

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# Michelle Obama In Her Own Words

Lisa Rogak

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Acknowledgments

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## About the Book

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‘The world as it is just won’t do.... we have an obligation to fight for the world as it should be’ Michelle Obama

Michelle Obama is First Lady of the United States of America. But she is also a mother, a wife, a lawyer and a campaigner. Her glamorous looks, down-to-earth personality and quick sense of humour have captivated the world since she first appeared on the public stage. Now this inspiring, often-funny and sometimes-controversial collection of quotations from the history-making First Lady gives a revealing insight into her life.

From thoughts on her role in the White House to reflections on the juggling act between work and motherhood and her own journey from a working class neighbourhood, this is a fascinating glimpse into the mind of this extraordinary woman.

## About the Author

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LISA ROGAK is the author of more than forty books and hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles. She has written biographies on Dr. Robert Atkins, Dan Brown, Shel Silverstein, and Stephen King. She lives in Charleston, South Carolina.

# MICHELLE OBAMA

## IN HER OWN WORDS

Edited by  
Lisa Rogak



To David Porter and John Willson



## Introduction

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NOW THAT BARACK OBAMA has become the forty-fourth president of the United States, the world is focused not only on what he will accomplish, but also on what kind of First Lady Michelle Obama will be. Throughout the long campaign season, Michelle Robinson Obama garnered a large amount of attention, kudos, and criticism about her words, actions, and even her appearance, but few people know what kind of role she'll play once she settles into the White House.

One clue is to examine her words and statements of the past. This volume aims to collect the most memorable of Michelle Obama's words for readers who are eager to learn more about America's new history-making First Lady. What is certain is that she's an incredibly accomplished woman in her own right, holding down high-powered executive jobs in the Chicago mayor's office and at the University of Chicago. She was determined to follow a fast-track powerful career of her own years before she met the man who would become her husband. Some have said that while Barack has greater drive and ambition, Michelle possesses a more brilliant intelligence.

Despite her successes, she still tells anyone who asks that her most important job is mother to the presidential couple's two children. "My first job is going to continue to be mom-in-chief, making sure that in this transition, the girls are settled and that they know they will continue to be the center of our universe," she said only hours after the election.

Time will tell what role Michelle will play as First Lady. In the meantime, this book will help you to gain a clearer picture of this history-making woman.

## Michelle Robinson Obama: A Brief Biography

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MICHELLE LAVAUGHN ROBINSON was born on January 17, 1964, to Fraser Robinson, a city water plant employee, and Marian Shields, a secretary. She grew up in a one-bedroom apartment on Chicago's South Side, sharing a bedroom with her brother Craig, who was sixteen months older. People on the street often commented on the "twins."

Michelle's paternal great-great-grandfather, Jim Robinson, was a slave in South Carolina, and her grandfather moved to Chicago during the Great Migration of the early 1900s to escape the blatant racism of the South. Throughout her childhood, Michelle watched as white families left her inner-city neighborhood for a quieter life in the suburbs, known as the white flight of the 1960s and 1970s. Fraser and Marian instead turned their sole focus to helping their kids become well educated.

Michelle's natural intelligence was obvious very early. She learned to read by the age of four and skipped the second grade. By the sixth grade, she had enrolled in classes for gifted students, where she learned French and took accelerated courses, and she attended Whitney Young High School, the city's first magnet high school for gifted children. She was on the honor roll during all four years of high school, took advanced-placement classes, was a member of the National Honor Society, and graduated in 1981 as salutatorian of her class. Her future was bright.

After high school, Michelle attended Princeton University, graduating with a degree in sociology and cum laude

honors in 1985. She attended Princeton during the height of the national debates over affirmative action. Her honors thesis was "Princeton-Educated Blacks and the Black Community." Michelle then went on to attend Harvard Law School and earned her JD in 1988. She was one year ahead of Barack Obama but didn't meet him until a year after she graduated.

After Harvard, Michelle accepted a position at Sidley Austin, a prestigious Chicago law firm. In 1989 she mentored a Harvard law student summer intern named Barack Obama. He asked her out, and she initially declined because she was his supervisor. But he was persistent and she was attracted to him, so she reluctantly gave in. On their first date, they saw the Spike Lee movie *Do the Right Thing*, after which he took her to a community organizing meeting. They married on October 18, 1992.

Shortly after the wedding, Michelle left the law firm and became executive director for Public Allies, a nonprofit leadership-training program in Chicago. Barack also worked for a community nonprofit while pursuing his political ambitions on the side. He was elected to the Illinois State Senate in 1996. That same year, Michelle became the associate dean of student services at the University of Chicago and developed the university's first community service program. She left to work in city government for a few years, taking a position as staff assistant to Chicago mayor Richard Daley and as Assistant Commissioner of Planning and Development.

Barack and Michelle waited almost seven years before having children. Their first daughter, Malia Ann, was born in 1999. Natasha (often called "Sasha") followed two years later in 2001.

Before the kids arrived, Barack and Michelle agreed that they would aspire to a dinner-together-every-night kind of life for their family. Once his political career took off, however, he spent many nights away from home, and his

ideal family life fell by the wayside. This generated a certain amount of resentment for Michelle, who felt that her husband wasn't living up to his end of the bargain, and it created a good deal of friction between them for a couple of years. Michelle wondered what she'd gotten herself into. But once she recruited her mother and girlfriends to help out with the kids, the stress on both Barack and Michelle eased considerably, and their marriage settled down.

In Michelle's world, discipline reigns when it comes to her husband and her kids. Every day, she fills out to-do lists for Malia and Natasha, making sure to schedule in time for play. Michelle is in bed most nights by 9:30 P.M. and rises each morning at 4:30 A.M. to work out for at least an hour.

To the casual observer, even to many friends, the Obamas' marriage is a bit of a mystery. While some say she wears the pants in the family—both have publicly admitted that he refers to her as "The Boss"—others say that it is an equal partnership, and that the presidency would not have been within reach if it weren't for Michelle.

In 2004, Barack Obama's star began to rise quickly with his keynote address at the Democratic National Convention when he was running for the U.S. Senate. His speech may have introduced him to the nation in one fell swoop, but it was Michelle's professional relationships that were vital to helping him win the election. He was supported by influential black business leaders, though overall they were closer to Michelle, because of her previous positions, than they were to him. When Barack won his seat in the U.S. Senate, she didn't pull back on the reins of her own ambitions. The couple decided it was best if he lived in Washington during the week and she remained in Chicago with the kids. After all, she was still dedicated to her own career; in May 2005, she became the Vice President of Community Relations and External Affairs at the University of Chicago Medical Center.

Initially, Michelle hated the idea of her husband's running for president. Not only did she not want the intrusiveness into her and her family's life that running for the highest office in the United States would bring, but she privately worried about the chance that some racist madman would tear her family apart with a single bullet. However, once the decision was made, Michelle fell into the task with a great passion, and she was fully committed to helping Barack win the nation's highest office.