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The Axe Files - Ep. 167: Rahm Emanuel

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Axelrod: [00:00:18] I've known Rahm Emanuel since he was a 22 year old kid. Thinking back to those days, he was relentlessly driven, pugnacious, very competent. That's been thirty five years, since then he's been a member of Congress, in the leadership of Congress, the White House Chief of Staff, and the mayor of Chicago. And today he is relentlessly driven, pugnacious, and competent. Plainspoken and blunt as ever. He's seen a lot of history, been a part a lot of history, and has a few thoughts for our current president. And because we're dealing with some timely issues, we're posting this the day after this conversation and it will run for the next 10 days. We'll be back on August 28.

Axelrod: [00:01:07] Good to be with you, my old buddy Rahm Emanuel. You know everybody knows the Emanuel boys. You, your brother Ari, who's the mogul-- Hollywood mogul, your brother Zeke--

Emanuel: [00:01:24] Yeah, I had a lengthy conversation today with Ari for 12 seconds.

Axelrod: [00:01:29] Your brother Zeke who is a world class bioethicist. And you're all, I would say, high strung people and it makes one wonder what the hell happened in your home that caused you to be this way.

Emanuel: [00:01:46] Our Wheaties box was mistreated. It had extra radiation treatment. No, I don't. First of all, to normalize it if I can. I would say you know my dad was an immigrant from Israel. I think that's--I think being steeped in the immigrant culture not only my father, but also my grandfather on my mother's side--I think that sense that you had to make something of your life here in the United States because a lot of people never made it here from our families. And I think I told you this story and I've said it before, but you know in our family room there was a picture of my grandmother, her two--my two great aunts, and their purse that carried the passports and on either side of that was black and white photos on my mother's side of the family and my father's side of the family of relatives who never made it to America. And there was my--my parents were very clear. I mean it was subtle. These people never made it. You're here, you have an obligation, so that drives you crazy.

Axelrod: [00:02:43] Now your mother--your dad was a pediatrician and your mother has a rich history that--

Emanuel: [00:02:50] In the Civils Rights Movement.

Axelrod: [00:02:50] I think a lot of people don't know in the Civil Rights Movement. Talk about that.

Emanuel: [00:02:54] So there was--that's one piece--the other thing, I would say is my parents were adamant about family dinners and you had to come prepared ready to argue and that could also make you a little crazy. I mean at five years old having current event discussions is a little much.

Axelrod: [00:03:07] Yeah we'll get back. I want to get back to that. But I didn't want to lose the thread of your mom. We will come back to the crazy achiever thing.

Emanuel: [00:03:15] My mother in late 50s, early 60s is running CORE in Chicago, at the leadership of Core--Congress on Racial Equality--did the open housing integration in Chicago and did also the integration of Chicago beaches which were once segregated. And she was steeped early before it became vogue in the civil rights movement. And not just--and I'm not saying other people weren't also steeped in it--but before it became, in the latter half of the 60s but in the late 50s and 60s, intimately

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involved in it and in pushing equality for all the races and was a big voice and used to take us off to marches all the time. And that was her. And I say this sometimes because there's one anecdote I'll give: my grandfather and grandmother are over for Sabbath dinner, and my grandfather who is a big giant. You would look at me, but he was 6'5" of a boxer. They're having an argument in 1967 about Henry--Wallace. I mean to the point that--

Axelrod: [00:04:30] Henry Wallace or George Wallace?

Emanuel: [00:04:33] Well, no. It was Henry Wallace, it was 20 years later, my grandfather was furious that Henry Wallace broke from the Democrat Party. My mother was supporting Henry Wallace break from it, but then 20 years later--

Axelrod: [00:04:46] Still arguing about it, huh?

Emanuel: [00:04:46] [cross talk] And it's still unresolved whether Henry Wallace was right to break. But, that was our home and my mother's history was very much about our responsibility for those who are either less privileged or for those who are locked out from America to make sure that, especially on the civil rights, that we had a responsibility and the bond that existed between the Jewish community and Jewish leadership [unclear].

