DAVID REMNICK INTERVIEW
OBAMA: IN PURSUIT OF A MORE PERFECT UNION
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

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ON-SCREEN TEXT:

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Editor, *The New Yorker*

Working closely with Obama

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DAVID REMNICK:

I know I'm not the first to say this, but there is something very writerly about him, very self-examining, very careful in the way he talks. Even when he's in a casual and more social situation, which I've been once or twice, or a few times, he is very aware of every word that comes out of his mouth. And when he answers a question, it's almost like he's writing. There's a little delay before the words come out of the mouth as opposed to other presidents that we might think of, where the words seem to be either free of thought or be divorced from reality. And to some people it seems formal, or it seems arrogant or distant somehow. It's not the typical fare in Washington. It's not

hail-fellow-well-met. It's not backslapping. And he can be funny, he can be–– he can needle the hell out of you, but when you ask him a question, particularly in an interview or some serious format like this, there is the sense that sentences and paragraphs are being formed, thought through, and then issued. It's- it's um –– you don't see that every day in Washington.

Obama on race

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DAVID REMNICK:

Well, I wouldn't say he's innately uncomfortable about talking about race. I mean, he's talked about race in any number of formats, in any number of situations, whether it's following some kind of strategy or political event or a police shooting or the famous incident with Henry Louis Gates that was early in his administration. But there's a self-consciousness there that he can't just blather on about it. And I'll tell you a story about that. I'm interviewing him in the Oval Office, and we've talked about race for quite a while, but there's a certain deliberative aspect to his answers. There's no question. It's not like, lunch and two guys talking about –– talking about race, and the interview ends. And I'm still in the Oval Office picking up my stuff. He's gone off to some great matter of state down the hall, or whatever it is, and I'm still there with the Press Secretary and whoever else. As I'm leaving, I see the President of the United States at the very end of the hallway turn around and come all the way back and tell me, "You got to understand. When I talk about race, it's––, every word can change things or spark something or worsen the situation, and it's like the Head of the Federal Reserve talking about interest rates or

the dollar. Everything is paid attention. So, he was hyper aware of that and hyper aware also that he was not the president of African Americans. He was the president of the United States of America, which is an infinitely complex piece of business, and he was aware of that and concentrated on that and focused on that in a way that I don't think people completely understood and he was hearing everything.

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He was on the internet. He reads. You know, he said he didn't watch cable television, but he was on the internet. He knows that there's a huge number of people out there talking about taking their country back. Big slogan of the Tea Party movement. This is long before the advent of Donald Trump and Steve Bannon and white nationalists' movements that seemed to bubble up from the ugly earth. That––those currents were always there. He knew they were there. He knew that his presence in the White House invariably exacerbated some of the worst elements in our history that are always there and so he was very careful.

The relationship between Obama and Trump's presidencies

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DAVID REMNICK:

I think the currents of racial hatred and racial resentment are part of American history. They are welded into American history. This nation in some large measure is built upon, its foundations are built upon, the White House is made by chattel slavery. Millions of African men and women and children brought here to build this country for nothing, who suffered

immeasurable pain and that didn't end with the Emancipation Proclamation. As we all know it led to the highly problematic period of reconstruction and then Jim Crow and look at where we are today. The president of the United States elected in no small measure on racism. American history, and we speak in that infantile way of exceptionalism. This is part of who we are, the Obama ascendance is- is- is part of who we are, a magnificent part of who we are, but it wasn't a unanimous vote and like it or not, Donald Trump won. Speak what you will about Russian influence or Hillary Clinton's faults as a campaigner, but the idea that somehow Obama's election eradicated racism is infantile, and who knew it most of all? Him.

Obama during the 2016 election

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DAVID REMNICK:

I did two reporting trips. One, I traveled with President Obama as he was campaigning for Hillary Clinton in North Carolina; he was not serenely confident of victory. You know, he came back to where I and a few other guests were seated on Air Force One, and I asked him, "Are you confident you got it in the bag?" "Nope." Very Obamian. His political director was sitting in the same cabin of the plane, and he had all kinds of statistics saying, well, you know, nothing's a slam dunk. It's very sober, but it looks good. Fine. The election happens. Obama doesn't watch TV until late. Then, this thing started coming in, and then they get results coming in from parts of Florida where suddenly Trump is doing way better than Romney. That's matched by districts in Michigan and Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, and we all know what

happens. I then went down and interviewed Obama. It would have been less than a week later. He had just had his meeting, his only meeting with Trump in the White House the day before. The White House was like a funeral parlor. People were devastated. They're walking around like, like some, just a horrible event had happened to everybody's family. Obama gathered people in the Oval Office and tried to tell them, "Things are not a straight line. History zigs and zags," very Obamian. But even he couldn't conceal his, the sense of loss, devastation frustration, pain.

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You know, my subsequent reporting revealed, although Obama himself was quite discreet about it, that Trump revealed himself in their meetings to be who he is, not interested in anything other than, you know, great big political rallies, knew nothing about any issues. He couldn't focus his attention on anything for more than two seconds. The only thing that they seemed to be able to connect on was, I think at that point anyway, Trump admired Obama's popularity. Trump hides in plain sight who he is, what his intellect is or isn't, what his sense of empathy is or is not. And Obama probably tried to put the best shine on it, saying that the Apocalypse doesn't come until the Apocalypse has actually come. But he knew. But of course it turned out even worse.

Obama and "White America"

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DAVID REMNICK:

There's some people that are just stone cold racists. We know that. But there are a lot of people also who feel, and are to some degree or another, they feel like they're on the losing end of the stick. Their communities are getting hollowed out. De-industrialization is happening. It's harder for working class people to make a living. This ignores a whole other thing, that a lot of the working class is people of color, but okay. But there are these people, there are a lot of people, who rose to the bait, I would say, the encouragement of the kind of PR mastery of Trump to see, you're being laughed at by elites like Obama. You're being distained and overlooked by those people. Trump made it into an us and them, and black and white. There was no question that he had a self-consciousness of a path to whipping up resentment.

