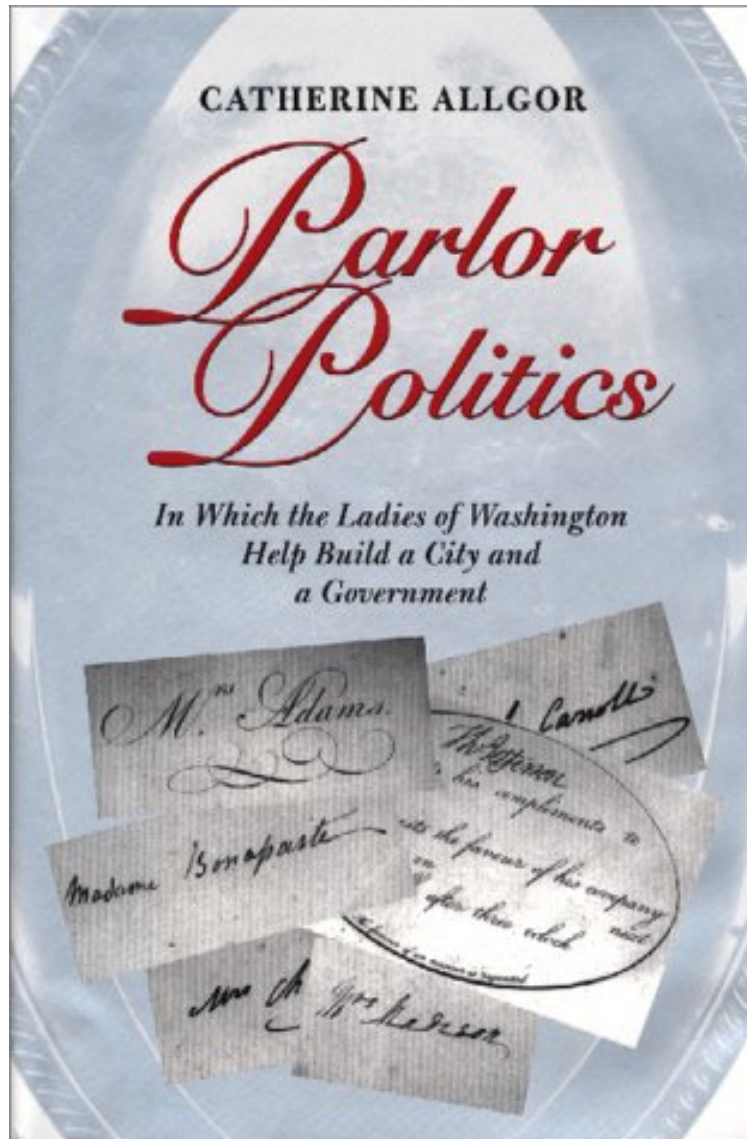


(Download pdf) Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government (Jeffersonian America)

Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government (Jeffersonian America)

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From University of Virginia Press : Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government (Jeffersonian America) before purchasing it in order to gage 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 (Jeffersonian America):

13 of 14 people found the following review helpful. well done and worth a read
By Crystall
I 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.

Before she had even set foot in the White House, Hillary Clinton had already been both applauded and reviled for taking an active role in her husband's policy decisions. But for those -- either fans or detractors -- who believe that Mrs. Clinton was the first such political wife to wield power and influence in the Nation's Capital, Catherine Allgor has a surprising story to tell. *Parlor Politics* goes back to the early days of the American republic, a time when politics had its own, somewhat different code than it has today -- in fact, the image of the disinterested statesman to which the founding generation aspired was so pure that it made it very hard to accomplish the actual business of governing. Enter women like Dolley Madison and Louisa Catherine Adams. By establishing a social circle in which the political men in their lives could discuss pressing issues informally, these women built the framework on which the young republic could grow. Delving into an extensive archive of letters, diaries, and reports of battles over matters of etiquette, Catherine Allgor recreates, in the manner of a nineteenth-century novel, the social events at which the rules of "petticoat politicking" were set down and broken to the glory and ruin of denizens of the new federal city.

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. "An extraordinary piece of work, easily one of the most intellectually original and stylishly elegant first books I have ever read." -- Joseph J. Ellis, author of *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*"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." -- Jeff Sharlet, *Chronicle of Higher Education*"*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*"*Parlor Politics* is an absolute gem of historical research and writing...sprightly, sparkling prose..." -- John Demos, author of *The Unredeemed Captive*"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*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." -- Jay Tolson, *U.S. News*About the AuthorCatherine Allgor, winner of dissertation awards from Yale University and the Organization of American Historians, is Assistant Professor of History at Simmons College.