



MICHELLE OBAMA; FIGHTING FOR
OR FIGHTING AGAINST?
REPRESENTATION ON FACEBOOK

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BA Thesis by Yvette Prinsen

Abstract

Michelle Obama was the 41st First Lady of the United States of America from 2009 to 2017 and the first presidential wife of color. Traditional media coverage of Michelle Obama differs from the coverage of her predecessors. She was scrutinized more extensively because of her race. The former First Lady was often framed negatively based on existing stereotypes on black womanhood. Mrs. Obama uses her voice and new media to counter the attributed stereotypes. After her role of First Lady she remained political by fighting for causes of her interest via Facebook. Education for children and teenagers, the well-being of girls, equality between females and males, and whites and non-whites are amongst the political and social causes at the heart of her activism. This thesis looks at the representation of the self on Facebook from March 2018 till July 2020.

Keywords: Michelle Obama, Facebook, New Media, traditional media, stereotypes, race, gender

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Introduction

In 2018, I was moved by the picture of a little girl, Parker Curry, standing in front of the official presidential portrait of Michelle Obama in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington D.C.¹ She was fixated on the portrait of a woman that resembles her, completely in awe with her mouth open. From that moment on, I knew I wanted to research the portrayal of the 41st First Lady of the United States.



Figure 1

Michelle Obama served as first lady of the United States from 2009 to 2017. In the time of Barack Obama's presidential campaign, it was without doubt that Michelle would be in the spotlights too. She was a well-educated black woman from Chicago, who received her bachelor's degree at Princeton, and a Juris Doctor degree from Harvard Law School. After earning her degrees, she worked as an attorney and held several other positions in Chicago. As first lady, Mrs. Obama focused mostly on children, education and health. She started four initiatives as First Lady; Let's Move!, Joining Forces, Reach Higher and Let Girls Learn.² They aimed at better health for children, helping military families, striving for better and accessible education and educational opportunities for girls.

As the first African American First Lady, she was unique. Over the course of Barack Obamas presidency, Michelle Obama has grown and became a role model for many African American women in the United States.³ Both Barack Obama and Michelle Obama became the representatives of their race.⁴ Michelle Obama was often framed negatively in the media, especially during the presidential campaign, and their first year in the White House. Media drew heavily on existing stereotypes of black women to form an image on the new First Lady. However, there were also positive portrayals of Mrs. Obama resulting in her becoming a role model. When her position as First Lady ended after serving two terms, she continued to be a

¹ Figure 1. Rosenwald, Michael. "A Moment of Awe: Photo of Little Girl Captivated by Michelle Obama Portrait Goes Viral." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 4 Mar. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/local/a-moment-of-awe-photo-of-little-girl-staring-at-michelle-obama-portrait-goes-viral/2018/03/04/4e5a4548-1ff2-11e8-94da-ebf9d112159c_story.html. Photograph taken by Ben Hines.

² Obama, Michelle. *Becoming*, 1st ed., Crown, 2018.

³ Guerrero, Lisa. "(M)Other-in-Chief: Michelle Obama and the Ideal of Republican Womanhood" *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Gill, Rosalind and Christina Scharff, Palgrave Macmillan UK, London, 2011, pp. 68-82., doi:10.1057/9780230294523_5; Haynes, Christina S, and Ray Block. "Role-Model-In-Chief: Understanding a Michelle Obama Effect." *Politics & Gender*, vol. 15, no. 03, 2019, pp. 365-402., doi:10.1017/S1743923X18000533.

⁴ Obama 295

role model through her activism. She uses new media like Facebook to continue her fight for equality, education and the empowerment of girls and women.

In Michelle Obama's memoir *Becoming* she writes "... because the personal stakes felt so high. I was stepping onto the stage after having been demonized as an angry black woman who didn't love her country. My speech that night gave me a chance to humanize myself, explaining who I was in my own voice, slaying the caricatures and stereotypes with my own words."⁵ This quote clearly shows how Michelle Obama was aware of the negative image the media painted of her and what stereotype she had to fight. The caricatures and stereotypes such as the 'angry black woman' were no new phenomenon that was created to describe Michelle, but they have existed for a long time. The struggle to become human again played out on Facebook is at the heart of this research.

Facebook is a medium where many people have a profile on and are active on. A Facebook post reaches many people, it is quick and relatively informal. In this way, she can reach people into their homes. The audience she reaches through Facebook are the young and middle-aged generations. Many teenagers and young adults use Facebook regularly. Michelle Obama's Facebook page has over 17 million likes and followers, so when she posts something, it will appear on the timeline of at least 17 million people.

In this paper, I will analyze various stereotypes the media uses to frame black women and discuss how they are woven into media coverage of Michelle Obama. This provides an overview of the negative stereotypes Mrs. Obama fights against. The media coverage, positive and negative, form the base from which Michelle Obama could build her own representation after the two presidential terms. Next is a chapter on the use of media by Michelle Obama. Posts from her Facebook page are analyzed with qualitative content analysis. The topics that are frequently addressed provide an overview of issues near to her heart and show what she is fighting for, but also show what she is fighting against.

⁵ Obama 406

Literary Review

This paper draws from works in media studies in general, and the framing of black women specifically. It also looks at scholarship on New Media as a means of crafting and conveying identity.

In *The Media Book* Chris Newbold, Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Hilde Van den Bulck's contribute to the study of media within society.⁶ They provide a useful framework for establishing the boundaries of communications research that consists of six key aspects: agency, category, technology, language, audience, and representation. A key aspect relevant for this thesis is representation. Newbold et al. focus in representation on the content, in particular of how they portray, reflect, filter and negotiate the 'real' world.⁷ 'Real', or reality, is never completely true because the methods of understanding the world are subject to processes of selection, and the real world is influenced by the media and the assumptions about the power of media.⁸ Whatever one consumes through media is never a true picture of reality, it always involves selection, inclusion, and exclusion.

They also argue that media has power to incite change. The so-called 'media effects' are desired to attribute causal responsibility to media content that results in a good or a bad effect.⁹ They are very difficult to predict and subject to interpretation of an individual. David Gauntlett elaborates on the media effects studies in his book *Media, Gender and Identity; An Introduction*.¹⁰ He provides ten arguments why the media effects theory is flawed and concludes that there is no simple causal link between the actions of an individual and seeing something in the media.¹¹

Moreover, Newbold et al. provides representational theories, the concept of realism, stereotyping, feminist media studies, gender representation and representation of race and ethnicity. Stereotyping within media studies is defined as the continuous repetition of ideas about groups of people in the media, where one feature or characteristic assumed to belong to a group is made representative of the whole group.¹² That feature can be anything that ties a group of people together, like skin color, gender, or sexuality. Some groups find that stereotypes in negative media representation is harmful. The repetition of the negative image can form

⁶ Newbold, Chris, et al. *The Media Book*. Arnold, 2002.

⁷ Newbold et al. 16

⁸ Newbold et al. 16, 261

⁹ Newbold et al. 41

¹⁰ Gauntlett, David. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008.

