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MARTIN NESBITT INTERVIEW
OBAMA: IN PURSUIT OF A MORE PERFECT UNION
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Martin Nesbitt
Friend
September 18, 2018
Interviewed by Peter Kunhardt
Total Running Time: 1 hour, 2 minutes, and 52 seconds

START TC: 01:00:00:00

MATT HENDERSON:

Speeding? Sound, speeds. Marty Nesbitt interview take one, marker. Stand by.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Martin Nesbitt
Friend

Michelle Obama

01:00:15:12

MARTIN NESBITT:

I met Michelle's brother, Craig, when I was actually in high school in Columbus, Ohio. He played for Princeton and Pete Carril, their coach, was recruiting at our school and invited me to go to see Princeton play Ohio State. So, I met Craig for the first time that night when he was playing in a basketball game against Ohio State. Later, when Michelle was working at the

University of Chicago, she became close friends with my wife. And my wife started encouraging me that we had to go play Scrabble with this couple that she'd become very friendly with the wife, and she--"I love them," and so forth, "they're really great people."

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And so after a lot of convincing I decided that I would go and have dinner with and play Scrabble with this couple, who my wife was encouraging me to meet. I walk in, it turns out it was Barack and I had known him for years having played basketball with him on basketball courts all over the city. And so I'm not quite sure which court I met him on first, but we met playing basketball and from that moment on, though, our lives continued to converge. As I had kids, my older kids were the ages of his niece and nephew, Craig Robinson's children, and so we started to spend time together at sporting events and other—at sporting events and other family activities. And then my wife, who was an obstetrician and gynecologist, delivered Malia and Sasha. And we had children that sort of bracketed their ages, too. And so our families started to grow together.

Ann Dunham, Barack Obama's mother

01:02:20:15

MARTIN NESBITT:

I did not know his mother. I understand her to be kind and giving, civically oriented, and a wonderful person. But I never got the privilege of—of knowing her.

Barack Obama's childhood family

01:02:40:20

MARTIN NESBITT:

His mother was kind, demanding, believed in the power of education, a giving person. His grandparents were loving and regimented and maybe in another day his grandmother would have risen to even higher ranks in the company where she worked, the bank where she worked that, you know, they were tolerant and loving and cared deeply for him. A lot of details but nothing you would--atypical of, you know, a classic American family.

Being raised by a single mother

01:03:31:09

MARTIN NESBITT:

There is kind of commonality when I hear him describe his mother, it—it reminds me of mine. Of course, we were both raised by our mothers. It's interesting that we both wound up marrying women who were deeply family-oriented and both—who both grew up on the Southside of Chicago. We both played high school basketball at private schools that made it to the

state championship, so I think there are a lot of things that line up between us that created this sense of shared values and shared perspectives that—that I think start there, with the family dynamics, and I think our mutual desire to have strong connected families, ourselves, which I think attracted us to the women that we ended up marrying.

Obama's motivation

01:04:43:02

MARTIN NESBITT:

I don't think of what drives him as being ambition. I think of--he has this sort of sense, this innate sense, internalized sense that anything is possible. And, I think he more sees an opportunity to make a difference and has this perspective that, you know, what others might see as impossible as being attainable. And I think that sort of facility around achievement of things that others might see as out of reach makes him special, right? And I was always sort of in our personal, more intimate conversations about the things that we might do, how things that I see as kind of improbable he seems to think of as--as possible.

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And, in so many ways, I think that's what made him a special leader and you know, the one being the president who was able to bring healthcare, for example, into play when so many others felt that it was out of reach and politically impossible to accomplish. This sort of sense that, you know,

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anything is possible. And, you know, then the idea from the very beginning that he could in fact be president was that same sort of--it wasn't ambition, it was just this idea that anything is possible and the fact that he had this commitment to making the place we live a better place. And that was a good platform from which to do it and that it was achievable. It was something that I've always found remarkable about him and I think also inspirational and empowering.

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MARTIN NESBITT:

I remember when he was driving by my house. Man, I'm trying to figure out what year it was, but I think it must have been 2002. And he stopped to tell me what he was going to do next, what he was thinking about doing next. And this was shortly after he lost in the Congressional race to Bobby Rush. And we came in the house, we sat down and he told me he was thinking about running for Senate. And I just started laughing. Right? Like, because it seemed so improbable given the result of the race against Bobby Rush. And then he said, "No, no, no. I know you think it's funny, but here's kind of my analysis and what has to happen in order for me to win and why I think it's possible."

