



Crowns of Thorns and Glory: Mary Todd Lincoln and Varina Howell Davis: The Two First Ladies of the Civil War

By Gerry Van der Heuvel

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this dual biography of two women who played significant roles in the country's history Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of the President of the United States and Varina Howell Davis, wife of the President of the Confederate States of America there is little outward commonality in their lives save for the fact that "for four years, and for the only time in American history, two women had simultaneously occupied, albeit in rival governments, the position of first lady." In this insightful study, Van der Heuvel, press secretary to first lady Pat Nixon, does much to rehabilitate the reputation of maligned Mary Todd Lincoln, who is pictured as pathetic and misunderstood, yet singleminded in her devotion to her husband. More attractive is the Confederate wife who, at age 34, became the first lady of the South and a major figure of the Civil War period. Well-educated, outspoken, an engaging foil for her older husband's reticence, Varina Davis left her mark on the social life of the Confederacy. The two women, who never met, bore family tragedies and the brunt of hostile publicity as the fortunes of their husbands turned.

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From Library Journal

This extremely readable dual biography is as gripping as any novel. Recounting the parallel lives of the only two women in American history to have served concurrently as "First Lady," it details how both reacted, from a feminine viewpoint, to the strains of their husbands' politics during the war. It also shows how both were the victims of political hostilities, bitter criticisms, and malicious gossip from an aggressive press. General readers will find timely press criticisms of Mary's "extravagance" and reports of her resort to seances and spiritualists in hopes of overcoming her young son's death. In Varina's words, the book demonstrates the "bitterness of being a politician's wife." Marie Marmo Mullaney, Caldwell Coll., N.J. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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