

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MICHELLE OBAMA: You come into this house and there is so much to do, there's so much coming at you that there's no time to think or reflect...

OBAMA: Hi everyone we are here digging up soil because we're about to plant a garden.

OBAMA: I won't be satisfied nor will my husband until every single veteran and military spouse who wants a job has one.

OBAMA: At the end of the day my most important title is still mom-in-chief.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: In 2008 Barack Obama was elected as our 44th president and he and first lady Michelle Obama went into the history books as the first African American first couple. Now one year into a second Obama term, the first lady continues her focus on childhood obesity, support for military families and access to education. Good evening and welcome. Well tonight is the final installment in our yearlong series First Ladies: Influence and Image, and we finish appropriately with the current first lady Michelle Obama.

For the next 90 minutes, we'll learn more about her biography and how she's approached the job in her six years in the office so far. Let me introduce you to our two guests who'll be here with us throughout that time and they're both journalists who have covered the first lady. Liza Mundy is a biographer of Michelle Obama; her 2008 book was called "Michelle." And Krissah Thompson is a "Washington Post" journalist who covers the first lady as her beat, thanks for coming both of you tonight.

SWAIN: Well we're going to start our program with a clip and this is from 2008; Michelle Obama in a campaign speech talking about her own personal story. Let's watch.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: Now all my life I have confronted people who had a certain expectation of me. Every step of the way there was somebody there telling me what I couldn't do. Applied to Princeton, you can't go there your test scores aren't high enough. Oh I went, I graduated with departmental honors, wrong. And then I wasn't supposed to go to Harvard, that was probably a little too tough for me, I don't even know why they said that.

But I could go through every curve and twist and turn of my life and find somebody that was telling me lower your expectations, set your sights low, you're not ready you can't do that. And every time I push past other people's limited expectations of me and reach for things that I knew I could do and grab my seat at the table that others felt so entitled to, what I learned was that there's no magic to these people who feel so much more ready than me. I was just as ready always just as prepared as anyone at that table.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: We are going to talk about her biography, but we chose that clip because it was before she went to the White House out on the campaign trail. Both of you have been observing her professionally. When you watch the 2008 Michelle Obama the pre-White House Michelle Obama and think about her today the woman that you cover, how has she grown in the job? How has she changed her approach to the public from what we see in that clip?

LIZA MUNDY: Well I think she's become more optimistic and positive. I have a hard time imagining her saying something quite like that today. She seems to be articulating in that clip something almost like there's something called imposter syndrome when people feel like they aren't supposed to be where they are. And it takes her a while to get over that feeling to realize wow, I'm just as good as everybody else because maybe you came from a background where you weren't expected to be in this place. And I think she's – if she felt any of that she's certainly gotten over. I mean I think she seems very comfortable in where she is.

SWAIN: Krissah Thompson, what are your observations?

THOMPSON: Well you know she's still saying some of same the things. I think that some of the rough edges have definitely been polished off. When she's talking to young people she's definitely saying you know, people didn't believe at me at different points in my life but I showed them that I could overcome and I you know made these achievements anyway and this line that there's no magic to this. She says that often so that people know that you know, she can close this gap between where she came from and where she is and that you know kids can do the same thing.

SWAIN: In your book you say early on that Michelle Obama once said of politics that sometimes like a waste of time and she has become over time her husband's trusted political advisor and often his surrogate. When did that transformation happen?

MUNDY: That's a really good question. I mean she came from Chicago which was a city of machine politics, a city that had not been politically just or fair to its African American residents. I mean she had a lot of reason to be skeptical of politics when she was growing up, and her family was famously skeptical of politics to the point where Barack Obama when he sort of confessed to Craig Robinson that he wanted to be a politician, Craig said, "Well don't tell Aunt Gracie, you know keep that under your hat."

And I think it – and you know she even described herself in 2007 as having been sort of the last one to accept or know that Barack Obama was really going to run for president. So I think it must have come you know during the presidential campaign really.

SWAIN: Do you agree?

THOMPSON: I do. You know there is this idea that she was a reluctant campaigner. I think that she was reluctant to sign on in part because she was you know, they had two young daughters at the time and thinking about the sort of sacrifices that would have to be made. She'd

already been through a campaign for Senate that took them you know all across the state and her mom had to step up in many ways and help with the daughters. So when you think about taking that to the nation you know, there was a lot to consider and she didn't you know she counted the cost you could put it that way.

But you know, but then I'm told you know once she signed on she was all in. So it wasn't that this kind of reluctance continued throughout.

SWAIN: We – when we started out this series we promised it would be from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama to cover the full span of the first ladies throughout history. Obviously this one's a challenge tonight because it is a sitting first lady and the story's not been told nor has there been some distance in time to judge her legacy and history.

So we're going to spend some time on her biography and how she's used her first six years in the White House. And we do invite your calls along the way. We hope they'll be less about politics tonight and more about biography as they have been throughout the series.

And here's how you can join in. You can do it by telephone; 202-585-3880 if you live in the eastern or central time zones, 202-585-3881 if you're in the mountain or pacific time zones or far west including Hawaii the president's home state. And you can find us on Twitter @firstladies is our Twitter address. And of course Facebook is another opportunity there's already a rollicking conversation on the Facebook page about Michelle Obama and you can join that and we'll mix in comments throughout the program.

So we're going to go to her biography. She was born when and where?

MUNDY: She was born in Chicago in 1964.

SWAIN: She just had her 50th birthday, so it was January 17th?

MUNDY: Right.

SWAIN: And you referenced this, but what was 1960s Chicago like for the Robinson family?

MUNDY: It was a very segregated city still. You know she grew up on the south side of Chicago, there were a lot of different neighborhoods or a lot of immigrants you know, different ethnic neighborhoods different – there was a lot of racial redlining. The city was just opening up a little bit so that her family when she was still pretty small was able to move into a neighborhood that had been a white neighborhood.

And you know and Craig has said and neighbors have said that they remember the white families started moving away when families like the Robinsons were moving in, and they would have been aware of that. I mean they would have been aware that opportunities were opening up for better neighborhoods, better schools but at the same time there was a white flag going on that they would have in some way been aware it was happening.

SWAIN: Father Frasier Robinson born in 1935, he died in 1991, and mother Marion Robinson who we all know because she lives at the White House and we don't see her too often but she's certainly part of the first family. We have a clip about Michelle Obama talking about her father, if watched the democratic convention in 2012 you may remember this speech. Let's listen in.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: My father was a pump operator at the city water plant and he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when my brother and I were young. And even as a kid, I knew there were plenty of days when he was in pain and I knew there were plenty of mornings when it was a struggle for him to simply get out of bed. But every morning I watched my father wake up with a smile. You know grab his walker, prop himself up against the bathroom sink and slowly shave and button his uniform.

And when he returned home after a long day's work my brother and I would stand at the top of the stairs of our little apartment patiently waiting to greet him, watching as he reached down to lift one leg and then the other to slowly climb his way into our arms. But despite these challenges, my dad hardly ever missed a day of work. He and my mom were determined to give me and my brother the kind of education they could only dream of.

And when my brother and I finally made it to college nearly all of our tuition came from student loans and grants but my dad still had to pay a tiny portion of that tuition himself. And every semester he was determined to pay that bill right on time, even taking out loans when he fell short. He was so proud to be sending his kids to college and he made sure we never missed a registration deadline because his check was late. You see, for my dad that's what it meant to be a man.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: So let's follow up with there. But let's start with her father and his influence on her life. If you look at the Obamas as a couple, the interesting comparison is that Barack Obama really didn't know his father at all. And it seems from what we can see there that for Michelle Obama, her father was a very important influence in her life.

THOMPSON: Well her father was a central figure, and really both of her parents. Her brother describes their childhood as being kind of a Shangri-La of Chicago where their parents spent lots of time with them you know, they weren't leaving the kids with babysitters. Often when they went out for entertainment they did it together. They built you know the kids' self esteem and just made it seem like they were wonderful people to be around and that kind of confidence sort infused in their lives.

