

Michelle Obama

Becoming

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Maybe these blinks will inspire you to dig deeper, or maybe they're enough to start you thinking and then on to something new. However you read blinks, we hope they help you become an even brighter you.

What's in it for me? The inspirational story of one woman's journey from Chicago's South Side to the White House.

The date: April 1, 2009. The location: London. The precise location: Buckingham Palace.

For Michelle and Barack Obama, it's a big day. Back in January, Barack was inaugurated as president of the United States. Now, he and Michelle are attending the reception of the G20 summit – and they're regarded as newcomers on the world stage. Here's Michelle, who grew up on Chicago's

South Side, rubbing shoulders and eating canapés with Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy. It's exciting – but she's not quite sure how to behave amid the strange newness of the old world.

Near the end of the party, the Queen of England appears suddenly on Michelle's right. Both have spent the evening engaged in small talk, adhering to strict formal protocol. So the mood seems to lighten when the Queen looks at Michelle's pumps and says, "Well, those shoes are rather unpleasant, are they not?" They both admit that their feet hurt – and have a

good laugh together. At this moment, following a natural impulse, Michelle lays her hand on the Queen's back, as she'd do with any other person she'd just formed a human connection with.

What she didn't know at the time was that she'd breached the protocol – massively. The yellow press acted as if she'd committed a heinous crime, or at least a monstrous faux pas. How dare she touch her Royalty! But rather than hiding her face in shame, Michelle stood by the gesture. It may not have been the correct thing to do. But it was the human thing to do. And

what's more, the Queen had returned the gesture, placing her hand, in its white glove, on Michelle's back.

This little scene reveals a lot about the warm character of Michelle Obama: She's a strong yet affectionate woman, who wants to do everything the right way and still seeks to find common ground. And yes, she's also controversial. These blinks will tell you her life story, and how she became what she is today.

An Ambitious Beginning

One of Michelle Obama's earliest memories is the sound of plinking piano keys. To her ears, this was the sound of ambition. In the room beneath her bedroom, Michelle's great-aunt Robbie taught piano lessons. On any given day, Michelle could hear the sounds of Robbie's students desperately fumbling through their songs. The sound of this amateurish music made such an impression on Michelle that, at the age of four, she became ambitious, too. Michelle was certain that she wanted to learn the piano.

This was near the end of the sixties, in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood. It was a time of political turmoil and social unrest, but Michelle was too young to have understood much about what was going on outside her home. Her close-knit family included her brother, Craig, who was older by two years; her father, who worked at a water filtration plant and loved the Chicago Cubs baseball team; and her mother, who was a wiz with a sewing needle and active in community fundraising.

One of the things that really brought their family together was music. At home, her father

was always playing jazz records. And over at her grandfather's place, every room had a speaker hooked up to the stereo system; at family gatherings, a cocktail of voices and horns filled the house: Ella Fitzgerald, John Coltrane, Miles Davis. It was her grandfather, known to everyone as "Southside," who bought Michelle her first record: Stevie Wonder's *Talking Book*.

But learning how to play music was a different story. What's more, Robbie was stiff and strict. Her posture was impeccable. Her reading glasses always hung around her neck, threatening scrutiny. She

scolded her students often. Nevertheless, Michelle was eager to win her approval.

If you've taken piano lessons, you know that one of the first steps is learning to find the middle C. Middle C functions like a musical landmark; knowing where it is enables you to position your hands correctly on the keys. But when you're four years old and sitting in front of 88 keys, finding middle C is no easy task. Fortunately, on Robbie's piano, this key was chipped, making it easy to spot.

For the most part, Michelle was a keen student and made quick

progress – a little too quick, as far as Robbie was concerned. Before long, Michelle tried to skip ahead to more advanced songs in the playbook. Far from impressing Robbie, this infuriated her, and she insisted Michelle do as she was told and go one step at a time.

