



**West End Elementary Naming Committee
Recommendation: Katherine Johnson**

Katherine Johnson

Human Computer who Shattered Stereotypes

**“Find out what your dream is and then work at it.
Because if you like what you’re doing, you will do well.”**



“Everything is physics and math.”

Katherine G. Johnson (1918 -) was born in West Virginia and **made the most of limited educational opportunities for African Americans, graduating from college at age 18**. She began working in aeronautics as a "computer" in 1952, and after the [formation of NASA](#), she **performed the calculations that sent astronauts into orbit in the early 1960s and to the moon in 1969**. Johnson was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015, and saw her story brought to light through a book and a feature film the following year.

Early Years and Education

Katherine G. Johnson was born Katherine Coleman on August 26, 1918, in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. A bright child with a gift for numbers, she breezed through her classes and **completed the eighth grade by age 10**. Although her town didn't offer classes for African Americans after that point, her father, Joshua, drove the family 120 miles to Institute, West Virginia, where they lived while she attended high school. Of her childhood, she said, **"I counted everything. I counted the steps to the road, the steps up to church, the number of dishes and silverware I washed ... anything that could be counted, I did."**

Johnson enrolled at West Virginia State College (now West Virginia State University) in Institute, West Virginia, where she encountered a hands-on faculty. One particularly engaged professor was Dr. William W. Schieffelin Claytor, the third African American to earn a Ph.D. in mathematics, who was determined to prepare Johnson to become a research mathematician. **At age 18, she graduated summa cum laude with degrees in mathematics and French.**

The following year, **Johnson became one of three students to desegregate West Virginia University's graduate school in Morgantown.** However, she found the environment less welcoming than it had been in Institute, and never completed her program there.

The 'Computer'

Beginning in the late 1930s, Johnson taught math and French at schools in Virginia and West Virginia. In 1952, Johnson learned that the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) was hiring African-American women to serve as "computers;" namely, people who performed and checked calculations for technological developments. Johnson applied, and the following year she was accepted for a position at Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia.

Johnson not only proved adept at her calculations, she **displayed a curiosity and assertiveness that caught her superiors by surprise.** "The women did what they were told to do," she recalled. "They didn't ask questions or take the task any further. **I asked questions; I wanted to know why.**" After only two weeks, Johnson was transferred from the African-American computing pool to Langley's flight research division, where she talked her way into meetings and earned additional responsibilities. She achieved success despite difficulties at home: In 1956, her husband died of a brain tumor.

NASA Pioneer

In 1958, after NACA was reformulated into the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), **Johnson was among the people charged with determining how to get a human into space and back.** The following year she remarried, to decorated Navy and Army officer James A. Johnson.

For Johnson, calculating space flight came down to the basics of geometry: "The early trajectory was a parabola, and it was easy to predict where it would be at any point," she said. "Early on, when they said they wanted the capsule to come down at a certain place, they were trying to compute when it should start. I said, 'Let me do it. You tell me when you want it and where you want it to land, and I'll

do it backwards and tell you when to take off.' " As a result, **the task of plotting the path for [Alan Shepard's 1961 journey to space, the first in American history, fell on her shoulders.](#)**

The next challenge was to send a man in orbit around Earth. This involved far more difficult calculations, to account for the gravitational pulls of celestial bodies, and by then NASA had begun using electronic computers. Yet, the job wasn't considered complete until **Johnson was summoned to check the work of the machines, providing the go-ahead to propel [John Glenn](#) into successful orbit in 1962.**

While the work of electronic computers took on increased importance at NASA, Johnson remained highly valuable for her unwavering accuracy. She performed calculations for the historic 1969 [Apollo 11](#) trip to the moon, and the following year, when [Apollo 13](#) experienced a malfunction in space, her contributions to contingency procedures helped ensure its safe return.

Johnson continued to serve as a key asset for NASA, helping to develop its Space Shuttle program and Earth Resources Satellite, until her retirement in 1986.

Awards and Legacy

Johnson has been honored with an array of awards for her groundbreaking work. Among them are the 1967 NASA Lunar Orbiter Spacecraft and Operations team award, and the National Technical Association's designation as its 1997 Mathematician of the Year. Additionally, she has earned honorary degrees from SUNY Farmingdale, Maryland's Capitol College, Virginia's Old Dominion University and West Virginia University.

In November 2015, President [Barack Obama](#) presented Johnson with the **Presidential Medal of Freedom**. Margot Lee Shetterly's 2016 book *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Who Helped Win the Space Race* celebrated the little-known story of Johnson and her fellow African-American computers. It was also turned into an Oscar-nominated feature film, *Hidden Figures* (2016).

A year later, in September 2017, 99-year-old Johnson was honored by NASA, with the dedication of a new research building which is named after her — the **Katherine G. Johnson Computational Research Facility**. Johnson, her family and friends were at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new building which is part of NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia.

