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# 1 CAPITAL COMMENT

Edited by GARRETT M. GRAFF

## First Half-Smokes, Now Burgers

THE Palm and the Capital Grille aren't going anywhere, but there's been a shift in the dining landscape ever since the Obamas came to Washington. The President and First Lady have been eating like locals, hitting all sorts of foodie hot spots, from **Michel Richard's** extravagant Georgetown dining room to a hidden-away Arlington burger joint. Where will they show up next? To help you guess, we've followed their trail of crumbs. If you flip burgers or operate a fry basket, stay on your toes.

**Restaurant:** Ben's Chili Bowl.

**Who:** Barack Obama and DC mayor Adrian Fenty.

**When:** The weekend after the Obamas moved here.

**What it's like:** A U Street landmark that's been grilling up half-smokes with chili for five decades.

**What they ate:** Chili half-smoke and sweet tea for Obama, cheese fries and water for Fenty.

**You might also see:** Bill Cosby; Hillary Clinton.

**Now, that's service:** A sign outside the diner used to read: "Who eats free at Ben's: Bill Cosby. No one else." It's now been changed to "Who eats free at Ben's: Bill Cosby. The Obama Family."

**Restaurant:** Equinox.

**Who:** Barack and Michelle Obama; her mother, Marian Robinson; presidential adviser Valerie Jarrett; and nine others.

**When:** A couple of days before Michelle's birthday.

**What it's like:** "Local" and "seasonal" are the buzzwords at this elegantly subdued dining room near the White House.

**What they ate:** Michelle started with fried oysters while Barack had a mixed green salad. They both ordered the beef strip loin—hers medium rare, his medium well.

**You might also see:** Rahm Emanuel; Scooter Libby; Sheila Johnson.

**Since then:** Heeding the call of local-eating acolytes, the Obamas have set up a vegetable garden on the South Lawn.

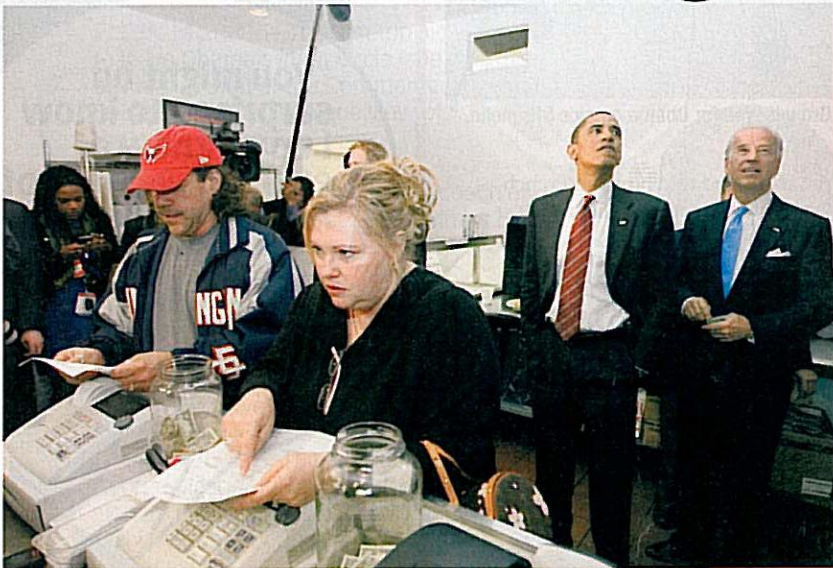
**Restaurant:** Art and Soul.

**Who:** Michelle Obama, Marian Robinson, White House social secretary Desirée Rogers, and seven others.

**When:** Before a spring Kennedy Center gala.

**What it's like:** Chicago chef Art Smith, who used to cook for Oprah Winfrey, runs this mod-Southern restaurant on Capitol Hill.

**What they ate:** The group shared salmon-and-caviar hoe cakes,



President Obama took the VP out for burgers.

hoe cakes with pulled pork and coleslaw, and an array of fried seafood. Obama had the crispy whole trout with rhubarb vinaigrette.

**You might also see:** Oprah; Tom Brokaw; "Dr. Phil" McGraw; Nancy Pelosi.

**Trend alert?:** A couple of months earlier, Obama joined Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton at B. Smith's, another upscale Southern spot near the Capitol.

**Restaurant:** Ray's Hell-Burger.

**Who:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden.

**When:** A weekday lunch.

**What it's like:** Michael Landrum's strip-mall burger shop in Arlington is a foodie favorite.

**What they ate:** Obama went for a cheddar burger with lettuce, tomato, and Dijon mustard; Biden had a patty topped with Swiss, jalapeños, and ketchup plus a root beer. They shared an order of cheese-and-potato puffs.

**You might also see:** Anthony Bourdain; a local chef or sommelier.

**In the tip jar:** Obama left a \$5 gratuity for his \$7.95 burger.

Sounds generous, but it apparently also covered the burgers he bought for members of the press.

**Restaurant:** Citronelle.

**Who:** Barack and Michelle Obama.

**When:** Saturday date night.

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