Then came Michelle's first big recital. Once a year, Robbie would present her students to an audience at Roosevelt University's music hall. Michelle put her hair in pigtails and wore a cute dress. She was ready to shine. But then, when she took her seat at the piano, she froze.

There was no chipped key.
Where was the middle C?

That's when Robbie came to the rescue. She calmly walked onto the stage, reached over her shoulder like a guardian angel and pointed. Michelle could now start her recital.

*“Then, turning back with
the smallest smile of
encouragement, she left
me to play my song.”*

Learning Confidence

Michelle grew up around people who were striving. Striving to make the most of what they had, and striving to give their children better opportunities than the ones they grew up with. Even as an elementary school student, Michelle strove to do well at school. However, given her circumstances, it wasn't always easy to shine.

For instance, when Michelle started second grade, she was stuck in a class full of chaotic kids, with a helpless teacher unable to get things under

control. Luckily, when Michelle explained how much she hated this class, her mom listened and soon had her tested and moved up to a third-grade class with other high-performing kids who liked to learn.

Michelle still wonders what her life would have been like if her mom hadn't intervened. For she continued to perform well academically, eventually earning a spot at the Whitney M. Young High School – an equal-opportunity school with progressive teachers that drew in high-performing kids from all over the city.

But now that she'd found a school that was a good fit, she had to learn how to fit *in*. For the first time, Michelle met kids from the wealthier North Side of Chicago – kids who had passports and took vacations that involved skiing. Kids who wore designer purses and lived in high-rise apartments.

However, Michelle did form a bond with one fellow student. Santita Jackson was the daughter of Jesse Jackson, the famous political leader, and Michelle was welcomed into the exciting and colorful Jackson household. One scorchingly hot day, she even marched in the

Bud Billiken Day Parade with Sanita and other Jesse Jackson supporters.

This marked Michelle's first introduction to what life in politics was like. And truth be told, it wasn't appealing. The Jackson household was chaotic, with staff running every which way and very little calm or stability. As a polite girl who liked a sense of control, she could already tell it wasn't really her thing.

Michelle started to gain intellectual confidence in high school. She learned that the harder she worked, the closer

she came to reaching the top of her class. And by the time she was a senior, she'd been elected class treasurer, was in the National Honor Society and was on track to be in the top 10 percent of her class. At this point, she became confident enough to set her sights on Princeton.

Her guidance counselor wasn't so sure about this plan. She said Michelle might not be "Princeton material." But Michelle was now confident enough to know that her counselor was wrong. Michelle applied. She continued to strive.

And, in the end, she was
accepted.

New School, New Role Model

Michelle was attracted to Princeton, in part, because her brother, Craig, was already enrolled there and had quickly become a star on the basketball team, much to their father's delight. So Michelle wasn't completely alone when she first stepped foot on the university's pristine New Jersey campus. But that doesn't mean the campus felt like a second home. Far from it, in fact.

On her first day at Princeton, Michelle dropped off her belongings in her dormroom

and looked out her window to see a wave of students – mostly white, mostly male – lugging their belongings across campus. This was a new feeling for Michelle, to be somewhere where she was one of the only nonwhite people. In fact, Michelle's freshman class was less than 9 percent Black. It was, in her words, like being a poppy seed in a bowl of rice.

But despite some initial discomfort, she did find a supportive community in the campus organization known as the Third World Center (TWC). And when she began working as the assistant to the woman who

ran the TWC, Michelle also gained an inspirational mentor.

Czerny Brasuell, Michelle's new boss, was a bold and beautiful young Black woman who was always on the move. Often seen sprinting from one meeting to the next, with a stack of papers under her arm and a cigarette dangling from her lips, Czerny was exciting, indefatigable, a force of nature. And she did it all while being a single mom.

Czerny was particularly impressive during a trip to New York City. Michelle had never been to the Big Apple, and it filled her with wonder and

concern. Horns honked. People shouted. Everything moved at a high and hectic pace. But Czerny was not only unfazed by all this bustling madness; she seemed recharged by its energy. She zipped the car around taxis and jaywalkers, double-parked, ran in and out of stores, and made it all look like it was no big deal.

