



“Now, I’m free to do whatever”: Michelle Obama explains her \$3,900 Balenciaga boots

With the White House years behind her, the former first lady made her boldest fashion choice yet.

By Nadra Nittle | Dec 20, 2018, 6:25pm EST

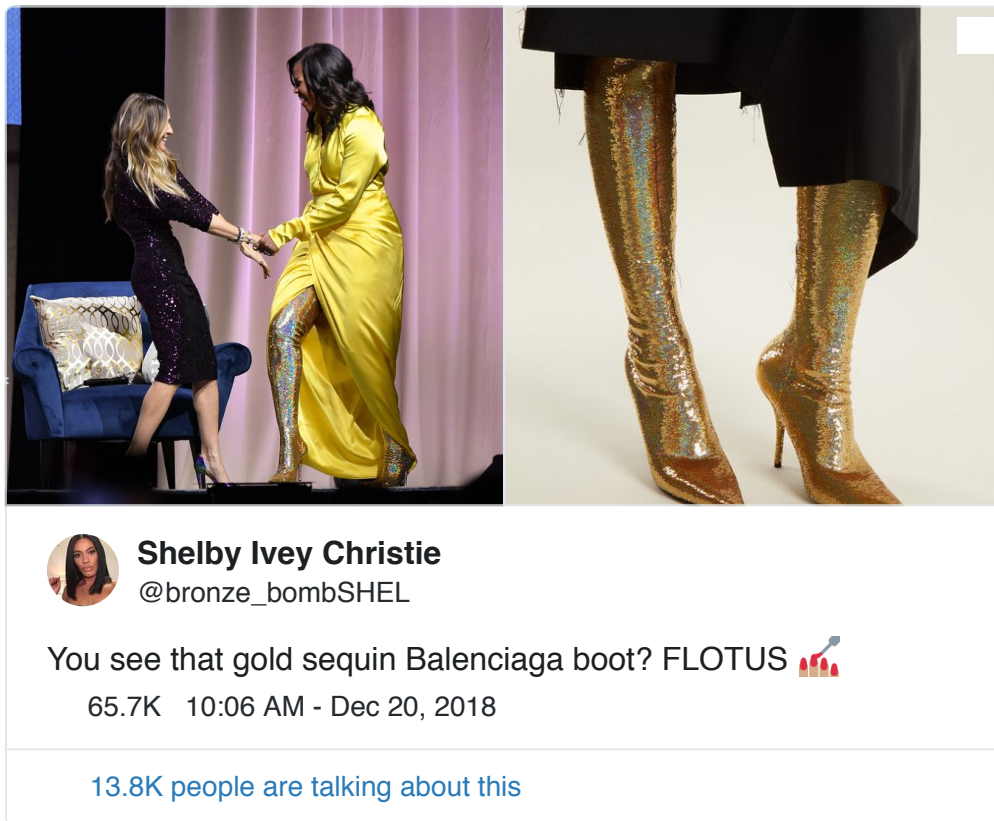


Michelle Obama's sparkly Balenciaga boots trended on social media and are nearly sold out. | Dia Dipasupil/Getty Images



In one appearance, Michelle Obama did for Balenciaga boots what it took a hit TV show for **Sarah Jessica Parker to do for Manolo Blahniks**. During the most recent stop on the book tour for her bestselling memoir *Becoming*, the former first lady dropped by Brooklyn's Barclays Center Wednesday night for a discussion with Parker.

While the *Sex and the City* star was clad in a holiday-appropriate sequin dress, Obama's sparkly **\$3,900 Balenciaga boots** got all the attention. In fact, by Thursday afternoon, the boots were trending on Twitter and were nearly sold out on the Balenciaga website.



As a two-term first lady, Michelle Obama was without a doubt a style influencer. The **clothes she wore routinely sold out**, whether they cost thousands of dollars or **fewer than a hundred**.

Her successor, **Melania Trump**, a former model, has repeatedly made headlines for fashion gaffes — such as wearing **stilettos on her way to hurricane-ravaged Texas**, an “**I don’t really care. Do U?**” jacket on a trip to see detained migrant children, or a **colonizer-style ensemble to a trip to Kenya**. But Michelle Obama stood out by **embracing young designers** and **championing retailers** that middle-class families could afford to wear, like J. Crew, the Gap, and Target. Obama, after all, served as first-lady as the nation rebounded from an economic recession.

With Parker, Obama discussed the significance of her sartorial choices in the White House, acknowledging that she was a fashion influencer and explaining why she chose to wear some designers and not others.

“You learn there are people in this scene who feel entitled to these things because they’ve done it for a while,” Obama told Parker about her interactions with fashion designers. “And I sensed that feeling of, like, ‘Oh, you think this is just yours? There are a lot of people out here trying to make it; young people, women, black folks, and immigrants.’”

During her early years as first lady, for example, world-famous designer **Oscar de la Renta criticized Obama for not wearing his fashions**. He also complained about an outfit she wore during a meeting with England's Queen Elizabeth. "You don't go to Buckingham Palace in a sweater," he griped.

Such comments signaled that fashion's elite thought Obama, raised working class on Chicago's South Side, simply didn't understand what was appropriate attire. But the former first lady explained to Parker that she chose to work with designers who treated her staff well and had a "good spirit." She finally wore an Oscar de la Renta gown in 2014 to a fashion education workshop she hosted at the White House.

Obama told Parker that during her time as first lady she learned that "fashion does have meaning." To many people, what she wore carried as much significance as what she said or did. It's a lesson that Melania Trump is still learning. But now that she's no longer in the White House, Obama is able to let loose, as shown by her thigh-high Balenciaga boots.

Obama made a point to buy all of the clothes she wore as first lady, but that likely wouldn't have mitigated criticism of such an extravagant pair of boots. Wearing the Balenciagas while in the White House likely would have led to charges of insensitivity, as many Americans don't even earn \$3,900 in a month.

Now that she's no longer first lady, the boots are far more than a sign of excess. Her memoir, which chronicles her rise from Chicago's South Side to the White House, is about how she arrived, and the Balenciagas symbolize how far she's come. **Women over 40 are told to play it safe with fashion** and **African Americans who flaunt their wealth**, including **Obama herself**, tend to be criticized for not showing humility. But the former first lady has thrown to caution to the wind.

"Now, I'm free to do whatever," she told Parker, adding that there was no real message behind the boots. She simply liked them.

"They were just really cute," she explained. "I was like, 'Those some nice boots!'"

*Want more stories from The Goods by Vox? **Sign up for our newsletter here.***