



SIENA RESEARCH INSTITUTE

SIENA COLLEGE, LOUDONVILLE, NY



For Immediate Release: Saturday, February 15, 2014

For information/comment: Dr. Don Levy, 518-944-0482

For PDF of release or for data summary, visit www.siena.edu/sri/firstladies

Siena/C-SPAN First Ladies Poll

Eleanor Roosevelt Retains Top Spot as America's Best First Lady

Michelle Obama Enters Study as 5th, Hillary Clinton Drops to 6th

Clinton Seen First Lady Most as Presidential Material; Laura Bush, Pat Nixon, Mamie Eisenhower, Bess Truman Could Have Done More in Office

Eleanor & FDR Top Power Couple; Mary Drags Lincolns Down in the Ratings

Loudonville, NY – For the fifth time in thirty-two years, Eleanor Roosevelt receives the top spot in the Siena College Expert Survey of American First Ladies released today. Historians and scholars once again see Mrs. Roosevelt best exemplifying the ten characteristics of a First Lady. Abigail Adams finishes second, Jacqueline Kennedy is again in the third spot, Dolley Madison moves into fourth position (from 6th), and Michelle Obama enters the survey and assumes fifth moving Hillary Clinton down two places to sixth. Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Martha Washington and Rosalynn Carter round out the top ten.

For the first time, Siena College has partnered on its First Ladies survey with the C-SPAN cable network as a complement to the network's year-long historical series *First Ladies: Influence and Image*. C-SPAN will feature the survey results during a live telecast of its *Washington Journal* morning program on February 16th and during the final program of the *First Ladies* series on February 17th.

Combining the data from this study with Siena's 2008 Rankings of the American Presidents, the top First Couple is Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt followed by the Washingtons, Edith and T.R. Roosevelt, the Madisons and Abigail and John Adams. While Edith Roosevelt, Martha Washington, and Elizabeth Monroe all had significantly lower ranking than their husbands, Mary Lincoln had the largest negative difference between her ranking and her husband's and dragged the Lincolns down to seventh place from Abe's stand-alone position in the Presidential rankings of third place.

Eleanor Roosevelt is ranked at the top in six of the categories: Background, Value to the Country, Leadership, Being her own Woman, Accomplishments and Courage. Abigail Adams is top rated in Integrity and Value to the President while Jacqueline Kennedy is the number one pick on Being a White House Steward and Public Image. While the lowest rated First Ladies are Jane Pierce, Eliza Johnson, Letitia Tyler, Florence Harding and Margaret Taylor; Abigail Fillmore, Pat Nixon and Ida McKinley also are on the whole seen as 'fair at best.' Mary Lincoln, previously in last place and in each replication of the study one of the 'final five', upped her standing this year rounding out the bottom ten.

Hillary Clinton is the clear choice of scholars as the First Lady they could most imagine serving as President garnering more than twice the support of Eleanor Roosevelt with Michelle Obama a distant third. While no First Lady is a pull away leader in the category of 'could have done more while in office', Laura Bush is mentioned most often followed closely by Pat Nixon, Mamie Eisenhower, Bess Truman and Barbara Bush.

Ranking America's First Ladies

Siena/C-SPAN

2014

Page 2 of 4

The surveys, conducted five times since 1982, ask historians, political scientists and published scholars to rank each First Lady, on a scale of one to five, five being excellent, in ten separate categories.

- **Background**
- **Value to the country**
- **Being the White House Steward**
- **Courage**
- **Accomplishments**
- **Integrity**
- **Leadership**
- **Being her own woman**
- **Public image**
- **Value to the President**

Siena College Research Institute's First Ladies Survey					
<i>The Top Ten...</i>					
Rank	1982	1993	2003	2008	2014
1 st	Eleanor Roosevelt				
2 nd	Abigail Adams	Hillary Clinton	Abigail Adams	Abigail Adams	Abigail Adams
3 rd	Lady Bird Johnson	Abigail Adams	Dolley Madison	Jacqueline Kennedy	Jacqueline Kennedy
4 th	Dolley Madison	Dolley Madison	Jacqueline Kennedy	Hillary Clinton	Dolley Madison
5 th	Rosalynn Carter	Rosalynn Carter	Hillary Clinton	Lady Bird Johnson	Michelle Obama
6 th	Betty Ford	Lady Bird Johnson	Rosalynn Carter	Dolley Madison	Hillary Clinton
7 th	Edith Wilson	Jacqueline Kennedy	Lady Bird Johnson	Betty Ford	Lady Bird Johnson
8 th	Jacqueline Kennedy	Barbara Bush	Betty Ford	Rosalynn Carter	Betty Ford
9 th	Martha Washington	Betty Ford	Edith Roosevelt	Martha Washington	Martha Washington
10 th	Edith Roosevelt	Edith Wilson	Sarah Polk	Edith Wilson	Rosalynn Carter

"Put Eleanor Roosevelt's picture next to First Lady in any text," notes Dr. Levy. "Not only is she most highly rated overall and in many of categories, but among First Ladies of the 20th-21st centuries she is seen as best on advancing women's issues, as the strongest communicator, greatest political asset, performing the greatest service to the country after leaving office and as creating a lasting legacy."

