

Written by Kathy

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**The White House portraits of former United States president Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama, the nation's first Black president and first Black first lady. Barack Obama's image was painted by Robert McCurdy and Michelle Obama's portrait was painted by Sharon Sprung**

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**By Kathy Wray Coleman, editor-in-chief, associate publisher**

**CLEVELANDURBANNEWS.COM-WASHINGTON, D.C.**-Barack and Michelle Obama, the nation's first Black president and first Black first lady, returned to the White House in Washington, D.C. on Wednesday for the first time together since 2017 for the unveiling of their official White House portraits, and they received a warm welcome from current President Joe Biden, Obama's vice president when he was president and one of his strongest political allies.

"This is the gift of the Obama presidency to the country and to history," said President Biden relative to the portraits of the Obamas, adding that Obama's election as president 14 years ago "generated hope for millions of people who were left behind for so long."

Biden was gracious, and he thanked Obama for choosing him as his vice presidential running mate in 2008. But he said that he thanked both Obama and Michelle Obama most for their "faith in Democracy and the American people."

The president said that the Obamas have an open invitation to the White House as long as he is president.

"Barack and Michelle," Biden said, "welcome home."

A Democrat like Biden, Obama won a first term in 2008 and was reelected in 2012. He was

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succeeded by former president Donald Trump, a Republican and Biden's predecessor whom Biden ousted from the White House in 2020. It was during the inauguration in January of 2017 when Obama and his wife Michelle handed the torch to then president Trump and first lady Melania Trump, and it would be more than five and a half years before they would return to the White House together.

During his unveiling speech at Wednesday's televised ceremony in the East Room, Obama joked about his official White House portrait, saying the artist refused his requests to get rid of some of his gray hair and to make his ears smaller. He also said he appreciated being back at the White House,

"It is great to be back," said Obama before a room of about 250 people including some former and current staffers at the White House. . "President and Dr. Biden, Vice President Harris and Second Gentleman Emhoff, thank you so much for your hospitality."

The former president called President Biden "a true partner and a true friend," and he said that he hopes that he and Michelle Obama are seen as role models for generations to come.

"When future generations walk these halls and look up at these portraits, I hope they get a better, honest sense of who Michelle and I were," Obama said, " And I hope they leave with a deeper understanding that if we could make it here, maybe they can too; they can do

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remarkable things too."

Obama's painted image shows him standing, and wearing a fitting dark blue suit and a gray shirt and tie, and Michelle Obama's White House portrait displays the former first lady in a powder blue dress, seated on a sofa in the Red Room of the White House. Obama's image was painted by Robert McCurdy and Michelle Obama's image was painted by Sharon Sprung.

A Black girl raised by her blue collar parents on the South Side of Chicago, along with her older brother, Craig Robinson, her only sibling and a successful college basketball coach, Michelle Obama also spoke briefly after her portrait was unveiled, and she said that she never expected to become a first lady in the footsteps of first lady icons such as Jacqueline Kennedy and Dolly Madison.

"For me, this day is not just about what has happened," said Michelle Obama, "It's also about what could happen. Because a girl like me, she was never supposed to be up there next to Jacqueline Kennedy and Dolley Madison. She was never supposed to live in this house, and she definitely wasn't supposed to serve as first lady."

The former first lady said that the American dream is in reach to other Americans as well, and that dreams do come true. She said that Obama's elevation as the first Black president of the United States of America and her journey to the White House as the first Black lady are proof that dreams can truly become realities.

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A Princeton University undergraduate and Harvard Law School graduate who met the former president, who is four years older, in their younger years before he became famous, and as his boss when he was an attorney at the Chicago law firm of Sidley Austin, Michelle Obama was an active and likable first lady whose approval ratings reveal the love and respect she has garnered from the American public since stepping into the White House with President Obama in 2009 for his first term as president, Michelle Obama stood by her husband's side, and helped him become president.

She campaigned for then U.S. senator Barack Obama, a former Illinois state senator and community organizer on Chicago's south side, throughout 2007 and 2008, delivering a keynote address at the 2008 Democratic National Convention. And she rallied for President Obama relative to his successful reelection bid in 2012, and spoke at the Democratic National Convention that year.

The Obamas have two grown children, Sasha and Malia. They were the youngest to occupy the White House since Amy Carter when they began residing there in January of 2000 when Obama began his first term in office.

By Kathy Wray Coleman, associate publisher, editor-in-chief (Coleman is a former biology teacher and a seasoned Black journalist, and an investigative, legal, scientific, and political reporter who trained for 17 years at the Call and Post Newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio).

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We interviewed former president Barack Obama one-on-one when he was campaigning for president. As to the Obama interview,

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