

# AMERICA'S GOODWILL AMBASSADORS

First Ladies Travel the World





**A** first lady's role as a goodwill ambassador is arguably one of the most important of her positions. It often becomes one of the most influential of the many titles attained and causes championed during her visits to other countries. While the history books may focus on the economic and intellectual developments of her husband's presidency internationally, a first lady's benevolent actions often sway the outcome. Yet when the ink hits the presidential paper, she is an unheralded asset in the history books. There may be a few sentences referencing her as an aside, if at all.

To be an envoy for international relations is not at all glamorous. It takes incredible stamina under the most grueling of circumstances to endure the following: the sleep lost when traveling in different time zones, the threat of sickness from eating unfamiliar foods, experiencing different altitudes, improper sanitary conditions, exposure to extremes in heat or humidity, insect infiltrations, angry mobs, grueling schedules, language barriers, intense media coverage, and the physical and mental strain of representing her husband and her country in foreign lands while being critiqued about her clothing and hairdo. Yet, all first ladies find that meeting the people in each country is a far greater reward than any hardships she may endure.

*America's Goodwill Ambassadors: First Ladies Travel the World*, acknowledges several first ladies whose roles as international agents of human kindness benefited their husbands' (and in one case uncle's) worldwide success before, during and after their presidencies.

## *Elizabeth Monroe ~ La Belle Américaine*

Travel was a way of life for James and Elizabeth Monroe. From the beginning of their marriage in 1786, Elizabeth accompanied James on the rounds of his legal circuit. Their home was in Albemarle County, Virginia where they traveled with their small daughter, Eliza, to Philadelphia when Monroe served as Senator for the first sessions of Congress in 1790. Four years later, President George Washington appointed Monroe Minister to France.



James Monroe's 1794 mission in France was complicated due to the French Revolution and the struggle for government power. Terrible conditions awaited the Monroes when their ship landed in war-torn France. Across the land, large mobs slaughtered innocent men, women and children; people were locked away in make-shift prisons for crimes real and imagined; and 17,000 lives ended under the sharp blades of guillotines. Paris, renowned for its luxury and beauty, was a shell of its former self. Food was scarce, and the filthy dilapidated streets and buildings were filled with rubbish and ragged hungry people. The food provisions the Monroes brought with them quickly disappeared.

Slowly but surely, James and Elizabeth Monroe learned the ways of French culture and were accepted by the leading military government officials in France. They learned to speak the French language fluently, filled their home with fine French household goods, and enrolled Eliza in an exclusive girls' boarding school. At state receptions Elizabeth became the center of attention. She was noted for her exquisite beauty, fashionable dress, and elegant poise. Captivated Parisians hailed her as "La Belle Américaine."

James Monroe's political and diplomatic success led to the release of many Americans from French prisons. There was one significant concern that Monroe was helpless to rectify. The General Marquis de Lafayette's wife faced the guillotine. During the chaotic government turnovers of the French Revolution, General Lafayette, an American Revolutionary war hero, became a traitor in his own country. He was imprisoned in Austria. His wife, Adrienne de Lafayette, was locked up along with her family and scheduled for execution at Le Plessis Prison in Paris.



It was too risky for Monroe to use his diplomatic status to directly intervene on behalf of Adrienne de Lafayette's release. So Elizabeth used her own popularity and power as the beautiful wife of the American Minister to directly call on Madame Lafayette in prison. She boldly and defiantly rode through the streets in her fine carriage on the way to the prison drawing public attention and curiosity along the way. With deliberate and self-confident composure she exited the coach and demanded to see Madame Lafayette at the prison gates. At first Madame Lafayette assumed she was being summoned to the guillotines, since her grandmother, mother and sister had recently met this fate. While still in this frantic and confused state, she fell into Elizabeth's arms openly shedding tears of immense relief. Promptly the city was abuzz with reports of Mrs. Monroe's visit and soon Madame Lafayette was released. She stayed with the Monroes until arrangements were made for her and her daughters to join General Lafayette in his Austrian prison cell at Olmütz.