¹¹ Gauntlett 37

¹² Newbold 265

negative tendencies towards these groups by the audiences of the media, resulting in discrimination or racism.¹³

The chapters on *Interactive Electronic Media* in *The Media Book* are from a pre-Facebook era. They give information about globalization and the internet, and how horizontal many-to-many communications become easily accessible. However, new media and social media platforms like Facebook are not discussed in *The Media Book* since they not yet existed.

However, José van Dijck offers an analysis on how Facebook is used to create a personal self-presentation, and explains how the purpose of Facebook shifted from a community space that connects people towards a platform that monetizes connectivity by maximizing data traffic between ideas, things and people.¹⁴ Whereas Facebook used to be a platform of users and for users, it changed after implementing the new timeline feature that created a chronological order of one's Facebook posts.¹⁵ After the new implementation in 2011, the focus shifted from connectedness to connectivity. Self-expression and self-promotion are combined in the new Facebook format that focuses on the narrative. Nancy Thumim has a chapter about self-representation on Facebook in her book *self-representation and digital culture*.¹⁶ She suggests that there are tensions surrounding the purpose of the self-representation on Facebook, and that the self-representations are never free of mediation because the company's goal is to make profit.¹⁷

Media, Gender and Identity; An introduction by David Gauntlett explores personal autonomy and focuses on popular, mainstream western media and culture. The background debate on media power it highlights is between Theodor Adorno and John Fiske. Adorno referred to mass media as the cultural industry and argued that the industry had power over the people. The cultural industry decided what the people consumed, and thus how they were influenced. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the choice a consumer thinks he/she has is an illusion too, because the range of choices is created by the industry.¹⁸ The impact of the cultural industry on society is that there is not much time for people to develop resistance, since they fill this time with consuming media.

¹³ Newbold et al. 265

¹⁴ Dijck, José van. "You have one identity": performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn" *Media, Culture & Society*, vol 35, no. 02, 2013, pp. 199-215., doi:10.1177/0163443712468605

¹⁵ Dijck 202, 204

¹⁶ Thumim, Nancy. *Self-Representation and Digital Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

¹⁷ Thumim 143-4

¹⁸ Gauntlett 24

John Fiske on the other hand argues that popular culture is made by the people, and not by the culture industry.¹⁹ He claims that the power is with the audience who interprets the media and determines its popularity, instead of with the industry that creates the media. Fiske's claim is an exaggerated version of the idea that a message encoded in media might be decoded differently by audience members. This results in the rejection of the idea that media can influence people, because the message is decoded differently. Fiske is an optimist who believes audiences have power over the media, while Adorno's view is more pessimistic, believing that there is no choice for consumers and the cultural industry has all the power.

New media platforms as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are thriving on user generated content. Fiske's theory that audience has power over the media is applicable to these mediums because users became popular through support of the audience. There is no big media company who invented influential people on new media platform, therefore Fiske's theory on media and power applies best to new media. Anyone with connection to the internet can create an account, interact and upload content on new media platforms.

New media platforms are based on user generated content, whereas traditional media such as magazines and TV provide more mediated content. Gauntlett argues that representations of gender in movies, magazines, TV and advertising used to be very stereotypical.²⁰ Men were represented more than women, and in more active, decisive, and intelligent roles, whereas women were underrepresented and more often portrayed as feminine and housewife types. Between the 1990s and 2007, the representation of men and women in movies became more diverse, whereas skills and abilities between male and female characters were more similar.²¹ Unfortunately, Gauntlett does not differentiate between race within these subjects.

Another interesting chapter in *Media, Gender and Identity* is on role models. A role model's value is to inspire and motivate.²² Gauntlett divides role models into six different types: the 'straightforward success' role model, the 'triumph over difficult circumstances' role model, the 'challenging stereotypes' role model, the 'wholesome' role model, the 'outsider' role model, and the family role model.²³ The portrayal of an individual in and by the media is crucial to become a role model.

In Douglas Kellner's paper on *Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture* he discusses the potential contributions of a cultural studies perspective to media critique and

¹⁹ Gauntlett 27

²⁰ Gauntlett 60

²¹ Gauntlett 83, 97

²² Gauntlett 226

²³ Gauntlett 226-7

literacy.²⁴ Global networks produce and distribute culture for corporate profits, whereas the internet and new media distribute more culture over the globe than any time before.²⁵ The audience, or consumers, can create their own media content to share online. This newly created media is not censored by a big company, and therefore it can include more oppositional voices of resistance.²⁶ Facebook is an example of new media that produces a platform to share ideas, information and opinions to a large audience.

Three scholarly works on stereotypes of black womanhood in media are central to the analysis of how Michelle Obama is portrayed. Marian McPherson and Cynthia Frisby in *Framing of African-American women in mainstream and black women's magazines* argue that media places black women in four frames.²⁷ The first is the Mammy, she is a big, happy woman that takes care of the white family. The second is the Jezebel, a young, beautiful and hypersexual. The third is the Sapphire, who is an assertive, angry, aggressive, and intimidating black woman who tries to act white. The fourth is the Matriarch, who dedicates her life to her children, her husband and the household. She is tough, dominant and controlling.

According to McPherson and Frisby, the framing has changed in the wake of Michelle Obama's time as First Lady from 2009 - 2014. In addition, they also claim that Michelle Obama's personality and presence has increased the number of black women featured in magazines specifically.

In *The Obamas and Mass Media: Race, Gender, Religion, and Politics*, Mia Moody-Ramirez and Jannette L. Dates use a cultural prism of race to critically examine the media images of African Americans in the 21st century and assess how the media focused on gender, religion, and politics during the Obama administration.²⁸ Their analysis includes the mass media stereotypes of the tragic mulatto, the angry black woman, and the hyper-independent black woman, in addition to the stereotypes that McPherson and Frisby discuss. Other works, like Philip Kretsedemas "*But She's Not Black!*" *Viewer Interpretations of "Angry Black Women" on Prime Time TV* focuses sharply on the stereotype of the angry black woman. Kretsedemas

²⁴ Kellner, Douglas. "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture", *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, by Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, Sage, 2011, pp. 7-19.

²⁵ Kellner 11-2

²⁶ Kellner 12

²⁷ McPherson, Marian, and Cynthia M Frisby. "Framing of African-American Women in Mainstream and Black Women's Magazines." Missouri: *University of Missouri--Columbia*, 2015.