"We're here to honor the legacy of one of the most admired and inspirational people ever associated with NASA," Langley Director David Bowles said in a [press release](#). "I can't imagine a better tribute to Mrs. Johnson's character and accomplishments than this building that will bear her name."

Johnson's humble response to a building named after her was said with a laugh: "You want my honest answer? I think they're crazy." Known for her humility, she credits her parents with teaching her that **"You are no better than anyone else, and no one is better than you."**

Her trailblazing contributions were celebrated at the dedication ceremony where Margot Lee Shetterly, the author of *Hidden Figures* and keynote speaker, said of the "[human computers](#)": "We are living in a present that they willed into existence with their pencils, their slide rules, their mechanical calculating machines — and, of course, their brilliant minds." She said to Johnson: "Your work changed our history and your history has changed our future." When asked to give her advice to NASA employees who will follow in her footsteps and work in the new building named after her, Johnson simply said: "Like what you do and then you will do your best."

Spouse and Children

In 1939, Johnson married James Francis Goble, with whom she had three daughters. In 1959 she married James A. Johnson.



**West End Elementary Naming Committee
Recommendation: Day-Ochoa**

Ferdinand T. Day

Civil Rights Icon, Education Pioneer and Trailblazer

"We had some hectic periods, but in the end, people of goodwill prevailed."



Ferdinand T. Day (1918-2015) was a trailblazer of historic proportions in the commonwealth. He was the **first black School Board Member in Virginia** — and the **first black School Board Chairman**. He oversaw Board policy when the city's schools made the difficult and controversial decision to consolidate all high school students at the then-new T.C. Williams High School.

Day was born in Alexandria on August 7, 1918, into what he called, "a typical southern port city. I love Alexandria very dearly," he said. "Alexandria has been very good to me. I have a great many friends throughout the city, both black and white. In a speech last fall, he expanded on that thought. "In my day, however, there were admittedly many injustices and shameful wrongs to be corrected.... Most of the problems then inherent in the Deep South were prevalent here in Alexandria."

Day was nominated as a Living Legend for his role in the integration of Alexandria schools and his work in obtaining rights and opportunities for African Americans in our city by former City Manager Vola Lawson, who recalled meeting Fred Day when she and others active in the civil

(Sources: Theismann, Jeanne (2015, January). Alexandria Civil Rights Pioneer Ferdinand Day Dies- The force behind the philosophy of "Every Student Counts." Gazette Packet. Retrieved from

<http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2015/jan/08/civil-rights-pioneer-ferdinand-day-dies/>.)

The Uncommon Fred Day: Student commons named to honor former School Board member. Gazette Packet. (2006, June 21). Retrieved from <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2006/jun/21/the-uncommon-fred-day/>.

Watters, Krista (2008, March 14). Meet Ferdinand T. Day Who Battled Segregation. Gazette Packet. Retrieved from <http://www.tisaraphoto.com/legends07/day.htm>.)

rights movement were picketing in Alexandria in the 1960s. "We picketed the ABC stores because they would not employ blacks, and Diamond Cab Company because they wouldn't hire black drivers or pick up black passengers. And we picketed City Hall because they flew the Confederate Flag," recalled Lawson. "Day was very much a part of the civil rights movement here in the sixties," she said. Day himself did not take part in the pickets, but offered moral support and advice. "He would say, 'Always comport yourself in a dignified manner, so the focus is on the issue, not on you.'"

Day attended the segregated Parker-Gray Elementary School through seventh grade. There was no public high school for African American youth in Alexandria, so he made the daily trek into Washington, D.C., where he graduated from Armstrong Technical High School in 1935.

Later he earned a B.S. degree, with a major in geography and history, from Minor Teachers College in D.C. Being unable to teach in his hometown, he found employment with the Federal government, participating in the Department of State Administrative Intern Program. He also completed advanced management courses at the Foreign Service Institute. Day retired from the U.S. Department of State as a Foreign Service Reserve Officer in 1978.

When he spoke at the Alexandria Education Partnership Awards Dinner on May 17, 2008, he reminded attendees that the date was the 53rd anniversary of the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision on **Brown vs. Board of Education. In response to that decision, the Alexandria City Council eventually expanded the City's public school board from 6 to 9 members, and appointed Day as one of the three new members. The date was July 1, 1964, ten years after the Brown decision. He was the only African American on the board.**

With then Superintendent John Albohm, the new board worked to achieve the **integration of Alexandria's public schools**, a process neither quick nor easy. A. Melvin Miller, chairman and acting deputy director of the Alexandria Housing and Redevelopment Authority and a former school board member and chair, worked closely with Ferdinand Day on many issues. Both were part of a group of African American men working toward civil rights and the integration of schools and other public institutions in Alexandria in the late 1950s and early 1960s. "I make a distinction between desegregation and integration," said Miller. **"The steps past token desegregation toward meaningful integration actually occurred with the 1971 consolidation of the high schools into T.C. Williams High School as shown in the film, 'Remember the Titans,'"** Miller said.