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And at the end of the conversation I was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, okay. We can do this. Alright, I'm on. I'm onboard." And so I do think part of it is that- that- that capacity to see a path, that strategic mind and how things will play out, and where the risks are, where the opportunities are. He has a facility of, sort

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of, finding a way in sort of a complicated set of circumstances that- that uh, I think, makes that—feeds that sort of anything is possible frame of mind that he has.

Michelle Obama's response to running for Senate

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MARTIN NESBITT:

I think she was sort of like, "Okay, time to move on to the private sector and get real." Right? And, you know, I think there's probably a notion of that it might be improbable to her. But she said, "Okay. I'll let you take this one last shot and if you don't win, then we gotta- gotta move on to something else." And he said, "I'll take that deal." And so the rest is history.

Obama's confidence

01:09:20:04

MARTIN NESBITT:

You know, I wouldn't say insecurity. I don't see insecurity at all. I think he's very well-adjusted and I think that's sort of a manifestation of sort of his family life and the love he got from his mother, and grandparents, and his sister. So there's no insecurity there at all. I think he's thoughtful, he's strategic, and he will take his time to sort of work through the dynamics around issues. And, of course, you become president, those dynamics become increasingly complex and take more thoughtfulness. But, you know, I think, healthily, he never thought that being president was about him, that- that he was only a vessel through which the American people were expressing their

desire to go down a certain path and they picked someone to- to- to lead them down that path. And he was always very objective about recognizing that it wasn't about him, it was about a moment in time in history. And he was a vessel through which, sort of, the desires of American people were being expressed.

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He's self confident but intellectual enough to be able to sort of sort out overconfidence from sort of risk, and self-aware enough to distinguish where he's just got raw confidence versus sort of, there's risk and opportunity and possibility. So he's been able to, I think, over the years as he's matured to be able to sort of sort through those dynamics as he comes--goes through a decision making process around any number of issues.

Michelle Obama's influence

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MARTIN NESBITT:

First of all, I mean they obviously--the family is the most important thing to both of them. And she was that rock that created that foundation and was, you know, and remains sort of, you know, a wonderful wife and mother serving as that rock and cornerstone of the family. But she's also very insightful, and pragmatic, and understands these communities in a nuanced way that I think adds to his perspective. And she's very authentic and transparent and, you know, you're never wondering what she's thinking. You know, you're never sitting on one side of the room going, "I wonder what

Michelle was thinking." Right? Yeah. You know what she's thinking and I think that kind of transparency and authenticity is- is very helpful. And she's so smart and articulate herself that I think it sort of raises the bar of performance, right? It's like, you know, you have to live up to the standard set in your own household, and I think that's a high bar, and I think--so she does a bit of that, too. So just very--an ideal companion I think in a lot of ways.

Malia Ann and Sasha Obama

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MARTIN NESBITT:

Malia was known as the oracle because as a very young child, she had a way of sort of describing to the adults the real dynamic between children when something happened and someone fell or someone's feelings got hurt. Malia had a way and a very mature and a way—and a mature way beyond her years of expressing sort of the actual--the real dynamics. You know, she thought he was saying this, but he was really saying that. He was trying to compliment her, but she thought it was an insult, and it hurt her feelings, and it's really a misunderstanding. And you hear this coming from a four-year-old or a five-year-old, and you go, "Well, you know what? That's a level of emotional insight that's just not typical for a child your age, but thank you for the explanation." So, she was just always bright and—and perceptive and had this great capacity to articulate her feelings and dynamics around her in a way that was just beyond her years. And Sasha is the same way, has the same intellect, the same ability to articulate her perspective, but, you know, is just

a little more willing to let Malia talk, as a younger child might let an older sibling do.

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But has her own unique intellectual and emotional abilities that I think are a product of having sort of two smart, caring, loving parents and nurturing parents. So, they're terrific, terrific young ladies, and I can't imagine either of them being better in any other way, you know? They're perfect, perfect children.

