

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – So, let’s just dive in... So, let’s just dive in.

So, we’re just going to dive in.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - [Laughs] Okay...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – We're recording this for the toppers...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – I know... [Laughs] I know it was just funny.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Did you get that without the laugh?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Nah, I was snickering... I was snickering. I’m sorry I’ll be quiet.

00:18

MUSIC BRIDGE

<00:41 – AD BREAK (+30 Sec)>

01:18

MICHELLE OBAMA VO -

Hello everybody, I am Michelle Obama and this is Michelle Obama podcast.

You’re listening to my very first episode.

I want to start by giving you all just a little bit on background on what it is I hope to do with this podcast.

And I thought I’d begin with taking you through the journey that brought me here today.

It starts back when our family left the White House. For eight years my life was full of crazy schedules, juggling big initiatives, speeches, state dinners. Not to mention trying to raise two daughters and keeping my head above water.

But once Barack's second term ended, the presidency was over and I finally had some time to breath. So, for a few months - the first year really — I spent a lot of time thinking, talking with friends and family. Really just being, if you know what I mean. I reflected back on my time in the White House of course, but I went even deeper. I looked back at the whole arc of my life.

02:28

In this first season, you'll be hearing me talk with some of the people I'm closest with — my mom... my brother...friends... colleagues. And I wanted to start at the most basic level. In these episodes, we'll be discussing the relationships that make us who we are. Sometimes that might be as personal as our relationship with ourselves or how we navigate our health and our bodies at various points in our lives. In other episodes we'll be talking about what the challenges and the joys of being a parent or a spouse... the growth we can gain from leaning on colleagues and mentors ... the friends that help us sort through the toughest times.

What I love about these conversations is that they're topics and issues that we're all dealing with, no matter what's going on; whether that's a pandemic or a nationwide reckoning with race or just any old summer afternoon sitting with our own thoughts. That's truly true of the topic for our first episode.

03:41

Today, we're gonna start by discussing one of those relationships that can take some time to figure out. That's our relationship to our communities and to our country. Sometimes this relationship might be a source of fulfillment or meaning or joy. Other times, it might provoke questions that we don't quite know the answer to. What we're really talking about is our place in this world. How we feel about it and what we can do with the power we have.

I asked a special someone to join me for this conversation because he's navigated these questions throughout the course of his entire life.

--INTERVIEW STARTS--

04:31

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Well, welcome to my podcast.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Thank you so much for having me on your podcast.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Just in case you don't recognize that voice...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – That is my husband Barack Obama...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – It's me!

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – It is you. It is you...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Like most Americans we've been spending a lot of time together in quarantine.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You don't seem to happy about that the way she said it, right?

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – It's just a fact.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – There wasn't a judgment. We've been together...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – I've been loving it.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah, I've been having a great time. But we've had some interesting conversations... Cause these are some crazy times.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – We’ve spent a lot of time talking about, sort of, how do our views about community... How do those shape who we are and shape our choices, and shape our reactions?

So, I thought we’d start with looking at how we’ve been shaped by our communities growing up. Our backgrounds are pretty different just in terms of the structure of our upbringing.

05:34

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Absolutely.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – That I grew up with – as you call it the...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Leave it to Beaver!

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – The Black Leave it to Beaver...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – The Black Leave it to Beavers...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – [Laughs] With a family of four, you know. A father at home...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Only thing missing was the dog.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – A dog, I know...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Cause Marian wouldn’t let you get a dog.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – I know...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – She feels bad about it now....

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And now, I got revenge. I’ve got two of them...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You do.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And I'd have more if it weren't for you.

BOTH - [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – But I grew up with that family of four...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Classic nuclear family unit.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Exactly. And you grew up a little bit differently.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Ah, things were a little crazier on my side.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - [Laughs] Well I don't know if it was crazy but it was different.

06:16

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yeah...yeah. Look I was raised mostly by a single mom and my grandparents until we then moved to Indonesia and I had a step-father and then Maya, my sister, was born. And then I moved back to Hawaii and lived with my grandparents for high school.

