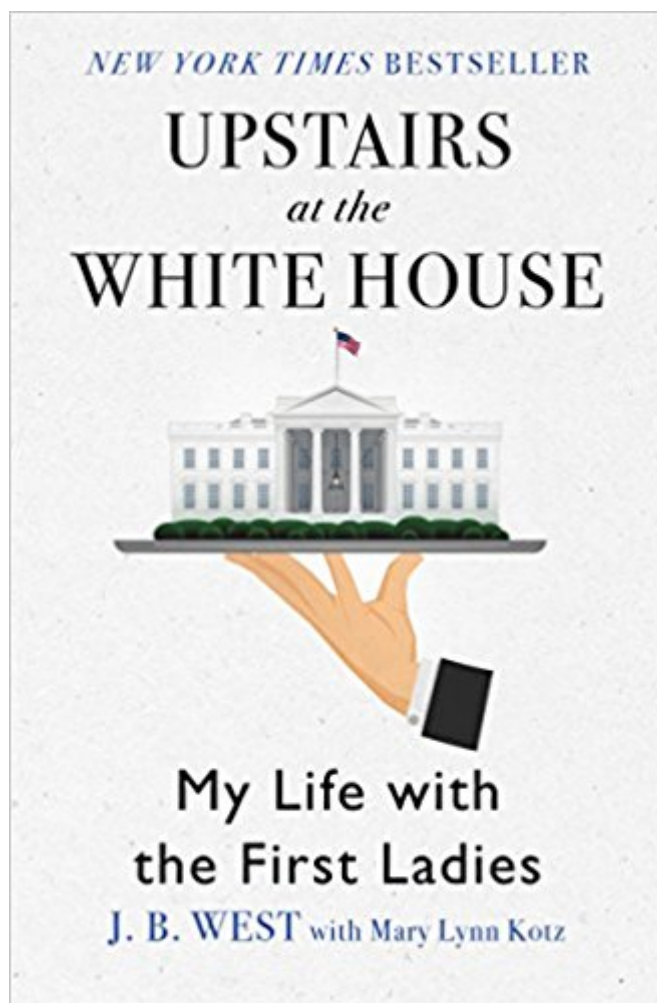


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Upstairs At The White House: My Life With The First Ladies



Synopsis

A *New York Times* bestseller: A fascinating behind-the-scenes look at life on Pennsylvania Avenue with America's first families, by the man who spent nearly three decades in their midst. J. B. West, chief usher of the White House, directed the operations and maintenance of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and coordinated its daily life at the request of the president and his family. He directed state functions; planned parties, weddings and funerals, gardens and playgrounds, and extensive renovations; and, with a large staff, supervised every activity in the presidential home. For twenty-eight years, first as assistant to the chief usher, then as chief usher, he witnessed national crises and triumphs, and interacted daily with six consecutive presidents and first ladies, as well as their parents, children and grandchildren, and houseguests including friends, relatives, and heads of state. J. B. West, whom Jackie Kennedy called "one of the most extraordinary men I have ever met," provides an absorbing, one-of-a-kind history of life among the first ladies. Alive with anecdotes ranging from Eleanor Roosevelt's fascinating political strategies to Jackie Kennedy's tragic loss and the personal struggles of Pat Nixon, *Upstairs at the White House* is a rich account of a slice of American history that usually remains behind closed doors.

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Customer Reviews

"I think he is one of the most extraordinary men I have ever met."

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis "If he were at court he would be called Head

Chamberlain. . . . He finds solutions to so many problems with quiet efficiency. —

—Lady Bird Johnson in *A White House Diary* —
“This memoir by the former Chief Usher (i.e. majordomo) of the White House is several Truman-balconies above all those others.” — Kirkus Reviews

J. B. West (1912–1983), chief usher of the White House or executive director of the executive mansion and grounds was once called “the most powerful man in Washington next to the president.” Discreet and witty, he supervised the large permanent staff that provided for every personal want and need for six presidents and first ladies, including at state dinners, weddings, and funerals, redecorating the facilities for each family and tending to every special request. He served first as assistant to the chief usher and then as chief usher after retiring as a high-level civilian officer of the US Navy. A native Iowan, his *White House* (1941–1969) followed a career in the Veterans Administration. *Upstairs at the White House* was published in 1973 and remained on the New York Times bestseller list for months, with more than five hundred extraordinarily positive reviews, editions in seven languages, and more than two million copies sold in the US across hardcover and paperback formats. Mary Lynn Kotz, the author of four books, is a freelance magazine journalist based in Washington, DC. A contributing editor of *ARTnews*, she has written many cover stories, including “A Day with Georgia O’Keeffe.” Her book *Rauschenberg: Art and Life* is the biography of the late American artist Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), about whom she has given illustrated lectures at more than seventy museums and festivals, including at the 2009 Venice Biennale.