### *Harriet Lane ~ Honorary Ambassadress*

Refined and intelligent, the young Harriet Lane was a great source of pride and service to her uncle, James Buchanan. The daughter of his sister, Jane, Harriet became Buchanan's ward when she was orphaned at the age of nine. Harriet was sent to boarding schools for her education, but the two retained a close relationship through letters. Upon completing her education at age eighteen, Harriet became an accomplished and lively hostess for all the political dignitaries



her uncle entertained. When President Franklin Pierce appointed Buchanan as Minister to the Court of St. James in 1853, Harriet joined him for the last 18 months of his appointment where she served as his official hostess in London.

Within two weeks of her arrival, 22-year-old Harriet was presented to Queen Victoria. Her graceful presentation and flawless manners made such a favorable impression on Queen Victoria that she gave Harriet the rank of "ministerial consort," a title that granted her the same status as a diplomat's wife. This title gave her access to upper British society and soon Harriet was greatly admired. The queen also gave her the title "Honorary Ambassadress" as Harriet traveled over England, Scotland and France. Her tremendous popularity spread throughout Europe. She was pursued by numerous European suitors and received two marriage proposals.

The friendships James and Harriet developed during their stay would forge a new beginning between the US and England. In 1860, the Prince of Wales would be the first royal to ever visit the United States. The major event of the trip was the prince's visit to Mount Vernon where the prince planted a horse chestnut tree at George Washington's grave. The warm bond between Harriet Lane and the Royal Family lasted her entire life. She received a personal invitation from the prince to his coronation as King Edward VII in 1901.



## Helen Taft ~ Rigadon Dancer



Helen Taft was an extraordinary woman, who embraced all new adventures in her life. One of the best decisions she made was to marry William Howard Taft, who understood and admired her intelligence. Knowing that she understood and cared more about politics than he, she was his closest confidante in the more modern sense of "political partner."

In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, President William McKinley offered Taft the newly established Governor-General position of the Philippine Islands in 1900. Helen enthusiastically packed up their belongings and three children to join him in the capital of Manila. For a woman who grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, the years in the Philippines would be some of her fondest. In her memoir, *Recollections of Full Years*, her experiences on these islands fill almost half of the book.

Taft's job as Governor-General of the Philippines was to establish a working democratic government that would eventually be turned over to the native Filipinos. The difficulty was gaining trust and asserting a calm authority to the common people who had suffered from years of war and former military rule. Helen Taft understood the political aspects – and knew her actions were crucial. She gave public receptions every Wednesday afternoon at the Malacanan Palace. At first

very few people came; however, she warmly and repeatedly invited all she met, "...we prevailed on a good number to believe

they were really wanted; and after a little while there began to be as many brown faces as white among our guests."

As a part of the new Commission to the Philippine Islands, Helen and several other officials' wives accompanied their husbands on a sixty-day tour of the southern islands. They visited over twenty different towns and villages. Helen quickly realized the Filipinos' love of speeches, and there was no time limit to the daily political lectures even in the tropical heat. At each *banquete* many courses "of assorted meats" were served and the hosts expected at least a small portion to be eaten while more formal addresses droned on. The first dance at the *baile* was the national dance of the Philippines, the *rigadon*. As the Governor-General's wife, Helen's partner was always the leading *ilustrado* of the community, and by rigorously repeating the quick and nimble steps she became quite proficient.

Helen Taft's most astounding feat was to journey into the mountain region of northern Luzon. Many isolated tribes lived throughout this area, and no white women had ever traveled there before. The remote trek was made by horseback over rugged terrain. Helen's problem was she had never ridden on horseback; nevertheless, she eagerly learned and was quite proud of her equestrian abilities along the dangerous pathways. Curious groups of natives gathered around her and the other women, but she wrote, "I'm sure we looked much more peculiar to them than they looked to us." She admired the tribes people for their farming skills. She noted the headhunters and the trophies of human skulls proudly displayed in





their homes. She slept on the ground on a bamboo cot with blankets strung as a division for men and women, and thoroughly enveloped herself in all she encountered.