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And Obama was a Black president. And, you know, one of the things that I've heard Obama say is that maybe he came along 20 years too soon. That maybe for demographic reasons, it might had been better if Gonzales had come along sooner than Obama. You know, he gave a very famous speech that brought him to fame in 2004 at the Democratic Convention in Boston. There's not a red America, there's not a blue America. That's an aspirational speech. I don't think Obama had any illusion that everybody had transcended race and had transcended historical animosities and all the rest, and everybody was in a full embrace of great unity. It was an aspirational notion. But it made people feel good, it was – which is what aspiration is all about. It –– um, it was a new kind of American optimism, voiced by somebody who had embodied this melding of identity. But I don't think he had radical illusions or disillusions. This is a guy who, you know, at the University of

Chicago Law School taught all the texts that are essential to our understanding of race. James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Malcolm X, the civil history of the Civil Rights' Movement, the history of slavery, reconstruction. He knows that history like, as well as anybody.

Racism in recent politics

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DAVID REMNICK:

I think racism is around always. It's around always. I mean, in my lifetime, race was a hugely evident, dominant theme during JFK, LBJ. I mean, Ronald Reagan, in order to signal to his- his base where he was on race, announces for the Presidency in Philadelphia and Mississippi and starts talking about state's rights. That's not an unconscious decision. Mitt Romney, who we now think of as relatively enlightened compared to, you know, what we've got now, talks about how half the country is kind of reliant on the government and is signaling, you know what that's signaling. It's the language of welfare queens. All the discussion, which I don't think lasted thank God for very long, of post racial America was delusional. It was delusional. But I think, and here's the debate and you see this debate between and among all kinds of people, not least between say somebody like Ta-Nehisi Coates, who I admire greatly, and Barack Obama. Obama seized Ta-Nehisi Coates as a risking despair, risking the notion that racism and- and- is almost innate and ineradicable. Whereas Obama, both I think sincerely and in his role as a politician, because they're doing, they have very different roles in society, that Obama's constant argument despite all the evidence, despite the

shootings, despite the –– despite Charlottesville, that he is constantly pressing, I think we've heard the quotation so many times and it was inscribed on his Oval Office carpet, about the arc of history bends towards justice.

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He refuses despair. That's what he saw as his political row where race was concerned. The refusal of despair. The insistence that American history is not just a matter of George Washington and- and- and the great armies of the Second World War. It certainly is that too, but it's also, it has to do with the influence of suffragettes and the Civil Rights Movement and now Black Lives Matter, movements that pushed the ball forward toward progress. Clearly what we're living in is a moment of reaction. A lot of it is the reaction towards eight years of a Black president and all that indicated in terms of where this country is going demographically, where our politics is going, who's up, who's down, who's the winner, who's the loser, whether it's true or illusion. Donald Trump didn't invent racism. Donald Trump didn't invent, kind of, white nationalism or this brand of right-wing populism. He was a reality TV star and a kind of mediocre real estate guy, but who had a gift for sensing these currents, and in the age of social media and a certain kind of alchemy of campaigning, took advantage. And again, all the other factors of that campaign taken into the, taken into the soup. I think nine times out of ten, probably, Hillary Clinton beats Donald Trump, but on that day in November, in those circumstances, in that particular weather of social media and all the rest, he won. And we are living through that every day.

Obama's childhood, family, and early years

01:16:12:08

DAVID REMNICK:

Obama once said that he has members of his family who look like Bernie Mac and members of his family who look like Margaret Thatcher. He has members of his family who have gone to some of the great universities of this world and country, and members of his family who live in cattle-herding villages in Kenya to this day. You know, it's an amalgam. His father, Barack Sr., is a Kenyan born from the Luo tribe and becomes the post-colonial elites. He comes to further his education in Hawaii on a project that was funded by all sorts of do-gooders, and he ends up in Hawaii and he meets a teenage girl of Midwestern origin whose family moved to Hawaii, and they have a child together, Barack Obama. The Barack Obama that we know is the son of um … an African intellectual who then becomes a very troubled and alcoholic intellectual when he comes home, and a teenage mother. And within a couple of years, she's a single mother.

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His childhood is largely among white people. His great advantage or his first real step up is he goes to this very elite school in Honolulu called Punahou School, which is a little bit like, you know, Exeter by the Sea. You know, it's- it looks like paradise. It looks like a country club but with better flowers, and is incredibly multi-ethnic except for one thing. There aren't any Black people. The only Black people at that time in Hawaii are in the military, for the most part. There are some Black people, but certainly not at Punahou. He was the only self-identifying Black kid in his class. There were other Black kids here

and there. And it was a very liberal school, you know, very Kumbaya, very, you know, guitars and Joan Baez songs. And people, you know, the most liberal kind of education you can imagine in that setting. And yet, when he's ten years old and there's a poster up on the board of who's going to be where in the tennis tournament and he's called Barry at that time, puts his finger up there and looks for his name, or looks for names. Some other kid says to him, "You're going to put your finger on there and it's going to get it dirty." Just what the hell is that? Some, you know, a racist incident. These things happened to him. He's not immune from it just because he's in this splendidly liberal setting. And every day, he's going home and he's living with his white grandparents. And his mother, who is very smart and idealistic, a little hippy-ish, is in Indonesia living, you know, many many hours away by air, both doing development work and also scholarly work. She's studying the art of blacksmithing among Indonesian villagers.

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It's a very strange, atypical, as we think of it, American childhood. I mean, beginning with Hawaii, which are these little rocks in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He did not grow up in, you know, Lansing or Detroit or, you know, Harlem or–– It's not quote unquote typical, or the Black middle class suburbs of, you know, Prince George's County or none of that. He doesn't know anything about that. He's completely divorced from it. His father is essentially absent from his life completely. He's gone by the time Obama is two. There's one visit to Hawaii that takes place for over several days, which is extremely confusing. The best he can make of this is almost to mythologize it, as any child would. You know, it has an outsized – that one visit has an

outsized presence in his mind as reflected in his book that he writes many years later. He loved, he adored his mother, but she wasn't always around, and he had these older grandparents, his white grandparents, and the grandmother is the most interesting. She worked at a bank, very smart, very hard headed, practical minded, kind of hit the glass ceiling as an executive, as a medium level executive at this rather modest bank.

