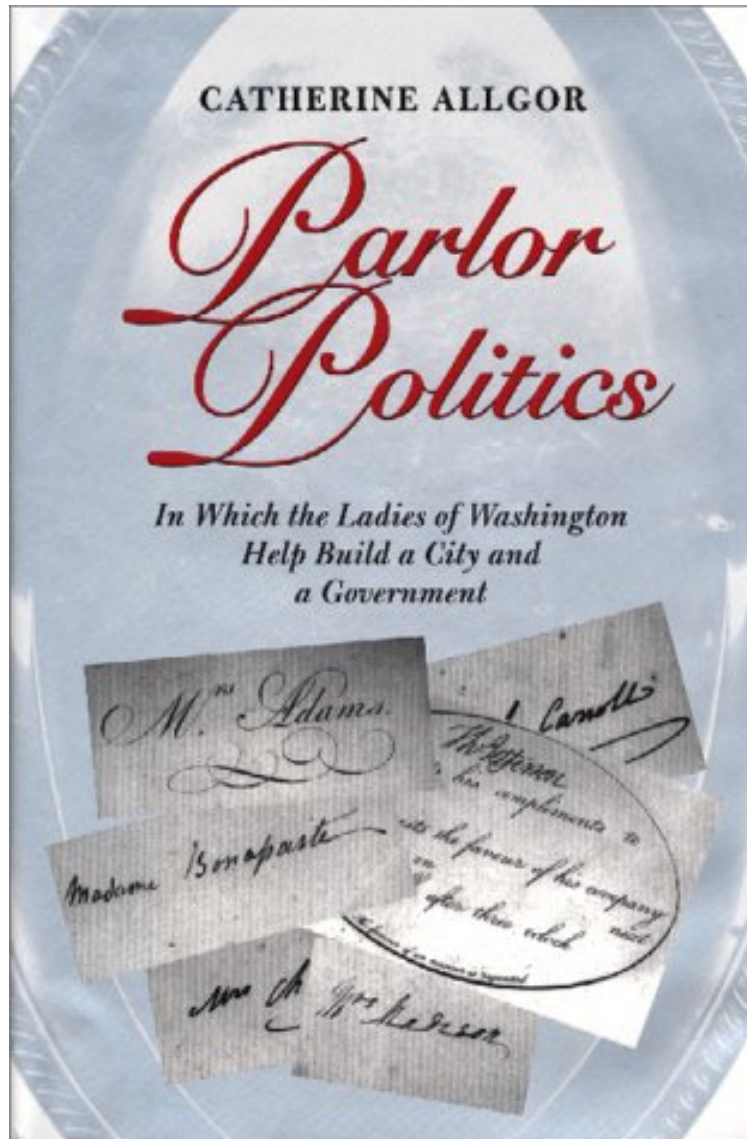


Parlor Politics : In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government

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From Catherine Allgor : Parlor Politics : In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Parlor Politics : In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government:

13 of 14 people found the following review helpful. well done and worth a read By CrystallI was lucky enough to be

student of Dr. Allgor's for three years and the book was everything I would expect from her. She is at times funny and serious, and capable of explaining history in academic terms that aren't so esoteric as to be incomprehensible to the non-historian while giving a fresh spin on a well documented time period. In *Parlor Politics*, Allgor documents the vital role that women played in the creation of a society during (arguably) the most fragile period in our history. One wrong move and the whole democracy concept could've gone out the window. Women were able to step in and do things that men couldn't, and under the guise of furthering their family became real movers and shakers in the early Washington scene. Allgor documents the time of Jefferson through the Jackson presidency and does so with a style that is often missing in academic texts. It is easy to see why this book is quickly becoming an influential work in the history of Washington and the construction of America. If you enjoy this book, you may want to also read "Good Wives" by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich...more dry, but also interesting. 21 of 22 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating view of Washington political and social life. By Joe Brown. In the early 19th century, Washington City was a new political frontier by the time Thomas Jefferson was elected to the President's House. The new political and social elites were both taken aback by Washington's crude facilities and (at first) socially barren lifestyle yet were somewhat anxious to create a new political and social capital. The male politicians who came to Washington City were accompanied by their wives, sisters, and other female relatives and counterparts who saw enormous opportunity for not only social gain but political influence as well. Catherine Allgor's book, "Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Build a City and Government", convincingly portrays women as important movers and shakers in both Jeffersonian and Jacksonian society. The increasing influence that women were making in social life was beginning to play an important role in politics as well. The republican ideals of womanhood brought increasing responsibility to mothers and wives to train younger generations in civic duties. Women then used this domestic role to effectively make their presence known in the male-dominated milieu of politics. Allgor uses the examples of Dolley Payne Todd Madison, Elizabeth Cortwright Monroe, and Catherine Adams (all First Ladies) to brilliantly point out that women could make or break a person's reputation in Washington. Women were ardent lobbyists; busily preparing and grooming their husbands' careers and making sure that they were introduced to the proper people in Washington. The practice of "calling", for example, on the city's social elite illustrates a complicated network of contacts which was a way of life in the social circles of the nation's capital. While it is easy for upper-class women to busy themselves with politics and social matters (they did have servants to perform most domestic chores) they nevertheless were provided more opportunities for political advancement. Allgor's analyses of the various levees and "drawing rooms" that were held in Washington City illustrate complex social situations in which women played a vital part. Dolley Madison, for example, realized how even the most intricate of details like the color of curtains, for example, could determine if a levee would be successful or not. Allgor's monograph is short yet detailed look at social life in early Washington. So much can be gleaned from this book that can be pertained to modern times (the Jackson scandals, for example). Overall, an interesting behind-the-scenes look at Washington political and social life. 1 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Assigned Reading. By Julia Had to read this as an class assignment. It actually turned out to be pretty interesting, but I think the author could have used 5 words instead of 50 to say the same thing.