Axelrod: [00:05:12] So, your mother was a civil rights activist. Your father was a Jewish immigrant. In that context, what was your reaction to what happened in Charlottesville and the president's reaction to it?

Emanuel: [00:05:30] This is in the line of things, David, that I never thought of the president of the United States would ever ever cross. The idea that white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and KKK members think they have a friend in the White House. I mean, I'm not a person that's usually left speechless, but I'm really close. I've never--it's frightening to me, they think they have a friend in the White House. Something that is a boundary regardless of how conservatives quote right--right--right wing you are--even George--George Bush disassociated himself from David Duke when David Duke said I'm going to become a Republican. This is unacceptable, is an [unclear] expression of our values. And I got to say on it--I'm going to say this and I say this has Rahm Israel Emanuel--I want to know what the Jewish members of his administration are thinking. What you--what are you--at what point does your common decency and values get crossed? I always said to everybody that worked with me in the White House, though there may be a point where a president makes a decision you decided the job is not worth your values. And I'm sorry, if you're Jewish in the history associated with Nazis and you--and this is going on where neo-Nazis find a comfort--and I think what's happening there's other issues as it relates to what's going on in Charlottesville that's happening in the country today that you could dissect politically. But a president of the United States has a bully pulpit, that bully pulpit is to speak to our American values and he failed and he failed the bully pulpit, he failed us, and he failed the job of being a president of United States. The truth of the matter is when he came out and condemned the racial bigotry espoused by those in Charlottesville that was written for him.

Axelrod: [00:07:26] Yeah.

Emanuel: [00:07:27] What he said the other day in the--

Axelrod: [00:07:29] Now I said that on the TV was that it looked like a hostage video.

Emanuel: [00:07:33] Well, I sometimes joke it looked like the American soldier in the North Korean prisons, you know blinking a lot. What he said the other day is what he felt. The other thing is what somebody else--the words they put to him. Those are his own words. And I'm just--I'm sorry: it is at every

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level fundamentally wrong and we can't--I don't want to whitewash history we've had presidents who have had different views as relates to American Indians different views as it relates to African-American slavery etc. But we're in a different time, a more modern time. We have as a journey as a country we were in a different place. He has turned his back and turned to trying to turn the clock back on America to a point it had walked away from. And it's wrong at every level.

Axelrod: [00:08:22] Let me get back to your--your story.

Emanuel: [00:08:25] Yeah.

Axelrod: [00:08:25] So, the--the in terms of the crazy achiever.

Emanuel: [00:08:29] Yeah.

Axelrod: [00:08:30] There was this--there was this expectation that you guys all felt: had to get good grades, had to perform.

Emanuel: [00:08:37] If you did not perform at the best, you were a--you know the Yiddish word "shanda," the word embarrassment to the family. And so it was inculcated from the days we were being weaned that this is what is expected of you and you have a responsibility and it's expected. And if you did not do it, you were an embarrassment to the family of what was expected of you. And I mean all of us were also encouraged you could do whatever we we all pick different fields but you had a responsibility that you couldn't be good at it--you had to be great at.

Axelrod: [00:09:13] The field you picked originally was not this--it was dance! How did that all happen?

Emanuel: [00:09:21] Well, my mom--first of all I was playing soccer.

Axelrod: [00:09:25] I always, by the way, said that's where you learned how to kick people in the groin. But that's a different question.

Emanuel: [00:09:29] You know, that's really--was--gratuitous.

Axelrod: [00:09:30] It was.

Emanuel: [00:09:31] You know we were getting along really well.

Axelrod: [00:09:32] So early in the podcast for that.

Emanuel: [00:09:35] We were--I was beginning to like you again, David. No, I was playing soccer and I [unclear]--after the soccer season which ends you know depending how far you go in state, ended November, late fall. And I wanted to prove my soccer game for the spring and my mother recommended ballet. Now, my mother used to be a dancer. Look at me: I'm 5' 8", if I stretch on my tippy toes. She is 5'11". When she was dancing ballet, you were under the Balanchine era, which was not that image.

Axelrod: [00:10:03] Right.