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Barack and Michelle were so careful about creating the environment for their children that they wanted, that they kept the people in their children's lives around and brought on new friends that shared the same values with their children and their families, that I think Sasha and Malia have turned out the way they would have turned out if they had never gone to the White House. You know, my kids have remained here in Chicago for the period that they were in the White House. And when the kids are together, it's like they were together yesterday, that their values are still the same, their interests are still the same, they enjoy being around each other the same way.

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And so I think Barack and Michelle have done a masterful job of having their kids have this sort of balance and perspective. And I think maybe this idea of recognizing that being president and the first lady wasn't about them, but it was about something bigger than them, has allowed them to be grounded and remain grounded in who they are. And I think that sort of translates into how their children see themselves and their own friends. So I-- I don't think

Sasha and Malia would have turned out any differently if they had grown up here on the Southside of Chicago.

Obama's run for Congress

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MARTIN NESBITT:

He probably had less of an idea then about how unique he was as a political figure. You know, he knew what he knew. He had the experiences that he had. But I don't think he had, nor any of us, had a perspective of—of what his unique attributes were as a politician. And I think as he started to become more engaged in a federal race were those unique attributes amplified and how we all came to- to recognize them.

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But I think from an intellectual perspective and sort of an authentic idea of what true north was for him as a person and as a civic leader, none of that has ever changed. I think what changed was sort of a perspective around how do these unique set of attributes play in a broader national and federal platform? And I think, you know, you can only learn that by being in that sort of national fray.

Dreams from My Father

01:18:17:11

MARTIN NESBITT:

I would say the thing that I learned the most from that book was that he's really smart. And I remember the story of when my wife had me spring—I

was out in the front yard again cutting the grass or raking leaves or something and he drove by. He stopped, he said, "Oh, you know what? You don't have my book. You ought to give me—you ought to read my book." And he didn't say, you know, he didn't give me any context around it or anything, and I was—and he never talked about, you know, I didn't know that he was president of the Harvard Law Review, I didn't know. He never talked about those things, and we never talked about those things—parts of our history. He had sort of a great humility around it. So, when he gave me h—the book, I was like surprised, and then I thought of course, he gave me the paperback version, and I thought oh, this is some self-published thing. And, you know, I had—I didn't know anything about him. Right? Other than that hey, we played ball together, and he's married to Michelle, and she was nice.

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And so, I took the book and I put it on the shelf in our little library in the house. And my wife, one day, had me doing spring cleaning. And I was like, man, I was getting tired, so I ducked into the little library and closed the door and like was going to take a 30-minute sort of break. So, I pulled the book off the shelf, and I- I started to read it. And I opened the door, and I called my wife, and I said, "Anita, Barack is an incredible writer. And he's really smart." And she said, "No shit, Sherlock." Like, "It took you that long to figure that out?" I said, "No, I had no idea." And that was sort of the first insight. So, the book put me in his head in a way that I realized he was a really smart, thoughtful, articulate person that knew how to use the power of narrative to tell a compelling story.

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And so that was the real—that's what I really learned. Now, I knew he was smart because we played Scrabble, like he -- we played the husbands played the wives and he did all of our words and like, I was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's a good one." So, I knew he was smart, but this gave me a level of insight into his intellect that- that I had not seen. So, that was the main thing I learned from the book.

Obama as an outsider

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MARTIN NESBITT:

You know, I'm sort of speculating here, but I think, you know, he was in a community high school, a school that was mostly not people of color. He spent time in Indonesia where he was clearly not a native. He went to Occidental and Columbia, where he was clearly an outsider. He came to Chicago to work on the Southside where he was bringing, you know, a native Hawaiian who went to Occidental and Columbia and wasn't of the Southside of Chicago. So, I think he always felt like he was on the outside learning about another community.

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But I think it gave him a great ability to understand communities, nuances of communities, be sensitive to nuances of the communities and adapt the best of those places. And I think that's why--one of the reasons why his relationship with Michelle was so important. It made him from a place, right? And when his children were born in Chicago, it made him a Southsider. And

he's proud about sort of that Southside heritage, you know? He owns it. He's passionate about it. He loves all the nuances of the Southside; the places to eat, and the parks to go to, and the baseball team to watch. And so, that's a unique thing, which I think he takes great pride in.