²⁸ Moody-Ramirez, Mia, and Jannette Lake Dates. *The Obamas and Mass Media: Race, Gender, Religion, and Politics*. First edition., First ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. *INSERT-MISSING-DATABASE-NAME*, *INSERT-MISSING-URL*. Accessed 2020.

focuses on portraits of black women in the professional world within popular culture. His analysis examines audience perceptions of the network television show *Ugly Betty*.²⁹

In new media is *New Media-Same Stereotypes: An Analysis of Social Media Depictions of President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama* by Mia Moody-Ramirez argue that new media platforms build on historical stereotypes and cultural narratives.³⁰ The authors extend on Walter Lippmann's claim articulated in *Public Opinion* in 1922, that a stereotype is a form of perception that imposes a certain way of seeing others.³¹ Moody-Ramirez and Dates argue that group solidarity creates an "us vs. them" mentality.³² This mentality justifies the dehumanization of the minority group and the idea that one group is better than the other. People can be dehumanized based on race, values, religion and/or physical characteristics. Dehumanization of a group can be used as a rationalization for mistreatment of that group by the leading political power or social construct.³³

Stereotypes of black womanhood in media

The following section focuses on the stereotypes of black womanhood in media. Stereotypes are used as generalizations by the dominant group over the subordinate group. They help maintain political power, social control and offer a rationalization for the mistreatment of marginalized groups as briefly described above.³⁴ People often form their opinions on race relations based on media. Media still uses framing and stereotypes in their coverage of stories. Before discussing how the media portrays Michelle Obama, it is necessary to understand what stereotypes of black women are used in media. The following section delves deeper into the stereotypes relevant to the mediated framing of Michelle Obama. It begins with a discussion of 'the' Jezebel and ends with a picture of 'the' angry black woman.

The Jezebel is overtly sexualized and assertive. She is immoral, sinful, and lustful³⁵. She is lascivious, young, over-sexed, and uses sexuality to get attention, love, and material goods

²⁹ Kretsedemas, Philip. "'But She's Not Black!'" *Journal of African American Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2010, pp. 149–170.

³⁰ Moody-Ramirez, Mia. "New Media-Same Stereotypes: An Analysis of Social Media Depictions of President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama" *Journal of New Media & Culture*, vol. 8, 2012.

³¹ Moody-Ramirez 2; Lippmann, Walter. *Public Opinion*. Harcourt Brace, 1922

³² Moody-Ramirez and Dates 10

³³ A social construct is an idea that has been created and accepted by the people in a society. "Social construct." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20construct>. Accessed 26 Jun. 2020.

³⁴ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 10; Moody-Ramirez 2; Newbold et al. 266

³⁵ Kretsedemas 151; Moody-Ramirez and Dates 38-9

from men³⁶. The stereotype is rooted in slavery, when white men misinterpreted the scanty clothing and dancing of African women as sexual. Jezebel's behavior and lust is used as an excuse for slave owners to abuse black women to fulfil their own sexual needs.³⁷ The stereotype of the Jezebel was created in the 20th century, however, in biblical history Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab of Israel around 860 BC. She was dominant and persuaded her husband to abandon a prophet and establish a religion. She used him to get what she wanted.

The Mammy is typically pictured as asexual, loyal and caring.³⁸ Historically, the mammy figure personified the black woman's content in their role as slaves. They were portrayed smiling and happy.³⁹ The figure was portrayed as a caregiver who puts the needs of the family or household first. The most common depiction of the mammy figure is where she is wearing an apron on top of a long dress, a head kerchief, a big smile on her face and either having a baby on her arm or carrying a bowl for food.⁴⁰ The mammy caricature is placed in sharp contrast to the Jezebel caricature, because the mammy was designed to be unattractive, so that white men would not be interested and accused of sexual exploitation.⁴¹

The mammy character is both embraced and rejected. She appeals to the mainstream white audience, because she supports the argument that black women were happy slaves. She is rejected by the middle-class black men and women because she represents a happiness that never existed.⁴² This rejection is evident in the contemporary debate about "Aunt Jemima".⁴³ Quaker Oats is the company that markets and sells "Aunt Jemima" products for over 130 years. The character displayed on the logo is Aunt Jemima, an African-American woman, who was a character from minstrel shows in the 1800s and 1900s that entertained whites by mocking blacks⁴⁴. They now acknowledge that the figure was based on a racial stereotype and announced that they will change the branding.

Whereas Aunt Jemimah appealed to the white, the Sapphire stereotype is a black woman who tries to act white. She imitates the culture of the white middle class, which then appears to be comical to white audiences.⁴⁵ A black person who is trying to sound and dress white was funny, because this implies that black people want to be white even though they can never

³⁶ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 39

³⁷ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 39

³⁸ Kretsedemas 152; McPherson and Frisby 39

³⁹ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 39-40

⁴⁰ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 39

⁴¹ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 40

⁴² Kretsedemas 152; Moody-Ramirez and Dates 40

⁴³ "Aunt Jemima to Change Branding Based on 'Racial Stereotype.'" *BBC News*, BBC, 17 June 2020, www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53083664.

⁴⁴ White actors often wore blackface as part of their costume.

⁴⁵ Kretsedemas 151

achieve it. It shows that white culture is more desirable. The Sapphire is assertive, angry, aggressive and intimidating, rude and stubborn towards her male counterpart.⁴⁶ These negative characteristics make the Sapphire unappealing.

The matriarch is like the mammy focused on the role of mother.⁴⁷ Usually the matriarch's life is dedicated to the children, the household, and her husband. The unfavorable sides of a mother are highlighted in particular, such as being dominant, aggressive, tough and controlling. There are similarities between the mammy and the matriarch, who both take care of the household. However, the mammy is mostly displayed as nurturing, jolly and frivolous, whereas the matriarch is tougher and more aggressive.

The tragic mulatto is a stereotype of a person with one white and one black parent.⁴⁸ Robert L. Reece explains in *Genesis of U.S. Colorism and Skin Tone Stratification: Slavery, Freedom and Mulatto-Black Occupational Inequality in the Late 19th Century* how many mulatto children in the United States were born during the period of slavery, when slaves had sexual intercourse with their owners.⁴⁹ Reece explains that there is a fondness for mixed mulatto slaves, because they were seen as partially white, which let the white slave owners believe they were more suited to fit into the normal society.⁵⁰ Officially, mulatto's and blacks were defined by their heritage. If a child has two 'pure' black parents, it was black. If one parent was white, or not 'pure' black, the child was classified as a mulatto. Both Reece on the one hand and Moody-Ramirez and Dates on the other explain that during the time of the Jim Crow laws the "one-drop rule" defined blackness.⁵¹ Mulattos were thus classified as black and segregated from whites. According to Moody-Ramirez and Dates, mulattos who do not culturally identify with the culture of one parent may feel guilt over the rejection of one parent over another.⁵² Thus, the tragic mulatto is a person who has one black and one white parent, who is in constant struggle between two cultures and never fully belongs anywhere.

The stereotype of the hyper-independent black woman is created in the 21st century. She pays her own bills, takes care of herself, does not need a man to live a stable and comfortable life, nor lets a man affect her stability.⁵³ This independence reflects black women's lives today.

⁴⁶ Kretsedemas 151; Moody-Ramirez and Dates 42; McPherson and Frisby 15.

⁴⁷ McPherson and Frisby 14-5

⁴⁸ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 40

⁴⁹ Reece R.L. "Genesis of U.S. Colorism and Skin Tone Stratification: Slavery, Freedom, and Mulatto-Black Occupational Inequality in the Late 19th Century." *Review of Black Political Economy*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2018, pp. 3–21., doi:10.1177/0034644618770761.

⁵⁰ Reece 6

⁵¹ Someone was classified as black when they had one drop of "negro blood" in their body; Reece 7; Moody-Ramirez and Dates 41

⁵² Moody-Ramirez and Dates 41

⁵³ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 43

According to Logan, nearly half of all black families are run by a single black woman.⁵⁴ Black women needed to be strong and independent during times of slavery, when they were working outside and raising families all by themselves. The hyper-independent black woman portrayal is a result of independence by necessity and independence by choice.

