

United States - "Michelle Obama is a good lawyer for her husband"

Photo credit: Reuters / K. Lamarque
Barack and Michelle Obama, February 4 2009

"Michelle Obama is a good lawyer for her husband"

Interview - Carl Sferrazza Anthony, historian of the First Ladies, LCI.fr how to decipher the wife of U.S. President has taken his role since January 20.

He believes that the trip to Europe at the summit of the G20 and NATO will be very important to her in the United States

Interview by Fabrice AUBERT - on 30/03/2009 - 11:44

Carl Sferrazza Anthony is a historian at the National First Ladies Library, the center dedicated to the history of American First Ladies. He has written nine books on the subject and speaks regularly in the American media.

LCI.fr: How is Michelle Obama does her role as First Lady since the end of January? Is it conventional or different from what the Americans were waiting?

Carl Sferrazza Anthony: For the moment, its role is quite unique. On the merits, she insisted on subjects that are not especially political and which are not specifically the policy of her husband. However, they partly reflect the agenda. It was thus made in the offices of various ministries (Health, Agriculture, Interior ...). It was addressed to employees, explaining that they should all work together to implement the changes desired by the President. His visits were important to get the support of these ministries.

They were also perceived as "visits neighborhood, that no First Lady has done for over a hundred years. They allow it to be the eyes and ears of the President. Michelle Obama may indeed go out, talk to people more easily, with security measures are less stringent. They say what they think, what their problems are, then they are often intimidated or nervous before the President. Michelle Obama is very warm, friendly and accessible.

LCI.fr: His actions have a political impact?

C.-S. A. : Yes. In fact, it helps Barack Obama. In a certain sense it is a very good lawyer and a very good spokesman for his policy. The first reception she hosted at the White House honored a worker who had fought for the recognition of "equal pay for equal work." This is in line with the philosophy of the new administration.

"On the personality, it looks like Barbara Bush!"

LCI.fr: If we were to compare with its predecessors, it is closer to Hillary Clinton, which many involved in the administration of Bill with the proposed reform of health, or Laura Bush, plus deleted ?

C.-S. A. It is still too early to compare it to one of the two. For now, we can say that it

lies halfway. But everything can change. During the first year, First Lady learned a lot.

LCI.fr: And in terms of personality?

C.-S. A. In fact, in an amusing way, with his sense of humor and his very pointed naturalness, his personality is very similar to that of ... Barbara Bush. It had a lot of humor, did not hesitate to admit that her husband could make mistakes. For her part, Nancy Reagan always gave to her husband because while Laura Bush is indeed remained outside the discussion of funding most of the time.

"It would not change his frank talk"

LCI.fr: Being African-American influences Does its role?

C.-S. A. : In general, no. However, it affects African Americans have a First Afro-American lady. A force to see it on television, they get used to her as First Lady, and not as an African American. This subtle change attitudes.

LCI.fr: During the campaign, she made several statements that have given arguments to Republicans. Since January, it has not sparked controversy. It is "briefed" by communicating the White House?

C.-S. A. : I do not think it is the kind of person to whom advisers should say what to do or say or not to do or not. It is very intuitive. When she realizes that what she says may be inconvenient for her husband, she stops. But this does not prevent them from being natural, especially with his humor and self-mockery. Sometimes it is true that it is poorly understood. She is conscious, but I do not think it will change radically as a result.

"It may help to clarify her husband's choice"

LCI.fr: Can it affect Barack Obama, consciously or not, certain decisions?

C.-S. A. : Yes, but not necessarily the final decision. But if he made his problems, it can help to clarify their thoughts so that it better identifies the implications of their choices. During the campaign, she especially liked to talk about what he could not do on the way: "Barack, you have choice A or choice B. Here are their implications. Now it's up to you decide ".

LCI.fr: The English press claims that it is causing the small gift (i.e.: DVD) offered to Gordon Brown during his visit to Washington because she always held the British responsible for slavery.

C.-S. A. As always, the English press is trying to create a good story. Although the gift was modest. But it should be noted that Gordon Brown was the first foreign leader to receive during a visit to the United States since January 20. Finally, if this gift was luxurious, the American press would have criticized Obama for being too generous.

"We can not prevent the press to make a fashion icon"

LCI.fr: With his robes, his covers of Vogue magazine, might she not become primarily a "people" more than a First Lady?

C.-S. A. : Not. What to do, people will always comment on what she wears, whether good or bad taste. We can not prevent the magazine into a fashion icon. It is like Jackie Kennedy in his time or Carla Bruni-Sarkozy today: everyone looks at her movements, her clothes ... Carla Bruni-Sarkozy has an advantage because it was already the case in its original environment and then in his work as top-model.

LCI.fr: This trip to Europe is important for Michelle Obama?

C.-S. A. : Yes, very important. In the past, Eleanor Roosevelt tours in England, Ireland and Australia during the Second World War and Jackie Kennedy in Europe in May 1961, in Paris, had changed everything for them. Their popularity abroad has had a huge impact in the United States. The same goes for Michelle Obama: If it is very popular abroad, if the people cheering in the streets in London and Strasbourg, it will increase its popularity in the United States and thus solidify its role.