



MICHELLE OBAMA

Michelle Obama (1964-) was an American first lady and the wife of Barack Obama, the 44th president of the United States. An Ivy League graduate, she built a successful career, first as a lawyer, and then in the private sector, which she maintained throughout her husband's early political career. Concerned about the effect the campaign would have on their young daughters, Michelle was initially reluctant to support the idea of her husband's run for the presidency. Despite her initial misgivings, she proved to be an effective surrogate for him on the campaign trail. After her husband's election, she chose a number of causes to support; advocating for support for military families and encouraging healthy eating to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity. As a young mother, a fashion icon and the first African-American first lady, Michelle Obama became a role model to many Americans.

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson was born on January 17, 1964, in Chicago, Illinois, to parents Marian and Fraser Robinson. Although Fraser's modest pay as a city-pump operator led to cramped living in their South Shore bungalow, the Robinsons were a close-knit family, with Michelle and older brother Craig pushed to excel in school. Both children skipped the second grade, and Michelle was later chosen for a gifted-student program that enabled her to take French and advanced biology courses.

Making the lengthy daily trip to attend Whitney M. Young Magnet High School, Michelle became student council treasurer and a member of the National Honor Society before graduating as class salutatorian in 1981. She then followed her brother to Princeton University, where she created a reading program for the children of the school's manual laborers. A sociology major with a minor in African-American studies, she explored the connections between the school's black alumni and their communities in her senior thesis, graduating cum laude in 1985.

After earning her J.D. from Harvard Law School in 1988, Michelle joined the Chicago office of the law firm Sidley Austin as a junior associate specializing in marketing and intellectual property. Assigned to mentor a summer intern named Barack Obama, she deflected his initial romantic advancements before they began dating. They were engaged within two years, and married at the Trinity United Church of Christ on October 3, 1992.

Michelle left corporate law in 1991 to pursue a career in public service, enabling her to fulfill a personal passion and create networking opportunities that would benefit her husband's future political career. Initially an assistant to Chicago mayor Richard Daley, she soon became the city's assistant commissioner of planning and development. In 1993, she was named executive director for the Chicago branch of Public Allies, a leadership-training program for young adults. Moving on to the University of Chicago as associate dean of student services, she developed the school's first community-service program.

When Obama decided to run for Illinois state senator in 1996, Michelle proved a disciplined campaign aide by canvassing for signatures and throwing fundraising parties. However, their victory presented the family with new challenges; following the births of daughters Malia (1998) and Sasha (2001), Michelle often had to juggle the demands of work and child-rearing alone with

her husband tending to business in the state capital of Springfield.

Successful despite the difficulties, Michelle was named executive director of community relations and external affairs for the University of Chicago Hospitals in 2002. She was promoted to vice president after three years, and served on the boards of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, but eventually scaled back her work hours and commitments to support Obama's entry into the U.S. presidential race.

Initially criticized for her candor, Michelle soon proved an asset on the campaign trail with her knack for delivering relatable stories about her family. In addition to becoming the first African-American first lady upon Obama's Election Day victory in 2008, she became the third with a post-graduate degree.

Michelle sought to tie her own agendas to her husband's larger legislative goals, notably targeting the epidemic of childhood obesity while the Affordable Care Act was being created. In 2009, she worked with local elementary school students to plant a 1,100-square-foot vegetable garden on the South Lawn of the White House. The following year she launched the Let's Move! initiative to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

In 2011, Michelle co-founded the Joining Forces program to expand educational and employment options for veterans and to raise awareness about the difficulties plaguing military families. After helping Obama win a second term in office, she formed the Reach Higher initiative to inspire young people to explore higher education and career-development opportunities.

Continuing the family theme of her campaign speeches, the first lady stressed the importance of remaining a diligent parent and brought her mother to live with her in the White House. She was also recognized for an ability to connect to younger generations by remaining attuned to popular culture. Embracing the use of social media, she encouraged fans to follow her progress on her Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts, and proved willing to bring her messages to audiences by appearing in humorous sketches online and on television.

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