You know they played board games, took family trips. You know there was a much broader Robinson clan in town and so they you know, knew all their relatives and went to visit and just kind of describe a really warm family centered childhood and you know their dad was at the heart of that.

SWAIN: Now she describes him as the pump operator, but he was also part of their precinct democratic precinct arrangement in the city of Chicago highly political city. So what was his job and how did that influence the family's understanding of politics and what it can do?

MUNDY: Well he was precinct captain. And so you know, he would go around and – in some ways he was a community organizer like Barack Obama, you know get people out get people to vote. And neighbors said that he was a joking man and he had a very good sense of humor that he was an extrovert. And so it may be that he genuinely enjoyed being a precinct captain, it may also be that it was necessary to be a precinct captain in order to get the pump operator's job because that was a way back with the city machine that you would get a city job with the through your political help.

And the other – the other thought I had you know about both of her parents is one of the – having a good city job meant for them that Michelle Obama's mom could stay home with the – with the children in a way that many women in their community were not able to do so. I mean African American women have a much longer tradition of having to go out to work. And so I think that – I think that when she had children you know she asked herself, should I be home with my daughters the way that my mother was home with me? But I think it probably made her father's job seem all the more you know valuable to have.

THOMPSON: Can I just add to that because I think that's an important point, about her mom. You know she was a stay at home mom but she also had a couple of years of teachers college. And so she was able to kind of home school her children before home schooling was popular in the way that we think about it in. Both of them you know skipped early grades in elementary school. And so you see some things happening in this family really early that are different you know.

SWAIN: So both children went to Princeton and Michelle went onto Harvard Law School. Where did that emphasis on education come from?

THOMPSON: Her parents. They were just really clear that this was the road to get ahead. And you know her brother in his book writes about you know his mom teaching them to read at home and doing math tables and that kind of thing. So when they got to school you know even as early as first and second grades, they were already steps ahead of everyone else and that just kind of continues along with their own hard work of course you know through high school. But they're excelling really early on.

MUNDY: And when Michelle Obama got into a magnet school that was in a completely different part of Chicago at a pretty early age, she had to take several you know modes of transportation to get to her high school and leave really early in the morning in the Chicago winter.

SWAIN: Hour long bus to school in each direction she's talked about to get to the school. Now during 2008 your newspaper "Washington Post" was – wrote a big story about the genealogy of Michelle Obama's family tracing it back to a slave in Georgetown, South Carolina. A question for both of you because you've both written about this, the arc of the Robinson family life is the

arc of black history in America in ways that Barack Obama's life is not. So can you comment about that and what we see in the Robinson family and part of the great migration in the 40s and 50s et cetera and how that we should understand their experience?

MUNDY: You want to go first?

THOMPSON: You go Liza; you may know a little bit more about the family from South Carolina onto Chicago and just that arc. I mean we do know that for African Americans the fact that her story is you know rooted in relatives that were enslaved has been very you know important and connective to just her relationship with the community in general. I mean when you look back to 2008 there were some questions early on about you know is Barack Obama black enough? And you never heard that sort of thing about Michelle Obama of course, and I think part of that is rooted in you know, the more traditional African American experience – experience. And so in that way she kind of serves as a validator for him in many ways ...

MUNDY: She definitely served as a validator when he was

THOMPSON: When you talk about questions of race right.

MUNDY: In Chicago politics.

THOMPSON: Yes, so that was important.

SWAIN: So what do you want to add about the Robinson family history?

MUNDY: Just as you say. I mean her family's history is quintessential in that some of her family stayed in Georgetown and she has relatives who are still there. There was I think a train depot very close to town and some – at least one of her male ancestors I think it would have been I can't remember – I'm sorry her grandfather her great grandfather you know traveled to Chicago because that's where the trains went, and was able to settle in the south side where there was the meat packing plants and the stock yards and all of that industrial labor. There was still a lot of racism, there were still different wage scales for black men and white men but it was better than the south.

And then the Robinson family was able to establish a very broad and rooted family in Chicago so that when she and Barack Obama were first going out, that was his – that was a real epiphany for him. I mean an experience to be in such a rooted family where your uncles were coming around and people were visiting with each other, it was just a different family life than he had experienced.

SWAIN: Before we leave her childhood years, Adrian Wilbur (ph) on Twitter asks Mrs. Obama is into having children exercise more, I wonder if she played any sports when she was younger.

THOMPSON: She did ballet in high school.

MUNDY: She danced yes.

THOMPSON: So she danced. And her brother writes a little bit about this in his book describing his sister as being very competitive. You know she wanted to win board games and foot races and that kind of thing. And if my recollection is right, part of the reason you know she didn't continue – you know let me pause. She said that she didn't do many sports in high school and beyond because like Liza said, she was taking the bus back and forth and it would have kept her at school too late to be able to do some of those after school extracurricular programs.

MUNDY: Because Craig went to a different high school ...

THOMPSON: Right.

MUNDY: More appropriate school where he was able to play basketball. And I thought she said at one point that she resisted playing basketball because she was tall and people thought that she would be likely to play basketball that was ...

SWAIN: That sounds

MUNDY: And not being able to beat your brother at it.

SWAIN: The first lady is 5'11"; do you know when she reached that height?

MUNDY: She well I have a photo of my book that was in the year book of her in ballet doing ballet and she looked pretty tall but...

SWAIN: Let me take a couple of calls and then learn about her days at Princeton and then law school and meeting the future president. Cathy (ph) is in Aurora, Colorado. Hi Cathy (ph).

CATHY (ph): Good evening, thank you so much for your program. I've been watching it from Martha Washington till now.

SWAIN: Well perfect, thanks.

MUNDY: And my comment is that I'm kind of a real romantic for sure. I see some of the presidents and their wives they seem to really show a lot of love and all this. And for instance Pat and Richard Nixon couldn't – they didn't seem you know, I think he loved her but he just didn't show it. And I can see it with Michelle and President Obama that they really do love one another it's not phony. I think they really do care for one another and they enjoy each other's company.

And that was just my comment, and I think that this is so important for the people of the United States or any country to say hey, these two people do love one another. And I don't care what if you're a republican or a democrat, I think it's so important that they do show that they do care and they don't put on a show. Thank you so much.

SWAIN: Thank you Cathy (ph). Also since we've been moving through history with this series, have society's standards changed where we're more welcoming of seeing the emotional personal emotional side of the people in the White House than we might have been?

THOMPSON: I think so in part just because of reality television if nothing else, right. We are so intimately involved with people that we don't know well and in some ways people feel like they know the Obamas and their relationship because it's on public display in something of the same way. I mean you know we catch a wind when they're on date night, we know that last weekend they had an early Valentine's Day dinner and that kind of thing. And the fact that that is out in the public and people see them you know warmly touching each other and hugging.

And you know even you know his campaign at one point sent out a photo of them together hugging one another both embracing one another and that just went viral. And you know then there were you know pieces in newspapers sort of thinking about what it means to see a kind of modern marriage in the White House and considering those ideas.

SWAIN: Well and the other layer to that a modern marriage in the White House and an African American couple, you write in one of your articles of Valeri Jared who's been with the first lady since her days at the Mayor Daley's office said they're cognizant of this role model importance that they have. And would you comment about then how much of this is a conscious effort?

THOMPSON: I think it's a very conscious. And it's not just for young people who've been a focus of both the president and first lady but also for families. I mean there is so much talk now about how you do family well in this country and they understand that people are hungry for that information. How do you raise well adjusted teenagers and still have a woman doing that in the White House and you know kind of giving parenting tips? Just the other day she gave some parenting tips to Justin Bieber's mother.

People want that kind of information, and I think it also provides some of that sort of personal connection that this White House has done I would say really well in helping people to feel like you know, the White House is the people's house and this is a family that could be the family next door and that you can relate to.

SWAIN: And it is really the first fully social media White House. They have advantages on social media that past presidents did not. So we've seen lots of them in lots of different forms than we have of earlier presidents and first ladies. John (ph) is in Houston, hi John (ph) you're on the air.

