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VALERIE JARRETT
OBAMA: IN PURSUIT OF A MORE PERFECT UNION
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Valerie Jarrett
Political Advisor
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MATTHEW HENDERSON

Valerie Jarrett interview take one. Marker.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Valerie Jarrett

Political Advisor

Meeting the Obamas

01:00:13:02

VALERIE JARRETT:

I first met Michelle Robinson when she was thinking of leaving her private law firm and a good friend of mine who was the head of the law department at the city sent her resume down to me. I had just been promoted to deputy chief of staff and across the top of the resume, Susan, our friend had written, "Outstanding young superstar, wants to leave the private practice, interested

in government service.” So I invited in Michelle for an interview and I still remember this tall, statuesque, elegant woman, simply dressed, hair pulled back, no makeup. Shook my hand, looked me right in the eye and from that point forward, rather than selling her resume as people often do, she told me her story: young woman growing up on the Southside of Chicago. Being a product of the Chicago public school system, going on off to outstanding schools, Princeton and Harvard, and after a couple of years practicing at a law firm, she hit the same point I had hit after six years. Took me a little longer and decided that she wanted to change course. And I was so blown away by her, I offered her a job on the spot. A few days later we’re chatting, and I said, “Well?” And she said, “We have a problem. My fiancée doesn’t think it’s such a great idea.” And I said, “Well, who’s your fiancée and why do we care what he thinks?” And she said, “His name is Barack Obama. He started his career as a community organizer on the Southside of Chicago, and he’s concerned about me going straight from a law firm into the fire. You at least were in the frying pan in the law department for four years; I’d be going right into this political hotbed. Would you have dinner with us and let’s talk about it?”

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And that was the beginning. I was struck by how much in love they were and how you felt this mutual respect. They listened to each other, they played off each other’s questions, and rather than beginning by asking me about the job, he began by asking about myself. I remember he said, “So, where’d you grow up?” And I said, “Chicago.” And he said, “Were you born here?” And I did what

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I always do when people ask that question. I brace myself for the response when I said that I was born in Iran. And rather than the normal kind of banal follow up and me trying to move on quickly, he said, “Well that’s interesting. Tell me about your life there.” And then he opened up and started telling me stories about his time in Indonesia and we compared what it was like to spend our formative years outside the United States, the appreciation it gave us for the United States, the ability of us to just feel confident that we could find something in common with people who had very different backgrounds than our own, and also importantly that the United States is the greatest country on earth already, if not the only country on earth and that we could learn a great deal outside of our own shores. He was one of the first people outside of my parents who actually understood my perspective, my worldview. And I had spent much of my childhood actually trying to be like everybody else and conform and I stopped speaking Farsi and I lost my British accent that I had developed and I just wanted to be a regular kid and he kind of gave me permission to be myself because I felt like I was not alone.

Valerie Jarrett’s international childhood

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VALERIE JARRETT:

It’s interesting you’d say that because actually we ended up in Iran because my father who was discharged from the army was looking for a job at a major teaching institution here in the United States and as an African-American in 1955, he couldn’t find a job, and so my parents investigated options outside

of the United States and the opportunity came along to be one of the first physicians to start a new hospital in Shiraz, Iran, and really what happened to him during his time in Iran is he stopped viewing himself as an African-American physician, and he started viewing himself as an American physician, and his self-confidence grew during that period of time and from there he was recruited to go to University College of London and do research. And ironically from there to the University of Chicago where my mom grew up and where he'd done his residency, and so in a sense, leaving the United States allowed him to no longer be subjected to the discrimination and racism of the time but actually to thrive on the merits. And so, it wasn't what you might expect, that we were viewed as people of color. We weren't actually. We were just Americans.

Dreams from My Father

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VALERIE JARRETT:

I do remember the first time I read *Dreams From My Father*. I've now read it several times since and each time I see a different message and part of him that I didn't necessarily focus on the first time. But I was struck by how candid he was about the painful parts of his childhood and coming of age and reckoning with being an African American from mixed parents. Grappling with the anger that comes when one is abandoned by one's own father, particularly for boys. I think that was a hard thing for him, and he struggled.

