



*The*  
**OBAMA  
YEARS**

 *The* OBAMA YEARS



# AMERICA SAYS YES TO 'HOPE'

## His historic win

**O**n that freezing January day eight years ago, he stood before the gathered thousands and rose to the nation's highest office. He was a young man, a brilliant man, a man of unparalleled political gifts. He was self-evidently a good man, a doting husband of a strong a beautiful wife, a devoted father to two little girls.

He was a man who had risen to prominence and power in a nation torn apart by deep partisan rifts, offering himself as a uniter of Democrats, Republicans and independents.

And, lost on no one, America's 44th President, Barack Hussein Obama, was a black man – or, more precisely, the Hawaii-born son of a white mother from Kansas and a black father from Kenya.

For a nation whose original sin is forcing humans of darker skin color into brutal bondage by the millions, a nation still shadowed by racial discrimination and degradation, Obama's blackness was epochal.

"This will be a milestone that so many suffered for, fought for, died for and voted for," we wrote the day he swore the oath. "A mountain will be crossed."

The mantra of the man carrying the flag across the mountain was hope. Though treated by some as little more than an electoral slogan, it was a prescription-strength balm for a country dispirited, racked with cynicism, sour to its stomach.

Barack Obama became President Obama at a moment of near-perfect peril. America's economy was bleeding 700,000 jobs a month, in danger of lapsing into a depression. Its financial system was in near-free-fall.

A national industrial jewel, its automobile industry, was failing.

Two long wars, one waged for all the right reasons, the other launched under false pretenses, still raged, and boots on the ground felt increasingly mired in quicksand.

And voters looked to him not only to be an emergency room surgeon who would stop the bleeding and stabilize the pulse, but as a master builder who, after years of too-small thinking and government by and for the special

*Continued on next page*



Barack Obama stands on stage along with his wife Michelle and daughters Sasha (l.) and Malia and on Election Night 2008 in Chicago. Every vote counted, and the couple (top) cast theirs early in the day. Above, Obama gives victory speech.



# The OBAMA YEARS



GETTY

## Vowing to build a better future

*Continued from previous*

interests, would accomplish important things for the greater good again.

America's ambitions for Obama were rivaled only by Obama's ambitions for himself, and for his administration. He would turn the page, he told us, on bitter generational squabbles.

He would save livelihoods from economic collapse.

He would save lives from the ravages of battle.

He would knit together a frayed safety net by finally extending health coverage to millions of uninsured Americans.

He would lead the nation to lead the world to slay climate change.

He would restore America's battered reputation around the globe.

He would, he implicitly hinted, help heal the country's still-visible racial scars.

And he would bring America together not through the magic of his charisma, but by leading a debate grounded in decency.

On that day, in words that crackled with optimism but were, typical for the man, sober and straightforward, he told us:

"Being true to our founding documents does not require us to agree on every contour of life.

"It does not mean we all define liberty in exactly the same way or follow the same precise path to happiness.

"Progress does not compel us to settle centuries-long debates about the role of government for all time, but it does require us to act in our time."

He said, "Let us, each of us, now embrace with solemn duty and awesome joy what is our lasting birthright. With common effort and common purpose, with passion and dedication, let us answer the call of history and carry into an uncertain future that precious light of freedom."

The grace of those words, the grandeur of the moment, and the gravity of the speaker were about to encounter the grit of guiding America through eight wrenching years of politics and history.



GETTY

**Chief Justice of the United States John Roberts (top) administers oath of office in public ceremony in January 2009, and in private (above) inside the White House. After the ceremonies it was time for some fun at the inaugural ball (far right and right).**



AP

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With Vice President Biden watching, Obama signs the nearly \$1 trillion stimulus bill into law in February 2009. Above, Great Recession prompted anger at big banks and calls for reform.