The most recent stereotypical frame is the angry black woman. Contrary to the Jezebel, Mammy and the Sapphire, it is not rooted in slavery. Portraits of angry black women on television and in media are often set in the professional work world. They serve to undermine, or at least question, the strides black women have made professionally. The origin of the anger can have various causes. One of them is that the black woman is devalued by white beauty standards which she cannot meet, and therefore has a harder time finding an available black man.⁵⁵ This stereotype is applicable to any African-American woman who seems upset or aggressive, which makes it easy to categorize them. The stereotype serves white people because the angry black woman is irrational and not in for reason. The focus on anger creates an idea that rational thinking and having a civil conversation are not possible.

Stereotypes and Michelle Obama in traditional media

When Barack Obama ran for the presidency, both he and Michelle Obama were placed under a microscope. According to Moody-Ramirez and Dates, Michelle Obama was most frequently framed as the angry black woman.⁵⁶ Examples that are given are of Cal Thomas, who stated on Fox News that black women are always angry about something, Michelle Malkin called Mrs. Obama “Obama’s bitter half”, National Review who captioned a cover of Michelle Obama “Mrs. Grievance”, and called her “America’s Unhappiest Millionaire”.⁵⁷

In Obama’s book *Becoming*, she describes the first time she was portrayed as an angry black woman by the media.⁵⁸ This was in February 2008, when a short ten-second clip from a forty-minute talk circled the internet and was picked up by radio and TV outlets. In this clip, Michelle Obama said: “For the first time in my adult lifetime, I’m really proud of my country”, which caused the first uproar of anger towards Mrs. Obama for not being proud of America, or even hating it.⁵⁹ Melissa Harris-Perry notes in her book *Sister Citizen : Shame, Stereotypes, and*

⁵⁴ Logan, Sadye L. “Strengthening Family Ties: Working with Black Female Single-Parent Families” *The Black Family: Strengths, Self-help, And Positive Change*, 2nd ed, 2001.

⁵⁵ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 43

⁵⁶ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 45

⁵⁷ Fox News. “Fox News: Michelle Obama: Angry Black women” *YouTube*, uploaded by crooksandliars, 20 June 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fdru4BphJ4E>.; Moody-Ramirez and Dates 45; Kachun 43

⁵⁸ Obama, Michelle. *Becoming*. 1st ed., Crown, 2018.

⁵⁹ Obama 260

Black Women in America that after this pride comment and her Princeton Ph.D. dissertation was picked up by the media, the of angry black woman stereotype became more evident.⁶⁰ The discussion fueled the stereotype. In her book *Becoming*, Mrs. Obama writes: “It’s remarkable how a stereotype functions as an actual trap”, when the stereotype is applied, anything that one does can be placed within that frame, reinforcing the stereotype.⁶¹ Michelle Obama was more aware of the media image that was carefully crafted of her and countered this by openly showing more affection and love towards Barack Obama in public to soften the image created by media.⁶²

The new image depicted by the media as a loving and affectionate wife places Mrs. Obama more towards the stereotype of the matriarch; a woman who focuses on the children, the household, and her husband. Since they lived in the White House, Michelle Obama did not have to worry about doing the household, but she did raise two daughters during her time as First Lady. Barack and Michelle Obama both have an Ivy League education, and Mrs. Obama sometimes was responsible for the higher salary to support the family. This, in addition to the already existing idea that she is an angry black woman who is now more prominently depicted as a wife and mother creates the perfect fit for the matriarch stereotype.

The role of mammy is never applied to Michelle Obama, largely because she made a decision to focus on her own children instead of taking on a more active role in policy.⁶³ By choosing to spend her time on her own family instead of on (national) policies, she rejects the role of the mammy, who cared for other families than her own. The choice she made, is one that has been denied to black woman for years. By denying the mammy role, Mrs. Obama reclaims her own narrative.

The stereotype of the hypersexual Jezebel is a bit odd to place onto a woman with two kids and a husband who is President of the United States. However, Michelle Obama was sexualized for her choice of wearing sleeveless dresses, and for having a round butt.⁶⁴ Her arms were making headlines, and her butt was the topic of an article. Later in her role as First Lady, Michelle Obama used her arms to exemplify strength and even did a push-up challenge on the

⁶⁰ Harris-Perry, Melissa V. *Sister Citizen : Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. Yale University Press, 2011. *EBSCO eBook Subscription Academic Collection – Worldwide*, <http://search.ebscohost.com.ru.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=389343&site=ehost-live>. Accessed 2020; Michelle Obama’s Ph.D. dissertation was written when she was 21. It was a survey that looked at how African American alumni felt about race and identity after being at Princeton (Obama 263).

⁶¹ Obama 265

⁶² Harris-Perry 288

⁶³ Harris-Perry 284

⁶⁴ Harris-Perry 278; Obama 332; Kachun 41, 47

Ellen DeGeneres show.⁶⁵ The push-up challenge was part of raising awareness for the “Let’s Move!” campaign, but it also shows that showing arms and being strong is not necessarily sexual.

Michelle Obama has never been framed as the tragic mulatto because both her parents are black, and her family history traces back to slavery. However, Barack Obama has a black Kenyan father and a white American mother. Thus, that makes him a ‘mulatto’. In July 2008, *The New Yorker* featured a caricature of Barack and Michelle Obama fist bumping in the Oval Office with an American flag burning in the fireplace. Michelle Obama wears cargo pants, combat boots and an AK47 strapped over her shoulder, and Barack wears traditional North African apparel.⁶⁶ In this image, Barack Obama is placed in the tragic mulatto stereotype because he appears to be in conflict with his two heritages, whereas Michelle Obama is merely depicted as angry and even dangerous.

How the media portrays Michelle Obama

The traditional media crafted an image of Michelle Obama in which many stereotypes can be traced. Especially in the early years of Barack Obama’s campaign, and their first presidential years, Michelle Obama was subject to negative media outputs. According to Ray Block Jr. and Mitch Kachun, the media coverage of Michelle Obama differs from media coverage of any other First Lady because of her race.⁶⁷ Michelle Obama was scrutinized more extensively and more critically by the media than previous First Ladies. To counter the claims of her physicality and stereotypical views made by traditional media, Michelle Obama reclaimed her narrative by appearing on various television shows.⁶⁸ Here, she could counter the stereotypes and show who she was and what she stands for. The outcome of the research Ray Block Jr. conducted together with Christina Haynes shows that the polling numbers were influenced by the frequency and type of television appearance. This also confirms the assumption that media can have an influence on the audience. That simultaneously indicates that negative stereotypes and positive role models also can have an influence on the audience.

⁶⁵ Obama 372

⁶⁶ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 46; Harris-Perry 276

⁶⁷ Block, Ray Jr. “Race, Gender, and Media Coverage of Michelle Obama.” *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, vol. 5, No. 1, 2017, pp. 161-165; Kachun, Mitch. “Michelle Obama, the Media Circus, and America’s Racial Obsession.” *Obama, Clinton, Palin: Making History in Election 2008*, edited by LIETTE GIDLOW, by Kathryn Kish Sklar et al., University of Illinois Press, Urbana; Chicago; Springfield, 2011, pp. 39–50. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt2tt9t8.7. Accessed 26 June 2020.