JOHN (ph): Hi I called – this show is great. And I called during Helen Taft's show about what –. My questions are after they killed Osama bin Laden when they saw the pictures what was his reaction, what was her reaction and will they ever release them? And how come they never released them? Thank you.

SWAIN: Thank you very much. Do either of you know whether or not she had a reaction about Osama?

THOMPSON: No idea. If I'm remembering correctly that night he was at was it the White House correspondent's dinner. And I think she went out to dinner with his sister maybe. So we don't – we don't know anything about their private reactions to those photos. We do know they were not in the White House.

SWAIN: Yes. Keith (ph) in Greenup, Illinois. Hi Keith (ph).

KEITH (ph): Hi, it's obvious – thank you for taking my call first of all. It's obvious that Michelle and Barack Obama are really good parents, and I was appalled with that ad campaign that came out this last election that was talking about their kids was getting special you know treatment and this and that and they should have, they're the president's children. But how did that affect Michelle and how did she maintain and not just go viral on TV after that was done? Thank you.

THOMPSON: I think I know what he's referring to the – I believe it was the NRA; it could have been another organization when we were in the midst of the gun rights debate ...

SWAIN: Right.

THOMPSON: Produced I think it was web ad and not an ad for television that asked some questions about you know, the president's daughters being guarded by secret service and men who are carrying guns and why shouldn't other young people you know have armed guards in their schools? And I believe the president himself reacted and you know said that he didn't think those sorts ads were appropriate. But this brings up an interesting point about just how protective this White House has been of the Obama daughters, and you do see some very fine lines.

There were some companies that tried to create some dolls you know named Sasha and Malia early on and the White House quickly shut that down. And so this sort of thing that the daughters are off limits has been you know pretty true to form.

SWAIN: And also interesting and I have to move the story along here, but further back in history there were some presidents who fully embraced having the children be available making advertisements out of them and the like. So that's been another storyline as our series has progressed that we've seen evolve over the White House.

MUNDY: Although first ladies have also handed down advice. Like Jackie Kennedy handed down advice to Hillary Clinton who handed down advice to Michelle Obama about how to raise little kids in the White House.

SWAIN: But we're advancing this story because we have her not yet at Princeton. So she's a successful student at Princeton at a time when there were about 90 African Americans on campus to 1,100 I think. One of the things that has stayed with her in politics is her thesis because she was a sociology major and she wrote on the subject of black Princeton alumni. Would you talk about that thesis and how it evolved into a political really tool for the opposition?

MUNDY: Yes, yes. And I have to say as someone who was at Princeton at about the same time and wrote a thesis, the thought that it would end up in the public view and be sort of used against you it just sort of boggles the mind. You know it's not something that you would ever think would happen when you were struggling through your senior thesis.

But you know she was – she was on the Princeton campus at a really interesting time. The campus had opened up to you know to women, to African American students, to a more diverse student body but there was definitely resistance and backlash against that. It was a time where a lot of students at campus didn't have a lot of experience you know hadn't travelled a lot, and so were coming to campus and sort of made aware of their difference in a way that they had never been made aware before.

So her thesis you know talking about the fact that for the first time on the campus at Princeton she realized that she was black seems completely unsurprising to me and yet – and it's interesting it was a sociology experiment where she was writing alumni and saying so did you feel now – before you graduated while you were here and then afterwards, did you feel more comfortable with white people or black people? What kind of responsibility now do you feel to the lower income black community? She was working out all these you know changes and questions that she was asking herself in a way that seems to me so normal and that so many other students of different you know gender or racial groups or ethnic groups would also be asking themselves on this campus exposed to a lot of different people ...

THOMPSON: Hey you're making a really big class jump and you kind of have to figure out what does that ...

MUNDY: Class jump also.

THOMPSON: What does that mean what does that look like? How do I stay connected to where I come from which is really important to me and also move into some of these opportunities that are head of me?

MUNDY: Right.

SWAIN: But the lesson in American politics today for the highest office in the land is anything's fair game, right? So she moves from Princeton to Harvard and decides to study law. What took her in the direction of law?

MUNDY: I think – I think really part of it was what everybody – everybody around campus if you weren't quite sure what you were going to do you went to law school. And I think I did – and I think also for many people at that – at that point you thought you know the civil rights act was not that old. You thought I'll change the world I'll you know, that'll be what I do if I go to law school. But there was a pretty strong conformist sort of push to law school at that time.

And I did interview an administrator there at Princeton. He knew her very well and tried to talk her out of going to law school. And eventually she said Michelle did call her when she was at Harvard Law saying you know you were probably right.

SWAIN: But she chose to go back to Chicago and get a job at a corporate law firm that specialized in telecommunication law. So she took the conventional path with her law ...

MUNDY: She did for a while and I mean I'm sure you might want to comment on this. But I think that getting back to the what do I owe my community and what will make my parents proud? I think both she and Craig were part of the first generation of African American citizens who did have the opportunity to go into corporate America, or work for a corporate law firm and have access to you know this kind of a job in a way that their parents had not.

So they asked themselves, should I take advantage of that opportunity now or should I go back and work on behalf of my community and the community that I came from? And I think that's something that she's wrestled with you know ever since.

SWAIN: Krissah Thompson I'm going to take a telephone call because our time will go by quickly here. Lisa's (ph) in Portland, Oregon you're on the air. Hi Lisa (ph).

LISA (ph): Hi, her brother Craig lives here in Oregon and I was wondering if you're fairly certain that she and the president are going to return to Chicago.

SWAIN: OK thanks. Do we know – they're beginning to talk about what they might do.

THOMPSON: Right, I think we don't know where they'll eventually end up. They have talked about perhaps staying in Washington right after his term ends, because their youngest daughter will still have a couple of years in high school. And after having uprooted their lives to come here you know for as the president has said to fulfill his dream, you know that some other members of the family will kind of come first in deciding where they go next.

So I think we can look for their youngest daughter Sasha to have quite a bit of input into where they end. And whether eventually they'll make their way to back to Chicago or Oregon or Hawaii or any number of places I think we can't be sure.

SWAIN: Laura (ph) is in Hinesville, Georgia. Hi Laura (ph).

LAURA (ph): Hi. Thank you, thank you so much. I lived in Indiana in 2008 and Michelle Obama came to speak. And there was a group of us Allen county for Obama and it was about 150 of us. And she spoke at a high school and everyone in that room had tears. She was just amazing, she is amazing and I really enjoyed the series, I've been watching it ever since Martha Washington. And thank you so much, thank you.

SWAIN: All right, thanks for your telephone call. Well to advance our story she takes a job at Sidley we mentioned the big law firm in Chicago and it was a fateful decision because she meets

a young summer law intern from Harvard. Would you tell the story about how the two of them met and how long he pursued her?

MUNDY: Right. So he was a summer associate and she was his boss, she was assigned as his supervisor. So I think probably like modern workplace laws would not permit this relationship to develop. But in fact I think he was taken with her. Her colleagues who I interviewed you know became aware that in sort of the late afternoons they'd walk by her office and he'd be sort of perched on her desk, and they could tell that something was developing. And I don't think it took too long actually before they were going out and both smitten with each other.

SWAIN: But they didn't marry for four years.

MUNDY: That's right, that's right because they were – he was – he had to go back to law school. So she was in Chicago, he was going back to Harvard Law. And so there were several years where they were not necessarily living in the same town. And she does tell a funny story on herself where she began to pressure him and they were going out to dinner in Chicago and she sort of started in on the when are we going to get married.

And he for a while he would say oh marriage is just a word et cetera. So she started in and then with the dessert a ring was delivered with the dessert and she tells a story on herself where she says you know, that did shut me up.

SWAIN: They were married in 1992 in Michelle Obama's church which would also become part of their political story. It was the Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago and the pastor there Reverend Jeremiah Wright. How did his story their story together become important to the Obamas politically?

