

# KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

JESSE JACKSON INTERVIEW  
*OBAMA: IN PURSUIT OF A MORE PERFECT UNION*  
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

**Jesse Jackson**  
**Civil rights activist**  
**October 19, 2019**  
**Interviewed by Peter Kunhardt**  
**Total Running Time: 1 hour, 1 minute and 33 seconds**

START TC: 01:00:00:00

MATT HENDERSON:

Reverend Jackson take one, marker.

ON-SCREEN TEXT:

Reverend Jesse Jackson

Civil Rights Activist

## **Coming to Chicago**

01:00:12:01

JESSE JACKSON:

Actually, in 1960 I was arrested with several Klansmen trying to use a public library. We were beginning to protest, that was the season of resistance of racial segregation. In Greensboro, North Carolina, I was president of the student body at North Carolina A&T in (Inaudible) jail. And so I was inclined to go to Duke University to register to the UNC Law School. The President, Dr. Procter said, "If you go to either of those schools, you will be under so much

pressure to remain in law, separate for a while and study and try seminary.” So, I came to Chicago in seminary in 1964, and I soon found my rhythm. This was my place to be in seminary, and that’s how I got here.

### **Entering politics**

01:01:03:03

JESSE JACKSON:

It’s interesting. The sitting in in the public libraries was a political act. We didn’t see it as such. Marching in the south was a political act: we did not see it as such. But by the time I got to Chicago in 1964, it was apparent that we were on the cusp of getting the right to vote. That would be our lever in the future. In slavery time, in the Old Testament, it said he had to make bricks without straw. We had to (Inaudible) the marchers out the right to vote, so the vote became the lever for us in 1965. And, so, I used that lever for voter registration in 1972 when we were trying to democratize the Democratic Party. They would not accept the new formation. Bill Singer and I led a delegation, and we set in in Miami, Florida, and we just figured that they -- the delegation at the time. And so we got our seats, and we went to Mississippi Democratic Party and John Conyers and Willie Brown and that generation of freedom fighters and so...but I did not see for myself being involved politically as a politician. I was an organizer, a street organizer. In 1983, we were doing a radio show on Saturday morning and someone called in and said, “Jane Byrne is about to have a coronation, you guys should protest and boycott Chicago Fest.” I said, “You can’t do that.” I said, “After

they've got Stevie Wonder coming, and the O'Jay's and Odetta and free beer and popcorn and peanuts and hotdogs, you can't boycott that."

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My mind said that. My spirit said, "But if he's right, you can't be wrong." So we met here on a Wednesday, we said, "Enough is enough." And we begin to organize to boycott Chicago Fest. My job was to get the artists not to cross that picket line. Stevie Wonder took the leadership in that. He signed the contract: he defied the contract willing to take the hit. And—but while we were in that campaign to get Harold Washington elected as mayor, we heard that Ted Kennedy and Mondale were coming to Chicago to support Jane Byrne and Daley. No, this is a primary. I mean Jane Byrne and Daley over Harold? And, so, we send a telegram, a telegram if you will saying, "Please don't come in." They said in effect, "These are our friends. We have to come here." Well, what are we? We'd always seen them as our liberal allies in the process and so I said, "Somebody Black should run against him in the primary." And I asked... Jackson... said, "I would run, it should happen. But I've just finished my public service... economic institution." And they wouldn't do it. So, I kept raising the question and finally somebody said in our rural registration (inaudible). So, I got involved as a protest really, resisting how liberals were taking us for granted and dismissing us and marginalizing us in the process. And so one thing led to another.

01:04:19:19

Well, when we were fighting to desegregate schools, Ted Kennedy was vis a vis Ed Brooke. He was on the wrong side of the club, the wrong side of that struggle. It was the thing that liberals had assumed that we had some

limitations, and they didn't have to deal with us from a power point of view. I felt that we had the right to run and the reason to run and the capacity. Take our case to the next level and that's kind of why I got involved in '84. We learned a lot.

### **Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign**

01:05:00:10

JESSE JACKSON:

We determined with Maxine Waters and Dick Hatchett under the bus, Carl Stokes and Percy said that if we ran, we'd have to run on a ticket broad enough to be inclusive. A rainbow coalition, a multi-racial, multicultural coalition. It couldn't be narrowly conceived, and we were told, "Don't run in Iowa, Iowa's too White." you know. We get double digits in the Iowa, it shows that we are valid." So, we ran in Iowa, we ran out there milking cows and going to family farms. We learned a lot in Iowa. We went to New Hampshire, you know. You met a poor person in Mississippi—in New Hampshire as in Mississippi, cold and poor. We're building allies all along the way and then comes Super Tuesday. We had developed momentum, and so we began to win, and we won South Carolina and Louisiana and Mississippi. We began to feel the taste of victory. I remember one night when we were in New Hampshire...and one of the leaders said, "You've done pretty well so far, but you know, you might want to get a sense of foreign policy." He said, "If you don't want to be there..." you saw right, he was trying to patronize me. You need a sense in foreign policy. I said, "I look forward." He said—I said, "We can't look forward, slavery was a foreign policy." So I had a global view and

he had a nationalistic view. I looked at the world in a global sense: he looked at me in the racial limitations so we can do racial limitations and assumptions are in that same season and the headwinds of the press being dismissive of us and the violent threats. All of it was a big part of the '84 campaign.