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He's kind of on his own. He goes to Occidental College. He wasn't a great high school student. He starts to get more serious about his studies. Still has a good time. He has a very multicultural friend group. One guy is from Pakistan, another is from India. There's white kids, Black kids, dates all around. For the first time, he's in the center of anything approaching, you know, some access to African American culture, music, books, instead of his white mother giving him the autobiography of Malcolm X in a very touching way. Now, he's consuming it. But he gets sick of the–– of Occidental, which he saw as a little provincial, and then he transfers to Columbia to get in the thick of it. He wants to be on 116th Street. He ends up at Columbia, and I think for most of us, who have written biographically about Obama, the Columbia years are the least available because Obama is the least available. He's like a stealth student. He's living at apartments around the city. He's going to class. He's a pretty good student. He's writing a little bit for publications about, you know, whether there should be –– about nuclear arms in Europe and stuff, but not all that seriously. He takes a course or two with Edward Said, doesn't really like it. Goes to hear various speakers around town, liberal radical or otherwise. And he's getting more engaged with New York City, Black life in

New York City. At Occidental, he gave one speech at a divestment rally, divestment from South Africa, which was the issue. I was the same year.

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Um, you know, and he's just, he's untethered. There's no community. He comes from Hawaii, his white parents. His father eventually dies while he's at Columbia. The mother he sees, but she's in and out of his life. He has friends here and there. And he decides to go to Chicago. And Chicago is where he finds home, which is almost like out of a narrative of something earlier in the century, you know, of the great migration. His individual migration is to Chicago, and he becomes a community organizer. As a young man, he puts off law school. He puts off ambition, and he becomes a community. He wants to find some place, some purpose, and he gets to know leaders of Black churches and people who are fighting against the misuse of asbestos in housing projects in the south side of Chicago. And the south side of Chicago is Black Chicago, as is the west side, and he begins to call this home. And at Harvard Law School, where he eventually goes, he's an absolute star, an absolute star. He becomes the first Black editor of the Harvard Law Review.

Obama and Michelle's relationship

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DAVID REMNICK:

During one of his, you know, summer jobs, he goes to a firm in Chicago to work for the summer and his supervisor is a young woman named Michelle Robinson, and they go on a date, and, although she resisted this for whatever matters are propriety at the firm, and they finally go out and things

developed and the rest is history. And that's really finding home. So Michelle Robinson becomes Michelle Obama, and she's from the opposite background, as atypical as his background is in conventional terms of what we expect a certain kind of African American growing up to be, hers is typical. You know, she's from the south side of Chicago. Her father works his ass off and even after he develops Multiple Sclerosis, he's working for the city, and her mother is, who we now know very well. You know, it's a striving family. Craig goes to Princeton, her brother, and plays basketball and is a terrific student. She makes it to Princeton. That whole story, that kind of –– what eventually becomes an incredibly achieving, high achieving family. As a biographer, as a reporter, I'm torn about the business of dating, you know, finding old girlfriends, but we do know from my really esteemed colleague, David Maraniss at the Washington Post and others, that Obama didn't only date Black women, whether it was in college or after.

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But what's clear is, and it's clear because he says so, that Chicago, marriage to Michelle Robinson, who became Michelle Obama, gave her a kind of grounding and a sense of bearing in the world that he just did not have before. I think it's very, very cynical for biographers or journalists who are try as they might not real intimates, and I'm no intimate, to say, "He married Michelle Obama because he knew he couldn't run for Congress or Mayor if he had a white wife or an Asian American wife," or something like that. I think that's insulting and ridiculous and gross. But, from his mouth, you do get the sense that not only was he in love with her and wanted to spend his life with

her and make a family with her, but there was a sense of completeness that he lacked and that involved the city as well.

Harold Washington

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DAVID REMNICK:

Certainly early in his thinking about this own future, when he first got to Washington, if Obama had a political dream, it was to succeed or elaborate on the career or Harold Washington, the first black mayor of Chicago. Remember, Chicago was a city, that in modern times, was dominated by a family, Richard Daly and then Richard Daly's son. And this was a city where the parameters and the weight of race was inscribed in every neighborhood because of housing covenants and, you know, segregation doesn't happen by accident, whether it's in schools, or where people live and how people live. As a community organizer, you see from the ground up how it happened. You know, why is that housing project almost in the state of Indiana, it's so far south? Why is it ignored, why do--why can't person A live over here as opposed to over there? He got very interested in Chic–– People talk about politics in Chicago a lot, and if you're, the history of Chicago and race and how everything came to be is, for an interested Chicagoan, a matter of daily talk. It's inscribed in how people live their lives. It's, you know, it's one trip to the library. It's a fascinating story, and Obama really became fascinated with it. And Harold Washington, who had all kinds of faults, and also suffered from bad health in his political career, and life ended prematurely, was a hero to the Black community. I mean, imagine to- to- to ascend to that seat in that

city after so many years of Richard Daly and his- his kind of crony successors and people around him. It was remarkable. He was a hero.

Obama's "sacred stories" of Chicago

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DAVID REMNICK:

You know, Obama, yeah, he collected what he called sacred stories, but again, this is- this is part of him as the political aspect of his life. He's getting up every morning and he's, you know, going to a church to talk to what their needs are or housing projects, but he's talking to people all the time, and he's also a writerly guy. He had ambitions for himself as a writer. He's writing short stories that he's showing to friends and ex-classmates. He used to mail them to, among other people, Phil Boerner, who was an old roommate of his at Columbia. He was a big letter writer, which is not a common thing, even before the internet, even before email, to be a–– to write expansive letters about his life in Chicago and he would send these to all kinds of friends. He's a watcher. He's a listener. Most politicians are not. They –– everything is about them and they tell you what they think and they're not hearing people much at all, except waiting for you to stop talking so I can talk more. Obama is very attentive. I think he has a career as a writer. Let's see, I hope he writes a good memoir. I think he will.

Obama as an outsider

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DAVID REMNICK:

I do think that Obama, because of the nature of his past, his unusual family in which somebody looks like Bernie Mac and somebody looks like Margaret Thatcher and estranged, you know, hegira across the world from Indonesia to Honolulu to Chicago, to New York, to wherever. He's ridden in Chicago, an outsider, but he is also somebody who feels comfortable as a result of his background, here's the advantage. When he's campaigning for the Senate, say, and he's campaigning in Southern Illinois, which feels a lot more like the deep South than it does Chicago, he's at home at those Elks' Club picnics. He's doing all right playing poker with State Senators from Southern Illinois, or playing golf with them in a way that I'm not sure that other, you know, more locally specific politicians might.

