...] 1946" moreover demonstrates the demand of the Kennedy administration for such policy changes (qtd. in Giglio 106). Therefore, it is likely that the first lady consciously refers to the people's former urge to directly seek jobs in the president's office and contrasts it with the employment situation during the Kennedy administration. This serves the purpose of subtly giving viewers the impression that President Kennedy's ongoing political agenda had not only responded to the people's demands but had already eased the employment market.

Besides President Kennedy's rhetorical and political concern with the problems of poverty and the necessity of employment opportunities, his foci within the larger theme of the New Frontier also included his political involvement in the field of education, e.g., "federal assistance to public schools" (Giglio 97). He praised the education system in California in his address at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1962 "because they recognize[d] how important it is to the maintenance of a free society that its citizens be well educated" (Kennedy, "Address" 0:02:48). His administration's political endeavors in the field of education eventually resulted in the Higher Education Facilities Act in 1963.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, after having entered the scene toward the end of the White House Tour, President Kennedy's remarks concerning his evaluation of the first lady's restoration project demonstrate a further allusion to his political ambitions. Kennedy mentions the increase in visitors to the White House—among them a large percentage of "young boys and girls at school" (*Tour* 0:52:09). These visitors, thanks to the work of his wife, are able to "see alive this building and [...] in a sense touch the people who have been here," which not only results in American history becoming less "dull" but in the visitors "becom[ing] better Americans" (*Tour* 0:52:22). President Kennedy's statements imply that his wife's cultural project causes an improvement in education and thus reflect his administration's political concerns in terms of education.

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13 Even though the Higher Education Facilities Act was passed by President Johnson in December 1963, the temporal proximity to John F. Kennedy's assassination and Johnson's own remarks that "President Kennedy fought hard for this legislation" indicate that it was President Kennedy who initiated this policy (Johnson).

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The range of allusions to concrete political approaches of the New Frontier within First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's project of restoring the White House are evident, in addition, in her recurring remarks on the funding of her restoration project. After assuring viewers in the beginning of the White House Tour that "everything we do is by private donation" (0:09:12), Kennedy goes on to acknowledge the participation of certain private individuals. For example, she and her husband "wished there were more people like Mrs. Noun" (0:39:54), who, in a self-initiated manner, offered a furniture donation to the White House. These acknowledgments encourage the American people to actively participate in the work of the White House, which is reflected in President Kennedy's 1960 declaration that "I'm asking each of you to be pioneers towards that New Frontier" (Kennedy, "Democratic National Convention"). This declaration as well as one of his most famous statements, demanding of the American people to "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," is supported by First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's emphasis on the necessity of the people's engagement (Kennedy, "Inaugural Address").

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, with her clear ambitions to not get involved in political discussions, does not make direct references to her husband's concrete policies. However, when analyzing the implicit hints at President Kennedy's theme of the New Frontier, allusions to larger projects of the Kennedy administration become apparent. Therefore, Jacqueline and John F. Kennedy's performances of their respective roles indicate to the viewer the connection between the restoration of the White House as a cultural project and the president's politics concerning the New Frontier.

### **THE FIRST LADY'S OMISSION OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

While the New Frontier was a theme that surrounded the Kennedy administration's objectives from the time of John F. Kennedy's winning of the primary elections, the administration's level of engagement with the emerging Civil Rights Movement remained low throughout major parts of President Kennedy's term in office (Giglio 161). According to James N. Giglio, President Kennedy's avoidance of the topic of civil rights can be seen in its absence in his inaugural address and in the omission of a civil rights task force within the administration (161). Even though President Kennedy included minor policy changes in his agenda—like the creation of the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity in order to ensure that minority groups were not omitted in federal employment (Berg 232)—it was not until the Birmingham crisis in

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1963 that the Kennedy administration explicitly admitted responsibility in the struggle for African American rights (Berg 238-39).

The long-term indecisiveness of President Kennedy's politics in terms of civil rights is also reflected in First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's White House Tour. Strikingly, she mentions the representation of Native Americans in the furnishing of the White House several times. For example, she mentions the wallpaper in the Diplomatic Reception Room that shows "all scenes of America," including "Indians," as well as paintings showing the history of the East Room, among them "meetings with American Indians and other dignitaries" (0:11:25, 0:14:05). One scene depicts a group of Native Americans being greeted by white statesmen dressed in black suits, one of whom stretches out his arm toward them. The gesture displayed can be read as suggesting the political establishment's outreach to Native Americans. However, throughout the whole White House Tour, the first lady does not mention African Americans. As explained previously, it is unlikely that the inclusions and omissions made are accidental. However, the absence of explicit references to African Americans seems to reflect the insecurity of the Kennedy administration in the political handling of the situation.