It wasn't the classic nuclear family. It was a tight knit family. The thing that maybe we did share was my mom and grandparents were similar to your parents in really prioritizing kids.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – And, thinking that you had to make sacrifices for kids.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – And so, we felt loved and supported. And that's obviously where a community starts.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – One of the things we talked about a lot it that, one way or another, they didn't have to do it completely alone. That there was a neighborhood or a community or....

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Extended family...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Extended families. Structures around that helped families raise their kids in a loving environment. And they didn't feel as isolated.

07:31

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – A lot of the way families ran before recently was an economic necessity. You know my parents were poor...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You're livin on the second floor of you aunt house.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - Livin on the second floor of my great-aunt's house because that was a way to save money so that my parents... My mother could stay home. And you know, my mom was able to work on the PTA at our public school because she and a couple of other mothers who could afford to stay home, stayed home and they kept their eye on everybody in the school.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – So there was an opportunity because we saved money and we lived small, as my father said, there were parents who could be in the schools and who could be going on field trips, knowing that there were plenty of single mothers or mothers who couldn't stay home. So, moms like mine were looking out for all the kids at Bryn Mawr Elementary School.

My dad's city job paid for everything we did.

08:56

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yes.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And that's not true today.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Couldn't happen.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Couldn't happen.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Because of the higher cost of health care...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Wage stagnation.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – The higher cost of if you want to send your kid to college.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – So, you get financial pressures on the family. You then have all these institutions that used to be support systems – shrinking. So more and more, people start thinking in terms of...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Me.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Me. And I do things on my own.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And not us.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – I pursue a career. I make money. And then, if I'm successful enough, I can be self-sufficient and my family can be self-sufficient. Of course, the challenge is that that kind of set up creates a huge separation between people, between economic levels. Ah, you always had separation, unfortunately, around race...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Right. But now you've got separation within race.

10:00

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right. Talk about that cause you... one of the things that happens in your neighborhood is... It's not just white folks who move out over time.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Right.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – It's also Black folks who have means. They start saying, “well we want the same thing.”

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – We want to go out the suburbs.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – You know we saw that too. I mean, I write in my book about ‘white flight.’

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – But the truth is, later on down the line in the 80s or so as Black folks earned more money and got professions, the dream was to move to the suburbs.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – That was the dream of middle-class Black folks too. But I also...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Why did your parents not think about that?

10:42

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – [Laughs] You know, my parents were uniquely stubborn about the suburbs. You know, they really...

Number one, my father never wanted to be house poor. Right?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - So, there were times that they talked about buying a home. And I remember going to look at some homes and being excited that – Oh, I am going to have my own room. I was obsessed with having stairs in your house. [chuckles]

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - [chuckles]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Along with a station wagon. Because maybe we're gonna have an upstairs and I can have some stairs. I distinctly remember that. But I also...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – So, you wanted some stairs...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – I wanted some stairs! And a station wagon.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Cause now that's some success.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – That's some success right there.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – That's some Cleaver success.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – [Laughs] Did the Cleaver's have stairs?

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Everybody had stairs!

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – They must have had some stairs.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Everybody! The Brady Bunch had stairs.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – All those people. Damn.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – The Partridge Family. The only people who didn't have stairs were...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Was y'all.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – The Jefferson's and the Evan's Family.

BOTH – [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And the Robinson's.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – And the Robinson's.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – So I thought, you know, I want some stairs.

11:51

But my parents looked and my dad crunched the numbers and he said, “You know, if I'm putting all my money into a mortgage then we're not going to be able to go on vacation. I am not going to be able to save for your college...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And who cares about stairs? And you know, we grew up in the city. And this is just fine. And you need to learn how to live in the city.” And my father was suspicious of the suburbs because they still weren't completely welcoming.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – We had had incidents of going into the suburbs of Park Forest, that were all white. And I write about the incident where somebody scratched my father's car because we were Black folks in a neighborhood.