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But I also think it made him uniquely qualified to be our president, right? A— a country that is a melting pot of people from different places, from different times, at different times, from all over the world. The capacity to understand perspectives and respect different points of view and the ability—he has this incredibly unique ability to, as quickly as anybody, see things from your perspective. And some people go through their entire lives thinking that their perspective is the right one and the only one that matters. And his ability to sit and listen and figure out the nuances of your perspective is one of the things that I think made him such a great civic leader, especially in a country like this that is made up of so many different cultures and backgrounds.

Obama's loss to Bobby Rush

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MARTIN NESBITT:

Probably, this idea that every strength is a weakness and every weakness is a strength, and it just depends on the on the circumstances. And, I think in some ways, the fact that he was you know, president of the Harvard Law Review and went to Harvard Law School and was from Hawaii, those things that ultimately I think were strengths for him. They were a weakness in that circumstance, and I think one of the reasons why he struggled. So yeah, I

mean, I think there were some valuable lessons just around, sort of having a more evolved perspective on who he was, and I think I made that point earlier about that race helped him figure out how to use his unique advantages to--you know, in politics to have the opportunity to serve the people the way he wanted to. And that rush against—that race against Bobby Rush was part of that, yeah.

Obama's decision to run for president

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MARTIN NESBITT:

You know, nobody's ever ready to be president, right? There's no job training program to be president of the United States. But I think from 2004 to 2006 or early 2007, what he realized after spending time in Washington was that he could do that, that he could do this, that there were a lot of smart people in Washington and a lot of people with important perspectives, that--but that he had as great a capacity as anybody and that--that he too was qualified to one, fulfill the obligations of a U.S. Senator, but also think about possibilities beyond that. And I think as he had the opportunity to interact with and work with other public servants in Washington, he just realized that, yeah, you know what, he had some of the same attributes that other potential candidates had, and he had the potential to serve at any level in the federal government. And I think it just gave him a certain confidence around—around that.

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MARTIN NESBITT:

Well, you know, I think it was--one, it was a series of conversations, it wasn't a single conversation. But, you know, it involved every dimension of that choice to run for president, of the sacrifices that would have to be made. I think they were very sensitive to the impact that this—that decision would have on not just them and their family, but their closest friends. That, in some way, we would all be running for president. And that we would need their support and they would need ours as he went through the process. So there was a whole dialogue around that, and there was a very candid dialogue about—around, you know, what it would take and the demands on it, and sort of how all of us had to think about changing in order to adapt to those demands. And so, it was a very, you know, drawn out series of conversations that also included the benefits, right? The most important of which was the impact that a Obama—Obama win would have on the community, not just a local community but the broader African-American community, and the U.S. community, and the global community. And at the end of the day, and all those pluses and minuses, the—the idea that Barack and Michelle could have kind of a historic impact on this country and the rest of the world kind of outweighed any of the other negatives.

Obama's safety

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MARTIN NESBITT:

You know, I can't say that at some point that didn't come up, but just part of those conversations, we didn't really talk about that. I think the one thing I will say about the president and first lady, or Barack and Michelle, is that, you

know, they—they come from an authentic place of trust in their fellow man, right? And I think one of the reasons why he was so well accepted as a candidate was that sort of place of trust and faith in the American people was authentic, and I think the community was receptive to him. And so even through the early processes, the idea that, you know, he wouldn't be safe as a candidate never really was a big subject of conversation.

The intensity of running for president

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MARTIN NESBITT:

24/7 365. Right? I mean, it was--it was a grind for him. It was a relentless pursuit. It was the hardest thing I've ever seen anybody do, right? It was hard for me and I wasn't even running. And I can't even imagine the rigor that he had to go through on a day-to-day basis. It was hard. Listen, to me that's the hardest thing you can—a person can do professionally is to try to become president of the United States, so it was an incredible grind. He demonstrated great discipline and regimen to be able to endure the process. But it was-- that is a hard thing, and it's coming at you all day every day from the day you announce to the day the election is over. And then the work starts, right? So, a very difficult endeavor.

Reverend Jeremiah Wright

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MARTIN NESBITT:

You know, there was just a point in time when the clips of Reverend Wright and some of his sermons were just playing in a loop on every station in the country, and it was just coming at us continuously. And my wife was pregnant with our fourth child at the time, and there was a campaign trip that I decided that I just couldn't go on and he and Valerie Jarrett called me from the road as they sat down for dinner.

