

The Real Housewives of D.C.

Bravo's hit franchise reaches orange-alert status with the addition of the infamous "White House party crashers."
BY TANNER STRANSKY



The Housewives. (From left) Catherine Ommanney, Stacie Scott Turner, Mary Schmidt Amons, Lynda Erkiletian, and Michaela Salahi

BRAVO'S *Real Housewives* franchise is built on rich women behaving badly, and after four years, one might think we've seen it all—hair pulling, table flipping, candy-fueled nervous breakdowns. Our nation's security, however, has never been put at risk...until now. When *The Real Housewives of D.C.* premieres on Aug. 5 at 9 p.m., viewers will be formally reintroduced to Michaela Salahi, one half of the infamous "White House party

crashers" duo, who finagled their way into a state dinner with President Obama last November.

Almost immediately, Salahi—who the network claimed was only a prospective *Housewives* cast member at the time—and her husband, Tareq, became symbols of reality TV fame whoredom, and Bravo found its highly rated franchise under attack. Had the network set up the Salahi stunt for the show? Or did the couple snooker security in a desperate effort to be on *Housewives*? (The incident even

spurred a congressional review—during which Michaela and Tareq pleaded the Fifth.) Bravo maintains that it didn't condone the visit and definitely did *not* direct the Salahis to crash the White House party. "We were surprised," says Frances Berwick, president of Bravo, of



Salahi meets President Obama on Nov. 24, 2009

The Salahi Scandal

It was the party crash heard round the world. Michaela and Tareq Salahi claimed they were invited to last November's state dinner hosted by President Obama—but the White House begged to differ. Congress even launched a formal investigation into the security lapse, and the couple was compelled to appear. (The investigation is ongoing.)



On the *Today* show on Dec. 1



A congressional hearing on Dec. 3

SALAHIS WITH OBAMA: SAMANTHA APPELTON/AP IMAGES; ON TODAY: PETER REARER/ABC; CONGRESSIONAL HEARING: RON SACCHI/UP/ICORIS

★★★
SHE'S THE
WHITE HOUSE
PARTY
CRASHER!



cougar-rific head of D.C.'s top modeling agency; Catherine Ommanney, 38, a British import whose husband is the well-known *Newsweek* photographer Charles Ommanney (the couple separated after production wrapped); and Stacie Scott Turner, 43, a high-end real estate broker and the show's sole African-American cast member. Right from the outset, it's clear that the Salahi's won't be the only cause of controversy this season. In the premiere, two of the wives commit racially charged blunders: Amons drunkenly proclaims that white and black salons "should be integrated," and Ommanney does an exaggerated impression of Tyra Banks that more than a few viewers are likely to find offensive. Layered on top of that is the show's lack of diversity: The cast is only 20 percent black, despite being set in a city that's 54 percent black. "It surprised me," says Turner. "One of the unique characteristics of D.C. is that it was majority African-American for so long." Bravo execs insist that casting for *D.C.*—and all their *Housewives* series—is color-blind. Says Cohen, "What we did was cast the best people."

They certainly ended up with a surplus of drama: In addition to the racial tension and the Salahi's security breach, political differences will come into play. In yet another OMG moment from the premiere, the women engage in a heated discussion about the merits of George W. Bush versus Barack Obama, during which Ommanney declares that Bush is the better man of the two. Why? Because Bush RSVP'd to her wedding, while Obama did not. "That, to me, is a golden moment for *The Real Housewives of D.C.*," marvels Cohen. "This is their reality. Truth is stranger than fiction—always." ■

the incident. "Obviously we were filming—we just understood them to be going to a state dinner." (Cameras managed to capture the run-up to the dinner but weren't allowed into the actual event.) Meanwhile, Salahi, 44, insists she *was* an invited guest, even though staffers at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. say she was never on the list. "Here's how I think about it: If you go to a party and say, 'Hi, I'm Michael Salahi and here's my ID,' and you're never asked to leave, how is that crashing?" she says. "We were never asked to leave. We had a great time."

A juicy, borderline-absurd political scandal seems like the perfect platform for launching a reality show set in D.C., and promos for the season include footage of Michael Salahi heading grandly toward the White House in her now-famous red sari. Bravo execs, however, are quick to downplay the series' emphasis on the couple. "I think there is this misconception that this is



Ommanney and Turner

The Salahi Show," says Andy Cohen, Bravo's SVP of original programming and development, who adds that only one hour at the end of *D.C.*'s nine-episode run will focus on the event. "It is a small part of the series. I keep telling people to watch the first episode because I really think they will get hooked into all of these other women."

Oh, yeah, that reminds us—there are four other *Housewives*: Mary Schmidt Amons, 43, a socialite who installed a biometric lock on her closet so her daughter can't borrow her clothes; Lynda Erkiletian, 52, the