Obama visits Africa before attending Harvard Law School

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DAVID REMNICK:

Imagine the strangeness of it. You're- you're- you're an American. What you've known is Hawaii and California and Chicago, and you have this mythological notion of your father and your father's homeland, and you get on an airplane and you fly 12, 14 hours. You get to Nairobi, and that's not even, just the start of it, and you go to essentially your ancestral homeland and you meet relatives who don't speak your language, some of them. Don't speak your language. And your relatives are buried in the backyard. Now, most of us, if we have this sense at all, we have it in a very sentimental way, in a very ordered way, and Ellis Island and maybe we go on a heritage tour and in my case, you go to Ukraine, and kind of imagine that your great

grandparents were in a Shtetl or whatever happens to be your ethnicity. But here, he gets on an airplane and he can see it and they're alive. And he has certain relatives who can tell him stories about his own father that he had no idea about. And it's--by the way, they're painful stories. 'Cause his father, by the way, when he arrived in Hawaii, never told Obama's mother that he had another wife and child, Kezia was her name, in- in Africa. And he knew very, very little about how when Barack Obama Sr. went back, he tried to enter the higher reaches of Kenyan politics, but never quite makes it, develops a horrendous drinking problem, is constantly smashing up his car, even more seriously, he beat his--one of his wives.

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It's an ugly story. It's a painful story to hear. And finally, of course, Barack Obama Sr. crashes his car and dies while Obama is in college. But he has so little knowledge of it, and then he learns these stories. Then he does something amazing. I mean, as a really young man, he writes his autobiography. His autobiography, and one of the things that's really interesting about this is, it is arguable that the most developed of all the genres of African American literature is the autobiography, the memoir, beginning with slave narratives, Frederick Douglas and many, many others, right through to Baldwin and Maya Angelou. And he's consuming these, and he does this incredibly ballsy thing. He's nobody! He's a young guy of great promise, and he writes his autobiography and it's all about identity and family and the missing father. It's much more about the missing father than it is about the present mother. And it ends, and there's a certain highly literary aspect to these stories that he tells. And he does monkey around with the

details. He does change details to- to give the story more shapeliness or to protect the guilty or innocent. And it ends with a marriage. The book ends with a marriage, which is like a Greek comedy. Greek comedies end with marriages, Greek tragedies end with, we know what they end with, funerals, death. And the marriage is to Michelle Obama. There's kind of an Odyssean aspect to this. It's very self-conscious. This is a very confident, literary, self-serious guy that- that does this. And the material is gained not just in Chicago, but it's acquired on this trip to Africa.

Obama's primary campaign

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DAVID REMNICK:

I think Obama is incredibly introspective. He's just not an over sharer. The act of writing an autobiography is the ultimate sharing. And it's crucial to him. Two things to me are crucial to his campaign for president and his political career. On a very––on a policy basis, his differential with Hillary Clinton is, you were for the war in Iraq – well, it's a complicated matter. And I gave a speech early on saying, "This is a stupid war." I mean, on domestic policy, there was not a hell of a lot differentiating them, certainly not enough for him to overcome what even in 2008 seemed like, at least early on, a kind of inevitability. The other thing was identity. She never made use of or knew how to give a vocabulary to or a language to the feminist aspect of her candidacy. She was very reluctant to do so for a variety of reasons. Obama was not reluctant in the least to- to make use of his identity, but he fashioned it in a very particular way, so that it was an embrace rather than a division.

He embodied–– his DNA embodied an embrace. Now, that's going to be a lot rougher for Corey Booker to do, or any number of African American politicians. Well, that will happen when it happens, and we'll see how that goes and what language they develop for a national campaign, but Obama drew on his autobiography, his past and- and his book to give a language to his campaign. And to my mind, that begins in 2004 with the red state, blue state aspirational speech. I mean, it is a comic book somehow. It's not a comic book, but a hope or even if you're being critical, a fantasy of America, but it's a kind of optimism, which has a role in political rhetoric. And then you see it again when he starts to run for president, and the way he has a--he shifts his language just enough so that if he's in a Black church, language is a certain way and modulated a certain way. If he's in an Elk's Club lunch in the Midwest, it's modulated a slightly different way. And some people found this phony. To me, that's just that's life. Your language modulates according to whom you're speaking with. Not the truth, although that happens often enough with other politicians, but Sunday morning at 11 AM on the South side of Chicago in a church is one language, one tone, one set of word choices, and a convention platform is another, and a VFW in Minnesota is different.

Racism in Obama's family

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DAVID REMNICK:

I mean, one painful thing that Obama makes reference to is that at a certain point, his grandparents, who were doing a large measure of raising him in Honolulu, got a letter from Barack Obama Sr.'s father saying, "We don't want

Ann Dunham", Obama's mother, "to come with their," their language not mine, "half-breed child to Africa." It was very angry and aggressive rejection, very painful, and it's- it's described with enormous pain in the book.

International experiences

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DAVID REMNICK:

It's hard to say when somebody recognizes anything, whether it's race or the difference between good and evil, or anything like that, but there's no question that a kid like Obama who finds he's a child in Hawaii and suddenly he's in a place in Indonesia where, by the way, they lived better because their dollar went further and they had servants and people helping them, and so on, particularly in Jakarta. He was seeing a world that 99.9 percent of Americans has never seen. Of otherness, of different languages, just an entirely different world. The reality of that and the memory of that, he carried with him for the rest of his life. The same spirit when he was in college, he had a Pakistani friend who brought him, invited him to Pakistan one summer, and he saw what life was like in Pakistan. The radical, radical, radical division between rich and poor, which we think we know a lot about in the United States, but it's even more extreme in other parts of the world. In kind of visual, dramatic terms. This was just a much more international, peripatetic life than most of us ever experience. I mean, I grew up in a small town, and then I went to college, and then I got a job. It wasn't until I became a Moscow correspondent that I really steeped myself in something entirely different, but I was 29 by the time that happened. To have it happen when

you're between when you were a little kid, and then do it again, and never be rooted anywhere until you were in your 20s, that's unusual.