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He said, "Hey, just checking in. How you doing?" And I said, "I'm doing—I'm doing great." He said, "Well, there's an empty seat right here where you—you would've been sitting, so, we miss you." And I said, "Yeah." I said, "How you doing?" He said, "Yeah, you know, this Reverend Wright stuff is coming at me, relentlessly." And I said, "Yeah, you know, I think this Reverend Wright thing is a blessing in disguise." And he started laughing so hard, and he said, "Valerie, Marty said Reverend Wright is a blessing in disguise." And then I heard her start laughing, like that was the craziest thing, and I said—and I said, "No, no, seriously." I said, "A hurdle has been put in front of you that only you can clear." And I said, "Your opponent has no such opportunity to clear this hurdle.

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I said, "You clear this hurdle, I think you—you win." And he said, "I guess I got to do the speech." I said, "I guess you got to do the speech." And that was kind of the end of the conversation. And I'm sure he had been having conversations with David Plouffe and David Axelrod about sort of whether or not he can do the speech, and I don't know where they were in those conversations, but I can tell you that that was the conversation that we had.

And he wrote the speech, what I—which I think was one of the greatest presidential speeches ever—ever given. It was--it was like a-- it was like a jazz composition, right? Where a truly good piece of music, it's not just what you play, but it's what you decide not to play. And he used sort of this straightforward plain language to articulate feelings about race on both sides that nobody could question his sort of authentic perspective on it. And I just think it was a very powerful moment for the American people.

Obama's connection to friends and family

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MARTIN NESBITT:

Deeply connected to the people who are close to him, you know? Yeah. I mean, it's just one of the things that makes him a sort of very special friend. And I've seen it, you know, many times. He's always there for his friends and his family. So that was just who he is. If everybody knew him as well as I did, as well as I do, he would've gotten every vote.

Election night 2008

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MARTIN NESBITT:

It was--the whole process was so incremental. Minute by minute, day by day, you knew you were getting closer, closer, closer to winning. And sort of the whole campaign team was super scientific and we had all the polling, and the models, and we incremented to a point where, you know, there was-- a level

of certainty. I shouldn't--because it, you know, there was always a question. But it was incremental, right? We even had the early poll—early exit polls. And so at the moment he was declared the winner, he looked at me and he said, "I think you've got to get the kids, man, get them all packed up, and get down to Grant Park for the speech." I said, "Yeah, we got to get going."

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It was like the next thing; we got to execute the next element of this. And so it didn't affect us and the people in the room in the suite there in the way that I think it affected people who were a little bit more removed from the process. But, the next day, we all met at the Obamas' for dinner. Now, there was 12 or 14 or 15 of us sitting around a table, I can't remember how many. And a friend of mine sent me an email. He was a lawyer. He's a lawyer here in town, very articulate, great writer. And he basically took the time to write this note that described the experience he had waiting in line in Grant Park to hear the President's speech.

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And he talked about the way he was interacting with other people in line, and the sense of community, and a sense of the country sort of evolving to a new place and this sort of milestone moment in American history and how wonderful it was. And he had great perspective on sort of what this meant and what that meant as a historical moment. And I looked up after reading that to everybody at the dinner table, and like everybody was in tears. And I think at moment we realized like what we missed, that we missed all of that at Park because we were just in there grinding day to day, minute to minute, that we missed sort of that perspective.

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So, I think that's really when it all kind of sunk in for me and for a lot of people around that table. So--but I think that was really for me the moment where we were like, "Okay, now that election is over and we're sitting down as-- at dinner as friends and family." and it was a powerful moment.

Reflections on the impact of Obama's presidency across generations

01:38:07:12

MARTIN NESBITT:

The first moment that was magical to me was, you know, you had sort of the Cabinet and the Senators and friends and family behind the podium at the Capitol at the Inauguration. And we were inside, and they had a specific order that they were sit—seating us. And when I walked out and looked out on the mall and saw two million people standing there, celebrating the peaceful transition of power in this country, it gave you a sense of what made America great. And you—at that moment I thought about all the civil wars and the assassinations and the struggle, violent struggle for power in countries all over the world and then looked at our people, with the rule of law, celebrating a democratic election of a new president in this country.

