

DYNAMC FUTURE LEADER SPEAKS WITH

Michael Skolnik

“EMERGING LEADER TO SEASONED LEADER”



Michael Skolnik President of Globalgrind.com

Jasmine Jordan, a NAMCO student member, is an undergraduate student pursuing her Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics with minors in both Leadership and Civic Engagement and Marketing at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is specializing in microeconomics with a focus on quantitative marketing, brand strategy/development, and product sales projection. Currently serving her fourth term, Jasmine is president of the Native American Student Association at UNLV. She was recently given the opportunity to interview Michael Skolnik, who serves as political director for Russell Simmons and is the president of Global Grind, for DyNAMC Leaders for a Changing World Magazine.

Jasmine: “We are so happy to have you on the cover of DyNAMC Leaders for a Changing World Magazine. We like to include strong ethnic, energizing, spirited people, and we really think you represent that idea. In your words, what makes you a leader for a changing world and what leadership style do you possess when you’re directing your staff?”

Michael: “Thank you for the kind words. I think, no matter what team you’re a part of, you always want to show that you’re a team player. You always want to work as much as everyone else on your team. I think people respect that and people see that, and it shows that you’re not someone who shows up half the time or a quarter of the time, but all the time. I think work ethic is important. I think the amount of time you put into something is important and not so much talent. Of course talent is important, but talent is relative. A strong work ethic is hard to disagree with. You know, when the woman and man next to you are busting their butts to get something done -- those are the people you want to have around. I’ve always tried to be that person. I’ve always tried to outwork everyone else, and outwork myself. I think it’s why people look to me for leadership and thoughts because they know I’ll put in the time to make it happen.”



Namco Student Member Jasmine Simone Jordan, University Nevada, Las Vegas

Jasmine: “I definitely agree with that. What is the one characteristic you believe every leader should possess? What do you feel is the biggest challenge that a lot of leaders today might be facing?”

Michael: “I think humility. Every leader has to be humble. They have to lose, and then recognize that being down or lost are oftentimes places from which to bounce back, places from which to learn. We often deal with deep, tough issues and we don’t often get to see the fruits of our labor because we lost a lot. We’ve lost a lot of court cases, we’ve lost a lot of people, and we’ve lost a lot of love and families. So in that sense, you’ve got to be humble and have humility. Whoever is reading this and feels they possess leadership qualities, they’ve got to listen to everybody’s opinions. I may not agree with everyone, but I will listen to them. I will listen to the intern as well as the CEO. From the 15-year-old high school dropout to the Harvard graduate, you just never know who is going to give you those words of wisdom to keep you humble and keep your mission focused. I’m always surrounding myself with people who are

interesting and inspiring and who constantly keep me humble.”

Jasmine: “I definitely agree. Being from New York and going to school in California, you kind of see a different way of communication and diversity. Why do you think diversity should be important to people and what projects do you support that focus on diversity and inclusion?”

Michael: “When I went to UCLA, I participated in the protests against Proposition

209, which ended Affirmative Action in the State of California. I’m a firm supporter of Affirmative Action. I know it works. I’ve seen it work. I still think it’s needed. I believe young people of color, especially young women, often don’t get the chance to go to college. I’m constantly looking for young talent who may have not had the opportunities that other young people have. I love young white people who want to be around in the new America, who want to be inspired by where this country is going. I think the LGBT community, certainly, has had an incredible last few years. I’m

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excited about the direction America is going. I’m excited we’re going to be a country where white people won’t be

the majority and it’ll be a more diverse and inclusive community. New kinds of power and new kinds of leadership are healthy.”

Jasmine: “There’s definitely a shift taking place, and I think the youth are

becoming more responsible for their voices. Your demographic is from ages 18 to 34, and I'm sure you've seen tons of spikes in your readership because they want to be involved and they want to know what's going on. At the NAMCO Leadership Diversity Summit, you gave a thought-provoking keynote address. I served on the

youth panel, and we described different issues about America's future leaders and diversity issues that are shaping our future. The panel also included other students from very diverse communities and we discussed how the Millennial Generation Y accounts for one-third of the adult population and how we're starting to pass the Baby Boomers. How important are ethical business practices to you?"

