JERRY KELLMAN INTERVIEW
OBAMA: IN PURSUIT OF A MORE PERFECT UNION
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Jerry Kellman
Community Organizer
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Interviewed by Peter Kunhardt
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START TC: 01:00:00:00

CREW:

Jerry Kellman interview, take one, marker.

ON-SCREEN TEXT:

Jerry Kellman

Community Organizer

Obama as a risk-taker

01:00:14:09

JERRY KELLMAN:

If you're African American and you aspire to high office in the United States, you're required to meet a different standard. You don't have this much—not much room to make mistakes. So, if you're not cautious, if you're not disciplined, you certainly don't become President of the United States if you're African American, 'cause nobody else ever has. So, you need that kind of discipline, you need that kind of caution. You need to think of the repercussions of what you do. But if you're at any kind of real life situation,

sooner or later, you get to the point where there's a choice that has to be made. At that point, Barack's willing to take very significant risks, but he postpones that decision as long as possible—and he's been that way, you know, when I knew him as a young man too, but you see that in the Presidency as well as in other kinds of behavior. To some extent even running for the office, you know, was a risk in many ways. I think the one that was the big—biggest risk was Osama Bin Laden. I mean, it was a big success, but that could have gone wrong in so many ways. And if he had created a scenario where he put American lives in danger, it would not have been—what was it, a mile from the headquarters of the Pakistani military college? You know, that would not have been the ideal situation. And he didn't—he didn't shrink from it—shrink from it at all. I think during the campaign, I think the whole Jeremiah Wright stuff, I mean, I think he kicked the ball down the road as much as he could. Not only because it wasn't a winner, in terms of the African American community, Wright has been an important voice in Chicago—if not throughout the country—but personally, I mean, he had a personal relationship with Wright. He didn't want to burn the bridges, so, but he decided to do it, and he made the Civil Rights speech in Philadelphia. He was all in on race. Maybe, I'd say, the best speech ever made on race by anybody running for President of the United States.

Mentoring Obama

01:02:20:20

JERRY KELLMAN:

Barack wanted to learn, so Barack has a series of mentors, you know, throughout his—and I imagine he hasn't stopped yet. I mean he's hungry to learn and if someone knows how to do something, he's gonna talk to you and learn from it. So, in terms of community organizing was something he hadn't known prior to coming to Chicago as a… as a young man, but I don't know that I had the influence as much as Chicago had the influence. I mean it was really a pivotal time in his life. He had never lived in an African American community before. He had never dealt with politics and the kind of naked power that's in Chicago, and, to this day, and utilized its… You know, he—and he was sort of itinerant. He was… he had moved quite a bit in his life, not just the United States but around the world. Coming to Chicago for him was a chance to get rooted in a way he never had before and to experience how things get done in a big state in the United States in a way he never knew, and I was sort of a guide for that. I don't know if I was influencing, I was with him when he had that experience and you know, probably I was another—I, to some extent, I carried the history of those kinds, that kind of work; community organizing, the labor movement, the struggle of Blacks and Latinos in major cities, so he was able to pick that up a little bit faster without having to live it all himself.

Meeting Obama

01:03:54:05

JERRY KELLMAN:

I just finished a project of trying to pull Latino Catholic churches together in Chicago and the steel mills were closing all over the place. The Indiana-

Illinois bi-state Calumet Region was the larger produce, largest producer of steel in the country—it wasn't Pittsburgh, it wasn't Sparrows Point in Baltimore, it was, it was Indiana-Illinois. There were nine major, huge steel mills, almost cities in themselves, and they began to go down one-by-one. So, I began a project and I was—I worked with churches a great deal at that time pulling churches together in that part of the Illinois side, initially, to see what could be done for steelworkers. A large part of the area was the Southside of Chicago, the Roseland area, areas like that, and there I was a White organizer dealing with an all-African American community, which is wrong on two levels. One is, it was hard to be trusted, you know. The other level is we need African American, you know, leadership speaking for themselves at all levels. So, I needed someone to be an organizer. So, it was very hard to find an organizer, and I, I would say that if you're smart enough to be an organizer—'cause it's very demanding—you should be smart enough not to be an organizer, because it doesn't pay much, you don't—the victories can, you know, can—so it wasn't that easy.

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So, I put… I put ads in some newspapers, but, as it turns out, Barack saw it in the New York Public Library in a public—he calls—he called it a do-gooder act. It was called Community Jobs and people who didn't want to make money would go to this go to this magazine to find out the various ways you could not make money in life. And he saw—he saw it—saw it and sent me a resume. And we did a long, a long phone conversation, which—part of which I was trying to determine was he Black or not. My wife is Japanese, Obama is a name, a Japanese name, and he was from Hawaii so I wasn't, wasn't

altogether clear until the end of the conversation that he actually was Black. But the conversation went well and then I—we set up an interview two weeks later in Manhattan. My dad was alive and living in Manhattan at the time. And we spent about two and a half hours talking, and I offered him a job—I think it was for 12,000 a year, he wanted 2,000 more for a car—[laughs] and he decided to move to Chicago on that basis, so talk about taking risks. It seems to me that's—those are a fairly big set of risks. He didn't know anybody in Chicago.

First impression of Obama

01:06:29:07

JERRY KELLMAN:

You can't look back 20 years and say, "Oh, I knew this guy was going to be the President of the United States, I knew he had the talent to, you know, to do something nobody has ever done in history before." But, what I could say is that he—he was extremely intelligent, he was curious, he had a very diverse life and diverse view of the world. More so than identify him as an African American view of the world. I mean, some of that may have come from experiencing the Southside of Chicago, which is the largest single Black community in the United States. But it was more, he had experienced different kinds of people. And that's a great quality for a community organizer because, even if you're only working with one sort of person, even if you're just working within the Southside of Chicago, you know, a primarily Black community, there's all kinds of people, there's all kinds of perspectives. So, being able to deal with diversity was… was pretty key, and he was—he

seemed stable and integrated. The work has a lot of pressure, so it was—it's not unreal that a young person would have a nervous breakdown trying to do the work 'cause they had been successful in college and every place else, and they weren't going to be successful when they tried to do this work, at least not for a long time. So… he just seemed like… he, he'd be able to do it. But did I see the sense of possibilities at that point? No. Coming to know him in Chicago, I certainly did, but I don't think that he, he thought about being President of the United States, at that point. Even when he began to open up to politics, which wasn't that easy—'cause we could be very cynical about politicians doing the work that we did living in Chicago. I thought he was just as much considering being behind the scenes in political work, and if he had an aspiration, it probably was to be mayor of Chicago, initially, because in Illinois, that's the job, or it was at one time—the job that everybody would aspire to and the great success story—however brief it was, not just for the Black community, but for Chicago—was Harold Washington's time as Mayor of Chicago.

