

Does Michelle Obama Think Short People Are Racists?



A few years ago, First Lady Michelle Obama was a guest on David Letterman's show. She told a humorous story that night about a trip she had taken to a *Target* store. Dressed somewhat in disguise in hopes of avoiding detection and drawing a crowd, she shopped the aisles until one of the other shoppers approached her.

"Excuse me," the female shopper said to her. "I just have to ask you something."

At that moment, Obama feared she had been recognized. Once she heard the next comment that left the shopper's mouth, however, she realized she hadn't been: "Can you reach on that shelf and hand me the detergent?"

The cute story prompted a big laugh from Letterman, his audience, and Obama herself. Obama went on to describe that the woman was short and just needed a tall person's help.

Flash-forward to this week when *People Magazine* released excerpts from an interview they conducted with both Michelle and President Obama: In the interview, Mrs. Obama once again told that story of her experience at the *Target* store. Only this time, instead of presenting it as an endearing, humorous anecdote, she presented it as an example of racial prejudice in modern day America.

The interview, titled "The Obamas: How We Deal with Our Own

Racist Experiences”, covers a few instances of how the Obamas have faced racism in their adult lives. Such examples include Barack Obama having trouble catching cabs, years ago, on the South Side of Chicago, and being mistaken for a car valet outside a restaurant. Michelle Obama’s contribution was the *Target* story.

She told *People*: “I tell this story – I mean, even as the first lady – during that wonderfully publicized trip I took to Target, not highly disguised, the only person who came up to me in the store was a woman who asked me to help her take something off a shelf. Because she didn’t see me as the first lady, she saw me as someone who could help her. Those kinds of things happen in life. So it isn’t anything new.”

You know, I’ve been writing for this website for over three years now, and in that time I don’t recall ever being critical of anything Michelle Obama has said or done... But her apparent accusation that racial prejudice was what compelled someone to ask her for help is so utterly ridiculous that it *has* to be called out.

Short people ask tall people to reach things for them. It happens in stores all over the world each and every day. It transcends gender, ethnicity, and religion. Most people are more than happy to fulfill the simple favor when asked, without reading ugly, prejudiced motivations or condescension in those who ask it.

Lucy McCalmont of *The Politico* tried to help the First Lady out a bit. In a piece she wrote on the interview, she claimed that the shopper had assumed Mrs. Obama was actually a *Target* employee, and thus the story was similar to her husband’s tale about being mistaken for a valet. The problem is that that couldn’t possibly have been true. Beyond the fact that Mrs. Obama has never made that claim, the photo used in this column shows what Obama was wearing that day in the store. No one would have mistaken her for an employee, being that Target

workers famously wear red shirts and khaki pants.

A few others in the charitable media have suggested that the unknown shopper may have recognized Mrs. Obama as the First Lady, and wanted to take some personal pleasure in inconveniencing her. Talk about a cynical theory – one that stands at odds with Obama's own words on Letterman's show, as well as any logical, reasonable thought process.

I would hope, for Michelle Obama's sake, that *People Magazine* somehow took her comments totally out of context, and that she was applying the story to a completely different point. That doesn't seem to be the case, but I suppose it's possible. If not, I think it's safe to say that the *Target* incident was not at all about *racism*, but rather *elitism* – and not on the part of the other shopper.

Casting an American as being racially prejudiced for asking a simple, common favor is unbecoming of a First Lady, but it does perhaps reflect the growing racial tension we've seen in this country in recent years. All of us should find that very sad.

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