A story that is told so simply that it has the ring of truth about it. You almost expect an *Upstairs Downstairs* type of story but it is nothing like it. This book gave a great measure of humanity to the Presidents it covers and their First Ladies showing just how influential the Ladies were. Highly recommended

J. B. West’s book is about his work (1941 to 1969) first as Assistant to the Chief Usher and then Chief Usher (i.e., General Manager of the Executive Mansion). In his Foreword, Mr. West described his duty as ‘doing what I’m told to do.’ Don’t let that fool you though. He had the knack of getting a job done, as is shown in his direction and interaction with the many people that staff the “President’s House.” He was well suited for his position....and what an awesome position that was. Life at the White House is interesting beyond one’s imagination. It is with humility that he writes of the day to

day life of working with and for six First Ladies of the United States. As one reads this book, you can't help but gain an admiration and respect for each of these First Ladies. While the book isn't meant to be 'about' the Presidents, you do learn some things about them and what makes them tick. In his Foreword, Mr. West states "My loyalty was not to one President, but rather, to the Presidency, and to the institution that is the White House." I have enjoyed this book so much that I will be searching for another book like this one depicting life at the White House. I hope that if and when I find one, it is as interesting a read as was Mr. West's book....although, while the subject material is interesting, I can't help but feel that Mr. West's depiction in his writing is what made this book such an interesting read.

I really liked this book. I especially liked that the author chose to emphasize the positive aspects of the first families. It is not that he did not have knowledge of some of the negative behavior that is public knowledge but he chose to be positive and I appreciated this. What an interesting life he led during his work at the White House. I wonder what he would have to say about Trump if he worked for him. The head usher position would be quite a roller coaster with the current occupants of that great home.

If you are at all interested in past presidents, first ladies, and the history of the White House, this is the book for you! The story is told by the Usher of the White House (a position I didn't know had a name) and the relationships between the Presidents, the White House, and their staff. Being a woman, it was interesting to read the First Ladies and how they related to the President, and their staff. A good read!

This was an interesting and enjoyable read. This provided an insiders look at the personalities and styles of the first ladies and their famous husbands. At times intimate and humorous, it was never trite or gossipy. Mr. West was a gentleman and also a supportive friend as he carried out his demanding role. An amazing amount of activity goes on behind the scenes as the President and his family carry out their social and diplomatic obligations. Adjusting to different occupants, sometimes with a short turn around time, redecorating and moving furniture and pictures, incorporating varied food and entertaining preferences, and housing a steady flow of visitors from family members to royalty kept the staff hopping. It was especially good to read in the middle of an election year and to speculate about who might be the next residents.

Being interested in the history of our our country, I especially like to hear about the background of things, in Washington and elsewhere. This book was written in a fun, easy-to-read style and it gave a glimpse into a time when presidents and their families were free to roam about in Washington, to when security was much tighter. I especially loved the insight on the First Ladies and families and thought it was interesting how things came to unfold behind historic events or much publicized happenings. Many bits of information within this book gave me incentive enough to do much own research and find out even more. Great read, I highly recommend it.

Very interesting account of life inside the White House through decades of different administrations from the perspective of someone dedicated to the job first, with a non-partisan work ethic. Mr. West describes these ladies as individually as they actually were, bringing them to life so that you see the human side of each lady, regardless of whether or not you agree with their politics. Mr West is careful not to sound gossipy or to sensationalize their lives while living in the White House. The book is tactful and tastefully written. This book is nothing like some other presidential/first family biographies I've read - no eye-popping, scandalous accounts of their daily lives, compared to other biographies. Thanks to Mr. West's descriptions, I could almost visualize Eleanor Roosevelt running through the White House, from one meeting to another with tendrils of unkempt hair falling about her shoulders; or recall Jacqueline Kennedy's televised tour of the redecorated White House and hear her odd, whispery voice as she described each room. I found this respectful book quite enjoyable to read. (I just wonder whether Mr. West held on to those yellow legal pads Mrs. Kennedy used to communicate with him. They're probably priceless now!)

This is a wonderful look into some day to day life events of the White House Families over the years! Seen through the eyes of the Chief Usher, this book presents a look at the inner workings of this magnificent mansion and the hundreds of dedicated workers it took to keep it running.

Professionally written with understanding and humor readers get a glimpse of the role of the First Ladies whose job it is to oversee family life in this very public, and very private, historical home.

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