⁶⁸ Block 162

Michelle Obama was placed in the position of a national public figure as the first black First Lady of the United States and became a role model, despite the negative portrayals in the media. A role model's value is to inspire and motivate.⁶⁹ Gauntlett divides role models into six different types: the 'straightforward success' role model, the 'triumph over difficult circumstances' role model, the 'challenging stereotypes' role model, the 'wholesome' role model, the 'outsider' role model, and the family role model.⁷⁰ Michelle Obama is categorized best under the challenging stereotypes role model, because she is a well-educated black woman in the public eye, who counters traditional and prejudiced ideas about the limitations of African American women. Although one could argue that Michelle Obama also classifies under the 'triumph over difficult circumstances' role model, because she was raised in the South of Chicago and worked her way up, the 'wholesome' role model, and/or the family role model.

Michelle Obama is also labelled a fashion role model. The resemblance between Jackie Kennedy and Michelle Obama was made by the media in 2007 and 2008.⁷¹ The A-line dresses, pearls, and hairstyle completed the image of a black Jackie O. named Michelle O. Guerrero claims that Jackie Kennedy was the first televisual First Lady, and Michelle Obama was the first new media First Lady.⁷²

Another positive media frame of Michelle Obama emerged after an interview with Robin Roberts for ABC News.⁷³ Mrs. Obama was called a successful businesswoman, a hands-on mother to their two daughters and a supportive wife. She refutes the idea that being a strong, outspoken woman is a bad thing and enhances it. After the interview, Michelle Obama was called a warm, strong woman who is free to speak her mind.⁷⁴ This countered the negative frame of Mrs. Obama as an angry black woman and placed her in a more positive frame. Moody-Ramirez and Dates provide more examples of positive framing of Michelle Obama during her time as First Lady.

Negative frames of Michelle Obama mainly focus on the angry black woman stereotype. They can be based on something she said in a speech or interview, it can be a facial expression, the way she treats her children or how she communicates with Barack Obama. The statement that caused the most negative reactions and blew up is the phrase "for the first time in my adult life, I am really proud of my country".⁷⁵ Michelle Obama was either depicted as unpatriotic,

⁶⁹ Gauntlett 226

⁷⁰ Gauntlett 226-7

⁷¹ Kachun 41; Lauret 99; Guerrero 76;

⁷² Guerrero 77

⁷³ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 47

⁷⁴ Moody-Ramirez and Dates 47

⁷⁵ Harris-Perry 275; Lauret 114; Guerrero 72; Moody-Ramirez and Dates 46; Knuckey 365; Moody-Ramirez 6

racist, or an angry black woman. This phrase was part of a longer speech and is taken out of its context.

How Michelle Obama uses the Media

The quote “for the first time in my adult life, I’m really proud of my country” is analyzed by Maria Lauret in the paper *How to read Michelle Obama*. She does not look at television appearances or clothes, but rather analyzes what Michelle Obama says in speeches and interviews.⁷⁶ Lauret takes four quotes from Michelle Obama and analyzes these in the context of the historiography of the civil rights movement and four literary works, three of them written by African American authors.⁷⁷ Lauret analyzes the self-representation of Michelle Obama and argues that she represents more than just herself in the discussed quotes. She represents all black women and families in some situations, largely because her ancestry dates back to her great-great-grandfather Jim Robinson, who had been born a slave in South Carolina.⁷⁸ The topics of the quotes are on family, education, and blackness in the United States, which are also topics that come back on Michelle Obama’s Facebook page.

Michelle Obama uses Facebook to counter stereotypes. On the one hand, she crafts a public self that serves political ends. On the other, the issues and developments grappled with on her Facebook provide compelling insights into society. Issues that she posts about frequently are education, girls and women, and voting. All posts on Facebook represent Michelle Obama in text and in imagery. This provides a new and personally crafted portrayal of the self, in contrast to the already existing portrayal of the media.

Michelle Obama not only represents herself, but she represents all black women. After her Princeton Ph.D. dissertation was picked up by the media and she was depicted as a racist and an angry black woman, she softened her spousal image. She deliberately changed her behavior to create a less angry and more loving frame. Since the media was already targeting Michelle Obama, she used the momentum to create a softer image. The softer image humanized her, showing that she was also a woman who loved her husband and her family.

⁷⁶ Lauret, Maria. “How to Read Michelle Obama.” *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 45, no. 1-2, 2011, pp. 95–117., doi:10.1080/0031322X.2011.563149.

⁷⁷ 1. “So the world has this perspective that ... we’re unique. And we’re not. You just haven’t seen us before.” 2. “The most important message we can send out is to show that we are a solid family with love and respect for one another. So many times you don’t see that in the African American community.” 3. “... I am not supposed to be here ...” 4. “For the first time in my adult life, I am really proud of my country.” Lauret 97

⁷⁸ Lauret 109

Michelle Obama also uses Facebook to represent herself and use her voice. After a 5-year social media break, she starts updating her Facebook Page again on March 8, 2018.⁷⁹ March 8th is International Women’s Day, a day when the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women are celebrated around the globe. One can argue that the timing of returning to Facebook on International Women’s Day brings more emphasis on women.

The first things she updated were her cover photo and her profile picture. Her cover photo was updated to a picture of her sitting next to Prince Harry in a classroom or library room, surrounded by seated black students. This picture shows her connection to the British Royals and the importance they place on education. Her profile picture was updated that day to a black and white photo of herself, which shows resemblances to Auguste Rodin’s *The Thinker* (see figure 2).⁸⁰ *The Thinker* is often used to represent philosophy, intellect, and poetry.



Figure 2

From March 8, 2018 until July 1, 2020, Michelle Obama added 181 posts to her Facebook page.⁸¹ Appendix 1 provides an overview of the Facebook posts within the mentioned time span, including date, topic and if the post had a video or picture accompanying the text. The first post of Michelle Obama after the updated profile picture and cover photo is:

“Hi, everyone—it’s been a while! I’m firing up this Facebook page again because I’d like to have more conversations about how we can work together to change our world, and International Women’s Day seemed like a great time to start. To mark the day, I teamed up with Refinery29 to exchange stories with young women from Nepal, Ghana, Guatemala, and my hometown of Chicago. We shared stories about why it is so important for girls around the world to reach their full potential through education and why there is such power in persistence.”

⁷⁹ Michelle Obama also stopped posting on Twitter from March 4, 2013 until January 20, 2017.

⁸⁰ Obama, Michelle. “Facebook Profile Picture”, *Facebook*. March 8, 2020, *jpg* file, web, <https://www.facebook.com/michelleobama/photos/a.10150302971455578/10160148454140578/> Accessed 1 July 2020.; Rodin, Auguste. *Le Penseur (The Thinker)*. 1880, Musée de Rodin, Paris.

⁸¹ Appendix 1; “Michelle Obama.” *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/michelleobama.

