

Playing Second Fiddle: Feminism in the Life Writings of First Ladies.

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Summary

For thousands of years, women have occupied the side-lines of history and as the centuries have gone by, very few have made a name for themselves in politics. As for the wives of heads of state, some are kept out of politics and others are expected to follow in the wake of their husbands and do everything possible to further their spouse's interests and career. This change has allowed some first ladies to go further; by building up their own careers and support bases, they have become actively involved in politics in their own right, instead of simply following their husbands. They have become true political entrepreneurs as they work alongside their husbands in the conquest and retention of power.

First ladies, far from staying out of the political arena, have become associated with their husbands in exercising and keeping power and they do this through their public activities and by discreetly influencing their spouses. These ladies know how very important their presence is in re-assuring, consoling, encouraging, inspiring and advising. Their public support for certain policies, especially through the media, helps defend their husband's position as well as enabling them to play other roles in national and international affairs. For some first ladies, their husband's coming to power was only one event in their own political career.

Thus through life writing with its subgenres of autobiographies, biographies and memoirs the study is relevant as it helps to explore the life of strong women who stood behind men in power. Some women inspired, others sustained and yet others steadied or redeemed men who showed a stable façade even as they tottered and whimpered before their mother figures. The study scrutinizes a range of figures from the twentieth century and hopes to draw insights from their contributions, sacrifices, unsung heroism, inner conflicts, follies, foibles, moments of despair and triumph.

The ideologies which are instrumental in continuing women's oppression, has to be erased and this in turn will expunge the predetermined gender roles. Though there are women who have come up, there are many others who still remain at the flipside or even mysterious. But the factor which remains unnoticed is that though it is the woman who stands as a base and support for their counterpart, they occupy only a secondary position. In their vain attempt to become a companion rather than mere wives to their husbands, the socializing process of the subordination of women get reception. Hesitant to upset the gender hierarchies women deliberately or stoically seek solidarity with men who claim to possess superior virtues.

Women are in fact enforced to adopt a normal and comfortable state of being when the two live in harmony accepting the norms of society and hierarchies of power. For thousands of years, women have occupied the side-lines of history and as the centuries have gone by, very few have made a name for themselves in politics. As for the wives of heads of state, some are kept out of politics and others are expected to follow in the wake of their husbands and do everything possible to further their spouse's interests and career. They have become true political entrepreneurs as they work alongside their husbands in the conquest and retention of power. Ensuring that women have equal access to power and are equally represented in our democracy is a matter of both social justice and democratic legitimacy. Women have a right to participate in decisions that affect our lives, it's a matter of good governance that our institutions are representative.

Moreover, decisions of national importance, that affect us all, are being made without women round the table: the different experiences and perspectives of one half of the country are not being heard. In austere times, when economic decisions have a particular impact on women, it is important the needs, interests and experiences of women are duly informing political decisions. In terms of business – women need to be part of rebuilding the economy and more broadly in rebuilding trust in financial and institutions that affect the lives of everyone.

Moreover, evidence shows a direct link between a better bottom line and more women's involvement – in short it is clear that failing to involve women in shaping and building our economy is not just unfair, it is huge waste of talent and potential. The lack of women at the top also reproduces a norm of what leadership looks like and in turn can stifle the aspirations of future generations of women. Given the vita

I role our media plays in change, and how as a society and culture we view women, it also important that women play as much of a role as men in shaping this sector's work and output.

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