

THE GIFT OF A FUNNY NAME LIKE OBAMA

BY XIMENA N. BELTRAN QUAN KIU

At 25, the only two elections I've ever been able to vote in included a black man with a funny name of mixed race, raised by a single mother.

President Barack Obama and I have some things in common.

I also have a funny name. It's Ximena Beltran Quan Kiu. I'm mixed ethnicity — Mexican and Chinese. And I was raised by a single mother.

I'm one of the voters who make up the cultural shift happening in this country. I'm a millennial. I am a woman. I'm Latina and Asian. I am the future.

President Obama will be sworn in for a second term on Monday. His presidency is more than his politics or a moment in U.S. history. He is the symbol of a cultural shift that I also represent.

The 2008 election was a collective of people hungry for change. Voters of different ages, races, and socio-economic standing swarmed the polls. Fast-forward four years later and that excitement had worn off.

The novelty of change had evaporated. Obama's new America could disappear in an instant. He had embraced women, youth, gays and Latinos, but would they support him to prove his presidency was more than a fad?

We all know the answer to that. Fifty-five percent of female voters backed Obama. He also took 75 percent of the Latino vote and 60 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds.

We are called minorities, but the results of our actions say we are the majority. We are Barack Obama.

Like President Obama, I was different and faced challenges in my youth.

My name started with an X. I was a Mexican-Chinese immigrant being raised by a single-mom in a low-income Chicago suburb



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that fed into an affluent high school. My life was a far cry from some peers who received Audis and BMWs on their 16th birthdays from mom and dad.

My mother encouraged me to take pride and advantage of what set me apart from my peers, but I didn't see those differences as a gift. I just wanted to fit in.

That all changed when Barack Obama crossed the stage at Grant Park in 2008. I didn't have an excuse anymore. Here was someone who didn't have a father growing up, wasn't famous or rich. He simply had a dream and was willing to work for it, and we were now calling him Mr. President.

For the first time, I began to think of long-term goals and envision a successful future — a future that would be built by what distinguished me from others.

This new-found realization kept me positive and hopeful through a gloomy economy.

I graduated college, along with millions of 20-somethings, into an economy with a 9.4

percent unemployment rate. I took a third job in order to complete the internship I knew would benefit me in the long run. I continued my education past a bachelor's degree in order to pounce when the economy rebounded.

As a result, I came out stronger and more competitive than my peers.

This humbled and inspired me to give back and let others know the American Dream is alive and well.

As I walk through the South Side Chicago public school where I am a reading mentor, I am surprised by how often a face like President Obama's face greets me in every hallway and classroom.

Ruggles Elementary has a student body of more than 400 and is 98 percent black.

What will these children become?

I smile at the possibilities their futures hold knowing they can in fact become president.

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