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On the other hand, as he's often said to me since, the people who loved him most in the world were White and so that allowed him this sense of belonging or expectation of being able to connect in the way that maybe some African Americans did not. But I do remember thinking what a candid, honest, portrayal of your evolution. Interestingly similar to his wife *Becoming* in her story but from very different childhoods. Both raised though with very common values. And those values of hard work and excellence and resilience I think are part of what led him to be the extraordinary president and human being that he is today.

Michelle Obama's family

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VALERIE JARRETT:

I think the fact that Michelle had come from two parents who loved each other dearly, a brother who was a buddy and partner and literally shared a bedroom for most of their childhood, extremely close, just not in proximity but in spirit, reminded Barack Obama of what he didn't have. And I think he hungered for that, and he used Michelle's father as a role model. Someone who believed in hard work and family and sacrifice, and who was present in the lives of his children, even though he obviously was in great pain quite often from MS and how he overcame that pain in order to be an integral part of his family life. He died not that long after Barack came on the scene, I think the stories that both Michelle and her mom and Craig told him of their

upbringing helped him understand the kind of father he wanted to be. He wanted to be the father he never had.

The Obamas' wedding

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VALERIE JARRETT:

Their wedding was a hoot. Everything from the pomp that came with the ceremony to the party and dinner that was at the Southshore Country Club not far from where I grew up, and it was the first and only time I met Barack's mom. And he made a point of taking her around table-to-table and introducing her to all his friends who she hadn't had yet a chance to meet. And I just remember sitting with people, many of whom I've known for decades at that point and feeling this sense of, the different way that they had spokes that came together from their separate circles of friends that were now joining as one, the overlaps that were there. One of my best friends had hired Barack when he was a summer associate before—even before he had graduated from law school and had always said to me, "You've got to meet this fine young man named Barack Obama." And I never met him that summer and only met him a couple years later, so there were lots of overlapping friendships as well and it was just a great, great party, celebration.

The beginning of Obama's political career

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VALERIE JARRETT:

Well, the first time I met Barack Obama at the dinner that he and Michelle and I had, he—they both talked about the importance of public service in their life and at that point, he wasn't sure what path it would take but he knew he was committed to it. The work that he had done fighting for civil rights and being an advocate before even going to law school, he wanted to continue that work and I think he was just looking for the right in. I thought when I first met him, my goodness you would be an excellent public servant. Maybe one day, one day you'll be Mayor of Chicago. Wouldn't that be extraordinary? And I think thinking back, if there hadn't been a Harold Washington who had been Mayor of Chicago, maybe we wouldn't have all thought that the sky was the limit for Barack Obama but at that point, the sky was the mayor's office. And so when he came and he said there was going to be an open seat in the State Senate, he thought it might make sense 'cause it's so much easier to run in an open seat, that started—that made us all think that was a good place to start.

Balancing family and career

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VALERIE JARRETT:

The Obamas, particularly after Malia and Sasha came on the scene, faced the same challenges that most working parents face. And it was exacerbated by the fact that he had to commute to Springfield on a weekly basis, so there were a number of days during the week where Michelle was really a single

parent on her own; thank goodness she had her mother to support her and her mom would come over in the morning when Michelle would go work out and be available and—and a huge asset just as she was in the White House, but she felt that she was responsible for excelling at work and being the sole parent. And one of the things Michelle and I bonded on early on since I was a single mom was just the stresses of that. You're trying to be perfect at everything, and it's overwhelming. And one of the lessons we learned is, look, it's just hard, and you do the best you can. You get through it, and we were the lucky ones. We had resources and a support network and there are so many working moms in particular out there who don't have that, who are minimum wage workers trying to take down two shifts while finding someone to care for their children. We spend a lot of time fussing about our circumstances but recognizing that we were the lucky ones and trying to form a network for support for one another so that we didn't feel so alone. I know when I was Michelle's age at the time that she and I met and they had children, I felt if I just worked harder, if I just needed less sleep, if I were just smarter, if I were better organized, maybe this wouldn't be so hard.

