

Spotify's exclusive Michelle Obama podcast will be available on other platforms starting tomorrow

Spotify made major headlines last year when it announced an exclusive podcast deal with the Obamas' production studio Higher Ground. Today, the company made a perplexing about-face. The company says it'll be releasing the first season of *The Michelle Obama Podcast* on "a number" of other podcast listening platforms starting tomorrow, September 30th – two weeks after the show's season 1 finale.

The company hasn't detailed which platforms will have the show, but it's in conversations with several, including Stitcher, Google, Apple, and iHeart. A Spotify spokesperson says future seasons, if the show's renewed, will "debut exclusively" on Spotify, but didn't say whether the show will be windowed or fully exclusive to the service.

Obama's show expansion could help Spotify find a larger audience while also driving listeners back to the platform. It has tested this strategy with other shows, including *Dope Labs*, *Son of Hitman*, and *InCharge with DVF*, although it's unclear whether those shows are gaining listeners on Spotify. (Ads within some of these previously exclusive shows promote Spotify, even on other platforms.) It's also unclear if the Higher Ground deal always accounted for a wider release – a Spotify spokesperson wouldn't comment.

What will happen to season 2?

This news amounts to a 180-degree flip in stance for the audio

company. Although it's piloted the strategy with other shows, the Obamas are some of the biggest stars – and likely the biggest investments – that Spotify has decided to make available outside its platform. The company's garnered attention around its podcast ambitions because of its flashy acquisitions and big-name exclusive show launches, like one with Kim Kardashian West. In fact, Spotify's press release about the Higher Ground deal said the partnership would "produce podcasts exclusive to the platform," so it's odd to see Spotify make this first show widely available after all the exclusive hype.

At the same time, some exclusive hosts have spoken up about unfair deals in recent months. Joe Budden, one of the original exclusive Spotify hosts, denounced the platform last month, saying he planned to leave after his contract expired on September 23rd. An episode hasn't published on his feed since September 19th. The hosts of *The Nod*, originally a Gimlet Media show, also said in June they wanted to own their podcast because Spotify, which acquired Gimlet, now owns the show's IP.

It doesn't seem like the Obama show's wider release came out of similar issues with Spotify, but still, it feels like it's coming out of left field.

Update 9/29, 5:41 PM ET: Updated to reflect that any future seasons of The Michelle Obama Podcast will debut exclusively on Spotify.

<https://www.theverge.com/2020/9/29/21494284/spotify-michelle-obama-podcast-release-exclusive>