So, I think they probably felt a level of safety and security staying in a neighborhood that was surrounded by our extended family. As I said earlier...

12:45

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Well one of the things when I move to Chicago – and I started as a community organizer – And I was basically working in the neighborhoods that you grew up in.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – You were there.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – And I remember when I went to start my job - the guy who was training me – he said, “The first month all I want you to do is just talk to people.”

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – So I would go around the neighborhoods and just talk to people about how they ended up in Chicago. Folks coming up from the South in The Great Migration. Their parents and grandparents. And people would reminisce, and they would say, “You know, when we first moved here everybody raised everybody’s kids.”

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - That was a really common theme. People would say, “If I was messing up, it wasn’t... Ms. Smith down the street, she’d see me messing up. She’d scold me.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yup.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Then when I got home, I might get whooped because Ms. Smith would have called my mom...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – “How dare you have Ms. Smith calling me and telling me you were on her grass and then you said...And you had the nerve to talk back boy.”

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Exactly.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Boy.

BOTH – *Chuckle*

13:59

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right, so what you got was this portrait of a village.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah, things were just...it felt easier in those times...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – To have a family unit because it wasn't just you were supposed to branch out. That success was defined by your ability to leave your nuclear unit and make it on your own... That wasn't how either one of us was raised.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Every elder lived with someone. They shared expenses, they shared households, they shared the duties of raising kids. So, there wasn't this feeling that you were supposed to do this thing called loving and supporting you family on your own. You know that seems to be kind of a new thing.

And so, it felt like the community, the neighborhood I grew up with operated on that notion. And it wasn't just up to that parent to provide that stability and that love.

15:00

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - Your values always start with those closest to you, right? So, my mom deeply believed in everybody being worthy of love, praise, and support.

I think part of what also happened because I moved around a lot as a kid and I didn't have a big extended family like you did, was my friendships became really important. All my buddies who you still know... Bobby, Greg and Mike – all the guys I grew up with and have stayed in touch with all these years. That was my crew, that was my family.

It's interesting when I look back, all of us were from broken homes. All of us were working-class to middle-class, at least from an income perspective, but we were going to a school that had a lot a lot of rich kids. We had to share and improvise, right? So, Greg – he lived on one side of town. The school where we went was a lot closer to my grandparent's apartment. So, he'd sleep at either my place or Mike Ramos' place most of the week. And my grandparents fed him.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Fed him.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – And Mike Ramos' mom looked after him and made sure his clothes were clean. You know, his dad was working, Greg's dad was a hard-working guy. The point is... to some degree... We built our own community.

16:45

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - You know that at the core of everything you have done politically, what I know about you as a person and one of the reasons why I feel in love with you is...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – It wasn't just my looks... but that's okay...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – You're cute you know... But no, one of the reasons I feel in love with you is because you are guided by the principle that we are each other's brother's and sister's keepers. And that's how I was raised!

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Mm hmm.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - I mean, my values, in terms of what I think my obligation – my personal obligation – Michelle Obama – is that it is not enough that I succeed on my own. I have to care about the kid in the desk next to me at school because he's just as smart but his mom works.

And my father always kind of taught us to take in everybody's full story. Not to judge people, the drunk uncle or the cousin out of work...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Cause you didn't know what was happening...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – You didn't know what happened to them. You know, we weren't special. And as a result, you know if something good happens to you, if you have an advantage, you don't hoard it. You share it. You reach out. You give back.

And I can say that my family, my neighborhood, my notion of community growing up shaped that view and shaped the choices that I made in life as I felt your experiences shaped yours.

18:19

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - I think I figured out once I got to school that if I am chasing after my own success, that somehow, I am going to end up alone and unhappy.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – And that's why I ended up going into community organizing and the work that I was doing because when I thought about how I was going to spend my life, what I looked at was what those civil rights workers had done...And the freedom writers had done.

And I thought, you know, that looks like hard work but it never looks like lonely work.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm, yeah.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – That looks like hard and risky work but it never looks like...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Selfish...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Selfish, isolated, meaningless work...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah.

