

Michelle Obama

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama (born January 17, 1964) is an American lawyer and writer. She is the wife of the 44th and current President of the United States, Barack Obama, and the first African-American First Lady of the United States. Raised on the South Side of Chicago, she is a graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Law School, and spent the early part of her legal career working at the law firm Sidley Austin, where she met Obama. Subsequently, she worked as part of the staff of Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley, and for the University of Chicago Medical Center.

Throughout 2007 and 2008, she helped campaign for her husband's presidential bid. She delivered a keynote address at the 2008 Democratic National Convention and also spoke at the 2012 Democratic National Convention. She and her husband have two daughters together. As the wife of a senator, and later the first lady, she has become a fashion icon and role model for women, and an advocate for poverty awareness, nutrition, and healthy eating. [1][2]

1 Family and education

See also: Michelle Robinson Obama's extended family

1.1 Early life and ancestry

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson was born on January 17, 1964, in Chicago, Illinois, to Fraser Robinson III, [3] a city water plant employee and Democratic precinct captain, and Marian (née Shields), a secretary at Spiegel's catalog store.^[4] Her mother was a full-time homemaker until Michelle entered high school.^[5] The Robinson and Shields families can trace their roots to pre-Civil War African Americans in the American South.[3] On her father's side she is descended from the Gullah people of South Carolina's Low Country region. [6] Her paternal great-great grandfather, Jim Robinson, was a slave on Friendfield Plantation in the state of South Carolina, [7][8] the state where some of her paternal family still reside. [9][10] Her grandfather Fraser Robinson, Jr. had built his own house in South Carolina, and he and his wife LaVaughn (née Johnson) returned to the Low Country after retirement.^[7]

Among her maternal ancestors was her great-great-grandmother, Melvinia Shields, a slave on Henry Walls Shields' 200-acre farm in Clayton County, Georgia; he

and his children would have worked along with the slaves. Her first son, Dolphus T. Shields, was biracial and born into slavery about 1860. Based on DNA and other evidence, in 2012 researchers said his father was likely 20-year-old Charles Marion Shields, son of her master. (Charles later married a white woman and had white children). [11] Melvinia did not talk to relatives about Dolphus' father. [12] Dolphus Shields moved to Birmingham, Alabama after the Civil War, and some of his children migrated to Cleveland, Ohio and Chicago. [11]

All four of Michelle's grandparents were multiracial, reflecting the complex history of the U.S., but her extended family said that people didn't talk about the era of slavery when they were growing up.^[11] Michelle Obama's distant ancestry also includes Irish and other European roots.^[13] In addition, a paternal first cousin once-removed is the African-American Jewish Rabbi Capers Funnye, son of her grandfather's sister.^[14][15]

Michelle grew up in a two-story house on Euclid Street in Chicago's South Shore community area. Her parents rented a small apartment on the house's second floor from her great-aunt, who lived downstairs. [4][16][17][18] She was raised in what she describes as a "conventional" home, with "the mother at home, the father works, you have dinner around the table."[19] Her elementary school was down the street. The family enjoyed playing games such as Monopoly and reading, and frequently saw extended family on both sides.^[20] They attended services at nearby South Shore Methodist Church.[16] The Robinsons used to vacation in a rustic cabin in White Cloud, Michigan.[16] She and her 21-month older brother, Craig, skipped the second grade. Her brother is a former basketball coach at Oregon State University and Brown University.[21] By sixth grade, Michelle joined a gifted class at Bryn Mawr Elementary School (later renamed Bouchet Academy).[22]

1.2 Education and early career

She attended Whitney Young High School, ^[23] Chicago's first magnet high school, where she was a classmate of Jesse Jackson's daughter Santita. ^[20] The round-trip commute from the Robinsons' South Side home to the Near West Side, where the school was located, took three hours. ^[24] Michelle Robinson was on the honor roll for four years, took advanced placement classes, was a member of the National Honor Society, and served as student council treasurer. ^[4] She graduated in 1981 as the salutatorian of her class. ^[24]

