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## Womanist Exploration of Michelle Obama's Becoming

### مفهوم النسوية في ضوء السيرة الذاتية لميشيل أوباما

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#### Abstract

The harsh circumstances witnessed by Black people specifically in the diaspora are commonly acknowledged. The whole world witnessed how these people's contributions were neglected and Black women's benefactions were no exception. Any research focusing on the representations of Black women should emphasize examining the communication of resistance. Therefore, this study aims at examining the concept of Womanism and how it was carried out and portrayed by Michelle Obama in her biography *Becoming* (2020). The latter is considered a modern-day example of when privileged Black women utilize their platforms in the name of activism to reclaim Black womanhood. This paper also analyzes the character of the First Black First Lady, as well as the unique ways in which privileged Black women who self-identify as Womanists reject hegemonic images and stereotypes. This paper also considers how Womanist behaviors affect and alter preexisting image representations of Black women, as well as why it is vital to assert one's identity and womanhood. Thus, this paper is built upon the work of Womanist (Alice Walker, 1983) and Black Feminist scholars to interrogate the harmful and systemic nature of controlling images of Black women and how the movement of Womanism resisted such portrayals and reclaimed Black womanhood.

#### ملخص

التجارب والظروف القاسية التي عاشها السود والنساء على وجه الخصوص في مختلف ربوع العالم بالضبط في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية ليست مجهولة من قبل الرأي العام. شهد العالم كله كيف تم إهمال مساهمات هؤلاء الأشخاص والفئة النسوية خاصة. يجب أن يؤكد أي بحث يركز على تجارب وتمثيلات النساء السود على فحص لغة المقاومة. لذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تدارس مفهوم النسوية وكيف تم نقله وتصويره من قبل ميشيل أوباما في سيرتها الذاتية. تعتبر الأخيرة مثالاً حديثاً على استخدام النساء السود المتميزات لمنصاتهن باسم النشاط الاجتماعي والسياسي من أجل إعادة بناء مفهوم النسوية ومبادئها. تحلل هذه الورقة أيضاً شخصية أول سيدة أولى سوداء، فضلاً عن الطرق الفريدة التي ترفض بها النساء السود ذوات امتياز سياسي واجتماعي اللواتي يعرّفن أنفسهن على أنهن نسويات، الصور والقوالب النمطية المهيمنة. تتناول هذه الدراسة أيضاً كيفية تأثير السلوكيات النسوية على تمثيلات الصور الموجودة مسبقاً للمرأة السوداء وتغييرها، وكذلك سبب أهمية تأكيد هوية المرأة وأنوثتها. وهكذا، فإن هذا البحث مبني على أعمال النسوية أليس والكر (1983) وعلماء النسويات السود لاستجواب الطبيعة الضارة والنظامية للتحكم في صور النساء السود وكيف قاومت حركة النسوية مثل هذه الصور واستعادت أهميتها ومبادئها.

#### الكلمات المفتاحية:

الصور المهيمنة  
ذاتية التحديد  
النسوية  
ميشيل أوباما.

## 1. introduction

Throughout history, Black women's identities in Africa and particularly those in the diaspora have been mostly ignored despite all of the contributions these women have made to the world. While white women used the mainstream of Feminism to fight for their rights, coloured women felt compelled to form their own movements after being rejected by the previously established white ideologies. The concept of Womanism was the one that represented most of the needs, opinions, and values of these women and it shed light on their contributions to the United States and the world. Womanism aimed to bring attention to historical concerns to change the narrative of history as portrayed by white supremacists. It also attempted to decolonize previously constructed beliefs and dominating images of Black women, in the hopes of a brighter and more optimistic future than the one already in existence. Many authors have been motivated to advocate for themselves and their people via music, poetry, novels, and even bibliographies, with Africans and African Americans at the forefront of such movements and ideologies.