The passing of Obama's mother

01:41:38:21

DAVID REMNICK:

Well, by 1995 Obama's mother was very sick, and she was diagnosed for cancer, if I remember correctly, here in New York before going home, and he loved, he adored his mother. He had a certain bemusement about her, in terms of her idealism, which seemed to him a little corny, but he also knew she was doing the best she could for him. She's got this child who's--identifies as and appears to the world as African American and is, and what's she supposed to do about it? So, she very sweetly gives him certain books, plays certain music for him, sees certain kinds of movies, she's doing the best she can. And then at the same time she's off doing her thing, and she's trying to live her idealistic and scholarly life. And so she's absent and she's present. She's, you know, she ain't- she's not Donna Reed. She's not "Leave it to Beaver's" mom. And he has a stepsister, because she married an Indonesian guy, and he has a step-sister named Maya, they're very close, big age difference. And his sister too is very kind of, world peace. You know, she works for I think something called the Peace Institute, or something like that. Very idealistic. Whereas Obama's politics are in many ways extremely practical, and the critique of him on the left is- is not insignificant. Even to this day. Even with Trump and even with people yearning for a saner president, much less Obama, there is a real critique of Obama on the left,

because of his, you know, what they see, what people on the left see as a kind of a failure to cope with everything from drones to Afghanistan, to any number of other issues. But he adored his idealistic mother, and there's not much more to say about that. The compounding tragedy of- of the death of Obama's mother is that he didn't make it in time to say good-bye. He was involved with politics in such a way that he felt that he couldn't quite strip himself away and he got there--you know, Hawaii is far away, and he just got- got there late. And um, she died. And then he and Maya spread her ashes, I think, at the East-West Institute. And that was that.

The passing of Obama's grandmother

01:44:25:08

DAVID REMNICK:

His grandmother lived longer. His grandmother, who was so important to him lived 'till, I think it was three days or two days before he was elected president. And there's a very memorable speech that he gave where he's talking about her. He'd broken away at the end of October to go visit the grandmother and wanted to say good-bye to her, which he managed to do. Then he got back on the campaign trail, and she died, and he announced this death and ascribed his practical-mindedness. But also, the grandmother played an even more important political role. When Obama was forced to give a speech on race. And he was forced to, because of Jeremiah Wright's sermons bubbling up into public consciousness. "Goddamn America, the USA of the KKK," and all that stuff. Obama had always wanted to give a speech like this, but his campaign was very nervous about doing it. He wanted to give

one as early as the Iowa caucuses. And his staff really counseled against it. It got to be the spring and the Jeremiah Wright thing had exploded, I think on ABC, and he gave what was called A More Perfect Union speech. Crucial moment came, and the most criticized moment came, when he said, "I can no more disavow Jeremiah Wright than I can disavow my own grandmother who, while a wonderful woman in so many ways, admitted to me that she would sometimes cross the street because she was afraid of encountering a couple of African American guys." Or she would use, if I remember this right, "She would use racial language once in a while" that would make him cringe.

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In other words, he didn't call his grandmother a stone cold racist, but she was a woman of her generation who, in certain of her reflexes, embarrassed him. And he was making an equivalence with Jeremiah Wright. And a lot of people were critical of that. But that was a very Obamian moment. That's a very Obama move. And I don't mean that in a cynical way. I think that's at the core of him. The attempt, the desire to create a language of embrace. And his critics will say that's a language that ignores reality. That is too idealistic, that is … a peril. But that's him.

Reverend Jeremiah Wright

01:47:14:00

DAVID REMNICK:

He was in trouble. He was in trouble. He had just lost Texas and Ohio to Hillary Clinton. And the Hillary campaign had, you know, had done its negative research and all the rest, all campaigns do. But they were very wary

about deploying some of the nastier racial stuff. For example, I remember getting some email from somebody, you know, "Have you noticed that one of Louis Farrakhan's aides worked in proximity to Obama at the State House in Springfield?" You know, trying to stir it up. ABC had all these tapes of Jeremiah Wright's sermons, and there were millions of them. And they – it kind of wasn't a priority, they had a lot to do during the campaign. And Brian Ross, I think it was the reporter, starts watching these, or an assistant starts watching them. And most of them are long and boring and irrelevant to anything. And then they stumble upon a couple of these sermons that seemed incendiary, that were deeply critical of American foreign policy and in a language that was way more inflammatory than most of America, white America, could stomach. And Obama had found a home in this church. And he had found a home with Jeremiah Wright, too. Jeremiah Wright, who was by the way, had a distinguished military career, had done tremendous things for the community, a man of great complexity and kindness, and also politics that is much more familiar to and rhetoric that is much more familiar to an African American. I think it was Martin Luther King who said that the most segregated hour of the week is 11 a.m. on Sunday morning. There's not a--certainly back in the 60s, and even to this day, there's not a hell of a lot of multi-ethnic, multi-racial church congregations. Some, but each group's consciousness of the language and ways of and means of expression of the others is pretty divorced.

Bobby Rush

01:49:35:14

DAVID REMNICK:
Obama was a state senator, which is, you know, name your state senator. Most people can't do it, it's not an unimportant office in American politics, but it's certainly not one of global significance, and- and- and Obama was ambitious. And he wanted to graduate from Springfield to Washington. Michelle Obama, not all that enthusiastic about it. Kind of is thinking, okay, you're in Springfield, you're away most of the week, can't we do well and do good at the same time? Can't you run a foundation and have a lucrative law practice? We could, you know, we could do good and well at the same time. She's getting impatient with this stuff. And it's obscure. Then he comes up with the idea he's going to run for Congress in a district where the congressman for years has been Bobby Rush. Bobby Rush has street cred like–– he was a Black Panther and a leader of the Black Panthers. He was an ally of Fred Hampton, who was murdered in his home. He is no one's idea of a national political figure, but for that district on the south side of Chicago, most people thought, "Why would we replace Bobby Rush? He's always been here. He's our guy." And along comes this guy from Harvard Law School, with a funny name and too many ears and an imperious way of talking, academic way of talking. And he's going to run for Congress. All of his friends told him – most of his friends told him, "What are you doing? Don't do this." And he runs for Congress, and the criticism is, he's not Black enough, he's not ours. Even more conspiratorially, he's a tool of white business interests or political interests. He's an outsider. And in the debates with Bobby Rush, who had the real sympathy of the- of the community. I mean, is he as intellectually as adept as Barack Obama? Does he have Barack Obama's gifts as they later

came to flourish? No! But this is our guy. And Bobby Rush kicked Barack Obama's ass, as predicted.

