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[On President Obama's Eternal Optimism](#)

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[TRANSCRIPT OF CLIP]

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...

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...

Below are additional pull quotes from the episode:

#### **On Quantining Together**

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 too 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.

#### **On Being Raised By Community**

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 your 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.

#### **On Why Michelle Fell In Love with Barack**

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 fell 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!

#### **On Why President Obama Became a Community Organizer**

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.

### **On Why the First Lady Became Community Organizer**

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 47<sup>th</sup> 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 the city from my office. I could see the lake and I could see all of the neighborhood that I came from. And I never felt further from that neighborhood than when I was sitting in that office working on briefs and cases that had 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. And I say this to young people, ‘why did I leave corporate law and go into 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.

### **On Their Early Days as Community Organizers**

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – You know, you’re exactly right. I always 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.

### **On The Power of Community**

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA – 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 that genuinely includes everybody. To me that’s the better story. 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 – 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. 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 it’s 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.

### **On Political Apathy in Young People**

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.

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.

### **On Raising Daughters and Idealistic Young People**

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, this isn't right.

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.

### **On Living Life as a 'We'**

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA – 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.

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.

### **On The World They Hope to Leave Behind for Malia and Sasha**

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]