Becoming is the bibliography written by the first Black First Lady Michelle Obama that was released in 2020. It portrays all aspects of her life starting as a young ambitious African American woman from the south side of Chicago to being the first Black First Lady of the United States. The book reveals to its readers the long and challenging journey Michelle faced when entering the political sphere while projecting her womanist standpoints before and throughout her husband's presidency. Growing up at a time when the civil rights movement was at its peak,

Michelle witnessed all sorts of racist and sexist acts. However, growing up in a loving and an encouraging family who supported education and all her choices in life, she never let those judgments affect her by any means and she grew up proving to the world that she is a powerful Black woman who would change the public perspective on Black women. A big portion of the book is dedicated to her being a wife and a mother and how proud she is to be such. She always refers to herself as the mom-in-chief whose pleasure lies in the support of her husband and raising her daughters

in the most peaceful environment in a time where the glare of the media was not always merciful.

Womanist acts are very detectable in the work. As a Black woman, Michelle resisted controlling images and stereotypes, acknowledged her strengths and resilience as well as her weaknesses, invoked action and claimed power, advocated for others and encouraged self-improvement, supported her community, and spoke for the injustice they face daily while supporting her husband and her family. All these acts best exemplify the values that Womanism carries, therefore Michelle can be seen as a significant figure that managed to carry the principles of the movement. As a celebrity who used her celebrity status as an agent of change and symbolizes a sense of influence, Michelle Obama undoubtedly succeeded in inspiring and empowering many black women throughout the world to embrace their womanhood and believe in themselves while shattering all of the oppressive images that serve only as barriers preventing them from a brighter future.

## II. Reasons Behind Womanism

Coloured women's concerns needed to be extensively publicized and debated; allowing black women's voices to be heard outside of the confines of Feminism. Given the various obstacles that women of colour experienced, it was critical to focus on their specific issues. Coloured females had to deal not only with the challenges of being women but also with being marginalized as people of colour. Thus, due to such circumstances, the concept of Womanism was created to draw more attention to Black women. Even while many regarded it as merely a subset of Feminism, many more argued that it is distinct not only in terms of theory but also in terms of the principles and values it adheres to.

Womanism is a cultural and social theory centered on the history and daily interactions of people of colour, with a particular focus on the experiences of Black females as they tried to reclaim their womanhood and identity as both women and Black women. According to womanist scholar Phillips Layli (2006), Womanism aims to restore the balance between humans and the environment, as well as to reconcile a person's

existence with its spiritual dimension. Womanism, in other words, blends spirituality with environmentalism to restore dignity to a woman's daily responsibilities. The author claims that for womanists, the community is organized into a series of interconnected tiers, starting with Black women or women of colour (the level of self or identity), then the Black community as well as other people of colour (the level of "tribe" or "kin"), then all oppressed people (the level of similarly situated others), and finally all humanity 'the universal level' (Phillips Layli 2006). The movement is a social change concept anchored in the everyday experiences and problem-solving methods of Black and other women of colour in everyday environments and stretched to the challenge of abolishing all forms of oppression for all people. The actions of harmonizing and coordinating, balancing, and healing are central to womanist social transformation approaches. These techniques work within all of the relationships, reject violence and aggression but not assertiveness, and include "ordinary" activities easily. Dialogue, arbitration, mediation, spiritual activities, hospitality, mutual aid and self-help, and "mothering" are only a few examples of overlapping practices. Womanists view physical healing and ways of reconciling body, mind, and spirit (such as integrative medicine and folk healing) as strategies of social transformation, based on the belief that physical and psychological well-being are fundamental foundations for social justice (The Womanist Working Collective, 2021). Unlike Feminism, this movement is about femininity and culture (Black culture) as a whole, because both ideas are equally vital to a woman's existence, and one's femininity cannot be separated from the culture in which it exists. Womanism promotes the concept that a woman's femininity is defined by her culture and heritage rather than her skin colour or ethnicity (Gillman, L. 2006). As a result, a woman's Blackness is not a component of her Feminism; rather, it is the lens through which she sees her femininity. The sexism experienced by women of colour in the feminist movement, on the other hand, must be acknowledged, since both have distinct perspectives on womanhood and femininity. Because of the flawed manner, in which certain feminists have handled blackness in history, some feminists think that black

