

## Good move by First Lady to focus on eating habits of Americans

*by Roland\_S\_Martin*

First lady Michelle Obama has been in the news recently for her visits to her local schools in the Washington area, but I believe her outspokenness on healthy eating habits really has the potential to transform the country.

I fully understand her message because I recently began working with fitness guru Donna Richardson Joyner on the Isagenix cleansing system. The program calls for multiple cleanse days and limiting meals to 500-600 calories a day. In 11 days, I've lost 9 pounds on the program, and having to watch your calorie count, as well as drink upward of 80 ounces of water a day, you get a good sense of your body and what it requires.

By Michelle doing front-page stories in The New York Times on healthy cooking and adding fresh fruits and vegetables to the daily diet, we can get a better handle on the obesity epidemic in this country. Some might see the creation of a vegetable garden on the White House lawn as a publicity stunt, but we are seeing efforts in urban areas, including Chicago, to do the same.

For all Americans, but especially African-Americans, we definitely need this emphasis on food. A couple of months ago, the Chicago Tribune did a story showing that black women are growing shorter because of obesity. We certainly know that the food decisions we make are having a negative impact on our health, whether it's diabetes, heart disease, hypertension or cancer.

We spend a lot of time and money focusing on the social issues affecting people of color, folks in inner cities and rural America, but it's clear that our health should be at the top of the list. We are seeing far too many of our family members, church members, neighbors and friends fight illnesses that can be prevented by wellness programs and healthy eating.

But this also means we've got to fight the negative influences that are in abundance in our communities, namely liquor stores and fast-food restaurants. I can't tell you how many times I've tried to find baked or grilled fish when I'm on the South Side of Chicago, only to be faced with signs that shout, "Fried!"

Am I saying fast food is wrong? No. But it might mean going with the healthy choices on the menu rather than salads and other items not high in fat rather than juicy burgers with cheese and bacon.

The obesity epidemic in America is no joke. It really hit home when I was talking with Spencer Leak Sr., a major funeral home owner in Chicago. He said they have had to order plus-size caskets because most people can't fit in their traditional caskets. Even in death, obesity is costing more money.

There is no doubt that we need universal health care and to close the health gap that exists between the haves and have-nots. But government can't do it all. Individuals must take their health into their own hands, and that means regular fitness, as well as better food selection and preparation.

The efforts by Michelle Obama have gotten a lot of attention, but not nearly enough. If we're going to have town hall meetings in our neighborhoods dealing with police brutality and crime, we need to confront the violence to our bodies at the dinner table.

Roland S. Martin is an award-winning CNN contributor and the author of "Listening to the Spirit Within: 50 Perspectives on Faith."

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