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TODAY IN SAGINAW

My View: First lady hits, misses on politics of color

by Pat Heydlauff

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Momentous events such as a historic presidential inauguration convey both obvious messages through the spoken word, pomp and circumstance, and the less obvious messages conveyed through the choice of apparel on the new residents of the White House.

Clothing provides a great deal of energy to the wearer and projects a huge energetic message to the viewer. The colors and structure of the clothing of the first family on Inauguration Day convey volumes of information about the new White House.

President Obama and Vice President Biden got it right. Their wardrobe choices exuded confidence, power and the solemn importance of the moment.

Their neckties in power red (Obama) and self-confident aqua (Biden), conservative dark suits, topcoats and scarves along with their U.S. flag lapel pins sent the energy of "you can depend on us to care for the future of our country. We take our responsibilities seriously."

Michelle Obama and Jill Biden did not fare so well. Michelle Obama appeared in a "caution sign" yellow brocade dress and coat, accessorized with olive green gloves and shoes that projected the energy of a 1960s-era mother-of-the-bride, rather than a modern take-charge mother and first lady.

Yellow is often thought of as cheery, warm and joyful in small amounts, but as a full dress and coat, the yellow exuded the negative energy of frustration, disorientation and the warning signs of caution. The ensemble was semi-structured, giving her a sense of strength and position but the fabric, with its brocade-appearing glitz, gave the energy of a semi-formal eveningwear worn inappropriately to a midday event. It also gave the feeling of extravagance during the difficult economic times.

Her much-awaited ball gown was a refreshing breath of timelessness showing off her regal stature. The long, flowing full-skirted gown was reminiscent of more peaceful and less turbulent times. It projected the energy of a clean, empty slate where history has yet to be written.

While the designer created a masterpiece worthy of the Smithsonian, unfortunately he did not plan ahead so the first lady actually could dance in her gown.

The energy of the white gown was that of innocence, but Michelle Obama would have been better served with a lush, jewel tone that would emphasize her stately youthfulness and projected the energy of better times ahead.

Rather, the color white seemed to emphasize an attitude of mourning for the current atmosphere in Washington and Wall Street.

In feng shui, white is the absence of all energy. A jewel-tone would have projected an energy of accomplishment, being the new first lady and a busy, young mother. Since "bling is king," the added sparkle and glimmer from the Swarovski crystals provided an upbeat and uplifting energy everyone could, at least briefly, tap into before going back to the reality of the economy and all things political.

During the inauguration, Jill Biden upstaged the first lady in her red knee-length coat and black leather boots. The red coat provided the energy of being the most important female in the presidential party. The boots however, exuded the energy of leftover youth from the 1960s.

Even though she looked smashing at the inaugural balls, Biden again wore the strongest and most significant attention-getting color: red. Perhaps there are power issues lurking under the surface.

What the first lady chose to wear conveyed a significant message to the world about her ambitions and attitude -- along with an unspoken message from the White House.

While Michelle Obama seemed physically cold and uncomfortable in her daywear, the evening gown was a significantly better choice and complemented the formal wear of the new president, exuding the energy of supportive teamwork and respect.

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