GETTY

REUTERS

# ON THE MONEY

## Depression threat stimulated quick econ jolt

**H**ome foreclosures swept the nation, devastating communities. Major financial institutions had failed and more were on the brink. Employers were hemorrhaging 700,000 jobs every month. The auto industry was on the verge of collapse.

As he stepped into the Oval Office, President Obama, a man who had never been the chief executive of anything, inherited an American economy on life support.

With the nation on the brink of a depression, Obama sidelined some of his grandest ambitions, foreign and domestic, to get the patient off the table.

As a first order of business, he rushed to assemble, then pass, the largest-ever spending package — a hugely controversial stimulus bill that

would lock him in high-stakes warfare with Republicans, who said the U.S. could ill-afford nearly a trillion dollars in spending, much of which they deemed wasteful.

But in February 2009, Obama and fellow Democrats, who controlled Congress, got the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act through a brick wall of opposition.

Many of the promised “shovel-ready” infrastructure projects turned out to be less than advertised. Spending on health care, education, tax incentives and other direct government support were higher than anticipated.

But the timely intervention averted utter disaster, and the long recovery from the Great Recession was underway.

# PEACE OF HIS MIND

## Faced world of strife

**P**resident Obama set out not only to remake the United States in its own eyes and heal longstanding partisan divisions, but to recast America in the eyes of the world. He would end the war in Iraq, which Obama had famously called a “dumb war.” He would wind down the war in Afghanistan. He would rebuild alliances strained under the eight-year term of George W. Bush.

In 2009, before Obama had the chance to make good on any of these seismic promises, he won the Nobel Peace Prize.

And throughout his two terms, as Obama strained to recast American foreign policy in his own image, he repeatedly crashed against the rocky shoals of reality.

A promise to swiftly close the terrorist detention center in Guantanamo Bay was thwarted. A Russia reset failed, as relations with one crucially important partner soured.

An intervention in Libya succeeded on some terms, toppling Moammar Qaddafi, and failed on others. Four Americans lost their lives in Benghazi.

As Obama hemmed, a civil war in Syria raged. The President drew a “red line” warning dictator Bashar Assad not to use chemical weapons, then flinched when it was crossed.

Though the U.S. made progress against core Al Qaeda, the even more brutal terrorist offshoot known as the Islamic State, which Obama had dismissed as a “JV” team, made bloody and chilling gains in Syria and Iraq and beyond.

America’s friendship with close ally Israel turned tense, especially as Obama pressed to complete a nuclear deal to welcome terrorist-supporting, Israel-hating Iran back into the international community.

Obama brokered that agreement, and joined an international accord on climate change, and thawed relations with Cuba – ending more than a half-century of hostilities with the Communist nation off Florida’s coast. And even as smaller wars rage, American troops are no longer dying in large numbers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

His supporters celebrate those triumphs. But to others, his time in office was marked by discord, turmoil and arguably a diminishment of America’s standing in the world.



EPA



AP

**Relations between the U.S. and its old Cold War enemies blew hot and cold. Obama gets into icy stare-down (above) with Russia’s Vladimir Putin at summit in China last September. Left, he awkwardly shares celebratory moment with Cuban dictator Raul Castro on historic visit to Communist nation last February.**

**Obama is a tense would-be peace-maker between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (far left) and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas. Right, he hugs a veteran’s loved one in 2011 while on visit with the First Lady to section of Arlington National Cemetery where soldiers of Iraq and Afghanistan wars are interred.**



REUTERS



THE WHITE HOUSE



# TO YOUR HEALTH

## Bamacare legacy still up in air

**B**arack Obama had made clear his intention not to be a Bill Clinton – a triangulator who settled for incremental change – but to instead be a transformational President, the left's Ronald Reagan.

Fulfilling that ambition depended in no small part on health care reform, a massive effort to expand coverage to 40 million uninsured people so that no American ever again had to go bankrupt when they fell ill. Presidents from Richard Nixon on had tried and failed. Obama was determined to prevail.