[00:10:03] It's still not that image. So let me say that. I loved--ended up liking ballet and I realized that I was going to be better at ballet than at soccer. And so I started to dance more seriously. And then when I came to college, I had a--very late in life for a dancer--but I had a chance at the Joffrey School which I did not take.

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Axelrod: [00:10:26] And you went--but you did go to Sarah Lawrence College which was until recently, before your arrival, was like an all girls school right?

Emanuel: [00:10:35] Yeah, it was all girls school. And I think about three to four years before I arrived started to allow men/boys.

Axelrod: [00:10:42] And did you go there to dance? I mean did they have a dance program?

Emanuel: [00:10:44] Well here's what I did. I convinced my mother, who was desperate.

Axelrod: [00:10:47] Or did you think you'd have a better chance to make the soccer team?

Emanuel: [00:10:51] No, I convinced myself and I'd have a better chance of getting a date. My mother--I convinced my mother, I wanted to go to a school that had a strong dance program because I wasn't sure I want to commit to dance. It was a big argument. She said yes--the parent, my parents pulled out of Lin Dorm driveway and I threw the ballet shoes against the wall and I dent. I dropped ballet. I graduate and I end up picking up ballet and dancing--and dancing at the Hubbard Street here at Joel Hall and I dance all the way until Zachariah is born at--when we were in the White House.

Axelrod: [00:11:27] When you left Sarah Lawrence, you got into politics.

Emanuel: [00:11:34] My last year at Sarah Lawrence, between my--pickup, I work on a campaign. I worked for Common Cause--I end up picking up--and working on a campaign from somebody I met there. Interrupted my senior year, so I graduate in December. It's not the normal's season because I took a semester off to work on a campaign. When I graduated, I worked for Illinois Public Action Council here in Chicago working on utility rates and other kind of consumer issues. And that's why I started my career back here in Chicago.

Axelrod: [00:12:04] Now tell the world who Ron Madison is.

Emanuel: [00:12:08] . . . Do we need to do this?

Axelrod: [00:12:11] Just tell everybody.

Emanuel: [00:12:13] How do you remember that?

Axelrod: [00:12:15] It's my job.

Emanuel: [00:12:16] Did one of these little minions around here find this?

Axelrod: [00:12:19] No, this was my--this was tucked away in the recesses of my own my mind, but I love the story.

Emanuel: [00:12:23] So my campaign is down in Springfield, Illinois for David Robinson against Paul Findley. And Mike Curran who one day becomes a state rep--no longer a state rep--says that we can't have a guy named Rahm Israel Emanuel work on the campaign. Now remember--

Axelrod: [00:12:38] In Central Illinois.

Emanuel: [00:12:38] In Central Illinois in 1980. We have to come up with a new name. We think he should

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be called "Ron Madison," not Rahm Emmanuel. And I said I said I'm not changing my name. And he said we don't want to change your name, just introduce yourself as Ron Madison. And I think it lasted about 24 to 48 hours. And I said I'm out here, this is what I got to do. But for a 48 hour period, Rahm Emanuel was Ron Madison.

Axelrod: [00:13:02] And--what about the experience--

Emanuel: [00:13:02] I can't believe you remember. I have not--

Axelrod: [00:13:03] Well I think you worked with David Wilhelm in that race, who became a big part of your life.

Emanuel: [00:13:12] David Wilhelm and Forrest Claypoole.

Axelrod: [00:13:14] Yes. Who's now the--

Emanuel: [00:13:14] Yes.

Axelrod: [00:13:15] Yes. Who's now the CEO of the Chicago public schools. I met you in 1982 when you were working for the Illinois Public Action Council. I often tell the story about you. You wanted me to write a piece about the role that they played in electing a--the first Democrat in 150 years or something in [crosstalk] Western Illinois and then--and in order to escape from you, blessedly, my wife agreed to go into labor. So, we go into the hospital and somehow you track me down into the recovery room to ask when I'll be back at work.

Emanuel: [00:13:51] You know what you never said about that story?

Axelrod: [00:13:52] What?

Emanuel: [00:13:53] You--You took the phone call.

