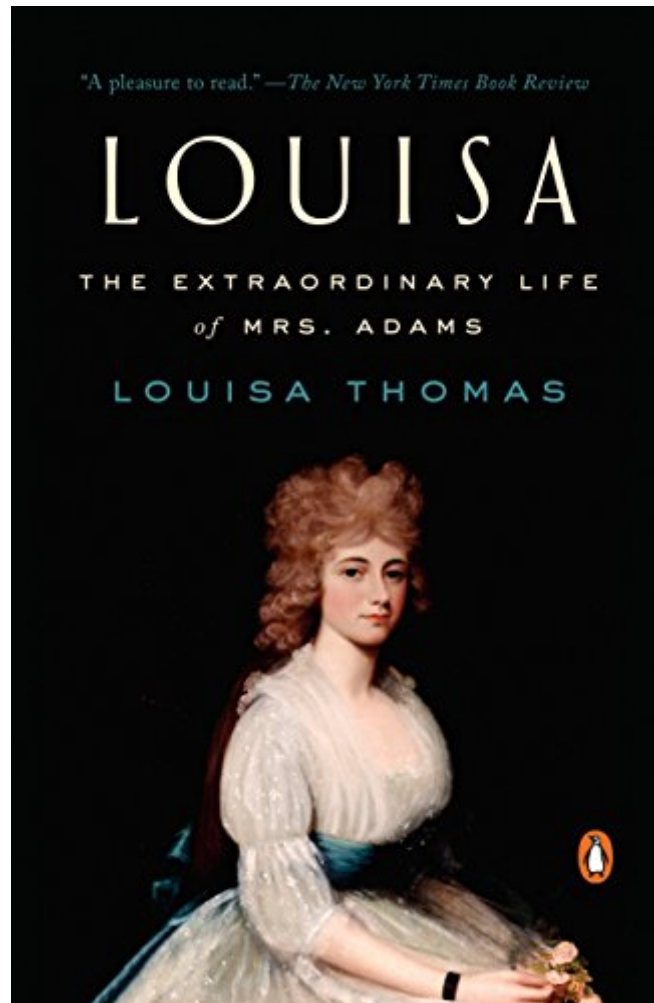


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Louisa: The Extraordinary Life Of Mrs. Adams



Synopsis

An intimate portrait of Louisa Catherine Adams, the wife of John Quincy Adams, who witnessed firsthand the greatest transformations of her time. Born in London to an American father and a British mother on the eve of the Revolutionary War, Louisa Catherine Johnson was raised in circumstances very different from the New England upbringing of the future president John Quincy Adams, whose life had been dedicated to public service from the earliest age. And yet John Quincy fell in love with her, almost despite himself. Their often tempestuous but deeply close marriage lasted half a century. They lived in Prussia, Massachusetts, Washington, Russia, and England, at royal courts, on farms, in cities, and in the White House. Louisa saw more of Europe and America than nearly any other woman of her time. But wherever she lived, she was always pressing her nose against the glass, not quite sure whether she was looking in or out. The other members of the Adams family could take their identity for granted—they were Adamses; they were Americans—but she had to invent her own. The story of Louisa Catherine Adams is one of a woman who forged a sense of self. As the country her husband led found its place in the world, she found a voice. That voice resonates still. In this deeply felt biography, the talented journalist and historian Louisa Thomas finally gives Louisa Catherine Adams's full extraordinary life its due. An intimate portrait of a remarkable woman, a complicated marriage, and a pivotal historical moment, Louisa Thomas's biography is a masterful work from an elegant storyteller. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I love biographies, although I feel like I've read more memoirs than biographies in recent years. I also love reading about the presidents and their wives, but have typically read books about recent presidents and their families. *Louisa: The Extraordinary Life of Mrs. Adams* by Louisa Thomas gives an in depth account of the life of Louisa Adams, the wife of John Quincy Adams. I'll admit that prior to reading this book, I hadn't thought much about Louisa Adams. Yet, I was extremely interested in her life and did truly find her life fascinating. Just a few tidbits I took away from this book: Louisa's own early life is covered, including the fact that her parents were not married until she was ten herself. She had never been to the United States until after she is married to John Quincy Adams. She suffered from many miscarriages, although the exact number is never known since her diaries may only indicate that she had been sick, so it is speculation as to whether her illness was a miscarriage or a different sickness. For a time she and John Quincy Adams and their youngest son lived in Russia. Louisa knew Napoleon Bonaparte. Louisa had a difficult time forming relationships with other wives in Washington, D.C. Despite the fact that Louisa was frail and often sickly, she found some inner reserve of strength to endure the deaths of her own children and managed to live without the constant help of her husband during challenging situations. Louisa is a comprehensive and researched look at this First Lady's life. Although I hadn't much thought of Louisa Adams prior to reading this book, I thoroughly enjoyed this look at her life. I appreciated Thomas' easy to read writing style and her ability to create a biography that reads almost like fiction and kept me interested up until the last page.

An interesting book about John Quincy Adams' wife, but only if read in conjunction with Traub's recent book about John Quincy. I read this book because I had recently finished Traub's biography and wanted to flesh out the marriage and complicated relationship between husband and wife. This book offered some insight into that troubled marriage, but not satisfyingly. Clearly, John Quincy was

an ass in his personal life and relationships, but Louisa's chronic, and often unexplained, health problems, were difficult to live with. Of course, people are complicated, but the juxtaposition of her periodic refusal to see guests on holidays with weekly social gatherings involving hundreds of guests deserves a bit of analysis and discussion. I, also, found the attempt toward the end of the book to evaluate Louisa's and everyone else's views on slavery in the context of modern culture and values more annoying than helpful. This current trend among historians and biographers to transplant 21st century opinions to the the 18th and 19th centuries is neither helpful nor enlightening. They did not live in our times, and we do not live in theirs. You cannot inject the subjects with our views or fairly judge them by our standards. I recommend this book be read with the Traub biography. Standing alone, I think it fails as either interesting enough to warrant the time or complete enough to represent an accurate view of the couple.

Louisa Thomas has researched and written a wonderful narrative history of a most amazing woman. Louisa Catherine Johnson Adams was the wife of John Quincy Adams. Ms. Thomas truly brings her namesake to life. I strongly urge you to read about the important, though little known, strong, intelligent, self-deprecating yet amazing and influential woman.

Louise Adams had an extraordinary life. As the wife of John Quincy Adams she was living in Russia at the time of Napoleon's attack on Moscow. She danced with Tsar Alexander. Back in Washington she gave famous parties including a ball for Andrew Jackson, her husband's rival for president. She was responsible to a large degree for her husband's successes including his election to the presidency. She experienced the loss of three of her four children as well as numerous miscarriages. Medical care at the time as described makes me wonder how anyone survived the most minor of illnesses. This book is rich in historical detail. It could use a good editor, however.

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