I hope you'll take a look and join me at the Obama Foundation as we continue this vitally important work.”⁸²

In this post she introduces the reason to fire up her Facebook page again, namely working together to change our world. The word ‘our’ suggests cooperation and implies a mutual responsibility for taking care of the world. She focuses on the education of girls all over the world, so that they can have a better future. While Michelle Obama was First Lady, she set up four initiatives, the fourth was ‘Let Girls Learn’, a government-wide effort that focusses on helping girls get better access to education all over the world.⁸³ She keeps asking for attention to help girls get better education.

Education is a topic which is near to Michelle Obama’s heart. Her own education and perseverance are what made her the successful woman she is to this day. Education is something worth working for that will help one move forward in the rest of one’s life.⁸⁴ Post on her Facebook page about education are about College Signing Day, an initiative that she and Barack Obama set up as a part of the Reach Higher initiative, her talking with students, or attending schools to give a speech.

The first post about College Signing Day is accompanied by multiple pictures and a personal note from Michelle Obama. She writes how she and her brother were first generation college graduates, that her parents did not have an education but wanted their children to pursue higher education that would lead to better opportunities. This personal insight into her childhood and family shows that there is hope for children who are in that same position. Ambition, determination, and hard work can make the change, and the first step is signing in. The message comes from someone who firsthand experienced that pursuing an education can change one’s life.

She encourages young adults to pursue a higher education, without putting emphasis on race or gender. Let Girls Learn was aimed at girls all over the world, but Let’s Reach Higher and College Signing Day are focused on American students who need a little encouragement to stay in school and reach higher. Encouraging young adults to stay in school is typically something a mother would do. This aspect of a mother is not recurring in a stereotype, and shows that Mrs. Obama is caring, supportive, and striving for a better future.

⁸² “Michelle Obama.” *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/michelleobama.

⁸³ Obama 401

⁸⁴ Obama 320

The topic of politics cannot be untouched as former First Lady. Michelle Obama devotes a number of Facebook posts on politics, in particular voting. She emphasizes the importance of voting and encourages people to register to vote. She writes that her father “taught me to never take my right to vote for granted, because he knew that it’s the most powerful tool we have to shape the future of our communities and our country”. In this post, Michelle Obama also looks back on her own upbringing and values. She announces that she will be working together with *When We All Vote*, because voting is important to her and to the future of the country. Throughout her Facebook page, there are many posts on voting, reminders to register to vote, and personal stories on voting.

Being able to vote is a privilege. African Americans had been denied their right to vote in the United States for a long time. In a video she explains the efforts that were made to ensure voting rights for African Americans in 1965. Here, she represents not just herself but all African Americans. She takes on the role of educator to highlight the fact that voting is a right that you should value and not take for granted.

In 2018, Michelle Obama announced that she wrote a memoir named *Becoming*. The posts from 2018 on her Facebook page are mainly about education, voting and promotion for her upcoming book. Her memoir is the ultimate self-representation. It gives an insight in her childhood, family, education, hardships, victory, young professional life, insecurities, love, changing careers, her insecurities and great memories of her time in the White House. The stories of hardships, first love and personal victories resonate with any human being alive. This shows that she is not special or gifted, and that anyone can become what they want.

Most of Michelle Obama’s Facebook posts are about women, girls, or youth. However, on December 12, 2018 she posted that she is proud of young men. As part of her book tour, she visited the Wayne State University in Detroit with her brother. The focus on girls and women seems so natural that the post about men seems a little misplaced. However, the visibility of men includes them in the same narrative as the women. Both genders can relate to her story, and both can become better.

In 2018 the most common topics on Michelle Obama’s Facebook feed were education, girls and *Becoming*. In 2019, there is a slight shift adding topics such as blackness, women, and celebration. College Signing Day and the *Becoming* book tour are still well represented on her Facebook page, but besides the political topics, she shares more moments to celebrate. Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Malala’s birthday, Anne Frank’s birthday, 50 years Sesame Street, national sibling day, Beyoncé’s Homecoming, Black Girl Magic and more

national days and birthdays. These celebratory posts show that Michelle Obama is not always angry, taking care of her family or fighting for a political cause but that she has fun and takes time to celebrate others.

2019 is also the year when Michelle Obama uploads images and videos of herself wearing her natural hairstyle. Her straightened hair, either wavy or more Jackie Kennedy style, changed to her natural hair texture. The natural hairstyle complements and emphasizes her African roots. During her time as First Lady, she was hardly ever pictured wearing her hair in her natural style. So showing off her natural hair texture is a way of representing and embracing her history.

In 2020 most of Mrs. Obama's Facebook posts are about comfort and support because of the Covid-19 pandemic. She still advocates for *When We All Vote* because politics cannot be stopped by a pandemic. A new initiative she took part in is reading to kids, online so it is completely Corona-proof. Every week she reads a children's book to which parents and their children can read along. This new initiative shows her love for children.

While scrolling through her Facebook page, there is one thing that catches the eye: the racial diversity pictured on images and in videos. The overall representation of people of color and minorities is visible. Whether in pictures of schools she visits, pictures and videos of her book tour, or celebratory pictures and videos; minorities and people of color are represented. Michelle Obama uses her platform to show diversity while supporting causes that are near to her heart.

Conclusion

Stereotypes in media often determine the image the audience gets to see of a group or racial minority. Negative stereotypes can be harmful to the targeted group, especially when they are repeated for years by traditional media. New media gives people the chance to represent themselves and to counter the often-portrayed negative images. Adequate representation can counter a negative stereotype.

The first African American First Lady of the United States was subjected to many negative stereotypes in traditional media. She rejected the negative frames created by the media by speaking up and showing a more realistic image of a strong black woman. Her representation of the self on Facebook gives insight in what she fights for, but also what she fights against. She fights against the misconceptions created by negative stereotyping through creating a timeline full of positive messages. She focuses on positive change for girls, women and young Americans.

On the one hand, the stereotypes reflect contemporary misconceptions of black women. On the other, Michelle Obama counters those stereotypes by focusing sharply on contemporary developments and issues of girlhood; education; and black womanhood on her Facebook page. She continues to be a role model for Americans and non-Americans through her personal platform. The Facebook page also provides her with a means of forging her own identity, instead of simply accepting the identity the media has given her from 2007 onwards.

Further research can explore the frame in which Michelle Obama is visualized in traditional media, after she was First Lady. Many scholars have studied how Mrs. Obama was portrayed during the campaign period and the first few years of Barack Obama's presidency, but there is no scholarly information on how she managed to change narrative portrayed by the traditional media. Another interesting approach to studying Michelle Obama is to look at how she introduces messages on a specific topic on different new media platforms. Something that is also open to research is how Michelle Obama's initiatives as First Lady still have an effect on the United States now.

“Aspiration begins in imagination, and that imagination is in turn fed by example”, Michelle Obama was, is and will be an example for many. ⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Lauret 109

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Appendix 1

Michelle Obama – Facebook Post overview March 8, 2018 till July 1, 2020

*X = no. O = yes.