**Racism during the 1984 campaign**

01:06:47:02

JESSE JACKSON:

Racism in the sense of the downright threats. I remember one time we were—I went to see Bill Cosby's mother who was sick in the hospital in LA. And I saw two guys crying embrace each other. After visiting Bill Cosby's mother, one time said, "Reverend, will you pray for my wife?" Said she's in a coma. I said, "Yes sir." "But she's Jewish." I said, "I won't pray for her, I'll pray with her." Went down to the room, "She's a big fan of yours." And she looked up and saw me and she never went back, she snapped out of it. It was miraculous, and yet New York Times had this—their Sunday story the day after the '84 campaign they're selling the story for example. And someone asked me at the end of the campaign how'd I feel, I said it was kind of like one day Jesse Jackson was out on a boat with the Pope, and we're talking religious talk and a strong wind blows the Pope's holy hat off... And he reached for it and couldn't get it, the pole couldn't get it. And so I walked on the water, I got it for ya, the headline is "Jesse Jackson Can't Swim." So no matter what we did at that time there were certain assumptions about our limitations. For the first time really, African American journalists on the campaign it was always

the case that you had Black journalists on these campaigns. So many of them—George Curry, many got their first shot at getting national campaigns in '84. We learned a lot—a lot of growing up while all the way around.

### **Shirley Chisholm's presidential campaign**

01:08:39:10

JESSE JACKSON:

Well, King was killed in '68. Was a big convention in 1971, a Black convention in Gary, Indiana. And Dick Hatchett and Carl Stokes and Percy... were discussing.....somebody... should consider running—someone should consider running. Shirley announced in New York she was... the women's movement. I tried to convince her to come to the Black convention: she wouldn't come to the convention, which was a big thing 'cause she didn't want to be seen as the black candidate but more a women's candidate. So I knew her as a candidate, as a congresswoman, a really brilliant woman with tremendous courage and so her run was a breakthrough and it laid the groundwork in substance for my run in '84, in '88 and laid the groundwork for '08.

### **Reactions to Dr. King's assassination**

01:09:33:07

JESSE JACKSON:

When Dr. King was killed, some reacted with applause. Some FBI agents out here just jumped on the desk and applauded in Atlanta, Georgia. They reported this. Some reacted with riots, others passed resolutions to name

streets after him. John Conyers, congressman at the time said they should make King a holiday. You looked at this, he was absurd. After all, Dr. King was 55% negative among Blacks because of the Vietnam War position and leaders attacking him broadside. 72% negative among Whites was reacting to what he stood for as racial justice, and so there was an ugly season of—and so John Conyers—every January 15<sup>th</sup> we go out by the Lincoln Memorial and protest. And at some point in time with the hostility that the Reagan represented related to our movement... Stevie Wonder captured the spirit of that protest, turned to a song, Happy Birthday Martin Luther King. And music adds meaning to the holiday. It took off and became a cultural phenomenon. So, some say it was kind of cheap of Reagan to do it as a gesture, but he did it because there was some talk about King holiday and... All that was a part of it... spirit of that time. Originally it was if you have a King holiday, it would be too expensive to have it... attack him—even to the grave they were attacking him and his morals, even into the grave they were attacking Dr. King. He didn't deserve it. We demanded it and it became a transcendent note and now of course we've gone from King protests to legislation to the holiday to the memorial in Washington, but there is this roots, really in his assassination and in the role that congress—congress played in making it legislative and then Stevie Wonder adding the cultural phenomenon. Music is so important to this because I remember when Dr. King was in his anti-war speeches meeting stiff resistance. I mean he was being attacked all over the place and churches half full, he couldn't have—get an audience. And Marvin Gaye did What's Going On? And, somehow, he gave meaning through music. So Marvin Gaye came to the anti-war protest, but Stevie Wonder came to the

King holiday with his music, empowered music taking it about to another level.

**Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign**

01:12:13:10

JESSE JACKSON:

Our base was Black churches and music and artists supported us and their support was meaningful to us. In '88, some expectations been built since '84. We could command presence on stage. I'm trying to figure out what two or three angles can I take that would give us a track of change. So, I said free Mandela. Neither party wanted to touch Mandela because America was allied with South Africa. South Africa was our ally and we saw the cape as the—in the Atlantic Ocean some together as a trade route we could trust with the Blacks of South Africa. Free Mandela became one of my rally cries. The drugs in the high schools, it was never seen as a not—not so relevant issue, it was. I would go to high schools and speak. 18-year-olds were eligible to register and vote and so we were getting votes out of the high schools. That became a big piece of our work. And we had laid the groundwork. In the Middle East we said let's talk as opposed to a no talk policy... they should talk. That was controversial but it was critical. And the day that Clinton signed the bill on the Palestinian state, I was there watching people cry but we had taken hits saying let's talk policy in the Middle East, Free Mandela, and the drug flow, a comprehensive healthcare plan, Medicaid for all—Medicare for all. We took these kinds of positions, which the press called liberal. They're really in the moral center. Free Mandela is not left, it's moral center. A two-state solution



where Palestinians and Israelis coexist is a moral center position really. Stopping the drug flow, bringing drugs in, guns in, jobs out. We have to break that cycle, you know.