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And I think part of what we learn through opening up and telling our stories to each other is, you know, it's just hard. Well, when they started their career and their life together, both of them had college and law school debt. They were—she was making a reasonable living back then but not by any stretch of the imagined affluent, and he was cobbling together jobs where he could, working at a law firm and teaching a little bit at the University of Chicago and

then in the State Senate, but the debt was looming, and it was always present in their minds, and I think it caused a level of stress that it does to so many Americans, trying to figure out how to do what you want to do without in their cases feeling like they had to go practice at a big law firm for much more money. So here they wanted to do public service, but they're faced with the debt. And so it did cause a lot of stress early, and as Michelle joked later, you can't count on writing a bestseller book to pay back your college loans. It should be easier than that.

Smoking

01:12:06:01

VALERIE JARRETT:

Well, he was a closet smoker. I've never seen him smoke. And in fact, the first time it really came front and center for me was during the campaign when he was running for president and we were in Indiana. And it was the first time I met Stevie Wonder, who played at a concert right before we arrived on the scene, and I was thrilled with meeting this super star who I had idolized for as long as I can remember. And Stevie Wonder walked over to me and he whispered in my ear, "I smell smoke on him." And I thought, "This is the first conversation I'm having with Stevie Wonder, is about smoking and it's not even me?" It was a subject that he and I didn't talk about, but I think Michelle's view was obvious, which was she wanted him around for the long haul. If they were gonna build a life together and have children, then he needed to be mindful of what his habit could do. It could wreak havoc on his

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health. And so yes, it was a bone of contention, and he—he was a closet smoker until in the middle of healthcare reform, while we were trying to get the legislation passed, he picked the most stressful, difficult time to quit smoking. Classic Barack Obama.

Obama's mother's passing

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VALERIE JARRETT:

Barack Obama's mother's death came quite suddenly. Her cancer was quite aggressive, and she wasn't expected to die as quickly as she did, so he was shocked by it, devastated. They were very close, and I think it really—it took its toll and thank goodness Michelle was right there to provide him with the support and love that he needed. I think her death also was the personal motivation for him to push so hard for healthcare. She struggled with her insurance trying to figure out would she be adequately covered, and he felt like at a time like that, you shouldn't have to worry about whether or not you can afford your treatment. Often on the campaign trail, he told this story about his mom, to personalize why he was fighting so hard for something that was so difficult to get done. When he finished his book, and she died so suddenly, he felt that his search for his father perhaps overlooked just how fundamentally important his mother had been to his shaping. I think that's natural. When you don't have something, I—it—you chase after it. It feels elusive, and that's what his father had been his whole life. But after losing his mother, then that became the loss as well, and I think with her death came a

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far better appreciation for just how important she had been to making him the man that he was.

Campaign strategy

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VALERIE JARRETT:

Early in the campaign, because our strategy was all hands on deck in Iowa, other than raising money, he really moved in Iowa, and the theory of the case was if he could win Iowa, then he would be credible not just to people in White America but also people in Black America who were hesitant about his chances of winning, but that strategy came with a cost, and the cost was Black people feeling somewhat neglected. And people clamored to have him show up in their cities and their towns around the country outside of Iowa where there were large concentrations of Black people. And so one of my responsibilities was running interference and trying to explain why you really had to do this with an Iowa first strategy. And that it would be almost impossible with time and money for him to do both. Now we came up with a magic solution, which was, we asked Michelle to go to South Carolina where she gave an extraordinary speech that really spoke to the feelings in the African American community, the feelings of fear, worrying would he lose, worrying would he be hurt, worrying about what it would mean for future candidates should this wash out.