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And it was a powerful moment. It was an awe-inspiring moment, seeing more people in one place than I've ever seen in my entire life. That was the first moment that- that was magical. The second moment was my wife and I heading up to the Residency, the White—the Residence at the--on the first day that they were in the White House and riding up with an elevator

operator, Jermaine was his name I think. And so I say to him -- he's an African-American guy who had worked in the White House for 40 years at that time and I said, "So how did it feel during this whole process where an African American was in the—on his way to be elected president of the United States?"

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And he said, which is a very revealing moment to me, he said, "At no time during the entire campaign, the primary or the general election did I ever think he was going to win." He said, "I voted for him, but I didn't think he had a chance to win until the moment I read it in the paper the day after the election." He said, "That is how improbable it all felt to a man my age." And that was a very enlightening moment for me in thinking about; I felt like there was a possibility, I thought it was remote. I think younger people thought it was more likely than even I.

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But there—I think there was a certain age in the African-American community of people like, "This is never going to happen." And so that was an insightful moment. But then also as we interacted with the staff at the White House, we all saw our own parents. I mean, my mother did domestic work. And to see these African-American and Hispanic people on the staff who we could relate to in so—such an intimate way, it was just a powerful moment. It was like, "This is what our parents did to make our lives possible for us." So, that was another very powerful moment. And then a third one,

just as an anecdote, which I repeated every time I came to the residence is I just walked into the Lincoln bedroom every time I went there, and I read the Gettysburg Address, which was a copy, a handwritten copy by Abraham Lincoln, was... is on display in that room. And that speech moved me equally every time I read it and just sort of the history in that moment, reading that Gettysburg Address while the first African-American president in this country history—in this country's history is in the next room reading his daily briefing or—or whatever was just always very powerful to me. And seeing that connectivity between Abraham Lincoln and Barack Obama, that without one, the other's opportunity wouldn't even be possible, was just kind of a powerful juxtaposition of events that's just right there in front of you.

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I mean, Abraham Lincoln's speech, handwritten, is right there. And Barack Obama's in the other room working on, you know, stuff that's in the interest of the country, which was very powerful every time I... every time I came in. And then whenever I was there with a party, with other people, I was like, "Oh, come on. You got to come and we got to read the," you know, "the Gettysburg Address." So—so, just some incredible—I mean, it was all surreal. It was all surreal every time I walked into that—the White House, it just seemed so improbable. And—and I'd never th—I had never seen a U.S. president in person until he started running when I was in a room with Clinton, right? So, just a lot of crazy stuff, you know? And I think about my own children.

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MARTIN NESBITT:

I think it was in the first year, it was spring break and Barack and Michelle said, "Hey, why don't—why don't you guys come to the White House? We'll spend a few days in D.C. and then we'll go up to Camp David, and the kids can hang out and have fun over spring break." So, I says, "Great." My son was in preschool at the time, and my older kids had the same preschool teacher, so she knew our family pretty intimately. They got back. They get a rug time, and he's sitting on the rug, and they were asking everybody what they did on spring break. And she of course knew what he had done, so she was trying to get him to talk about it. And she said, "Xavier," you know, "where did you go for spring break?" And he said, "Washington and D.C." He said—he always said, "Washington and D.C." "Washington and D.C." And she said, "Yes, I know that. But where did you sleep?" And he said, "In a bed."

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MARTIN NESBITT:

So from the 80-year-old elevator operator who thought it could never—it would never happen, to our generation who saw our parents in the people who were working at the White House, to his generation, which is like, "I was in D.C. sleeping in a bed, like, what are you talking about? Where else would I sleep?" That's sort of a pretty powerful expression of the impact of this presidency on the next generation. I'll tell one other story. One—one Washingtonian, who become friends with the President, told a very powerful story to all of us at a Super Bowl party one day. I think he and his wife were... they lived in a high rise—they live in a high rise in D.C., and they were returning from a black-tie function. And he pulled up to his building and he gets out of the car and he walks around to open the door for his wife.

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MARTIN NESBITT:

And as he was opening the door in his tux, his bow tie, and his... cummerbund, a woman and her three or four-year-old daughter come walking down the street. And as they were passing by, the daughter says to the mother, "Mommy, is that the president?" Okay? It's an African-American man. And it hit him that every other time he was getting out of a car or opening a door for somebody in a tux, people thought he was the valet parker. And, at that moment, that little girl said, "Is that the president?" And that is another example of the power of this presidency on that next generation, and this idea that anything is possible for any citizen of this country.