01:52:05:12

And it really, that was almost the end of Obama's political career. Going back to Springfield was a bit of a drag, Michelle Obama's getting impatient with this, the kids are starting to get a little older, and he lost an authenticity contest. But instead of quitting, he gets it in his head he's going to run for Senate. Senate's an entirely different thing in the state of Illinois. And he, a guy – a kind of political operative named Dan Shomon starts traveling around the state of Illinois with Barack Obama, and the game is now different. We're no longer competing for a slice of Black south side Chicago, but we're now competing over an entire state where you've got Chicago, but you've also got cities and towns in southern Illinois that not so long ago had the presence of the Ku Klux Klan. And you had farm towns and smaller cities. Here, Obama learns, in a sense, national politics. The state of Illinois, in some sense, is kind of national feeling. It's not that narrow slice. And his skills develop. And what he did learn in terms of building allies in the state house in Springfield now begins to come into play in Illinois. Or the way he campaigned for and became editor of Law Review at Harvard. Those skills come into play. And then he gets crazily lucky. Crazily lucky. Not one sex scandal, but two, and arguably three scandals open the gates to his winning the Senate seat. And everybody's pleased by this, and even Michelle is cool with this. The next morning, he gives a press conference and what's the first question anybody asks him? When are you going to run for president of the United States? And we're off to the races.

Obama's response to Hurricane Katrina

01:54:16:10

DAVID REMNICK:

Hurricane Katrina comes, and it's 2005, August. The Gulf Coast is under water. New Orleans, a great American city in every sense, is- is under water. Whole neighborhoods are irredeemably damaged. The city will never be the same, and not only are the preparations for this abysmal, but the racial disparity in the way people were treated and cared for was appalling. And the indifference from Washington and other levels of government was appalling. Some Black leaders came out and just hammered on this theme. Obama, who's now a senator, was not uncritical, but, when he got on television, he would say, "Look ..." again, in that Obama way ... "the goal is to forge unity. The goal is to forge political understanding." The temperament is calm rather than incendiary. And he says, "Yes, there's no question that the Republicans have fallen down on the job here, but we too in the Democratic party have not done nearly enough for people in poor communities." There's an aspect of conciliation rather than the battering ram. Which, by the way, the battering ram was called for in this situation. It was terrible. It was the Bush administration equivalent of going to Puerto Rico and throwing rolls of paper towels as your way of showing your deep empathy for victims of a terrible tragedy. I don't think Obama impressed people like Cornel West, for example, by any stretch of the imagination. But that's the way he played Hurricane Katrina. And that's very emblematic of the way Obama deals with situations like that, throughout his presidency to come.

Obama's speech at Brown Chapel

01:56:33:06

DAVID REMNICK:

Obama has decided to run for president. It's quite clear. And every year, there's a commemoration of Selma, a great Civil Rights moment, a great encounter between the forces of the Civil Rights Movement led by John Lewis, and others, and police with dogs, and truncheons and the violence that ensued. And that violence, which was broadcast nationally on television, led to a breakthrough in Washington, and in the heart and legislative strategy of LBJ to have a Civil Rights Act and subsequently a Voting Rights Act. Every year there's a commemoration, and the great figure that often leads this is John Lewis, who is still in Congress to this day. And he's kind of–– and he's the great survivor of the Civil Rights Movement to this day, and also somebody who entered electoral politics. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama want to make an impression in Selma. And the Clintons, remember, felt that they had deep inroads with the African American community, and with reason. You remember, in a certain New Yorker magazine, Toni Morrison wrote that Bill Clinton was the first Black president. Said with some irony, said all kinds of ... but mostly with admiration too, as opposed to all of his predecessors. John Lewis is kind of … he's torn. He's got an allegiance, a longstanding allegiance to the Clintons, and then there's this new guy that's coming along, an African American guy that's running for president. It's a contest. And as you know, in the nominating process, particularly on the

Democratic side, there are certain primaries where the Black vote is crucial. And South Carolina is emblematic of this.

01:58:31:00

So they all show up, they descend on Selma, which is this incredibly – it's much, first of all, it's much smaller in reality than it is in its historical place, with 20 thousand people, it's not much of a town. And the Edmund Pettus Bridge, still called the Edmund Pettus Bridge, named for the last Confederate General in Congress, big KKK sympathizer. And Obama gives his speech at Brown Church. And Hillary is down the street at another church. Obama does something amazing. First of all, he's introduced by Joseph Lowery, who's another griot, you know, wise man of the civil rights movement. And he gets up and he starts talking about Harriet Tubman and how people thought she was crazy, but it was a good crazy. And all kinds of events happened that were crazy, but they were good crazy. And something might happen that's crazy, but a good crazy. Meaning this guy. Obama gets up and he gives a speech, and it takes the form of a Sunday sermon, and he knows how to do this. He's been in Black churches before, he's not a white visitor. And he gets up, and he pays–– the first thing he does is pay obeisance to the elders, John Lewis, Lowery, Joseph Lowery, and other people in the room who were in town. Shuttlesworth, Fred Shuttlesworth. And he begins paying tribute to what he calls the Moses generation, this kind of mosaic idea of this- this- this allegory of the Jews leaving Egypt is a well-trodden allegory for Blacks leaving slavery and entering freedom, and it's repeated and repeated and repeated because iniquities continue. So, it's in the heart and souls of everybody who goes to churches like this and hears it all the time. It's in Zora

Neale Hurston, it's just in one book after another. And then he pronounces himself the head of the Joshua Generation. Moses doesn't see this promised land. Who's Moses? MLK, Martin Luther King, did not see ... famously says it in his speech, "I might not get there with you." Obama pronounces himself the head of the Joshua Generation. That's incredibly nervy, and yet, at the same time, deeply moving to these people, and to the world beyond who were inclined to listen. That's the speech, and then he marches across the bridge as people do. And he, I think he's been back to Selma many times since, or a number of times since, including at the end of his presidency. To me, that event is as much his declaration to run for president as his announcement speech in Springfield, but it's made particular to the Black community in Selma.

“Race doesn’t matter”

02:01:51:13

DAVID REMNICK:

“Race doesn't matter” was a thing you heard during the Obama euphoria. It's very hard to hear it now. It doesn't make sense. It's not real. And it was as aspirational, and maybe deluded, as the 2004 Convention Speech. It was that… that moment was the moment where things edged into the so-called post-racial and fantastical. It's understandable, euphoria is euphoria. We haven't felt that in a very long time. But it was fantastical.