19:05

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Here you were, you could have done anything because of your academic achievement. Because you were the number one student at Harvard Law Review, the first Black President of the Harvard Law Review, top of your class...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yeah, see that’s why you started dating me... you thought I was gonna...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Nah, I didn’t even... I didn’t know all that.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – I was a meal ticket. You didn’t know I was gonna do some...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah, I didn’t know you were gonna be like, “What?”

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Broke. [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – You were running away from the money! I was like, “What is wrong with this negro?” [Laughs]

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – So, but the thing that a Harvard education gave me, the real ticket that I punched wasn’t to chase as much money as I wanted. What I purchased was enough credentials and security that I could go do the crazy things I wanted to do in terms of working in neighborhoods, going in to politics, all that. Knowing that I had enough of a floor beneath me that I was going to be okay.

20:08

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And our paths were almost flipped because I was punching the ticket.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yeah, you were that Saab driving...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – I was like... That was what I thought. Get out of school, buy a nice car, you know?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Remember the wine club? Remember that...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah, I joined. Yes.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You were a wine club member.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And we didn't even drink wine back then.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Nah, I don't want to know how good that wine is left either. I was skeptical.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah, I never opened the bottle. I just joined the wine club. It seemed like the very professional thing to do.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - [Laughs] Yeah, I think I teased you a little bit on that one.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Oh, definitely. Definitely.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – The Saab did have heated seats though.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Oh, you loved the Saab. Don't act like... Especially coming from that yellow car with that whole in the bottom.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Cause, at that time I was...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – I was like, “No we are not taking your car my brother, we are taking the Saab.” [Laughs]

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – I was still driving those thousand-dollar, five-hundred-dollar cars.

20:58

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – But I was punching the ticket.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – I was on the track. I was checking my boxes. Because I was doing what I thought I needed to do because I was a poor kid.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yes.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – So, I didn't feel like I had the option to just go off and do other things. But I also had a limited vision of what I could be because schools don't show you the world, they just show you a bunch of careers.

But I came to learn the same thing you learned that while working on the 47th floor in that fancy law firm making all that money, that it felt lonely.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And it felt isolating. And you know, I had this amazing view of the southeast side of city from my office. I could see the lake and I could see all of the neighborhood that had I come from. And I never felt further from that neighborhood than when I was sitting in that office working on briefs and cases that has nothing to do with anything that helped a broader group of people outside of myself.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And it felt lonely.

22:06

And I say this to young people, 'why did I leave corporate law and go in to community service?' - the truth is it was selfish. I was happier. When I left that firm and started working in the city, getting out into the broader community of Chicago and seeing the interconnectedness of these neighborhoods by being alive in the dirt and the grit of helping people...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yeah.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – I never looked back.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You know, you’re exactly right. I always to say the years I spent organizing, I got more out of it than the people I was supposedly helping.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Really, we were young. We didn’t know...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – We were so young. And inexperienced. [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – We were stumbling around trying to figure it... We can fix it... It’s like, ‘No, we can’t.’ We don’t know anything.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - [Laughs] Right. So, it not like I set the world on fire but I felt like, “Okay, I got roots here, I’ve got a community. I’ve got people whose stories I know, who know me. Who connect me to a larger vision and larger purpose...

23:17

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - And one of the things that happened as a community organizer in Chicago is there are all these different neighborhoods. And I know you started to feel that way with doing Public Allies.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Talk a little bit about how seeing all these different neighborhoods in Chicago and these young people gave you a better sense of, “Oh, my community is not just the South Side, my community is all these communities’...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – When I left the firm, I went to the city and I got really interesting insight and exposure of what it’s like to work in a government. But then I had an opportunity to run the

Chicago office of this new non-profit that was basically designed to help young adults 18-30 find careers in public service.

I had to literally go into to almost all 77 community areas that make up the city of Chicago and meet with the heads of alternative school programs or, you know, programs working single mothers, or health care initiatives or fairly qualified health centers...

