



My Visit with the First Family

Actress Tatyana Ali's special day at the White House

SHE'S BEST KNOWN for her star turns on *The Young and the Restless* and as teenager Ashley Banks on the '90s sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. But Tatyana Ali added one more role to her résumé last year: Democratic political campaigner. Ali teamed up with other actors to head up voter registration drives at higher learning campuses around the country, particularly historically black colleges and universities. Her support for President Obama on the trail led to a post-election White House visit earlier this year. Here, Ali chronicles for *Capitol File* her whirlwind 24 hours of culture and conversation in the nation's capital.

6:30 AM: Land in DC, off to Hotel Madera, a cute boutique hotel in Dupont Circle. Washington is such an amazing place. There's so much history and even though it's a little imposing, it's very beautiful.

9 AM: My sister, Anastasia, and I grab breakfast and walk around the neighborhood. My parents were pretty excited for us. And everyone who saw the invitation I got in the mail just geeked out!

2:30 PM: Interview with Kiki Ryan, a columnist for the *Washington Examiner's* "Yeas and Nays" section, about my experience on the campaign trail and the education initiatives I support.

3:30 PM: Hair and makeup arrives! I opt for a soft half-up, half-down look to complement the embellishment on my BCBG little black dress.



LEFT: Ali speaking to students and parents at North Carolina Central University in September 2008. **BELOW:** Ali at the DNC in Denver with (FROM LEFT) Regina King, Hill Harper, Bryan Barber and Herbie Hancock



6:30 PM: Off to the White House for an evening of poetry, music and spoken word hosted by the president and first lady! It's surreal. It isn't until we go through the checkpoints that it really hits us that we are at the *White House*. I don't know what to expect this evening, but I'm elated to be here. One of the first things Michelle Obama says is, "This is your White House. We are opening up the White House to everyone." Anastasia and I are greeted by a number of staffers, some of whom we worked with on the campaign. We ascend the staircase to the reception area and are shocked to see a DJ spinning deep house from an Apple MacBook! We know this will be a different kind of affair. Kudos to the incomparable Desirée Rogers.

7 PM: President and Mrs. Obama speak briefly before the evening's performances. Mrs. Obama brilliantly points out that a democracy works best when we are not only free to speak our minds but actively listen to those who want to be heard. Performances in the East Room by Joshua Bennett, James Earl Jones, Eric Lewis, Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, Mayda del Valle and Esperanza Spalding leave us tearful and speechless.

8:30 PM: Anastasia and I shake hands with the president afterwards. He refers to us as "the sisters." We are still beaming.

10 PM: Meet up with Hill Harper, Brian Mathis and his wife Tracey Kemble, Terry and Kimberly Maitland and others for a late (and delicious) dinner at Leopold's in Georgetown.

1 AM: On my way to bed.

6 AM: Exhausted but still on cloud nine from an incredible night, I am on the plane headed back to LA to tape *The Young and the Restless*. ★