Once integration was accomplished on the secondary level, he said, the school system moved on to pairing elementary schools from different neighborhoods. For example, Jefferson-Houston, a largely black inner city school, was paired with Ramsay, a then largely white school

(Sources: Theismann, Jeanne (2015, January). Alexandria Civil Rights Pioneer Ferdinand Day Dies- The force behind the philosophy of "Every Student Counts." Gazette Packet. Retrieved from

[http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2015/jan/08/civil-rights-pioneer-ferdinand-day-dies/.](http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2015/jan/08/civil-rights-pioneer-ferdinand-day-dies/))

The Uncommon Fred Day: Student commons named to honor former School Board member. Gazette Packet. (2006, June 21). Retrieved from [http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2006/jun/21/the-uncommon-fred-day/.](http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2006/jun/21/the-uncommon-fred-day/)

Watters, Krista (2008, March 14). Meet Ferdinand T. Day Who Battled Segregation. Gazette Packet. Retrieved from [http://www.tisaraphoto.com/legends07/day.htm.](http://www.tisaraphoto.com/legends07/day.htm))

in the West End. With the help of busing, their student populations were then blended, with half the grades going to Houston, the other half to Ramsay. These schools then fed into the middle schools, and eventually on up to T.C. Williams, achieving the goal of system-wide integration.

"Certainly Ferdinand was the strong voice and the strong mover, because he was on the school board," said Miller. "His strong leadership and ability to work with the community was what made that successful." **"Fred Day provided the moral leadership that helped Alexandria reconcile its segregated past of racial injustice by appealing to the City's conscience and hopes for a better future,"** Lawson said. "Martin Luther King Jr. believed that to effect the change necessary in America required people who were **tough-minded but tenderhearted**, and that describes my dear friend of 40 years, Fred Day," Lawson continued, calling him "a passionate advocate for educational equality and excellence."

Lewis Stearman, former editor of the old Alexandria Gazette and a longtime friend of Day's, said, "He was one of the outstanding black leaders of our community. **He was a man that knew what he was doing, and set out to make giant achievements.**"

FIRST AS A MEMBER, then as vice chair and chair of the board of Alexandria Public Schools, and as vice-chairman of both the Northern Virginia and the Virginia State Boards of Community Colleges, **Day served for nearly two decades in the cause of improving local education. When he became chair of the Alexandria School Board, he was the first African American chairman of a public school board in Virginia. In 1985, he was selected by the Secretary of Education to assist in the further implementation of the Virginia desegregation plan for higher education.**

Lillian Patterson, curator of the Alexandria Black History Museum, recalled Ferdinand Day as a family friend. Her late husband, E.L. Patterson was also a member of the group working to integrate Alexandria, sometimes called the **Secret Seven**. "Ferdinand was in the forefront of everything that had to do with civil rights and education," she said, "not just formal education, but all the things that help people advance."

Over the years, Day received many awards for outstanding community service from groups such as the Alexandria City Council, Alexandria Olympic Boys and Girls Club, Alexandria Public Schools, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Departmental Progressive Club, Elks Lodge, Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association, Hopkins House Association, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Society for Personnel Administration, Northern Virginia and Washington Urban Leagues, the Virginia Community College System and the U.S. Department of State.

(Sources: Theismann, Jeanne (2015, January). Alexandria Civil Rights Pioneer Ferdinand Day Dies- The force behind the philosophy of "Every Student Counts." Gazette Packet. Retrieved from

<http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2015/jan/08/civil-rights-pioneer-ferdinand-day-dies/>.)

The Uncommon Fred Day: Student commons named to honor former School Board member. Gazette Packet. (2006, June 21). Retrieved from <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2006/jun/21/the-uncommon-fred-day/>.

Watters, Krista (2008, March 14). Meet Ferdinand T. Day Who Battled Segregation. Gazette Packet. Retrieved from <http://www.tisaraphoto.com/legends07/day.htm>.)