A definition of community organizing

01:08:45:03

JERRY KELLMAN:

So philosophically, a lot of this was encoded by Saul Alinsky, who had trained under John L. Lewis, who had put together the CIO, so they took labor union organizing and applied it to… applied it to… applied it to communities. And it was the concept of self-interest, that you deal with people, not on their aspirations or values but around their self-interest. So, the way I talk about

that is, you're trying to get people to understand how to initiate relationships based on mutuality. If you have that skill, you can take where you are and go someplace else, you know, as an individual or a group of people. If it can't be mutual, then, in the end, it's all going to go bad. So, that's the philosophy. So, you're listening for where you want to go and where that person—or the person is, and trying to find their meeting place. The best way to do that in sort of the same skills of a journalist; you spend a lot of time listening to people one-on-one. And so, the first thing you do as an organizer is you go from appointment to appointment, listening to people and listening to their stories, maybe eight a day. It's like many things in life, a narrative. Right? A story is very important in how people understand themselves and how they color, how they color their situation.

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So, you're listening for story but you're getting a lot of information, and you're building a relationship and you know, you… you organize around mutuality bolstered on relationships. People do things when they know people. Mayor Daley used to say, "Don't send me somebody who nobody sent." In Chicago, if you wanted to meet with somebody—same thing on our level, we had to form relationships. So, you do all those conversations and you begin to connect the dots. Who knows who, what's on the agenda, what's possible, and then, at that point, you shift gears from being sort of a listener to being a coach. You begin to challenge people and say, "Look, you've been dealing with this crap, you know, all your life, why—why haven't you challenged anything?" "Well, I can't." "Well, why can't you?" And you begin to walk people through how they might think about it. So, in some ways you

became a coach and a teacher. And then, finally, there's an element of being a strategist. You still have far less resources than whoever you're challenging, whether it's a public entity or a private entity—I mean, banks have billions of dollars, and the Mayor has a political machine. So, you begin to help people strategize on how to move things.

Obama's strengths as an 'outsider'

01:11:16:20

JERRY KELLMAN:

So, an organizer is always an outsider, somebody coming from the outside, right, so you know everybody. But, because Barack had traveled, he had been an American abroad, because he had been separated from his mom, his principle—his parental relationship during… during high school. He's bi-racial, but if you're Black and bi-racial, you're Black to the world, and people begin to have—automatically define you by how you look, not who you are. All that puts you one step away, so that's—that's actually a very good skill for an organizer: you need to sometimes step away and see yourself in the situation and not just be so immersed in it that you can't make distinctions. So, I think that his youth created that for him, and, I mean, I've heard said—and there's some truth to that—that Barack can talk to someone whose opinion is very different than his own, and then he can summarize what the person believes and said better than the person themself can. So, you have an ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes, which is important with friends. It's probably more important with enemies.

Obama's humanity

01:12:32:03

JERRY KELLMAN:

You know, we're all faced with tragedy and seeing stuff that's painful and you want to be a full human being, you want to take it all in. You want to react to it, keep your emotions alive, and you don't want to be paralyzed by it, right? You don't want to get to the point where you can't even move because you're basically experiencing post-traumatic shock, right, from the stuff that you've done, the stuff that you've watched, so trying to find a balance of that, I think, is unique. And it's interesting 'cause people talk of Barack as being cool—and I think he is cool in the sense of television and Marshall McLuhan and all that, all of that—but I think a lot of the presidency and a lot of the struggle is how he remains open, right, how he remains a much fuller human being in ways in the presidency when other people have failed to do that in a variety of ways. And so I think the struggle to keep himself open, you know, and open is vulnerable, right, to some degree, amidst an environment where you take a risk is pretty fascinating. Barack seems extremely human to us. The Obamas seem extremely human to us. How did that happen? And we don't—we don't think it's because they tried to manage the media.

Michelle Obama

01:13:53:14

JERRY KELLMAN:

Michelle is a stabilizing influence. I mean, that's critical. You don't—it's hard to undertake what you undertake without having home, and Barack's home

had been dispersed; his mom had died early and his sister was in Hawaii, which is pretty far away, and the other sisters and brothers from Kenya—he didn't, he hardly knew them at all. So, she provided a foundation, but the other thing is she didn't like politics. I mean, she gave him all kinds of crap because it was an unstable, you know, here's a… here's somebody who had a Harvard Law degree, had a law review—he could've done anything he wanted, right, and could have made as much money as he wanted. She had a different sense of what was important. I mean, I think she's come to see the value of it, and she's been dragged into a political role gradually in the course of the presidency, but it wasn't, it was not good news for her that Barack was running for President. You need that perspective. You need to know that the choice you made is another choice. And you have to keep it, and hold them in balance and I, I suppose in any… in any decent marriage that's, that's not unusual—we hold each other accountable. And that's some of the pain of the marriage. In the end, you think it's valuable, but as it's going on it's, yeah, it can be rough. It's a joke to say he was scared of her. It's not a joke to say that she had a different set of values, and she was constantly putting those in front of him. You know, if you go down, you wouldn't necessarily see Michelle at a Christmas party if you went to the White House, she's up with the kids—she might come down for 30 seconds and wave and say hello and then she'd go back and be with the girls—so, yeah, she had a counterpoint of values to American political life and god knows we need that.

Obama's search for stability

01:15:41:18

JERRY KELLMAN:

I do think that, by the time he met Michelle, he was trying to look at a longer trajectory of his life. And marriage became something which was love and then also making a home, having children, all of that. And, so, I think a different calculus began to come into play, but I don't think the primary factor of that calculus was race. I think it was more stability, and stability was a huge issue for him. I mean, his dad, you know, when he told me he was gonna go to Harvard, he, his list—he gave two reasons. One was, we could work all--for years, he would never have enough power to change things the way he thought things needed to be changed. And the second was, you know, he had been learning more and more about his father's life and how his father ended up, and stability began to factor in. That was… that was tough. I mean, we were on—we did a workshop together, and we had to take the train up to—up to the workshop in Northberg, and he said it just—it just bothered him because the idea that he would take a train to work—a commuter train to work—every day and come home on the train every work, that sort of, that sort of regularity was, on the one hand, frightening to him, other hand: his father's life, right, of instability and failure, was equally frightening to him. And so I think that the calculus of marriage became more real to him by the ca—by the time he—he met Michelle, and I think that all of us if we look at our dating lives right before marriage, we're going to have a variety of experiences and make judgments. Sooner or later, we decide "What do I want to do long term?"

