



Mamie Doud Eisenhower: The General's First Lady (Modern First Ladies)

Marilyn Irvin Holt

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It was fitting for a soldier's wife to make curtains out of military-surplus parachutes. That they would hang in the White House made little difference.

Mamie Doud Eisenhower was a president's wife who seemed to most Americans like the friend next door. She gave us "Mamie pink" and "Mamie bangs" but has stood in the shadows of first ladies who followed. Yet she accomplished more than even her own contemporaries noticed, and her popularity not only enhanced her husband's presidency but also put a distinctive stamp on the role of first lady.

This first scholarly biography of Mamie Eisenhower draws on original sources in the Eisenhower Library to paint a realistic and captivating portrait. Marilyn Irvin Holt places her in the context of her time, showing that she was a perfect first lady for the fifties—a stylish grandmother who doted on her family and considered her job to be creating a home life that eased her husband's work tensions. But Holt shows that besides being steadfastly devoted to Ike, Mamie Eisenhower employed her own "hidden hand" to boost his image.

Holt recaptures the winning personality that made Mrs. Eisenhower an important part of both her husband's success and her cultural milieu, and relates how her experience as an army wife—with overseas postings, acquaintance with heads of state, and experience as an accomplished hostess—better prepared her for the White House. Holt reveals that there was much more to Mamie Eisenhower than the housewife she described herself as, showing us instead a resourceful first lady who ran the executive mansion like an army sergeant, relished charity work, and promoted cultural events.

As an agent for change, Mamie Eisenhower not only entertained foreign dignitaries but also invited African Americans to the White House when tensions over civil rights were mounting. Holt shares other behind-the-scenes stories of the first lady flying in the face of social and political expectations during the McCarthy era, and also debunks prevailing notions of animosity with Pat Nixon.

Although Ike's reputation has rebounded in recent years, Mamie's has remained in the shadows. Holt convincingly shows that there was far more to this neglected first lady than she has received credit for.

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