Date	What	Topic	Vid	Pic	
↓ 2018 ↓					
8 March	New profile and background picture	-	X	o	1.
8 March	International Women’s Day, firing up FB again, Refinery29, girls education	Education girls	x	o	2.
16 April	Obama Foundation	Charity	x	x	3.
2 May	College signing day	Education	x	o	4.
6 May	United State of Women	Women/girl empowerment	x	o	5.
7 May	Clip of her conversation with Tracee Ellis Ross for the United State of Women 2018	Women/girl empowerment	o	x	6.
13 May	Mother’s Day	Mother’s Day	x	o	7.
21 May	Obama Foundation – video of talk with high school seniors	Charity – education	o	x	8.
24 May	Announcement ‘Becoming’, and cover reveal	Becoming – publicity	x	o	9.
14 June	Students	Education	x	o	10.
26 June	American Library Association – talk about memoir, Becoming	Becoming	o	x	11.
19 July	When We All Vote – video and text	Voting – Politics	o	x	12.
24 July	Obama Leaders – Obama Foundation. Education of girls	Charity – Education	O	x	13.
6 August	When We All Vote – voting rights	Voting – politics	O	x	14.
22 August	When We All Vote – importance of voting	Voting – politics	O	x	15.
11 Sept	When We All Vote – women of color	Voting – Women of color	O	X	16.
12 Sept	Book Tour announcement	Becoming – book tour	O	X	17.
18 Sept	College	Education	O	X	18.
20 Sept	Becoming book tour dates	Becoming – book tour	X	O	19.
24 Sept	When We All Vote. Register to vote	Voting – politics	X	O	20.
25 Sept	When We All Vote – election this November	Voting – Politics	O	X	21.
29 Sept	When We All Vote – week of action	Voting – Politics	X	O	22.
3 October	When We All Vote	Voting – Politics	O	X	23.
11 Oct	Girls are not in school	Education – Girls	O	X	24.
17 Oct	Global Girls Alliance teaming up with GoFundMe	Education – Girls – Charity	X	X	25.

18 Oct	Becoming	Becoming	X	O	26.
22 Oct	Election Day reminder	Voting – Politics	O	X	27.
26 Oct	Becoming – encouraging students with skype call	Becoming – Education	O	X	28.
26 Oct	Election day reminder	Voting – Politics	O	X	29.
30 Oct	I Am Becoming book tour	Becoming	X	O	30.
1 Nov	Empower adolescent girls in Malawi	Charity – Girls	O	X	31.
5 Nov	Election day reminder	Voting – Politics	O	X	32.
13 Nov	Chicago Defender	Becoming	X	O	33.
13 Nov	Becoming, share own story	Becoming	O	X	34.
14 Nov	Book store, own book	Becoming	X	O	35.
15 Nov	Becoming Chicago	Becoming	O	X	36.
17 Nov	I am Becoming – LA tour	Becoming	O	X	37.
19 Nov	Global Girls Alliance	Charity – Education – Girls	O	X	38.
20 Nov	What a week. I Am Becoming	Becoming	O	X	39.
21 Nov	Thanksgiving Story	Sharing – coming together – be open	X	X	40.
27 Nov	Giving Tuesday – Global Girls Alliance	Girls	O	X	41.
30 Nov	beGirl.world stories	Becoming – Girls	X	O	42.
1 Dec	George H.W. Bush passed away.	Memory	X	O	43.
3 Dec	Becoming NYC	Becoming	O	X	44.
↑	All accessed on March 17 2020 ↑	↑	↑	↑	
			Vid	Pic	
3 Dec	Girls, education	Education – Girls	O	X	45.
6 Dec	I <3 NY	Becoming	O	X	46.
11 Dec	Barack Obama – Health insurance	Politics	O	X	47.
11 Dec	Becoming tour	Becoming	O	X	48.
12 Dec	Becoming Detroit University	Becoming	X	O	49.
14 Dec	Holiday joy, Children’s Hospital Colorado, Denver	Kids	O	X	50.
15 Dec	Public Allies Chicago	Education, work	X	O	51.
18 Dec	Denver, becoming	Becoming	O	X	52.
19 Dec	Young ladies, Dallas	Becoming, Girls	X	O	53.
20 Dec	Becoming, wrap American tour	Becoming	O	X	54.
21 Dec	Becoming recap, women	Becoming, Women	X	O	55.
31 Dec	Reflection past year	Becoming, Education, Politics	X	O	56.
↓ 2019 ↓			Vid	Pic	
1 Feb	School Counselor of the Year	Education		O	57.
4 Feb	School Counselor	Education	O		58.
5 Feb	Book club	Becoming	O		59.
11 Feb	Friendship, Girls	Girls		O	60.

12 Feb	Gila River Indian Community, students	Education		O	61.
14 Feb	Valentine's Day family pic	Valentine's Day		O	62.
21 Feb	Becoming, letter to readers	Becoming			63.
25 Feb	Students, your story matters	Education	O		64.
1 March	Women's History Month	Girls, Women		O	65.
3 March	Book and Brunch book club	Becoming		O	66.
5 March	Students, college, college sign in day	Education	O		67.
7 March	Becoming book tour dates	Becoming		O	68.
8 March	International Women's Day	Women/girl empowerment		O	69.
14 March	Book club	Becoming		O	70.
19 March	BookTubers	Becoming	O		71.
21 March	Bookstore stop	Becoming		O	72.
25 March	Balanced Black Girl	Blackness, Women		O	73.
10 April	National Sibling Day. Brother	National Sibling Day		O	74.
16 April	Notre Dame Cathedral	(international) crisis		O	75.
18 April	Homecoming Beyoncé	Women, Blackness, Celebration	O		76.
26 April	Seniors, graduating	Education		O	77.
1 May	College sign in day	Education	O		78.
2 May	College sign in day	Education		O	79.
9 May	Women, preparation for Mother's Day	Women		O	80.
10 May	Almost Mother's Day	Women		O	81.
12 May	Becoming tour, girls	Becoming, Girls		O	82.
12 May	Mother's Day	Celebration, Mother's Day, Women		O	83.
14 May	Becoming Nashville	Becoming		O	84.
20 May	Becoming tour end	Becoming	O		85.
30 May	Celebration 50 years Sesame Street	Celebration		O	86.
12 June	Anne Frank's 90 th birthday	Celebration, Women		O	87.
16 June	Father. Father's Day	Celebration, Father's Day		O	88.
16 June	Father's Day	Celebration, Father's Day		O	89.
7 July	Black Girl Magic. Becoming <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Celebration, Becoming, Women, Blackness		O	90.
7 July	Women, make yourself a priority <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Women	O		91.
11 July	Women's World Cup, sports. Obama foundation	Charity, Girls, sport	O		92.
12 July	Malala's birthday	Celebration, Girls		O	93.
24 July	Beating the odd <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Education		O	94.
29 July	Birthday mother	Celebration, Women		O	95.
1 Aug	Potential of young people <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Women, sport		O	96.
6 Aug	Toni Morrison passed away	Memory		O	97.

