

Obamas rock and rule

The Straits Times

April 26, 2009



WASHINGTON - FANS swooning over the First Family's every move, wall-to-wall media coverage and one pampered pooch: the Obamas are the planet's hottest rock stars busy revamping the image of the US presidency.

In the 100 days since President Barack Obama and his family

Americans find the Obamas' image of the family next door endearing and inspirational. -- PHOTO: AP

arrived in the White House there has been no sign of any let-up in the Obamania which swept the globe during the 2008 campaign.

Rather it has moved to the next level.

Magazine editors fight for the coolest image of the new president and his wife, Michelle, whether digging in the new organic garden, showing off their honed muscles, or romping with the First dog, Bo.

A new swing set adorns the White House lawn for the girls, rock stars have given intimate invitation-only concerts, and the White House has been dragged into the Internet age after Obama was allowed to keep his beloved Blackberry.

And even though the United States is in the grip of its worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s, it seems the Obamas can do no wrong.

'This is Camelot the Sequel,' said Robert Watson, director of American studies at Lynn University, Florida, referring to the name given to the brief White House reign of John F. Kennedy and his wife Jackie, seen as a golden era for the US presidency.

And unlike the Kennedys, the Obamas come from ordinary, middle-class families, born without the advantages of privilege and wealth. It is exactly this image of the family next door, which so many Americans as well as people around the world, find both endearing and inspirational, analysts argue.

'They represent more than just the president and first lady, more than just partisan Democrats, more than just African-Americans,' said Carl Sferrazza Anthony, historian to the Ohio-based National First Ladies' Library.

He highlighted Michelle Obama's authenticity and her down-to-earth nature, seen in the way she mixes chain store clothes with designer outfits. The First Lady, who only last year was criticized as an 'angry black woman,' has reinvented her image as mom-in-chief, focusing on family issues and often seen hugging and laughing with children.

Last week she joked with visiting kids that she didn't miss having to cook the dinner, and revealed she and her staff sometimes 'sneak out, without telling anybody, and we go and test out all the fun places to eat in DC'. -- AFP