women's perspectives will not be recognized by Feminism as equal to white women's experiences (Mazama, Ama. 2003). Thus, womanists regard Womanism as a conceptual framework that exists independently of Feminist theory, rather than as an element or extension of Feminism. Walker explains the differences between the two movements using her famous metaphor stating that "*Womanist is to Feminist as purple is to lavender*" (Walker, 1983).

### III. The Birth of Womanism (Alice Walker)

Alice Malsenior Walker (born 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia, United States) is an American novelist, short story writer, and poet known for her sensitive and thoughtful representation of African American culture in her novels, short stories, and poetry. Her whole body of work is devoted to women of colour and their struggle to reclaim their womanhood. She was the first writer to give a proper definition to the term Womanism in her short story, "Coming Apart", in 1979 and later in her book "*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*" in 1983 and she defined it as:

*From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious (In Search of Our Mother's Gardens .1983. P.11)*

The author also defined it as:

*A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tear as a natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. [...] (In Search of Our Mother's Gardens .1983. P.12).*

The author defines the womanist as a woman of colour who loves music, loves dance, and loves the moon. She loves the spirit and loves love and food and roundness. A womanist loves struggle, loves the Folk, and most importantly loves herself, regardless of anything (Walker, 1983).

Womanism is a social construct that differs from Feminism in that it includes Black females, encourages femininity, and strives for an inclusive culture in all communities. This movement is about and against all forms of oppression, not just the one issue that these women experienced. The phrases “Womanist,” “Womanism,” and “Womanish” are all terms connected with Black femininity, and they have had a literary and socio-cultural impact. Even though numerous African American writers contributed significantly to the subject of Womanism, Alice Walker is the one who gave it a legitimate name and definition. As a kid, the writer witnessed Black women dealing with difficulties such as lack of education and intolerance, as well as being condemned to face the miseries of discrimination, racism, crime, and poverty. Her writings are loaded with the notion of addressing African-American women’s particular experiences and displaying a female connection with another, all while acknowledging the shared difficulties that they face in the disadvantaged and marginalized sexist and racist culture which is what Womanism is about.

Deborah K. King (1988) was one of the many writers who contributed to the realm of Womanism. She stated that Womanism represents an expectation and experience of female knowledge, competence, and responsibilities that are beyond those associated either with youth or with the gender traits traditionally assigned to females in the Western culture. Its characterization of women as audacious as well as capable contrasts with an image of females under patriarchy as submissive and inferior. It is significant to note that while Black males regardless of their ages, have been stereotypically addressed as “boys”, Black females were supposedly denigrated by being referred to as “women”, rather than “ladies”. However, the connotations of “women” within the black community have become positive ones, asserting and affirming the value in females of adult qualities such as ability,

independence, creativity, loving, and strength.

As King (1988) argues, Womanism is a disposition, a behavior, or a sense of a deep willingness to believe in oneself despite all previously built ideologies and stereotypes, and claims that Black women’s identity has always been taken away as they have always been referred to as something rather than someone even when they were most accomplished. As pointed out by Griffin-Padgett and Allison (2016), “*One of the foundational differences between womanism and feminism is that while feminist epistemology mainly ranked different systems of oppression and thus prioritized the liberal agendas of certain groups. womanist epistemology projects race, class, gender, and sexuality as codependent variables that cannot readily be separated and ranked in scholarship, in political practice, or lived experience*” (P. 152).