Mr. Day, who passed away in 2015 at age 96, was predeceased by his wife Lucille in 2003 and is survived by their daughter, two grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

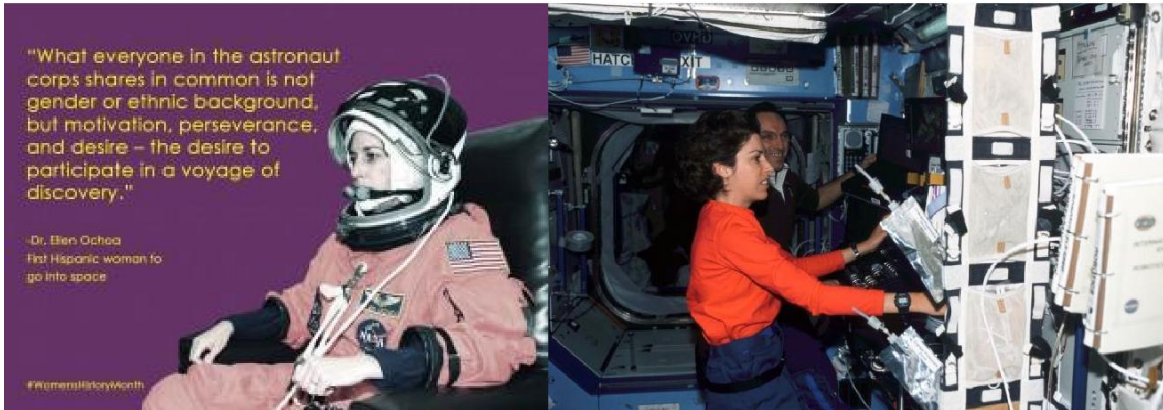
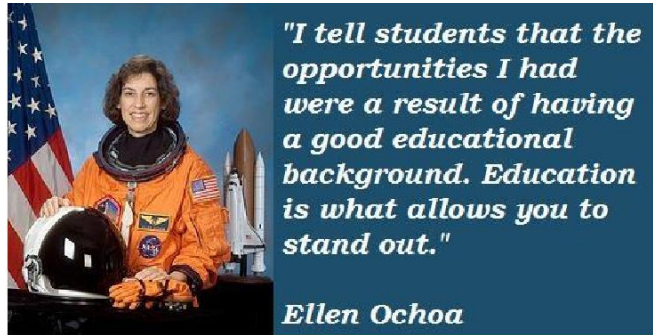
(Sources: Theismann, Jeanne (2015, January). Alexandria Civil Rights Pioneer Ferdinand Day Dies- The force behind the philosophy of "Every Student Counts." Gazette Packet. Retrieved from <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2015/jan/08/civil-rights-pioneer-ferdinand-day-dies/>.)
The Uncommon Fred Day: Student commons named to honor former School Board member. Gazette Packet. (2006, June 21). Retrieved from <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2006/jun/21/the-uncommon-fred-day/>.
Watters, Krista (2008, March 14). Meet Ferdinand T. Day Who Battled Segregation. Gazette Packet. Retrieved from <http://www.tisaraphoto.com/legends07/day.htm>.)



**West End Elementary Naming Committee
Recommendation: Day-Ochoa**

Dr. Ellen Ochoa

First Latina Astronaut, Inventor, and Current Director of “Mission Control”



Dr. Ellen Ochoa (1958-) is a veteran astronaut who was chosen for four space flights and has almost one thousand flight hours to her credit. She was the first Latina to be chosen as an astronaut, and she is now director of NASA’s Johnson Space Center, the second woman to hold the title and the first Latina. She also holds three patents on optical systems that can applied in multiple uses, including space.

The space program was in its infancy during Ochoa’s childhood, so she did not grow up dreaming of becoming an astronaut. Even when the United States began sending men into space (the first manned spaceflight was 1961), the program clearly involved no women.

(Source: Kelly, Kate (2014, September 24). Ellen Ochoa: First Latina Astronaut, Inventor and Now Director of “Mission Control.” Retrieved from <https://americacomesalive.com/2014/09/24/ellen-ochoa-first-latina-astronaut-inventor-now-director-mission-control/>.)

Sally Ride's first flight was in 1983 and this opened a window for many women, but the NASA Training Program has always been highly competitive. **Dr. Ochoa applied three times before she was accepted in 1990.**

Background and Education

Ellen Ochoa was born in 1958 and grew up in La Mesa, California, the middle child of five. Neither parent had college degrees, so the Ochoa children's initial focus was on gaining an education.

Her father served in the Navy and later managed a retail store. He grew up in New Mexico, **the youngest of 12 children born to parents who had emigrated from Mexico. He and his siblings often faced discrimination, and this affected him strongly.** (One example involved the public pool. The Hispanics could only swim on the day before it was to be cleaned; the community felt they would make the water dirty.) As a result, her father wanted his children to assimilate and insisted they not speak Spanish.

Her mother valued family and education. She had no college degree but when Ellen was a baby, her mother began taking college courses—one at a time. It took her 22 years but she achieved her goal and received a college degree. With their mother as a role model, all of the Ochoa children pursued their education.

After graduating at the top of her high school class, Ochoa was offered a scholarship to Stanford, but she opted to stay nearby to help her mother. (Her mother and father divorced while she was growing up.)