Axelrod: [00:13:56] Well I didn't know who was on the line.

Emanuel: [00:13:56] No no, wait. No no. I get blamed.

Axelrod: [00:14:01] I thought it might be a relative.

Emanuel: [00:14:02] I get blamed--I never took any phone calls when my wife was in labor for three children--

Axelrod: [00:14:06] Because you know why? Because they knew enough to remove the phone. But, but then I saw--I met you again. I mean we kept in touch, but I met you again two years later when I quit the Chicago Tribune and I went to work for Paul Simon who was a congressman running for the U.S. Senate. And I walked in, I think you were shaking down a captain of industry on the phone for a contribution for Simon when I came in. No need to comment on that. But you were a part, part of field operative and part fund raiser. And throughout your career that was--you know, you were very good at the fund raising piece, but you also were involved in the political piece.

Emanuel: [00:14:51] Correct.

Axelrod: [00:14:51] Did you prefer one or the other?

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Emanuel: [00:14:54] You know I think, I see the fundraising. There's no campaign without it. It's not my desire to always do it. I don't want to do it. But I'm OK. I'm obviously good at it, but it's not what I identify. I say that by--you know in the '92 election for Bill Clinton for president, after I got in the fundraising all set, Wilhelm and I actually agreed that I would set up the state by state, it was the first time a presidential had actual state by state where we did for Ohio had its own TV team, its own polling team, its own manager, and its own direct mail team. And we did that. And I organized a team, so I did the politics then. That was always--

Axelrod: [00:15:35] Even as you were doing the fundraising.

Emanuel: [00:15:37] Yeah, but I had the fundraising kind of an automatic by then, but--so I'll do it. But I--if you--and I know it's important and if other people won't do and if you believe in what you're doing, whether it's Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, or for my own campaign--I'll do it. But the preference also is then to be involved intimately in politics.

Axelrod: [00:15:54] You went out to the Simon campaign to the DCCC.

Emanuel: [00:15:58] Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

Axelrod: [00:16:00] And first, you were like a regional director.

Emanuel: [00:16:04] I set up the political system for regional.

Axelrod: [00:16:07] Yeah.

Emanuel: [00:16:07] And I then took the Midwest position. I was the first one hired, set up the model, and took the Midwest position.

Axelrod: [00:16:13] And that was your first taste of candidate recruitment and development and.

Emanuel: [00:16:18] Exactly.

Axelrod: [00:16:19] And then two years later, you were the political director?

Emanuel: [00:16:22] National political director.

Axelrod: [00:16:24] Which is when the famous dead fish story happened. You and I were both involved. Why don't you quickly tell that story because I--I can't do a podcast without asking you about sending someone a dead fish.

Emanuel: [00:16:35] Let me be clear that wasn't by me, that was by Ron Madison.

Axelrod: [00:16:38] Yes, exactly.

Emanuel: [00:16:41] So we had a very important race in 1988 to fill Jack Kemp's open seat and it was not just a win. If you won it, you were taking Jack Kemp, who was the darling of the Republican Party.

Axelrod: [00:16:53] Up in Buffalo, New York.

Emanuel: [00:16:54] Yeah, David Schwartz. A pollster by the name of Alan Seacrest--We were down 30,

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it's a Republican seat. We had close to 12 points. If I'm not mistaken--

Axelrod: [00:17:06] Thanks to superior media by the media consultants.

Emanuel: [00:17:09] I can't remember the media consultants, if anybody remembers that. Please do some research on that. That happens. And David convinces--David Schwartz convinces his spouse that if he gets within single digits, they'll take a second mortgage. Five straight polls, we've closed the margin down. We go in the field, we're at 11, and all of a sudden we jump up to being down 20. And nothing had changed, in fact, we had a add on by some unknown media guy that was really unbelievable on environmental policy, on a dump, and we found out the manager went back realized that the area they polled was the adjacent congressional district, not the congressional district of the campiagn.

Axelrod: [00:17:52] It was a polling error.