At one point, when double parking wasn't an option, Czerny had Michelle take the wheel, telling her to drive around the block a couple times so she could run an errand. Michelle was a bit shocked at first. But then she saw the expression on Czerny's face and jumped into

the driver's seat. The expression Czerny gave her said, "Get over it and just live a little."

Michelle majored in sociology at Princeton, and she planned to apply to Harvard Law School. But she learned a great deal about life from Czerny. Michelle knew that, one day, she wanted to be a working mom – and Czerny was the perfect example of how this could be done with grace and style.

“Czerny saw some sort of potential in me. . . She treated me like an adult, asking for my thoughts. . . She seemed determined to awaken more boldness in me.”

A Date to Remember

After finishing Harvard Law School in 1988, Michelle moved back to Chicago to join Sidley & Austin, a prestigious law firm. Part of Michelle's job was to advise promising law students and possibly set them up to join the firm when they graduated. It was in this context that Michelle met a young hotshot named Barack Obama.

Before she ever met him, Michelle had heard people talking about this striking young man, but Michelle was skeptical. Harvard professors were calling

him the most gifted student they had ever worked with. Yet, in Michelle's experience, white professors often went cuckoo over any half-smart black man in a nice suit. Plus, he had the gall to show up late to their first appointment. And worst of all, he was a smoker!

Once Barack finally did arrive, it was immediately apparent that he was indeed different. He'd taken a couple of years off before attending Harvard Law, so he was a few years older than her. He radiated confidence and self-reliance. So much so that everyone in the firm was eager

to get *his* opinion on whatever they were working on.

And yet he and Michelle were like-minded, and an easy rapport quickly developed between them. He was familiar with Chicago's South Side neighborhoods, having worked there as a community organizer. And he was certainly handsome. Still, Michelle didn't immediately think they were a romantic match. But the weeks went by and their meetings went smoothly and eventually she accepted his offer: she'd try to ignore his smoking and go out on a date with him.

On the first date she was a bit guarded. After all, she had been on a very rigid track for most of her life, chasing one career goal after another. Only recently had Michelle started to realize that she'd never stopped to ask herself if this was the life she really wanted. To Michelle, who felt increasingly uncertain about the path she'd taken, Barack's confident and easy-going nature almost seemed like a threat. But gradually her defenses began to melt away.

Barack had a different way of thinking than the people she was used to being around. It wasn't just that he was cerebral

and liked to read about urban housing in his spare time. He also didn't care about money. His desire to make a difference far outweighed his interest in wealth. And so, for the first time, Michelle began to think long and hard about what kind of career she really wanted.

Finally, after attending a barbecue at a colleague's house, where she'd watched Barack play a game of basketball, Michelle could feel herself slowing down to match his pace. Barack has what you could call a certain Hawaiian casualness. Later that day, after grabbing an ice cream, they kissed for the

first time. And just like that, all doubt about her future husband seemed to vanish.

Changes and Loss

What should have been an exciting time of new love was mostly a time of frustration, since Barack had to finish up at Harvard. To his credit, the school made him the first Black editor of the school's prestigious journal, the *Harvard Law Review*.

And while the new couple were trying to make the best of a long-distance relationship, Michelle received some disturbing news. Her father was in the hospital.

Michelle knew he'd been fighting multiple sclerosis, but now the pain of simply getting to his feet had become too much. For a couple of weeks, Michelle visited the hospital only to see her father's condition worsen. This strong, unbreakable figure in her life was only 55-years-old, but suddenly he looked so frail.

Even though he couldn't speak, his eyes, and the way he repeatedly kissed the back of Michelle's hand, said everything that needed saying. He was giving her his love and bidding her goodbye.

It's not easy to carry on after the death of a loved one, but in 1991, things did take a positive turn. Barack had returned to Chicago, and the two could finally bask in the joy of living together. Even though he had many job offers coming in, Barack remained as thoughtful and considerate as he ever was. He was always more interested in helping a friend set up a community workshop than taking a high-paying gig at a law firm.