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt summoned Taft to become his Secretary of War. It was hard for the Tafts to leave the Philippines, for they deeply cared for the many diverse people of the islands. They were devoted to the country's development into a self-governing democracy.

## *Lou Hoover ~ Hoo Loo*

It was the study of the Earth's history that would bring Herbert and Lou Hoover together. Both were geology majors at Stanford University when they met. Herbert Hoover graduated a few years before Lou and began his career in the mining fields of Australia. He wired a marriage proposal to Lou and the wedding was arranged for February 10, 1899, so that the two could board a ship to China the following day. Hoover had accepted a new position as Director General of the Department of Mines of the Chinese Government.



Lou was captivated with all things Chinese. She explored the countryside and cities and learned to fluently speak the Chinese language. The Chinese called her *Hoo Loo* which roughly translated to "wild deer." Often Lou would accompany Hoover on mine inspections. The Chinese miners were astounded that as the chief mining engineer, Hoover would physically go underground to examine the mine's shafts, tunnels and equipment. On one occasion Lou descended with Herbert, and the miners were so distressed that they held a special ceremony to expel the evil spirits that accompanied this outlandish woman down below.

The Hoovers lived in the city of Tientsin (now known as Tianjin). The accessible waterways of Tientsin made it the foreign capital of China. Lou described it as "a series of plots assigned to different nations" that was walled off from the rest of the city in an area known as the Concession. The ruling Mandarin class in China did not like this influx of foreigners and the power and influence they brought with them. The Mandarins convinced the Empress Dowager to seize control from the Emperor, and in the political unrest the Ei Ho Chiang ("The Closed Fist") movement arose. These "Boxers" believed it was their duty to rid China of all foreigners including any Chinese who associated with them. The Boxers believed their cause gave them invincible powers against bullets, and without military organization they ultimately were overcome. However, at the height of their strength they caused much havoc. Over 200 foreigners were killed and 30,000 Chinese Christians. Tientsin was completely surrounded for twenty-nine days.



As was typical of Lou Hoover throughout her life, she threw her tremendous energy into helping others. She rode her bicycle protectively along the walls to deliver sheets and bandages to the makeshift hospital and to deliver rationed food supplies. A stray bullet pierced her bicycle's front tire once, but she calmly carried on with her errands. She helped build barricades and carried her small rifle on her 9 to 11 pm shift patrolling the Concession. The Hoovers' house was continually struck by cannon shells. A friend described Lou playing solitaire as a

shell whizzed through the door. Unfazed she continued the card game commenting, "I don't seem to be getting this." Shortly



after relief forces arrived and drove the Boxers from the city, the Hoovers read their obituaries in a New York newspaper.

The Hoovers left China in early fall of 1900 as Hoover took on a new venture traveling the world inspecting mines for Bewick, Moreing and Company, based in England. Lou began to organize her diaries and sketches from her experiences in China and started a manuscript on her experiences during the Boxer Rebellion that was never published. She continued to study China's history and collected a handsome display of Ming and Ch'ing porcelains. The Hoovers would speak Chinese whenever they wanted to communicate privately throughout their very public lives.

## *Jacqueline Kennedy ~ Durga, Goddess of Power*

It is a rare occasion when a woman captures the awe and fixation of the entire world. Jacqueline Kennedy was a natural beauty, but as First Lady her essence captured global allure. Her gift of language – she spoke Spanish, Italian and French fluently – and her inherent love of history and art only added to her international appeal. With all the media attention mainly on what she wore and did, it was easy to ignore the important diplomatic relationships she brilliantly impressed.