A complex, 906-page bill championed by a Democratic-controlled Congress and the President was quickly dubbed Obamacare, and Republicans went to the mattresses to defeat it.

The measure would use “death panels” to enable government bureaucrats to pull the plug on care, they falsely claimed. It would destroy jobs, then in short supply, they insisted. It would empower the government to wield a heavy hand over one-sixth of the American economy.

As the vitriol intensified from the grass roots to the House and Senate floor, Democrats pressed ahead.

Passed with no Republican votes by the Democratic majority in Congress in March 2010, Obamacare, in the words of Vice President Joe Biden, was a “Big f---ing deal.”

Has it worked? The debate rages. The legislation helped lower the uninsured rate from 15.7% when it was passed to 8.6% this past quarter, with 24 million more Americans receiving health insurance, with millions receiving subsidies to help pay for care. Medicaid expansions have given far more low-income Americans access to primary care.

The law also made it illegal for insurance companies to bar people from coverage based upon preexisting conditions, and allowed young people to stay on their parents' insurance until age 26.

But the rollout of Healthcare.gov was a disaster and some state-level insurance markets struggled, with companies canceling many lower-cost plans they didn't find profitable. Premiums rose sharply in 2016, part of a larger trend of increased costs and shrinking access to doctors that the law hasn't alleviated.

Many patients swallowed Dr. Obama's medicine and got better. Others, still reeling from its side effects, are dead-set on finally changing the course of treatment, and now likely have the power to do precisely that.



Obama delivers fist-bump in meeting with medical professionals to pitch the Affordable Care Act in March 2010 and talks with a top Obamacare foe, Rep. Paul Ryan (above). Below, his signature on the historic legislation.







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He is the first African-American elected to serve as President of the United States. She is a First Lady widely admired for her intelligence, style and passion. They will be leaving the White House in January 2017 for the next stage of their lives, and an exclusive Collector's Edition set imagines how they might look on that memorable day.

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Memory of 2012 Newtown, Conn., school massacre (News front page, inset) brought the usually cool Obama to tears in January 2016. Near right, he inks executive order to curb gun violence with families of Newtown victims. Far right, he sings "Amazing Grace" at service for victim of 2015 Charleston black church massacre.

# TEARS FLOW

## But no action on gun plague

**E**motionally, nothing tugged at the President's spirit as profoundly as gun violence — which, combining homicides, suicides and accidents, kill more than 30,000 Americans every year.

It wasn't just the numbers. It was the nature of the deaths, which tore little children from their mothers and fathers and parishioners from their church.

And it was the fact that despite senseless tragedy after senseless tragedy, Obama couldn't break the National Rifle Association's grip on Washington politics.

He began with caution.

After a terrorist shooting at Fort Hood, and after Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-Ariz.) was shot and nearly killed in an attack that claimed six lives, Obama let pass chances to call for gun control. The same was true when a man shot up an Aurora, Colo., movie theater in July 2012.

It all changed after Newtown.

Shortly after Obama's 2012 reelection, mentally ill gunman Adam Lanza killed 26 people at Connecticut's Sandy Hook Elementary School, including 20 first-graders.

Visibly shaken and choking back tears as he read their names, the President then pivoted hard towards gun reform, declaring:

"We're going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this, regardless of the politics."

That effort fell apart in Congress, however, after the NRA and congressional Republicans blocked background check legislation or any other gun measures.

Obama grew increasingly distraught with each subsequent mass shooting. After white supremacist Dylann Roof murdered nine black parishioners at Charleston AME Church, Obama led a prayer service in singing "Amazing Grace."



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GETTY

The President hugs courageous shooting survivor Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (top) before his State of the Union address in 2012. Above, the Obamas at service last July for Dallas police officers gunned down while guarding Black Lives Matter rally.



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President Obama holds the hand of Amelia Boynton as they cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., in 2015 on the 50th anniversary of an attack on voting rights protesters. Boynton was one of the protesters beaten on the march known as “Bloody Sunday.” Also with Obama is Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and Michelle Obama, along with former President George W. Bush and his wife Laura (far right).

