

# Ties That Bound: The Intriguing Connection Between the Founding First Ladies and Slaves

As we explore the rich history of the United States, we often come across stories that highlight the experiences of influential figures such as the founding fathers. However, it is equally important to shed light on the untold stories of the women who played significant roles in shaping the nation's early years - the founding first ladies. This article aims to uncover the profound and complex connections between these remarkable women and the slaves who lived and worked in the shadows.

From Martha Washington to Dolley Madison and beyond, the first ladies of the United States contributed to the growth and development of the nation in various ways. But what we often overlook is the role that enslaved individuals played in supporting these women and their families, and the ways in which these relationships shaped their experiences.

The institution of slavery was deeply ingrained in the fabric of American society during the 18th and 19th centuries. Slaves were considered personal property, and many of the founding fathers and early presidents owned enslaved individuals. Consequently, it was common for first ladies to have enslaved individuals as part of their households.

## **Ties That Bound: Founding First Ladies and Slaves** by Marie Jenkins Schwartz (Kindle Edition)

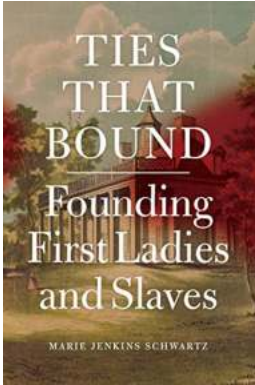
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## **Martha Washington: A Founding First Lady's Struggle**

Martha Washington, the wife of George Washington, was known for her strength and resilience. However, behind the scenes, she relied heavily on her enslaved helpers to manage Mount Vernon, their plantation in Virginia. Slaves like Oney Judge and Hercules Mulligan were an integral part of Martha's daily life, assisting her with household tasks and providing support in times of need.

While historians have often focused on the achievements and contributions of the founding fathers, it is essential to recognize the influence that enslaved individuals had on their success. Martha Washington's enslaved workers played critical roles in ensuring the smooth operation of her household, allowing her to focus on her duties as the first lady.

## **The Enigmatic Dolley Madison and Her Connection to Slavery**

Dolley Madison is widely admired for her charm, elegance, and her role as a prominent socialite during her husband James Madison's presidency. However, few people know that Dolley Madison relied on a network of enslaved individuals to maintain her influential position in society. Paul Jennings, one of Dolley Madison's slaves, played an especially significant role in her life.

Paul Jennings started as a body servant to James Madison and later served as Dolley Madison's personal attendant. With his help, Dolley Madison was able to navigate the intricate social and political circles of the time, making critical contributions to her husband's political career. The stories of individuals like Paul Jennings illustrate the deep interdependence between first ladies and the enslaved individuals who were a vital part of their lives.

## **The Power of Influence: How First Ladies Impacted the Lives of Slaves**

The relationships between first ladies and their enslaved workers were complex and multifaceted. While slaves endured harsh living conditions and limited personal freedoms, there were instances where first ladies had a profound impact on their lives.

Take, for example, Thomas Jefferson's enslaved mistress, Sally Hemings, who had a deep bond with Jefferson's wife, Martha. Martha Jefferson took Hemings under her wing, taught her important skills, and even assigned her domestic responsibilities. These actions, while controversial and problematic within the context of slavery, shed light on the intricate relationships that existed between first ladies and the slaves who served them.

The stories surrounding these relationships are often shrouded in mystery, but they provide a unique perspective on the experiences of enslaved individuals. Recognizing and acknowledging these connections allows us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role that enslaved individuals played in the lives of the founding first ladies and, by extension, in the shaping of the early United States.

## **Confronting the Uncomfortable Truths of History**

Examining the connections between the founding first ladies and enslaved individuals compels us to confront the uncomfortable truths of America's history. These relationships were the product of a deeply flawed system that perpetuated human bondage and oppression.

By shining a light on these hidden stories, we not only honor the contributions and experiences of the enslaved individuals but also gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of our nation's history. It forces us to question and challenge preconceived notions about the founding first ladies and the broader society that allowed such injustices to prevail.

The ties that bound the founding first ladies and slaves are a reminder of the importance of acknowledging and grappling with the darker aspects of our history. By confronting these uncomfortable truths, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable future.