#### **IV. Becoming: Revolutionizing History and Future**

Michelle Obama has emerged as one of the most iconic and fascinating women of our time, with a life filled with purpose and achievements. As First Lady of the United States of America—the first African American to serve in that role—She contributed to the creation of the most welcoming and inclusive White House in history, as well as establishing herself as a powerful advocate for women and in the United States. and around the globe, dramatically changing how families pursue healthier and more active lifestyles, and standing by her husband as he led America through some of its most challenging times. Along the way, she showed us a few dance moves in various television shows, slew Carpool Karaoke in The Late Late Show With James Corden in 2016, and raised two grounded children despite the glare of an unforgiving media.

Michelle Obama welcomes readers into her world in her memoir, a work of profound reflection and mesmerizing narrating, chronicling the encounters and experiences that have shaped and molded her from her childhood on Chicago’s South Side to her years as an executive adjusting the requirements of parenthood and work, to her time spent at the world’s most popular address. She chronicles her victories and disappointments, both public and private, with

unflinching honesty and vibrant wit, revealing her whole journey as she has lived it—in her own words and on her own terms. Warm, shrewd, and brilliant, *Becoming* is the profoundly personal figurine of a lady of soul and substance who has relentlessly defied and opposed expectations and whose story inspires us to do the same.

#### **V. Becoming Me: Michelle’s Womanism as an African American Woman**

Idrissa Nichelle Snider is a researcher who has been greatly impacted by powerful Black women such as Michelle Obama. Her Dissertation written in 2019 titled “*Self-Defined: A Womanist Exploration of Michelle Obama, Viola Davis, And Beyonce Knowles*” explains that not only is Michelle Obama the first and only Black First Lady, but she is also a historical figure that many coloured people mainly women look up to whether in Africa or the diaspora. Born on January 17, 1964, on the south side of Chicago, she also represents a cohort of Black middle-aged women whose adolescence was defined by The Civil Rights Movement’s peak and the end of segregation. As a result, she came from a generation of Black people who saw society through the lens of achieving equality, working for justice, and being recognized for their contributions to society and the world.

As a national and global symbol, she epitomizes all things American and modern. During her Democratic Convention (2008) speech, Tuskegee University commencement speech (2015), and farewell address interview with Oprah Winfrey (2016), she resisted the controlling images of Mammie, an angry Black woman, and strong Black woman (Snider, Idrissa Nichelle, 2019). Nonetheless, she refused the labialization of coloured women and all the stereotypical images and prototypes created of them by a white patriarchal perspective. The first lady refused the notion of “The Other” or “Otherness” stating that she often was treated like an outsider even when felt a light sense of belonging. Wilson (2016) quoted Michelle stating:

*My experiences at Princeton have made me far more aware of my “blackness” than ever before...I found*

*that no matter how liberal and open-minded some of my white professors and classmates try to be towards me, I sometimes feel like a visitor on campus; as if I really don’t belong”* (P.63).

While growing up, Michelle witnessed all sorts of racist and sexist acts. She states in her book that when she was in Princeton, one of her white roommates moves out. Only years later does Michelle learn that the roommate’s mother did not want her daughter rooming with a Black girl. In the course of time, Michelle increasingly feels that she belongs at Princeton as much as anyone. Still, she makes a point of adding “South Side” when telling people, she is from Chicago. She stated in various interviews that she emphasizes the phrase South Side to demonstrate that that part of Chicago was her home which engraved in her the sense of Black pride. Thus, she grew up having a unique perspective of who she was as a person, as a woman, as an African American woman, or later as a wife and a mother. She made sure that she and women like her of all ages feel empowered and embrace who they are for whoever they are and whomever they will be for they are the force of the future.