# RACE & GRACE

## Fight far from over

**B**arack Obama knew what the nation knew: That the election of its first black President, in a nation haunted by the original sin of slavery, was itself historic.

The Hawaii-born son of a white Kansan mother and a black Kenyan father, Obama handled questions about America’s color line deftly throughout his 2008 campaign, giving an acclaimed speech about racial understanding when his pastor’s views came under scrutiny.

But early on, it became clear that the color of his skin gave him special responsibility, and placed upon him special scrutiny.

When he reacted to the unmerited arrest of African American Harvard University Prof. Henry Louis Gates, saying, “There’s a long history in this country of African Americans and Latinos being stopped by law enforcement disproportionately,” he sustained a deafening blowback.

So too when, in the wake of the shooting death of teenager Trayvon Martin, he said, “If I had a son, he’d look like Trayvon.”

And, again, when he tried to navigate the tricky terrain of Black Lives Matter by expressing sympathy for the growing movement’s goals while simultaneously supporting police.

Following sometimes-violent protests in Ferguson, Mo., he organized a task force to reform policing. And he increasingly talked about the need for prison and sentencing reform, an effort that gained steam in Congress but failed to pass before Donald Trump’s election victory likely ended that push.

Through it all, simmering in the background, a small but angry slice of the nation peddled a toxic, racist lie: That Obama was not born in America, and therefore was an ineligible President.

For many, Obama has bridged large gaps in America’s racial divides. But his presidency also revealed that the nation is still wracked by the legacies of its founding social evil.



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In a moment that shows how far race relations have to go, Obama talks with young civil rights leaders in the Oval Office in 2014 after a public outcry followed the police killing of a black man in Ferguson, Mo. But we have also come a long way. The President sits in the Rosa Parks bus in a Michigan museum in 2012.



# CALL WAS DEAD ON

## Risky gamble to raid Osama's lair paid off

**I**t was the annual White House Correspondents' dinner, when Washington's glitterati gather and the President stands before them in a tux to make light of them, the town and himself. In the crowd that year, and a target of many Obama punchlines, sat birther-in-chief Donald Trump.

But as Obama smiled broadly, he knew what everyone else would soon learn: That final preparations were underway to target the man responsible for the largest mass murder in American history, Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden.

Obama, as commander in chief, had ordered an elite team of 25 Navy SEALs to conduct a high-risk, pre-dawn raid on the terrorist leader's fortified compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

Nothing was inevitable. If the operation succeeded, Obama would be, at least for a time, a hero. If it failed, it would be his Bay of Pigs, or worse.

The operation itself took 40 minutes, during which the President and his national security team huddled in the Situation Room, in a tableau immortalized in one of the most iconic photographs of the Obama presidency.

It revealed the complexity of the man. A President caricatured as a weak-willed pacifist with insufficient allegiance to America, who was committed to winding down two foreign wars, was battering terrorists via drone – and did not flinch as he commanded a team to kill Public Enemy Number One.

Americans celebrated what seemed a capstone in a war on terrorism that grew out of the smoldering wreckage of the World Trade Centers – only to later discover that the many-headed hydra of radical Islamist violence would resurface again and again.



President Obama, addressing the nation from White House on May 1, 2011, announces killing of Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan by Navy SEALs.



The President, surrounded by Vice President Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other members of his national security team, follow the raid as it goes down.


**The OBAMA YEARS**


Not even a month into his first term, Obama shows he's not all business, smooching the wife and cuddling daughters Malia (l.) and Sasha.

# WAY TO GROW!

## The girls are great

America remembers when they were only this tall. First Daughters Sasha and Malia Obama entered the White House at just 7 and 10 years old – maturing as quickly and quietly as their dad's hair grayed. The eight years that followed made for an extraordinary childhood: The two accompanied their parents around the world, representing the U.S. abroad. Their every outing came with a gaggle of Secret Service escorts. Emulating their mother, they became style icons and role models for young women.