The dynamics between Obama and the Republican Party

01:47:14:11

MARTIN NESBITT:

You know, every politician has a cross to bear, right? And Washington is ruthless and people will use anything to gain a strategic advantage or create space and alternatives between them and the opposition. And I think, under no uncertain terms, that race was part of that toolbox for some presidents. It doesn't make them... it doesn't make all of them racist.

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It makes all of them or a lot of them willing to use race to create some sort of strategic advantage. As we sort of get time and space between then and now, isn't it interesting that what he started out to do is sort of being manifested

now in the issues that the Republican party is facing? The dynamic that really crested with that party during his two terms as president is the exact dynamic that is hurting them right now and, ultimately, it may be the Obama presidency that fundamentally changes the Republican party. Right? It didn't happen in the instant we thought.

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But that, over time, that sort of last gasp to use race as a tool, to use sexism as a tool, may ultimately be the thing that drives more harmony in D.C., and changes fundamentally what that party stands for. These things don't always happen at the time and pace that we expect, but I—I find it interesting now, at this moment, to look at dynamics and that party and see it sort of fraying as a result of strategic choices that were made during his two terms as president.

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He was a great political strategist. And uh, he always thought about the war rather than the battle. He had great patience. And I think outsmarted the opposition, over and over and over again. And I think some of them must be sitting around and saying, "How did he outsmart us again?" But I think he outsmarted them many, many, many times and made them make choices that, in retrospect, probably didn't make much sense.

Navigating race

01:50:11:11

MARTIN NESBITT:

You know, I think he sort of recognized that in spite of his accomplishments, and in spite of how the country has evolved, or had evolved, that there was still great risk to being an African American male. There's still pockets and places, and nooks and crannies, where biases and racism and assumptions about who people are, put some of us at great risk. And, you know, I think that was a moment of clarity. That there's—while we've come a long way, there's still an incredibly long way to go to get where we ought to be as a country around this issue of race.

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MARTIN NESBITT:

He learned, over time, how to play that instrument and he learned how delicate that issue, the issue of race remained in this country. I think he learned that with sort of the Gates issue and Harvard—and at Harvard and Cambridge and that whole incident, how sensitive of a subject race is in this country. And so, I think he learned how to do it in the—in an effective way as a leader.

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So yeah I mean, I think there is some evol—as we said, at the beginning, right? There is no classroom, no training program for being president of the United States. But you want to have a president who has great capacity to learn, and perspective. And he obviously became very—more and more adept in navigating around that issue of race in a constructive way, over time.

Hadiya Pendleton

01:52:10:21

MARTIN NESBITT:

As I remember the story, she was, you know, shot and killed in a place that just is not too far from where they live, where we all live on the Southside of Chicago. That made it all the more impactful on- on everybody. A young woman on the Southside of Chicago, you see your own children. In you know, in a place where there's at least some probab~~il~~—probability that your children could have been, you know, that's tragic and you know, another instance where sort of the realities for some people, the ways -- the risks that some people face every day, become real. You know, that was a story that I think made us all very sad. It made us all feel great empathy for some circumstances, and the need for fixing some of these deeply rooted problems in some areas of our country.

Charleston church shooting

01:5:28:15

MARTIN NESBITT:

He was inspired by the people who survived. And the people—the people who survived, the victims, and their capacity for unconditional love and grace in a tough set of circumstances. And it was their response that revealed who we really are in this country, and I think their response in turn inspired him and empowered him to sort of exercise the kind of leadership in that moment that I think the country needed. Everybody, sort of, white and black, in this country was inspired by that community's capacity to come together in a moment, a tough moment.

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And I think that was sort of inspirational to all of us. And, you know, again I think he was the vessel through which the true nature of our community was revealed, and his capacity to express that on the behalf of the country and all those sort of caring deeply about those moments. It's just another testament to his leadership, but also the way he reflected who we really are. And I think that's the thing about him, is that he represents to the people in this country everything that's good about us. It's not about him, it's what we see in him that represents us and who are and who we aspire to be. I think that's sort of the powerful thing about leadership and the thing that's important about being in that position in this country.