Ranking America's First Ladies

Siena/C-SPAN

2014

Page 3 of 4

“But the final chapters have not been written on Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama by any means. Clinton is not surprisingly seen as the one First Lady most readily capable of moving from the White House quarters into the Oval Office, a feat that may come to pass by the next First Lady Survey. Michelle Obama finishes third as a potential President and rates strongly on attributes including balancing family life, women’s issues and communicating.”

The Final Five...				
1982	1993	2003	2008	2014
38 th : Jane Pierce	33 rd : Margaret Taylor	34 th : Letitia Tyler	34 th : Margaret Taylor	35 th : Margaret Taylor
39 th : Nancy Reagan	34 th : Jane Pierce	35 th : Margaret Taylor	35 th : Letitia Tyler	36 th : Florence Harding
40 th : Ida McKinley	35 th : Florence Harding	36 th : Mary Lincoln	36 th : Mary Lincoln	37 th : Letitia Tyler
41 st : Florence Harding	36 th : Nancy Reagan	37 th : Florence Harding	37 th : Florence Harding	38 th : Eliza Johnson
42 nd : Mary Lincoln	37 th : Mary Lincoln	38 th : Jane Pierce	38 th : Jane Pierce	39 th : Jane Pierce

“Not only is Eleanor Roosevelt America’s First Lady according to these scholars, but in Siena’s most recent poll, her husband, FDR, was the top President. Comparing that ‘power couple’ to all others only one couple, the Washingtons get a grade of A minus, while nine, TR and Edith, the Madisons, John and Abigail Adams, the Kennedys, Lincolns, Obamas, Clintons, LBJ and Lady Bird and Edith and Woodrow Wilson get B’s. The rest are C ranked at best with failing grades going to the Pierce’s, Harding’s and Eliza and Andrew Johnson.”

Top Choice Among 20 th and 21 st Century First Ladies*							
Managed Family Life	Advanced Women’s Issues	Greatest Political Asset	Strongest Public Communicator	Could Have Done More	Imagine Serving as President	Performed Greatest Service After Leaving Office	Created Lasting Legacy
Michelle Obama (43)	Eleanor Roosevelt (52)	Eleanor Roosevelt (54)	Eleanor Roosevelt (59)	Laura Bush (23)	Hillary Clinton (69)	Eleanor Roosevelt (49)	Eleanor Roosevelt (69)
Jacqueline Kennedy (22)	Hillary Clinton (46)	Hillary Clinton (22)	Hillary Clinton (32)	Pat Nixon (15)	Eleanor Roosevelt (31)	Hillary Clinton (44)	Jacqueline Kennedy (24)
Edith Roosevelt (17)	Betty Ford (19)	Jacqueline Kennedy (12)	Michelle Obama (17)	Mamie Eisenhower (15)	Michelle Obama (13)	Betty Ford (16)	Hillary Clinton (11)
Laura Bush (13)	Michelle Obama (5)	Michelle Obama (12)	Jacqueline Kennedy (10)	Bess Truman (15)	Edith Wilson (6)	Rosalynn Carter (11)	Betty Ford (10)
Rosalynn Carter (12)	Jacqueline Kennedy (4)	Nancy Reagan (9)	Nancy Reagan (5)	Barbara Bush (13)	Lady Bird Johnson (4)	Lady Bird Johnson (4)	Lady Bird Johnson (9)

* Numbers in parenthesis indicate score. A score of 100 would indicate that 100% of scholars named that First Lady as their top choice.

Ranking America's First Ladies

Siena/C-SPAN

2014

Page 4 of 4

“Asked whether or not they think the job of First Lady ought to be paid, this group of experts overwhelmingly is opposed with only a quarter calling for compensating this important and much discussed position. While we may not send the First Lady a paycheck, this study and continuing research on these First Ladies show that the country, in many cases, reap the benefits and in others, suffers the ill effects of their performance,” Levy added.

Siena College 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. 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
- “Rating the First Ladies: The Women Who Influenced the Presidency” by John B. Roberts II

This Siena/C-SPAN survey of historians, political scientists and published scholars was conducted from October 10 – November 25, 2013 via mail and online interviews with 242 experts.

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/firstladies.

For comment, please contact Dr. Don Levy, SRI Director at 518-944-0482 or dlevy@siena.edu .

Appendices: (found at www.siena.edu/sri/firstladies)

A: Overall Survey Results 2014

B: Relative rankings of 20th – 21st Century First Ladies on select questions

C: Ranking of Presidential Couples set to Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt

D: Previous rankings in 1982, 1992, 2003, 2008