FIRST LADY - SECOND TERM

Michelle Obama

SPECIAL EDITION CELEBRATING
LEADING WOMEN OF COLOUR IN POLITICS
Welcome to our special edition of Today Magazine profiling political women of colour who are making their mark in the world and are passionate about their opportunity to serve. Many of the women have been first at what they do including MPs in the UK, such as Dianne Abbott MP. Each leader uses her role to inspire others to make a positive difference in our world.

Our cover features the talented American First Lady Michelle Obama. She campaigned alongside her husband to present their family to the electorate. As a highly successful attorney and campaigner she is as qualified to be President and has found many ways to serve her country. She is passionate about health and fitness, equipping people to eat better, exercise more and access better health advice.

We have included two other international political women, namely the iconic Winnie Mandela of South Africa who played a crucial role in the transformation of her country and Jamaica’s Prime Minister Portia Simpson who was again elected in 2012. I will end with an extract from First Lady Michelle Obama’s speech to the Democratic National Convention in September 2012: “Barack and I were both raised by families who didn’t have much in the way of money or material possessions but who had given us something far more valuable – their unconditional love, their unflinching sacrifice, and the chance to go places they had never imagined for themselves.” We hope you enjoy and take inspiration from this issue – please do let us know!
Diane Julie Abbott (born 27 September 1953) is a British Labour Party politician who has been the Member of Parliament (MP) for Hackney North and Stoke Newington since 1987, when she became the first black woman to be elected to the House of Commons. In 2010, Abbott became Shadow Public Health Minister after unsuccessfully standing for election as leader of the Labour Party.

Abbott was born to Jamaican parents in London in 1953. Her father was a welder and her mother a nurse. She attended Harrow County Grammar School for Girls, and then Newnham College, Cambridge, where she read history. At Cambridge, she was tutored by historian Simon Schama. After university she became an administration trainee at the Home Office (1976 to 1978), and then a Race Relations Officer at the National Council for Civil Liberties (1978 to 1980).

Abbott was a researcher and reporter at Thames Television from 1980 to 1983 and then a researcher and reporter at the breakfast television company TV-am from 1983 to 1985. Abbott was a press officer at the Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone from 1985 to 1986 and Head of Press and Public Relations at Lambeth Council from 1986 to 1987.

Abbott’s career in politics began in 1982 when she was elected to Westminster City Council serving until 1986. In 1987 she was elected to the House of Commons, replacing the deselected serving Labour MP Ernest Roberts as MP for Hackney North & Stoke Newington. Along with Keith Vaz, Bernie Grant and Paul Boateng she became part of the first black and Asian intake in Parliament for almost 100 years.

Abbott has a record of disagreeing with some party policies, voting against the Iraq war, opposing ID cards and campaigning against the renewal of Britain’s Trident nuclear weapons. She has been seen as a “maverick, a free-thinker, willing to rebel against the party machine.”

Abbott’s speech on civil liberties, in the debate on the Counter-Terrorism Bill 2008 won The Spectator magazine’s “Parliamentary Speech of the Year” award and further recognition at the 2008 Human Rights awards. Abbott has served on a number of parliamentary committees on social and international issues. For most of the 1990s she also served on the Treasury Select Committee of the House of Commons. She went on to serve on the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. Abbott chairs the All-Party Parliamentary British-Caribbean Group and the All-Party Sickle Cell and Thalassemia Group. Abbott is founder of the London Schools and the Black Child initiative, which aims to raise educational achievement levels amongst black children.

In May 2010, she was re-elected in her constituency of Hackney North and Stoke Newington, with a doubled majority on an increased turn-out. She was given a score of 79% by Stonewall based on how she voted on all gay equality legislation before Parliament between 2005 and 2010. On 5 February 2013 MP Diane Abbott voted in favour in the House of Commons Second Reading vote on marriage equality in Britain.
Oona King

Second Black Woman MP in the UK (1997)

Born Oona Tamsyn King on October 22, 1967, in Great Britain; daughter of Hazel King, a teacher, and Preston King, a professor; married Tiberio Santomarco, 1994.

Education: York University, BA with honours in politics, 1990; studied at University of California-Berkeley.

Memberships: Oxfam; Campaign for Pension Fund Democracy; Amnesty International; Jewish Council for Racial Equality (J-CORE); One World.

Career: Political assistant to Glynn Ford, Minister of European Parliament, 1991-93; member, John Smith’s campaign team for leadership of Labour Party, 1992; political assistant to Glynnis Kosmod, MP, 1993; member, trade union organizer and equality officer, GMB Southern Region, 1995-97; elected Member of Parliament (Labour Party), Bethnal Green and Bow, 1997.