***The New Yorker* magazine**

02:02:52:03

DAVID REMNICK:

Barry Blitt drew a cover that meant to take every crazy stereotype about Michelle and Barack Obama and put them into one image. That they were unpatriotic, that she was some sort of bomb throwing militant, that he was a Muslim, as if there's something wrong with that, although he's not, that Obama was the same as Osama, and so he put all these crazy fantasy images into one image. And the title of the- the cover was called The Politics of Fear. And you were seeing these images and this rhetoric on Fox News, for example, all the time. We didn't draw it out of nowhere, and worse. The reaction was not, let's just say, uniformly fantastic. And Obama pronounced himself unamused. And we had published I don't know how many covers making fun of George Bush politically, in myriad ways. The reason for the reaction to this cover was that a mainly liberal audience reacted in the following way. The most typical letter and email I got was the following, "Of course I understand this. But those people out there, those rubes in the big square states who can't understand anything are going to see this as not something ironic or a comment on something, but as reality." And I found that wrong and condescending and wrongheaded, as if somehow this New Yorker cover was going to spark racism from coast to coast. It did no such thing. I was glad to see that very night John Stewart went on the air and was hilarious about explaining this joke, this satire. Look, some people can–– people can misread it, or they can read it the way they want. And it's foolish of me to sort of argue with someone's reaction to a joke. That way lies madness. It's fantastic. And, in fact, I think on Entertainment Weekly, Stephen

Colbert and John Stewart re-enacted this cover for the cover of Entertainment Weekly, which I think defused the crisis.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and law enforcement

02:05:19:03

DAVID REMNICK:

I don't know that the Henry Louis Gates thing taught him anything, other than it reinforced the notion of how difficult it was for him to talk about race. I mean, let's remember what happened. Henry Louis Gates, who basically broadened and expanded and deepened the study of African American Studies, not only at Harvard University, but in this country. His contribution is enormous in a scholarly sense, in a fundraising sense, in a kind of entrepreneurial sense. Comes home from a long trip, on his porch, just gets out of the car, goes up to his porch in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Neighbors report, or somebody reports, that this black guy is breaking into a house. And the cops show up, and he has all the proof in the world that this is home. And he gets arrested, he gets cuffed. And- and Skip Gates, Henry Louis Gates, is lo and behold angry about this. And perhaps doesn't behave with the most equanimity in the world, but who the hell can blame him? He's been on a plane for 14 hours; he's cuffed in front of his house. Obama's asked about this at a press conference. And again, in a very Obamian way, indicates that, in fact, people of color in this country get stopped by police more often than white people. And he is slightly critical of the Cambridge police for the treatment of Skip Gates, indicating that he could quite understand how people might be angry about this. Does he go crazy about it? Is it Trumpian in

its level of explosion? No, quite the opposite. I mean, we have a white president now who's furious on a minute-by-minute basis. But an angry black man, forget it. Then they summon the cop and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. to what was called the Beer Summit. Which, I think, was a failure in some ways.

02:07:38:16

It- it- it kind of put everything on an even plane, it was a photo op of reconciliation. It was an attempt by Obama to calm the waters because the polls were showing that the numbers were against Obama being critical about the police. He was siding against the police. Imagine, a Black president siding against the police, you know what that means. And so, it was a bad situation, but reality doesn't let any president avoid the subject of race. In years to come, we get Trayvon Martin, and Ferguson, and and and and. And it may be statistically hard to know, and maybe the level of these incidents is not what it was many years ago, but we see them. We have pictures of them, and there are demonstrations that follow up on the pictures, and there is no way to call that anger and protest anything but legitimate. And Obama's got to react, just as he has to react to the insanity of school shootings. And bit by bit, he allows himself more sense of grief and outrage in the parameters of what he can see as possible as president, he is president of the United States. He is not a community activist, he is not the leader of a social movement, to the frustration of many, he's the president of the United States, and he has all sorts of countervailing things to deal with. To me, the apotheosis of this is Charleston, South Carolina. A deranged, racist kid named Dylan Roof, who has swallowed a lot of white supremacist literature and hatred, goes into a church basement and interrupts a Bible study group and mows down nine

people, including the pastor. We all know this. Obama goes to Charleston, and leads- leads the church service in song, in a spiritual. The capacity to do that is immense. Will it stop shootings? Will it bury white supremacy once and for all? It will not. As history proved all too quickly.

Eric Holder, Jr.

02:10:27:12

DAVID REMNICK:

I think Barack Obama and Eric Holder had different jobs. You know, Eric Holder was the chief law enforcement officer of the nation, Barack Obama has a much more varied set of circumstances and responsibilities. Obviously, law enforcement is one of them, but I think Eric Holder probably felt he could say a bit more than Obama could. Again, I'm not here as Obama's ventriloquist, or endorser of every moment along the way, I'm just trying to explain his thinking the best I know of it through public utterances and interviews and a lot of study.

Threats made toward Barack Obama

02:11:18:17

DAVID REMNICK:

I know for a fact from reporting that the number of threats that came into the various law enforcement agencies and Secret Service and all the rest, were off the charts. Off the charts. One of the biggest things holding him back from running for president in the first place was that Michelle Obama had to be convinced, insofar as you can be convinced, that she wasn't going to lose her

husband to some maniac. I think that was, you know, it's an enormous risk. It's an enormous risk every time he went into public, every time he stood on the Truman Balcony, no matter how sophisticated and comprehensive his ... history proves over and over and over again that somebody with some guile and a gun can get to anybody. There was a threat on the day of the inauguration. Day one. Now, this was a terrorist threat, a foreign terrorist threat that- that came in. But there's no question that there was not only more threats that came into the Secret Service, but the memory… Look, what preceded Lee Harvey Oswald? What was the atmosphere in Dallas in November of 1963? There were all kinds of threats and literature being passed around Dallas about JFK as an N-word lover and all this kind of conspiratorial, hateful, hateful, hateful shit. Are we so much more advanced? And you have a Black president? Even as just a journalist, as somebody who wrote a book, the kind of crazy emails and- and the kind of marginal publication stuff that'll be written about me and my research or conclusions, and how really, I got it all wrong, and that Barack Obama was created by terrorists and bomb throwing radicals. Unfortunately, that crap entered the mainstream in the name of Sarah Palin. He's palling around with terrorists. This language was, and the feeling was not just some American marginalia over here. People saw it as sufficient enough that it needed whipping up and developing into a political movement.