I learned so much about the non-profit world but more importantly I got out into this big, broad, amazing city that was Chicago. Because when you grow up in Chicago, as you know...

24:34

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You don't leave the neighborhood.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - You do not leave the neighborhood. Some kids never had ever been from... left the West Side to even go to the South Side. There were kids who has never seen the lake... Lake Michigan.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – There were kids who had never been downtown before. That was not an unusual thing. Because of racism, because of segregation, because of gangs, because of a whole host of things. So I was one of those kids, I saw more of the city because I went to a magnet high school...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – And took the bus.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And had to take the bus. Take an hour-long bus ride so at least I knew downtown. But I had never spent much time on the North Side.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You had... You wouldn't go into Pilsen or...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - Pilsen Little Village, which is a predominantly a Latino community with all this culture.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Devon Street, with this entire Indian-American community. It's like you walk down those streets...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – It's just a whole new world. And they were all alive and vibrant. With good people trying to affect their neighborhoods. And caring...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Polish neighborhoods in Chicago. Second largest outside of Warsaw.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Exactly.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – More Polish folks than Chicago.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And for the first time I felt like a true Chicagoan. I felt the 'we' of Chicago.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yes. Exactly.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And that was, by far, one of the best parts of my career development was working with that non-profit organization and meeting kids from all over the city and watching them discover each other and discover different parts of the community. And start to find their power and their voice. I mean...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – And start to find their common stories, that's right?

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah.

26:16

Anna Holmes – The Michelle Obama Podcast continues after the break...

<MIDROLL - AD BREAK (+37 Sec)>

27:24

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – But I also think that something changed it seems like in the late 70s, early 80s. And I am a little bit older than you – although I look so much older than you -

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - [Laughs] Good one...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yeah...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Point scored. [Laughs]

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yeah, but I think when we were coming up the culture wasn't beaten you over the head everyday with what you should have. So, you went back to my grandparent's apartment, right?...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Oh yeah, it looked like my...our apartment.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – It wasn't any bigger than the place you guys stayed. I didn't feel poor in that.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Exactly. As we didn't feel poor either. But you go back to visit the house we grew up in...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – It's tiny!

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – You think... On my God, we were broke.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - We were broke.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – But yeah, we talk about this a lot, it's like...The phrase that sticks with me from my parents is 'Never Enough...Never Enough.' Because the minute you had a little bit of something, you know you had a pint ice cream and a chocolate and you asked for strawberry? You'd get in trouble.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – It's like, 'How dare you not be satisfied with what you have.'

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And then we would feel bad. Because you'd think "you're right... here I am with all this little bowl of ice cream and I am asking for more..." you know?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yes. Before you even finished!

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Before you even finished!

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You haven't even finished your ice cream! [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Never satisfied. Never satisfied. And I find myself saying that to Malia and Sasha.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – I know...

29:10

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - That's the biggest thing that gets on my nerves. They know it. It's like we're doing something great and you start looking over at the other...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You start looking over to see what else is next...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Never satisfied, you know...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Stuff doesn't make you happy.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Yes. So, this were I was going to take it.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – I think that culturally, we become much more focused on stuff and much less focused on relationships and family. And part of being an adult...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Part of being a citizen is you give something up.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – So instead of that, we have – you can have it all. You know, that’s the philosophy. You know even when I talk to young mothers its, “how do I have it all?” You know, or young families...

Because the motto has become not that you sacrifice but you should be able to have it all. And how do you get it? And if you're not getting it then something is wrong.

And I always joke it's like – that was the opposite of how we were brought up. You were never supposed to have it all. In fact, if you had it all, you were being greedy.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Cause if you have it all, that meant that someone didn’t have anything.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

30:18

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – But that’s what we’re teaching young people. You should, you know, have a career and you should earn a lot of money. You should be fulfilled. You should have your passion. You shouldn’t have to sacrifice that much. You should have it all.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - And you now have this sense of kind of a cut-throat competition.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – We’re all on our own.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – That we're all on our own.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - And it's a dog-eat-dog.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - And it's a dog-eat-dog.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – It's not us... it's us against them.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right, and we are constantly nervous about where we are going to be on this pecking order.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Pecking order.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – And that then reflects itself in our politics, right? Because at a certain point, you know, I am going to start thinking about politics in terms of how do I protect me.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Not how do I look after us.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Help the most people.