But they were also regular kids – and despite the President and First Lady's attempts at privacy, snippets from the growing girls' personal lives still emerged.

Sasha, now 15, the youngest child to inhabit the White House since John F. Kennedy Jr., was outed by her dad as possibly operating a secret Twitter account. She geeked out upon meeting Hollywood hunk Ryan Reynolds last year at a state dinner, and spent a week over the summer working at a fast-food seafood joint on Martha's Vineyard. Eighteen-year-old Malia, meanwhile, learned to drive under the tutelage of the Secret Service and interned on the set of HBO's "Girls."

Like other children, they wanted a puppy. The President, having promised his daughters a pooch during his 2008 campaign, delivered post-inauguration with a Portuguese water dog named Bo. Sunny, a female of the same breed, was added in 2013.

The family will likely stick around in Washington "a couple of years" after their White House move-out so that Sasha can complete high school, the President said in March. Malia, following her gap year, plans to enroll at Harvard University in the fall.

"They are wonderful girls," Obama told Jimmy Fallon last year. "They're smart and funny, but most importantly, they're kind. They don't have an attitude ... They've just turned out to be incredible kids. I could not be prouder."



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The Obamas head to church in 2013. Inset left, Sasha and dad share a quiet moment in Great Falls, Va., in 2014.

AP

# The OBAMA YEARS

Schoolchildren help First Lady Michelle Obama harvest vegetables from the White House garden (far right) in 2014. Just like any other parent or spouse, Michelle picks up a few things at a Target in Alexandria, Va., in 2011; and in 2013, she shared a moment with Elmo. Bottom, Michelle surprised middle-schoolers in Washington by breaking into dance as part of her push to promote physical fitness.



# 1ST LADY OF THE HOUSE

Michelle has class, style and smarts





The First Lady gives two thumbs up in 2014 to Army Ranger Cory Remsburg, who was wounded in Afghanistan. She talks with students (below) on a visit to a school for girls in London in 2015.



**T**he odds that Michelle Obama will run for President in 2020 are beyond long. But it's not because we don't want her.

From the moment Barack Obama was elected in 2008 she has been her husband's better half. Her approval numbers soared to 72% in those early days, and she closed out 2016 right around her two-term average of 65%.

Message to Michelle: We like you ... we really like you.

To be honest, things were not always so rosy. By all accounts, she was a reluctant campaigner and early on took some hits, most notably when she stated in one 2008 speech that "for the first time in my adult lifetime I am really proud of my country."

Truly, a don't-believe-I-would've-said-that moment, but we all moved on – and up – together.

From her official First Lady missions on behalf of children's health, veterans' welfare, boys' and girls' education worldwide to her less explicit, but no less crucial efforts to raise the esteem of African-American women and girls, to name sexual assault for the odious transgression it is, to face this country's original sin head on, Obama has been an object lesson in keeping it real.

And in spite of the vile characterizations from a racist core that was going to hold on to that early misstep, and nurture it into countless hateful memes and commentaries, she did it with grace and especially humor. She told the world her secret to keeping her poise at the 2016 Democratic National Convention: "When they go low, we go high."

Sigh.

So while #Michelle2020 may live only in our dreams – she promptly squelched any notions of another President Obama – we have lots to remember: The dignity, the glamour, the passion, and the love. And then of course, there's the History of the Mom Dance.

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Michelle adjusts the President's tie in 2015. The couple share a laugh in 2014 and dance at the White House in 2009.

# POWER COUPLE

Leading, laughing, loving

**M**arriage is a tricky dance for anyone – and that goes double, or triple, when you're the First Couple. Which is why it's all the more remarkable that Barack and Michelle Obama have made the intricate steps look so easy during their eight years in the White House.

It helps, of course, when you've got the perfect partner to share the dance floor – and the world's brightest spotlight.