In 1997, at the age of 29, Oona King became the Member of Parliament (MP) for the east London district of Bethnal Green and Bow. A member of the Labour Party, King was only the second black woman to be elected to the House of Commons in centuries of parliamentary history. “Oona King is Jewish, black—and the epitome of a new class of determined young women bringing a chic euphoria to the Commons,” Valerie Grove wrote in the London Times. As a Labour MP, King was branded one of the “Blair Babes,” the media’s nickname for the young women MPs who came to power along with Prime Minister Tony Blair. She has also had to deal with reporters that express more interest in her fashion choices than in her viewpoints.

“People still tell her she’s the image of singing star Sade, which makes her groan in frustration,” Helen Weathers wrote in the London Mirror. Nevertheless, King has managed to make a name for herself as a fearless and dedicated fighter for minorities, women, and the poor. As Nick Servini wrote in the Mirror three years after her election, “the 32-year-old Blair Babe” has built her reputation with her straight talking, championing the cause of the worst-hit in society.” Her mother, Hazel (Stem) King, came from a poor Jewish family in the north of England, while her father, Preston King, was from an affluent African-American family. The two had met while studying at the London School of Economics. At the time, Preston King, a civil rights activist, was living in exile, unable to return to the United States because of a trumped-up charge of draft dodging. He would not be able to return to his native country until 2000, when his daughter’s efforts on his behalf earned him a presidential pardon. After her parents divorced, Oona and her younger brother Slater were brought up by their mother, a teacher, in London. “My mother is my heroine in every way,” King later recalled in an interview with Valerie Grove of the Times. “She sacrificed so much for myself and my brother, and for the children she taught.”

Growing up, King experienced prejudice from both sides—whites called her names because she was black, blacks because she was Jewish. “But it’s nothing compared to what my parents suffered,” King told Helen Weathers of the Mirror. As a child, her mother had stones thrown at her as she walked to school, simply because she was Jewish; and her father had experienced the institutionalized racism of the American South. The House of Commons, held up as a beacon of democracy, has a ‘dirty little secret’, according to black MPs: its racism. Dawn Butler, only the third black woman ever to have become an MP, said she faced such frequent racism from politicians of all parties that she had to ‘pick her battles’ to avoid being constantly in conflict with her colleagues. Disillusioned by what she has found, she is calling for a dedicated complaints department with the power to suspend politicians and send them on awareness training courses. Butler’s first attempt at entering Parliament was in Hackney South where she featured on a Labour All Women Shortlist but was unsuccessful Butler put herself forward for selection for West-Ham but was not selected. Following the retirement of Paul Boateng to become British High Commissioner to South Africa she was selected as the Labour candidate in Brent South and won the subsequent election with a majority of 11,326. She is the third black woman to become a British MP, the others being Diane Abbott and Oona King.

Butler made her maiden speech on 24 May 2005 in which she described her constituency as a “shining example of integration at its best”, highlighted the importance of the Warwick Agreement with the Trade Unions, paid tribute to other sitting and former black MPs and said she would be a voice for youth.

Interest in youth services has continued as one of her main interests in Parliament. On 24 October 2006 she was appointed Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs, and she is an Honorary Vice President of the British Youth Council. After Gordon Brown became Prime Minister, on 27 June 2007, Butler was made one of the Labour Party’s six Vice Chairs, with particular responsibility for Youth issues. She was appointed to the Select Committee third black woman in the House of Commons shortly after her election, and has also served on standing committees (notably on the Violent Crime Reduction Bill 2006). In November 2007 she was appointed to the Children & Families Select Committee. Earlier (in November 2006), she had been promoted to Parliamentary Private Secretary to the health minister Jane Kennedy, but decided to stand down from this post in early 2008. On 6 November 2007, Butler was chosen to second the Queen’s Speech. Her voting record shows she has largely been loyal to the government. She was promoted to Assistant Whip on 12 September 2008.

Butler was named female MP of the year at the 2009 Women in Public Life awards, beating fellow Labour MPs Margaret Moran and Sharon Hodgson. Following her appointment as Minister for Young Citizens and Youth Engagement, Butler became the first black woman to speak from the Despatch Box in the House of Commons during question time on 9 December 2009.
Rushanara Ali
First MP of Bangladeshi origin and one of the first three Muslim Women MPs in the UK (2010)

Rushanara Ali is the Labour Member of Parliament for Bethnal Green and Bow. She was elected in May 2010 with a majority of 11,574, having defeated George Galloway’s Respect Party. In October 2010, Rushanara was appointed to the Labour front bench as Shadow Minister for International Development. As part of this role she is the Labour spokesperson on International Development matters for Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, climate change, conflict and stabilisation as well as gender equality. Prior to her election in May 2010, she was a Research Assistant to Lord Young of Dartington (author of the 1945 Labour the Research Assistant to Lord Young of Dartington (author of the 1945 Labour). She has also worked as the Tate Britain Council.