On their first trip abroad during President Kennedy's administration, they flew to Paris at French President Charles de Gaulle's invitation. A national holiday was declared on May 31, 1961 in honor of the Kennedys' visit. Over five hundred thousand people jammed the streets shouting, "Vive Jacqui!" as they slowly motored to the Quai d'Orsay where they were staying. That afternoon Mrs. Kennedy accompanied Mme. De Gaulle to a children's hospital besieged by the media and more chants from the crowd. The de Gaulles hosted a formal dinner banquet the next night in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles Palace followed by a ballet in the jewel-box theatre of Louis XV. During the course of the night, Jackie dazzled de Gaulle with her knowledge of French history, literature and art. She served as the personal interpreter between her husband and the French president. De Gaulle admitted to Kennedy, "I now have more confidence in your country."

In Vienna the next day, Jackie's charm was the only highlight of the relations between the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev

and President Kennedy. When the media asked him to shake hands with Kennedy, Khrushchev responded, "I'd like to shake her hand first." Though Kennedy failed to get assurance of better relations between the two super powers, Khrushchev sent one of the puppies from one of the dogs flown in the USSR's space program to Jackie as a gift.

The American Ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith, arranged for Mrs. Kennedy's goodwill trip to India and Pakistan in March of 1962. Communist China was a looming threat to relations between India and America at the time, and Ambassador Galbraith knew Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was captivated by Jackie. Not only did Nehru waive protocol by leaving Parliament early to greet a non-head of state upon her arrival, but he insisted that Jackie and her sister, Princess Lee Radziwill stay at his home. Even though the tour was billed as "non-official," this was a carefully thought out expedition. Galbraith held press briefings twice a day and great care was taken with the two vans full of Mrs. Kennedy's clothes. Jackie chose outfits of rich jewel-tone colors to reflect the lovely saris worn by the women of these countries. She also had a red dot, or *tilak*, placed on her forehead. The media in India hailed her as "Durga, goddess of power." Film crews and photographers captured every move she made, from her ride on an elephant, her admiration of the Taj Mahal, to a boat ride down the Ganges River as adoring crowds along the banks waved and blew on conch shells.



*Photo courtesy of John F. Kennedy Presidential Library*

President Ayub Kahn of Pakistan showered Jackie with as much admiring attention as Nehru. Kahn gave her one of her favorite gifts of the trip, the magnificent ten-year-old bay gelding named Sardar. On the motorway from the airport to the Government Guest House in Rawalpindi, over 100,000 people lined the streets



waving American flags and showering cars with rose petals for good luck. At Khyber Pass a tribal chief praised the honored friendship and aid of America to which Jackie gently replied, "You don't have to tell me that." It was reported that "people danced in the streets" as Mrs. Kennedy's car drove by.

In October of 1962, China invaded the north-east corner of India. Nehru requested military aid from the US. As the military supplies arrived the Indian government was extremely grateful for this sign of friendship – yet another assurance of the bond between the two countries cemented by Jackie's visit. Though critics were harsh on the expense of Jackie's "unofficial" trip, the diplomatic bonds gained by her delight in the culture of another land, and the exposure to a foreign country made for a better understanding of acceptance on both sides of the world.

## *Pat Nixon ~ The People's Ambassador*

By the time Pat Nixon became First Lady she had traveled around the world several times. Beginning in 1953, when Richard Nixon was Vice-President under the Eisenhower administration, the Nixons went on numerous goodwill tours. Pat Nixon never tired of meeting the people of foreign lands; in fact, many often remarked on her energy and empathy. Richard Nixon was immensely supportive and proud of her accomplishments. He wrote, "...too many times our trips abroad deal with hard problems and not enough of the far more important personal warmth and symbolism



*Photo courtesy of John F. Kennedy Presidential Library*



which means so much... what came through was love of the people of the countries she visited for her, and, on her part, love for them."

Pat Nixon was at ease no matter what her agenda was in a foreign land, whether discussing human rights issues in South Africa, or recommending to Yugoslavian officials that their parliament could use more women members. She stubbornly insisted, however, that her schedule be filled with meeting the country's people in outlying villages, schools, hospitals and orphanages.