Michelle Obama is the woman who carried all the aspects of Womanism and self-definition and identity. Nichelle Sandri discusses Patricia Hill Collins’ book “*Black Feminist Thought*” (1991) and how it paved the way for clarifying the theoretical framework that underpins the various forms of self-definitive demonstrations. She argues that liberation happens when Black women can cultivate and grow a collective voice, as Collins and other womanist academics have stated (Collins, 1991). Individuality is not promoted, as it is in Western cultures, and “self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others.” Rather, “*self is found in the context of family and community*” (Collins, 1991. P. 113). The sense of having or carrying a family along with a sense of belonging to one’s community and heritage with an optimistic viewpoint has always been a major part of what Womanism was and is all about. Michelle states in the first chapter of her book that she started her life with much optimism, looking forward to life as she spent much of her childhood listening

to “*the sound of striving.*” The word “striving” itself suggests both hard work and hope that one will get better in the future that is, an optimism that effort will lead to growth. Her years with her family were the most joyous to her as they were filled with love and warmth. Her family was very fond of good education and encouraged their daughter to seek a good career. One can deduce that she was very mature for her age and embraced her womanhood with all grace. She is fully aware that her father, Fraser C. Robinson III, despite his struggle with multiple sclerosis, worked tirelessly to provide for her and her elder brother. “*Having come of age at the tail end of the Black Power movement and possessing ruling-class educational credentials, she wears her working-class roots as easily as she wears Narciso,*” wrote Snider (2019), and this description reveals why even when Obama stood side by side with the leader of the free world, advocating for Black people was standard. One might easily believe that Obama had already picked up on some of the important lessons regarding racial inequity that many Black people learn as they rise through society’s tiers.

Although the acts of women like Obama are personal, the presumption is that they represent the majority of African American women’s beliefs, values, and attitudes. Although some demonstrations are more intricate and nuanced than others, self-definitive performances can be performed simply and appear simple at times. Snider adds that the purposes of self-defining and claiming identity and womanhood are mainly to resist controlling images and address the intersections of Black women’s oppression, to invoke power (a powerful act), to promote ideas and actions that force rethinking concepts of hegemony, to force women to “jump outside” the frames and systems authorities provide, to rearticulate Black women’s experiences by infusing them with new meaning and to dismantle controlling images without replacing them with other controlling images (be they positive or negative), all by assuming a Womanist standpoint (Snider, 2019). All of the mentioned above cannot be demonstrated and symbolized better than within the very first and only Black First Lady.

## VI. Becoming Us and More: A Womanist Standpoint as a Wife and First Lady

This chapter of her life is not of her as an individual but as a Black wife to a Black man and a political figure. Michelle Obama’s image has hybrid quality to it. She handles the roles of a modern strong professional woman and a simple conventional family lady. While stereotypes lack these characteristics, they are prevalent in realistic Black women, both privileged and not. Taking into consideration Michelle Obama’s marriage to Barack Obama from a womanist perspective demonstrates how Black women may use the wife identity as a progressive way to gain strength, especially when they are in positions of privilege (Snider, 2019). Unlike the feminist viewpoint on marriage which is more negative and often avoided, womanists see themselves as stronger and more successful when surrounded by a supportive husband and family. They do not consider men as their rivals; on the contrary, they support Black men and show solidarity with them against all sorts of oppression. Rather than gender equality, womanists seek gender reconciliation which is much embraced and symbolized by the Obamas. Alice Walker stated on the matter that Womanism is a manifestation of black women’s issues through which these coloured women articulate their policies and ideas, and as Walker said: “*I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival. Whole of my people, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women*” (In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens .1983. P. 250). Michelle Obama is considered to be a true representative of Womanism as a wife, a political partner, a mother-in-chief, and the first Black First Lady.

Michelle Obama’s portrayal as a Black First Lady, wife, and mother provided the country with a never-before-seen image. It was not as though Black women had not ever been spouses or moms involved in public activities. African American women, on the other hand, have played a critical role in the advancement of the country while bringing up children. Obama’s affluence and stature force America to pay attention, and it reminds us of their historical significance. Similarly, her apparent ease in carrying out these tasks

with distinction and success is not the conventional visual depiction of African American women as controlling images (Snider, 2019). Spreading her voice to the world as the first and so far, the only Black first lady was not easy, but as an African American womanist, she never disregarded her responsibility as a mother. She valued her family above all else, and she always regarded her first job to be “Mom-in-chief,” which she still considers being the most essential role in her life.