### **Laying the groundwork for Obama**

01:14:16:21

JESSE JACKSON:

So, the position we took was we laid the groundwork. There was a certain readiness in '88 that didn't exist in '84. So we did well and then we beat Mondale and Gore I think in whatever, they were dismissive of that. We kept on growing, we kept on growing. And once we were in Michigan, they gave us the attention. It was—this thing was for real. It was clear to me—and we've got 1,200 delegates and 19 million dollars. If we had 400 million dollars we could have won the campaign in '88 really. But we had laid the groundwork for somebody in the future to come along to seize that stage and take this to the logical conclusion. I remember President Barack Obama one time when we were talking downtown, we'd be debating Hart and Mondale. And the press said I did well. They gave me high marks the next day. He said he saw the debate and said, "This thing can happen." And if—and I'm sowing seeds—some seeds at the at the rocks, some at the air. some that germinate, the seed was sown for him at Columbia University. It was worth it all. Jesus in the Parables -- you sow seeds, a rock, land, soil, and if that was a part of his inspiration, it's gratifying to me. Our struggle is built upon the landmarks of the time. I mean with the '54 decision, the legal decision, the one by Thurgood Marshall and... and that group laid the groundwork for Rosa Parks.

Rosa Parks was protesting the legal segregation, testing the '54 decision, which the boycott was won in '55: we won the legal decision in '56. Dr. King emerged out of that, so in some sense Dr. King's struggle for the right to vote in '65 had Dick Hatchett and Carl Stokes came out of that and so each generation's contribution lays the groundwork for the next generation, and it must be seized. I asked Mrs. Parks, "Mrs. Parks, why didn't you go to the back of the bus? You could've been hurt; you could've been thrown under the bus and brutalized." She said, "I wanted to go back. I thought about Emmitt Till. I couldn't go back." Emmitt Till, August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1955, lynched. Rosa Parks sits up front December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1955. August 28<sup>th</sup>, Dr. King's speech is in Washington, march on Washington. August 28, Barack Obama is declared the candidate in Denver Colorado. August 28<sup>th</sup> had the certain ring to me. A sense it just started ringing. And so, I look at the '54 decision, laid the predicate for the '64 civil rights act.....the predicate for the voting rights act in '65, predicate for the fair housing act. And so, you can almost follow—we live in our faith, we live under the law. The legal victories accumulated, and the result was this brilliant, ingenious politician.

### **Family friendship with the Obamas**

01:17:36:13

JESSE JACKSON:

Santita, my daughter and Michelle were close friends, and they studied together, they were kind of soul mates, and when she was dating Barack, they were talking girl talk together so--and in the household, Jesse, who became very close friends with President Barack Obama, said he's the guy to watch.

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He got something special. He has that special X-factor. And he did have an X-factor. He was working in some foundations downtown and some legal work downtown and he was organizing but he... early on as having the 'it' factor. I learned through my children, and I met him, and I take it as they did that he had the 'it' factor.

**Michelle Obama**

01:18:27:00

JESSE JACKSON:

She is such a strong and smart person. We've never had a first lady more qualified, more able, bigger contributor than Michelle Robinson Obama. Well, many people who did not know President Barack Obama, he did not know many people. After all, he grew up in Hawaii, not on the mainland. But people identify with Michelle, and she has the ability to speak. But in some sense that whole White House revolved around that family with like, killing the first-born babies in the Old Testament, Moses' mother figured out a way to get Moses and his sister into the King's household, into the Pharaoh's household. So Moses' mother raised Moses and his sister in the big house. So seeing Mrs. Robinson raise their children in the big house to me was quite biblical. It brought us lots of hope, lots of joy, lots of pleasure and no scandal. So there's something a little bit purifying about the children in that White House with their grandmother and their parents doing so well. They set the pace for a model of family leadership for all time.

**Obama's 1996 Senate campaign**

01:19:53:02

JESSE JACKSON:

He clearly had the capacity to reach beyond the limits, beyond one side of town, rural and urban and suburban. Like he had a rainbow vision in his mind's eye and of course so able as a writer and as a thinker. One time we were downtown at a peace rally -- anti-war. And Barack said, "I'm not against all wars." At a peace rally. Said, "The war to end slavery, to save the United—I would have been part of that war. The war with Nazi Germany, I would have been in that war." The fact he was thinking in that way at a peace rally saying I'm not against all wars, like what are you talking about? Because it's so anti-war, he said there are some wars you have to fight, ending slavery to save the union, you know, Nazi Germany was a war worth fighting. So he had that sense of audacity and vision.