Emanuel: [00:17:54] Yes. And so, I got angry. We got the--by the time we then got the media back up we went dark for three days, about 10 days out. Once we got back up on the air, the race was out of control, out of our reach and we lost by I think--

Axelrod: [00:18:07] Five--five point, six points.

Emanuel: [00:18:08] And had we not gone off, I think we all convinced ourselves we would either have--it would've been much closer.

Axelrod: [00:18:13] So as a young man, not as mature as you are now.

Emanuel: [00:18:17] I was so angry. One of my staff members named Joseph Heimer found a service that you could send dead fish. So not only did I send the dead fish, I then sent it with a note "Thanks for an awful year. Love, Rahm Emanuel." And then it was signed by others, let me say that. He was on vacation after the election, so was left on his desk for two weeks. When he came back from vacation, he opened the box of a dead fish that had been left in the office.

Axelrod: [00:18:50] So you achieve the desired effect?

Emanuel: [00:18:53] He did in, its full aroma. And then he wrote me an infamous two page single page note that campaign--in the magazine campaign at elections wrote and it became an infamous story of my growth and maturity.

Axelrod: [00:19:07] So you came back to Chicago when you were involved in the Richard Daley campaign, the first campaign the city was on--

Emanuel: [00:19:14] Yes.

Axelrod: [00:19:15] Tender hooks and very divided.

Emanuel: [00:19:18] It was called then is people you know, "Beirut on the Lake." And, I think, and I want to say this--for on behalf--I mean all people when you're done people say good things, bad things. But, people don't really fully appreciate what Rich did from the tenure of 1989 to the time he left then in healing those wounds. And he should get credit for that. It's a big accomplishment and not easy.

Axelrod: [00:19:44] There was a couple of decades between that experience and when you came back as Mayor. Did you learn stuff about the city in that campaign that was useful to you later and about city

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politics?

Emanuel: [00:19:58] Well there's always--first of all, the city is the same and different today . . .and it's both. I mean it is Chicago so there's a--as I described it then, Chicago is a very big city with a small town feeling and I'm not the only one who says that. Our politics are very much balkanized by ethnic identity. On the other hand, you know I mean I'm--I'm clear that I'm Jewish. You can't hide it from: Rahm Israel Emanuel. And yet, Jews only represent 3 percent. But I don't think anybody would have ever thought that a Jew could become mayor of the city of Chicago and the rough and you know I would say I learned a lot. I've learned in every job I've had something, I've learned a lot about the city when I was working for Mayor Daley's campaign and the way we not only where our politics on our sleeve, but our love for our city and our city on our sleeve and on our shoulders. And I do--but I also think whether it's geographic identity, racial identity, or ethnic identity, or class identity we have a very kind of a set of politics identified around that like in the way that it used to be around a place of worship or a park.

Axelrod: [00:21:16] You went on to the Clinton campaign.

Emanuel: [00:21:19] Yeah.

Axelrod: [00:21:19] In '92, that the aforementioned David Wilhelm of the Ron Madison days managed the Daley campaign and then he was appointed campaign manager for Bill Clinton and immediately hired you to come down there. That was kind of a crazy time when you arrived in Little Rock.

Emanuel: [00:21:38] Well first of all my dad was very angry that I agreed to go down. "What are you doing? This guy is at 3%, what are you doing? I mean this is insane, I've never something so stupid." That's the kind of thing. "Nobody's heard of this guy." So we went down and the truth is, people forget this, David. Bill Clinton, at that point was considered a candidate running--first of all, he's running in '92. In '88, he gave a horrendous speech at the convention. People thought he was running maybe for being a vice president on the Cuomo ticket or the Bradley ticket, he was not running to be the president of the United States. And, you know, I say now--and I went down to work on a campaign that the guy was at 3 percent and then once Bradley, Rockefeller, and Cuomo all decided not to run. Tsongas was--and Harkin--were considered the frontrunners. Bill Clinton was the outsider candidate with zero, slightly above zero, chance to be the nominee. And when I went down there which was early October '91, at that point, they were thinking of him as vice presidential material. And I remember when we were flying from Memphis to Nashville, he and I that we got the word on the tarmac that Cuomo was not going--

Axelrod: [00:22:49] Not going to run. What did you see in Clinton then that made you believe this guy can go from 3 percent?