The 44th President has proudly acknowledged that he cherishes his wife. She is, he has said, his "rock."

"Obviously, I couldn't have done anything that I've done without Michelle," he said in an interview with Oprah Winfrey in 2011. "I count on her in so many ways every single day."

Michelle Obama has made no secret of her love for her husband.

"That's my man!" she tweeted about him last year. "Your truth, dignity and grace reminds us what real leadership looks like."

On the other hand, she's also teased him about getting older – like real longtime couples do.

"Your hair's a little grayer," she tweeted to her followers on his 52nd birthday in 2013, "but I love you more than ever."

No kidding. The super duo celebrated their 24th wedding anniversary on Oct. 3 – and they still have the look of love and act like a pair of newlyweds.

They hold hands constantly. They make room for date night and a Broadway show.

They're constantly leaning in – foreheads touching in a tender unspoken mind-meld of marital realness.

In picture after picture they're seen gazing at each other – wearing telltale expressions that reveal the love. How's that for a marriage role model?

The presidency and residency at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. is about to be over.

For Barack and Michelle Obama, the dance goes on.



PETE SOUZA



# The OBAMA YEARS

President and First Lady Michelle Obama accept cheers at an awards dinner in September.





POOL

# THE BIG CITY IN HIS SOUL

## Visits playful, painful

**P**resident Obama had no problem giving up the sterling halls of the White House for the chaos, excitement and flavor of Manhattan.

Obama, who received his undergraduate degree from Columbia University in 1983, came back to the city numerous times throughout his eight years in office for purposes that ranged from his annual stately speeches to the UN General Assembly to date-night jaunts with Michelle to trendy restaurants across the city, including Blue Hill, Maialino and Estela.

He held fund-raisers at famous spots like Upland, The Nomad, ABC Kitchen and Carbone.

Obama also enjoyed Broadway, taking his wife to “A Raisin in the Sun” in April 2014, and daughters Sasha and Malia to a July 2015 matinee performance of “Hamilton,” where he received a standing ovation from the audience.

There were somber occasions, too, like in 2011, when he and his predecessor, George W. Bush, stood side-by-side at the north pool of the 9/11 memorial on the 10th anniversary of the terror attack that brought down the World Trade Center.

New York came to Obama, too. In April 2010, the Yankees, just months removed from their 2009 World Series championship, visited the White House.

“It’s the people underneath the pinstripes that set this team apart,” he said.



Obama, with Michelle and George W. Bush, pay tribute on 10th anniversary of WTC attack (above). Mayor de Blasio helps him make a tough and tasty decision at Junior’s in Brooklyn in 2014. He walked with his kids and some friends through Central Park in 2015 (below).

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The President and Vice President Biden putt-er around the White House (r.) in 2009. Obama shoots pool at Camp David in 2012, and shoots hoops at Georgia Tech (below) after a speech in 2015.



Obama plays coach to daughter Sasha's basketball team in 2011.



# Hooping it up

**E**ven with his busy schedule, President Obama always made time for his biggest nonpolitical passion: Basketball.

To say that Obama was a fan of hoops — both playing, watching and studying — would be an understatement.

“O” pretty much played ball whenever he possibly could, including at playgrounds at campaign stops in 2008 and 2012, and at gyms while on state visits across the world.

He even hired former Duke University forward Reggie Love as his personal assistant, aide and “body-man,” and frequently played b-ball with him during their time together.

Obama famously also invited ESPN into his inner-most fanboy thoughts, filling out his NCAA college basketball playoff tournament bracket in an annual spring tradition the sports network dubbed “Baracketology.”

But his love of sports spanned beyond hoops, as he made time for billiards, football and, not least of all, golf.

Obama played more than 300 rounds during his time in office, making him the most avid putter since Dwight Eisenhower, who built a green on the White House lawn.