### **Stages of the Civil Rights Movement**

01:21:04:13

JESSE JACKSON:

Andy Young came out of our circle and became a congressman and then U.N. Leader. And Walter Fauntroy came out of our organization so that in some sense politicians are the next step. You know, the four stages in our struggle, the four stages, at the first stage is to end legal slavery. The next stage was to end legal Jim Crow. 5,000 Blacks were lynched, in a sense of protection from terror. Third stage was access to voting--stage. Beyond voting, access to capitol, industry, and technology and deal flow. So, in the stage of political empowerment comes these possibilities of people coming out because if

you—if you can't use a public toilet, you're not discussing running for mayor. I mean, the day Dr. King gave the speech in Washington, the reason why it resonated in a certain kind of way, from Texas to Florida to Maryland we couldn't use a single public toilet. We had to go behind cans and alleys or behind trees and ask you not to look, basic indignity. And the women going behind trees said, "Don't look." Men using, "Don't look."

01:22:31:17

I mean it was humiliation. You kind of learned to drive the routes where you didn't stop at small restaurants. You stopped by friend's houses or churches or roadsides. It was that kind of navigating—navigating life. We couldn't use the toilet. Our money was counterfeit. You couldn't buy a room from Howard Johnsons; you couldn't rent a room at Holiday Inn. You couldn't sit at Woolworth's across the South. We lived in abject humility, and I dream of a day when this will not be. And... expanding from that dream, and so one can never be at that march talking about I want to be the mayor and you don't have the right to vote. You know, I want to be the congressman and don't have the right to vote. So that in the stage of political emancipation emerged a whole generation of young activists who had various levels of aspirations. 50 years ago it was a different--Dr. King never saw a cell phone, he never saw an African American man in Atlanta or New Orleans not to mention his staff member Andy Young voted into congress. He could not imagine 55 Blacks in the congress today, African Americans since is full of them and a US president, African American. All those things... in the 50 year span an explosion of opportunities, the possibilities in the last 50 years.

**Bobby Rush**

01:24:10:22

JESSE JACKSON:

I knew Bobby and when Bobby was a young panther. Panthers in the lineage of stop and frisk and driving while Black and Black lives matter. The Panthers were in that lineage. For young Blacks particularly against police brutality. And Bobby was a part of that, and his friend, Fred Hampton, was killed. They was trying to kill Bobby and his friend, Mark Clark. And Bobby was not home that night, and these friends were killed. He called me at two o'clock in the morning and said, "Reverend, I'm accused from the law, can I turn myself in?" So, we decided on meeting in a very public space we did. So, we became very tight. But to me it's not necessarily normal course after when Bobby ran against Charlie Hayes, a lifelong political labor leader. Remember though that Bobby shouldn't have—he ran, he won. That's politics, you know. So Barack running was his right to run and to learn the sphere. He lost but Bobby run—he ran. So, I think many of these—we get our stars from our scars. We have to be true enough to take these hits. A lot of them, the hits linger. You cannot play with pain for so long and play—and fully function. I think Barack did a good thing by running. He learned a lot. Then he ran for US Senate and then do it—the congress, and then the president. He was not a perpetual Bobby Rush candidate. It just happened one time.

**Obama's 2004 Senate election**

01:25:58:10

JESSE JACKSON:

Barack was a nexus, he was a connector, he was a bridge builder. He took the risk to see if Whites would follow somebody who made sense, and not limited based on race. He took the risk, it paid off for him. Of course, he began—he swept Cook County for the first time, and so his race was a magnificent race, it set the stage for many other races around the nation frankly.

### **Obama's 2004 DNC Speech**

01:26:26:15

JESSE JACKSON:

It was hard to describe. It was lots of joy to be watching him on the big stage. And—but watching him from my living room sitting down smoking a cigarette, talking the talk with my boys to become a US Senator, to hit the big stage. I knew he would do well because he had the right stuff, the 'it' factor. Barack is extremely intelligent, as a writer, a thinker, and he was just a stage away from greatness, and he got the stage and seized it and kept on steppin. During the 2004 speech, he talked about that America is not—it's red, white, and blue, America? He was aspirational; he was trying to make—to use that platform to make his case. That we cannot be oversensitive and insensitive to his navigation to get to the end zone. Sometimes he had to reverse the field. He's running backwards though. There's a lot of positioning in what he had to do. From the time that they tried to use Jeremiah Wright to defeat him, to Crowley and Bill Gates, to deny him a Supreme Court nominee, they never stopped trying to diminish him. Said every day was a day of negotiations and we who support him have to understand the navigation. I understand it a lot

because having run I know the subtleties involved. I remember I was running in Iowa in '84. We were packing schoolhouses. I was only coming because I was a novelty to them speaking and whatever. And two White guys came out and their grandchildren, they had the... Said, "Reverend?" Asked—she said, "Can we speak to him?" They said—I said, "Yes." The Reverend's here. These two guys must've been 60 with their grandchildren. They said, "We heard you tonight. We're not quite there yet, don't give up on us." Their grandchildren were there... 20 years later. I mean, you gotta look at my face, you make sense to me. We're not quite there yet. I mean, what he really said, "We cannot go to a caucus in our—and argue your case against our neighbors but don't give up." So, we always had that kind of mixed arrangement.

