

## **Fashion and the First Lady, Michelle Obama**

It has been said, "you are what you wear," this saying has never been truer than the fashion choices and styles of the first lady.

Since the creation of our country, the first lady has been an advisor and assistant to her husband. The fashion choices of the president and first lady have an impact on how society views them as leaders.

Michelle Obama's inaugural ensembles were more of a hit than miss, according to a new Associated Press-Knowledge Networks poll.

The fashion industry has waited anxiously for the inauguration of Barack Obama for months, wondering which designer the future first lady will choose.

Michelle Obama is a symbol for modern style. She wears clothes from young, upcoming designers to well known mainstream American retailers.

At the inaugural ceremony and parade, Obama wore an Isabel Toledo lemon grass yellow ensemble.

The Cuban-born American designer created a sheath dress with a matching coat that many applauded and saw as a ray of hope.

Toledo, who worked with Anne Klein for a short while, is considered an avante garde designer, which is exactly the kind of designer Obama gravitates toward.

Toledo designed the outfit with hopes Obama would choose it for the ceremony, though she did not know for certain until Tuesday morning.

The coat was made of wool lace in a silk net, with a silk radzimir underneath and was worn with a pashmina for warmth. The dress has a jewel-like embellishment around the neckline.

"There is nothing that comes close to this moment," Toledo said, speaking in New York. "It's not just my moment and hers, but it's the world's...It's not only what she's wearing. It's what the moment represents."

For the Inaugural Ball Obama choose a white, one-shouldered gown, covered in fabric petals and dotted with beads designed by 26-year-old Jason Wu, a rising star in the fashion world but otherwise not well-known.

Wu said he sewed the dress himself as late as December, according to his Web site. Wu sent sketches to Obama at the suggestion of Ikram Goldman, who owns the Ikram boutique in Chicago, where Michelle Obama has been known to shop.

Wu did not know she had selected the dress until she appeared in it.

"It's soft, feminine, but powerful; I wanted to convey all that in a dress," he said, according to the Associated Press. "I wanted it to look like a sign of hope."

It will be donated to the Smithsonian for its collection of first lady gowns.

Each inauguration, the public looks forward to seeing what the first lady will be wearing. Many of the dresses represent the character of the first lady who wears them.

It has been a tradition that goes back to the earliest celebrations of the new republic.

Martha Washington used social celebrations to further her husband's career throughout their marriage.

First lady Caroline Harrison took advantage of her high profile moment to reinforce her husband's campaign theme. Benjamin Harrison's campaign was on the protection of home industries. Harrison's inaugural gown was the first all American-made gown to be worn to an inauguration.

Jacqueline Kennedy's inaugural dress was also a huge success at the time of Kennedy's inauguration. Kennedy had a niche for fashion that the American public adored. She designed the gown herself and took it to Bergdorf Goodman to be made.

The result was a simple, sleeveless ivory sheath with a matching cape, perfectly suited for Kennedy's graceful style.

"When she wore that, it was such high fashion, it was so beautiful and she looked gorgeous in it," said Mary Eliza Massengill, a recent fashion merchandising major at Auburn. "It really created a scene and established her."

The gowns of every inaugural ball have become more than just a dress, but a statement for each of these powerful women.