



Political couples exhibiting other types of relationships do not seem to have a long-term hold like the Fergusons did. Symbiotic-ness in a relationship pertains to how a couple works together. In the non-commensal forms there is a deficit created ultimately by the division of interest which decreases the power of a couple's drive. Parasitic relationships result in one partner gaining while the other is being leeched from.<sup>2</sup> An example of a political couple with a parasitically symbiotic relationship would be Lyndon B. and Lady Bird (Claudia) Johnson. Lyndon had a habit of mistreating his wife. A friend of the Johnsons observed: "Lyndon depended on her for everything...he w...r onm Mfoi pe !fÄ q



see that LBJ has his arms around these women unlike the other man present in Figure 4 and unlike Figures 1-3, where he abstains from so connecting with Lady Bird. In Figures 2 and 3 the two relatively tall couples that share the photographs with the Johnsons each show a more common orientation, even though the man in Figure 3 is clearly being distracted. The hands of the Johnsons in all four photographs orient away from their spouse, and at the same time, in three instances, LBJ's hands are oriented toward other women. LBJ kisses one woman in Figure 1 and Lady Bird is clearly looking away from the act. In Figure 2, we see LBJ with a cheeky grin on his face and Lady Bird with a disheartened or disappointed smile. This couple lacked synchronicity.

The Fergusons' commensal relationship allowed them to advertise their desirably healthy and effective relationship as the foundation to their political façade, which supported their strong grip and longevity in Texas government. Texans especially found some solace in the Fergusons after the onset of the Great Depression. Pa Ferguson had been put out of job, as many Texans had, but there was Ma and Pa still working together, and willing to meet another challenge. There were times when Jim Ferguson's emotional, family appeal meshed so well with the experience of ordinary Texans that audiences were left in tears! Though this "country-time" duo tried to blend into the stereotypical standards of a "down-home" lifestyle, the biggest factor in their political success was their continuously commensal relationship that made them a staunchly symbiotic super couple.<sup>9</sup>

Commensalism worked for the most part because Ma remained mindful of Pa's wishes. But the problem facing this close couple stemmed from this reliance. Would Miriam Ferguson's growing experience distance her from relying on her husband? Would their unity snap with her

accumulation of power? A timeline of Miriam's political development can be divided into three phases: First Lady of Texas; Mrs. Governor of Texas, and her second election. Through each phase she gained political skills, but it is never seen that Ma strayed from Pa's guidance to

failed runs for other various government positions, Pa decided that he'd run under Ma's name in the 1924 election for Texas governor.<sup>13</sup>

