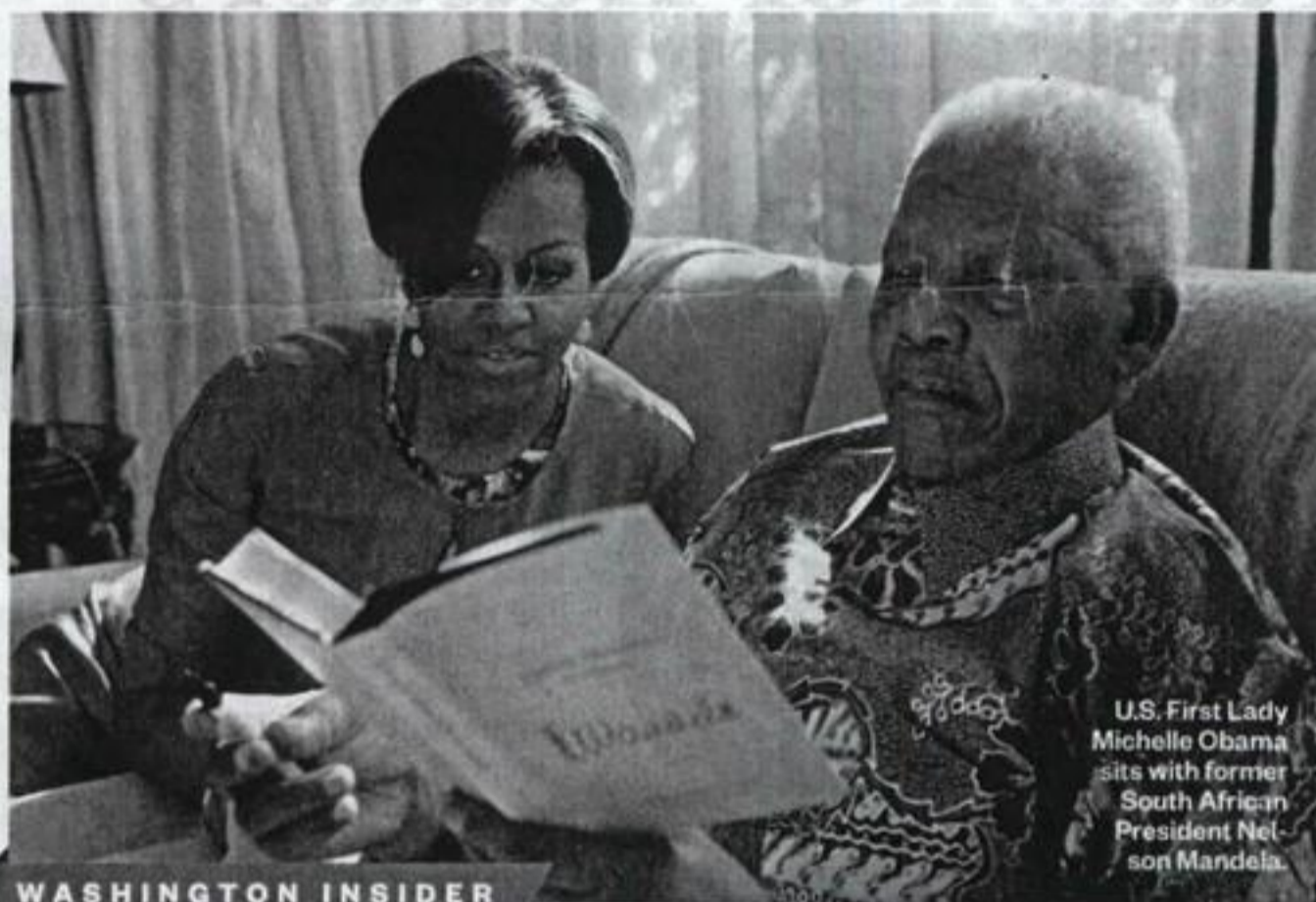


The Radar

EDITED BY ADRIENNE SAMUELS GIBBS

POLITICS | FILM | TELEVISION | MUSIC | BOOKS | ART | TECHNOLOGY



WASHINGTON INSIDER

U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama sits with former South African President Nelson Mandela.

The First Lady Unplugged

WHY MICHELLE OBAMA MAY BE A MORE POWERFUL SPEAKER THAN HER HUSBAND **By KEVIN CHAPPELL**

SOME WERE MOVED TO TEARS. Others were moved to action. Either way, the group of young women, participants in the Young African Women's Forum, who gathered at the Rosa Parks Library in Soweto to see First Lady Michelle Obama seemed to be moved by the passion of her words.

The first lady's recent travels to South Africa and Botswana with daughters Malia and Sasha offered her a chance to escape the White House "bubble." Whether it was showing compassion to AIDS victims, or fervor in rallying women to civic action, she seemed to relish the opportunity to let down her guard and speak from the heart.

During a breakout session with the young women, Mrs. Obama discussed her inspiring visit with former South African President Nelson Mandela. Her off-the-cuff "girl talk" was preacherlike in its delivery as she used Mandela's life as an entrée into a discussion about empowerment and ambition. The impromptu speech

transcended geopolitical boundaries, and could serve as a blueprint for women of color around the world struggling for equal rights and respect.

"[Mandela] has lived through a struggle that few nations know. ... There must have been moments in that jail when he thought, 'This is too slow. I am so tired. And this is never going to work,'" she said. "But ... if we see Mandela as hope, we would see the slowness not as a reason to stop and be impatient but to keep moving, and not get so caught up in the immediacy."

As the young women hung on her every word, she continued: "The only thing that happens in an instant is destruction. ... Build something ... earthquake; it's gone. But everything else requires time. Raising children, building a family, having a career: All of it takes time. I want all of you to continue to work fiercely, and to be impatient. But don't let the struggle discourage you because it's hard. It's supposed to be hard."

"[Her] power comes from her ability to empower young people like she did in South Africa and Botswana," says Semonti Stephens, the first lady's deputy communications director.

Whether the topic is childhood obesity, care for military families or the need for better schools, the first lady has shown the ability to rally the masses, particularly women and girls, behind her cause. Many now think that she is a better unscripted speaker than President Barack Obama. He is, perhaps, too dependent on prepared speeches from a teleprompter. She, however, thrives in relaxed settings—perhaps more than any previous first lady.

During visits to Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, India, Mexico and the United Kingdom, Michelle Obama was treated like a rock star as large crowds of women and girls followed her every move. The first lady would serve herself, her husband, the nation and the world best by using her gift of inspiration more often during her time in the White House. Females everywhere, and of every race, can learn how many lessons from the smart, beautiful *and* caring woman who speaks so powerfully from the heart.

IN DEDICATION

Nelson Mandela



"During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

—FROM MANDELA'S FOUR-AND-A-HALF-HOUR SPEECH AT THE RIVONIA TRIAL, 1964

Top row, from left: Wearing the traditional outfit of the Thembu tribe, which he came from, ca. 1945; during his time as a leader of the African National Congress, ca. 1950; as defense lawyer during the Treason Trial, 1961; as a prisoner working in a garden, 1977.
Bottom row, from left: Celebrating Mandela's release from jail, 1990; receiving an honorary doctorate from the Netherlands' Leiden University, 1999; at his home in the Eastern Cape, 2011; celebrating his 94th birthday with his great-grandchildren, 2012.