31:14

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Look the good news is that I think everybody's feeling this uncertainty. This anxiety. This sense that what we've been doing isn't working the way it should. Now, I think you have this big contest of competing ideas. On one side is those who just argue that the problem is just 'them.'

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm. [chuckles]

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – So, there nothing wrong with chasing after as much money as you can get, not investing in public goods...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Because when the problem is them, you don't really have to change.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You don't have to change. All you have do to is to stop them from taking your stuff. And that is one route that our society and our politics could take.

And then there's another story that says, you know, let's go ahead and re-embrace those values that made everybody better off back in the 50s, 60s and 70s - except this time let's do it in a way the genuinely includes everybody. To me that's the better story.

32:41

If you go back to that basic insight, and just widen it and take the blinders of racism, sexism, homophobia... All those things off. And say really our tribe is everybody.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah. And how beautiful and safe...stabilizing that would be. We all have each other to lean on.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Yes.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - That we don't have to hold up this big, gigantic thing all by ourselves.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – When everyone was looking about for everybody then the whole was greater than the sum of its parts.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yes.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA - Everybody gets a little bit more. Kids get more role models even if their family is not doing as well. Because there are people with some clout in these neighborhoods...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Everybody benefits from that piece of clout.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Everybody benefits from their ability to advocate, to make sure the resources are coming in. That whole process of lifting all boats comes about from this network of relationships in a community.

34:06

And the good news is, that when you look at all these young people who've been out there protesting in the wake of the George Floyd murder, that's their instinct. It's not uniform, and it could still go both ways in this country just like its teetering one way or the other in countries all around the world. This is not unique to the United States, it's we just got our own version of it.

How do we live together in a world that is shrinking and we are no longer just living in our own individual neighborhoods? Remember you were talking about Chicago...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Well, now everybody is on top of each other. And you can't just feel secure in your own neighborhood. Either you are going to war with the other neighborhoods or you start seeing that the people in the other neighborhoods are just like you and not as scary. And let's see how we can put this whole thing together. I think that's how young people... that's their instinct.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – The only thing that worries me, and I agree - in terms of the hope that I feel when I look at young people – just how they were raised, the values, their exposure, the questions that they have, the change in the economy that's forcing them to ask a certain set of questions – that give me hope.

But the thing that I worry is that I hear, I think, too many young people who question whether voting, whether politics is worth it.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Well, partly because they have been told. The message is sent every day that government doesn't work. They take for granted all the things that a working government has done in the past...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– In some ways, we're still living on the investment that was made by that greatest generation.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – I always joke, and I've always said one of the challenges of being president... Like you don't have a marketing budget, you know?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Yeah.

36:09

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – There's really no structure to market government, right?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – The average young person knows far more about the cereal they're eating, and the car they are driving than they do about what government actually does for them because they don't have marketing budgets. There isn't a jingle...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA- [Laughs] The only time they know about what government doing is when...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Is when it doesn't work, right?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– So we're getting a good lesson in that right now.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Exactly. If people are paying attention and understand what's missing.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Not having, you know, a public health system that takes care of people whether you are working or not. That takes care of you whether you have preexisting conditions or not. Unemployment. Social Security. You know all of the things that sort of keep people going when the chosen path doesn't work. [Laughs]

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– And I think you're absolutely right, that the danger for this generation is that they have become too deeply cynical in government. Not understanding that all government is us collectively making decisions together.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – That community we talked about.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– That community we talked about.