THOMPSON: Well it becomes an important part of the 2008 campaign, and it really speaks to I think in so many ways this kind of latent question that was always out there like is America ready for African Americans White House? Is America ready for a black president? And so in some ways Jeremiah Wright's stands in as a kind of charge point for that question, he comes out of a kind of strain of African American pastors in thinking black liberation theology where you know there were many radical sermons which were excerpted and lines taken from them that become a huge political problem for the Obamas.

But he was also a man who you know for a time had quite a bit of influence on them. President Obama takes when you know when he's in the U.S. Senate takes the title of his second book "Audacity to Hope" comes from one of Reverend Wright's sermons. And in that sermon Reverend Wright is talking about this idea of not having very much but hoping anyway and holding on to hope. And so these are some of the kind of ideas that connect them to him and the church. But when this breaks open in the campaign if we all remember, there's really a large sort of national conversation about race that begins.

SWAIN: They were married in 1992. Malia their first daughter didn't arrive until 1998. What was life like for the young couple in those six years?

MUNDY: They were working very hard. You know at a certain point I think – I think Barack Obama helped persuade Michelle Obama that she could leave corporate law. She could leave Sidley Austin, and she could do something less conventional and more interesting that she didn't have to follow you know a really kind of predictable path. And I think that's one thing he did for her at the same time that she gave him a very rooted family, the sense of belonging in Chicago. I think he gave her a sense that of the possible of what was possible for her.

So she took a job in the city government then she took a job with a nonprofit called Public Allies. And for that period – and then he was teaching at the law school and getting started in politics. And they were both really working very hard and very intensely; two very intense people.

SWAIN: Is it true that in addition to her more community oriented jobs she was also serving on corporate boards. So she I read in a biography that she served on several corporate boards during that period.

MUNDY: She was on some boards and I think one was a board of a dance company; I'm not sure about corporate boards actually.

SWAIN: All right, so the distinction would be important in her development.

MUNDY: Yes, yes.

SWAIN: So when Barack Obama starts to move from community organizing into elective politics how supportive was Michelle?

THOMPSON: I have a quote ...

SWAIN: OK.

THOMPSON: I have a quote from "The Audacity of Hope" when he's you know talking about after Sasha is born Michelle would often say, "You only think about yourself. I never thought I'd have to raise a family alone." And this was an argument, this kind of classic marital argument that happened in their household repeatedly during this time because she was shouldering so much of the weight of raising a family so ...

MUNDY: And supporting the family.

THOMPSON: Right, right. And so this is a – this is a difficult point for them in their marriage and kind of you know what he's going to do with his life you know.

SWAIN: And not the first time in the history of the first ladies where a political wife is left to really raise the family as the husband is pursuing ...

THOMPSON: Right.

SWAIN: So it's a real commitment on the part of both spouses to do, pursue this.

MUNDY: And there have been first ladies who have prayed for their husband's defeat. I mean there have been first ladies who were really dragged into the White House against their will.

THOMPSON: It doesn't feel like she was in that camp but.

MUNDY: Not quite, not quite. Yes, yes.

SWAIN: Sandy (ph) is in Clarksville, Tennessee. Hi, Sandy (ph).

SANDY (ph): Hello. I wanted to commend you guys for doing an excellent series and I'm very proud that you guys done this. The question I have is probably twofold. The main one is the presidential library. I know that after the president and first lady will end their service, are they -
- to do it either in Honolulu or in Chicago.

MUNDY: You would be more likely to know.

THOMPSON: No one knows. But we do know that they have formed a committee to begin to think about the library and where it will be. And they'll begin soliciting I guess you would call them bids from cities in different locations. I know you know Chicago's on the list, I hear that New York is also vying, President Obama spent some time at Columbia, Hawaii will put in a bid. There could be some other cities that they've just passed through that are hoping.

But there is a sense that you know Chicago makes sense in part because the political start was there they got their roots. But it doesn't you know feel like at this point that it's been completely settled. And even within Chicago there are different locations that are hoping to eventually you know win the library.

SWAIN: We're going to fast forward to the Obama life, his time as a state senator in Illinois and his bid for the United States Senate successful bid and coming to Washington and then the decision to start running for president during his first term in the United States Senate. How much a part of that decision was Michelle Obama? Was this something that the two of them strategized together and made the decision together to do?

THOMPSON: He had to convince her according to you know the way her brother tells the story. You know first Barack Obama went to Michelle Obama's brother Craig Robinson had a conversation with him like you know, "I think this is the opportunity I think I should do this." And he says, "Have you talked to your wife"? And Barack Obama says, "I thought you could help me with that."

And Craig Robinson sort of floats with both his mother and his sister this idea, and you know in some ways like -- in his book describes sort of paving the way. And you know and as a family they made the decision that this is something that they would do with councilors and strategists.

SWAIN: We're going to go back to that 2008 Wisconsin speech with Michelle Obama out on the campaign trail because another part of that speech contains a section that has stayed with this first lady throughout her tenure in office. Let's listen in.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: But what we've learned over this year is that hope is making a comeback. It is making a comeback and let me tell you something, for the first time in my adult lifetime I'm really proud of my country and not just because Barack has done well but because I think people are hungry for change. And I have been desperate to see our country moving in that direction, and just not feeling so alone in my frustration and disappointment. I've seen people who are hungry to be unified around some basic common issues and it's made me proud.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: I can tell you that tonight on our Facebook page lots of people were quoting that line back to us all— years later. It has stayed with people as their view of how she thinks about American society. Has she talked about what she was saying there and what she was trying to say?

THOMPSON: I think she did – I think she did soon after talk a bit about that. And in fact at the time you know she had said expressed the same sentiment in different ways. What happened in that moment was the political press hadn't been paying much attention to her from day to day. You know she was out mostly speaking to grassroots and supporters. You know I saw her a couple of times when she was on the campaign trail, got applause from crowds.

People enjoyed hearing her in part because you know unlike the candidate she wasn't you know so strictly message, she just kind of spoke from her heart without a lot of notes and you know at that time the democratic grassroots found that refreshing. And then comes this moment where this one line is [extrapolated] from you know this speech and it begins to define her. And the campaign gear has to immediately snap into action and begin to create you know a different story around her because one emerges that is not favorable.

SWAIN: Any comments on that narrative and how it defined her and then how the opposition used it to create a narrative about the president as well?

MUNDY: Right. And so it sort of lined up with you know they would – they would the Princeton thesis and Reverend Wright, and so all sort of used as allegedly evidence that she was unhappy with America. I think – I think to me where that line came out and she was talking a lot at that time. She would talk about racial division if she was on a college campus talking to students she'd say, "Look there are white students sitting there are blacks students sitting, I know what that's like. You guys need to come together."

She would talk about America being isolated so that you know people who were fighting a war, the people at home were going shopping and the twain— weren't meeting. You know a sense that there was a coming together that still needed to happen. I think that was where that was coming

from. But the campaign definitely kicked into gear after that and you know there was – there was not another episode like that.

SWAIN: So during the primary Hillary Clinton was the primary rival of Barack Obama. Would you comment a bit about this interesting relationship of a former first lady who's now a presidential candidate and ultimately, is defeated by this opponent then goes on to serve as his secretary of state and has a first lady that she can give guidance to about time in the White House? I mean how did that relationship between the two women all work out?

THOMPSON: Well it's interesting because during the 2008 primary campaign it really becomes you know a dog fight towards end. They're grasping you know, and it got ugly at some points, and you had two you know really defined camps within the democratic party and they were you know the Clinton-ites and the Obamas you know. And there were some question as to whether everyone was going to be able to come together in a very natural way. And this idea that Hillary Clinton would serve you know as secretary of state did a lot in terms of mending those bridges.

And you know early on in the Obamas term, Michelle Obama goes over to the state department and they you know have some interaction and are very warm to each other publicly. And that was you know another moment of coming together. You know Michelle Obama has been a very different kind of first lady than Hillary Clinton was. And so in many ways she's relied on Laura Bush's team to give her staff early on guidance about how things would operate in the east wing because you know, Hillary Clinton had an office in the west wing which was – which was different than the way she planned to set things up.