He also appeared to relish the White House visits of championship-winning teams and never let his Chicago pride get in the way of a good jab at a rival. During the Green Bay Packers’ 2011 visit to Washington, Obama, a Chicago Bears fan, joked that they were only there to “rub it in.”

**HE SHOOTS,**



The President tries to avoid being sacked by Bo, the First Dog, at the White House in 2009.

THE WHITE HOUSE

# MAKING TIME TO PLAY

## Even leader of the free world needs some fun

**E**ven President Obama's political critics would admit that that outgoing commander-in-chief was truly a commander of cool – with a tremendous sense of comic timing.

He gleefully entertained people with hilarious segments like BuzzFeed's "Things Everyone Does But Doesn't Talk About" (which featured Obama playing with a selfie stick and poking fun at himself with the "Thanks Obama" meme); sparred with Zach Galifianakis on his bizarre "Between Two Ferns" program; danced with Ellen DeGeneres, and "slow jammed the news" with NBC's Jimmy Fallon.

"Have you been watching all the election coverage this week about Donald Trump," Fallon asked in a sing-song voice during Obama's June 2016 spot on the show.

"No, I have been watching my new favorite show, 'Orange is not the New Black,'" Obama replied, prompting raucous laughter.

That fun file doesn't even include the countless times Obama clowned around with actors (such as appearing on Jerry Seinfeld's "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee"), sports figures (mastering McKayla Maroney's "not impressed" face) and musicians (singing "Sweet Home Chicago" with B.B. King during a 2012 White House concert), or even his popularization of the fist-bump.

Obama literally dropped the mic at his final appearance at the White House Correspondents dinner last April, when he ended his speech with two memorably cool words. "Obama out."

But one of his last comic appearances is now bittersweet – an October appearance on "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" where he read various mean tweets about himself.

One was from Republican nominee Donald Trump, who was lagging behind Hillary Clinton in the polls.

"President Obama will go down as perhaps the worst president in the history of the United States!" the Trump tweet read.

Obama responded, "At least I will go down as a President."



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**In 2015 Jerry Seinfeld (top left) tried to get the President's attention, tapping on the Oval Office window for 'Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee.'**

**President Obama hams it up with Jimmy Fallon (left) in June and jammed with blues legend B.B. King at the White House in 2012 (center).**





THE WHITE HOUSE



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**P**resident Obama never left any doubt that he loves his daughters, Sasha and Malia, dearly, but he also appeared to have a blast with all the other kids who visited the White House.

While all Presidents are bound to the time-honored tradition of kissing babies, Obama actually appeared to do it with love.

The annual "Easter Egg Roll," held on the White House's South Lawn, as well as yearly Halloween events there, brought hundreds of happy children through the President's abode, including in October 2012, a jovial young boy dressed as Spider-Man, and an infant, in October 2015, who came dressed as The Pope.

A photo of Obama holding up Ella Rhodes (the daughter of his deputy national security adviser), adorned in an elephant onesie, captured the affection of the world when it went viral last year.

Obama also memorably welcomed to the White House six-year-old Alex Myteberi, of Scarsdale, N.Y., after he had written a letter to the President asking if Omran Daqneesh – the young Syrian boy whose picture sitting in an ambulance became a devastating reminder of war there – could come live with him.

"You, being so nice and kind, hopefully makes other people think the same way," Obama told little Myteberi during his White House visit.

Obama annually welcomed a generation of young scientists during the yearly White House Science Fairs.

And he'd occasionally let his own inner-child out – once getting into a water gun fight with daughter Sasha during a trip to Camp David on her birthday weekend in 2011.

President Obama bonds with elephantine Ella (top), daughter of national security adviser Ben Rhodes, at a White House Halloween event in 2015. He pretends to be ensnared in web (above) cast by 3-year-old Spider-Man Nicholas Tamarin; greets Josephine Gronniger (r.) in July 2015 and dons festive headwear (far r.) with Brownies from Tulsa, Okla., during annual White House Science Fair in May 2014.