Michelle was inspired to follow her brother to Princeton University, [5] where Craig graduated in 1983. At Princeton, she challenged the teaching methodology for French because she felt that it should be more conversational.^[25] As part of her requirements for graduation, she wrote a thesis entitled Princeton-Educated Blacks and the Black Community. [26][27] "I remember being shocked," she says, "by college students who drove BMWs. I didn't even know parents who drove BMWs."[24] While at Princeton, she got involved with the Third World Center (now known as the Carl A. Fields Center), an academic and cultural group that supported minority students, running their day care center, which also included after school tutoring.^[28] Obama (then known as Robinson) majored in sociology and minored in African American studies; she graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in 1985. [4][29] She earned her Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree from Harvard Law School in 1988.[30] At Harvard she participated in demonstrations advocating the hiring of professors who were members of minorities^[31] and worked for the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, assisting low-income tenants with housing cases.^[32] She is the third First Lady with a postgraduate degree, after her two immediate predecessors, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Laura Bush.[33] In July 2008, Obama accepted the invitation to become an honorary member of the 100year-old black sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha, which had no active undergraduate chapter at Princeton when she attended.[34]

1.3 Family life



Barack and Michelle Obama, 2008

She met Barack Obama when they were among the few African Americans at their law firm, Sidley Austin (she has sometimes said only two, although others have pointed out there were others in different departments),^[35] and she was assigned to mentor him as a summer associate.^[36] Their relationship started with a business lunch and then a community organization meeting where he first impressed her.^[37] The couple's first date was to the Spike Lee movie *Do the Right Thing*.^[38] They married in October 1992,^[37] and have two daughters,

Malia Ann (born 1998) and Natasha (known as Sasha, born 2001). [39] After his election to the U.S. Senate, the Obama family continued to live on Chicago's South Side, choosing to remain there rather than moving to Washington, D.C. Throughout her husband's 2008 campaign for US President, she made a "commitment to be away overnight only once a week – to campaign only two days a week and be home by the end of the second day" for their two daughters. [40]

She once requested that her then-fiancé meet her prospective boss, Valerie Jarrett, when considering her first career move. [19] Jarrett is now one of her husband's closest advisors. [41][42] The marital relationship has had its ebbs and flows; the combination of an evolving family life and beginning political career led to many arguments about balancing work and family. Barack Obama wrote in his second book, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, that "Tired and stressed, we had little time for conversation, much less romance." [43] However, despite their family obligations and careers, they continue to attempt to schedule date nights while they lived in Chicago. [44]

The Obamas' daughters attended the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, a private school. [45] As a member of the school's board, Michelle fought to maintain diversity in the school when other board members connected with the University of Chicago tried to reserve more slots for children of the university faculty. This resulted in a plan to expand the school.^[5] Malia and Sasha now attend Sidwell Friends School in Washington, after also considering Georgetown Day School. [46][47] Michelle stated in an interview on The Ellen DeGeneres Show that they do not intend to have any more children. [48] The Obamas have received advice from past first ladies Laura Bush, Rosalynn Carter and Hillary Rodham Clinton about raising children in the White House. [47] Marian Robinson, Michelle's mother, has moved into the White House to assist with child care. [49]

1.4 Religion



The Obamas attend a church service in Washington, D.C., January 2013

Michelle Obama is a Protestant Christian. She was raised Methodist and joined the Trinity United Church of Christ, where she and Barack Obama married, performed by Rev. Jeremiah Wright. On May 31, 2008, Barack and Michelle Obama announced that they had withdrawn their membership in Trinity United Church of Christ stating that "Our relations with Trinity have been strained by the divisive statements of Reverend Wright, which sharply conflict with our own views."^[50]

The Obama family has attended several different churches since moving to Washington D.C. in 2009, including Shiloh Baptist Church and St. John's Episcopal Church. At the 49th African Methodist Episcopal Church's general conference, Michelle Obama encouraged the attendees to advocate for political awareness, saying "To anyone who says that church is no place to talk about these issues, you tell them there is no place better – no place better, because ultimately, these are not just political issues – they are moral issues, they're issues that have to do with human dignity and human potential, and the future we want for our kids and our grandkids." [51]

