

January 1st, 2019

Dear Michelle Robinson Obama,

One of my earliest memories of politics surrounds Election Day in 2008. I remember my six-year-old self staying up an extra hour to watch patches of the US map flicker red or blue on the TV, representing millions of American citizens as they voted in our new president.

Although I was then too young to fully comprehend the significance of the first black First Family filling the White House, a decade later, I am immensely grateful for the barriers you and your husband struck down that night, for the hope you embodied to minorities, for the bold and unapologetic way you challenged traditions and pre-existing stereotypes.

Before I read your autobiography, *Becoming*, I regarded you as one of the strongest and incredibly empowering women I knew. While I read, my opinion was only reinforced as you unveiled a side to you that was previously hidden from the public eye. By sharing the difficult decisions and sacrifices you made out of love for your family and for this country, you acknowledged a vulnerability that made you more human, more grounded.

In *Becoming*, you spelled out in detail your whirlwind of a life: from elementary school student to Princeton graduate, lawyer to former First Lady. As I read your story, somehow, I, as a 16-year-old Chinese-American girl growing up in the suburbs of Washington D.C., was able to empathize with your fears and internal conflicts as a black girl growing up in the South Side of Chicago forty years earlier. You had to constantly prove yourself in different settings—first at Whitney Young High School, then at Princeton, and eventually at the White House—often as the only black woman in the room. Throughout it all, you kept asking yourself, “Am I good enough?”

I wrestle with the same question. My parents immigrated from China to America in the 1990s. The two of them lived in the basement of a three-story house, fully subsisted on my dad's scholarship money while he completed his doctorate degree. My mom, unable to speak English, worked as a waitress in a pizzeria to earn additional income. My parents struggled and sacrificed to raise me and my sister in a stable environment, and the thought of disappointing them breaks my heart.

So, holding tight to a promise to my parents, I strive.

I am one of a handful of girls enrolled in the most advanced math and physics courses offered at school. I am the only female captain of my high school's math team— and it's jarring, to walk

into a room knowing that people may doubt my intelligence and authority simply because of my gender. I feel pressured to perform well on tests and competitions in order to prove that I earned my place through talent and hard work, that my voice has value, and that girls are not to be underestimated. I ask if I am good enough; I found my story in yours.

And in your story, you taught me the importance of wielding my voice and refusing to let others mold it. You spent your childhood seeking validation from others and graduated from Harvard Law School only to realize you didn't want to be a lawyer. In *Becoming*, you wrote, “This may be the fundamental problem with caring a lot about what others think: it can put you on the established path.”

That I would let others’ criticisms and skepticism stop me from realizing my own dreams used to be my biggest fear. But you have empowered me with a simple truth: I own my voice. And with that voice, I can become an endless list of possibilities.

By attaining fulfillment from following your heart— dropping law for civic engagement while making time for your family— you gave me confidence that I too can find happiness and make my parents proud by following my heart.

Thank you for being an inspiration and role model to people all around the world, especially girls like me, who are searching for the courage to elevate their voices. There is a quote from *Becoming* that deeply resonates within me: “There’s power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there’s grace in being willing to know and hear others.”

You have shown me what it means to be brave and bold, to use my voice as a weapon or as a means to unity, to take the reins of my aspirations. At 16, I have a future yet to be determined and a story yet to be told. But I am confident that with drive and self-motivation, I will become a courageous woman who fights for her voice and her dreams.

Sincerely,  
Emmy Song