Partisanship with the Republicans

02:14:05:09

DAVID REMNICK:

So Mitch McConnell announces from day one that their prime goal, the Republican Party's prime goal should be to oppose everything and to get Obama out of office and turn things. Let's not be naïve here. Political parties are in a permanent state of opposition and political battle. And to some degree, that's as it should be, it's a battle for ideas and whose policy is better and all the rest. On the other hand, Obama –– the things that were said about Obama, he doesn't--he's not friendly enough, he's aloof, he's––I mean, it's preposterous. He was met with absolutely––an absolute wall of recalcitrance from day one. So, the idea that a round of golf would have solved everything, this kind of romance of the back room and the cigars and brandy and rounds of golf and all that stuff, it seems to me an illusion. How much of it is racial and how much of it is partisan party politics? It's hard to separate out.

Racism and policy

02:15:20:20

DAVID REMNICK:

Just to be clear, there was no great affection for universal health care when it was initiated by other presidents and candidates. The racial aspect to Obamacare was not so much Obama himself, is the fact that a large part of the people who were going to benefit from Obamacare were poor people, were poor folks. And a lot of those folks of color. And not everybody wants to pay into that. That has to do with politics in general, not just Obamacare. How long have we debated issues about social welfare, about income inequality, about equal access, about voting rights? Hmm, how do those things break

down? Is it all racial? No. Is there a huge racial component to the opposition if you have any eyes to see? Yeah.

Alliance with John Lewis

02:16:26:23

DAVID REMNICK:

John Lewis for Obama became Moses, the Moses Generation. As Obama was coming out onto the platform for his first inauguration, he turns to his right and shakes hands and embraces John Lewis. And he afterwards signs a picture for- for John that says, "I'm not here without you." I forget the exact words. It is a conscious respect for the elder there, and it's so interesting to me that Lewis would get lambasted this way because he favored a acquiring health care for millions of Americans who didn't have it. Now, is Obamacare problematic? I myself would prefer to see single payer. I think Obama in his heart of hearts would prefer to see single payer and national health care for everybody is simpler, but it's very hard to skip across the abyss in 14 steps. It's infinitely complicated politically and for many other reasons. Lots of interests and doctors and drug companies and all kinds of other bureaucracies make it ... and our history make it very complicated. It's not so easy. Of course, there's a sense of they're getting theirs and I'm not getting mine.

Trayvon Martin and Obama's empathy

02:17:58:11

DAVID REMNICK:

What are we most missing in American politics today from the White House besides intelligence, and integrity, and a great deal else? Empathy. Some sense that the President of the United States has some feeling for somebody else other than himself. When Barack Obama expresses, “That could've been my son,” an empathy for Trayvon Martin, it has great meaning. It has great meaning to the Black community, and it should have great meaning for all of us. I don't see a moment in the day, whether he's throwing paper towels to people in Puerto Rico, or he's talking about the wetness of the rain at a flood in North Carolina, or many other examples where Donald Trump is capable of the simplest expression of sincere empathy for anyone else. It's just ... you don't see it. You don't hear it. Even--I think even his supporters see this in him and they excuse it.

Obama’s legacy

02:19:06:23

DAVID REMNICK:

One of the questions I asked Obama the day after he met Trump in the Oval Office, which was essentially the changing of the guard: What will he strip away and what can't he strip away? And at that point, a year and a half ago or more, Obama was kind of confident. He basically said, "You know, politics is tough. You can't move the battleship so quickly as you might think." And okay maybe he changes the name of Obamacare, and he calls it Trumpcare and it's slightly different, and he improves on it in some way maybe even. But I'm afraid that that's a fantasy. We're on the brink of a second Supreme Court justice, which has enormous ramifications for voting rights, women's rights,

abortion rights, all kinds of things, for not just a few years but for a generation, at least. We've seen radical change in immigration. We've seen radical change in foreign policy, not least our attitude towards international institutions and our allies are suddenly treated like enemies and our enemies are treated the opposite. We see a coarsening of the American psyche and dialogue. Again, I don't want to romanticize what occurred between 2008 and 2016, but if you don't feel a difference in the air about our sense of who we are, our sense of language with each other, our respect for liberal values and institutions. All of these are in question. We're asking questions like, is the president or is the president not a fascist or an authoritarian. We're trying to parse the behavior of a president of the United States in terms of simple human capacities, not just in terms of empathy, but whether has he lost it? Is he a thief? Is he a radically dishonest businessman? What kind of relations does he have with our biggest international rival? Were we asking these questions four years ago? Not remotely. Not remotely.

02:21:37:01

And so much of what we value is now in jeopardy, real jeopardy. And I think of it as an emergency. Now, I'm a journalist, and I think the best thing we can do, I can do is do our work with even greater intensity and determination. But I can't--and I can't pretend that there's never been an emergency before in American history. As my colleague, Jill Lepore says, "Every day before the Emancipation Proclamation this country lived legally with slavery." During the Vietnam War we were a badly divided nation in a war that left--we've had emergencies before. But this is of a particular kind, and the president is who he is and behaves the way he does, and whether you go at it as a reporter or

as a commentator or as a scholar or a filmmaker or a citizen just going to work every day. To calm yourself by saying we've seen worse, and everything will be fine is an insufficient answer. It's an insufficient answer for the work that each of us do in each of our own ways, and it's an insufficient answer of citizenship. And Obama had to figure out how to play his own role in this, and I think for a year and a half he was extremely discreet because he felt, "I just can't be all politics all the time in the sense that I can't rescue every situation particularly as a former president." And he laid back a bit. He's not, you know from conversations that I know of and have been involved with, he doesn't feel very differently about Trump. But wanted to save his voice for the right time, and so he saved it for the midterm elections. And we'll see how--what role that plays, how effective it is.

02:23:43:04

I think it's clear that in the first paragraph of any obituary, may not come for many years to come, will be that he was the first African-American president. And but that's something of enormous importance, value, and historical precedent. There are many other achievements, there are many other actions to be debated and so on, whether it's in foreign policy or domestic policy, whether it's about his rhetoric, whether it's about race, whatever, whatever it is. But the achievement of that office, the sense of possibility provided, not just to African American kids, but to the whole country is immense. Obamacare is getting whacked away, and it certainly wasn't a complete answer, but it was a great achievement. A rescue of an entire economy, however unsatisfying it was in certain respects in terms of bankers getting away with murder despite all kinds of malfeasance beforehand. We forget the

peril the economy was in 2008, 2009. We were in a great depression moment. And um, a lot has been done to rectify that, and now a lot that's been done to rectify it has been reversed. There are any number of things that you could point to in terms of triumph, but the first paragraph I have to believe, despite it all, and I don't know how he, how Obama would react to that reality, is that he's the first African American president and the effect that's had, whether it's galvanizing or otherwise.

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