Meanwhile, Michelle was considering a big change in her own career. It was now abundantly clear that what she

really wanted to do was help people, face-to-face, not analyze corporate contracts.

Fortunately, 1991 was the year she met another influential figure in her life: Valerie Jarrett.

Like Michelle, Valerie was a lawyer who left a high-paying job in order to fulfill her desire to help people. The two bonded quickly and Valerie helped Michelle get a job as an assistant to Chicago's mayor, Richard Daley Jr. But this was just the beginning of a lifelong relationship, with Valerie continuing to be a valuable friend and advisor to the family.

Speaking of family: In October of 1992, Michelle and Barack were married, though there was little time for a honeymoon. That November was an important election year, and Barack was enlisted into the Project VOTE! initiative, which was designed to help people from Black communities register to vote. Barack worked tirelessly, getting 7,000 people registered in a single week.

Then, in 1993, after a couple of years working at City Hall, Michelle found a new job as the executive director of a nonprofit called Public Allies, which sought to connect promising

young people with mentors who worked in the public sector. Since Michelle knew firsthand how meeting the right person could lead to life-changing consequences, she felt passionate about the organization's purpose and found the work deeply meaningful.

Uneasy Approval

One sweaty summer night, early in their relationship, Michelle accompanied Barack to a church basement in Roseland, a neighborhood deep in the South Side of Chicago. People there had been struggling to rebuild their community after factory closings. Barack wanted to help. But in this cramped, fluorescent-lit basement, a group of mostly older women were highly skeptical of this well-dressed young Black man. What could he possibly do to help?

Michelle marvelled as Barack slowly won over the group. He spoke about the power of political engagement. Are you going to give up, or fight for a better world? He implored them to vote and to put pressure on their local representatives. By the end, the women were shouting “Amen!”

It was on this day that Michelle realized just how persuasive and inspiring her husband could be. But while this talent opened a lot of doors, it would at times test their marriage as well.

After the Project VOTE! campaign, *Chicago* magazine

had also noticed Barack's talents. The article went so far as to suggest that this young man should run for office. But Barack shrugged it off. At the time, he was more focused on finishing his first book, a memoir about his early life experiences. It was an important story to him, but he also had another motivation: If he didn't finish it soon, he'd have to pay back the publisher's advance of \$40,000!

In the end, he finished on deadline, and *Dreams from My Father* was published in 1995 – the same year that Barack was formally approached about entering politics.

Michelle was highly skeptical about the idea for a number of reasons. First of all, she didn't much like what she knew or read about politicians and the political process. Most politicians seemed consumed with self-interest and few of them were what you'd describe as a productive force of good. Plus, her experiences at the Jackson household showed her that politicians tend to be absent from home a lot of the time. In her mind, Barack was more likely to make a difference as the head of a nonprofit than as a politician in some stuffy office.

Nevertheless, there was a big opportunity before them. A seat in the Illinois State Senate was opening up – one that represented Hyde Park, the district they were living in.

Michelle warned Barack that he'd end up frustrated – that no matter how much effort he'd put into it, nothing would change. Barack shrugged. “Maybe,” he said. “But maybe I can do some good. Who knows?”

It was hard to argue with that. Ultimately, Michelle gave her approval. She was skeptical, and she worried that her earnest

and idealistic husband would get eaten alive. But she wasn't about to stand in the way of a good person who wanted to make a difference.

The Dark Side of Politics

If there is one apparent difference between Michelle and Barack, it's how they handle confrontations and personal attacks: Barack has the amazing ability to roll with the punches, while Michelle finds it difficult to brush off someone's hurtful remark. In their life together so far, this difference hadn't been much of an issue. But when you enter politics, you're essentially opening the door to personal attacks and baseless accusations – and this can be a difficult thing to get used to, especially if you're someone like Michelle.