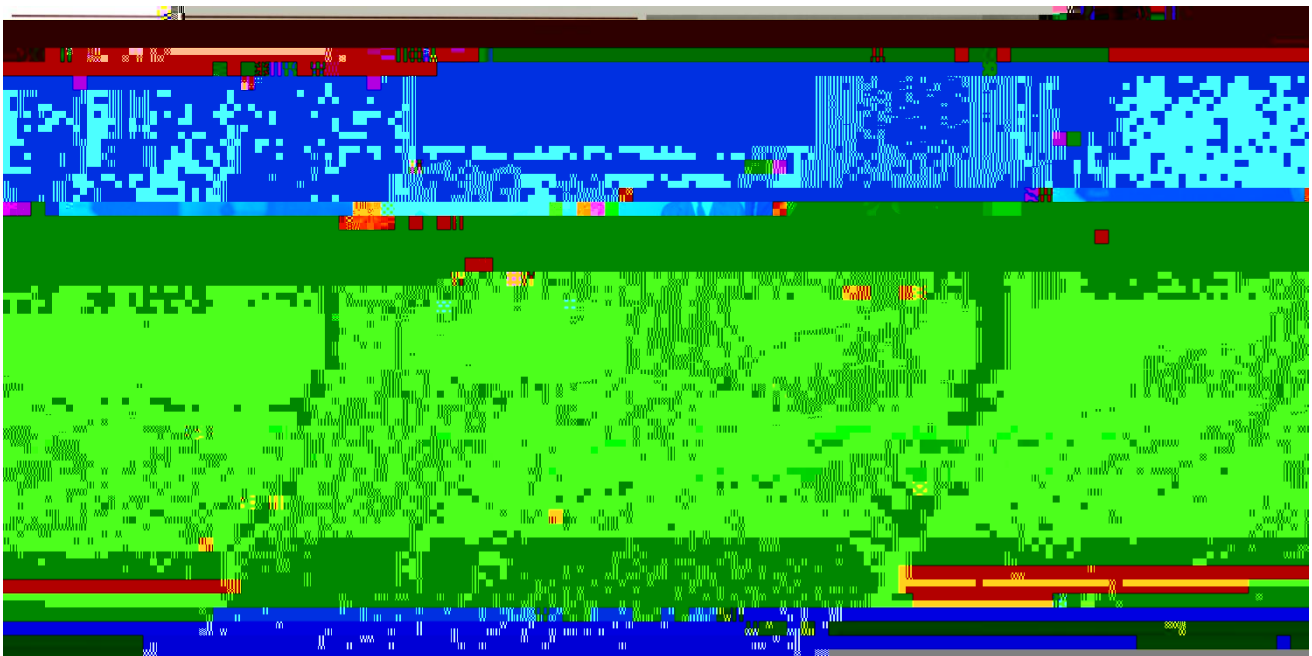
Ma's blanket willingness to run for her husband had a formidable impact on voters in 1924. As the Ogdensburg Advance and St. Lawrence Weekly Democrat stated, "...she made the run for [Pa's] place more as a vindication than a desire for the office."<sup>14</sup> This rarity of structured commitment







good enough for Jesus Christ, was good enough for the children of Texas.” Unlike most women of her day, Miriam had not only attended college, but had had her own tutor. But she enjoyed joking—especially with young people. She proclaimed a “Laugh Month” in Texas mimicking her husband’s down-home style. Though the pair argued at home according to their daughters, Miriam never publicly expressed disapproval of her husband’s under-the-table highway commission dealings.<sup>24</sup>



**Figures 6-7:** Ma in office<sup>25</sup> --and alone; The Governor working<sup>26</sup> --Ma and Pa in office

The above images show how very close Pa actually was to Ma’s work as governor. In Figure 6, it is seen that an extra chair is placed behind Ma’s governor desk, which can presumably belong to Pa. It’s a rather interesting image because traditionally governors will have their picture taken at their desk, but why the blatantly extra chair? No other governor had an additional chair, so why was there this insistence unless to promote Pa’s presence? In Figure 7, Pa is seen directly beside Ma as she works at her desk. He is the closest person to her and whereas others gaze on her work, he poses as if serenely aware of all she is doing. Unlike

Lyndon Johnson, in the above images, he does not stand with the woman beside him, but a step ahead. He seems conscious of both wanting to form a kind of social halo, a concentric circle of honor around Ma, and yet exude his ultimate a

The Fergusons' popularity had never been as high as when Ma returned to her second term as Texas governor. With a more updated amount of political experience under her "bonnet," Ma was able to better make her own decisions, and with a magnitude of power that Pa never enjoyed. Pa remained as Ma's faithful advisor, but Ma threatened the commensal undertaking as it became clear that she no longer needed him in this role. She did better this time in office than all the Ferguson-terms combined. Ma

and more enthusiastic about politics. The increased amount of governmental output paraded an evolution of her political prowess from a sitting duck to a crouching tiger.

