

Test Your Knowledge of Herstory with this  
**“First Ladies Challenge”**



Credit: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Artist: Amy Sherald

As First Lady, Michelle Obama comes from a proud tradition of “first” ladies – women who’ve made their mark on history as pioneers in their field. Test your knowledge of herstory with this “First Ladies Challenge.”

## QUESTIONS:

What historic firsts did these American women achieve and what links their stories?

1. In 1770, the American colonies' first known child prodigy, **Phillis Wheatley**, stood trial in Boston before 18 men. Why?
2. In 1819, **Jarena Lee** wrestled her "demons and her gods" to become this American first. HINT: In 1990, **Barbara Clementine Harris** followed in Lee's footsteps for another historic milestone.
3. In 1832, **Maria Stewart** hailed women's rights with this first.
4. In 1853, **Mary Ann Shadd** brought power to the word with her first.
5. In 1863, **Harriet Tubman** marshaled her Underground Railroad skills for this first.
6. In 1872, **Charlotte E. Ray** broke the legal bar with her first.
7. In 1888, **Ida B. Wells** scored her first of many in publishing with this achievement.
8. In 1903, **Maggie Lena Walker** bankrupted the exclusion of women with this first.
9. In 1911, **Mme. C. J. Walker** and her mentor **Annie Turbo Malone** attained this historic first.
10. In 1972, **Shirley Chisholm** paved important ground for our new first family with this first.
11. In 2018, artist **Amy Sherald** changed the history of American art with this.
12. In 2019, **Simone Biles** changed world history becoming this.

And this bonus question:

What is **First Lady Michelle Obama's** surprising first as a first family-member?

## ANSWERS:

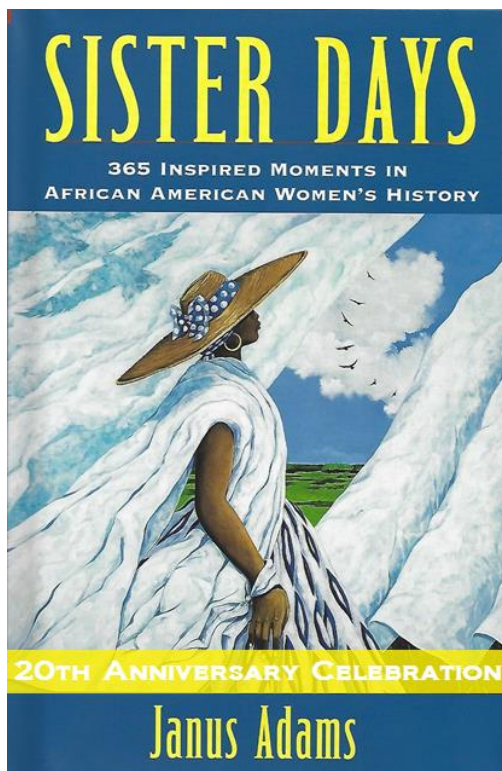
First, the bonus question and key to this quiz: Mrs. Obama's Harvard Law degree is well-known, but the surprising first she brings to the White House is her undergraduate degree in African American studies (Princeton). And that's the common thread linking the "first ladies" in this quiz: they are all African American women.

1. **Phillis Wheatley** was the American colonies' first known child prodigy. Enslaved, in 1770 she stood "trial" before eighteen of the "most respectable Characters in Boston" to defend herself against charges of fraud as author of her own volume of poetry (later published in England in 1773). Warranted authentic, among her defenders a soon-to-be Founding Father signed his true John Hancock.
2. In 1819, AME (African Methodist Episcopal Church) parishioner, **Jarena Lee** became the first American woman ordained a minister. In 1990, Reverend **Barbara Clementine Harris** became the first woman ordained a bishop in the 1,900-year history of the Episcopal Church and its forebears, the Church of England and the Catholic Church.
3. Boston's **Maria Stewart**, risked her personal safety to break new ground for women's rights and for African Americans as a whole to become, in 1832, the first American woman to lecture in public.
4. With her newspaper, *The Provincial Freeman*, abolitionist **Mary Ann Shadd** – an émigré from Philadelphia—became Canada's first woman publisher in 1853. Facing up to men "so conservative" they shut down her public talks, she published news of such incidents; rallying more women to the cause.
5. **Harriet Tubman**, legendary UGRR conductor and Civil War scout, became the first woman to command American troops in battle in 1863. Her battalion of 300 soldiers "struck terror into the heart of rebeldom" (South Carolina) and "brought off near 800 slaves... without losing a man or receiving a scratch."
6. In 1872, **Charlotte E. Ray** was the first woman admitted to the Washington, DC bar and the first African American woman attorney nationwide.
7. **Ida B. Wells** was, in 1888, elected the first woman officer of a national press organization. A pioneer of investigative journalism; she used her platform to launch an international anti-lynching campaign. In 1909, she was one of only two African American women co-founders of the NAACP.
8. **Maggie Lena Walker** was America's first woman bank founder and president.

In 1903, with \$31.61 in the kitty, she recruited “1,400 new soldiers” to the cause with a message so powerful listeners wept: Pool your wealth. Save yourself.

9. In 1911, **Mme. C. J. Walker** incorporated the company that would make her America’s first self-made woman millionaire. Better known than her mentor and rival **Annie Turbo Malone**, founder of Poro Beauty Products and Poro College, together the two employed thousands with their potions and formula for success.
10. Elected in 1968, **Shirley Chisholm** was the first African American congress-woman, and, in 1972, the first American woman presidential candidate nominated at a Democratic or Republican convention.
11. With her portrait of First Lady Michelle Obama—*Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama, oil on linen, 2018*— **Amy Sherald** and Kehinde Wiley (whose portrait of President Barack Obama was unveiled at the same time) became the first African Americans commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery since its founding in 1962; and the first African American official presidential portrait artists since Gilbert Stuart painted George Washington in 1796.
12. **Simone Biles** became the world’s most decorated gymnast with her history-making triumphant five gold-medal win at the 2019 World Championships in Stuttgart, Germany for a total of 25 medals.

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## “First Ladies Challenge”

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