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Photo: White House Archives

Mrs. Michelle Obama

Obesity and the Let's Move! Initiative

Carter G. Woodson established Negro History Week in 1926 to highlight the significant impact blacks had on the “development of the social, political, and economic structures of the United States and the world”. In 1976, President Gerald Ford officially recognized February as Black History Month.

Civil rights activists are traditionally remembered during this time of year. Many pay homage to Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We read and listen to the “I Have a Dream” speech and question our progress as African Americans and as a nation.

This year, I'd like to highlight our former First Lady, Mrs. Michelle Obama. While we celebrate her as being the first and only black First Lady of the United States of America, Mrs. Obama used her position to address needs in the black community and throughout our nation.

In 2010, The Wall Street Journal reported “nearly one of three children is overweight or obese, which is astonishing enough except that two-thirds of adults are too—and thus at risk for diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers. Obesity has tripled among adolescents since 1980, rising to 17.6 percent, while the number of childhood hospitalizations for obesity-associated conditions doubled between 1999 and 2005. Type 2 diabetes used to be called ‘adult-onset diabetes’, until it started to show up in children.” According to the White House, obesity is also a major reason for rejection of military applicants which puts our national security at risk.

February

Black History Month

- 2 - Groundhog Day
- 4 - Super Bowl LII
- 13 - Mardi Gras
- 14 - Valentine's Day
- 14 - Ash Wednesday
- 19 - President's Day



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Furthermore, Ebony magazine reported obesity to be the “most widespread non-communicable disease in the African American community”. Obesity is also an increasing epidemic for African American children. The 2009-2010 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) indicated that 41.2% of African American adolescents from ages 12 to 19 were overweight or obese compared to 30% of white adolescents ages 12 to 19. Unfortunately, “this generation of children is the first generation predicted to die before their parents”.

To combat these issues, Mrs. Obama instituted *Let’s Move!*—one of four main initiatives she implemented during her stay in the White House. Launched in 2010, it’s purpose was to help kids and families lead healthier lives. Specifically, *Let’s Move!* is about:

- putting children on the path to a healthy future during their earliest months and years;
- giving parents helpful information and fostering environments that support healthy choices;
- providing healthier foods in schools;
- ensuring that every family has access to healthy, affordable food; and,
- helping children become more physically active.

Essentially, *Let’s Move!* is a total lifestyle change. Youth and their families have made commitments to healthier lifestyles for themselves and those in their schools and communities. For example, a couple of youth in Prince Frederick, Maryland went door-to-door handing out jump ropes to encourage their peers to be active. Cities have added community gardens as well as more farmers markets and trails.

While it is unknown if the current White House administration will continue to support *Let’s Move!*, it is clear that much work remains to be done. So many Americans are busy with work and life and fail to devote the time required for healthy meals and physical activity.

I appreciate the time and energy Mrs. Obama has devoted to promoting healthy living. Her initiative has positively impacted citizens across the nation.

What can we do to continue the work she has begun? How can we incorporate physical activity into our day? What healthy food alternatives can we use when we prepare our meals?

Although we may not have all the answers, we owe it to ourselves and our children to have these conversations.

Sources: asah.org (Association for the Study of African American Life and History), [Ebony](http://Ebony.com), obamawhitehouse.archives.org, [ISRN Public Health](http://ISRN.org), [BMC Public Health](http://BMC.org), [Scholastic News](http://Scholastic.com), [The Charleston Gazette](http://TheCharlestonGazette.com)

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