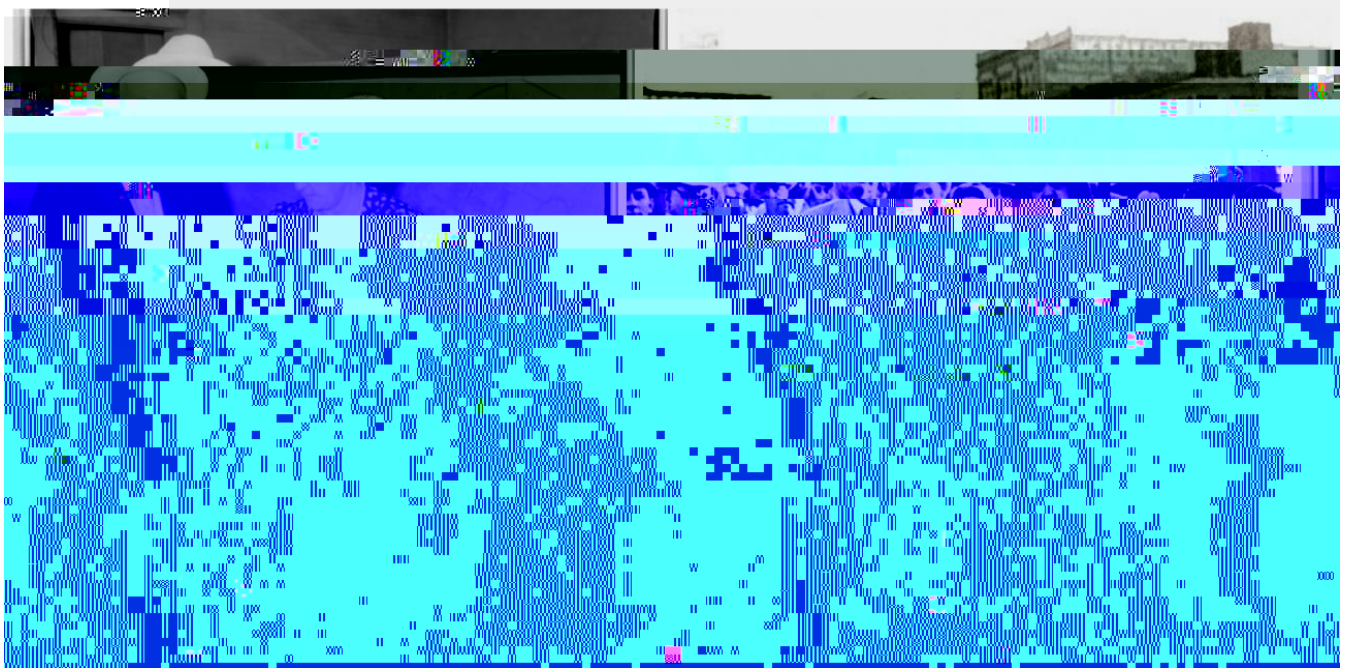
One of the most successful acts of Miriam Ferguson was her call for a five-day bank holiday. In light of the Great Depression, Ma saw that the banks were being hounded, several closed across the country due to bank runs and elevated pressure. The break allowed for banks to regroup and it brought forth an overall depression of the allotted dramatics, formed from the inauguration of new president Franklin D. Roosevelt, for all Texans.<sup>35</sup>

Ma also introduced “bread bonds,” a twenty-million-dollar relief bond insurance that would procure “continued financial aid from the federal government.”<sup>36</sup> Pa Ferguson headed this pursuit under the guise of his wife’s position. The Fergusons heavily pushed for the passing of this bond bill. It was passed in August 26 of 1933 along with the repeal of Prohibition, which gratified Pa but later enticed him to partake in his habitual acts of fraud and misapplication of

The next election did not have Ma Ferguson's name written on the ballot, no matter how severely Pa wanted reelection. On November 29, 1933, Miriam announced that the following year would be her last as governor.<sup>39</sup> Miriam was ready for her retirement and the return to a lifestyle of anonymity. For years between Ma's campaigns Pa had tried to influence Miriam's return to the political limelight. Again in 1934, he felt that Texans wanted Ma and additionally himself back in office. But, this time, Ma stood her ground against another campaign. Pa would testify in his diary that he neither had the money nor his wife's desire for a political comeback.<sup>40</sup> Here at last it was evident that Miriam was no push-over. As when she had first refused his proposal of marriage over thirty years before, the more refined Miriam held her ground. James enlisted numerous newspapers to draft a public poll on the opinion for Ma's return, in hopes that she'd succumb to the public pressure. Miriam fired back to the persuasions of both the public and her husband that "she was not physically or financially able to make the race."<sup>41</sup> James finally dropped his pleas, and Ma, indeed, would not run in 1934.