SWAIN: All right, after the Reverend Wright controversy, Barack and Michelle Obama went to NBC and talked to "The Today Show" about the issue and we got a chance one of many chances to see them interacting as a couple. We're going to show a short clip from that and then talk about how they used in the campaign the national media to present a portrait of themselves. Let's watch.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

FEMALE: So you never sit there and get upset about these?

OBAMA: Never, I never get upset Meredith. Not – do I

FEMALE: ... take off the political hats ...

B. OBAMA: She just – she stops – she stops – she stops reading the newspapers during certain spans of time.

OBAMA: I take the paper and I ball it up and I throw it in a corner. You know of course there are frustrations. You know this ...

B. OBAMA: She gets protective of me but ...

OBAMA: I do.

B. OBAMA: Which is OK, and the ...

OBAMA: I love my husband. I don't you know you don't – you don't want anybody talking poorly about the people that you love.

B. OBAMA: Right.

OBAMA: And quite frankly I think he's handled this stuff. I mean this you know, I'm so proud of how he has maintained his dignity, his cool, his honor.

B. OBAMA: So ...

OBAMA: I know you're trying to cut me off when I'm you know talking nicely about you.

B. OBAMA: Yes it get me embarrassed but ...

OBAMA: But I am proud of you.

B. OBAMA: I know. I appreciate that.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: What should we take away from this and other experiences like that that the public saw through the national media?

THOMPSON: Well it's always interesting to see them interacting with each other right; the sort of playfulness there the way that they you know sometimes pick at each other and joke with each other. And seems they genuinely enjoy being together. And I think that more than anything the idea of this family and this relationship in addition to President Obama addressing some of the issues around the Reverend Wright controversy head on in the speech that he gave on race, did much to you know toss that issue out the window and lead him right to the White House.

SWAIN: So when John McCain chose Sarah Palin as his vice presidential pick and wondering about whether or not that engendered a national dialogue about the role of women that happen to run the 2008 campaign.

MUNDY: Yes, but I wouldn't say it was a very coherent conversation about the role of women. I mean one thing also that struck me about Michelle Obama particularly compared to Hillary Clinton is, she did define herself also as mom in chief and I think that had a big effect on changing her image. I mean because one thing that you saw is that before the 2008 election she still polled – her favorables were high with democratic women and democratic men. But what you saw after the election and the inauguration was that her favorables really rose with conservative women.

And so I think presenting herself as a mother first and foremost did a lot to change her image and to soften her image. It's also something that women of Hillary Clinton's generation could not say of themselves. You know Hillary Clinton was in the generation where you couldn't even have a photo of your children on your desk if you wanted to be seen as a credible working woman.

SWAIN: Because you'd be too soft?

MUNDY: Right, too soft and you would remind people that you had children and you weren't supposed to do that in the 1980s, you were supposed to be all there at the workplace. And I really thought like that was a generational difference between the two women that ...

SWAIN: We're going to look next at the 2008 convention where people of both parties political junkies who watch and size up the candidates and independents of course as well had a chance to see Michelle Obama in long form before this national audience.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: What struck me when I first met Barack was that even though he had this funny name and even though he had grown up all the way across the continent in Hawaii, his family was so much like mine. He was raised by grandparents who were working class folks just like my parents, and by a single mother who struggled to pay the bills just like we did. And like my family, they scrimped and saved so that he could have opportunities that they never had for themselves.

And Barack and I were raised with so many of the same values like you work hard for what you want in life, that your word is your bond that you do what you say you're going to do, that you treat people with dignity and respect even if you don't know them and even if you don't agree with them.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: So what was she doing there?

THOMPSON: Introducing herself and her husband to the American public ...

SWAIN: The guy with the funny name.

THOMPSON: The guy with the funny name. And really she did – she did a lot of that early on during the campaign. I mean the role of the first lady in the modern campaign has been to humanize if that's the right word the candidate to help people connect with who he is as a person and you know what he's about, what he's like at home. You know in her campaign stump speech when she travelled around, she would talk about you know he leaves his socks out sometimes and you know he snores and that kind of thing. Like he's a real – he's a real guy you know and her you know and talking about him as a man.

MUNDY: And I think – I think in her case it was even more important because she was also Americanizing him. I mean she was confirming OK, this guy has a funny name, I thought he had a funny name too when I first heard of him when I was at Sidley Austin. But then when I met him I realized he was just as you know just as American as you and me; he has a Midwestern family. And so I think she walked the audience through that process of ...

SWAIN: That she went through herself?

MUNDY: Right.

SWAIN: David (ph) is watching us from Provo–, Utah. Hi David (ph), your question.

David (ph): Thanks Susan. First off I want to thank CSPAN and the White House historical association for this series; I've really learned a lot about our first ladies. My question is I know one of the issues that Michelle Obama has been interested in is military families. I was just wondering if the panelists know where that issue originated from and how she has influenced military families today.

THOMPSON: Yes. So Michelle Obama got involved with the issue of military families really early on. During the campaign she talks about having met in many cases women who were raising their you know families without their husbands who were away at war and just being really moved by their sacrifices. And so wanting to do something for not only the veterans, but their families who were left behind and realizing that you know like herself most Americans don't have relatives who are serving in the military.

And so she along with Joe Biden, Joe Biden's wife who you know do have children who've served (form) joining forces which is the name of the program which serves military families. And you know they've done more than just visit families and go to bases. She went to the business roundtable and spoke to CEOs there of top companies about the need to hire more veterans and their families and got you know some companies to sign pledges to say how many they would hire. So it's a – it's a program that's many faceted and you know she says she plans to continue with throughout her time in the White House.

SWAIN: So 2008 election night the Obamas are victorious. We've got one of those iconic pictures of the fist bump of the two of them that people will remember seeing. Can you comment a bit about the historical significance of that night for the record for this series?

THOMPSON: Well you know they were going to be in history books regardless because they're first. And so there comes the moment when the history is made and you see in the photos of Grant Park this sort of sense of jubilation amongst their supporters there and still a very divided electorate. But you heard afterwards many people on both sides of the aisle who felt a sort of pride in the country for having at least eclipsed that barrier. And as the president himself said you know, he thinks people were excited about that for – I think he says something like for about five minutes and then they want to know what you're going to do.

And I think they both faced that pretty quickly this idea that, they did not only want to be history making for having achieved this really remarkable you know feat of being the first you know, but then to leave a legacy that's greater than that.

SWAIN: And of course remembering that they came in the midst of the 2008 financial crisis. And so people were wanting whoever won to get immediately to work. We have – we had an interview at CSPAN with the first lady in 2009 shortly after she took over in the job which she talked about her approach to it. Let's listen in.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: I think every first lady brings their unique perspective to this job, if you didn't you couldn't live through it. I think to the extent that this feels natural to me at any level, and I would never have thought that living in the White House and being first lady would feel natural it's because I try to make it me. I try to bring a little bit of Michelle Obama into this but at the same time respecting and valuing the tradition that is America's.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: And as you mentioned earlier, they reached out to Laura Bush for ways in which they might emulate some of the approach that she took to the role of first lady when she came to the White House.

THOMPSON: Right. Leaned on some of that staff knowledge there and just how things sort of work in the house. I mean it's a significant institution and Michelle Obama unlike some other first ladies had not been a governor's wife, so did not have the experience of really setting up shop and home in that way. And so she has to figure out how to do that and so she gets some help there you know. Nancy Reagan came in for I think they had lunch and I'm told some of Nancy Reagan's advice was you know, have lots of state dinners.

So she does kind of you know talk to those who know as she prepares for this role.

SWAIN: Early on the first lady went out to visit various cabinet agencies which was an unusual thing for first ladies to do, also homeless shelters and soup kitchens in the city meeting with local officials. And we have an article that you wrote Krissah Thompson about another thing she did which is unusual with first ladies, she really lived in Washington D.C.

You've got a story that was called Michelle Obama's Washington with a graphic that over the course of her first term all the places in the Washington metropolitan area that she visited, went out to work in, made speeches at, went out to restaurants. How's that differ from other first families in this town?