Nevertheless, the fact that First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy mentions Abraham Lincoln several times—most prominently when showing and describing the Lincoln Room (*Tour* 0:42:20)—can be seen as an association to one of Lincoln's most prominent roles: the president who abolished slavery and introduced the Emancipation Proclamation. While in the Lincoln Room, Mrs. Kennedy explicitly mentions that "this room is where Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation" (*Tour* 0:44:01). Prior to that, she explains that she and her husband lived in this room at the beginning of their time in the White House (*Tour* 0:42:15). This reference brings up the topic of African American emancipation and the emerging Civil Rights Movement without making a direct political statement. Nevertheless, her statement alludes to the administration's awareness of the ongoing African American struggle for civil rights. Similar to the Kennedy administration's vagueness in dealing with the Civil Rights Movement at that point in time (Berg 221), the first lady also tries to avoid this topic while still providing the impression that her husband in his role as president deals with these questions in the light of the heroized former President Lincoln.

When putting First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's White House Tour in context with President Kennedy's Civil Rights Address in response to the devastating occasions at



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the University of Alabama on June 11, 1963, an interesting allusion appears.<sup>14</sup> Kennedy argued that

[t]his Nation [...] was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened. [...] One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free. ("Civil Rights Address")

Quoting the Declaration of Independence as well as referring to Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, President Kennedy put the present struggles for civil rights into a historical context. By connecting Lincoln's legacy with the opening words of the Declaration of Independence, Kennedy exposed the political shortcomings that have shaped African American lives since their ancestors' official emancipation. Moreover, in his address, President Kennedy identified the necessity for public reassessment and action for a real emancipation.

When regarding the first lady's White House Tour in this context, her reference to one of Lincoln's portraits included in the restoration process seems to obtain a new metaphorical meaning: "The most famous one of all [pictures in the State Dining Room] is this one of Abraham Lincoln [...]. You can see two damaged spots on it, really quite bad ones. So we hope soon to have all the pictures [...] that need repair repaired" (0:24:14). The painting, which hangs over the fireplace in the State Dining Room, displays President Lincoln dressed in a suit and sitting on a chair with one hand propped on the chair's arm and the other touching his chin while his elbow rests on his knee. A close-up shows damage where President Lincoln's feet are portrayed. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's reference to "two damaged spots" on the image of President Lincoln evokes a metaphor that alludes to the shortcomings in the fulfillment of the Emancipation Proclamation's promise for African American freedom. Due to the time discrepancy between the White House Tour and President Kennedy's speech, it is unlikely that most viewers could have understood this allusion toward the upcoming policies of President Kennedy's administration concerning the Civil Rights Movement. However, in retrospect, the connection between First Lady

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14 On June 11, 1963, Alabama Governor George C. Wallace blocked a schoolhouse door at the University of Alabama in order to hinder two African American students from registering at the university ("Governor"). In doing so, Governor Wallace attempted to prevent the desegregation of the University of Alabama ("Governor"). In reaction to this, "President John F. Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard, and ordered its units to the university campus," which led to Governor Wallace "stepp[ing] aside" and "allowing students to enter" ("Governor"). This incident served for the content of the opening statement to President Kennedy's Civil Rights Address on the same day.

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Jacqueline Kennedy's remark and President Kennedy's shift in policy concerning the rights of African Americans is striking.

## **CONCLUSION**

Jacqueline Kennedy was a very innovative first lady, which is exemplified in her individuality, in her choice of fashion, and in her utilization of the media. Due to her publicly declared appreciation and cultivation of traditional American female roles such as caring for her family and staying away from any typically male functions in society, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy was accepted not only by modern America but also by more traditional parts of society. In the White House Tour, she promotes traditional American values while also providing subtle indications and historical contextualization for some of her husband's domestic political objectives. By positioning herself and her husband among former first ladies and presidents, Jacqueline Kennedy legitimizes the Kennedy administration's approaches, notions, and domestic policies in an indirectly political way. The president's pursuit of excellence, the notion of the New Frontier, and the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement provide a basis for the first lady's allusions in the White House Tour. According to Dolata-Kreutzkamp, President Kennedy's main focus was on his international political agenda rather than his domestic one (243). Thus, a cultural backing of his administration's domestic interest by the first lady would not only promote the individual objectives but also raise awareness of these.

To conclude, Jacqueline Kennedy in her role as the First Lady of the United States does not seem to have been apolitical, as has been suggested by several scholars (Caroli 226; cf. Frey 179). Her strong focus on the fields of fashion and culture as well as her restraint in terms of overt political discussions appear to have contributed to her image as an apolitical but still influential national icon. However, the subtle and indirect gestures toward and contextualization of her husband's political themes and agenda reflect a highly sophisticated political application of rhetorical skills and cultural knowledge, as this analysis of *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy* has shown.

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