



# **The Politics of the President's Wife (Joseph V. Hughes Jr. and Holly O. Hughes Series on the Presidency and Leadership)**

*MaryAnne Borrelli PhD*

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As the West Wing has grown in power and organizational complexity during the modern presidency, so has the East Wing, office home to the First Lady of the United States. This groundbreaking work by MaryAnne Borrelli offers both theoretical and substantive insight into behind-the-scenes developments from the time of Lou Henry Hoover to the unfolding tenure of Michelle Robinson Obama.

Political scientists and historians have recognized the personal influence the First Lady can exercise with her husband, and they have noted the moral, ethical, and sometimes policy leadership certain presidents' wives have offered. Nonetheless, scholars and commentators alike have treated the personal relationship and the professional relationship as overlapping.

Borrelli offers a compelling counter-perspective: that the president's wife exercises power intrinsic to her role within the administration. Like others within the presidency, she has sometimes presented the president's views to constituents and sometimes presented constituents' views to the president, thus taking on a representative function within the system. In mediating president-constituent relationships, she has given a historical and social frame to the presidency that has enhanced its symbolic representation; she has served as a gender role model, enriching descriptive representation in the executive branch; and she has participated in policy initiatives to strengthen an administration's substantive representation. These contributions have been controversial, as might be predicted for a gender outsider, but they have unquestionably made the First Lady a representative of and to the president and, by extension, the president's administration.

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