

“Could These Two People Have Ever Imagined?”

Participant: Melody Barnes

Interviewers: Russell L. Riley, Guian McKee, Barbara A. Perry

Interview Date: June 12, 2019

Project: Barack Obama Oral History Project

During Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign for president, Melody Barnes was a domestic policy advisor. She was later named Domestic Policy Council director in the Obama administration. Barnes describes a memorable scene from election day in 2008.

Melody Barnes: So I drove south and I went to South Boston and Danville. I went to a polling site there. I’m pretty sure, no matter how old I live to be, I will never forget this. It was a drizzly day, and this really old car—I don’t know if I mentioned this to you ever before—but this very old car pulls up. The driver’s side door opens, and this elderly African American woman gets out. If I had to guess, she was probably in her mid- to late eighties. She gets out and she goes inside and she comes back with an election worker. Consistent with the law, if you’re too frail to go in and vote, the election worker will come to your car. Then the passenger’s side opens and this even more frail African American man pulls himself up and he votes. I remember looking at that and thinking, Could these two people have ever imagined—I’m assuming things, but I’m guessing I’m right—ever imagined that they were going to vote for an African American man to be President? It was just—

Interviewer (Perry): And they voted in their car?

Barnes: Yes. She may have voted inside, but he voted at the car.

Perry: She brought out the election official?

Barnes: The election official comes out. That’s a way to ensure people who are, as I said, too frail to make their way inside can vote. I was there and observing and saw that. It was extremely moving.

End of excerpt.

Interview with Melody Barnes, June 12, 2019, Barack Obama Oral History Project, Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.
URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/melody-barnes-oral-history-0>