In a memorable goodwill tour to war-torn Vietnam in July of 1969, Pat became the second First Lady to enter a combat zone – following in the steps of Eleanor Roosevelt. She visited the Thuduc orphanage, which housed 774 children, and a Vietnamese hospital in the refugee camp of Sontay. A military helicopter flew her to the Twenty-fourth Evacuation Hospital at Long Binh where she spent over two hours personally visiting with each injured man, bending down on her knees to talk privately and jot down names and addresses of loved ones. Later she reassured families by sending them personal letters.

On May 31, 1970, an earthquake struck Peru on a Sunday afternoon. It came to be known as "The Great Peruvian Earthquake." The towns of Yungay and Ranrahirca were completely buried by the destabilized Mount Huascarán. Over one million people were left homeless. With a death toll of nearly 80,000, another 25,000 missing, and 200,000 injured, it was considered one of the worst earthquakes in history. Within a week of the disaster, Pat Nixon was heading to Peru with nine tons of supplies from private



donors. From there Mrs. Nixon and the President of Peru's wife, Mrs. Consuelo Velasco, took a cargo jet and headed into the Andes Mountain region to the worst of the disaster – what Peruvians called the "Valley of Death." For the entire day Pat walked through the rubble as people gathered around her. She listened to them tell of their ordeal as she reached out to console them.

The strained relations between Peru and the US lessened when a month after Pat's visit, President Velasco gave an Independence Day Speech. In it he thanked all the foreign aid that had been given, but singled out the "US solidarity with Peru as signified by the special visit of Mrs. Nixon." Her personal concern for people became a "diplomatic side-effect." The Velasco government later awarded her the Grand Cross of the Order of the Sun, the oldest decoration in the Americas. Mrs. Nixon is surpassed only by Hillary Clinton in global travel.

## *Rosalynn Carter ~ Portavoz*

President Jimmy Carter personally asked Rosalynn to go to Latin America for him in 1977. He was so busy setting up his administration's domestic and foreign policy initiatives in Washington that he needed her assistance. She explained "...it could help him tremendously in letting the people of Latin America and the Caribbean countries know that he was genuinely interested in them." Though this was an unprecedented first for a First Lady to be an unelected representative for the President in a foreign country, it was a natural decision between these two life partners.



The daily briefings were grueling; thirteen daily sessions lasting 5 hours each with experts, specialists, and officials from the State and Treasury Departments and the National Security Council. She was consumed with reading the histories and policies of all seven countries she would visit, and intensely brushed up her Spanish to help ease her concern for saying the "right thing" in another language.



*Photo courtesy of Jimmy Carter Library*

The State Department officially titled her a *portavoz*, or spokesperson for the government. However, *U.S. News & World Report* quoted a foreign diplomat's statement, "No Latin leader would send his wife to Washington to carry on substantive discussions with President Carter." Another source said, "I don't think any Latin American statesman will take her seriously, even if she is the wife of the President of the United States." Rosalynn was out to prove the nay-sayers wrong. "Clearly, what I had to do was convince the critics, the press, the leaders themselves that I was not only prepared but eager to discuss the issues and report what I learned directly to the President. I was *determined* to be taken seriously."

The journey began on May 30, 1977. When Mrs. Carter met the leader of each country, she had a standardized approach. Rosalynn gave a summary and overview of her husband's foreign policy to each leader– the main emphasis on his deep commitment to human rights for all peoples. This would let the country's leader know she meant business and she was capable because she was "informed and could enter into a productive conversation." It also broke the ice for discussion on each country's individual, regional and global concerns. It was a winning formula. In Jamaica her very presence was a symbol of renewed





*Photo courtesy of Jimmy Carter Library*

trust and interest. Since relations between Costa Rica and the US were already on good terms, Mrs. Carter's spent time discussing trade issues and human rights. Not all talks were easy, especially in Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil since those countries were under military rule at the time. In Colombia, Rosalynn delicately discussed drug traffic problems with President Alfonso López Micelson, and concluded they agreed to disagree. Both Ecuador and Venezuela were smarting from the US trade ban caused by the OPEC oil embargo. Both leaders frankly pointed out to Rosalynn that even though they were members of OPEC, they had not participated in the embargo. President Carlos Andrés Pérez argued that Venezuela had actually increased their oil shipments during that time. She found that Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela and Brazil all had suspicions about each other and were threatened by various purchases of weaponry and nuclear arms by their neighboring countries. In each of the seven countries, Rosalynn found the leaders eager to discuss their problems with her, and with all of them her talks went on for hours after the allotted time. Rosalynn took detailed notes and faithfully reported all the problems back to President Carter each day.