Michael: "It's the core of who we are. We can no longer think just about profits at corporations; we have to think about people and our planet -- all three at the same time. You have to be ethical if you're conducting business. You have to be ethical or you're going to be going out of business. If you do good work, you're not going to destroy the planet. The millennial generation is no longer accepting child labor. These things are coming to an end. It's happening. There are companies emerging that believe in doing business the right way."

Jasmine: "I definitely agree. In school we study how our generation takes the time to study and see where our money is going and, statistically, we are supporting companies that make the effort."

Michael: "We don't want to see places like Sierra Leone or the Congo ravaged over raw materials. We're tired of the exploitation of people and the planet. We're still going to have exploitation and people who want more money in their pockets. We can't stop all of it. But we're going to do our best to uplift this damned place, so we're able to go to sleep at night knowing that we've tried our best. I'm comforted by that."

Jasmine: "Being the father of a young child, what advice would you give to your son about making his viewpoints known to these large corporations, knowing that you do have a voice?"

Michael: "Look at what has happened in the last few weeks around the country among young people, and white progressives as well. They came to an understanding that

the justice system is not going to protect them, the political system is not going to protect them, and the only thing they had left in terms of showing their power was the economic system.

That's where you saw things like economic shutdowns and the boycotting of Black Friday. I think people are showing that we spend money. When we stop spending money, you need to start to listen to us or we'll shut your businesses down and cause disruption until you listen to us because we have that power. I think that's incredibly powerful. It's a sad state that the political and judicial systems are so broken, but when we look at our economic power, I think equity and equality aren't the same thing. It's one thing to tell somebody they have the right to vote and it's another thing to stop the oppression or repression of those who have the right to vote. Economic equity is when people have the same fair shot at reaching the same level as white people in this country. I certainly will encourage my child if he wants to be a business person to really take a look

at abundance and greed. I am a capitalist and I believe in a capitalist system. I think it is the greatest system in the world. But I also think greed and abundance has smeared it. That's us. That's us wanting to have four Birkin bags in different colors, and having Louis Vuitton purses that cost \$50 to make but \$800 to buy because of the logo on the outside. I guess that shows people you've got money in your pocket because you have a Louis Vuitton purse. Or big cars that aren't good for the environment and aren't even good for what you think you need them for. I don't get it. I think these days are coming to an end."

Jasmine: "We discussed diversity in the workplace, but when it comes to youth, both NAMCO and DyNAMC magazine do a terrific job in bringing attention to these issues and also social changes as they relate to diversity and inclusion. NAMCO also works strategically with large corporations and

organizations to level that playing field and increase access to small businesses and diverse businesses so they have a voice. We're seeing the change again across the country. As a political figure for youth, what advice would you give to those, such as myself, a multi-racial minority female, as far as how to support companies such as yours or even getting involved in the kind of movement that's happening?"

Michael: "I think the first thing to do is to recognize the power you have. We all have cultural differences, but at the core we are all one culture and we're leaning toward a multi-racial society. Because of that, we

have to recognize the power we have and not be afraid to show that power. You see Cheerios and other commercials with multi-racial families. Advertising on Madison Avenue has bought into it. We see, in movies and on television now more than ever in Hollywood multi-racial families and couples and the gay community being shown, and positive black and Latino roles in movies and television. It's happening and it's changing. You've got to buy into it and exploit it. You can exploit things for good and go to bed at night knowing that, in your heart, you are doing this for the right reasons. You want to create a new space for the consumer, or your constituency, or for your reader. That, to me, is our job. We go to work every day to create these spaces that didn't exist before. They're going to grow exponentially over the next 10-50 years. I believe a Katy Perry fan is a Rhianna fan – I know they are – and a Jay Z fan is a Coldplay fan, etc. That didn't happen when I was growing up. When I was growing up, a Lil Kim fan wasn't a Madonna fan and a Madonna fan didn't like Lil Kim. But, today, a Nicki Minaj fan is a Britney Spears fan, and a Britney Spears fan is a Nicki Minaj fan. That's called cultural power. This country is a cultural super power around the world. It's the place of change culturally, not racially. The cultural piece has shifted; the racial piece is the demographic that's happening. My boss, Russell [Simmons], would tell you that if you see an empty space, fill it. If it's in music, art, industry, or commerce, find that space and fill it. We felt there needed to be multi-racial programming on the internet – there are black sites and white sites – but we felt there wasn't a place where black and white people could come together and share an experience. So five years ago we made that shift at Global Grind and we've seen the company and organization grow. We just sold the company last week. We sold it in part because of the tremendous amount of growth in the company and the market we tapped into."