Emanuel: [00:22:59] Well, there's two things. First, is my exposure to him is when I'm political director of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. The chairman was Burle Anthony, a congressman from Arkansas and I used to go back all the time with him. Bill Clinton was up here with Vince lane when they were doing police--remember in the CHA housing? And I was exposed to him. And I thought Bill Clinton had a unique understanding where the party needed to be, where the country was, and a way to communicate and meld, which I think is really really important, policy and politics in a way that people can digest and understand and make relevant to them. And I thought he was a rare talent and somebody that I had an intellectual level and a political, and I say that positively political, affinity for.

Axelrod: [00:23:44] We're going to take a short break. We'll be back with Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

Emanuel: [00:23:49] And Ron Madison.

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Axelrod: [00:23:50] Yes. And Mayor Ron Madison as well.

Axelrod: [00:23:57] When you arrived, when you arrived in Little Rock, you--Clinton had enormous potential, but he didn't have enormous resources and you were able to raise.

Emanuel: [00:24:10] He could not--He could not raise or first of all he was a governor. And for the first three weeks before Thanksgiving he was seen--I'm telling you, it was all about--

Axelrod: [00:24:21] Yeah he was--excuse me--and he was a governor from a relatively small state.

Emanuel: [00:24:25] Very small state. Nobody ever done this. The last southerner was Jimmy Carter. We know how that ends. And you had all these titans--Cuomo, Bradley etc.--who were still hovering above the field at that time. And we put together a strategy and a schedule between Thanksgiving and Christmas that made Bill Clinton when he became the first primary which was a January fundraising report, he was the front runner and that's what established him as a guy that--

Axelrod: [00:24:50] Four million right? Four million dollars?

Emanuel: [00:24:52] I know you're going to find this weird. 3.2 million was raised in that first period.

Axelrod: [00:24:57] Right, which was like an enormous amount of money at that time. That's like lunch money in a presidential campaign.

Emanuel: [00:25:02] Today it would be, it would be seen as you know the hors d'oeuvre part of--

Axelrod: [00:25:07] But he needed it because--

Emanuel: [00:25:09] For credibility.

Axelrod: [00:25:10] But he hit, not just for credibility, but when when the early primaries took place, he had real turbulence. Turbulence involving women, turbulence involving his non-service in Vietnam, and many peoples had written him off for dead.

Emanuel: [00:25:28] We had a--not only that fundraising, but there was a--before the New Hampshire primary. It was a week out and we had a fundraiser in New York and again the fundraiser was proof that whether he had the staying power or the stamina to get through the Gennifer Flowers and the draft letter. And we did is an unbelievably successful event and people then said, well this guy may be able to kind of--and then he did the finish second, but called himself the comeback kid in New Hampshire [crosstalk].

Axelrod: [00:25:53] But part of it was that he had the resources to compete there.

Emanuel: [00:25:57] Yes without a doubt. And he says it. I mean he writes in his own book that if it wasn't for the resources of what I did, he would've been a "has been" and the resources became a primary--they came they gave him the resources to compete and they became ways of measuring whether he was still viable and inside the winner of a campaign.

Axelrod: [00:26:15] What is it about Bill Clinton, you know him very well, that causes him to fly close so close to the sun?

Emanuel: [00:26:25] Is he going to hear this podcast? No, I don't. I think David, he likes--there's something to the intensity and the win if you survive (A) an election and he does live close to the sun. I

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mean he flies close to the sun.

Axelrod: [00:26:43] So surviving not just elections, but sort of just the challenges of all sort, including--you know--self-induced crises.

Emanuel: [00:26:54] From self-inflicted to political ones to etc. I don't--you know, whether he seeks them out or they seek him out, but somehow he--that's where he goes.

Axelrod: [00:27:06] There's a kind of Dukes of Hazard quality.