THOMPSON: It was interesting because you know she clearly made this place home. And I was able to talk to her staff about that you know, it was the non profits it was visiting the agencies but also going out to restaurants with girlfriends and you know her daughters being in

school here, so you know she's at soccer games and catching shows at local theaters and that sort of thing. Just really getting to know the city as a place outside of federal Washington.

And that's become not only rare for first families but for political families in Washington in general where you have you know folks who are jetting back to their home states you know every weekend. And the idea of spending time in Washington is almost like you know bad for your political life. But you know she made – has made a concerted effort to get to know this place and this city, this town. And you know as I was putting the list together of all the places she's been you know I had colleagues saying you know, "She's been to more restaurants in town than I have."

And so she has not allowed the you know the White House sort of be as Martha Washington said something like a prison though Martha Washington wasn't in the White House. But the idea that you can't get outside this bubble, she's found ways to do that.

SWAIN: Including famously from time to time visiting places like Target in the Washington D.C. suburbs. Is she alone in first ladies in doing things like that? Are they able to sneak away incognito in this town and?

MUNDY: She's probably alone in having visited Target. I – and but you know sometimes though for her in terms of being alone with her family and free it also means leaving Washington, right. It means going to Camp David or going some place where she can sort of walk around and not be – not be the target of people ...

THOMPSON: Yes other modern first ladies have done similar things.

MUNDY: Right.

THOMPSON: Yes. Laura Bush went antiquing in Georgetown and would you know check out the shops there and that kind of thing. And so the idea that you have to you know find some way to you know maintain a life outside of just the structures of the White House.

MUNDY: and you know and Bill Clinton also famously would go running and not so much Hillary Clinton. But I feel like – I feel like the Clintons had a presence in Washington as well actually.

SWAIN: So the media really has covered the first lady extensively. We've got some graphics of the number of magazine covers that have been done on her. If you look and you wrote a book but it was highly competitive; there are lots of books coming out about Michelle Obama in various parts of her life and the like. Is this the way it will be for first ladies this time forward or is there something special particularly about this first lady.

THOMPSON: There is – there was an intense interest from the beginning and I think a willingness to engage the public outside of you know the traditional press corp. And the magazine covers I think are one example of that, it means everything from "Vogue" to "Better

Homes & Gardens" to you know Amtrak magazine prevention essence. So it's just such a broad spectrum and you're speaking to those audiences of those magazines in a very personal way.

In the same way you know she's on Univision, and she's on urban radio and talking to people directly and in some ways just like social media that removes some filters and she's able to connect

SWAIN: Well that's one thing I want to ask because this is all pretty soft stuff; the covers of women's magazines, using social media. You're both journalists who want to cover this woman and this White House. How accessible have they been to you in that role?

MUNDY: That's why I was saying I mean part of that is actually bypassing the traditional media and going to soft outlets, so I mean which of course are very eager to cover her. I would say when I was writing my book not accessible and they were being very, very careful about her public image. I mean it was after the you know does she like her country episode. And so they were being very careful about her public image and really not making her accessible. She was not being accessible and I you know, I had to find other ways to report the story but I think that's really still the case.

SWAIN: Here's another clip that demonstrates the Obama administration's approach to the entertainment media really to help leave us with an impression of the first family. Let's watch.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: Thank you Jack (ph) and welcome to the White House everyone. I am so honored to help introduce this year's nominees for best picture. This is my midlife crisis —. I couldn't get a sports car, they won't let me bungee jump so instead I kept my — here so.

FEMALE: So you went for the

OBAMA: I went for the ...

FEMALE: You're still in charge – you're the boss of your hair.

Male: ... eating right foods can help make you a better athlete.

FEMALE: I was just wondering if you can do more pushups than I could do.

OBAMA: You know it depends on how your back is, I know you get these back issues.

FEMALE: No, no. No, no.

People: 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: So it has been fascinating during the series since television arrived in the political scene in the 19 – late 1950s, you mentioned Jacqueline Kennedy in her tour of the White House to watch how the political campaigns the White Houses have used this medium to communicate with the public and to portray an image. How is this White House doing and how is the public been receiving?

THOMPSON: You know it's fascinating to look at the ways she especially has sort of collapsed the space between pop culture and politics in the public, and the ways that she has operated in that. You know creating these videos that go viral on YouTube. And she's on Instagram but she's not just on Instagram, she's like posting throwback Thursday photos and just really engaging in a way that captures kind of the public imagination.

And again like Liza was saying, it's not doing that through the filter of the mainstream press. And so you're constantly cultivating an image and being very present in the lives of every day people. And she's a popular figure, I don't know everyone's poll numbers now but she is probably one of the most popular figures within the Democratic Party. And so to have her you know be such a public presence you know with a team like the Miami Heat and that basketball thing that got shared around you know so much, is a really interesting and strategic way to look at the public image.

SWAIN: So I want to do two things. I'd like to put a slide which we've done in each one of our series about the key – some of the key events that have happened during the president's term so far. But then also we have a graphic from Pew Research -- stories that compares the president's approval ratings and the first lady's.

So let's take a look at key events in this presidency so far which included the 2008 financial crisis and the stimulus package and all the permutations thereof. The prosecution of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and the policy based over that, the passage of the healthcare act, the 2010 election which brought the republicans and their standoff relations with Congress. And again so many aspects to that story including the closing of the government and the debt ceiling debates, Osama bin Laden's killing and then of course the 2012 reelection campaign some of those.

Now along the way these are how Pew Research has tracked the president and first lady's approval ratings. You can see that the president's story has been one of coming down over a time and the first lady has been both higher and consistent along the way. The president from 79 now in the area of about 45, Michelle Obama 68, 76, 69, 66 fairly consistent along the way. To what do we owe that?

MUNDY: I think everything that Krissah said, the management and tending of her public image, the very strategic approach as well as to print media, the mom in chief. I mean the fact that the – that the family does seem to be flourishing and you know it is – it is and remains a very appealing family tableau and the issues that she's chosen. I mean they're not hard issues, they're not mold breaking issues the "Let's Move" campaign. I think they're in the lines with literacy and sort of traditional first lady programs like that.

SWAIN: Melza (ph) is in Jacksonville, Florida. Go ahead please Melza (ph).

MELZA (ph): Hi, the question I have for you is concerning Mrs. Obama and Dr. Biden. I wondered they seem to be so recognizable and that they work so well together as political wives. But do they ever go out and socialize just the two of them — if they're allowed to go outside the White House — together.

THOMPSON: That's an interesting question. I wrote a piece about Dr. Biden during the 2012 campaign, and so got to talk with some of her staff and see her and read up on her. And you know she made the point that they work well together, they're friendly but they both have very busy lives. And so the idea that they're sort of socializing or hanging out very regularly just doesn't happen.

In addition you know to being the vice president's wife which you know comes with much fewer but some official duties, Jill Biden also continues to teach at a local community college she's an English professor. And so you know often when she was travelling during the campaign she had her ...

SWAIN: Papers with her yes.

THOMPSON: And she'd be grading papers and that kind of thing. And I think that you know that idea that they are just you know enjoying one another's company doesn't happen very often.

SWAIN: Also — that the second lady can continue to pursue her career but something that so far the first lady has not been able to do. Something Laura Bush talked with us about during this series. And you mentioned that she chose somewhat non-controversial issues including the eating well and the let's move campaign.

THOMPSON: You know her staff would argue with you about you know.

SWAIN: Not controversial. Well I can tell you from Facebook comments it is controversial yes with some people. We have another clip with her talking to young people at the White House. These were students who were brought in from Washington D.C., and it all happened with a C-SPAN event from our student camp competition. One of the student's did a documentary about the "Let's Move" concept and Mrs. Obama met with students to talk about it at the White House. We'll watch a little bit of that.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: Having the platform of the White House is really helpful in getting attention to stuff, right. A lot of times when I do something a lot of cameras show up and people tend to watch and write about it, sometimes they write about more than what I'm wearing. So I think it's my job to help shine the light on things that are already working, so that's one of the reasons why I chose this as my initiative.