2 Career

Following law school, she was an associate at the Chicago office of the law firm Sidley Austin, where she first met her future husband. At the firm, she worked on marketing and intellectual property.^[4] She continues to hold her law license, but as she no longer needs it for her work, it has been on a voluntary inactive status since 1993.^{[52][53]}

In 1991, she held public sector positions in the Chicago city government as an Assistant to the Mayor, and as Assistant Commissioner of Planning and Development. In 1993, she became Executive Director for the Chicago Office of Public Allies, a non-profit organization encouraging young people to work on social issues in nonprofit groups and government agencies. [23] She worked there nearly four years and set fundraising records for the organization that still stood 12 years after she left. [20]

In 1996, she served as the Associate Dean of Student Services at the University of Chicago, where she developed the University's Community Service Center. [54] In 2002, she began working for the University of Chicago Hospitals, first as executive director for community affairs and, beginning May 2005, as Vice President for Community and External Affairs.[55] She continued to hold the University of Chicago Hospitals position during the primary campaign, but cut back to part-time in order to spend time with her daughters as well as work for her husband's election; [56] she subsequently took a leave of absence from her job.^[57] According to the couple's 2006 income tax return, her salary was \$273,618 from the University of Chicago Hospitals, while her husband had a salary of \$157,082 from the United States Senate. The Obamas' total income, however, was \$991,296, which included \$51,200 she earned as a member of the board of directors of TreeHouse Foods, and investments and royalties from his books.^[58]

She served as a salaried board member of TreeHouse Foods, Inc. (NYSE: THS),^[59] a major Wal-Mart supplier with whom she cut ties immediately after her husband made comments critical of Wal-Mart at an AFL-CIO forum in Trenton, New Jersey, on May 14, 2007.^[60] She also served on the board of directors of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.^[61]

3 Early campaigns

Although Obama has campaigned on her husband's behalf since early in his political career by handshaking and fund-raising, she did not relish the activity at first. When she campaigned during her husband's 2000 run for United States House of Representatives, her boss at the University of Chicago asked if there was any single thing about campaigning that she enjoyed; after some thought, she replied that visiting so many living rooms had given her some new decorating ideas. [62]



The Obamas fist bump upon his winning the Democratic nomination.



The Obamas, with Joe and Dr. Jill Biden at the August 23, 2008 Vice Presidential announcement in Springfield, Illinois

At first, Obama had reservations about her husband's presidential campaign, due to fears about a possible negative effect on their daughters. She says that she negotiated an agreement in which her husband was to give up smoking in exchange for her support of his decision to run. About her role in her husband's presidential campaign she has said: My job is not a senior adviser. If 165] During the campaign, she has dis-

4 3 EARLY CAMPAIGNS

cussed race and education by using motherhood as a framework.^[25]

In May 2007, three months after her husband declared his presidential candidacy, she reduced her professional responsibilities by 80 percent to support his presidential campaign. [19] Early in the campaign, she had limited involvement in which she traveled to political events only two days a week and rarely traveled overnight; [67] by early February 2008 her participation had increased significantly, attending thirty-three events in eight days. [42] She made several campaign appearances with Oprah Winfrey. [68][69] She wrote her own stump speeches for her husband's presidential campaign and generally spoke without notes. [24]

Throughout the campaign, some media often labeled her as an "angry black woman," [70][71][72] and some web sites attempted to propagate this image, [73] prompting her to respond: "Barack and I have been in the public eye for many years now, and we've developed a thick skin along the way. When you're out campaigning, there will always be criticism. I just take it in stride, and at the end of the day, I know that it comes with the territory."^[74] By the time of the 2008 Democratic National Convention in August, media outlets observed that her presence on the campaign trail had grown softer than at the start of the race, focusing on soliciting concerns and empathizing with the audience rather than throwing down challenges to them, and giving interviews to shows like The View and publications like Ladies' Home Journal rather than appearing on news programs. The change was even reflected in her fashion choices, wearing more informal clothes in place of her previous designer pieces. [62] The *View* appearance was partly intended to help soften her public image, [70] and it was widely covered in the press.^[75]