The most triumphal aspects of her trip were her talks with Ecuador and Peru. The Ecuadorean Supreme Council disclosed to Mrs. Carter that they did not intend for Ecuador to remain a military government and looked forward to the day when their country would be a democratic state. Likewise, General Francisco Morales Bermúdez confided to her that he intended to give up his power and establish a democracy in Peru. Rosalynn remained in close contact with those leaders,

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and she took personal pride as they continued their progress toward democracy. She attended the inauguration of Ecuador's newly elected president, Jaime Roldós Aguilera in August of 1979. She would do the same in 1980 for President Fernando Belaúnde after the national elections in Peru.

Rosalynn Carter continues to travel the world with former-President Jimmy Carter on their mission and commitment to peace, social justice and human rights.

## *Hillary Clinton ~ Ayda Nhaay*

"Human rights are women's rights...and women's rights are human rights, once and for all." This was the last line of First Lady Hillary Clinton's famous speech in Beijing, China at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. It remains the focus of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as the nation's top diplomat.

The history of Hillary's involvement in women's rights began well before she was First Lady. As First Lady, Hillary had the platform to carry out her passion for women's rights. In Mongolia she learned to milk a horse from a beautiful nomadic matriarch, and later sipped fermented mare's milk in her spacious tent. When one of the White House doctors found out later (nicknamed Dr. Doom) he ordered a strong regime of antibiotics in case she contracted brucellosis from drinking raw milk.

On her South Asian tour in 1995, the contradictions in women's lives astonished Hillary. She paid a morning visit to the wife of Pakistan's president, Mrs. Begum





Nasreen Leghari. Although Mrs. Leghari lived in luxury, she lived in isolation called *purdah*. It meant she could not be seen by any men outside her immediate family unless she was heavily veiled. She even watched her husband's inauguration on TV. Hillary's next stop was a luncheon held in her honor by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Harvard-educated Bhutto was an active advocate in seeking change for the women of her country. A year later, Bhutto was ousted from power under accusations of government corruption.



One of the continents that Hillary Clinton found the most fascinating was Africa. She was exhilarated by the many self-help efforts that continued despite the problems in a very troubled, exotic land. In 1997, she undertook a two week cross-country journey that encompassed everything from a visit to an AIDS-infested village in East Africa to a safari teeming with wildlife on the Serengeti Plain. In the small village of Saam Njaay in Senegal, Hillary was greeted by clapping and singing villagers. Though their dwellings were made of millet stalks and dried palm leaf roofs, the community was a model for US and UN grants and programs that taught literacy and democracy. The villagers performed a skit about democracy and asked her to join in the celebratory dancing afterwards. Both Hillary and her daughter, Chelsea were given village names – the First Lady's was *Ayda Nhaay*, in honor of a local teacher who "says what she thinks."

Hillary Clinton continues to travel the globe as Secretary of State. She is consciously aware of being a role model for young girls, and her commitment to women's rights is undeterred. She wrote, "When women suffer, their children suffer

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and their economies stagnate, ultimately weakening potential markets for US products. And when women are victimized, the stability of families, communities and nations is eroded, jeopardizing the prospects for democracy and prosperity globally."

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It takes remarkable stamina, vigor and thick skin to be a First Lady of the US. But when a First Lady represents the president in foreign countries – she walks a fine line. First Ladies have always been aware of their power and presence as they represented, and continue to represent our country as goodwill ambassadors.

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