Obama's identity on his own terms

01:17:30:00

JERRY KELLMAN:

People like you; people don't like you. In Chicago, he'd been to an Ivy League school, he didn't talk, he didn't have the—still the resonance of Mississippi, right, in his cadence. He, you know, he wasn't really Black, right, and they—you know, and other people said well, he was too Black, right. I don't wanna, right—they just don't like Black people. And look, people would be incredibly impressed by him. He's very articulate, right? He conducts himself with such grace. So, all of these are reactions to what he seemed like, not who he is. And that's not unique for Barack. If you're a person of color in the United States—some with far less advantages than Barack had—people define you by how, by who they think you are rather than who you are. So, your principal job as young adults begin to be to define yourself and not let other people define you, which, in fact, is what you have to do as a politician. So, in that sense it's good preparation, but it's more important that—it's whether you can write your own story or somebody else writes your story for you. And the community organizing work was—I mean, Barack was already interested in story. When he came to Chicago, he still, I think, would have rather preferred to be a successful fiction writer than be President of the United States. One can argue it can be harder to be a successful fiction writer than President of the United States, but narrative was already important to him, and then organizing, if you do it right, rubs your nose in narrative. It's people's lives, it's people's stories. It'll turn in ways to understand those stories. So, that's also good for understanding your own story, but you need to define yourself and not let other people define you. He was not a good ethnic politician. I

mean he—he got the crap beat out of him in the congressional race by Bobby Rush and, fortunately, he did, or he never would have been president, I think, if he had been elected to Congress at that time. So, I think that the issue about race and how to define yourself has worked out before he and, he and Michelle met. What wasn't worked out is how you—how you're Black and run for president of the United States.

Obama's childhood family

01:19:43:22

JERRY KELLMAN:

His father's chief impact on Barack's life was absence, right. I mean he'd—he'd seen his father for one week, I think, prior to the time that I—I met him. And he, you know, he was raised by his mom and his mom, I mean extraordinarily and intellectually, you know, a set of values. Essentially, she, she moved to where she wanted to do her work because that was important to her and values were important. When I met him, he was just beginning to understand Kenya. He had two or three sibs that were somewhere in the northern hemisphere—I think one was in London, one was studying in New York. So, he began to know his half, some of his half-sibs who had come north to Europe and the United States to study and, eventually, he made that trip—his first trip to Kenya and got to know people and, I think, then his father becomes a much realer presence. He doesn't even know the story, right? He doesn't know the story until he goes to Kenya and begins to meet his grandmother and ask questions and, you know, and begins to find out about the politics of Kenya during his father's life. So, at that point, I think his

father, then, becomes an object lesson of what not to do and what not to be—a source of fear. Now, for most of us, may go through a period of that, and then we come back to a more balanced view—I don't think Barack ever had that opportunity because he never knew his dad and his dad died young. But as an object lesson of what not to do, both in terms of family and in terms of public life. I think his dad becomes important at that point. Someone should be writing a novel about Barack's mom or a biography, because that's, that's who shaped him.

Obama's mother

01:21:29:02

JERRY KELLMAN:

I mean, take the decision to send him to Hawaii to, you know, to be with his grandparents to go to high school as a desertion, or you can take it as a sacrifice, and it all depends. I mean, it's like boarding school; is boarding school a good thing or a terrible thing, right, to do—to do to a young person? I think it illustrated the values she put on intellectual and formal education as a way to go forward. I mean, she had—I mean, she was an educator, right? She had gone to graduate school, and she was still an academic, if you will, and that was of critical importance to her. You know, if you look back and try to web her, you know, write her fabric, clearly if Barack doesn't come to Chicago, he doesn't follow the route he does, but who knows? If he had not come back to Hawaii and not had that experience and not had been part of a high school, which was intellectually rigorous, whether he would have gotten to where he needed to be. So, I wouldn't call it, I wouldn't call it desertion, I

would call it a sense of competing values. I mean, closeness and affinity to your parents is critical, but having opportunity, and I think she was keenly aware in a way that he wasn't—remember, we're not talking about now or even ten years ago, we're going back a long way in time—what kind of devastated it would be to be Black in the United States and what he'd have to do to overcome that. Not to be President, but even to have any kind of opportunity and not have doors shut in his face right and left. It was not a time when there was affirmative action even yet, so.

Influence of Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement on Obama

01:23:05:00

JERRY KELLMAN:

You know, probably the person he most admired in the world, like many African Americans, was Martin Luther King Jr.. Wanting that experience, wanting to be part of that heroic experience colors some of the decisions he makes. There was no Civil Rights Movement—things would change dramatically by 1984, 1985, which was when I met him. And, in some sense, community organizing, you know, seemed like a parallel activity, and he was drawn to that because it reflected something like what the Civil Rights Movement had done. In fact, I never subscribed to traditional community organizing in the sense that—Alinsky, for example, was often negative about King. He was competitive. But King had a movement, right. It was harder to control, harder to measure, and organization is very precise, you make these decisions. Social change comes from both. I don't think you have tremendous change unless you have some organizational capability, but you can't move

people in large numbers into a movement. His initial campaign in 2008 reflects that. I mean, it wasn't simply a- it was a political campaign—arguably the best presidential campaign run up in history to that point in terms of how professional it was—but it was also for young adults as well as for people of color. It was a chance to see something that they never thought they would ever see. So, movement and politics and organization have to be both, both present. I think his mom, probably, worked on that and tried to give him a sense of pride, but, I think, someone who was, who experienced the world and was educated and looked, and was reading history could not help but see that he was only twenty years away from one of the greatest changes the world had ever seen.

Channeling anger for social change

01:24:57:07

JERRY KELLMAN:

If you see stuff and it doesn't make you angry, then you wouldn't go into work like this, and you wouldn't last in work like this. I mean, it can be driven by love, but it also has to be driven by a sense of anger when you see injustice. And so you look for that in somebody. But what you do with anger isn't, isn't necessarily what you might assume. You don't--you use anger as a tool. You contain it. You don't show it if it's not going to help move your situation. That kind of discipline. And, sometimes, you may want to even appear angry even when you're not because it helps move the ball. If you can't react to injustice with anger, then you shouldn't be community organizing. I dare say, you shouldn't be President of the United States.