Had the winsome commensalist relationship of the Fergusons finally died as well? In this one instance of their political career together, Ma had gained the upper-hand. But this time, James went along. Their commensalism survived. The pendulum was flipped, but only for a moment. Miriam eventually did obey her husband, falling back into one more race. Her opponent was the incumbent governor, "Pappy" O'Daniel in 1940. Their teamwork converted back to its original form but this campaign brought the end to Fergusonism. Fergusonian

But the endeavors of the Fergusons to incorporate the radio as an instrument of advertising her campaign flopped, just as the veteran orator, James, was unable to connect to the unseen audience. Pappy stole the race with 55% of the vote, leaving Ma in 4<sup>th</sup> place and bidding her an adieu from the governor races for good.<sup>42</sup>



**Figures 8-9:** from Ma's last run in 1940: Voting,<sup>43</sup> and Standing Together.<sup>44</sup>

Photographs from Ma's last election pointed to her normal compliance towards running for and with Pa. Figure 8 has Ma casting her ballot alongside Pa, with Pa stealing a direct look at the viewer, while chivalrously allowing Ma to vote first. Figure 9 has the couple still parallel, wearing dark hats together and refusing "the Pappy O'Daniel grin" which Pa compared to that of a "Jackass in a briar patch." In each picture, she dutifully submits while carrying a feminine load, in one case, a good-sized purse, and in the other, flowers. However, the excitement seems gone from her eyes. The motherly Ma was no longer needed when there was a fun-filled Pappy handing the kiddos treats and farfetched promises. Still, the couple remained united in their front

no matter the sticky political situation or defective campaign. Ma's and Pa's collaborative work exhibited that strength which came from their togetherness. Their many identical stances and the willingness of Ma to mindfully back most of Pa's endeavors gave the couple a characterizing solidity that many Texans commemorated despite the lack of any real beneficial bi-products of their incumbencies.

The Idaho Senator, William Borah, noted when Jim Ferguson ran against a Klan candidate in a 1922 Senate race—"thank God only one of them can get elected." Yet the Fergusons were one remarkably popular political couple, and this is all the more notable as Carol Wilson's new book shows them to have been scandalous scoundrels.<sup>45</sup> Something kept pulling Texans back to supporting a couple where the two partners so completely and at times selflessly validated the other. The commensal relationship between Ma and Pa Ferguson exalted them in Texas politics. Their exemplary cohesiveness hooked many voters seeking a well-balanced governor. Though the Fergusons neither delivered on campaign promises, nor benefitted the state, as they had a habit of monetary fraudulence, Ma's employment into politics allowed for a deft remix on the Fergusonian style. Although sometimes characterized only as a puppet, Ma brought vindication to the Ferguson name through her broadcasted symbiosis with her husband. Their covalent goals made this commensal couple a powerful pair. This duo's total devotion to one another had a major impact on the history of the state. The Fergusons modeled the power that a truly symbiotic super couple can facilitate.

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<sup>1</sup> Even though several scholars have noted that the Fergusons gained power from their popularity with the rural folk, none have yet to further analyze that claim: Carol O'Keefe Wilson, *In The Governor's Shadow, The True Story of Ma and Pa Ferguson*, (Denton: University of North Texas, 2014), xiii; Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., *The Chief Executives of Texas From Stephen F. Austin to John B. Connally, Jr.* (College Station): Texas A&M University Press, 1995, 167.; "Ferguson, Miriam Amanda Wallace [Ma]" *The Handbook of Texas Online*,

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<<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffe06>> [Accessed October 12, 2014]. Other efforts to explain the success of the Fergusons point to their use of popular catch phrases, and their ability to use the Klan as a foil: Ross Phares,