Helen Grant
First Black Woman Conservative MP in the UK (2010)

British Helen Grant was elected as Conservative MP for Maidstone & the Weald on May 6th 2010 with a majority of 5,889.

Born in London, Helen was brought up on the Raffles council estate in Carlisle for much of her early childhood. She represented the County in Hockey, Tennis, Athletics, and Cross-Country. She later became under-16 Judo Champion in North of England and Southern Scotland. Helen moved on to obtain a law degree at the University of Hull, undertook solicitors’ finals at the College of Law in Guildford and qualified as a solicitor in 1988.

In 1996 Helen set up Grants Solicitors, a specialist firm focused on dealing with the problems of family breakdown. The practice is now managed by Helen’s husband Simon. “My alarm usually goes off at about 6.30am. Although, sometimes I’ll get up as early as 4.45am to head into a TV news studio where I’ll be on the sofa on current affairs shows, such as Daybreak and Sky News.

In 2007, The Labour Party chose Ali as a prospective Parliamentary candidate for Bethnal Green and Bow. On the 6th May 2010, Ali became the first person of Bangladeshi origin to be elected to the House of Commons with 11,574 votes. Ali is one of the United Kingdom’s first female Muslim Members of Parliament.
Shabana Mahmood MP was elected to Parliament in May 2010, and was one of the first female Muslim MPs in the country. Soon after her election, she was elected to the Work and Pensions Select Committee, where she took a particular interest in unemployment issues and the government’s Work Programme. In October 2010 Shabana was appointed Shadow Home Office Minister, with responsibility for immigration and counter-terrorism.

Shabana was born in Birmingham and attended local schools before winning a place at Oxford University to study Law. Whilst studying at Oxford she was involved in a number of programmes designed to increase applications to the university from students from non-traditional backgrounds, including ethnic minority students.

Shabana completed her Bar Vocational Course at the Inns of Court School of Law and before her election was a practising Barrister specialising in professional indemnity litigation at a leading national law firm. Shabana is an experienced litigator and has acted on a number of high value and complex cases, primarily representing defendants and their insurers. In addition to her legal career, Shabana volunteered as a supplementary school teacher where alongside her teaching responsibilities, she continued to mentor, advise and assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with university and job applications.

Lisa Nandy (born 9 August 1979) is a British Labour Party politician. She has been the Member of Parliament (MP) for the Wigan constituency, in Greater Manchester, since the 2010 general election and is one of six Asian female MPs in the country.

Nandy was born in Manchester, Greater Manchester to Lady Luise Nandy (née Byers) and her then husband Dipak. Nandy grew up both in Manchester and in Bury, Greater Manchester, where her family later moved to. She graduated from Newcastle University, Tyne and Wear, in 2003 with a degree in politics and obtained a master’s degree in public policy from the University of London. She has worked in the voluntary sector, as a researcher at the homelessness charity Centrepoint from 2003 to 2005, and then as senior policy adviser at The Children’s Society from 2005, where she specialised in issues facing young refugees. She also acts as an adviser to the Children’s Commissioner for England and to the Independent Asylum Commissioner.

Lisa served as a Labour councillor in the Shepherds Bush Green ward, Hammersmith and Fulham, from 4 May 2006 to 10 May 2010. She was selected as the Labour parliamentary candidate for Wigan in February 2010 from an all-women shortlist. Elected to Parliament on 7 May 2010, she became the constituency’s first female MP and one of the first six Asian female MPs elected to Parliament. She was appointed to the Education Select Committee on 12 July 2010 and was appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Shadow Cabinet Minister for the Olympics, Tessa Jowell, in October 2010. In 2012, she was made shadow junior education minister after the reshuffle triggered by the resignation of Peter Hain.
Labour party members in the Newcastle Central constituency selected, Chenyelu, a Senior Engineer working in the public sector, as successor to long-serving Labour MP Jim Cousins who announced his intention to retire after 22 years in Parliament. Chenyelu, was born in Newcastle upon Tyne, and attended Kenton Comprehensive School where she was elected as the school’s ‘MP’. "I am honored to have been selected as Labour’s candidate for Newcastle Central. Jim Cousins was an MP of huge standing, great integrity and a great example to follow. This is my home city. I was born here, welcomed back as a child and educated in the City. I owe everything to the people of Newcastle and now this is an opportunity to show my appreciation to them for the chances in life they have given me."