The presidential campaign was her first exposure to the national political scene; even before the field of Democratic candidates was narrowed to two, she was considered the least famous of the candidates' spouses. [65] Early in the campaign, she told anecdotes about the Obama family life; however, as the press began to emphasize her sarcasm, she toned it down. [58][64] *The New York Times* op-ed columnist Maureen Dowd wrote:

I wince a bit when Michelle Obama chides her husband as a mere mortal – a comic routine that rests on the presumption that we see him as a god ... But it may not be smart politics to mock him in a way that turns him from the glam JFK into the mundane Gerald Ford, toasting his own English muffin. If all Senator Obama is peddling is the Camelot mystique, why debunk this mystique?^{[65][76]}



Oprah Winfrey joins the Obamas on the campaign trail, December 10, 2007



Obama speaks at the 2008 Democratic convention

On the first night of the 2008 Democratic National Convention, Craig Robinson introduced his younger sister. [77] She delivered her speech, during which she sought to portray herself and her family as the embodiment of the American Dream.[78] Obama said both she and her husband believed "that you work hard for what you want in life, that your word is your bond, and you do what you say you're going to do, that you treat people with dignity and respect, even if you don't know them, and even if you don't agree with them."[79] She also emphasized loving her country, in response to criticism for her previous statements about feeling proud of her country for the first time, [78][80][81] where the original statement was seen as a gaffe.^[82] That keynote address was largely well received and drew mostly positive reviews.^[83] A Rasmussen Reports poll found that her favorability among Americans reached 55%.[84]

On an October 6, 2008 broadcast, Larry King asked her if the American electorate was past the Bradley effect. She stated that her husband's achievement of the nomination was a fairly strong indicator that it was. [85] The same night she also was interviewed by Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show* where she deflected criticism of her husband and his campaign. [86] On Fox News' *America's Pulse*, E. D. Hill referred to the fist bump shared by the Obamas on the night that he clinched the Democratic presidential nomination as a "terrorist fist jab"; Hill was taken off air and the show itself was cancelled. [87][88][89]

4.1 Let's Move!

4 First Lady of the United States



Obama is greeted by Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace, United Kingdom April 1, 2009.



Michelle Obama and Carla Bruni During her early months as First Lady, she vis-



Michelle Obama with LeBron James and Dwyane Wade in January 2014

ited homeless shelters and soup kitchens.^[90] She also sent representatives to schools and advocated public service.^{[90][91]}

Obama advocated for her husband's policy priorities by promoting bills that support it. Obama hosted a White House reception for women's rights advocates in celebration of the enactment of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 Pay equity law. She supported the economic stimulus bill in visits to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development and United States Department of Education. Some observers looked favorably upon her legislative activities, while others said that she should be less involved in politics. According to her representatives, she intends to visit all United States Cabinet-level agencies in order to get acquainted with Washington. [92]

On June 5, 2009, the White House announced that Michelle Obama was replacing her current chief of staff, Jackie Norris, with Susan Sher, a longtime friend and adviser. Norris became a senior adviser to the Corporation for National and Community Service.^[93]

Other initiatives of First Lady Michelle Obama include advocating on behalf of military families, helping working women balance career and family, encouraging national service, and promoting the arts and arts education. [94][95] Obama has made supporting military families and spouses a personal mission and has been increasingly bonding with military families. According to her aides, stories of the sacrifice these families make move her to tears. [95]

In November 2013, a *Politico* article by Michelle Cottle accusing Obama of being a "feminist nightmare" for not using her position and education to advocate for women's issues was sharply criticized across the political spectrum. [96][97][98] Cottle quoted Linda Hirshman saying of Obama's trendy styles, promotion of gardening and healthy eating, and support of military families that "She essentially became the English lady of the manor, Tory Party, circa 1830s."[96] A prominent critic of Cottle was MSNBC host Melissa Harris-Perry, who rhetorically asked "Are you serious?"[98][97] Supporters of Obama note that the First Lady has been one of the only people in the administration to address obesity, through promoting good eating habits, which is one of the leading US public health crises. [99]