### **Endorsing Obama for the presidency**

01:29:13:20

JESSE JACKSON:

My son Jessie Jr. was co-chair, and so we immediately endorsed him for President because A., he was a live option. It was a long shot, an African American running, it was a long shot. He took the long shot, and I could never really have benefited the way I did from '84 and '88.....and that's putting him in that lineage of struggle and he had—the time was right, you know. He didn't start the struggle. He benefited from it. He didn't cause it, he is the result of it. 50 years of public accommodations and the right to vote and fair housing and women's organizations and women's rights, civil rights, gay rights, it's 50 years of that work resulting in '08. Barack lives six houses from where we are right now. He lives right around the corner. We have a



meeting—we've been meeting here every Saturday morning since 1966. Barack would come around almost every Saturday and speak. He was blood of my blood, flesh of my flesh, spirit of my spirit. He was ours. He belonged to us. To watch him grow, much to learn to pronounce his name. It was all a part of our growing up together and so to me it was a simple decision to support him.

### **Obama's response to the Jena Six case**

01:30:57:08

JESSE JACKSON:

We were sensitive to candidates who run who don't take into account the ethnic history of our people. Barack was sensitive however in his run to not get caught up in highly emotionally charged Black issues. He was—he had a bigger vision. I mean he wasn't insensitive, it just meant he had to project it differently. Let me give you an example. When he became president and this guy Crowley went to Dr. Gates house, arrested him in Boston, which was a terrible thing for Crowley to have done, Barack's behavior... is silly. The press acted as if he had done something as hideous as Trump's behavior. I mean, he said, "You know, why should we let every issue become a national issue?" The Jena Six was a big issue, Crowley and Gates was a big issue, but put these in perspective and let's move the big picture. So, I saw him as struggling to—struggling with moving the big picture and I wanted him to be careful of the fact that we were all aware of the fact that Blacks should not be sacrificed in coalition politics. If that's the way it runs, they want to prove they're tough, either attack Blacks or ignore Blacks I mean, so—Ted Kennedy, his

traditional... he challenges Ed Brooke and Ed Brooke loses. You know, Biden and the '94 crime bill. Tough on crime. And always some reason to use Blacks as a scapegoat. So I was sensitive to that and I went to see with the Jena Six and... one of the young men is a lawyer now by the way, but the stakes are too high to try to pin him down to any issue and any demonstration... we must see Barack out of a... doorknob through a keyhole...see the keyhole you see—he's a big picture guy.

**Hurricane Katrina**

01:33:16:20

JESSE JACKSON:

I was in Venezuela with Hugo Chavez trying to expand that relationship. When he saw the hurricane, he said, "Reverend, this is the big one." It was going towards to New Orleans. Because of that, his oil company got to help people before American government, Chavez did. And so people were there on the rooftops, and the press is saying they're refugees. They're citizens. I mean, the press was saying—it's where the press comes in—they're not refugees, they're citizens. And so—and the fact that George Bush flew over it a bit late.....and the president's indifference to it, it seemed amplified the fact this was how we treat Black people after... on the slave ports as well. So, the treatment of Black people in crisis is epitomized in a big way by Katrina.

**Reverend Jeremiah Wright**

01:34:22:19

JESSE JACKSON:

A brilliant preacher. Many of our first movements toward... preacher Reverend Wright. When AIDS became an issue, his church's leadership on fighting AIDS. When Magic Johnson said he had HIV/AIDS, and other NBA players ran from him because they was afraid of AIDS, Reverend Wright was around on that issue. And free South Africa. He had signs outside his church, free South Africa: he was on top of the issue. And, so, Barack was a member of that church. Used to take his tapes in school and learn from his tapes. A freethinking, freewheeling Black preacher. And I think that unfortunately in the political campaign, people are always looking for something to exaggerate, you know. He'd say, "God damn America." He was saying God, condemn America. He was saying you will reap what you sow. I mean, Jefferson put it—Jefferson said, "I think about God as just enslaved by... for my country." That was his way of saying that. Dr. King said America was the most violent nation on earth, which is his way of saying that. And Reverend Jeremiah Wright, his way of saying it was America should be condemned, should be damned for its behavior towards other people. And so, they tried to make him the boogiemán but that's not fair. He's a solid preacher, a good guy. I have a great appreciation for Reverend Jeremiah Wright, his ministry and how he has been reduced to a soundbite, he is much more than that. President Barack learned progressive pastor and church from Reverend Wright, he was a member of that church. He said when he was at Harvard he would get Reverend Wright's tapes and play them in the dormitory. Reverend Wright was that kind of enlightened, sophisticated, progressive, real trained minister, a cutting-edge minister. I look back at some of the things Dr. King said, if he said them in the middle of a campaign, they'd have