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# HARSH REALITY

## Big successes tinged with brutal failures

**E**ight years later, that initial spirit of hope he conjured has faded. The echoes of his speeches have died down.

In place of that poetry are pages and pages of prose from two terms of President Obama's governance.

Obama's accomplishments are significant — some would argue profound. At the same time, we know enough today to say that his shortcomings are real, and, particularly with a Trump administration on the horizon, his legacy hangs in the balance.

Nasty reality has reared its head — sometimes the result of deliberate strategies by Obama's political foes, other times the result of the President's own inability to move from philosopher-king to pragmatic problem-solver.

An economy that wheezed and limped when he took office today is breathing in through healthy lungs and jogging. With little to no help from a Republican-controlled Congress, Obama created the conditions for a record streak of private-sector job creation.

But even as those jobs, jobs, jobs materialized, too many Americans remain on the sidelines, not in the workforce. The American Dream remains out of focus for millions, including many of the 63 million voters for whom Donald Trump's complaints about a rigged economy plagued by anemic growth resounded.

his 2008 run quickly gave way — with viciously obstinate Republicans deserving a large share of the blame — to instincts to hunker down in partisan camps.

It is overseas that Obama's grand ambitions ran most violently onto the rocky shores.

Though Osama Bin Laden is dead and Al Qaeda, for a time, seemed crippled, radical Islamist jihadism is resurgent. And ISIS, a virulent offshoot of the terrorist network that attacked America on Sept. 11, 2001, is emboldened by a commander-in-chief who did too little, too late to stem its rise.

Though the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are, on paper, over, U.S. forces continue to fight the war on terrorism in many corners of the globe, punishing adversaries and putting lives at risk. Obama would be the first to say those fights are necessary; but this is not the more peaceful planet we were promised.

An Arab Spring that seemed as though it would mark the rise of American ideals has in most cases strengthened the hand of authoritarian and extremist forces.

In Iran, an attempt to bring an extremist regime into the community of nations succeeded, again on paper, but fine print and the messy realities of geopolitics have left the so-called Islamic Republic emboldened.



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The passage of the Affordable Care Act was a potentially seismic domestic policy achievement — expanding coverage and primary care to Americans regardless of their means.

But the underlying mechanics of that law rest on an unstable, perhaps unsustainable foundation. Trump and the incoming Congress have promised to undo it, even as they know full well its many popular provisions are here to stay.

Obama's strength, Herculean though it seemed at times, was unable to wrestle with America's most vexing challenges.

The gun lobby continues to rule the roost at the federal level, frustrating every well-intentioned effort to save lives taken and forever scarred by firearm violence. Mass shootings, including the most horrific in our long history, have been a disgustingly regular feature of his tenure.

Despite his promises to reform the nation's broken immigration policies, the President failed, as his predecessors had, to persuade the Congress to forge a better way.

Most glaringly, the unifying spirit Obama spoke of repeatedly during

Some, including the President-elect and the Republican-controlled Congress, hold Obama in low regard and are eager to discard much of what he accomplished.

But the November election cannot change the fact that Barack Obama leaves office having won the abiding affection of millions of Americans, many of whom consider him a great President. There is good reason his public approval dwarfs that of both major-party candidates who ran to replace him.

His supporters see a man who kept his head held high and his priorities in line even as he endured an endless barrage of slings and arrows, some of them poison-tipped.

A man who personified integrity.

Who grappled honestly with complex challenges.

Who tried his level best to heal an embittered nation.

Who, refusing to settle for cosmetic victories, delivered concrete improvements in millions of lives.

These Americans confidently await the judgment of history on the man who, for eight years, they were proud to call their President.



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**The end of an era is marked by Obama consoling Hillary Clinton after she lost to Donald Trump in November; Trump, in turn, accepts congratulations (below) from Obama on Nov. 10. The 44th President will soon join the ranks of unemployed Presidents - Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush (far left).**



AP