In March 2014, Obama posted on a blog on the White House website that she and her two daughters Malia and Sasha, and her mother Marian Robinson, would visit China later that month. She met with Peng Liyuan, the wife of Chinese President Xi Jinping and visited historic and cultural sites, as well as a university and two high schools.^[100]

In May 2014, Obama joined the campaign to bring back school girls who had been kidnapped in Nigeria. The First Lady tweeted a picture of herself holding a poster with the #bringbackourgirls campaign hashtag.^[101]

4.1 Let's Move!

Main article: Let's Move!

Obama's predecessors Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush supported the organic movement by instructing the White House kitchens to buy organic food, and Obama extended their efforts toward healthy eating by planting the White House Kitchen Garden, an organic garden, the first White House vegetable garden since Eleanor Roosevelt served as First Lady, and installing bee hives, on the South Lawn of the White House. The garden supplied organic produce and honey to the First Family and for state dinners and other official gatherings. [102][103][104][105]

In January 2010, Obama undertook her first lead role



Obama and Ellen DeGeneres dance on the second anniversary of Let's Move!.

in an administration-wide initiative, which she named "Let's Move!," to make progress in reversing the 21st century trend of childhood obesity. [104][106] On February 9, 2010, the First Lady announced Let's Move! and President Barack Obama created the Task Force on Childhood Obesity to review all current programs and create a national plan towards change.[107] Michelle Obama stated that her goal was to make this effort her legacy: "I want to leave something behind that we can say, 'Because of this time that this person spent here, this thing has changed.' And my hope is that that's going to be in the area of childhood obesity."[104] Her 2012 book American Grown: The Story of the White House Kitchen Garden and Gardens Across America is based on her experiences with the garden and promotes healthy eating. [108] Her call for action on healthy eating has been echoed by the United States Department of Defense, which has been facing an ever expanding problem of recruit obesity.[109]



Obama's first term official portrait

4.2 LGBT rights

In the 2008 US presidential election, Michelle boasted, to gay Democrat groups, of her husband's record on LGBT rights: his support of the Illinois Human Rights Act, the Illinois gender violence act, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, repealing Don't Ask Don't Tell, and full repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act, civil unions; along with hate crimes protection for sexual orientation and gender identity and renewed effort to fight HIV and AIDS. They have both been opponents of constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage in the federal, California, and Florida constitutions. She said that the US Supreme Court delivered justice in the *Lawrence v*. *Texas* case and drew a connection between the struggles for gay rights and civil rights by stating "We are all only here because of those who marched and bled and died, from Selma to Stonewall, in the pursuit of a more perfect union."[110][111][112]

After the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell on September 20, 2011, Michelle Obama included openly gay service members in her national military families initiative. [113]

On May 9, 2012, Barack and Michelle Obama came out publicly in favor of same-sex marriage. Prior to this, Michelle Obama had never stated her position on same-sex marriage publicly. Senior White House officials claim that Michelle Obama and Senior Adviser Valerie Jarrett had been the two most consistent advocates for same-sex marriage in Barack Obama's life.[114] Michelle went on to say that "This is an important issue for millions of Americans, and for Barack and me, it really comes down to the values of fairness and equality we want to pass down to our girls. These are basic values that kids learn at a very young age and that we encourage them to apply in all areas of their lives. And in a country where we teach our children that everyone is equal under the law, discriminating against same-sex couples just isn't right. It's as simple as that."[115] At the 2012 DNC Michelle said "Barack knows the American Dream because he's lived it ... and he wants everyone in this country to have that same opportunity, no matter who we are, or where we're from, or what we look like, or who we love."[116]

4.3 Public image and style



Michelle Obama wore Isabel Toledo clothes made of St. Gallen Embroidery to the 2009 presidential inauguration.



The Obamas dance at a presidential inaugural ball.