Conversations with Obama

01:25:43:13

JERRY KELLMAN:

If you're gonna talk to someone for an hour or two, you can sit in McDonalds, which we did, or you're in Chicago and the lake is the center of anything natural and beautiful in Chicago and the parks are always right there. We'd walk and we'd talk. I mean, I think that that's useful in terms of being a better environment, but there's something useful about being ambulatory when you're talking also I think. We had most of those conversations when he first arrived, because I needed to try to understand him and push back in terms of his understanding of himself and a lot of it was how he saw himself and how he saw the world, so, I wanted to understand why he wanted to write fiction, you know. He was writing short stories, even while he was organizing. I threw them out, unfortunately. But… so a lot of it was you know, his aspirations, how he saw things, how he reacted to things. So, I was kind of doing with him what he would have to do with people in the community, really digging a little bit, getting to know, getting to know his story, etcetera, public life. You know, the questions we were dealing with about who had power and how to influence them and how to come up with strategies to create some sort of change.

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So we moved to more, I think public territory, but also the frustrations of the work, because it was pretty frustrating, and I, I know a lot more now—I don't know that much now, but I was 35, remember, he was 25, or so. I mean, so in

retrospect, I was a fairly young man at the time, and what I knew about the work, even though I'd been doing it since I was very young. So, a lot of it was, was about public strategies and how to go from there. I think friendships with older men were important to Barack at that point, and I wasn't probably quite as available along those lines as he would have liked. But your life is very different at 35 then at 25 when you're married and you have a kid and life begins to you know, take its course. Yeah, I think there's a lot of right and wrong in those conversations about the figures we deal with. A lot of them were pastors. We basically dealt with two major church systems: the Roman Catholic Church, which was still extraordinarily important in Chicago, and the historic African American church, which of course is extraordinarily important in the Black community. The personalized intricacies of those churches and how to work with them, I think he would talk about, you know, his dating life to some degree. You know, and… you know, if he met somebody or stuff of that sort. He didn't have to raise it with me, it was in our face all the time—both his race and my race. I remember that he… he had gone to see a particularly difficult Black pastor, and the guy had just chewed him out and not given him a chance to even get started, and he came back and he said, "Why didn't you warn me about this guy?"

01:28:50:18

And I said, "Well look, better you than me." So, even within the Black community, race was—race is central within the African American community, and certainly we talked about that and perceptions. We talked about alliances with the White community. I don't think, per se, we talked that much about how people perceived him—it was too obvious. I was

working in the south suburbs of Chicago as well as the city. He was in the city. The south suburbs hadn't changed racially as much as they have at that point in history, so I remember I'd… I'd be—I had to pick up something at a church, he'd come with me. And we walked down the street, and people would begin to peak from outside their windows because I was with somebody Black. I think he probably had more of that experience in Chicago. Chicago was… was an extremely racially divided city at that time, ironically probably much less racially divided than some places in the United States right now. But at that time, it was, and so it was a fact of life, and it was in our face and it was always coming up, absolutely. There was no theoretical construct, though, about how to do deal with race then. You know, he wasn't Ta Nehisi-Coates 40 years later writing essays about race but… and it was pretty intractable. I mean, there were—there were doors that were closed even more so than there are doors closed today. So, it was constantly factored into every conversation we have—still is. I don't go into any city in the country to organize without factoring in how people in African American, Latino perceive themselves and how other people perceive them, so it was—it was central to everything. Even if it was central in that you didn't pay attention to it. I mean, and he made a conscious decision not to talk about race when he decided to run for President for a while because he was running at a larger arena, but yes, we had… you couldn't help but have your noses rubbed in it every step of the way—not just for him, but also for me because I was White working in primarily minority communities.

Harold Washington

01:30:46:19

JERRY KELLMAN:

It's one of the ironies is when you come to the city, you begin to work for change, the mayor whoever he is, however heroic or however African American he is becomes a source of somebody you're trying to hold accountable who doesn't necessarily always come through for you, but I think it's hard to… to overestimate the kind of elected figure that Harold Washington was in Chicago. I mean, people say Barack is cool in front of the camera, Harold Washington was anything but cool in front of the camera. He was always—he was out there, everything—everything was said, everything was pushed out there in a dramatic way, sort of a larger than life kind of figure. So, it's hard to think of Barack modeling himself after Harold Washington, per se, but what Harold Washington did do, he's put together a multi-racial movement to change something that people never thought would be changed. I mean, right now, Chicago is in many ways—things happen that influence the country for years to come, and we don't even know it when it's happening. One of the most powerful mayors in the country right now, Rahm Emanuel, has chosen not to run because of a police shooting. That's not happened any place else, and the implications that--for Illinois and the country, will be unfolding for years. The same was true of Harold Washington's time as mayor in Chicago. So it provided an opportunity to think that you could get more—you could go higher than the ceilings that have been placed on you.

Obama's early years in Chicago

01:32:20:04

JERRY KELLMAN:

So, the danger of any work that grabs you is that it consumes you so much that you become imbalanced and, ultimately, you can't do the work because there's nothing else in your life. And so, I did have a concern the first few months that he would burn out. He'd just be working so hard. There'd be so many, you know, so many disappointments, a certain degree of isolation, that's—that's not who he was- and, you know, sooner or later, he developed a very full life beyond work. But the first few months… that was a, that was a danger, and part of that is you really don't know what you're doing. You come in and, you know, you… I mean, I stayed pretty close to him those months. I mean, I would go out with him when he did one-on-ones and watch him and then critique him, and let him watch me and do the same, but it was really those early months that… that he was a bit monkish and that changed, I think, socially. In fact, he developed a wide range of relationships in Chicago, both inside and outside of the African American community, so.

Obama's maternal figures in Chicago

01:33:34:23

JERRY KELLMAN:

He had a lot of mother figures. I mean he had Von Lloyd and Loretta Augustine, who were often in biographies because they're who he met, they were on the board of developing community's projects when he got there. At the time, they were both single moms and young-middle aged, and here was this really skinny young man, right, who was in a strange city, and so, there

was an attempt to feed him and fatten him up and… and all of that stuff. You know, wanted to adopt him, and he wasn't adverse, you know, organizers use whatever you can get [laughs] to, you know, to get in the door and make some progress, that was part of his experience, and I'm sure that was helpful, right, to have people who… who cared about him, even, you know, in a… even in a maternal kind of way.

Obama's deepening relationship with the Black church

01:34:25:22

JERRY KELLMAN:

So, we were faith-based community organizers. We used the church as a base for organizing but, at the level we did it, if you don't know a pastor, you couldn't be stupid about theology. You know, you had to be—you had to begin to read. I asked him to go to a different church every Sunday. You get to know the church better if you're there on Sunday. The pastor appreciates you being there and so, more so than me, even he, he went to a lot of different churches on Sunday morning. You know, he was always looking for mentors and Jeremiah Wright was the strongest voice in the African American church in Chicago, and he'd organized mega-church pastors around the country, so he was a, you know, a pretty compelling intellectual figure. And then, Trinity Church had become of the churches in Chicago where… almost a who's who of the African American community went. People of all walks of life, of variety. I mean, there were low-income people, but there was a lot of successful middle-income African Americans who had established

themselves in their careers, and so the congregation was a draw as well as Wright, himself.