One of the first incidents to really affect Michelle came in late 1999, when Barack was in the middle of a primary campaign for a seat in the House of Representatives. His opponents were fellow Democrats Bobby Rush and Donne Trotter.

Things quickly escalated during the middle of the holiday break, when the Illinois Senate suddenly announced an emergency vote on a hotly debated gun-control bill. At the time, Barack and Michelle were in Hawaii visiting relatives, and their newborn daughter, Malia, had come down with an ear

infection. Michelle's first pregnancy had been difficult and the couple chose to use in vitro fertilization, so Malia's illness was especially troubling. As Malia couldn't fly in her condition, Barack stayed by her side in Hawaii, rather than returning home. He'd fought hard for this bill, and now he wouldn't be voting on it. It was a difficult decision, though he had no doubt that putting family first was the right choice.

Nevertheless, an avalanche of attacks on Barack's character quickly followed. One editorial in a local paper called anyone who missed the vote "gutless

sheep.” But Barack’s primary opponents got far more personal in their attacks. Bobby Rush questioned Barack’s professionalism and called him an “educated fool.” Donne Trotter accused him of “using his child as an excuse not to go to work,” adding that he was “a white man in blackface.”

You could say that Barack’s decision was bound to be used as political ammo, but Michelle was deeply hurt. The attacks were so venomous and so untrue.

While Barack ended up losing the primary, he continued to

serve in the state senate. But more importantly, in June of 2001, the family's second girl arrived: Natasha Marian Obama. More commonly known as Sasha.

A Change of Heart

Michelle's opinion of politics didn't exactly improve as time went on. In his role as a state senator, Barack was absent a lot. Simply finding the time to enjoy a family dinner together was a rare treat. In fact, Barack's absence became such an issue that they eventually entered couples counseling. So when the idea of running for the US Senate was brought up, Michelle wasn't thrilled.

What Michelle didn't tell him at the time was that she truly doubted he would win. After all,

he'd lost a congressional primary not long before. So Michelle did give her approval, but she made him promise that, if he lost, he would give up politics and find another way to make a difference in the world. As fate would have it, this time his Republican opponent dropped out of the race!

As a US Senator, Barack was even busier and the lack of family time was a real issue. He'd regularly call to say, "On my way" or "Almost home," and Michelle had to learn to interpret these words. What they really meant was that he'd likely end up in an hour-long

chat with a colleague before he even got in the car to start the drive home.

But then came the 2004 Democratic National Convention. Presidential candidate John Kerry asked Barack to make a keynote speech, which was a surprisingly risky move given that he was virtually unknown to most Americans outside of Illinois – and a novice when it came to using teleprompters or being on primetime television. To say that 2004 was a lucky year for Barack would be an understatement. In fact, it felt

like there was some cosmic destiny at play.

The truth is that Barack had been preparing for the DNC speech for most of his life, and it's why that speech was so powerful. Yes, he did have it memorized, but he was also speaking from the heart. It wasn't such a surprising speech for Michelle to hear, since she already knew how amazing her husband was. But now the rest of the nation knew, and he became an overnight sensation.

As NBC commentator Chris Matthews said after he heard

the speech, “I’ve just seen the first Black president.”

And of course Barack did end up running for president in the next election. When he announced his candidacy, Michelle was stunned to see 15,000 people show up to the event, even though it was a bitterly cold Illinois day. It was as if her family had suddenly become a rock band!

At this moment, Michelle had a change of heart about politics. She understood that these people were counting on them. She began to feel a sense of commitment and responsibility;

she had to show up for the Americans who regarded her husband as a beacon of hope. Now she would need to play a big role in sharing his message and telling his story.

Fighting for Normalcy

Everything changed during the 2008 presidential campaign. The husband she once knew became a blur – a man in constant motion who needed to be everywhere at once. And then there were the threats, which meant that Barack received a secret-service security detail earlier than any other candidate in history.