Jasmine: "That was nicely said. What is a typical day in your life and how do you balance your professional obligations with being a father of a toddler and also with your social commitments?"

Michael: "I wake up very early and I go to sleep very late. I'm not a firm believer in the idea of balance. I think balance is often misunderstood between what we think is balance and what really is balance. I don't put too much pressure on myself to balance. I may work 10 hours a day and then go to the gym for an hour. Ten to one, is that balance? Often we make up these ideas of what balance is. You know, I love what I do. My grandfather would tell me, when he was alive, that when you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life. That was a quote by Mark Twain that I've kept with me for 20 years. I love what I do. I don't look at it as work. I don't look at it as a burden. I love it. I bring my kid with me. We travel together a lot, along with my girlfriend. She's an activist, a filmmaker, and a writer. We share the same politics and the same beliefs. We want our child to see the world and be around people. Last month he was in Jamaica, New Orleans, Miami, Los Angeles, and back to New Orleans. We might go to Haiti next week. So you show your child the world, you meet different people. I want him to be around rich people and poor people, black people and white people, artists and politicians. He's a lucky kid. I try my hardest to spend as much time as I can with him. I want to be an active father. I had an amazing father, while growing up, who I want to emulate. Today, I went to the museum with my son here in Miami and we played. We played in the pool. I never turn off. I'm 24/7. Christmas is a nice holiday, but it doesn't mean I can't work on Christmas. I don't ever turn off. A lot of people in the past have said, 'You work too hard and you're going to burn out' since I was 14 years old. I'm 36. I feel more energized and ready to go than ever before. I know it's

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rare, that everyone doesn't have that in them. I don't put that burden on other people. I was given a strong work ethic and that helps me 'balance;' it helps me work until 2:00 a.m. and get up at 6:00 a.m. and watch Dora the Explorer and dance to Michael Jackson with my kid."

Jasmine: "It's awesome that you expose him to different experiences and different people. It's going to pay off in the long run. That's exactly how my parents are. I'm one of three girls and I was born in San Francisco. My sisters were born in Las Vegas and Georgia. Our parents are firm believers in that you have to expose your kids to a lot of things and let them discover their own path. You mentioned your dad and grandfather were big influences during your upbringing and your way of thinking. Can you name anyone else who has had a tremendous impact on you as a leader when you were younger?"

Michael: "My mother and my father have had a huge impact. They're incredibly hard-working people. My mother has done like 15 things in her life and I've

always admired that. She was a computer programmer, a chef at a restaurant for 16 years, a film editor, and a bookkeeper. She was a director and a plumber. I always say if you are stuck in your life and in doubt, call my mother. She will help get

you off that doubt. My father has had a tremendous impact on my life in terms of his work ethic and intellect. I've studied the greats. I'm a fan of Mandela. I'm a fan of Steve Biko from South Africa. I'm a big fan of President Barack Obama. I'll tell you a secret. If you look at Obama's greatest speeches, he is such a great orator, but he is also a student. Look at his great speeches – the South Carolina primary, his race speech in Philadelphia,



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and his 2012 election night speech, which was 17-1/2 minutes. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, I Have a Dream speech was 17-1/2 minutes. Obama knows that great speeches are given between 17-18 minutes. They figure that is the attention span of most people. You study people. I studied Bobby Kennedy. I'm a big fan of Bobby Kennedy. His speech on April 4, 1968, the speech he gave the night just before he was assassinated? I have an original copy of that in my office that was a press release his campaign put out. I study the ones who have been in office a long time, who have been elected for 40 years, like the longest-serving black Congressman, John Conyers. I'm a student. I love studying people and how they operate. I'm in love with The Civil Rights Movement. I think it is one of the greatest and most difficult periods of our history. I like to read a lot of autobiographies. I don't like to read a lot of fiction."

