

# First Ladies of America



Nancy Reagan may be remembered for many things, but at the top of the list is the glamour and elegance she brought to the White House as a first lady.

The wife of 40th United States President Ronald Reagan, Mrs. Reagan was a former professional movie actress who was determined to bring "the best of everything" to the executive mansion. She did that, but by her husband's second term, she was involved in much more – taking on important causes of her own while working so closely with her husband that she became the target of widespread criticism.

Born Anne Frances Robbins, she was a child when her father abandoned the family. She lived in the care of relatives for a time while her mother, a movie actress, left to pursue her career. When her mother remarried Chicago neurosurgeon Loyal Davis, Mrs. Reagan was legally adopted by her stepfather and took the name of Nancy Davis, which she became known for in her movies.

Despite her own accomplishments prior to her marriage, Mrs. Reagan was at heart old-fashioned and the first to admit that "life began when I met my husband." On March 4, 1952, she gave up a promising Hollywood career to marry fellow actor Ronald Reagan, whom she had met while he served as president of the Screen Actors Guild.

In the White House, Mrs. Reagan's activities were both admired and criticized. Her decision to bring back Letitia Baldrige, social secretary during the Kennedy administration, was perhaps symbolic of her desire to

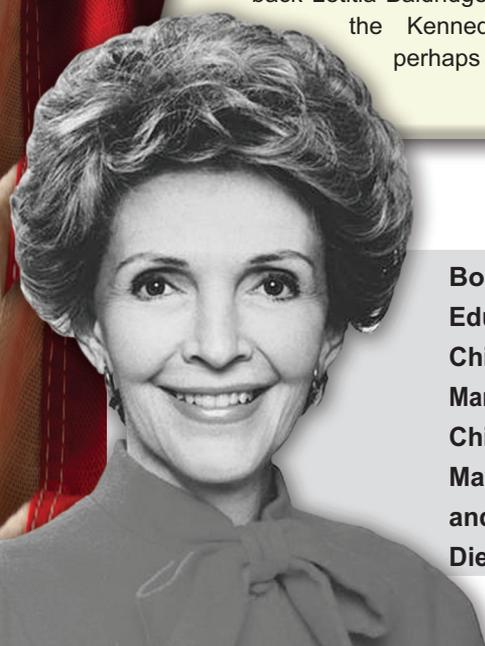
reinstate a royal feel to the White House. She also accomplished this with an expensive refurbishment of the family quarters, turning to private donors to raise funds.

These activities, along with her habit of accepting lavish designer gowns as gifts, were not lost on members of the press, who sarcastically referred to her as "Queen Nancy."

Her most memorable legacy is her involvement in the fight to prevent youth from abusing drugs and alcohol, and her "Just Say No" slogan made its way permanently into the American lexicon. She was also her husband's staunchest defender and supporter. While President Reagan recuperated from surgery for cancer, it was Mrs. Reagan who received foreign dignitaries at the White House on his behalf. During comments on her husband's radio address following the surgery, President Reagan extolled the contributions of first ladies dating to America's earliest days, stating that they "aren't elected and they don't receive a salary," but "they've all been heroes." Then he added: "Nancy is my everything. When I look back on these days, Nancy, I'll remember your radiance and your strength, your support and for taking part in the business of the nation. I say to myself, but also on behalf of the nation, 'Thank you, partner. Thanks for everything.'"

Her care of him following the March 1981 attempt on his life – a painful event that she could later only refer to as "that thing that happened" – demonstrated her courage and resilience. And, after President Reagan left office and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, Mrs. Reagan's continued her devoted care of him until his death in 2004.

**Ronald  
Reagan  
Administration,  
1981-1989**



## Nancy Davis Reagan

**Born:** July 6, 1921, in New York

**Education:** Sidwell Friends School, Washington, D.C.; Girl's Latin School, Chicago; Smith College

**Marriage:** 1952 to Ronald Reagan

**Children:** Patricia Ann (1952); Ronald Prescott (1958);

Maureen Elizabeth (stepdaughter) (1941-2001);

and Michael Edward (stepson) (1945)

**Died:** March 6, 2016, Los Angeles