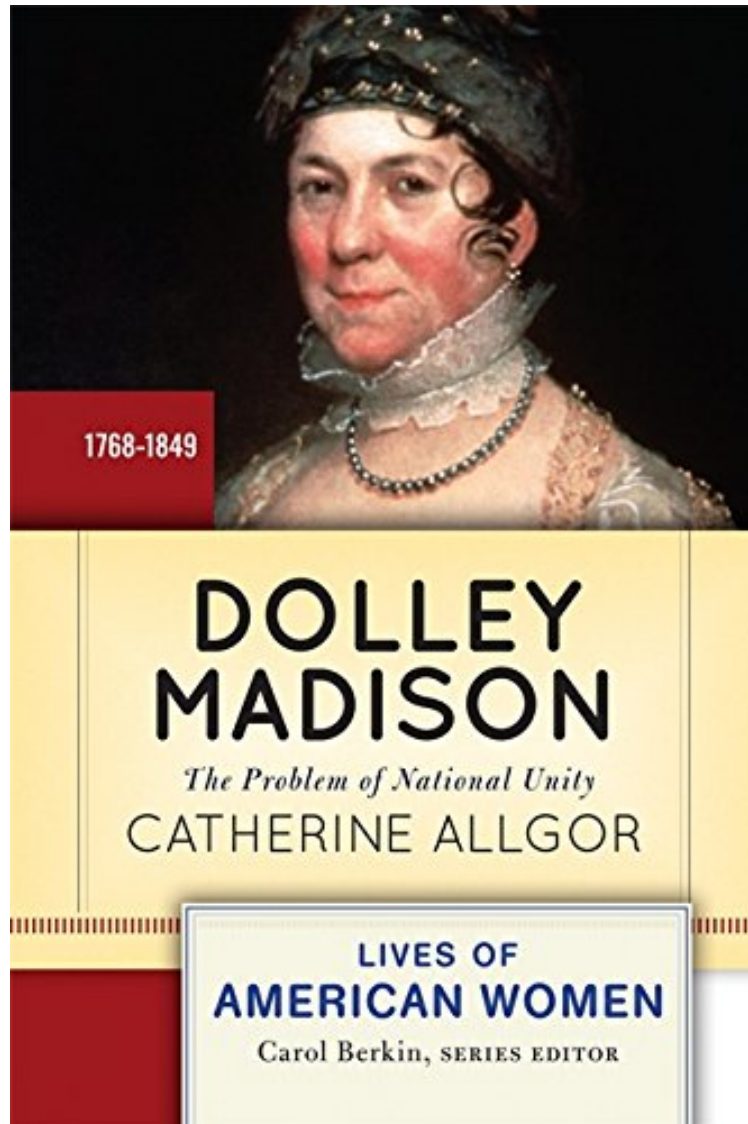


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Dolley Madison: The Problem of National Unity (Lives of American Women)

Catherine Allgor

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Catherine Allgor : Dolley Madison: The Problem of National Unity (Lives of American Women) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dolley Madison: The Problem of National Unity (Lives of American Women):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. dolley lives onBy Likes good books, movies, and musicRECEIVED FREE COPY FROM LIBRARYAt first, the author's pretext, subtext, and context of the evil, nasty patriarchal society

and equally villainous chauvinistic men that Dolley and her sex faced seemed somewhat redundant and tedious. But gradually, the author worked in interesting anecdotes of her life and times. Especially telling is how in the days before campaign managers, Dolley in effect became the de facto manager of her husband's run for the presidency in 1808 by hosting dinners, teas, and informal meetings at their home. As the author points out, this was crucial because candidates were chosen by congressional caucuses so all of those from Congress who visited the Madison home came under the sway of the vivacious charm and social graces of Dolley. The author notes that while her husband was basically a wallflower, Dolley would work a roomful of guests by making all feel welcome and comfortable. Once in power at the White House for 8 years and 2 terms, Dolley continued her ways to the point of building a legacy that ensconced her as a icon: "Pictures of a dark-haired beauty, "Dolly Madison," adorned a range of products, anything that had to do with home, hospitality, and femininity. There was even a sexy Dolly selling a brand of cigars!" (p. xiii). That legacy survives to this day; do a web search for "Dolly Madison products" for examples. That she could wield so much influence given the constraints placed on women of her day (as the author continually points out) is remarkable. At least she did so without complaining, judging by her letters included in the Primary Sources section, including one written during the dangerous days of the War of 1812 when most of Washington D.C.'s public buildings, including Dolley's home at the White House, were set on fire by British troops.

First Lady of the United States and America's "Queen of Hearts," Dolley Madison fashioned an unofficial role for herself in the new administration of the United States, helping to answer the nation's need for ceremony and leaving footprints for centuries of presidential wives to follow. Assisting her husband, James Madison, she helped to promote national unity, modeling a political behavior that stressed civility and empathy. Together, their approach fueled bipartisanship in a country still assembling a political identity. About the Lives of American Women series: Selected and edited by renowned women's historian Carol Berkin, these brief biographies are designed for use in undergraduate courses. Rather than a comprehensive approach, each biography focuses instead on a particular aspect of a women's life that is emblematic of her time, or which made her a pivotal figure in the era. The emphasis is on a "good read," featuring accessible writing and compelling narratives, without sacrificing sound scholarship and academic integrity. Primary sources at the end of each biography reveal the subject's perspective in her own words. Study questions and an annotated bibliography support the student reader.

Allgor digs deep beneath the surface of the Magnificent Doll,' revealing the far-reaching impact Dolley Madison had upon the political landscape of the early nineteenth century and the collective psyche of the American public for generations to come. Booklist Praise for Lives of American Women Finally! The majority of students by which I mean women will have the opportunity to read biographies of women from our nation's past. (Men can read them too, of course!) The Lives of American Women' series features an eclectic collection of books, readily accessible to students who will be able to see the contributions of women in many fields over the course of our history. Long overdue, these books will be a valuable resource for teachers, students, and the public at large. Cokie Roberts, author of Founding Mothers and Ladies of Liberty Just what any professor wants: books that will intrigue, inform, and fascinate students! These short, readable biographies of American women specifically designed for classroom use give instructors an appealing new option to assign to their history students. Mary Beth Norton, Mary Donlon Alger Professor of American History, Cornell University