Jasmine: "I love how you said you love to learn. You're very accomplished, yet you still feel the need to seek knowledge and better yourself and learn from others."

Michael: "I have studied Margaret Thatcher. I may not agree with her politics, but I studied

her leadership. I'm a student. I'm a student of history, a student of the arts, and a student of politics. Most importantly, I'm a fan. I'm a fan of Jay-Z. I'm a fan of the Cohen brothers. I'm a fan of the great artists. I don't ever want to be a critic; I want to be a fan."

Jasmine: "What are a few resources that you would recommend to emerging leaders, like NAMCO's students, looking to gain insight into becoming a better leader?"

Michael: "Go to the library or your local university to read books on Lincoln. Read FDR's First 100 Days. Read John F. Kennedy's, Profiles in Courage. Read the great speeches in history. Read the Gettysburg Address and King's Dream speech from beginning to end. Read Frederick Douglass. Read George Washington, Thomas Jefferson. That's American history. Certainly, there is amazing International history, but start there. Maybe start with Obama's Dreams from my Father or Audacity of Hope. Those are two fantastic books. Bill Clinton's My Life, and Hilary's book is another great read. You've just got to read. One of the best pieces of advice I was given, and I'm a sports fan, was 'don't just read the sports section, read the entire newspaper.' You can't walk into a cocktail party and have someone say to you, 'What's going on in New York with the police shootings and the protests? Or what about Obama and Cuba?' You've got to know that Raul Castro is the president of Cuba. You've got to know about the Cuban Revolution and the Bay of Pigs and the history of John F. Kennedy and Fidel Castro

and the Cubans in Miami. What do you know about climate change and what's happening in China? You've got to be constantly reading stuff. As a filmmaker in a previous life, I used to take articles and put them away in a file and then go back to that file and see what I had. You've got to be a reader. Watch

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documentaries. Or watch movies like Top Five and enjoy yourself. Watch The Hangover. Listen to 2 Chainz. Go to the clubs and dance. There's nothing wrong with going to the clubs on a Friday night as long as you're ready to go to the rally and march on Saturday afternoon. I just like to study and read things and learn things and understand things. I was a theater major. I didn't get a degree in this, I just taught myself.”

Jasmine: “That's awesome that you're saying go to school for one thing and develop that into a whole other passion or career. Typically, in the media you see the same public figures speaking out about race issues, justice, and inequality, yet these figures don't always represent a diverse group of races and viewpoints. So, what inspires you to take a leadership role in some of the issues today and in speaking up? Also, what kind of advice would you give about people speaking up? A lot of times it's easier for us to speak up when we're part of a group of people, but where do we find encouragement when we see something we feel should be addressed?”

Michael: “Look at domestic violence. You can't have a conversation about domestic violence without men. Sadly, one-third of women murdered in this country were murdered by their partners. We need a conversation with men at the table about domestic violence. If not, it's difficult to solve that problem. We

can't have a conversation about racism or racist structures in this country without white people. For a good 25 years of my life, I've focused on these issues and I've been pounding the pavement to get white people to join in on this conversation. It's okay for them to get in. It could be uncomfortable. It should be uncomfortable. It is uncomfortable. I believe in what I do and it's from the heart. I have good intentions, but it's these conversations we don't want

to have, or that we try not to have, that are America's Achilles heel. I keep pushing, and I respect everybody who's involved. I don't judge everybody. Everybody is trying their best. Everyone has the best intentions. Whether we Tweet or run a foundation or organization working on an issue, every ounce of participation is needed. I just try to play my part, and that has led me to television and led me to public life and has led me to speaking. I still wake up every morning and watch Dora the Explorer, like half of American parents with kids under age two. People might think I'm different, but I have the same hopes for my kid as everybody else. I want to live in a country that is post-racial or post-racist. That's what I fight for.”

