Washington's life intersects with all of the above: beauty, politics, family, the war, the Revolution, and so much more. Martha Washington—"a redoubtable and vastly admired figure in her own right," as Flora Fraser describes her—drew attention from the start. Martha's was the first of the First Ladies, and her role was nascent, and her predecessors who followed after her continued to craft and redefine the tradition of the First Lady. The women who followed, from Mrs. Adams to Mrs. Eisenhower, have been called upon in the same ways as Martha, to occupy the White House with their family, to heal the nation with the power of their presence, to use their platform to advance their own ideas, to sit as the face of the President and the country, and to be their personal confidante. It is an honor and a responsibility that has been deeply resisted and assumed by these women. As we consider the role of the First Lady in a time when culture and politics are changing so rapidly, we must consider how women have faced these challenges with resilience and wit.

The first First Lady, Martha Washington, was an extraordinary woman in her own right, who had a unique influence on the young nation as it was being formed. The stories of America's early First Ladies can provide a window into the times in which they lived, and their struggles and triumphs can inspire us today. In this book, we will explore the lives of First Ladies from Martha Washington to Melania Trump, examining the ways in which they have shaped American politics and culture. We will see how these women have taken on the responsibility of being leaders in their own right, balancing the demands of their personal lives with the expectations of the public. We will also consider how their experiences and achievements have contributed to the evolution of the First Lady role, and how their legacies continue to influence political and cultural discourse in the United States today.