37:21

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Well and we've talked about this, this is how we raised this generation. Right, we just...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– We gave lip service to it...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah, well we didn't complete the cycle of the message, right? You know, I think more people in our generation raised our kids to be more open-minded and to be more thoughtful and considerate. We had the words for it, right?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – When it comes to fathers raising their girls, I do think that the average father today does believe that their girl can be anything she wants to be and they are delivering those messages around the dinner table.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – There is a different way of parenting. But what we didn't do... We delivered those messages at the dinner table but we didn't take them to the board room. We didn't change our workplaces; we didn't change things outside the home...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – We didn't institutionalize...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - We didn't institutionalize the values that we'd been teaching this generation of kids. So now, they are growing up. They are leaving the dinner table and they are going out into the world and going, 'The world doesn't look like what I was taught back home.' You know, and this isn't right.

38:38

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Young people are idealistic as they have ever been. I think they are more idealistic now than they were when I was growing up. The difference though is that idealism that they feel as if they can channel it outside of governmental structures and outside of politics.

The problem is, again we're getting a pretty good lesson in this right now, there's some things we just can't do by ourselves or even groups of us can do by ourselves. As general proposition: we can't build infrastructure by ourselves, we can't deal with a pandemic by ourselves.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - We can't effectively educate the public by ourselves, through individual schools...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– There just certain things that you have to do collectively cause they're too big, they're too expensive. At the end of the day, I think that people are going to be...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – You think that they are going to do the right thing?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– I think folks are going to do the right thing.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – You think they’re gonna vote? [Laughs]

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– You... You know me... I’m just...

39:43

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – You are the eternal optimist. You’re the ‘Yes, We Can!’ man!

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– [Laughs] I’m the ‘Yes, We Can!’ man. I am the ‘audacity of hope’
guy. You know...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah. What’s the alternative? That’s the thing...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– And that’s the point.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Cynical as I can be in this... in the end I... I agree. We don’t have
an alternative.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– I think where we disagree is usually you just think things just have to
get super, super bad before folks figure stuff out.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Well, I hope we’re at that point.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– I’m always thinking... You know what maybe we can learn a little
bit...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – No... we’ll figure it out before we crash into the Sun.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA- [Laugh] Before...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – We’re getting close, Will Robinson, pull out! And it’s like, “Nah,
it’s not hot enough...”

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– [Laughs] Will Robinson... See that's a reference that anybody under fifty will not recognize.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Our older viewers will know Lost in Space. That's okay.

But I tend to agree. When in doubt, rely on hope.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Might as well.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Because, well as you pointed out as a former president who reads and knows history. Let's just take moment to pause and think about that.

But as that person, you understand the arc of progress. We are moving toward more inclusivity, more openness, more we-ness. It's not an easy trajectory.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– It's in fits and starts.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – It is bumpy and it is uncomfortable. And that is how change happens. It's not just one continuous arc...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Right.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – It's up and down. It's cyclical.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Exactly.

41:23

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Well, one of the things I want to encourage as we come to a close...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – A close...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Because I know you are a busy man. But I want to first of all thank you for...

BOTH - [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – What like you had a choice?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Right, exactly. What are you talking about? Come on now...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – But it's been fun to share...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – We like talking!

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Conversations that we have around the dinner table. Yes, sometimes our dinners get a little heavy. Part of what I hope that listeners take away from this conversation is not that we have the answers, but these kinds of conversations need to happen around our dinner tables and in our smaller communities for us to just sort of understand and to appreciate the importance that community plays on who we are.

And that we can't do this stuff and we're not supposed to do this stuff. We weren't built to do this thing called life in a vacuum.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Right.

42:29

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – It is much more hopeful, it is much more gratifying, much more effective to live this life as a 'we'. And I think as young people listen to this, as they are starting to shape their paths, I would really strongly encourage them to think about building lives that are self-less.

Not just because it's the right thing to do, but it truly is the better way to live.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– It's more fun.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - It's more fun.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– It's more fun and it comes back. Look, I know that this podcast it focused on a bunch of different kinds of relationships that we all rely on. And maybe one thing everybody can take away from this podcast, relative to the other shows and guests that you are going have on is just that you can isolate healthy friendships, marriages, parenting that goes on from the communities that they are in.