01:35:41:21

As an organizer, we do something called agitate people. We try to challenge them around their own values. Well, Wright's the kind of person who would turn that agitation around on you. So there was value in that relationship—and sooner or later, what happens to you, if you work with a lot of pastors, they, you know, they may want to get you into their church, but that's not critical. They want to know where you go to church, who's your pastor, right? So, African Americans in the Black church—you have a pastor. That pastor may not even be the church you're going to. But it's the person who's most influential to you, and you have a pastoral relationship with, and so he had to answer that question. So, sooner or later, so, he had to come down. I would say—people say, well do you have to marry someone African American to be an African American politician? I'd say the answer to that is no. But, at that point in time, did you have to be associated with a Black church? Yes. Yeah, or a mos—an Islamic institution. Some faith-based institution or you wouldn't have success. So, I think he had to make that choice and… and it's one of—it's a unique and wonderful congregation, so it wasn't that hard a choice to make.

Reverend Alvin Love

01:37:00:23

JERRY KELLMAN:

Alvin Love was critical. I mean, Barack was really struggling, and it wasn't until he met Alvin that somebody stepped forward for him and, and Alvin is a

highly respected African American pastor—very smart about the church as well as public life. I think they had more of a collegial relationship, they worked together, than that mentor kind of relationship because as an organizer, Barack knew some things that Alvin didn't, so there's some mutuality and give and take. I think his ability to have success in the work he did in Chicago—and you don't have success in one thing, you can't go onto another success—was--became much more likely when he began to work with… with Alvin Love. And later on, at critical points even in his Presidency for certain kinds of things, I mean, Alvin did a lot to neutralize the fallout around the Jeremiah Wright split for example, and also to help make sure Barack stayed connected to faith-based leaders when he was in office. You know, in any walk of life there are people who have greater integrity than others, and Alvin has tremendous integrity—so, that's not always the case among politicians or pastors or organizers, per se, so that was important.

Obama's decision to go to Harvard Law School

01:38:22:03

JERRY KELLMAN:

We were taking a walk along on… in, on the campus of Harvard, which I don't know really well, and he said, "I've decided to go to law school, and I'm going to go here, and I want you to know." And, you know, I said, "Ok, that's reasonable. Why?" You know? And he talked about power, that he didn't see having the… getting enough power to change things through community organizing—and he wanted to have some kind of platform to be able to create greater change. And then he talked about economic stability, and that

was significantly influenced by the lack of stability—both family stability and work stability—that his… that his father ended up having, which wasn't played out, ultimately, in America but was played out in the politics and power struggles of… of Kenya. His father went there, I think he wanted to go to Harvard because it could launch a successful career, and it was, because I mean that, you know, Barack carried two things into his political life, I think, that were of a public nature. One was the experience as an organizer in Chicago, and the other was Harvard Law School, and those are huge counterpoints. Right? In the… In organizing, you're not working with people who are going any place fast, and Harvard Law School—you're maybe dealing with a lot of people whose only concern is how fast they can get there.

Dreams From My Father

01:39:54:12

JERRY KELLMAN

So, I'd known about the book for a longtime. He was in significant debt from the tuition at Harvard, and he was pretty excited when he got the contract to write the book, and he kept procrastinating on it ,and I… I think he went to Hawaii, you know, after graduation to, you know, to write. My first reaction to the book, that this is—this book is written by somebody who wants to be a novelist. I was impressed how well it was written. I was—I, you know, with the narrative style. I thought it was a fairly, a fairly honest book in lots of ways, and it reflected the fact that we still had a—I had kept some distance from him but, you know, personally when I was working with him

professionally, and I think that that was something he wasn't altogether pleased with, like that's reflected. I thought it's a valuable book. I thought it's a good book. But this is the most personal of books, and we don't have many books that I've seen by people in public life who've written that before they become… enter it fully. I mean, maybe upon their deathbeds they're writing books like that, so… and in the end, it was—it helped him and hurt him. I mean, there was the drug use thing—well, our generation, if you didn't use drugs, you probably had to lock yourself in a closet, I mean, at least for a day, right? On the other hand, I think people found a person who was whole, and that moment, I think was attractive to people in public life and journalists who became increasingly important, you know, when you begin to run for office.

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He cared about it being a good book, first of all. I think the fear is that gee, $50,000, that's a lot of money, I can pay off a quarter of my $200,000 tuition bill just with this one advance on the book, but then you're confronted with the page, and you realize you've gotta actually write something. And then you have to write for… write for what you know, and at that point in his life, you know, he hadn't—he wasn't an old man, he hadn't had that many experiences. So, you turn to what you know, you write about it. And Barack is extremely well read. He reads a great deal, and he'd just finished, you know, not just, but a couple years out of four years at Columbia, or maybe a little bit less—he was at Occidental—and he read greatly. So, what do you read? You read coming of age. If you want to understand that book where people may not understand, is you have to… you'd have to ask him what he was reading

at the time, what he had read, because this was a guy who wanted to be—he… he wanted to be a novelist more than he wanted to be a public figure when I—when I met him still at that point. I mean, there was a… there was a push and pull. So, I think you have to look at the book in terms of American coming of age books. Much fiction is non-fiction. If you see it in those terms, the book makes enormous sense. He didn't set out to write a book about race, I don't think. He didn't set out to write a book that would advance his career. The next book, I can't even remember the name of it, that's about running for office and—but this was not.

Obama's relationship with Michelle

01:42:58:05

JERRY KELLMAN

From the very beginning, I think it was a… it was a serious relationship in that… they both wanted it to go somewhere, and I don't mean to say that Barack had other relationships which weren't that, but it's also timing, right? He had reached that time in his life when, I think, he was—he was ready to, to make that movement, and I think Michelle had been there, probably, before--got there before him, in terms of being stable and, you know… you know, finishing school, etcetera. So, it was—it wa—they were very much a couple. I think, from…from the beginning. Barack had a… had a quick education on the Southside of Chicago. Organizing immerses you in a place and you learn it very quickly, you're talking to all kinds of people, dealing with all kinds of issues, and he learned the Southside of Chicago. But Michelle was the Southside of Chicago. She represented--I mean, if you looked at her, a

series of people who had—and families who had struggled and really achieved stability amidst enormous pressures—economic and racial pressures—and created a world of incredible, incredible viability within that world. I don't think his marriage to Michelle is about race, but I think it was about home. I think that Barack probably would find it extremely attractive how rooted Michelle was in the Southside of Chicago and how family and community wherever you are, you know, becomes a part of life that you can't buy. They shared both experiences. They'd both had gone to you know, Ivy League Law School and made their way through that. At the same time, they both had come to know what it means to be part of a community, an extended community. And she was gracious, right? What you see—what you see, to this day, she was at that time. She was always gracious. I mean, if I would bump into her in Hyde Park, etcetera, she always stopped what she was doing—that's sort of who she was.