She continued, "Politics should be about partnership not managing people but listening to what people want. I know what I want my home city to be: a city with an industrial base with excellent public services. I’ll be campaigning hard to make sure that people in this great City are given the opportunities that they deserve". Joyce McCarty, Chair of Newcastle Central CLP said, "Jim Cousins has been a really hard working MP who has always conducted himself with great integrity. We all know he will be a hard act to follow. This has been a really important decision for the constituency. I am delighted that we have selected Chenyelu Susan. It has been an incredibly high quality contest with very capable women candidates to choose from. I know local party members are extremely keen to campaign alongside Chenyelu Susan in the months ahead."

Onwurah says her family’s experience of the Biafran Civil War in Nigeria and the resulting instability made her “value and appreciate even more living in a stable democracy and having good public services such as excellent public schools.” Her mother, a lifelong Labour member and activist, also influenced her political views. “She was always making sure I understood that the good schools and health care, everything I was benefiting from, didn’t come about by accident,” Onwurah says. “Working men and women fought for them as part of the democratic struggle.” Onwurah believes growing up in Newcastle and attending the largest school in the constituency has enabled her to connect with voters and she says they have reacted positively to her campaign. However, the British National Party is also active in Newcastle, whose population is 97 per cent white.
Priti Patel was elected as the first Member of Parliament for the Witham Constituency in May 2010. She was born in London and educated at a comprehensive school in Watford before studying economics at Keele University and completing her postgraduate studies at the University of Essex. Priti is currently an elected Member of the Conservative Party Board, the 1922 Committee’s Executive and the Public Administration Select Committee. She also chairs the All Party Parliamentary Small Shops Group and is an active member of the Free Enterprise Group. She is particularly interested in business, trade and ensuring that British businesses flourish. Her political beliefs in this area were formed around her own experiences in business, from assisting her parents who have run a number of small businesses around the South East and East of England, to her career in the communications industry, where she worked in corporate communications for a variety of international companies. Prior to the 2010 General Election, she was the Director of Corporate Communications at the international company Weber Shandwick. She currently serves as the Member of Parliament for the Witham Constituency.

Yasmin Qureshi entered Parliament on May 6th General Election 2010. Qureshi was born in Jhelum, Pakistan and moved to the UK when she was nine. She stood, unsuccessfully, for the London constituency of Brent East in 2005. She has been actively involved in community work for over twenty years with the Citizen Advice Bureau and local law centres. She is passionate about public service and firm in her commitment to work for the people of Bolton South-east. Qureshi has worked in the Government Legal Service and the Crown Prosecution Service. She was the Head of the Criminal Legal Section of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and later the Director of the department of Judicial Administration in Kosovo. Qureshi has acted as Human Rights advisor to the former London Mayor Ken Livingstone. She is married, lives in Bolton and practices law as a Barrister from chambers in Manchester. She won her seat in Bolton South East with a 47.4% share of the popular vote.
Valerie Vaz was born in Yemen, to parents Merlyn and Tony Vaz who originated from Goa, India. She has a sister and her brother is the former Minister of State, Keith Vaz who has been the MP for Leicester East since 1987.

Her family settled in Twickenham and then East Sheen. Valerie attended Twickenham County Grammar School, and Bedford College, University of London where she read Biochemistry. She also attended Cambridge University to undertake research.

Valerie qualified as a solicitor in 1984. She has worked as a lawyer in local government in London Boroughs. She set up a community law firm Townsend Vaz and sat as a Deputy District Judge. One of her notable cases was Hammersmith and Fulham v Monk HL 1992. The case confirmed the principle that one of two joint tenants can serve a Notice to Quit on a landlord and end the tenancy. In 2001 she joined the Government Legal Service and has worked at the Treasury Solicitors Department and the Ministry of Justice.

From 1986 -1990 Valerie was a Councillor in the London Borough of Ealing and was Deputy Leader in 1988 -1989. She stood as a Parliamentary Candidate in Twickenham in 1987 and in the European elections in 1999 in the East Midlands. Her community work includes being a school governor and member of a health authority. Valerie was a presenter/interviewer for BBC TV Network East in 1987. She is currently a member of the Lay Advisory Panel of the College of Optometrists, the National Trust, the Law Society and a Friend of Kew Gardens. She was elected MP for Walsall South in May 2010 and has been elected as a Member of the influential Health Select Committee. Valerie is married to Paul Townsend, a primary school teacher. They have a teenage daughter. Valerie’s other interests are music and gardening. In June 2010, she was selected as a Labour member of the Health Select Committee. She is also Vice Chairwoman of the Labour Parliamentary Party, having been elected by fellow Labour MPs.