And I also think that you know one of the reasons — the ways that I think that we can move this effort, one of the reasons why I think we can be successful is that it doesn't require I don't believe

and others may have struggled a bit more, it doesn't require whole scale changes in your life. The beauty about kids you guys is that, you're young your metabolisms are really healthy which essentially means that you know once you start moving and eating right you're going to you know you guys change really quickly; you're growing and everything is working right.

So if we make some little changes get you guys moving more you know a little more movement a little less TV, if we take out sugary drinks, if we can make school lunches better, if we get you guys educated and your families about what to eat, these are all things that we can control and it doesn't take millions of dollars and a whole bunch of legislation to get it done. We don't have to count on people passing stuff thank god to move this problem along.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: But your point of calling sugary drinks a problem for people and also the school lunch debate.

THOMPSON: There's a lot of money tied up in the food industry. And so you know there's also some strategy in how you address these — these issues. You know, food politics for those who are involved in it you know are very contentious. And you see some of this in the debate you know this idea that you know she's a part of the nanny state and telling you know kids what they can't eat. And you know in the video she talked about not needing to pass legislation to get some of these happen, but she you know very much was supportive of the legislation that changed school lunches which in some corners has been a bit controversial.

You know they're pretty big changes in you know aside from some teenagers making videos complaining about you know, like not having as much junk food at lunch. People are trying to figure out how to implement these things and you know, there's some support in some corners and not so much in others.

SWAIN: Liza Mundy you — we have a photograph of the organic garden at the White House. And we were talking before the program started you mentioned it's going to become a permanent part of the White House grounds as far as I know. Is that right?

MUNDY: Right is it — like an eternal garden.

THOMPSON: Well as the first lady her garden book which made the "New York Times" bestseller list at least in the beginning, the proceeds of the book are all going to a foundation that's supportive of the garden. So there you know is money there to continue to tend it even after the Obamas are no longer in the White House.

MUNDY: And that's very much in keeping with the tradition of the White House, right? I mean there used to be animals grazing on the — so they could bring in some urban chickens at some point.

SWAIN: Right, I think left the Wilson administration. The other part that we don't see the influence that she's had on the president, what is known about how she's been able to move him in the direction and causes that matter to her from a policy perspective?

THOMPSON: Well he talks about this some you know, this idea that especially on social issues she's pretty progressive and you know their family talked about same sex marriage before he came out in support of gay marriage. And you know she was for it and it was a family conversation. And even in her 2012 stump speech before the vice president came out for same sex marriage before the president came out for same sex marriage she was talking about you know not discriminating against people because of who they love. That line you know was in her speech, it didn't generate a lot of headlines but she you know sort of made clear where she stood on that issue.

And similarly you know, earlier in her time in the White House there's this moment where she's with the first lady of Mexico they're in a school you know in the Washington D.C. – I think they were in the suburbs. And there's a young girl who's in the audience they're just having a conversation probably about something related to healthy eating, and she raises her hand and said you know – and said you know what should do I do my mom doesn't have papers to the first ladies who were there. And that was a really gripping moment. And so it's hard to imagine that there weren't conversations back at the White House about this encounter in immigration.

SWAIN: Liz (ph) is watching us in Bridgewill, Delaware. Hi Liz (ph), you're on the air.

LIZ (ph): Hi Susan thank you for the program, I've been enjoying it. I'd like to ask your guest how Michelle Obama interacted or felt about her in-laws. I know family seems to very important to them and I'm wondering how much they met with each other and did she have a fond affection for her in-laws.

SWAIN: Thank you so much. Ashantix (ph) on Twitter asks the same question, did Michelle Obama ever meet the president's mother? If yes, what was the relationship?

MUNDY: You know, that's a really good question and I can't answer it at length. They did meet, of course she would not have met Barack Obama's father.

SWAIN: We have a picture that she was at the wedding.

MUNDY: Right, right. I don't know a great deal about their relationship, I don't think it was close. Do you Krissah?

THOMPSON: I don't know and you know the president talks a bit about his mother's passing when he talked about healthcare. And I'm not sure how much time that they did have to spend together.

SWAIN: Tomorrow night as -- there's going to be a state dinner at the White House. You mentioned earlier that they've used the state dinner. We've asked in each program about the first lady's job as the steward of the White House. How has Mrs. Obama approached life in the White

House? What has she done for the mansion and how does she use it perhaps differently than other first ladies?

THOMPSON: Well we just talked about the garden a bit. That has been a signature part of her stamp on the place. And it seems to be the part that she's most excited about. You know we see her regularly going out for the kind of ceremonial plantings and harvesting, and being out there with children. But also using the house she's referred to it as the people's house; this idea that people who never come to the White House should be welcomed and what are ways to do that and the kind of bringing in folks who've never been there before.

So you see lots of school children coming through for workshops, when there is a celebrity who's giving a musical performance there'll be a workshop earlier in the day with students from local schools. And so this idea that you can kind of use it as a third space or in some ways a community center is I think you know a little – a little fresh and different.

SWAIN: Yes just remember that for a number of years in the beginning of their administration it was closed to public tours because of the financial downturn, so restrictions were happening at that point. So they had different public interface with the White House than in previous administrations. We have just 15 minutes left and a lot to cover in this part time. You mentioned Krissah Thompson that, after the election once the election was won the first lady got together with strategists to talk about issues that she would get more involved in, one of those is clearly going to be education.

We have a clip from Bowie State University last year – a historically black college where the first lady talks about education and its importance. Let's listen.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: For generations in many parts of this country it was illegal for black people to get an education. Slaves caught reading or writing could be beaten to within an inch of their lives. Anyone black or white who dared to teach them could be fined or thrown into jail, and yet just two years after the emancipation proclamation was signed this school was founded not just to educate African Americans but to teach them how to educate others. It was in many ways an act of defiance, an eloquent rebuttal to the idea that black people couldn't or shouldn't be educated.

But today more than 150 years after the emancipation proclamation more than 50 years after the end of separate but equal, when it comes to getting an education too many of our young people just can't be bothered. Today instead of walking miles every day to school they're sitting on couches for hours playing video games, watching TV. Instead of dreaming of being a teacher or a lawyer or a business leader, they're fantasizing about being a baller or a rapper.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: What can we expect from Michelle Obama on this issue in the years ahead?

THOMPSON: It's interesting I was there when she gave that speech and I don't know if you can hear the applause clearly there but it was very well received. And in holding those meetings and thinking about what she would spend her time doing in addition to the healthy eating and military families, the sort of connectivity that you could see that she had with these audiences where she was talking about issues around education became clear to her staff. And so they you know plan to develop this issue of education as one that she will be focused most closely on students working with the Department of Education to just reinforce to high school students particularly those who are you know are still early in their high school years that, they really need to be preparing themselves for college.

You know going through the very minutia of it you know, I think just last week she was at a seminar where they were talking about the importance of filling out your financial aid forms. She's done a video where she you know shared some of her experience when she first got to Princeton and like didn't have sheets that were long enough for her bed. These kinds of things the idea that she knows what it feels like not to be completely prepared for this process but that you could go through it anyway, that you could be successful. And really again this idea of role modeling these things and saying that there's no magic here, that's her message in this education.

SWAIN: Calvin (ph) in Portland, Oregon you're on. Go ahead please.

CALVIN (ph): Thank you very much, this is Calvin (ph) from Portland, Oregon. I want to say to the host and to also the guests invited that you all – my family, my mother is really enjoying the show.

SWAIN: Thank you.

CALVIN (ph): I've got a quick question. But first former Texas governor Ann Richards and Barbara Jordan said that women are always dubbed with a double standard that's why you have to know your own purpose. And I think Michelle Obama exemplifies knowing her own purpose, so I just want to say this is a great show. Is there a possible consideration for a Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama ticket in 2016? Thank you very much.

SWAIN: Thank you. We've had a number of people on Twitter wonder whether or not the first lady has political ambitions of her own.