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And I remember on the plane on the way to the speech, Michelle was talking about this feeling of fear and she said, “You know, it’s like people who cover their furniture with plastic trying to keep it safe.” And so out of this conversation, she really came up with this extem—extemporaneous addition to her speech where she broke it down and everyone in the audience, which were—which was comprised of primarily African American women all knew about their grandmother’s couch and this sense that she gave them permission by acknowledging their fear but then said, “Look, I have the most to lose. And if I am prepared to face this for the greater good, you know, take my hand and join me in that effort.” And so that really was like the magic solution to what was becoming an enormous problem for our campaign, this sense of Black people not feeling as though they were appreciated or safe to invest.

Reverend Al Sharpton

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VALERIE JARRETT:

Al Sharpton is my friend, and I’m really proud that we’ve developed this relationship over the last ten years. And my experience with him is he’s a real straight shooter. And he appreciated the fact that there were times when Barack Obama reached out to him directly, and they would have frank and open conversations, like whether it was prudent for Sharpton to show up in Iowa. Barack Obama did—thought it was not and because he made that phone call directly, Sharpton honored his wish. As we got to know him better

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and after we entered into the White House, he was probably the one voice on the outside who was consistently understanding what we were trying to do. We would call that on message. And we never gave him talking points or anything like that. He just simply got Barack Obama and I think it grew out of this honest and open friendship.

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And often times we would be sitting in meetings, and we'd be looking at the morning clips and Al Sharpton would have said something, and the refrain would go something like this. "Well, so far, Al Sharpton's been pretty good." And I remember one morning, I said, "Well when are we gonna drop the so far and just say he's being pretty solid?" And to this day, he continues to fight the good fight, and he's pragmatic. He once said to a group of civil rights leaders, "Our job is to make trouble from the inside. He's grappling with a whole host of issues far broader than our agenda. He is president for all of America so why don't we do what we do and why don't we let him do what he does." President Obama is one of the most popular men in the world. He enjoys enormous support and love from the African American community, and so I think a few of the gadflies who saw him as frankly a threat to their power structure ended up being pretty irrelevant and people like Reverend Sharpton who came in and wanted to work with President Obama and pursue a joint agenda focusing on civil rights actually got more done. And so I think that it'd be fair to say that Reverend Sharpton's breadth and depth of experience on the ground and willingness to come in and work with us ended

up having a bigger impact—a bigger positive impact in the African American community than many of the voices who were fussing from the cheap seats.

Reverend Jeremiah Wright

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VALERIE JARRETT:

When the Reverend Wright crisis blew up, Barack Obama's first instinct was to address it head on. He felt that he owed the American people an explanation and that they had to hear it directly and honestly from him. I agreed with that. I think that at times like that, people deserve to have a better understanding, and there were a lot of people who had been supportive of him who were confused by Reverend Wright and some of his outrageous statements that he had made. I had confidence that he had figured out how to say it in a way that would touch people, and I think a lot of the other folks were just like, what on earth can he possibly say to make this ok. And so, I bet on him.

Racist opposition

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VALERIE JARRETT:

So from day one, leader McConnell is quoted as having said his number one objective was to make sure that Barack Obama was a one-term president. Not that we keep our economy from falling into a free fall and a great depression. Not to make sure that Americans had healthcare or that we

wound down the wars and kept America safe at the same time and avert terror threats including capturing Osama Bin Laden, not to focus on our dependence on foreign oil or our stature around the world. But one short term in the—in the arc of our country, political objective. And what was profoundly disappointing to me, that took a while for it to sink in fully was that they were so determined to put their short-term political objectives ahead of what was good for the country. I can't look into their hearts and see what their motivation was. I think race was an easy tool that was available to them to try to keep that fissure as broad as it could possibly be at a time when you're attacking somebody political—politically, it's—it's kind of you know, 101 in fear mongering playbook to play on whatever differences you can find and try to make the—they be an other. I think the birther movement was also an attempt to delegitimize his presidency. There I think some of the undertones were far more racial than I would attribute necessarily to the folks who were in the senate and in the house in the Republican Party. This fresh, young politician coming in on a wave of hope and change was a real threat to the status quo, and they benefited from the status quo. Nobody gives up power easily and he was determined to take that power and put it back in the hands of the American people, and they were determined to put their short-term political interests ahead of the American people.

