

The Rise and Fall of the Georgetown Hostess and Salons

In 1877, Henry and Clover Adams began hosting political contemporaries to dinner in their H Street home across from the White House. **These salon parties, where neighbors and political movers and shakers came to break bread while discussing the critical issues of the day, prompted Henry James to call Washington DC the “city of conversation”⁸.**

Salon parties continued throughout history, reaching their peak influence under nationally syndicated columnist Joseph Alsop in the 1950s and 60s.



Alsop’s “Sunday Night Supper,” whose regular guest list included people such as Frank Wisner, Chief of Covert Operations at the CIA, George Kennan, the State Department Official who created the Containment Doctrine, Charles Bohlen, the State Department’s lead Sovietologist, and Katharine Graham, owner of The Washington Post, along with rotating guests of political and journalist importance, are credited with not only influencing events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, but also countless bills and legislature making it through

Congress⁴. No matter the issue at hand, all of the guests operated with the assumption that no matter what the perspective of a specific issue was, everyone was basically on the same side⁸. There were battles, but not wars, and the expectation of civility prevailed².



The Vietnam War was the beginning of the end, as the illusion of self-containment was lost, and the foreign policy establishment crumbled. After Nixon left office, no one in office cared what

“Georgetown thinks,” and when Carter arrived, he did not even respond to his dinner invitation⁸. By 1987, Sally Quinn officially declared the Georgetown Hostess dead in an article in The Post Magazine, and noted **“the common refrain that our government hasn’t worked as well, and civility in this town has suffered, since the personal connections that hostesses facilitated have been lost¹.”**



1. “In a New Play, the Washington Hostess Lives Again” by Sally Quinn for *The Washington Post*
2. “What Really Happened at Those Famous Georgetown Dinner Parties.” By Roxanne Roberts, for *The Washington Post*.
4. “Why Nixon Hated Georgetown.” By Evan Thomas for *Politico*.
8. “The Ruins of Georgetown” by Syndey Blumental for *New Yorker*.