The impact of race in community organizing

01:45:03:09

JERRY KELLMAN:

Incredibly, we've und—we continue to underestimate the impact of race in American life. I mean, it's incredible that people who have spent their lives working these issues would do that as we have, but we continually find ways to try to not confront how--how central that is to what happens to the country. As an organizer, in some sense, it underlies every issue because people are living in the situation they are because of discrimination and because of racism. The opportunities are denied. You know, Chicago was one

of the racist cities in the country—some would argue it still is, I don't necessarily share that—for generations, so it underlined everything if you're working with people who are in the situation they were. Narrative and race became critical in how you move forward. We were dealing with folks who had been laid off from the steel mills. And it was a big shock, because you made good money at the steel mill, good benefits, you knew you had a future—and, suddenly, that was all pulled out from under you, and large-large percentage were Black and Latinos. And so, there were… there were several competing narratives about why folks were in the place they were in, and how you told the narrative, and what you believed was critical in how you moved forward. So, one narrative was that these folks were failures. I mean, if they had been smarter, they would have gone to college, they'd pull themself up, right, by their shoes or whatever, and it was their fault. So, you kind of blame them.

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Another was you'd feel sympathy for them. You know, gee, this is horrible. These poor folks, the only option they had was to go into the mill. They went into the mill and that was tough, it was tough work, but now they get that pulled away from them and we just feel sorry for them. So, they were victims. And the third narrative was that if you looked at the trajectory of—of the African American community in the United States, that the kind of obstacles, you know, from slavery on, that people had faced and overcome for generations had been remarkable and enormous. And so, these… these folks, whether Latino or African American, were part of—part of generations of people who'd encountered adversity and overcome that. And if you saw the

story that way, you might move in a different direction with a different conclusion. But you had to have an operating narrative of what was happening. You know, I have to—and I had to have a narrative about, well you're White, why are you working in the Black community? Or Barack—well, you went to Columbia, right? He went to the Ivy League school; he went to a prep school in Hawaii. What are—what are you doing, you know, on the Southside of Chicago, you know, driving around in your car trying to convince people to do things that they didn't see the need to, need to do in the beginning? So, race is pretty central to public life at that stage.

Obama's avoidance of 'minority issues'

01:47:55:10

JERRY KELLMAN:

Barack was pretty committed to a broad view of the United States. He was President for all—all Americans and not—not just—not just African Americans, even if African Americans held a special place in his life and his heart and as being from the community. I think, to some extent, that that might've… that might've been a mistake—not just for him, but for all of us who thought that maybe we had made a little more progress on that. But, you know, at that same time, you know, we had—we had destroyed the African American community through incarceration and selective judicial processes and the creating of jails for minorities who had mental health issues and drug issues and so it was always—it was always an undercurrent, and I think when Barack began to feel more freedom—that is the last two years of the second term—you begin to see him turning towards issues that are not

specif—specifically African American. But, you know, the drug reform that Eric Holder pushed along, along with him certainly he begins to redeem himself with Latinos because he was not a great President for Latinos in the first—in the first two years with the various programs he initiates through executive order. So, I think that his—he—he was—he felt extremely constrained about building a focus just in that direction, and I think the restraint begins to come off in the last two years of the Presidency. Unfortunately by that point he has a Republican congress which is hell bent on the… on thwarting him, even if it means destruction for America.

Obama's approach to change-making

01:49:38:20

JERRY KELLMAN:

So, his training—and I don't want to attribute this to me but to the milieu he moved into when he became an organizer, it's an… it's an eminently practical kind of work. It's—you're… you're, you know, you're taught to tackle things, which are immediate, specific and realizable. Is what you're working on, will it have a somewhat immediate results that people can see? Can you define specifically—so, metrically, you can point to what you've done or not done? And is it realizable; can you really get it done? If not, don't bother with it, however the—however great the need is. And clearly—and Barack only deviated from that once, I saw, in his presidency and that was on gun—gun control. He knows this is not going to get passed and he does it anyway, you know, and you, you know, can see the emotion on his face. He's just sick and tired of children being killed in the United States. It's—he—you know, and—

and more children were killed in Chicago—were at that time—than any place else. Gangs were very prevalent. You know, his training was… was: get done what you can done. The… the politics of the possible, to a very—a very large… very large extent. And so, there, in some sense, there might have been some disappointment because his—his aspirations and his values are—are for significant change, but his method of operating, you know, is to be a very practical public figure and elected official to try to get stuff done, not to tilt at windmills per—per se. So, there's sort of a… inherent contradiction in that, and that's—becomes even stronger because you get no… you get—you get no slack cut for you if you're Black. Either as a community organizer or as President of the United States. You have a very little margin of error before huge numbers of people will, will turn against you.

Cornel West and criticisms of Obama's actions

01:51:26:00

JERRY KELLMAN:

I don't think Cornell West has ever been a community organizer. If you're not there, if you're not doing it yourself, it's easy to raise questions. I think the way to evaluate that is policy by policy. I think if you want to critique the Obama administration, let's talk about education policy, the early childhood commitment was—was wonderful. The kind of going back and forth between what… what we call Education Reform—the charter school movement, which was born in Chicago, and that… that he connected with in terms of Richie Daley—was that a good thing? Probably wasn't, but even there he came in with moderation if you look at what's happening versus the current

administration. So, I think those questions have to be answered by specific policies. The largest distribution of… of wealth towards the middle income—toward the African American people that occurred since… since Medicare was the Affordable Care Act. So, if you did nothing else, and you wanted to put the money—real money—in the pockets of low-income Blacks and Latinos, let alone low-income people—folks from Appalachia who are White, it was the Affordable Care Act. Having that conversation in the abstract doesn't mean much. I think you—you… he's willing to have those conversations with people around specific policies, and I think that's how you have them.