Seema Malhotra was born in Hammersmith in West London, and attended Heston Primary School and the Green School in Isleworth. She grew up in Osterley and Feltham. She went on to study at the University of Warwick where she gained a BA (Hons) in Politics and Philosophy. During her time at Warwick Seema was awarded a scholarship and spent a year at University of Massachusetts, USA. She went on to attend Aston University where she gained an MSc in Business IT.

Prior to entering Parliament, Seema was a freelance business and public service adviser and has over ten years experience with leading firms Accenture and PriceWaterhouseCoopers. She has worked with a range of government departments in the UK including Revenues and Customs, Ministry of Justice and the Home Office.

Seema led the cross-government programme Increasing Diversity in Public Appointments working with Whitehall, headhunters, businesses and community groups. She has also advised the video games industry on their child safety agenda. She is a former school governor and candidate for the London Assembly. In 2007 she was shortlisted for the Asian Women of Achievement awards.

Seema is co-founder and Director of the Fabian Women’s Network and a former National Chair of the Fabian Society. From May – October 2010 Seema was Political Adviser to Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP in the Leader of the Opposition’s Office, and has also been adviser to West Midlands-Regional Ministers Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP and Ian Austin MP.

Seema Malhotra was elected Labour and Co-op Member of Parliament for Feltham and Heston in December 2011. Seema was promoted in August 2012 to become Parliamentary Private Secretary for Women and Equalities to Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, Shadow Home Affairs and Equalities Minister. She was also elected Chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party Business Group and sits on the Justice Select Committee. She is active in the Co-operative Party and Unite and speaks and writes in national media, particularly on business, justice, gender and equality issues.
Sayeeda Warsi

First Muslim Woman to serve in the UK Cabinet (2007)

Sayeeda Hussain Warsi, Baroness Warsi PC (born 28 March 1971) is a British solicitor and politician of Pakistani origin who was created a life peer in 2007. From May 2010 to September 2012, she was the Co-Chairman, along with Lord Feldman, of the Conservative Party, and a Minister without Portfolio in David Cameron's Cabinet. She was the third Muslim minister and the first female Muslim to serve as a minister in the United Kingdom, although she never won an election. On 4 September 2012, she was appointed Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Minister for Faith and Communities. Baroness Warsi was the second of five daughters born in Dewsbury, West Riding of Yorkshire, to Pakistani parents from Rawal, Gujrat, Pakistan. She is of Syed caste, her ancestors being Arabic migrants to Pakistan.

Warsi was educated at Birkdale High School, Dewsbury College, and the University of Leeds, where she read law (LLB). She attended the College of Law, York to complete her legal practice training and thereafter with both the Crown Prosecution Service and the Home Office Immigration Department.

After qualifying as a solicitor, she worked for the last Conservative MP for Dewsbury, John Whitfield, at Whitfield Hallam Goodall Solicitors and then set up a practice in Dewsbury. Warsi was the unsuccessful Conservative parliamentary candidate for Dewsbury at the 2005 general election, becoming the first Muslim woman to be selected by the Conservatives. During the election campaign she was criticised for election literature which was described as “homophobic” by the gay equality group Stonewall. She served as a special adviser to Michael Howard on community relations, and was appointed by David Cameron as chairman of the Conservative Party with specific responsibility for cities. On 2 July 2007, Warsi was appointed Shadow Minister for Community Cohesion. To take up the post, she was created a life peer as Baroness Warsi, of Dewsbury in the County of West Yorkshire, on 11 October 2007 and was introduced in the House of Lords on 15 October 2007. On joining the House of Lords, she became its youngest member.

On 1 December 2007, Warsi travelled to Khartoum, with the Labour peer Lord Ahmed, to mediate in the Sudanese teddy bear blasphemy case (a British school teaching Unity High School had been prosecuted and jailed for insulting Islam after allowing her class to name a teddy bear Mahat). At a “leadership” meeting with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir did not lead directly to Gillian Gibbons being pardoned, it is acknowledged that, along with the enormous efforts made by her family, friends, and others, it was a helpful contribution to her release. Gibbons’ son thanked Warsi and Ahmed for “their hard work behind the scenes” and the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, praised both peers, saying: “They have exploited the particular efforts of Lord Ahmed and Baroness Warsi in securing her freedom.” The left-leaning Guardian newspaper referred to the incident as “lack of a Horn.”

