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Brief History of President Barack Obama

Barack and Michelle Obama, along with their intelligent and energetic daughters Sasha and Malia, set a new standard for American society, normalizing the once unthinkable prospect of having a black president and first family in the White House. Together, they broke powerful barriers installed by the nation’s brutal history of slavery, Jim Crow and institutional racism.

For eight extraordinary years, Obama and his poised, elegant and brilliant family occupied the domestic and world stage in a way that offered new models of excellence for millions of black children living in a society that continues to marginalize their hopes and dreams, accentuate their mistakes and errors, and place too little values on their lives or deaths.

One [picture](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/24/us/politics/indelible-image-of-a-boys-pat-on-obamas-head-hangs-in-white-house.html) of Obama’s impact on black children remains especially poignant. A five-year-old African American boy visiting the White House asked to feel the president’s hair, as if to assure himself that the leader of the free world not only looked like him, but had similar hair as well. It’s one of the defining moments of Obama’s presidency. It illustrated how the very fact of having a black president unlocked new worlds of hope and possibility in millions of people – young and old –who never imagined that such a thing was possible.

Michelle Obama revealed a remarkable ability for grace when under pressure, even when faced with hurtful [myths](http://www.snopes.com/michelle-obama-white-folks-quote/) that she hated America. She responded to racist assaults, character assassination by rightwing pundits and blatant lies by conspiracy theorists and alt-right fanatics with a now legendary poise. And Michelle’s defiant black beauty in the face of online trolls – who compared her to animals and used racial slurs against her – helped make her time as first lady both inspiring and instructive.

For millions of black girls and women, Michelle Obama became a role model both for her astonishing educational accomplishments and political achievements in the White House. Her public resilience in leading a charge to promote healthy eating across the nation, including providing nutritious foods for economically and racially segregated youth living in poverty, was illuminating – as was her willingness to speak truth to power at the Democratic national convention, where she acknowledged living in a house built by slaves. Moments like these cemented her soaring stature nationally and solidified the special place she holds within the hearts of black people everywhere.

The Obamas leave the White House, if not the world stage, having accomplished, through sheer force of will, something entirely unprecedented in American history: humanizing the black experience by simply being themselves.

In the process they normalized black excellence, codified graceful resistance to white supremacy and illustrated the profundity of black romantic and familial love. And they looked great doing it. The Obamas will be missed by millions – but no one will miss them more than black Americans. We found in Obama a president who justified the faith of generations who persisted in loving America – even when the nation refused to love us back.