Michelle understood the reasons for the heightened security, but she also worried about how this unusual life on the campaign trail would affect

her kids. So, with the nation following their every move, Michelle tried to keep things as normal as possible.

On the Fourth of July in 2008, they were campaigning in Montana when they tried their best to give Malia a little birthday celebration during a picnic. There she was, sitting in front of a cheeseburger on a plate, surrounded by a group of strangers singing her “Happy Birthday,” as secret-service agents hovered nearby. Was she really going to remember this birthday as a happy one?

But the truth was, the girls handled it all with such aplomb that it made campaigning all the more enjoyable. They liked playing cards with campaign staff and hunting for ice cream shops when they got to a new town. Secret-service agents usually turned into grown-up friends. And above all, they really didn't care about all the attention their dad was getting.

Of course, things took another turn once Barack won the election. It quickly became apparent that life in the White House meant entering a bizarre alternate universe. In this reality, even the simplest of things, like

walking out the front door or buying a birthday card, could require a coordinated team effort involving numerous security protocols.

It was one thing for Michelle and Barack to lose some privacy and autonomy, but she was determined to keep things as normal as possible for her kids.

One of the first things Michelle did was to make sure that Sasha and Malia understood that, despite its austere grandeur, the White House was their home. It was OK for them to play in the hallways and rummage in the pantry for snacks. In particular,

Michelle made it a priority to figure out a reliable system for letting the girls have friends over to visit.

All the rules and restrictions of the White House don't make it easy to raise kids. But early on, Michelle saw something that made her breathe a bit easier. One winter day, she looked out the window and noticed that Sasha and Malia had borrowed a big tray from the kitchen and were using it to slide down a snow-covered slope on the South Lawn. It made her think, Maybe this experience won't be so bad for them after all.

A First Lady

There were some positive aspects to life in the White House. One immediate benefit was that Barack no longer had to make long daily commutes. The Oval Office was literally downstairs from where they lived! Oddly enough, as president, Barack was present for far more dinners than he ever was as a senator.

But now Michelle faced a new and very unique challenge: being the First Lady. Unfortunately, the job doesn't come with a playbook. Nevertheless, Michelle

was highly aware that the world was going to be watching. And since Michelle was not only First Lady but first African-American First Lady, the world was sure to be watching extra closely, and just waiting for a misstep.

As a former First Lady, Hillary Clinton gave her some fair warning about potential pitfalls. One is to get too involved in the administration's agenda. Hillary was heavily criticized for wanting to use her experience as a lawyer to help set policies around health care and other issues. In her experience, the public believed the First Lady should not act as an elected

official. So Michelle was careful to start initiatives that could complement the administration's policies while being their own separate endeavors.

One of her first efforts was the Let's Move! initiative, created to address childhood obesity, a serious condition that has tripled over the past 30 years, leading to one in every three American kids being obese or overweight. At the heart of this program was Michelle's idea to start a White House garden. Not only would this promote eating fresh and healthy foods, but it would also support her efforts

in making the White House feel more like a home than a fortress.

After some negotiating, the garden project was given 1,100 square feet of soil to work with, from the White House South Lawn. Once spring arrived, Michelle and a group of fifth grade students from the local Bancroft Elementary School got to work with shovels and hoes to prepare the soil for planting. Weeks later, the press were invited to watch the planting of carrots, lettuce, onions, spinach, broccoli, fennel, collard greens, shell peas, berry bushes, and a variety of herbs.

The planting of the garden received a lot of coverage in the press, which was good for the initiative, but it also came with some pressure. As any gardener knows, planting seeds doesn't always lead to sprouting vegetables. Michelle could easily envision the bad press that would come once the garden refused to cooperate. It would certainly get her tenure as First Lady off to an embarrassing start.

Fortunately, the vegetables did their part. After ten weeks, the first harvest yielded 90 pounds of produce that immediately made its way into the daily

meals at the White House.
Before she left the White
House, the garden provided an
annual yield of 2,000 pounds of
food.