The path to the White House was not without its difficulties. She was frequently accused of using derogatory words in reference to the white population, and she felt uncomfortable the majority of the time. Nobody in the political world considered her for the position of the first lady. Researcher Snider (2019) stated in her thesis that her femininity was continuously attacked due to her Blackness, despite past First Ladies Hillary Clinton and Barbara Bush being complimented for adopting traditional male qualities; intersectionality components surrounding Black women’s oppression are obvious in this regard. She was frequently confronted with racist and sexist statements, but her womanist approach was to respond in such a manner that she never reduced herself to talking about her physical appearance in a way that would cause her to be objectified more. People were drawn to her because of her distinctiveness and strong spirit, as well as her humanitarian efforts. Americans were just as eager in learning about the first Black First Lady of the United States as they were in learning about the Black man with the contagious smile and amusing name.

Michelle’s rhetorical frameworks, which she establishes through public exhibition, are unquestionably deliberate and planned. Furthermore, Michelle recognizes the seriousness and great responsibility that comes with the esteemed position of First Lady of the United States. She also appears to be very aware of the significance and weight of being the first Black woman to hold the post. *“Though she was successful at implementing several national and global campaigns aimed at assisting all Americans, with operations like “Let’s Move”*

*and “62milliongirls,” her actions reveal traces of a woman who is devoted to the community that shaped her, and the African American people are those to whom she seems to indicate she is most indebted”* (Snider, 2019)

Michelle’s admiration and passion for Black America is palpable; it also explains why she frequently emphasizes her Blackness, the problems that Black people face, and the rich history of African Americans. First Ladies’ platforms have always been designed to support humanitarian activities. Grey (2016) explained, *“first ladies of the United States have used their office to advocate for social programs that served vulnerable populations, such as Rosalyn Carter’s work for mental health awareness, Grace Coolidge’s embrace of the deaf, and Florence Harding’s efforts on behalf of soldiers returning from war, but never before did our nation have a First Lady who openly served the Black community—which is also vulnerable to multiple forms of disenfranchisement* (P. 565).

Michelle Obama was able to speak out against the damage of being compared to dominating images since she is a woman of colour that faced them. According to the New York Times, 38 million people turned in to see then-Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama give his party acceptance speech, which included Michelle’s. During her time in office, Obama drew our notice on several occasions. She stood out because she exhibited a level of candor and honesty that is uncommon among First Ladies. She is usually forthright about her objectives and straightforward in expressing her feelings in her talks. At the 2008 NDC she told the crowd:

*Serving as your First Lady is an honor and a privilege. But back when we first came together four years ago, I still had some concerns about this journey we’d begun. While I believed deeply in my husband’s vision for this country, and I was certain he would make an extraordinary President, like any mother, I was worried about what it would mean for our girls if he got that chance. How will I keep them grounded under the glare of the national spotlight? How would they feel being uprooted from their school, their friends,*

*and the only home they'd ever known? See our life before moving to Washington was filled with simple joys. And the truth is, I loved the life we built for our girls, and I deeply loved the man I had built that life with –and I didn't want that to change if he became President.* (Snider, 2019)

Michelle Obama maintained addressing her worries about being the President's wife after Barack Obama's second victory, and she did not hold back from highlighting the challenges of being a Black First Lady. Obama's Tuskegee address shed further light on how race and gender influenced her performance in this position. The graduation ceremony was aired for the whole country through the C-SPAN television network and YouTube channel, despite the fact that it took place in a very limited and restricted setting. Therefore, Michelle Obama was well aware that she was also addressing the American public when she told a crowd of Black graduates:

*They [mainstream America] don't know that part of you. Instead, they will make assumptions about who they think you are based on their limited notion of the world. And my husband and I know how frustrating that experience can be. We've felt the sting of those daily slights throughout our entire lives –the folks who crossed the street in fear of their safety; the clerks who kept a close eye on us in all those department stores; the people at formal events who assumed we were the 'help' –and those who have questioned our 10 intelligences, our honesty, even our love of this country* (Tuskegee University Commencement Address, 2015).