Henry Louis "Skip" Gates Jr.

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VALERIE JARRETT:

In the summer of 2009, we were running out of time to get healthcare reform done that year. And it was important to finish it so we could move on to the rest of President Obama's agenda. So President Obama decided to have a press conference where he would have the sole topic would be healthcare, and he could communicate through the press directly to the American people why he was fighting so hard for this important reform. The press conference went very well except the last question that came from Lindsweed, of our hometown, the Chicago Sun Times, and she asked him about this altercation between Skip Gates when he had been arrested in his own home. And President Obama with an appropriate disclaimer said he didn't know all the facts, but it seemed to him that perhaps the police had behaved stupidly, and that turned into a firestorm. It was probably the first real good example for us of two things. Number one, how every word that the president used is taken so seriously. He knew words matter, but he did state the obvious, and yet it turned into not just a issue between Skip Gates and this policeman but writ large police and communities of color where historically there had been problems, and all he was doing was shedding light on the obvious, but it was taken as a message of being anti-police by some.

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And so, the president was dealing with these daily stories of you know, increased anxiety and anger from all quarters—or not all quarters, many quarters about this situation. And so he said, "Well, let's just call them in, and let's see if these two men can model good behavior for the rest of the

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country.” Not that we would then suddenly become post-racial, and all—all of the tensions would evaporate but that it could be a good example but more importantly so that we could stop talking about it and get back to healthcare, and it accomplished both. I think—I think it had an impact on him being extremely careful in the words that he chose. There was also a great kerfuffle when he called members of the business community fat cats and believe me, I heard from many of them about that. And he was somewhat taken aback because he said, “Look, people say perfectly dreadful things about me all day long every day. Why is everyone so sensitive?” But you know what, people are sensitive.

Trayvon Martin

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VALERIE JARRETT:

He was careful, and he tried to speak about issues of race as he had in his race speech during the campaign in ways where people could hear his voice, and I think the best example of that was after Trayvon Martin’s death. And I remember being in the oval office, and he said in much more emotional terms, “If I had a son, he would look like Trayvon Martin.” And when he went out and addressed the press, he said it in a calmer voice, but the message I think was searing to many because here, the president of the United States own son could be a threat walking down a street in his own community. In the aftermath of the verdict, the Zimmerman verdict, he said, “We should all do some soul searching to find out why that is, why this young man can’t

walk down the street without being looked at as—in fear.” And, so I think his language that he used, well that he’s used throughout his life has been one of unifying people, trying to make people understand and be empathetic, describing us as not red states and blue states but the United States. All intended to bring us closer together, and he was measured in his words I think after that incident with Skip in a way that he probably hadn’t been quite so careful before.

Strength of character

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VALERIE JARRETT:

President Obama was acutely aware of the frustrations in many quarters that wanted him to be much more forward leaning and confrontational and one of his strengths I think is his ability to absorb a lot of pain, particularly coming from friendly quarters for the greater good, for the long view, for the recognition that using his voice was there for—for—to be a force for good. Another example would be when he decided to give a joint address to congress, again solely on healthcare. And in the middle of his address, Congressman Joe Wilson yelled out, “You lie.” Well, there are people who think he should’ve stopped and checked him for that and chastised him in public, and he said, “I’m trying to get healthcare passed. I don’t want to see what happened at the press conference when I talked about Skip Gates happen again here.” That requires an enormous amount of strength of character, to take the long view and absorb all of the shocks and you know,

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spears that are being thrown at you for what you think is the greater good and to resist the temptation to put yourself ahead of the mission, to succumb to the bait, to get taken off course and you just have to look at that true north and keep heading in that way and often times that means that people don't understand you until they look back in the rearview mirror, and many of the folks who were critical and wanted him to be more outspoken and—and emotional and reactive now have a better appreciation for how temperament actually is a strength.

Eric Holder, Jr.

