

Expectations of Others

I didn't start out as the fully-formed First Lady who stands before you today. No, no, I had my share of bumps along the way.

Was I too loud, or too angry, or too emasculating? Or was I too soft, too much of a mom, not enough of a career woman?

Then there was the first time I was on a magazine cover – it was a cartoon drawing of me with a huge afro and machine gun. Now, yeah, it was satire, but if I'm really being honest, it knocked me back a bit. It made me wonder, just how are people seeing me.

And over the years, folks have used plenty of interesting words to describe me. One said I exhibited “a little bit of uppity-ism.” Another noted that I was one of my husband's “cronies of color.” Cable news once charmingly referred to me as “Obama's Baby Mama.”

And all of this used to really get to me. Back in those days, I had a lot of sleepless nights, worrying about what people thought of me, wondering if I might be hurting my husband's chances of winning his election, fearing how my girls would feel if they found out what some people were saying about their mom.

But eventually, I realized that if I wanted to keep my sanity and not let others define me, there was only one thing I could do, and that was to have faith in God's plan for me. I had to ignore all of the noise and be true to myself – and the rest would work itself out.

Michelle Obama, Tuskegee University, Commencement Address, 9th May 2015