Ochoa attended San Diego State University where she sampled many classes in selecting her major course of study. She was a gifted musician (flute player) and considered majoring in music, but **ultimately decided to major in physics after she had been discouraged from engineering, which she had been told was "not a woman's field."**

When she graduated, Ochoa contemplated a career in music or in science; her mother recommended graduate school. This time she was able to pursue her preferred subject as she received an **engineering fellowship to Stanford.**

Specializing in Optical Aspects of Engineering

At Stanford she became fascinated by the field of optics, and between her work at Stanford, and later her employment at Sandia National Laboratory (Livermore, California) and NASA's Ames Research Center (Mountain View, California), she eventually **became the owner of three shared patents.**

Dr. Ochoa investigated optical systems for performing information processing. **Simply put, her work involved helping computers to "see."** One of the patented inventions is an optical

(Source: Kelly, Kate (2014, September 24). Ellen Ochoa: First Latina Astronaut, Inventor and Now Director of "Mission Control." Retrieved from <https://americacomesalive.com/2014/09/24/ellen-ochoa-first-latina-astronaut-inventor-now-director-mission-control/>.)

inspection system, another is an optical object recognition method, and a third is a tool for “noise removal” in images.

On the [Smithsonian](#) education website, Dr. Ochoa provides a very understandable explanation of her work. She describes her patents as involving ways for a computer to find a particular object within an image. This system could be used in manufacturing such as inspecting for flaws, or it might be used on a space vehicle such as the rover that is currently at work on Mars. In the case of space flight, the goal is for the computer to be able to locate and land the vehicle at a particular spot.

Applying to the NASA Training Program

In 1985 Dr. Ochoa applied for the NASA Training Program but she was rejected. She continued her work in optics at Sandia and decided to get a pilot’s license as that might be helpful to her.

In 1987 she applied again. She was again turned down, but she learned she was among the top 100 of the thousands who had applied. **Her third application in 1990 was accepted.** She finished training in 1991, which made her one of 110 astronauts eligible for flight.

Ochoa did not have to wait long. She was soon selected for a mission on **Discovery**, a flight that took place in April of 1993. The purpose of the mission was to conduct atmospheric and solar studies in order to better understand the effect of solar activity on the Earth’s climate and environment. Dr. Ochoa was placed in charge of the Remote Manipulator System (the robot arm). One of her assignments on that flight was to launch and retrieve a satellite. The Spartan satellite was successfully launched into orbit for 2 days before being retrieved by the robotic arm.

In November of 1994 she was payload commander to the **Atlantis** where studies were continued on the energy of the sun. Her third flight was in 1999 on board the **Discovery**; a primary mission of the trip was taking supplies to the International Space Station. Her fourth and final flight was again to **the International Space Station** in 2002 where she was again responsible for manipulating the robotic arm.

Now Director of “Mission Control”

Even after she quit flying, she remained with NASA. In 2008 she became deputy director at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, often called “Mission Control.” **In 2013 Dr. Ochoa took the helm and became director of the entire Space Center, a position she continues to hold.**

Personal Life

Dr. Ochoa and her husband, a fellow NASA employee, have two sons.

(Source: Kelly, Kate (2014, September 24). Ellen Ochoa: First Latina Astronaut, Inventor and Now Director of “Mission Control.” Retrieved from <https://americacomesalive.com/2014/09/24/ellen-ochoa-first-latina-astronaut-inventor-now-director-mission-control/>.)



**West End Elementary Naming Committee
Recommendation: Sonia Sotomayor**

Sonia Sotomayor

Attorney and First Latina Supreme Court Justice

“It’s important to move people beyond just dreaming into doing. They have to be able to see that you are just like them, and you made it.”



Sonia Sotomayor (1954 -) was born as the elder of two children in the South Bronx area of New York City, on June 25, 1954. Her parents, Juan and Celina Baez Sotomayor, were from Puerto Rico and moved to New York City to raise their children. Sotomayor's family functioned on a very modest income; her mother was a nurse at a methadone clinic and was emotionally distant, and her father, an alcoholic, was a tool-and-die worker.

Childhood

She **felt closest to her grandmother**, who she later said gave her a source of "protection and purpose". Sonia was **diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at age seven**, and began taking daily insulin injections. **Her father died** of heart problems at age 42, **when she was nine years old**. **After this, she became fluent in English**. Sotomayor has said that she was first inspired by the strong-willed Nancy Drew book character, and then after her diabetes diagnosis led doctors to suggest a different career from detective, she was inspired to go into a legal

(Sources: Sonia Sotomayor Biography. (2016, June 23). Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/people/sonia-sotomayor-453906>.

Sonia Sotomayor. (2018, January 30). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonia_Sotomayor)

career and become a judge by watching the *Perry Mason* television series. She reflected in 1998: "I was going to college and I was going to become an attorney, and I knew that when I was ten. Ten. That's no jest."

When her father died in 1963, **her mother worked hard to raise her children as a single parent. She placed what Sotomayor would later call an "almost fanatical emphasis" on a higher education,** pushing the children to become fluent in English and making huge sacrifices to purchase a set of encyclopedias that would give them proper research materials for school.