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VALERIE JARRETT:

President Obama and Eric Holder forged a very close friendship that began when President Obama was first running for Senate. I think they have similar perspectives in terms of fighting for civil rights and justice and making sure that our system works for everybody. And he selected him as his attorney general knowing that the position is an independent position and that he wouldn't be able to micro-manage investigations or much of the work that Eric would do but that he trusted him to go forth and represent the interests that they had bonded around. Eric was certainly a teammate and an important integral part of the team because there were major policies that the justice department's input was important in order to move forward the president's agenda. So it was an interesting—it was a friendship—it was

acknowledging the important independence of the attorney general and yet there were policies that required them to work closely together.

Valerie Jarrett's role in the White House

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VALERIE JARRETT:

In addition to my responsibilities that I had in the White House, I think they both wanted to have someone who they knew, knew them well, knew them individually and as a couple, shared their values, shared their vision for why we were there in the first place, what had driven us early, early, so many years before to go into public service in the first place and to have no other agenda than their best interest. I think that was a comfort to them. It was important that I bring that history to the table and to fight for their values when they weren't in the room. And that's what they both expected of me to do. And there were times where even though the east wing and the west wing were a block apart, there was a need for a bridge between the teams. And so early on particularly I did that as well.

Marian Robinson

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VALERIE JARRETT:

For both Michelle and Barack Obama, having Marian Robinson move in from day one and be an integral part of the family, to provide support to all of them, not just the children but to the adults as well was invaluable. I don't

know how they would have been able to get through those eight years without her constant presence; when they traveled, knowing that she would be there. Her trips to and from school with the girls. The habits that families—that normal families have that she was able to help solidify by her presence in the White House was just remarkable. In some ways it was a sacrifice for her. She loved Chicago and her friends back home, but there was no higher calling for her than to be this incredible resource for the first family.

Malia and Sasha Obama

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VALERIE JARRETT:

I think it was a top priority for both Michelle and Barack Obama to raise their children with core values that reflected their view of the world and that had nothing to do with the incredible property upon which they found themselves. The most important house in the world that had all of the trappings that could be quite seductive if character and integrity and those core values were not reinforced. And so President Obama would give Michelle Obama most of the credit for that, but she's a grounded person and she kept those girls feet firmly on the ground, and I think they've grown up into incredible, responsible, caring, bright, and delicious young ladies and I think their parents and Marianne Robinson have a lot to do with that.

The Obamas as a role model family

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VALERIE JARRETT:

I think the Obama family is the American family and I would hope that every American could look at them and as they all grew over the eight years that he was in office and became a household name and treasure to so many. I would hope that they would be a model, a new model of what an American family could and should look like. I can't tell you the number of moms particularly who've come up to me over the years and have said, "Wow, look what Sasha and Malia do, and if they do it, you can do it too." And I think that the Obama's were—were—I think the Obama's were obviously mindful that they wanted to raise their daughters to be the extraordinary adults that they'd become, but they also recognized that their behavior was a role model to so many others. Not just African American children but all children and that if they comported themselves in a way where people could be proud if their daughters were raised in a fashion where they were not indulged because of the opulence of the White House, then that's an important message to send to all children, all families.

Inspired by young people

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VALERIE JARRETT:

I would say both President and Michelle Obama were inspired by young people. They loved young people. They gave them a sense of hope, of infinite possibilities. They were smart, curious, energetic, not burdened down by the

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jadedness that comes with age and so whether it was the young people that came to the White House or the ones that devoted themselves to his campaigns, nothing could make either of them tear up faster than seeing the marvels of our youth.

Obama's temperament

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VALERIE JARRETT:

I would describe President Obama as a stillwater that runs deep, that he has a very cool temperament and demeanor which requires strength, because it's not that the emotion isn't there. It's just that he knows that it's important that he keep it under check, that he not be solely driven by emotion, particularly when he's the most important man in the world making decisions that affect millions and millions of people. You do have to learn to control yourself and so I think where he could, he did. There were certainly moments where he simply couldn't, and I think when you—having traveled with him to Sandy Hook and met the parents whose children were fatally killed as well as the families of the adults who were murdered. There was no worse day for us than that. His frustrations spilled out into tears at the fact that Congress in the face of such an abhorrent tragedy, wouldn't take the most basic steps to keep guns out of the hands of people who are a threat to themselves or to others.