## In

Unraveling the ties that bound the founding first ladies and slaves offers a fresh perspective on the influential women who shaped America's early years. Their lives were intertwined with the enslaved individuals who were an essential part of their households and daily activities. Understanding these connections allows us to delve deeper into the complexities of America's past and ultimately strive for a more just society in the present and future.

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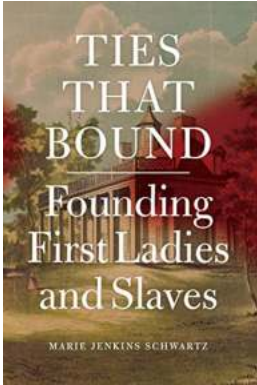
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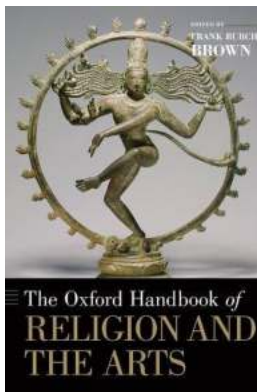


Behind every great man stands a great woman. And behind that great woman stands a slave. Or so it was in the households of the Founding Fathers from Virginia, where slaves worked and suffered throughout the domestic environments of the era, from Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Montpelier to the nation's capital. American icons like Martha Washington, Martha Jefferson, and Dolley Madison were all slaveholders. And as Marie Jenkins Schwartz uncovers in *Ties That Bound*, these women, as the day-to-day managers of their households, dealt with the realities of a slaveholding culture directly and continually, even in the most intimate of spaces.

Unlike other histories that treat the stories of the First Ladies' slaves as separate from the lives of their mistresses, *Ties That Bound* closely examines the relationships that developed between the First Ladies and their slaves. For elite women and their families, slaves were more than an agricultural workforce; slavery was an entire domestic way of life that reflected and reinforced their status. In many cases slaves were more constant companions to the white women of the household than were their husbands and sons, who often traveled or were at war. By looking closely at the complicated intimacy these women shared, Schwartz is able to reveal how they negotiated their roles, illuminating

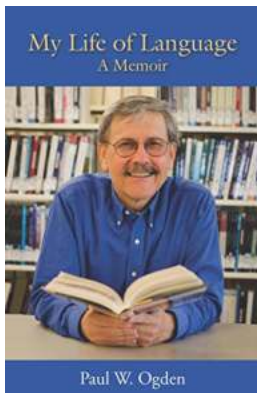
much about the lives of slaves themselves, as well as class, race, and gender in early America.

By detailing the prevalence and prominence of slaves in the daily lives of women who helped shape the country, Schwartz makes it clear that it is impossible to honestly tell the stories of these women while ignoring their slaves. She asks us to consider anew the embedded power of slavery in the very earliest conception of American politics, society, and everyday domestic routines.



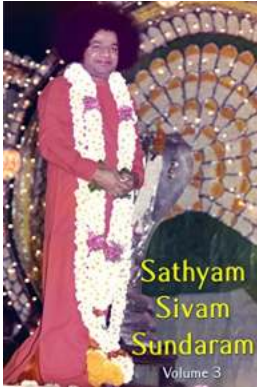
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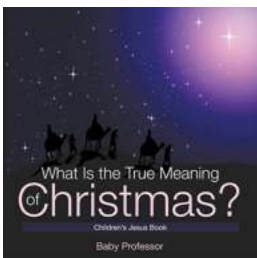
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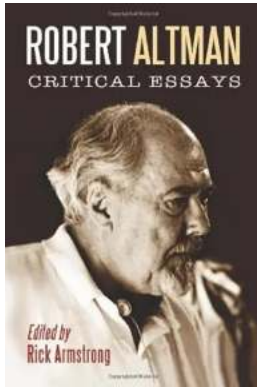
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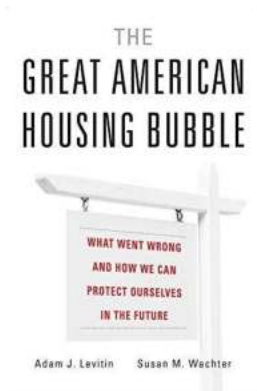
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