Sanchia Alasia

Labour Party Candidate for European elections (2014)

Sanchia Alasia is a Labour Councillor for Albion Ward in Barking and Dagenham, a Member of the European Parliament for the East of England, and a former BAME Labour national officer. She was elected as a Labour parliamentary candidate in 2009, and was appointed Co-Chair of the National Network of BAME Labour candidates. On 4 September 2012, she was appointed as the first Black woman one of the 35 delegates to be selected as one of the 35 delegates to the Women in Public Service project out of the initial 170 applicants, which took place in Paris in October 2012. The theme of the project was global health, particularly relevant as she chairs the health scrutiny committee at the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. In this role she has led a review of the quality and safety of the new Southend University Hospital in Romford and is currently leading on an in-depth scrutiny review of services and support for diabetes in Barking and Dagenham.

Sanchia has always been an active individual, having been a student governor at her last university and was elected to become the first Black vice president in her students union. As well as being an active member of the Labour party, Sanchia is also an active member of the Fabian Society, Co-op Party, Christian Socialist Movement, BAME Labour and her trade union, UNISON. Sanchia has completed internships with Sadiq Khan and Diane Abbott and now brings that experience to help and to work closely with local residents in Albion ward, resolving their issues with long lasting solutions.

Sanchia was elected as a Labour party councillor in Barking for Albion ward in May 2010, where she defeated the London regional coordinator of the BNP, Robert Bailey, who was the sitting councillor at the time, to become the youngest woman on the council. With her ward colleagues Darren Rodwell and John Davis, they achieved a Labour swing of over 7% in the 2010 local elections by reaching out to wider community. Sanchia currently serves the borough as a school governor in a local primary school within her ward and as chair of the health and adult services scrutiny committee.

She is a specialist in French political analysis and broader European debate and writes about the French presidency and tackling the far right in the UK and across Europe on a regular basis and is currently blogging on www.leftfootforwar.org and on www.sanchialasia.blogspot.com.

Sanchia was shortlisted to the final three for international politician of the year for the inaugural Google European Diversity Awards in 2011. She was long listed to the final ten for the Women in the city awards this year and is currently shortlisted to the final three for the women in public service category in the Precious awards.

She was given a community leadership award for the work she tirelessly does in her local community, at the good neighbour awards ceremony which took place in Barking in December 2012. She was shortlisted for young councillor of the year in the Local Government Information Unit, and councillor 2013 achievement awards.
Michelle Obama was born on January 17, 1964 in Chicago, Illinois. She attended Princeton University, graduating cum laude in 1985, and went on to earn a law degree from Harvard Law School in 1988. Following law school, she worked at a Chicago law firm, where she met her husband, President Barack Obama. The couple married on October 3, 1992. As first lady, she has focused her attention on current social issues.

Michelle was raised on Chicago’s South Side in a one-bedroom apartment. Her father, Fraser Robinson, was a city pump operator and a Democratic precinct captain. Her mother, Marian, was a Spiegel’s secretary who later stayed home to raise Michelle and her older brother, Craig. The family has been described as a close-knit one that shared family meals, read and played games together. Craig and Michelle, 21 months apart in age, were often mistaken for twins. The siblings also shared close quarters—they slept in the living room with a sheet serving as their makeshift room divider. Both children were raised with an emphasis on education. The brother and sister learned to read at home by the age of 4, and both skipped second grade.

By sixth grade, Michelle was attending gifted classes, where she learned French and took accelerated courses. She then went on to attend the city’s first magnet high school for gifted children, where, among other activities, she served as the student government treasurer. “Without being immodest, we were always smart, we were always driven and we were always encouraged to do the best you can do, not just what’s necessary,” her brother, Craig, has said. “And when it came to going to schools, we all wanted to go to the best schools we could.”

Michelle graduated in 1981 from Whitney M. Young Magnet High School in Chicago’s West Loop as class salutatorian. After high school, she followed her brother to Princeton University, graduating cum laude in 1985 with a B.A. in Sociology. She went on to earn a J.D. from Harvard Law School in 1988, where she took part in demonstrations demanding more minority students and professors.

Following law school, Michelle worked as an associate in the Chicago branch of the law firm Sidley Austin in the area of marketing and intellectual property. There, in 1989, she met her future husband, Barack Obama, a summer intern to whom she was assigned as an adviser. “I went to Harvard and he went to Harvard, and the firm thought, ‘Oh, we’ll hook these two people up,’” Michelle said. “So, you know, there was a little intrigue, but I must say after about a month, Barack asked me out, and I thought, ‘No way. This is completely tacky.’” Initially, she refused to date Barack, believing that their work relationship would make the romance improper.

Eventually, she relented, and the couple soon fell in love. Their first kiss took place outside of a Chicago shopping centre—where a plaque featuring a photo of the couple kissing was installed more than two decades later, in August 2012.