With the ascent of her husband as a prominent national politician, Michelle Obama has become a part of popular culture. In May 2006, Essence listed her among "25 of the World's Most Inspiring Women."[117][118] In July 2007, Vanity Fair listed her among "10 of the World's Best Dressed People." She was an honorary guest at Oprah Winfrey's Legends Ball as a "young'un" paying tribute to the 'Legends,' who helped pave the way for African American women. In September 2007, 02138 magazine listed her 58th of 'The Harvard 100'; a list of the prior year's most influential Harvard alumni. Her husband was ranked fourth.[117][119] In July 2008, she made a repeat appearance on the Vanity Fair international best dressed list. [120] She also appeared on the 2008 *People* list of bestdressed women and was praised by the magazine for her "classic and confident" look. [121] [122]

At the time of her husband's election, some sources anticipated that as a high-profile African-American woman in a stable marriage she would be a positive role model who would influence the view the world has of African-Americans.^{[123][124]} Her fashion choices were part of the 2009 Fashion week,^[125] but Obama's influence in the field did not have the impact on the paucity of African-American models who participate, that some thought it might.^{[126][127]}

Her public support grew in her early months as First Lady, [90][128] as she was accepted as a role model. [90] On her first trip abroad in April 2009, she toured a cancer ward with Sarah Brown, wife of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. [129] Newsweek described her

first trip abroad as an exhibition of her so-called "star power" [128] and MSN described it as a display of sartorial elegance. [118] Questions were raised by some in the American and British media regarding protocol when the Obamas met Queen Elizabeth II [130] and Michelle reciprocated a touch on her back by the Queen during a reception, purportedly against traditional royal etiquette. [130][131] Palace sources denied that any breach in etiquette had occurred. [132]



Barack and Michelle Obama have come to express their condolences on the death of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah in January 2015

She has been compared to Jacqueline Kennedy due to her sense of style, [120] and also to Barbara Bush for her discipline and decorum. [133][134] Obama's style has been described as "fashion populist." [33] In 2010, she wore clothes, many high end, from more than 50 design companies with less expensive pieces from J.Crew and Target, and the same year a study found that her patronage was worth an average of \$14 million to a company. [135] She became a fashion trendsetter, in particular favoring sleeveless dresses, including her first-term official portrait in a dress by Michael Kors, and her ball gowns designed by Jason Wu for both inaugurals. [136]

She appeared on the cover and in a photo spread in the March 2009 issue of *Vogue*.^{[137][138]} Every First Lady since Lou Hoover (except Bess Truman) has been in *Vogue*,^[137] but only Hillary Clinton had previously appeared on the cover.^[139] In August 2011, she appeared on the cover of *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine, the first person to do so in 48 years, and the first woman.^[140] During the 2013 Academy Awards, she became the first First Lady to announce the winner of an Oscar (Best Picture which went to *Argo*).^[141]

The media have been criticized for focusing more on the First Lady's fashion sense than her serious contributions. [33][142] She has stated that she would like to focus attention as First Lady on issues of concern to military and working families. [123][143][144] In 2008 *U.S. News & World Report* blogger, PBS host and Scripps Howard columnist Bonnie Erbé argued that Obama's own publicists seemed to be feeding the emphasis on style over substance. [145] Erbé has stated on several occasions

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style.[49][146]

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7 External links

- First Lady Michelle Obama at Whitehouse.gov
- "About Michelle Obama" at BarackObama.com
- Michelle Obama at DMOZ
- Appearances on C-SPAN
- Michelle Obama at C-SPAN's First Ladies: Influence & Image
- Michelle Obama at the Internet Movie Database
- Michelle Obama at TED

- Works by or about Michelle Obama in libraries (WorldCat catalog)
- Michelle Obama at the Notable Names Database
- Michelle Obama collected news and commentary at Chicago Tribune
- Michelle Obama collected news and commentary at The New York Times
- Michelle Obama collected news and commentary at U.S.News & World Report
- Michelle Obama On Love, Family & Politics, interview with Katie Couric of CBS News, February 15, 2008
- Michelle Obama's Roots links to genealogical research by Megan Smolenyak featured in the New York Times and Huffington Post

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