Higher Education

Sotomayor graduated as valedictorian from Cardinal Spellman High School in the Bronx in 1972 and entered **Princeton University on a full scholarship. The young Latina woman felt overwhelmed by her new school and was too intimidated to ask questions during her freshman year. Her writing and vocabulary skills were weak, and she lacked knowledge in the classics. She put in long hours in the library and over summers, worked with a professor outside of class, and gained skills, knowledge, and confidence.** She also became highly involved with the Puerto Rican groups on campus, including Acción Puertorriqueña and the Third World Center. The groups, she said, provided her "with an anchor I needed to ground myself in that new and different world." She also worked with the university's discipline committee, where she started developing her legal skills.

All of Sotomayor's hard work paid off when she graduated summa cum laude from Princeton in 1976. She was also awarded the Pyne Prize, which is **the highest academic award given to Princeton undergraduates.** That same year, Sotomayor entered **Yale Law School on a scholarship,** where she was an editor for the *Yale Law Journal*. She received her J.D. in 1979, passed the bar in 1980 and immediately began work as an assistant district attorney in Manhattan, serving as a trial lawyer under District Attorney Robert Morgenthau.

Legal Practice & Judicial Appointments

In 1984, Sotomayor entered private practice, making partner at the commercial litigation firm Pavia & Harcourt, where she specialized in intellectual property litigation. She moved from associate to partner at the firm in 1988. **While she climbed the ladder there, Sotomayor also served on the board of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, the New York City Campaign Finance Board and the State of New York Mortgage Agency.**

Sotomayor's pro bono work at these agencies caught the attention of Senators [Ted Kennedy](#) and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who were partially responsible for her **appointment as U.S. District Court Judge** for the Southern District of New York City. [President George H.W. Bush](#) nominated her for the position in 1992, which was confirmed unanimously by the Senate on August 11, 1992. **When she joined the court, she was its youngest judge.** On her 43rd birthday, June 25, 1997, she was nominated for the U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals by [President Bill Clinton](#). She was confirmed by the Senate that October.

(Sources: Sonia Sotomayor Biography. (2016, June 23). Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/people/sonia-sotomayor-453906>.

Sonia Sotomayor. (2018, January 30). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonia_Sotomayor)

In addition to her work in the Court of Appeals, Sotomayor **also began teaching law** as an adjunct professor at New York University in 1998 and at Columbia Law School in 1999. She has also received honorary law degrees from Herbert H. Lehman College, Princeton University and Brooklyn Law School. And she served on the Board of Trustees at Princeton.

First Latina Supreme Court Justice

On May 26, 2009, [President Barack Obama](#) announced his nomination of Sotomayor for Supreme Court Justice. The nomination was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in August 2009 by a vote of 68 to 31, making Sotomayor the **first Latina Supreme Court Justice in U.S. history**. During her tenure on the Supreme Court, **Sotomayor has been identified with concern for the rights of defendants, calls for reform of the criminal justice system, and making impassioned dissents on issues of race, gender and ethnic identity.**

Personal Life

In 1976, Sotomayor married Kevin Noonan, whom she had dated since high school. They divorced amicably in 1983; they did not have children.

Quotations:

“I don’t measure myself by others’ expectations or let others define my worth.”

“The challenges I have faced are not uncommon, but neither have they kept me from uncommon achievement.”

“In every position that I’ve been in, there have been naysayers who don’t believe I’m qualified or who don’t believe I can do the work. And I feel a special responsibility to prove them wrong.”

(Sources: Sonia Sotomayor Biography. (2016, June 23). Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/people/sonia-sotomayor-453906>.

Sonia Sotomayor. (2018, January 30). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonia_Sotomayor)



**West End Elementary Naming Committee
Recommendation: Barack and Michelle Obama**

Barack Obama

Attorney and First African-American President of the United States



“Democracy does not require uniformity. Our founders quarreled and compromised, and expected us to do the same. But they knew that democracy does require a basic sense of solidarity – the idea that for all our outward differences, we are all in this together; that we rise or fall as one.”

Barack Obama (1961 -) was the **44th President of the United States**, and the **first African- American to serve in the office**. First elected to the presidency in 2008, he won a second term in 2012. Born in Honolulu in 1961, Barack Obama went on to become **President of the Harvard Law Review** and a **U.S. Senator** representing Illinois before being elected President.

Childhood

Barack Hussein Obama II was born on August 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii. **His mother**, Ann Dunham, was **born on an Army base in Wichita, Kansas**, during World War II. **Obama's father**, Barack Obama Sr., **was born in Kenya**. Obama Sr. grew up herding goats in Africa and, eventually earned a scholarship that allowed him to leave Kenya and pursue his dreams of going to college in Hawaii. While studying at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Obama Sr. met fellow student Ann Dunham, and they married on February 2, 1961.