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And to go to memorial service after memorial service after memorial service and feel incapable of doing what as a president you know you should caused him just incredible frustration. And—and the tears that happened in the White House when—near the end when we were announcing the final executive orders that he signed were motivated by looking at Mark Barton, whose son Daniel had been killed and who for the years since Daniel's death had been fighting so hard for gun violence reduction. And I think Mark's introduction just moved the president to tears, just as the young people in a much more positive way moved him to tears after his 2012 campaign. He knew it was his last campaign, his last election and that so many people had sacrificed and worked so hard in order to have him re-elected. A re-election, which was in some ways more important than the first one.

2012 Election

01:35:08:13

VALERIE JARRETT:

I always looked at the first election as aspirational. Everybody was hoping that he would turn out to be the president he promised to be. The second one was affirmational, having seen him in action for four years, that he still enjoyed their confidence. And he knew that a lot of the credit went to these amazing young people who sacrificed and worked so hard and were so darn smart.

Michelle Obama's support

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VALERIE JARRETT:

Michelle Obama is her husband's best friend. He trusts her completely. He knows she has only his best interests and the best interests of our country at heart and that she will tell him the truth. And I think the higher you go, you begin to be in rarified air and people are afraid to be honest with you and candid, and he always knows one thing for sure. She's a straight shooter, and she'll tell him what he wants to hear even if he doesn't want to hear it. She's also enormously empathetic. She can take one look at him and tell what kind of a day he had, and she ensured that the family unit provided him that rock of support that he had needed to get through the toughest of times.

2016 election

01:36:20:09

VALERIE JARRETT:

One of the reasons why President Obama campaigned so hard for Hillary Clinton was recognizing the choice that was before the American people, and he wanted to use his popularity to encourage people that if they wanted to continue on the path that we were going and they cared about him, then they should support her. And so it was quite jarring to see the election outcome, but you know what, elections have consequences, and we all live with them. And as the Obama's often say, they're fine, they're gonna do just fine. The people they were fighting for are at risk. And the President also said that he would reserve his voice post-presidency for times when he felt that the core

values of our country were at stake. And so whether it was the republican's attempt to repeal the Affordable Care Act, or walk away from the climate deal, or walk away from the Iran deal, keeping Iran from developing nuclear weapons. These were times when he thought it was important to speak up. He also spoke up over the separation of families at the border, and then at the midterms he really rolled up his sleeves and fought hard. He thought the midterm elections were the most important of our life and that the core foundation of our democracy was at risk.

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And so that was worth fighting for, even though that's unusual for a former president to do. I think that fortunately, the country is moving in a progressive direction. It's moving in a direction where more voices are included, where by sheer population, the majority is changing, and the momentum that started when he announced his candidacy in Springfield, Illinois continues to this day. Young people who are getting involved. Now there was a little bit of a complacency I think during his term in office where people were, well President Obama's got it, I guess we can go back to life. And I think the election in 2016; perhaps the only silver lining was it was a wake up call, and people realize that democracy is only as good as we demand that it be. Politicians will put their short term interests first if we let them and that we have to hold them accountable, and so I think both of the Obama's are feeling optimistic about the direction that our country is going, so that in turn becomes part of his legacy. That the activism, the people who are willing to run for office, the record number of women who run for office, all of that

comes from I think an excitement he helped start back over a decade ago. And so the question will be, is that sustainable? And will people continue to recognize they've got to get in there and fight for a democracy and if it's gonna be of the people, by the people and for the people, that requires the people.

Obama's next chapter

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VALERIE JARRETT:

President Obama's devoting this next chapter of his life to creating a platform for civic engagement through his foundation where people who want to make their country better but don't have the tools will get the tools and share best practices and take those best practices to scale, and if he can as he has said, create a million Barack Obamas and a million Michelle Obamas to go forth and bend that arc of the moral universe towards justice, what better legacy than that?

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