Rather than striving to meet the expectations of those who do not understand her cultural or ethnic heritage, she appears to suggest that she finds comfort in continuing to embrace others who have the same identity, and she cherishes people who share similar beliefs. Michelle Obama announced to the crowd during Barack Obama's second run for office:

*We learned about dignity and decency—that how you work matters more than how much you make; that helping others means more than just getting ahead of yourself. We learned about honesty and integrity—*

*that the truth matters—that you don't take shortcuts or play by your own set of rules; and success doesn't count unless you earn it fair and square. We learned about gratitude and humility—that so many people had a hand in our success, from the teachers who inspired us to the janitors who kept our school clean. And we were taught to value everyone's contribution and treat everyone with respect.* (Democratic National Convention, 2012)

Her sense of identity comprises race as well as a sense of belonging to a community. Obama's affection for her community, however, does not prevent her from appreciating others of various ethnic backgrounds or who share different ideas and beliefs. She was able to create numerous connections as First Lady, and her humanitarian activities demonstrated her capacity to do so. She is living proof that Womanism is not only about femininity, but is also about culture, community, family, and solidarity. She proved to the world that one's femininity cannot be separated from the culture in which it exists.

Even though President Barack Obama's final term concluded on January 20, 2017, his wife continues to be the focus of many public debates about what it means to be an African American woman in the United States, particularly one who is on the international stage. In the fall of 2018, Michelle Obama released her memoir *Becoming*, which “sold 1.4 million copies in its first week and quickly became the best-selling book of the year” (Merry, 2019). Michelle Obama has received support from a wide range of organizations and she celebrated her accomplishments as First Lady of The United States and as a woman of colour. Obama has appeared on the covers of several magazines, including *Vogue* and *Shape*, and has spoken out on several issues, including health care and women's rights. Whether or not you admire the former First Lady is a matter of personal preference, but one thing is certain: she has had a huge influence on how we see Black women, and even more so on how African American women see themselves. She was equally exact in her comments in which she was able to reclaim the narrative about “lazy” and “incapable”



Blacks and disprove all stereotypes (Snider, 2019)

the major goal of researching these events is to determine how Black women identify as people and as community members, as mothers, sisters, daughters, and most significantly as successful Black career women apart from the associations to controlling images and previously formed stereotypes. Nonetheless, this study does not ignore how stereotypes have influenced Black women's ability to understand and discover themselves. When challenged with these misrepresentations, both Womanism and self-defining are focused on giving answers and solutions that Black women may use as tools of empowerment.

## VII. Conclusion

Womanism empowers women of colour to deliberately craft and convey how they identify as individuals to themselves and others. Because one of the main aims of Black women's activism including womanist acts, is to shift from victimhood to empowerment, researchers should seek and analyze ways to improve these women's lived experiences and quality of life. Womanist and Black feminist researchers have discovered that self-defining is important for African American women's ability to survive and thrive in environments that frequently undermine their worth. When Black women do not speak out against the stereotypical portrayals they are subjected to, they risk adopting a racist, white, patriarchal perspective of themselves. Therefore, many Black women, particularly in the diaspora, believe that claiming a womanist standpoint separate from any white mainstream is critical in order to shed light on a dark portion of history that has been overlooked and, according to some, never correctly projected. They argue that by doing so, the world will acknowledge the numerous contributions made by Black women, paving the way for a brighter future, one that is more accepting of people of all genders and colours. A case study of Michelle Obama and her book *Becoming* (2020), was used to identify specific characteristics of womanist activity as well as to recognize prominent themes that arose from the performances. To decipher

such traits, a textual analysis was employed for this case study.

## Conflict of Interest

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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