A Failed Date and An Ugly Reminder

When you're the First Lady of the United States, going out on a date with your husband isn't so easy. Nevertheless, during the first term, Michelle and Barack tried to carve out a night for themselves. It felt like ages since they'd been on a date, and the idea of dinner and a Broadway play seemed too amazing to pass up. Sure, it might require some serious planning, but it would be worth it, right?

As it turned out, not so much. The presidential motorcade

brought New York traffic to a grinding halt, and people at both the restaurant and the theater had to go through security checks. It wasn't just embarrassing; it opened the door to a parade of negative press.

While the family was getting used to life in the White House by the start of the second term, Michelle was still finding it hard to deal with some of the press that came their way. In particular, she was upset with how media outlets were perpetuating ugly rumors about her husband. They claimed he had lied about his birthplace and

somehow faked his birth certificate as well as the Hawaiian newspaper clippings that announced his birth.

Aside from being hurtful, these allegations seemed to embolden dangerous people – people who made violent threats against Barack. Such rumors had been around since 2008, but when they resurfaced in the winter of 2011, a gunman opened fire on the residential floor of the White House with a semiautomatic rifle.

It took months before repairs could be made, and during that time there remained a sizable

dent on the bullet-proof window in Michelle's reading room. That ugly bullet mark served as a stark reminder of why there were so many protocols and security procedures.

A year later, Michelle decided to make gun violence another of her initiatives. Hadiya Pendleton was a 15-year-old girl who'd attended the January 2013 inauguration event. Just days later, she became the thirty-sixth person that month to be killed by gun violence in Chicago.

After attending Hadiya's funeral, Michelle had her chief of staff

coordinate with Chicago Mayor Raham Emanuel on helping at-risk kids in the city. Michelle met with community leaders and through a collaboration of efforts they were able to raise \$33 million dollars for youth programs in the city.

Michelle also invited students from Harper High School, located in Chicago's South Side, to visit the White House and tour Howard University. Getting a hug from the First Lady isn't going to solve anyone's problems. But she wanted to reassure these kids that being from the South Side doesn't

mean your future is already written.

It was never easy bringing up kids in such a strange environment or exercising her own voice within Barack's agenda. But looking back, Michelle is proud of what she was able to accomplish. At the start, she still had that nagging voice that wondered if she was really good enough. But once again, she was able to gain the confidence to say, "Yes, I am."

However, Michelle still dislikes politics and has no urge to run for any office.

Epilogue

Michelle Obama's life has been one of striving – striving to excel as a student, a professional, a mom and a First Lady. Along the way, she learned to better understand who she was as an individual and what she wanted to do with her life, rather than striving to fulfill some predetermined expectation. Michelle became her own independent woman – a working mom who could help her kids as well as the people in her community. And just because she may have reached a certain point in her life, it doesn't mean

she'll ever stop striving to help others.

Looking back, she can see that her time in the White House yielded quite a few successes. Along with the Let's Move! program, which brought healthier school lunches to 45 million kids and signed up 11 million kids to associated afterschool programs, there was also the Joining Forces initiative, which helped 1.5 million veterans and their spouses get jobs. Meanwhile, her Let Girls Learn initiative raised billions of dollars to help girls around the world gain access to schools, along with the empowerment that can

come with an education. These were certainly great achievements. But there's an achievement that, for Michelle, is greater still: despite the countless demands of holding public office, she and her husband were able to raise two amazing daughters.

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What to read next: *The Audacity of Hope* by Barack Obama

Michelle Obama is familiar with her husband’s story of growing up in a multiethnic family and how this fostered his hopes for harmony in America. But for most everyone else, Barack Obama’s speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention was a bold introduction to this unique man and his vision of America.

With *The Audacity of Hope*, Barack Obama expanded on the aspirational message in his speech, and it essentially served as a blueprint for the platform of his 2008 campaign for the presidency. So check out the links to *The Audacity of Hope* to find out more about Obama's hopes and dreams before his eight years in office.

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