MUNDY: People often ask that will she be like – they draw the parallel between her and Hillary Clinton because they're both lawyers. Because – and I always say – I'm interested to hear what Krissah thinks. I don't think she'll run for political office. I think Hillary Clinton had a passion interested in policy from early on but you may – you may disagree.

THOMPSON: No it's interesting. She has said emphatically many times that this is not something that she's interested in. Some politicians say that and you kind of know in the back of their minds that there's a sneaking suspicious that they'll run. But she's expansive about it you know. She talks about sort of feeling like she doesn't have the personality for it, that she you know she'd be too impatient for running for office.

And you get the sense especially in the way we were talking about messaging and the way she enjoys connecting with the public that like, going through the rigors of dealing with the political press would not be something that she would enjoy. I think that you know she'll be making an impact after the White House and ...

MUNDY: She'll stay in public life somehow.

THOMPSON: Definitely.

SWAIN: So Gary Robinson (ph) on Twitter wants to know how is Michelle changing the role of first lady that future first ladies will emulate or model? Do we know yet?

THOMPSON: I think the way that she has engaged with entertainment and pop culture has been in some ways groundbreaking. I have to say as a reporter who covers her, when I saw her at the Oscars it was like a head turning kind of moment like, what's the first lady doing on the Oscars? And you know talking you know her staff talked about it later.

You know she loves the movies and the idea that she could do it and that there was an invitation, and maybe some of these folks in Hollywood would then come and support some of her programs to help kids. And so just really kind of being outside of the structures of politics, I think that that's a trail that she's blazed that we may see some other first ladies follow.

SWAIN: So in the time we have left we looked at high approval ratings, consistently high in the 60s and also higher than her husband's for much of the time. But she's had some criticism, we talked about some that she endangered through choices of phrases that she's used and as a surrogate for her husband. But also there have been things like trips and vacations that she's taken which she's gotten criticized for. What are your comments when you look at how she's approached that and the White House has responded?

MUNDY: Right, and certain expensive sneakers worn to a soup kitchen. I think you know she did make a comment there about you know, sometimes they write about something other than what I'm wearing. But in fact you know she has cultivated the public image of being you know very fashionable and she has – she's quite interested in her clothes as well. So I think – I think every now and then there has been a misstep in terms of you know taking expensive vacations at a time when the country is really suffering. Krissah comments?

THOMPSON: You know there has been – she hasn't had to do much to animate folks who ...

SWAIN: True.

THOMPSON: Who don't like her. There – we looked at the poll numbers earlier the favorable rate has stayed pretty steady and so has the unfavorable rate. And so there is about I guess it's around a quarter of the American public that doesn't like this first lady and that's not uncommon. And you hear from them on even issues like the healthy eating. And when she you know shows up on the Oscars there are tweets and folks who are kind of like, she's everywhere why is she – why is she everywhere? And so you know it hasn't been a universal love fest, that's for sure.

SWAIN: You write in your book and this is sort of the behind the scenes and how she organizes the staff around her. She's had some turnover in her staff in the years that she's been in the White House. You write in your book she's a better boss than employee.

MUNDY: Right.

SWAIN: She likes to be in charge, she does not like her time to be wasted and she is forceful and can be intimidating. So what's the Michelle Obama that the public doesn't see?

MUNDY: Well I think you know I mean I don't think that those – I don't think that would surprise anybody. I mean we don't see that person I would say a lot, but I don't think it would surprise people. But she is – she does have a forceful and I think charismatic personality. I mean what you also don't see interestingly, when she was in high school she was terrified of public speaking and she had to work up the courage to give a public speech when she was running for office. And boy I mean that she has really grown into a role of being so comfortable, having fun in giving speeches. And really you know she's found the spotlight and is very comfortable in it.

SWAIN: Let's take a call from Jacky (ph) who's watching us in Claremore, Texas. Hi Jacky (ph).

JACKY (ph): Hi, how are you. Thank you so much for taking my phone call. I have two questions; the first one is which first lady do you think Michelle Obama is most similar to? And the second question is --, if Michelle Obama – you could arrange for Michelle Obama to have dinner with any of the first ladies which one would it be and why?

SWAIN: Well thank you. Those are great comments as we not only close the Michelle Obama program but also close out this series. Do you have any responses for her?

MUNDY: That's interesting I mean she gets compared to Hillary Clinton, I don't think she's like Hillary Clinton. I mean she gets compared to Jackie Onassis and I think in some ways the glamour and the arts and the harnessing of the culture I would make more of a comparison there actually.

THOMPSON: I think you could take pieces of first ladies you know and kind of compare them to, because there is some of the Jackie O with the cultivation of the image and the family. And then you know you can see a little bit of Laura Bush in the kind of being able to maintain that popularity being very popular with the base, she was also you know a popular fund raiser within her party. You know Hillary Clinton is a more difficult comparison, but I think that Michelle Obama is ambitious in her own way just as Hillary Clinton clearly is.

So you can sort of take slices of the modern first ladies. And I think Michelle Obama told you know C-SPAN that it is the modern first ladies that she sort of relates to much more than some of the other first ladies who seemed sort of like you know, pages of a history book.

SWAIN: Well let's listen to the first lady talk about the role once more. This is from her 2009 interview with C-SPAN.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: But I think it's all an evolutionary process; you grow into this role. And my sense is that you never get comfortable if you're always pushing for change and growth not just in yourself but in the issues that you care about. You're never done so there's never a point in time where you feel like, "There, I am now here and I can do this the same way all the time," it's always changing. It changes given the state of the issues of the country and you never know what those are going to be from one day to the next. So you have to be flexible and fluid and open to evolve.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: And on the evolution again we're kind of coming full circle on her three years that she has left what can we expect?

MUNDY: What would you say?

THOMPSON: I think the education initiative is going to be paramount. It's interesting because I do think that 2013 felt you know like a continuation of the first term.

MUNDY: Yes.

THOMPSON: So this idea of whether things will be much different in the next few years, you've already seen her be really busy about building you know this new program. But they – but she's also said you know, she's going to continue what she's been doing. So I think we may see have seen the Michelle Obama that we're going to see in the next three years. I don't think that she'll stray very far from course.

MUNDY: And she's also going to be sending her daughter to college in the next three years which I think is you know a really significant transition as a family. I don't know that we'll see much of that but that is a significant transition.

SWAIN: Because of the protection, the bubble they've put around their kids ...

MUNDY: Yes, yes.

SWAIN: During their years in the White House. We were talking earlier she'll be 16 the older daughter this year.

MUNDY: Right.

SWAIN: By the time – many children learn to drive and how do you learn to drive when you're in the White House and a teenager?

THOMPSON: Exactly.

MUNDY: Right.

SWAIN: It'll be interesting to watch. And Michelle Obama has a quote which I think you reported on Krissah Thompson about her life after the White House saying, "I will be in my early 50s when I leave and I have so much more that I should do whether as a mother or as a professional or as a mentor to other kids."

MUNDY: I think she's very representative also with many women. And we may see that women in general that our career trajectories are a little different than men's and that women's careers may peak later than men's because of that child rearing period. So she's been in this in addition to being the first lady, she's been in an intensive child rearing period. And I think when she comes out of all of this she will reenter the workforce if you will in a very significant way.

THOMPSON: If marriage is about taking turns and this has been his turn ...

MUNDY: Right, right.

THOMPSON: Maybe you know we'll see her turn coming up next.

MUNDY: Right.

SWAIN: And so we end it from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama our yearlong series on the lives of the first ladies. One of our early callers mentioned the White House Historical Association. I want to put the book on screen that they have written which is the biographies of all the first ladies. And to help make this special edition available to you throughout the year, they've also provided so much as many other historical organizations did of the materials and research that we did to produce this series. And as we close out here, I want to say thank you to them and to all of the folks along way interested in preserving American history and helping to tell these stories.

And to our two guests tonight Liza Mundy and Krissah Thompson, thank you for helping us understand more about the life of Michelle Obama.

MUNDY: Thank you.

END