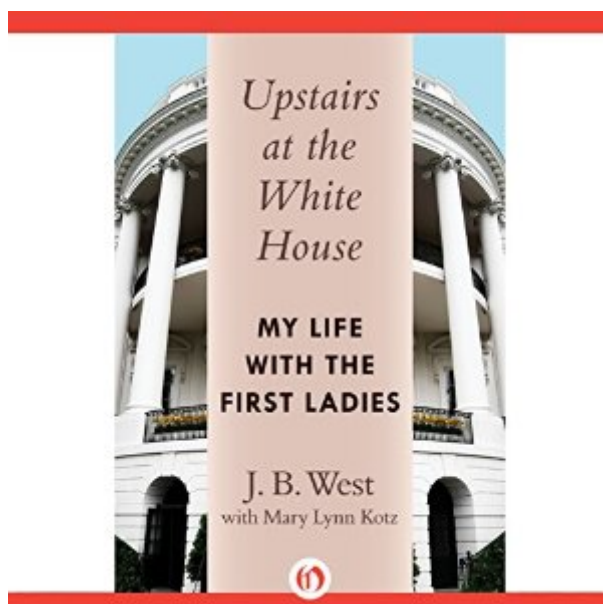


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# Upstairs At The White House: My Life With The First Ladies



## Synopsis

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, funerals, gardens, playgrounds, and extensive renovations; and with a large staff, supervised every activity in the presidential home. For 28 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, their parents, children and grandchildren, and houseguests - including friends, relatives, and heads of state. In *Upstairs at the White House*, West offers an absorbing and novel glimpse at America's first families, from the Roosevelts to the Kennedys and the Nixons. Alive with anecdotes ranging from the quotidian (Lyndon B. Johnson's showerheads) to the tragic (the aftermath of John F. Kennedy's assassination), West's audiobook is an enlightening and rich account of the American history that took place just behind the Palladian doors of the North Portico.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

J.B. West, the former Chief Usher at The White House, gives us an insider's view of America's most famous mansion. But this is hardly a boring house tour. Mr. West - in a dignified but very readable

account - focuses on the Presidents, First Ladies, and their children, all who made this house on Pennsylvania Avenue a home. With great empathy and appreciation, he recalls the experience of working for Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry and Bess Truman, Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower, John and Jacqueline Kennedy, and Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson. Each family had their own style that the White House staff had to adjust to, from the reserved Roosevelts, to the refined young Kennedys, to the big-as-Texas style of Lyndon Baines Johnson which was in contrast with Lady Bird, his considerate and composed wife. His portrayals of the First Families are not condescending, yet they are still very respectful. In his position, Mr. West worked closely with the First Ladies and each one had personal qualities that he grew to admire. The accounts of ceremonies, dinners and banquets, remodelings, sudden changes, and visits by various dignitaries are all compelling reading in themselves. But we get an even more significant historical viewpoint through the description of the events that took place in The White House during crises, such as FDR's death, the attempted shooting of Truman, the Kennedy assassination, LBJ's announcement that he would not seek another term. Surely, there were frustrations, and many of them are recorded in the book while others were avoided. For instance, I'm sure that Mr. West knew about some of JFK's White House trysts but chose not to write about them. If he would have, the book would have been even more successful than it was. But Mr. West takes the high road, and we get to enjoy the view with him. Well done, Mr. Chief Usher.

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

I am currently reading it, and although I enjoy the glimpse behind the scenes, but often find its readability lacking. I lived in DC for years and would often walk or drive past the White House on my way to or from work. So hearing about the daily life behind those enormous white walls is really fascinating. However, sometimes the text resembles more a list of short statements about a person or an incident than an actual story. It then becomes a bit dry and doesn't 'flow'. I am sometimes also confused with the time line, as I've noticed that often events are not told in a strict chronological order. However, despite these readability issues, I am enjoying it.

Very interesting book. I just wish it had completed Nixon and continued to the present

administration. Highly recommend this book.

I have been an avid collector of president/first lady/white house books since I was a child. I have read the same facts about the first families over and over. Then I found *Upstairs At the White House* by J.B. West, and it immediately became a favorite. Mr. West worked with the first families from the Franklin Roosevelts to the Richard Nixons on a daily basis. He was privy to "insider information" that most people never heard about. His approach to the divulgence of his knowledge is always in good taste and respectful of the families he served. Yet, this book is packed with anecdotes and information that I had never read in any other volume. Since my first reading of *Upstairs At the White House*, I have found Mr. West quoted by a number of other presidential writers. I can certainly understand why -- Mr. West gave the world a wonderful window into the lives of several of our nation's first families and made them come alive for us.

JB West's book "*Upstairs at the White House*" is a gold mine of interesting facts and anecdotes that is sure to capture the interest of anyone who picks it up. The easy, conversational style that West uses in telling of his experiences while employed at the White House gives an even more intimate quality to the already familial nature of the subject matter. Always respectful of those under which he served, West none the less shows us the faults as well as merits of those families that occupied the President's house during his approximately thirty year tenure. This is history that accomplishes so much of what good historical writing should: it is engaging, informative without being dry or long winded, and simply fun to read, enough so that this reviewer has gone back for another look more than once! If you want to know more about the White House lives of the first families from FDR to the early months of the Nixon administration, as well as fascinating stuff on the running of the mansion, this book is for you. Don't miss it!!

Read this book years ago when it first came out in paperback and literally wore it out. When I saw the Kindle edition, I had to get it. Enjoyed it again!

Really, really enjoyed reading about part of our history of the first families. It tells of interesting parts of daily lives you don't often read about.

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