12 Aug	International Youth Day	Education, Girls		O	98.
21 Aug	American Factory documentary	Recommendation	O		99.
26 Aug	National Dog Day	Celebration		O	100.
5 Sept	After Labor Day. School. World Charity Day	Education, girls, charity		O	101.
8 Sept	Grandparents. Grandparents Day	Celebration		O	102.
24 Sept	David Ledbetter, register to vote. National voter registration day	Voting		O	103.
25 Sept	Obama Foundation, Meghan Markle	Charity, education, girls		O	104.
7 Oct	International Day of the Girl	Charity, girls	O		105.
11 Oct	Day of the Girl	Girls		O	106.
11 Oct	International Day of the Girl, Obama foundation	Celebration, girls, charity	O		107.
29 Oct	Obama Summit, memories <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Obama Summit		O	108.
29 Oct	Obama Summit, Yara Shahidi & Barack <i>*note: live video</i>	Young leaders	O		109.
30 Oct	Obama Summit yesterday <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Education, girls		O	110.
7 nov	Temporary profile picture with natural hair. Comic style	Profile picture		O	111.
7 Nov	Voting squad	Voting, politics	O		112.
↑	All accessed on March 18 2020 ↑	↑	↑	↑	
7 Nov	Voting squad poster	Voting, Politics		O	113.
11 Nov	Veterans Day, inspiration	Celebration		O	114.
18 Nov	Friend Lin-Manuel Miranda (Hamilton) "Portrait of a Nation Prize" at National Portrait Gallery.	Celebration, Art		O	115.
19 Nov	Bookstore, Becoming	Becoming		O	116.
19 Nov	Becoming Journal. Create your own story <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Becoming	O		117.
20 Nov	Oprah Winfrey. Oprahs 2020 Vision Tour	Support		O	118.
21 Nov	Dropped by at Ellen DeGeneres' house. Song becoming on piano	Becoming	O		119.
27 Nov	Family, Thanksginving	Celebration		O	120.
3 Dec	Giving Tuesday. Donation to Girls Opportunity Alliance <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Celebration, Charity, Girls		O	121.
9 Dec	Vietnam visit. Girls Opportunity Alliance. <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Charity, Girls	O		122.
10 Dec	Caroll Spinney, Big Bird, passed away	Memory		O	123.

11 Dec	Elementary School visit, thanks to Ellen DeGeneres . <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Education	O		124.
12 Dec	Conversation trip to Vietnam with Julia Roberts and Deborah Henry. Girls Opportunity Alliance, Obama Leaders. <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Charity, Girls	O		125.
14 Dec	Obama Leaders, Lana Condor conversation about transformative power of girls' education. <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Charity, Girls, Education		O	126.
20 Dec	Trip to Vietnam and Malaysia. Girls Opportunity Alliance. <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Charity, Girls	O		127.
31 Dec	Year recap. Decade recap	Celebration, Thankful		O	128.
↓ 2020 ↓			Vid	Pic	
17 Jan	Birthday wishes. <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Celebration		O	129.
19 Jan	New Year's Resulution, workout playlist.	Support, Personal		O	130.
9 Feb	Oprah's 2020 Vision tour. Make wellness a priority. <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Support, self-care		O	131.
18 Feb	Throwback to 1982 prom. When We All Vote.	Personal, Voting, Politics		O	132.
20 Feb	Love Your Pet Day	Celebration, personal		O	133.
24 Feb	New cover photo, Girls Opportunity Alliance. <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Cover photo		O	134.
27 Feb	Black History Month closing, When We All Vote. <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Blackness, Voting, Politics	O		135.
8 March	International Women's Day. Girls Opportunity Alliance. <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Celebration, Girls	O		136.
17 March	Scary and difficult time. Girls Opportunity Alliance	Girls, Education	O		137.
↑	All accessed on March 18 2020 ↑	↑	↑	↑	
22 March	Scary and difficult weeks. Social distancing.	Comfort		O	138.
25 March	Crip Camp, something uplifting in these scary times. Humanity of those with disabilities	Teenagers, comfort	O		139.
↑	All accessed on March 26 2020 ↑	↑	↑ vid	↑ pic	

26 March	“Music has the power to unite us and lift our spirits”. Songs of Comfort, Coronavirus	Comfort, Music	O		140.
31 March	National Doctors Day, Coronavirus, music, continue to inspire	Celebration, inspire, support	O		141.
2 April	Grateful for first responders, send a “thank you” card, letter, e.g.	Support		O	142.
9 April	The America we need. Difficult times, article to think and reflect	Politics			143.
12 April	Easter, Coronavirus	Celebration		O	144.
13 April	When We All Vote, voting by mail, Coronavirus	Voting		O	145.
17 April	Reading for kids, online <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Kids		O	146.
19 April	Thank You to essential workers, coronavirus, Global Citizen with Laura Bush	Celebration, support	O		147.
20 April	When We All Vote, couch party	Voting		O	148.
20 April	Reading for kids, books, online <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Kids	O		149.
23 April	Social distancing, coronavirus, well-being calls	Support		O	150.
27 April	Reading to kids, online <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Kids	O		151.
27 April	Becoming on Netflix	Becoming		O	152.
1 May	College Signing Day, reach higher	Education		O	153.
4 May	Sneak peak of Becoming on Netflix	Becoming	O		154.
4 May	Reading to kids, online <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Kids	O		155.
5 May	Becoming, story of Shayla	Becoming	O		156.
5 May	Class of 2020, graduation, Reach Higher	Education		O	157.
6 May	Becoming on Netflix, story of Elizabeth	Becoming	O		158.
7 May	Teacher Appreciation Week	Celebration		O	159.
8 May	Mother’s Day weekend	Celebration	O		160.
10 May	Mother’s Day	Celebration		O	161.
11 May	Reading to kids, online <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Kids	O		162.
14 May	Family read-a-long with Barack. Live video	Kids	O		163.
15 May	Students, register to vote, MTV <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Education, voting	O		164.
15 May	Becoming, share your story	Becoming	O		165.

18 May	Reading to kids, read-along, online <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Kids	O		166.
20 May	Reach Higher, Class of 2020	Education		O	167.
23 May	Class of 2020, MTV, <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Education	O		168.
25 May	Reading for kids, read-along, online <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Kids	O		169.
27 May	Last year, Sesame Street, learning from home	Education, kids		O	170.
30 May	George Floyd, Breonna. Race and racism	Race, racism		O	171.
7 June	Class of 2020, register to vote, reach higher <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Education, voting,	O		172.
9 June	Make your voices heard. Go vote in primary election	Voting		O	173.
13 June	First step in making a change is voting. When we all vote, register	Voting		O	174.
16 June	When we all vote, co-host picnic	Voting		O	175.
19 June	Juneteenth, slavery, celebration,	Slavery, Celebration, education	O		176.
20 June	Father's Day weekend, girls opportunity alliance	Celebration, girls	O		177.
21 June	Father's Day	Celebration		O	178.
23 June	Election day in states, vote	Voting		O	179.
27 June	Same-sex marriage five years ago,	Celebration		O	180.
28 June	Roots Picnic, when we all vote <i>*note: natural hair</i>	Voting	O		181.
↑	All accessed on July 1, 2020 ↑	↑	↑ vid	↑ pic	