Jasmine: “You have such a diverse portfolio of work and involvement. What's the best, or most rewarding, experience of your career, so far?”

Michael: “Spending a week in Venice, California, at the house of composer Mark Kilian, and working with him in 2006 on a documentary called, “Without the King.” I'm such a big music fan and it involved South African music. He's South African. I got to work out of his studio in Venice and sit and collaborate on the music with our vision together. I am a lover of that type of music and to be able to create that work together was incredibly rewarding.”

Jasmine: “What advice would you give to NAMCO students who are looking to jumpstart their careers?”

Michael: “You've got to work hard. You've got to wake up before everybody else wakes up. If it's Saturday and you're just waking up at 10:00 a.m., you've slept too late. If you don't have a job, you've got to go out and help somebody in order for them to give you a job. You have to really put in the work. The more you give, the more you get. I can't tell you how many people I've hired in my company who didn't have the resume, but they had the passion and desire to do great work. I saw that and I gave them a chance. I might be unique as an employer, but I think there are others out there like me. Now these people I hired are making good money and have good jobs. They are senior level executives. So you've just got to go to work every day. You've got to wake up before everybody else, every day. You can't tell me you're tired at 22 years old. I'm 36 years old. You can't tell me you're tired.”

Jasmine: “What's next for you? We're hoping to have you speak next year at the NAMCO Leadership Diversity Summit. What do you have in store for 2015, for your company or as a personal project?”

Michael: “I will be there [NAMCO Leadership Diversity Summit]. I want to write a book on race. I've got to put my head down and do the work, but that's coming. There will be a book on race in the next two years, if I write it this year.”

Jasmine: “That would be awesome. Just hearing you speak, I would love for you to write a book.”

Michael: “Thank you.”

Jasmine: “There's a great deal of accessible information about you regarding your accomplishments. What do you like to do for fun that people might be surprised to know?”

Michael: “I play a lot of dominoes. I would challenge anyone, old or young. I can play pictures, I can play nines, I can play points, I can play first one out. Whatever one you want. Whatever game you want to play, bring your dominoes set; I'd be happy to play against you. I grew up in the theater so I am a big fan of theater. I sit on the Young Partners Board

of Public Theater where, as a kid, I used to be an usher. I was there, taking your ticket and now I'm sitting on the board. I go to the theater often. I studied theater at UCLA. People are sometimes surprised by those two things. I'm a big Dave Matthews Band fan. I have seen him over 300 times. I listen to hip hop; I live and die for hip hop. I love all kinds of music.”

Jasmine: “When you finally retire someday, what do you hope or expect to have accomplished? What do you want your legacy to be?”

Michael: “I hope the majority of white people will join the conversation on race. I discuss this often. I think it's the same as when you discuss violence against women and domestic violence, men have to be part of the conversation to solve it. When you discuss race, white people have to be part of the conversation to solve it because we benefit the most from not talking about it. I think it's liberating to be free of your privilege; that you can recognize you have it, and you feel good it's not something that's going to be hidden anymore. So, I hope when I'm done with all this that there will be real conversations and real admittances of our past; a real understanding of our present – in terms of

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Jim Crow to Civil Rights to incarceration and how we have systematically and, at times, successfully destroyed the fabric of

the black community. Certainly, other communities, as well, but specifically the black community. I hope there are real conversations and real action where power in this country – whether it's political power, economic power, intellectual power, or media power – represents who we are as a nation, not just a few; the few who, for centuries, have held onto it.”

Jasmine: “Lastly, give me three words that sum up Michael Skolnik?”

Michael: “Energetic, compassionate, and curious.”