Navigating opposition

01:52:49:17

JERRY KELLMAN:

So, Barack is a hopeful individual. He sees the future. I know because I share that. You know, he—you see… you see struggles as going on and very present, very real. He sees this as a detour towards where we need to go. So, and he has, you know, he's got confidence in his own personality, in his own power to use words of winning people over. There's very few people that Barack would give up on. So now is that unrealistic given what we have? I don't think he's unrealistic about the people, I mean, I do think that my—I'm doing a lot of work in Ohio, right, Appalachia now, I mean that people really have a degree of goodness in them and… and openness, but they are subject to leadership. And if you see a generation of corrupt political leadership willing to sacrifice the long term good of the country for some narrow…

narrow gains to themselves, that's—that's gonna imple—in—you know, that's gonna influence public discourse. But, I think Barack's view of it is that given enough time and enough reason, enough compassion, that that can be overcome. I think that's probably his view of things. So, his ability to kind of stand there, toe-to-toe, and go with it, as opposed to backing off of it—not only was that a good image to see but it really was… it was where he—where he felt—I mean, he… he's—he's pretty open to different kinds of people.

01:54:25:13

I would view the Harvard Law School years versus the community organizing years—I think he tended to go with key figures in the democratic establishment, partially because of his Harvard experience. He needed that. He wouldn't have been elected if he hadn't had the experience. But, I think that the tremendous spending that was done to—to… bring us out of the near-depression in the initial terms—it was all about the economy. At that point, he should've begun to spend in a political way, which he didn't. So, in that ca—in that sense, integrity, you know, begins to work against you, but the seeds of… of having spent that money and not being able to show gains—particularly in specific ways, political ways—was something that, historically, you know, Franklin Roosevelt, for example, would never have done. Even if there's a world war going on, he would have made sure that every dollar was spent to advance him politically, and Barack… Barack didn't do that. So yeah, I think his—his—his reaction to that, reaction to race, his reaction to people saying outrageous things about him and do things about him was either to engage it or to make fun of it, such as Trump.

Relationship between Obama and Trump presidencies

01:55:50:14

JERRY KELLMAN:

It's the natural pushback to historical change in the United States on many levels, and on the… and having an African American president is symbolically a major, major aspect of that. I mean the numbers of—the numbers of people who've long suffered economic discrimination or, you know, in the case of women, physical abuse and who now have beginning to at least have some kind of voice, was—it happened so fast, so quickly, that I think that for—change is difficult for people, that there's a reaction to that change.

There's also a reaction to people losing power. This country will not be run by White men too much longer in the future, but that—in those situations, peoples wanting to cling to that becomes even more—more determined or, you can—you can even view that geographically where the country is going. Now it's not just Barack, right? We're seeing congress people, senators, governors running who are Latino, African American, women, gay—you know, people—as to this massive change, and that's extremely threatening. And there's going to be reaction to that… to that threat—that's to be expected. It speaks to the poverty, I think, of the Republican party that they allowed somebody like Trump to, you know, to—to represent that as opposed to somebody who was—had some integrity but a different set of political positions. But, no, I think it's not the policies, it's the fact of having an African American president in a country that has been built around essentially racial oppression from its—from its get go, that people react to.

Obama's response to critics of Reverend Wright

01:57:35:23

JERRY KELLMAN:

Well, I think historically to have that on the record that he spoke about race in Philadelphia is important, but the incident, itself, is painful. To have to publicly disown somebody who you deeply respect because they made a mistake. I mean, Barack entered a world where you don't get to make mistakes. Jerimiah Wright entered a world where—not that what he did was tremendous in terms of building the kind of congregation he did and becoming a public voice in the Southside. But, he could make mistakes; he could do things wrong and then recoup and circle around, you know. When you run for President and you're Black, there's—there's no give. I think it's unfortunate. I think it's an instance where he was probably forced to do something that was tough for him emotionally but absolutely necessary politically. And those are the kind of situations that are tough for someone who's trying to maintain their humanity, you know, while they have that kind of responsibility and those kinds of tough decisions to make.

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And it was probably the beginning of a series of painful things, whether he'll ever write about that or not but having to make demarcations between where his heart was and where the country needed to go or he needed to go at a given time—there had to be lots of those, you know, throughout the Presidency. It's painful to… to be forced to disassociate yourself with things that you have an understanding of even if you don't agree with that. I mean, you know, it's sort of like your, you know, our parents. There's things that

our parents do that embarrass us, but who—who wants to publicly disown their parents because they've embarrassed them? And—and there's some of that in what he was forced to do. That he was forced to talk about race was helpful to us. I hope he'll choose to do it on a more voluntary basis, but who knows? The state of things are such that he still needs to be part of going to folks like in Appalachia and saying, you know, you're not being served well by this, there's another direction. So, he may never have the freedom to do that again. So, in that sense, the fact having him on the record in Philadelphia, having he and his speechwriters crafting that, I think, is worthwhile.

The Joshua Generation

02:00:03:09

JERRY KELLMAN:

So, I think David Remnick's book is good in part because it focuses on that as essential to who his—his self-definition. That is, the… the annual reenactment of the crossing of the Pettus Bridge in Selma is a pretty sacred movement to African Americans with historical memory of the Civil Rights Movement. And the speaking to the Black community in that forum is pretty essential, and when Barack did that, he spoke about being in the Joshua Generation—he defined himself to the African American community. He said, I am— you know, he, essentially, said, "I'm not a hero. We're not heroes. We're… we're here because of—there was a Moses Generation and we stood on their shoulders." I think that kind of self-understanding lends itself to humility and it's—and lends itself to historical understanding of who we are and where we're going. And it's central to his relationship with the black

community, but we can make similar statements. I think all of us—many of us are immigrants, right, our grandparents, certainly, or at least our great-grandparents went through struggles that we can't begin to imagine, and here we are, living comfortable free lives in the United States, and Barack's understanding of that is critical for the Black community, but Lord knows if America needs that understanding. We're—you know, we are a generation of immigrants, whether you migrated from Mississippi or whether you migrated from Russia or Ireland, that's who we are. So, I think his understanding of that was critical for the Black community at that point, it's also critical for the country now to understand we're only here because of what they did.

2008 DNC

02:01:44:21

JERRY KELLMAN:

That was about understanding what it meant to be a—a community organizer in the city, and so it was important, I think, to people understanding what he did, why he did it, and that he was still the same person—which I believe he was, at that time, that he had been as an organizer. So, I think that's the—that's the mesh of the same instincts, the same identification with people on a grassroots level, had not deserted him and was not going to desert him. I guess that was the message, and you try to help him get elected as much as you can if you're a friend.

Obama's legacy

02:02:28:05

JERRY KELLMAN:

Well, it's huge for… for people of color, and for children of color. I mean, there are no limits, you know, there just are no limits now. And you can tell people that and—and be honest about it. So, I think that that's critical. And not just for Black children, but for girls and for Latino children and Asian American children, all the rest. So, I think that's—that—that changes things, in terms of the American story and… and what it's about, and I think we'll see—it's not so much that we'll see another Black President that soon, but we'll see diversity enter. We are becoming a more diverse culture, and the--this last-ditch effort to try to stop that; demographics are like climate, they're not going to go away. The things that are the biggest concern to me are things where there's no time to undue. So, every month that we don't make dramatic changes towards the climate, it's hard to figure out how we get those back.