Amazing Grace

01:55:32:11

MARTIN NESBITT:

Here's the thing about being president of The United States: you cannot get elected and you cannot serve as president without everybody in this country finding out who you really are. I think that moment was who he really is. And his history, his life, the time he spent in the church, he loves music, he's inspired by music. It was not the first time I heard him sing. Right? And so I wasn't surprised, but it was another moment that the country had to see who he really was, and- and- and him expressing himself in an authentic way. And there are other presidents who did it in different ways. I think Ronald Reagan had a certain way to express himself and serve as that, sort of an inspirational leader.

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Whether you agreed with all of his policies or—or not, you—you can't deny the fact that he had a way to connect with the American public that in—that, in a way, was—that was inspirational. I think George H.W. Bush had a way to connect to people and—and anybody who spent any time with George Bush and- and Bill Clinton can attest to their abilities to connect to people. And I think President Obama had the same capacity, albeit sort of differently and maybe in a historic way, but that—those events were an expression of who he really was, or who he really is.

Donald Trump

01:57:21:04

MARTIN NESBITT:

You know, I think if you look back historically, the pendulum swings, right? From one administration to another, and voters tend to make choices that contrast each other from administration to administration. I think what people miss was that you know, in my--from my perspective I mean, the Obama presidency was a big pendulum swing in a, I think a very positive direction. This presidency, from my perspective, is a swing of the pendulum.

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A dramatic swing, probably a more exaggerated swing of the pendulum in- in- in a different direction. And so I think that's part of it. Trump was running against a candidate who had the unfortunate circumstance that an opposition party had been investing against her identity and profile for two decades. Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola are sugar and water. But billions of dollars have been spent over time to make them into these brands and give them an

identity that people sort of come to believe. And in so many ways a lot of money and time and effort and narrative had been invested in creating a—an image and a brand for Hillary Clinton that may not have been completely accurate, but that was really hard to overcome.

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And I think that outcome is sort of a function of that swing of the pendulum, and the fact that it was really hard at the end of the day to overcome how Trump's opposition had been branded and labeled over sort of two deca—two decades. That's my perspective. Barack might articulate it a different way, I don't know. But I think that's ultimately what happened.

Obama's legacy

01:59:41:18

MARTIN NESBITT:

President Obama had sort of objectives that were broader and more strategic than most people think. But I'd say the number one thing that Trump can't undo, is that Barack Obama won. And Barack Obama won twice. That's the most important accomplishment of his presidency. Now, he might argue differently, he has—he's more—he's a policy guy and he might argue healthcare, he might argue saving the banking industry, and then saving the auto industry and helping the economy recover—recover and put us on the right track, and ending the wars in... in the Middle East. The list of accomplishments is long and impressive. But to me, the most—the biggest accomplishment was that he won because it is historic and it means

something about this country and our com—our country's capacity to pursue becoming a more perfect union.

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And the fact that we are making prog—as slow as it may be, and as incremental as it may be, we are making progress. And Donald Trump can't undo that. But the second thing he can't undo that I think is important, is... on the healthcare front. The most important thing to President Obama, I think, about the healthcare strategy was not—not just to get more people covered, which he clearly accomplished, but to do something with people—with s—nobody's been able to do for seventy years up to that time, which is, put healthcare in play. Healthcare is play and will remain in play, and people remember the New Deal wasn't the New Deal overnight.

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There was great opposition and a lot of battling and elbowing back and forth as those platforms evolved into what they are today. And such will be the case with healthcare. We're in the--you know, there's one strike in the first inning of the game on healthcare and so I'm sure we'll see those programs evolve and our healthcare system in the U.S become better over time. I know now, as an investor in healthcare, that some of the dynamics that the President hoped to achieve in the industry have taken hold.

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We should be having more outcomes-oriented system, rather than a fee for service system, has taken hold in the industry. And- and- and a lot of entities, public and private, in healthcare are pursuing it because it's the right strategic focus to have a successful enterprise. And so, that dynamic can't be changed.

And there are other things on the policy front that I think are very difficult to change in a short period of time. And so try as you may, you know, the pendulum will continue to swing and will iterate to the right set of outcomes. And, I think, as time passes, the true impact of the Obama administration on this country will be made clear.

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