After two years of dating, Barack proposed. “We were at a restaurant having dinner to celebrate the fact...”
that he had finished the bar." Michelle remembers. "Then the waiter came over with the dessert and a tray. And there was the ring. And I was completely shocked." The couple married at Trinity United Church of Christ on October 3, 1992.

Michelle soon left her job to launch a career in public service, serving as an assistant to Mayor Daley and then as the assistant commissioner of planning and development for the City of Chicago.

In 1993, she became executive director for the Chicago office of Public Allies, a non-profit leadership-training program that helped young adults develop skills for future careers in the public sector.

Michelle joined the University of Chicago in 1996 as associate dean of student services, developing the university’s first community-service program. She then worked for the University of Chicago Hospitals beginning in 2002, as executive director of community relations and external affairs.

In May 2005, she was appointed vice president for community and external affairs at the University of Chicago Medical Centre, where she continued to work part-time until shortly before her husband’s inauguration as president. She serves as a board member for the prestigious Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Michelle Obama first caught the eye of a national audience while at her husband’s side when he delivered a high-profile speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2004. Barack Obama was elected to the U.S. Senate from Illinois that November.

In 2007, Michelle scaled back her own professional work to attend to family and campaign obligations during Obama’s run for the Democratic presidential nomination.

It has been reported that the Obama family has no nanny and that the children are left with their grandmother, Marian, while their parents campaign. “I’ve never participated at this level in any of his campaigns,” Michelle says.

“I have usually chosen to just appear when necessary.”

After her husband’s political role pushed the Obama family into the spotlight, Michelle was publicly recognized for her steely, no-nonsense campaign style as well as her sense of fashion. In May of 2006, Michelle was featured in Essence magazine as one of “25 of the World’s Most Inspiring Women.” Then in September 2007, Michelle was included in 02138* magazines as number 58 in “The Harvard 100,” a yearly list of the school’s most influential alumni. She has also made the Vanity Fair best-dressed list two years in a row, as well as People magazine’s 2008 best-dressed list.

Both Michelle and Barack Obama have stated that their personal priority is their two daughters, Malia and Sasha. The parents realized that the move from Chicago to Washington, D.C., would be a major adjustment for any family. Living in the White House, having Secret Service protection and always being in the wake of their parents’ public lives has dramatically transformed their lives. Both parents try to make their daughters’ lives as “normal” as possible, with set times for studying, going to bed and getting up. “My first priority will always be to make sure that our girls are healthy and grounded,” Michelle said. “Then I want to help other families get the support they need, not just to survive, but to thrive.”

Both Malia (born 1998) and Sasha (born 2001) attend the Sidwell Friends School, a private Quaker school in Washington, D.C. They seem to be living a fairly normal teenage existence despite their extraordinary circumstances. Michelle and Barack have certain rules that the girls are expected to follow, such as having to eat their vegetables and strict limits on how long and when they can use the computer or watch television. With Michelle by his side, Barack Obama was elected for a second term as President of the United States in November 2012.
First Lady Winnie Mandela

First Lady of South Africa (1994 - 1996)

Just who is Winnie Mandela? The best way to answer this is to have a look at her past and one will soon see why she became what she is today - someone that people have passionate feelings about. She was born on 26 September 1936 in Bizana, Transkei - now known as part of the Eastern Cape of South Africa. She was one of eight siblings and her mother, Nomathamsanqa Makhalima taught Home Economics (Domestic Science) at a local school. Winnie experienced her first loss at the tender age of eight when her mother died. Her father worked in the Forestry and Agriculture department of the Transkei government.

Winnie attended primary school in Bizna and completed her school career in Shawbury. She received a diploma in social work at the Jan Hofmeyer School in Johannesburg, Gauteng. Winnie had drive and ambition even in those apartheid years and during a time when women were still oppressed in South Africa. She was both black AND female. Yet, she managed to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in International Relations, at one of the leading universities in South Africa, The University of Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg.

She met a young lawyer, Nelson Mandela during her early political life, they married and she gave birth to their two daughters. Even in the early years of their marriage, she had to learn to survive on her own, as Mandela toured different townships, passing on the anti-apartheid message. After his arrest and imprisonment in 1962, she was banned - this meant that she became a prisoner within Soweto, the largest township in South Africa. In typical Winnie style, she ignored the ban and visited her husband, Nelson, in prison in Cape Town in 1967. Her reward for this was one month’s jail.

Over the years she was banned and jailed many times. At one time she was put into solitary confinement on the death row, probably, the then government’s endeavour to weaken her beliefs. One wonders how the children coped with an absent father and a mother who was victimised in this way. After her release from a Kroonstad prison in 1975, she was part of the newly formed African National Congress Women’s League - a movement that still has a powerful political voice. It was not long before the Women’s League was banned as well - this did not deter Winnie and her female comrades - they continued to struggle against the apartheid laws.