I think the other stuff we will get back as we change in terms of elections.

02:03:43:10

I think once you let the idea that people are entitled to healthcare out of the bag, you can never put it back in the bag. I mean, they can try to delay it, but I think that once that's out there in people's experience, you're not gonna—you're never going to be able to kill it in any—any dramatic way. Even on immigration, I think once you, you know, once you begin to establish that this idea of—that we've taken the DREAMers, these young people who have been brought to America and no matter where you stand on immigration, it's—it's extraordinarily unjust not to give them a right and, not only unjust but

detrimental to what we need as a country, in terms of energy and leadership. And once that's out there, it's going to be very hard to ever crush the DREAMers. I think the only way that Trump, I mean, undoes stuff long-term is if people follow him who are like him. We need to be concerned, of course, about the Supreme Court.

02:04:42:04

I mean, we saw a Justice who behaved very Trump-like just get appointed to the court—that's of concern because you don't easily remove those people once they're in office. But on the whole, I think we'll recoup all of it and then probably more. I do think that the climate is a wildcard and could thrust us into a situation that we can't now imagine 20 or 30 years down the road, both worldwide and nationally, and I think he saw that. We don't know the impact of that kind of upheaval and fear that the collapse of our physical environment will have on people. But if—if that doesn't delay where we are now, I think we'll recoup it and more. I don't think Trump has much legs, historically. I don't—I hope not. I don't think we've embraced—I mean, looking back at the closest thing to Trump, which is Joe McCarthy from the '50's. And I don't think that, other than with Donald Trump and Roy Cohn, that there's been much legs for that, and I don't think there'll be much legs for Donald Trump, historically. I also think, even in terms of civility and respect, I think the parents of America will get tired of trying to teach their kids to talk respectfully, and then turn on the TV and watch Trump—Trump-like figures every day. I think we'll—I think in the long-haul, what Obama be and we'll carry through.

Obama, Trayvon Martin and My Brother's Keeper

02:06:07:02

JERRY KELLMAN:

So, I don't think it was a transformative moment for him when Trayvon Martin was—was killed. I think it was an opportunity for him to speak about something that he knew well and wanted an opportunity to speak about. So, I don't think he just discovered that Black people were being killed by police, or other people condoned by police throughout the United States. It was an opportunity to—to speak about something that he knew very well, and I think that that's unfolding. I think My Brother's Keeper reflects his heart. I don't want to draw too close a distinction between that particular shooting. It's not just addressing that. We're also, I mean moreover, I think it's addressing the level of violence in those communities, and… and how you create a—create a different kind of course. And I think that, you know, I—often, when people are doing programs, particularly aimed at black or Latino boys, I say, well what about the girls? But, in fact, the view of those communities that the boys are so difficult, the challenge of keeping them from acting out—the impact of racism in their lives is so challenging that if you can provide service to Black and Latino boys and young men, that you've done something the whole community can then embrace. So, I think it's more complex than—than just the police shootings. I mean, that's something that he feels strongly—hopefully, we all feel strongly. But it's really about the complexity of the future in the inner city and what's needed. And I think it reflects his heart. I think his brain is reflected in the Gerrymandering Project with Eric Holder, and how he changed politics. I think My Brother's Keeper is,

you know, a reflection of a leader who, you know, who understands that reality understands how much is stacked against a low-income person of color in the United States and trying to close the gap if you can.

Obama criticized for talking down to African Americans

02:08:22:21

JERRY KELLMAN:

You know, Ta-Nehisi Coates has been critical of Barack, I think, in terms of some of the early political statements of trying to talk about staying off your cell phones and, you know, and that sort of thing—the kind of good thing a father might say to a child—sort of a blaming the victim kind of strategy. The problems these children face are not self-made. You know, we've created an environment for them which is deadly and traumatic, and the best voices in the—in these minority communities are people who care about them are looking at issues of resiliency, of strength—they're not saying change this, change that. And I think that if you had a long conversation with President Obama, he would certainly come down on believing resiliency, and not… they're not gonna solve the problems by making sure they do a half-hour of homework each night.

Charleston church shooting

02:09:23:22

JERRY KELLMAN:

We thought we were done. We thought we had—we thought the South was finished with that. That… and to be dragged back into that level of tragedy, I

think is enormously, enormously painful. I mean, some of us think more in terms of--in terms of history than other people, and they think President Obama is one of those people, so to have a southern church shot up this many years after Selma and after all of that, is to be dragged back into the tragedy once again. Normally you can watch stuff on TV, but it's probably another thing to be down there and be with that congregation and… and be part of that.

Amazing Grace

02:10:15:12

JERRY KELLMAN:

I think it's someone who spent a good time—a good—good—a… chunk of time at Black churches. And you sing and you preach and you pray. And when he—you—he put himself in that environment, he's still the President of the United States, but he's still someone who understands what it is to be the fabric of that—of that community. So no, I don't think it was calculated at all. It was a strongly appropriate cultural move where he was, where there are other people who haven't spent time—and the liturgies are different. I mean, it's a… just liturgically, it's a different experience than most White people have who go to a synagogue, a church, or mosque, I think. I think the next generation is always on the agenda of anyone who's trying to create change and move things forward. But I think--and I never had a conversation about him, but when I went to the inauguration, which was very powerful, the first inauguration, there were two groups who stood out. And there were all kinds of people there. The two groups who stood out were African Americans and

young adults. That he was carried to the presidency in part by lots of people, but in part by young adults. And having that experience of interacting with them in the campaign and seeing their response to him, and seeing the response to change I suspect had a profound impact on him.

The value of Obama's experience as a father

02:11:44:11

JERRY KELLMAN:

Not just his ability to build a strong family life, but his emotional stability, and his integration as a human being—that we should be seeking people in public life who've had those experiences. And either because they strived to have them, or in the case of someone like John McCain because they got immersed in tragedy and death and come to see the value of other ways of… other ways of moving. The two times that we've been most in trouble have been when we've had presidents who have been emotionally unmoored and seeing somebody—and politics doesn't necessarily draw people who are emotionally healthy. That should be something we value. We should begin to check out the degree of stability and integration of the people we—we put our lives—whose lives we put our hands in. Part of being healthy is… is to strive to hold your family together under pressure, which we all have to do.

END TC: 02:12:37:12