So, all these relationships are valuable by themselves but they thrive, they prosper when the whole society is reinforcing these relationships.

43:50

When you and I think about what's the inheritance that we would like to leave Malia and Sasha, more than anything what it would be is that they are living in a country that respects everybody and looks after everybody. Celebrates and sees everybody.

Cause we know that if we're not around, that those girls are in a society like that.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Mm hmm, like that.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– They'll be fine. Right?

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Yeah. That's absolutely right.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Okay.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Couldn't have said it better myself. [Laughs]

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – Well, you could. Thanks for having me. Appreciate ya.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – More conversations to come...

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– I’m so looking forward to all the other podcasts and wisdom that will be doled out.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA– Love ya.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - Love you.

44:35

MICHELLE OBAMA VO -

Well, I would like to thank my wonderful husband, Barack, for joining me today on this inaugural episode of The Michelle Obama Podcast.

Now, I know that a lot of you have been having similar conversations with the people you love trying to figure out how you feel with all these changes happening. But asking yourselves, ‘What is it you want to actually do about it?’

How you answer those questions is unique to you, to your experiences, to your communities but the important thing is you do, in fact, answer those questions. That you go through the process of reflecting and reaching out to close friends and family to talk through what you are feeling and what you're hoping for.

Because once you do those things - you do that work – I think you’ll have a better sense of your community, of your country and yourselves – more importantly. And if enough of us can do that, if enough of us can empathize with one another going through the process over time – and it will take a long time – we can come up with some solutions. Perhaps create the change we are all hoping for.

So, I know a lot of you are hurting out there right now and are confused and that’s okay. But as I’ve seen, as Barack has seen, we can take that anger, that disappointment and turn it into something useful.

Perhaps, even something hopeful.

But we just have to keep having those conversations because once we start the conversation there is no telling where it will go.

So, thanks everybody for listening and I will talk to you again soon.

46:37

ANNA HOLMES – This season on the Michelle Obama Podcast...

CRAIG ROBINSON – Oh, my sister has a show and I'm on it...

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – And my brother is here with me on my show...

UNKNOWN – You got to watch Soul Train! I grew up in Minnesota...where we didn't have Soul Train.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – [Laughs] Y'all didn't have Soul Train?! What did you do on Saturday?...

UNKNOWN – Nooo!

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – Just hot flashes! And I remember having one on Marine One. I'm dressed I need to get out walk into an event.

UNKNOWN – For me, it's not only having the people around me, "Oh, you're doing good... you're doing amazing...' they be like, 'Nah, girl that was shady. You were wrong for that!'

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA - [Laughs]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – You know if we looked at marriage as a real team, then you want your teammate to be a winner. You want Lebron.

CONAN O'BRIAN -[Laughs]

47:28

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – College was the next natural step. And that moment that she left the restaurant and we got in our car to go to the airport and then I heard Barack over on the side... [crying noises] you know that sort of... [crying noises] And Alan, his agent, passed a handkerchief back to him. And he was like, ‘Thanks, man.’

UNKNOWN – And I remember walking by the meeting and hearing your voice outside, and you were saying to all the city agencies that were around that table, “We are not going to leave this meeting until we figure this out.” And I remember I turned around and I was like, “She doesn't need me in that meeting...”

CONAN O'BRIAN - What a child does – it's a giant claw that comes down and it picks up your marriage and it shakes it really hard.

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – [Laughs]

UNKNOWN – You give us another bottle of that tequila and we can really go... [Laughs]

ANNA HOLMES - The Michelle Obama Podcast is a Spotify Original, presented and produced by HigherGround Audio in collaboration with Dustlight Productions.

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Our theme music is by Stevie Wonder. Original music by Andy Clausen and Tele Fresco.

The song you heard at the beginning of this show is "Black Truck" by Mereba.

Thanks for listening to The Michelle Obama Podcast.

49:51

<POSTROLL – AD BREAK (+30 Sec)>

50:21