As a child, Obama did not have a relationship with his father. When his son was still an infant, Obama Sr. relocated to Massachusetts to attend Harvard University and pursue a Ph.D. Obama's parents officially separated several months later and ultimately divorced in March 1964, when their son was two. Soon after, Obama Sr. returned to Kenya.

(Source: Barack Obama Biography. (2018, January 18). Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/people/barack-obama-12782369>.)

In 1965, his mother married Lolo Soetoro, a University of Hawaii student from Indonesia. A year later, **the family moved to Jakarta, Indonesia**, where Obama's half-sister, Maya Soetoro Ng, was born in 1970. Several incidents in Indonesia left Dunham afraid for her son's safety and education so, at the age of 10, Obama was **sent back to Hawaii to live with his maternal grandparents**. His mother and half-sister later joined them.

Education

While living with his grandparents, Obama enrolled in the esteemed Punahou Academy, He excelled in basketball and **graduated with academic honors in 1979. As one of only three black students at the school, Obama became conscious of racism and what it meant to be African-American. Obama also struggled with the absence of his father, who he saw only once more after his parents divorced, when Obama Sr. visited Hawaii for a short time in 1971.**

Ten years later, in 1981, tragedy struck Obama Sr. when he lost both of his legs in a serious car accident. Confined to a wheelchair, he also lost his job. In 1982, Obama Sr. was involved in yet another car accident while traveling in Nairobi. This time, however, the crash was fatal. Obama Sr. died on November 24, 1982, when Obama was 21 years old.

After high school, Obama studied at **Occidental College** in Los Angeles for two years. He then transferred to **Columbia University** in New York City, graduating in 1983 with a degree in political science. After working in the business sector for two years, **Obama moved to Chicago in 1985. There, he worked on the impoverished South Side as a community organizer for low-income residents.**

Law Career

It was during this time that Obama, who said he "was not raised in a religious household," joined the Trinity United Church of Christ. He also visited relatives in Kenya, and paid an emotional visit to the graves of his biological father and paternal grandfather. "For a long time I sat between the two graves and wept," Obama wrote. **"I saw that my life in America—the black life, the white life, the sense of abandonment I'd felt as a boy, the frustration and hope I'd witnessed in Chicago—all of it was connected with this small plot of earth an ocean away."**

Returning from Kenya with a sense of renewal, Obama entered Harvard Law School in 1988. The next year, he met with constitutional law professor Laurence Tribe and their discussion so impressed Tribe, that when Obama asked to join his team as a research assistant, the professor agreed. That same year Obama joined the Chicago law firm of Sidley Austin as a summer associate and it was there **he met Michelle Robinson**, a young lawyer who was assigned to be his adviser. Not long after, the couple began dating. In February 1990, Obama was elected the **first African-American editor of the *Harvard Law Review***. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard Law in 1991.

After law school, Obama returned to Chicago to **practice as a civil rights lawyer** with the firm of Miner, Barnhill & Galland. He also **taught constitutional law** part-time at the University of Chicago Law School between 1992 and 2004—first as a lecturer and then as a professor—and **helped organize voter registration drives** during the 1992 presidential campaign. On October 3, 1992, he and Michelle were married. They moved to Kenwood, on Chicago's South Side, and welcomed two daughters several years later: Malia (born 1998) and Sasha (born 2001).

(Source: Barack Obama Biography. (2018, January 18). Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/people/barack-obama-12782369>.)

Entry into Politics

Obama published an autobiography, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, in 1995. His advocacy work led him to run for a seat in the Illinois State Senate. He ran as a Democrat and won election in 1996.

In 2000, Obama made an unsuccessful Democratic primary run for the U.S. House of Representatives seat held by a four-term incumbent candidate. **Undeterred**, he created a campaign committee in 2002 and began raising funds to run for a seat in the U.S. Senate in 2004.

U.S. Senate Career

Obama was elected to the U.S. Senate from Illinois in 2004. With his win, he became only the third African-American elected to the U.S. Senate since Reconstruction. His second book, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, was published in October 2006. The work discussed Obama's visions for the future of America, many of which became talking points for his eventual presidential campaign.

Presidency

On November 4, 2008, Barack Obama defeated Republican presidential nominee John McCain, to win election as the 44th President of the United States—and the first African-American to hold this office. His running mate, Delaware Senator Joe Biden, became Vice President. During his first term, he worked with Congress to expand health care insurance for children, provide equal pay protection for women, and pass a \$787 billion stimulus bill to promote short-term economic growth.