When Thomas Jefferson moved his victorious Republican administration into the new capital city in 1801, one of his first acts was to abolish any formal receptions, except on New Year's Day and the Fourth of July. His successful campaign for the presidency had been partially founded on the idea that his Federalist enemies had assumed dangerously aristocratic trappings? a sword for George Washington and a raised dais for Martha when she received people at social occasions? in the first capital cities of New York and Philadelphia. When the ladies of Washington City, determined to have their own salon, arrived en masse at the president's house, Jefferson met them in riding clothes, expressing surprise at their presence. His deep suspicion of any occasion that resembled a European court caused a major problem, however: without the face-to-face relationships and networks of interest created in society, the American experiment in government could not function. Into this conundrum, writes Catherine Allgor, stepped women like Dolley Madison and Louisa Catherine Adams, women of political families who used the unofficial, social sphere to cement the relationships that politics needed to work. Not only did they create a space in which politics was effectively conducted; their efforts legitimated the new republic and the new capital in the eyes of European nations, whose representatives scoffed at the city's few amenities and desolate setting. Covered by the prescriptions of their gender, Washington women engaged in the dirty business of politics, which allowed their husbands to retain their republican purity. Constrained by the cultural taboos on "petticoat politicking," women rarely wrote forthrightly about their ambitions and plans, preferring to cast their political work as an extension of virtuous family roles. But by analyzing their correspondence, gossip events, "etiquette wars," and the material culture that surrounded them, Allgor finds that these women acted with conscious political intent. In the days before organized political parties, the social machine built by these early federal women helped to ease the transition from a failed republican experiment to a burgeoning democracy.

From *Publishers Weekly* In this scholarly yet animated and thought-provoking, analysis, Allgor presents her

groundbreaking research on the critical role that women played in the early days of Washington politics. Any connection whatsoever between women and government had been firmly opposed by Thomas Jefferson—the first president to make Washington his permanent residence—because a female presence reminded him of decadent European court life and offended his republican sensibilities. However, when Dolley Madison became first lady, she initiated a social life in Washington that enabled the political players to gather at "levees" (large parties) and dinners, presided over by Washington matriarchs, which not only redefined the social dimension of politics, but also gave women more freedom to participate in public life. In fact, during Andrew Jackson's administration, a scandal over the virtue of Margaret Eaton, who was married to his secretary of war, forced the resignation of the entire cabinet because their wives refused to speak to Eaton, much to Jackson's fury. Allgor, an assistant professor of history at Simmons College, combines excellent research, which draws on primary archival material, with a flair for expressive writing. (Dec.) Forecast: One of the new first lady's first official engagements in January will be a luncheon sponsored by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association and the First Ladies' Library, where Allgor is scheduled to be the guest speaker. A selection of the History Book Club, her book is bound to draw attention in Washington, as well as in New York and Boston, where publicity appearances should bring her work to the attention of readers interested in women's studies, U.S. history and politics. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. Parlor Politics is a stimulating, lively, and subtle book that enlarges our understanding of how, in just half a century, Washington City became an important world capital. (Alan Pell Crawford Wall Street Journal) For those whose knowledge of early Washington and its politics is in need of repair, Parlor Politics provides a fresh perspective and rich details? history at its most readable. (Jeff Sharlet Washington Post) What Ms. Allgor's history suggests is that the nation that dares to criticize its first lady's fashion sense may be a very healthy one indeed. (Emily Eakin New York Times) In this scholarly yet animated and thought-provoking analysis, Allgor presents her groundbreaking research on the critical role that women played in the early days of Washington politics.... Allgor... combines excellent research, which draws on primary archival material, with a flair for expressive writing. (Publishers Weekly, *starred review) An extraordinary piece of work, easily one of the most intellectually original and stylishly elegant first books I have ever read. Allgor's treatment of the role of women brings them into the center of the story of America's early political history and demonstrates that the republican values so central to the ideology of the post-Revolutionary era actually required the presence of women to permit the federal government to function. It's the kind of argument that seems utterly self-evident but in fact no one has made it before in anything like this persuasive way. Throughout the text, one encounters a truly lyrical presence, cajoling, whispering, taking us aside (as at an elegant dinner party) to talk interestingly about what the evidence means. (Joseph J. Ellis, author of Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation and American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson) Parlor Politics is an absolute gem of historical research and writing. Again and again?and yet again?it opens fresh views on the political culture of the early Republic. Moreover, its sprightly, sparkling prose will delight scholars and general readers alike. (John Demos, Yale University, author of The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America) Parlor Politics is cultural history at its best. Showing how style and substance merged into social power, Catherine Allgor has recovered the fascinating political role of women in the Washington of Jefferson and his successors. (Joyce Appleby, author of Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans) Allgor's concern with the blurred lines between official and unofficial politics, government and society, image making and power sharing, resonates loudly in our own time. (US News World Report) Ms. Allgor's argument is more than a new twist on the history of high society. Parlor Politics, her first book, has opened not just a new window on the past, but floodgates. (Chronicle of Higher Education) About the Author Catherine Allgor, winner of dissertation awards from Yale University and the Organization of American Historians, is Assistant Professor of History at Simmons College.