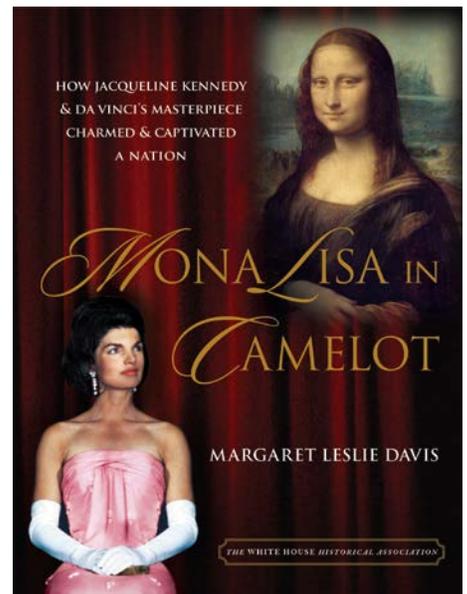


THE WHITE HOUSE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEW 1600 SESSIONS PODCAST: AUTHOR MARGARET LESLIE DAVIS ON ONE OF THE RISKIEST ART EXHIBITIONS EVER MOUNTED FIRST LADY JACQUELINE KENNEDY BRINGS MONA LISA TO AMERICA

March 21, 2018 (Washington, D.C.) — First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy takes center stage in the latest episode of [The 1600 Sessions podcast](#). Margaret Leslie Davis, author of *Mona Lisa in Camelot: How Jacqueline Kennedy & Da Vinci's Masterpiece Charmed and Captivated a Nation*, sits down with White House Historical Association President Stewart McLaurin to tell the story of Mrs. Kennedy's ambitious plan in 1963 to burnish America's international reputation and reinvigorate the country's appreciation of the arts by bringing the *Mona Lisa* to the United States on an 88-day tour.

Davis describes the state dinner at which Mrs. Kennedy convinced French Cultural Minister Andre Malraux to loan the painting: "She had worked for months planning the event. She invited the very best of America's great artists, writers, intellectuals...she even enlisted Arthur Schlesinger to write a toast for the President to offer Malraux...the list included Thornton Wilder, Rothko, George Balanchine, playwright Tennessee Williams, author Saul Bellow, and the Lindberghs. It was a night for America to shine." Mrs. Kennedy's careful planning paid off, and by the end of the night, Malraux promised her that "he would loan her the Mona Lisa as a tribute to her and Kennedy."



Davis highlights the diplomatic aspect of this effort to bring the *Mona Lisa* to the United States: "This was during a moment of great conflict between France and America over President de Gaul's desire to have a nuclear arsenal. So, both parties saw this as a moment of diplomacy, of amity, and goodwill, in which both nations could come together for a higher purpose to serve humanity."

The painting eventually embarked on a harrowing five-day journey from France to the United States. Davis explains the precautions French and American officials had to take: "There were armed guards, she was bolted to the floor in a specially designed traveling case...that was buoyant, so if the unthinkable happened she could be thrown overboard. And the French insisted the Mona Lisa must be kept at the same temperature as her home in the

Louvre...approximately 76 degrees. And President Kennedy hand-picked the Secret Service agent that he wanted to accompany the painting.”

“There’s no question that the exhibition triggered something new in the American consciousness...a sort of renewed appreciation for culture in the fine arts. For many of the visitors who came to the National Gallery to see the *Mona Lisa*, it was the very first time they had ever set foot in a museum,” Davis explains. “People from every facet of life, and many of them residents from Washington’s poorer neighborhoods, came out to see the *Mona Lisa*.”

Davis’ book, [*Mona Lisa in Camelot*](#), is available for purchase today.

The 1600 Sessions

White House Historical Association President Stewart McLaurin interviews luminaries, historians, and eyewitnesses to history about America’s most famous residence and office—the White House. Each episode includes a prominent guest or guests to discuss varying facets of White House history, including insights from former staff and many other topical issues.

The 1600 Sessions is available on iTunes, GooglePlay, SoundCloud, and Stitcher. To hear the full episode, visit The1600Sessions.org and learn more about White House History at WhiteHouseHistory.org.

For media inquiries, please contact press@whaa.org or Jessica Fredericks, Communications Director, at JFredericks@whha.org.

About The White House Historical Association

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy envisioned a restored White House that conveyed a sense of history through its decorative and fine arts. In 1961, the White House Historical Association was established to support her vision to preserve and share the Executive Mansion’s legacy for generations to come. Supported entirely by private resources, the Association’s mission is to assist in the preservation of the state and public rooms, fund acquisitions for the White House permanent collection, and educate the public on the history of the White House. Since its founding, the White House Historical Association has contributed more than \$47 million in fulfillment of its mission. To learn more about the White House Historical Association, please visit www.whitehousehistory.org.

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