He signed an executive order banning excessive interrogation techniques and ordered the closing of the military detention facility at Cuba's Guantanamo Bay within a year (a deadline that ultimately would not be met). For these efforts, the Nobel Committee in Norway awarded him the **2009 Nobel Peace Prize**. However, during his presidency, the U.S. remained embroiled in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During his first term, Obama signed the Affordable Care Act and the Budget Control Act of 2011 into law. He also Obama signed a repeal of the military policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." **In the 2012 election, Obama defeated Republican opponent Mitt Romney and Romney's vice-presidential running mate, U.S. Representative Paul Ryan.** During his second term, his administration supported marriage equality, gun control, race relations, combating climate change, and restoring relations with Cuba.

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”



**West End Elementary Naming Committee
Recommendation: Barack and Michelle Obama**

Michelle Obama

Attorney and First African-American First Lady of the United States



“Young people, don’t be afraid. Be focused. Be determined. Be hopeful. Be empowered. Empower yourselves with a good education...then get out there and use that education to build a country worthy of your boundless promise.”

Michelle Obama (1964 -) was born in 1964 in Chicago, Illinois. **She attended Princeton University, graduating *cum laude* in 1985, and went on to earn a degree from Harvard Law School in 1988.** Following her graduation from Harvard, she worked at a Chicago law firm, where she met her husband, future U.S. President Barack Obama. Prior to being First Lady, she was a **lawyer, Chicago city administrator and community-outreach worker.** As First Lady, she focused her attention on current social issues, such as **poverty, healthy living and education.**

Childhood

Michelle Obama was born Michelle LaVaughn Robinson on January 17, 1964, in Chicago, Illinois. She was raised in a small bungalow on Chicago's South Side. Her father, Fraser Robinson, was a city-pump operator and a Democratic precinct captain. Her mother, Marian, was a secretary, but later stayed home to raise Michelle and her older brother. They were a close-knit family, typically sharing meals, reading and playing games together.

Michelle and her brother, Craig, 21 months apart in age, were often mistaken for twins. The siblings also shared close quarters, sleeping in the living room with a sheet serving as a makeshift room divider. They were raised with an emphasis on education and had **learned to read at home by age four.** Both **skipped the second grade.**

(Source: Michelle Obama Biography. (2018, February 1). Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/people/michelle-obama-307592>.)

Of her childhood she has said, **“We learned about dignity and decency—that how hard you work matters more than how much you make ... that helping others means more than just getting ahead yourself.”**

Education

By the sixth grade, Michelle was taking classes in her school's gifted program, where she learned French and completed accelerated courses in biology. **She went on to attend Whitney M. Young Magnet High School, the city's first magnet high school for gifted children**, where, among other activities, she served as the student government treasurer. In 1981, Michelle graduated from the school as class salutatorian.

Michelle then attended Princeton University, graduating *cum laude* in 1985 with a B.A. in Sociology. She went on to study law at **Harvard Law School**, where she took part in demonstrations calling for the enrollment and hiring of more minority students and professors. She was awarded her J.D. in 1988.

Marriage and Family

After law school, Michelle worked as an associate in the Chicago branch of the firm Sidley Austin, in the area of marketing and intellectual property. It was there, in 1989, that she met her future husband, Barack Obama. They were married in 1992. Their daughters, Malia and Sasha, were born in 1998 and 2001, respectively.

Career

In 1991, Michelle **decided to leave corporate law and pursue a career in public service**, working as an assistant to Mayor Richard Daley and then as the assistant commissioner of planning and development for the City of Chicago.

In 1993, she became executive director for the Chicago office of Public Allies, a nonprofit leadership-training program that helped young adults develop skills for future careers in the public sector. In 1996, Michelle joined the University of Chicago as associate dean of student services, developing the school's first community-service program. Beginning in 2002, she worked for the University of Chicago Hospitals, as executive director of community relations and external affairs.

In May 2005, Michelle was appointed vice president for community and external affairs at the University of Chicago Medical Center, where she continued to work part-time until shortly before her husband's inauguration as president. She also served as a board member for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Issues and Causes

As the **first African-American First Lady of the United States**, Michelle Obama **focused her attention on issues such as the support of military families, helping working women balance career and family and encouraging national service**. During the first year of the Obama presidency, Michelle and her husband volunteered at homeless shelters and soup kitchens in the Washington, D.C. area.

(Source: Michelle Obama Biography. (2018, February 1). Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/people/michelle-obama-307592>.)

Michelle also made appearances at public schools, **stressing the importance of education and volunteer work.**

Michelle supported the organic-food movement, instructing the White House kitchens to prepare organic food for guests and her family. In March 2009, Michelle worked with 23 fifth graders from a local school in Washington D.C. to **plant a 1,100-square-foot garden** of fresh vegetables and install beehives on the South Lawn of the White House. She also put **efforts to fight childhood obesity** near the top of her agenda.

“As women, we must stand up for ourselves. As women, we must stand up for each other. As women, we must stand up for justice for all.”

(Source: Michelle Obama Biography. (2018, February 1). Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/people/michelle-obama-307592>.)