torn him apart. Dr. King, his vision, an ounce of racism and racist and bigotry. His analysis, America is the most violent nation on earth: the day Dr. King said that in the middle of a campaign would have been slaughterable. But Jeremiah Wright deserves a lot of respect. I understand what they were doing because they were trying to bring him down... trying to weld Reverend Wright onto him. It was a difficult decision for him to make, difficult decision for him to make. Distance himself from his pastor is a lot to do. He made a political choice. Even when I was running they tried to weld Farrakhan onto me. We were friends but to make him my... make him more than what he was to me was unfair. But they were looking for something and in the case of Reverend Wright they found something. He is--many people loved him. In many ways to say no matter what the press says, you're our guy. I'm in that school of thought, he's my guy.

**Bill Clinton's comments about Obama's primary win in South Carolina**

01:37:59:09

JESSE JACKSON:

I was in India giving a Gandhi lecture, got a call from President Barack Obama, at that time candidate saying that, "They're trying to race bait to separate us." That Bill Clinton is trying to say that even if you won this, it's not an important deal: it's no big deal. And I said you know, "Be composed don't overreact." We talked about it, we had prayer. Ten minutes later I got a call from Bill Clinton and his congressman from New York. Bill Clinton didn't mean this. That's not what Bill Clinton meant. So, they were—it was—and we

did win South Carolina and he was trying—he was trying to diminish Barack’s strength in South Carolina. It didn’t work but he certainly tried it.

**Jackson’s “hot” mic comment against Obama**

01:38:59:10

JESSE JACKSON:

I regret it so much because I wish I could have served him more, frankly, more directly. I supported him indirectly but not as a member of his inner circle. He had spoken in a church on Sunday and dealing with Black men’s behavior as opposed to policies that lend itself to our... We work the hardest, we make the least money. We live in the—we’re processed differently. We work harder, make less, live under stress and don’t live as long. I mean the Black men—we fill up the jails and the like. So, they give a speech challenging Black men’s behavior .....cut me kind of deep. And it was alright but the next one I was on a radio show downtown and two right wing radio shows said, “President Barack said this about you guys yesterday.” And so, I should have been able to shake it off easier. I was talking to a friend and I said, “Well, we would take Barack to the woodshed on this one.” That was not meant to be a lasting philosophical, political position. I mean after all in politics you agree to disagree. And I never stopped supporting, supporting him and he had to do what he had to do. I supported him. I’m sure Reverend Wright voted for him too. It was a very sensitive, sensitive season.

**Election night 2008**

01:40:39:05

JESSE JACKSON:

It was the moment the movement and the mission all came together. When I looked at him walk on that stage, and we were near Johnson Publishing Company where we had been tear gassed in '68. Dr. King was killed in '68. On that spot where we were dodging canisters of tear gas, we stood in the wide-open air... Barack Obama. Man, to my mind came the martyrs. I wish Dr. King, Rosa Parks- I wish Dr. King, Medgar Evers, for a moment just God gave them 15 seconds to look at their work. This is their work: he's the result of our work. And so, I thought about the martyrs, those who marched on the bridge in Selma that Sunday who couldn't afford to come to Chicago who may have been injured. After all, our warriors in America fighting for civil rights in America, we're soldiers too. Fighting for freedom in America is risky, it's very dangerous. And those who made it possible were not there. Those were very high price—I was sitting in a very high-priced section. And so, it was the moment, the movement and it came upon me and I was trying to hide behind someone's head and the tears being... was such a movement of joy.

01:42:26:08

The prayers of the righteous had been fulfilled. Scripture we often use, "I once was young, now I'm old and I've never seen the righteous forsaken... I once was young and now I'm old, I've never seen the righteous forsaken. Nor his seed beg for bread." The righteous had come to the front. I mean after '08, it's 53 years from '65. In 1965 was the right to vote—now in '65 blacks couldn't vote, we couldn't serve on juries in the south, 18-year-olds couldn't vote. You couldn't vote by... you couldn't vote on college campuses. So, in

many ways August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1965, a new America—a new majority was born that night. It was not just for Blacks only: a new America was born that night. So, it matured. The flower blossomed in '08. He had the right stuff. Of course, maybe in one country that was the rules. When he won, the whole world—hope was the word... of the globe. , I mean people said, “Can a Black run Prime Minister in Britain?” Blacks became a Supreme Court justice in France. Blacks in small towns in Europe became council people and all that. It was a transformative moment, you see. Barack is one of the five great presidents of our country. Not just what he did but the headwind he did it against. That’s what people don’t take into account. If I ran the race, then I ran a record-breaking race, they say, what was the wind factor? If it was a tailwind, they’ll say he’s not valid because tailwind pushed him. Headwinds don’t matter, the tailwinds do. When Barack ran and won, he carried the ball for a touchdown. There were many blockers along the way, but he took it in for the touchdown and what a race he won. He was smart, he played a lot of forces together, the coalition came together, and he won. When he won, we all won.

