



Becoming

By Michelle Obama

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Genre & subject

Biography

Michelle Obama

President's spouses

Synopsis

An intimate, powerful, and inspiring memoir by the former First Lady of the United States. In a life filled with meaning and accomplishment, Michelle Obama has emerged as one of the most iconic and compelling women of our era. As First Lady of the United States of America—the first African-American to serve in that role—she helped create the most welcoming and inclusive White House in history, while also establishing herself as a powerful advocate for women and girls in the U.S. and around the world, dramatically changing the ways that families pursue healthier and more active lives, and standing with her husband as he led America through some of its most harrowing moments.

Along the way, she showed us a few dance moves, crushed Carpool Karaoke, and raised two down-to-earth daughters under an unforgiving media glare. In her memoir, a work of deep reflection and mesmerizing storytelling, Michelle Obama invites readers into her world, chronicling the experiences that have shaped her—from her childhood on the South Side of Chicago to her years as an executive balancing the demands of motherhood and work, to her time spent at the world's most famous address.

With unerring honesty and lively wit, she describes her triumphs and her disappointments, both public and private, telling her full story as she has lived it—in her own words and on her own terms. Warm, wise, and revelatory, *Becoming* is the deeply personal reckoning of a woman of soul and substance who has steadily defied expectations—and whose story inspires us to do the same.

Author biography

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama (born January 17, 1964) is an American lawyer, university administrator and writer, who was First Lady of the United States from 2009 to 2017. She is married to the 44th U.S. President, Barack Obama, and was the first African-American First Lady.

Raised on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois, Obama is a graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Law School. In her early legal career, she worked at the law firm Sidley Austin, where she met Barack Obama. She subsequently worked in non-profits and as the Associate Dean of Student Services at the University of Chicago and the Vice President for Community and External Affairs of the University of Chicago Medical Center. Michelle married Barack in 1992 and they have two daughters.

Obama campaigned for her husband's presidential bid throughout 2007 and 2008, delivering a keynote address at the 2008 Democratic National Convention. She returned to speak for him at the 2012 Democratic National Convention. During the 2016 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, she delivered a speech in support of the Democratic presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton, a former First Lady.

As First Lady, Obama served as a role model for women, and worked as an advocate for poverty awareness, education, nutrition, physical activity and healthy eating. She supported American designers and was considered a fashion icon

Discussion starters

1. Mrs. Obama begins her book with a story about making cheese toast on a quiet night at home, a few months after leaving the White House. Why do you think she chose this story to begin her memoir?
2. Mrs. Robinson is the opposite of a helicopter parent. She was tough and had very high expectations for her children, and she also expected them to figure some things out on their own and learn from their missteps and the process of making choices. She gave her children agency at a very young age. How did that shape Mrs. Obama? What is the balance between discipline and trust?
3. In *Becoming*, we get to know the constellation of Mrs. Obama's extended family through her eyes. Her grandfather, Southside filled his house with music and makeshift speakers and merriment. Years later, Mrs. Obama would fill the White House with music and culture through live performances and several programs aimed at children. How do those kinds of early memories leave an imprint on us as we grow older? What were the sights and smells that you remember from visiting grandparents or other elders, and how have they left a mark on you?
4. In discussing her neighbourhood on the South Side of Chicago, Mrs. Obama writes, "Failure is a feeling long before it becomes an actual result. It's vulnerability that breeds with self-doubt and then is escalated, often deliberately, by fear." How did this insight shape Mrs. Obama's work and mission as First Lady? What can we all do—as individuals, parents, and community members—to help break this cycle?"
5. Mrs. Obama writes about the early influences of her mother, Marion Robinson, and her TV role model Mary Tyler Moore. One was a single, professional living on her own in the big city. One was a wise and supportive stay-at-home mother, who later went to work to help pay for her children's education. Where do you see the influences of both of these women in Mrs. Obama's life?
6. Early in her senior year at Whitney Young High School, Mrs. Obama went for an obligatory first appointment with the school college counsellor. Mrs. Obama was treasurer of the senior class. She had earned a spot in the National Honour Society. She was on track to graduate in the top 10 percent of her class and she was interested in joining her older brother, Craig, at Princeton University. The guidance counsellor said to her, "I'm not sure that you're Princeton material." How did Mrs. Obama handle hearing that statement? How does one avoid having one's dreams dislodged by someone else's lower expectations?
7. In high school Mrs. Obama said she felt like she was representing her neighbourhood+. At Princeton, faced with questions of whether she was the product of Affirmative Action programs, she felt like she was representing her race. Was that

- more than a feeling? Was she actually representing her communities in those settings? Have you had moments in life where you feel as though you are representing one of your communities?
8. In her early life Mrs. Obama writes about being a "box checker," but as she gets older she learns how to "swerve" to adjust to life's circumstances. What does it mean to swerve and how do we develop that skill in life?
 9. In *Becoming*, Mrs. Obama describes a number of women who have served as mentors for her at different times in her life, including Czerny Brasuell, Valerie Jarrett, and Susan Sher. What do these women have in common? What lessons did Mrs. Obama learn from them about finding a fulfilling career as a parent? Who are your mentors and how do you cultivate those relationships?
 10. In Chapter 15, Mrs. Obama explains why she chose to support her husband's run for the presidency despite her misgivings about politics. What made her change her mind? Would you have made the same choice? How do you balance the competing worlds of family life and work in your life?
 11. As Mrs. Obama notes, First Lady is a role without a job description. How did Mrs. Obama choose to approach the role? If you were in charge of writing the job description for the First Lady, what would you include and exclude?
 12. In *Becoming*, Mrs. Obama writes candidly about detractors who tried to invalidate her standing or her work. "I was female, black, and strong, which to certain people, maintaining a certain mind-set, translated only to 'angry.' It was another damaging cliché, one that's been forever used to sweep minority women to the perimeter of every room, an unconscious signal not to listen to what we've got to say." What is the root of that "angry black woman" cliché? How and why does it do damage?
 13. Throughout her life, Michelle Obama has been a meticulous planner. It is evident in her approach to her studies in high school and at Princeton. It is evident in the way she transitioned through jobs as a professional. And it is evident in the way she approached her role as First Lady. Where did that come from? How did Fraser Robinson's approach to life impact his daughter? Are you a planner or more spontaneous? How does it impact those around you and your life?
 14. In the epilogue, Mrs. Obama writes, "I've never been a fan of politics, and my experience over the last ten years has done little to change that." Did you find her statement surprising? Do you think politics is an effective way to make social change?
 15. Why do you think Michelle Obama chose to name her memoir "Becoming"? What does the idea of "becoming" mean to you?

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