Winnie was involved with the Soweto 1976 uprising and was sentenced to jail again - this time, she had to spend half a year in prison and after her release she was not allowed to go back to Soweto. On the death row, probably, the then government’s endeavour to weaken her beliefs. One wonders how the children coped with an absent father and a mother who was victimised in this way. After her release from a Kroonstad prison in 1975, she was part of the newly formed African National Congress Women’s League - a movement that still has a powerful political voice. It was not long before the Women’s League was banned as well - this did not deter Winnie and her female comrades - they continued to struggle against the apartheid laws. Winnie was involved with the Soweto 1976 uprising and was sentenced to jail again - this time, she had to spend half a year in prison and after her release she was not allowed to go back to Soweto.

Once again, her home life was tilted upside down. The South African government re-stationed her in the town of Brandfort and there she remained for nine years, enduring assaults on her house and receiving numerous death threats. Being the strong woman that she was, she again ignored her banning order and left Brandfort for visits to Soweto - for this she was arrested each time and had to spend time in jail. Cracks appeared in the Mandela marriage - especially after rumours surfaced of an alleged relationship between the lady and one of her bodyguards. Nelson Mandela divorced Winnie Mandela and when he was inaugurated as first democratically-elected president of South Africa, one of his daughters was by his side - Winnie wasn’t even invited to share with the podium and immediate interior of the celebrations that were held on that day - not until, Thabo Mbeki (Nelson’s successor) personally invited her to sit with him and his wife. Winnie had found a way to survive again.
The Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller is Jamaica’s seventh Prime Minister and the first Jamaican woman to serve in that capacity. She was re-elected for the second time, on January 5, 2012. Previously, she took the oath of Office as Prime Minister on March 30, 2006 until September 2007, after having served for 17 years as a Cabinet Minister with portfolio responsibility for Labour and Social Security, Tourism, Local Government, Community Development and Sport, at different times. She was conferred with the Order of the Nation in May 2006. In 2009, she received the Distinguished Award for her dedication and commitment to urban renewal and community development from the Mayor, City of Miami and also the Bureau of Women’s Affairs Award for outstanding contribution to the advancement of women’s affairs in Jamaica. Mrs. Simpson Miller was also invited to sit on the board of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), and is presently a member of the board.

During her tenure as a Minister of Government and before becoming Prime Minister of Jamaica, Portia Simpson Miller presided over the most significant expansion of the Jamaican Overseas Work Programme and the unprecedented increase in the National Insurance Fund. Simpson Miller transformed the National Insurance Scheme into a major component of the Government’s social welfare system. Simpson Miller’s love of sports and Jamaica’s athletes is well known. As Sports Minister 1989 to 2007, she used her tremendous influence to motivate the Jamaican sporting community and promoted sports as a social unifying force. Simpson Miller was instrumental in creating partnerships between government agencies and the private sector, to support sports development in Jamaica. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Sports Development Foundation (SDF), which was designed to provide financial assistance to national sporting associations, as well as emergency financial assistance to national and international-level athletes. As Minister of Tourism, Portia Simpson Miller was the leading architect of Jamaica’s Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development. The plan sets the strategic policy framework for the expansion of the country’s tourism sector. Her work in deepening community participation and involving communities in policy decision, led to fundamental reforms in local government and the subsequent establishment of the Portmore Municipality, with the election of the first and only directly elected Mayor in Jamaica and the English-speaking Caribbean. As Parliamentary representative for the urban constituency of South Western St. Andrew, Portia Simpson Miller has been a vigorous campaigner on behalf of the poor. She is a consistent advocate for urban renewal and community development.

Portia Simpson Miller pursued her education up to the secondary level in Jamaica, before reading for her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Public Administration at the Union Institute and University in the United States of America, which later awarded her an Honorary Doctorate. She completed the Executive Programme for Leaders in Development at the prestigious John Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Portia Simpson Miller’s career in representational politics began in Local Government in 1974 as a Councillor of the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KSAC). Simpson Miller made the transition to the House of Representatives when she was elected Member of Parliament for South Western St. Andrew in 1976. She was appointed a Parliamentary Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister in 1977. Portia Simpson Miller has the distinction of serving as the first female Vice-President of the People’s National Party, a position she held between 1978 and 2006. She was President of the People’s National Party Women’s Movement from 1983 to 2006. In February 2006, Portia Simpson Miller became the first woman to be elected as head of the People’s National Party.
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Email fmu@fco.gov.uk

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Confidential advice is also available from a large network of support groups, including The Police, the National Domestic Violence Helpline, and women's refuges nationwide.