### **How Obama won in '08**

01:44:50:20

JESSE JACKSON:

If you run on the rules—I ran on the winner take all. Winner take all is if I get 48 and somebody else gets 49, they take all the delegates. '08, Hillary won, and then she began to surge. She won California. Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey. In '84 rules, she’d have been the winner. But we democratized democracy with proportionality. So, he lost, he kept winning.

And so, we were part—it was the rules of '88, a big factor in '08. Many attribute his winning to social media and all that. He had social media but he still lost California, Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. Social media notwithstanding, without proportionality, he couldn't have won. So, the '88 campaign was the factor in the rules that made that victory possible that night. But my job was frankly on the martyrs who—I felt I was representing them. '84, Fannie Lou Hayman, Mississippi Democratic Party. '64 in Atlantic City, New Jersey, those who were marching in the—for the poor people's campaign and Dr. King on the balcony in Memphis. All that stuff came upon me, it just kind of—it was a great moment of high...but not just me, for the whole world.

### **Trump and racial opposition to Obama**

01:46:25:09

JESSE JACKSON:

Again, it goes with the territory. His way of name-calling, after all Barack—Trump attacked a journalist who was physically challenged and mocked him. He said a Mexican judge cannot dispense justice. He equated the Nazi's in Charlottesville with the freedom fighters so that it didn't—his being attacked in that way by Trump unfortunately was part of the territory. He had by far the biggest gathering for a nomination for a... in Washington. While the throngs by the media and the whole world was watching, they met and said, "We'll fight him, we'll stop him, we'll just say no." And the racist campaign against Barack was not subtle to me. I think sometimes we—he missed some of the right fights. For example, his signature legislation was affordable



healthcare. It's not affordability—Obamacare. Well, that was racializing it and the media—Obamacare and Obama didn't fight as racial, he was trying to avoid racial fights, frankly. That was a fight worth fighting. I talked to people last year in South Carolina for the campaign. My mother was in the hospital dying, she was very sick. I met— I was going to the hospital quite often. A woman came, she said, "Reverend, my father's upstairs, you see he's quite sick, and my husband has an amputation. Will you pray for them?" I said, "I'll be glad—I won't only pray for them, I'll go upstairs and visit them." She said, "No, no, don't visit them, just pray for them." She didn't want me close to them. I said, "Well, how're you paying for this?" She said, "Well you know, Jesse, let me tell you. I'm with—before we had healthcare and no Obamacare, full healthcare. Now we're on full healthcare not Obamacare without the eggs." America was—they racialized—they didn't make the Voting Rights Act the Johnson Act or the King Act. It was the Voting Rights Act of '65. The Affordable Healthcare Act was a signature piece that 26 million people, many of whom would have died got health care for the first time, that's a big deal. It was racialized. He came in office, 800,000 jobs were being lost per month before. When he came in, net gain jobs every month for eight years. Big deal. Or when the automotive industry collapsed, he took the risk in making a loan, it paid off. They paid it back, we're number one again in the world. The climate act, the nuclear act in Paris. I mean, against the odds, even putting up a civilized, decent Supreme Court Justice, and they sat on it, just they killed the courts. So the racial attacks on Barack were just that. It was he ran against this tremendous headwind of violent—of people. I mean, he faced every day the most threats of anybody who ever ran, the most threats while

he was the president, the most resistance to the good sense—I mean, after all, a nuclear deal—anti-nuclear deal with Iran and Obama was a big deal. The climate change conference was a big deal, American leadership: build our economy out of a real deep hole. Eight years in the plus zone, a big deal. No shame. No embarrassment. The whole world took lead from our president. We should never forget that. You become immune to certain attacks. You have to develop a tough skin, that's why you cannot be tender-headed and... to have a tough mind and a tender heart to run. And part of a Black man living in America is to be able to cope with racial attacks. Some suddenly are overt, and Barack had learned to cope with them. And most of us who've survived have.

### **Obama's challenges navigating race**

01:51:21:05

JESSE JACKSON:

Yes, it was hard because every time you did it, the press would jump in and amplify it as if it were speaking off base, and he's speaking on base. The things Bill Clinton can say Barack can't say as well. If—if Barack had put forth the Johnson plan for the war on poverty... and democrats should not miss this lesson. Lyndon Johnson, if he had gone to Harlem with Adam Powell to announce the war on poverty and held a Black baby in his arms, he'd be dismissed as just liberal. He opened up the war on poverty in Appalachia, Universal Heart of Athens. He Whitened the face of poverty. He... with the race bait. He said poverty, the poorest people in America are hardworking Appalachian coal miners and chemical workers. He was that

smart, Lyndon Johnson. The war on poverty was open... by particular Appalachians but Lyndon opened up the war on poverty in Athens, and he traveled for a couple days—I tried to get Kerry and Hillary to do it, really, because the biggest body of poor people in America are Whites in Appalachia. Hard workers, risk workers, chemical workers, coal miners, live in tough terrain, and yet they matter so much. Their needs, their human needs matter so very much. And so, Barack was sensitive to those people, but he took everything that was like the—you ask Barack, you know, it's him. I mean, I'm convinced that we lost a lot of legislative seats under Barack... campaign. It wasn't based upon his actions. They weren't anti-Barack based upon the climate change agreement in Paris. They weren't anti-Barack based upon the nuclear deal in Athens... it wasn't based upon bailing out the automotive industry. It wasn't based upon reconnecting Cuba to our hemisphere, it wasn't based upon his bailing out the banks, and they become solvent again. So, objectively, it wasn't based upon 26 million Americans, more White than Black getting healthcare for the first time. It wasn't based upon that. So, if you look at their resistance of him.....the subtext is race in a big way.

### **Relationship between Obama and Trump presidencies**

01:54:08:18

JESSE JACKSON:

It laid raw many faces, many wounds about race that race take over. The fact of the matter is most people in America are White familiar. Poor folk—the gap—used to be a hard zone gap, Black and White. Nastiness, a very... area...

Even Trump, the top 1% got a trillion-dollar deal. If you look at the Trump base, Trump has four bases. Those at the rallies were in the Make America Great Again, they get race baited. The trillion-dollar tax cut for the very wealthy, that's his base. The fox news/internet crowd... congress. They will take anything including treason. See, he has captured a lot of America, and President Barack unfortunately triggered some of those fears. It had nothing to do with his—just his being. Why would anyone want to kill Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.? Unarmed nonviolent preacher preaching love. Shot him down in cold blood. So, when you're in the lies, you are guilty to be begot by the liar.

### **Keeping hope alive during the Trump presidency**

01:55:53:01

JESSE JACKSON:

What I'm amazed at is that in spite of Trump's losing and winning. He lost by three million votes. So, the Electoral College is a whole slave legislation. Don't stop. Jones' victory in Alabama in 2017. Don't give up. Black people rose up in a big way in Alabama. Don't give up. Keep the hope alive. The swimming—the swimming from London to France, the 30-mile English Channel, it's not the 30-mile length, it's the undercurrent that makes the difference. So, the undercurrent of justice, we live in our faith, we live in our faith, we live under the law, but people of faith keep fighting and never give up. It gets dark sometimes but the morning cometh. When the morning cometh, the light—the darkness cannot prevail. I think about Trump sometimes, think about Dr. King used to talk about going around a mountain. You go around...You see

you're walking; you see the city. If you're walking and you don't see the star, you keep walking. ...you see more of it because you're higher. So, this is a dark season, and we must—we'll work in the darkness like we'll work in the light. We can work at night. We can vote at night, we can study at night, we can think at night, we can pray at night. So, it's nighttime in America. But the morning cometh.

**We're a better nation today**

01:57:33:06

JESSE JACKSON:

You have to look at the brighter side. You know, when I see Clemson playing Alabama in the big football game, I grew up 30 miles—I couldn't apply to Clemson when I graduated high school in '59. I began with them next year with further protection. I couldn't apply there. Alabama couldn't recruit me and my generation of ball players. Now I see Alabama playing Clemson in the big football game I see... banning being overcome. Black quarterback at Clemson, top NFL black quarter—quarterbacks are now Black. Lamar Jackson and Mahomes and Watson, Cam Newton. When I was—on a given Sunday, I notice that when I see these athletic Whites and Blacks, Alabama plays LSU, seeing that color in that uniform, color, our complexion, I see growth. I was in there when Jones run and won in Alabama. I was close to—did he win Tuscaloosa when he was in Alabama. He won that county. So, all of a sudden, his Mercedes-Benz is there. And he also won the county down where Auburn is, where... So, one sees these breakthroughs of light. I'm not gonna let these episodes of darkness and meanness distract me from the

victories that we've realized... is our number one in... production. Walls came down. When Carolina plays the Atlanta Falcons, the walls come down. You couldn't have the Dallas Cowboys or Houston Texans behind the curtain: they couldn't play together, couldn't sit together. Walls are down. We are a new and better America no matter how much stuff Trump puts in the game, we're a better America 50 years later. I said about Black pilot or female pilot fly me to California, LA to New York. It's new. I remember when... what's the name... Diane Carroll.....was in a TV movie and she had a White guy kiss, she had nothing to lose. Now I see Whites and Blacks in commercials in line to be together advertising something. There will become a certain amount of race shock that—we're almost shocked when the subject of race manifests itself again. But we are a better nation 50 years later.

### **Obama's legacy**

02:00:26:03

JESSE JACKSON:

First African American president. First African American president, he'll be remembered for that. He brought intellect and stability to the white house. All glory and no shame to the white house. A dash of hope, never despair he brought to the white house. A lot to remember about Obama's season. And in some sense, what Trump has done in contrast adds more light to the legacy of Obama. We wish that today we would have the president who was not caught up in corruption, abuse of power, name-calling and foolishness every day. Move along for the day that we have a Barack with his sense of dignity

and poise and cool under pressure, his demeanor. We long for that day, and we're gonna get it, we'll get it again but it's be tough.

END TC: 02:01:33:13