Emanuel: [00:27:08] I don't, you know. I--but I will say, let me flip that. He went into terrain which is what I was drawn to politically. I think--we can--when we say that we're thinking of, obviously, some of the scandals, some of the stuff that happened. But, you know he took on things where other people wobbled in their knees and backed off. Whether you are on welfare reform, on trade.

Axelrod: [00:27:30] Yes. No doubt.

Emanuel: [00:27:31] So he lived politically--

Axelrod: [00:27:34] Well look: I think he was an amazing amalgam of intellect and sort of animal political instincts. You know just base political instincts, the ability to read a crowd, the ability to read a person, the sort of encyclopedic knowledge of the places in which he was campaigning.

Axelrod: [00:27:54] He had--he had a depth. I always said he was one of the first-- Here's one thing I always say: very successful national candidates are multilingual. Bill Clinton could go to a church, a black church and in the afternoon be in a corporate boardroom and not miss a beat. And you need a versatility and a capacity and to then integrate it, whether it is an individual to a group to the larger audience, everything you're trying to communicate and the politics and the policy at the same and I'm telling you, I don't think we'll see a talent like his in our lifetime.

Axelrod: [00:28:31] Yeah, yeah. I mean Obama had the same ability to go from venue to venue. I noticed that when he was running for the Senate.

Emanuel: [00:28:37] That's because he was and he's successful.

Axelrod: [00:28:39] Yeah. You were rewarded, after the election with the appointment as political director of the White House. You flamed out pretty quickly. You're a young guy, a little brash, but what happened from your perspective?

Emanuel: [00:28:55] Well that's been written about, but the first lady and--I was--I was pushing the president's agenda. I was political director. I will note that when I was political director, she won all three specials.

Axelrod: [00:29:08] Yeah, but who's counting? But go ahead.

Emanuel: [00:29:09] Yeah. The second, is I ran into a little conflict with the first lady which also guides me in the rest of my life. But that said is [unclear]. And I--

Axelrod: [00:29:18] Hillary Clinton.

Emanuel: [00:29:18] Hillary Clinton. And I was about to be let go by Mack McLarty. I don't know where I

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got the chutzpah and the courage, but I said, "I'm not leaving until the President of the United States tells me." And I can't imagine where I found the courage to say that. And then in the end of the day, I knew that Bill Clinton would not let me go given our relationship going back to Iowa and Little Rock--New Hampshire. And, but I ran into--as did George Stephanopoulos when he was let go and then became senior advisor--so they came up with a title called Special Projects.

Axelrod: [00:29:53] Yeah and Special Projects was located in the basement with no windows.

Emanuel: [00:29:57] Not only no windows, Playskool phone that didn't dial out. I was given--my first assignment: NAFTA. And we had 12 Democratic votes who were supposed to pass this thing which we obviously did, but--and that was the beginning of my return.

Axelrod: [00:30:15] And you worked on the crime bill as well.

Emanuel: [00:30:18] The crime bill, the assault--before the crime bill people forget this: We passed the assault--so we then--we worked after NAFTA, then passed the Brady bil. And then it was in March of '93, we passed the assault weapon ban by one vote in the House of Representatives. And I have these great pictures at home of Bill Clinton and I where I tell him about the vote. I literally jumped in the arms of the president of the United States. I mean we have this photo where we are bear hugging in the library. And then the crime bill that put 100,000 community police officers.

Axelrod: [00:30:53] You mention that part, the other part that's controversial that I'm sure you hear about and he's heard about needs to apologize for and so on went to determinant sentencing and some of the provisions of that bill that were viewed as--

Emanuel: [00:31:04] Can I say one thing to that?

Axelrod: [00:31:05] Yeah . . . antithetical to social justice and . . .

Emanuel: [00:31:09] Sure, this'll probably get me into trouble. Well first of all, you've got--let's go backwards. It went down and was going to be over, the assault weapon ban was dead. The midnight basketball after school programs were dead. Everything was dead. We needed Republican votes and Newt Gingrich was not going to let the Republican votes. You know who was key to negotiations at that time? John Kasich, the governor of Ohio. He and I sat down, in the cabinet room. We designed a bill to allow 12 Republicans to help us pass the rule to Bill the bill. And you ended up with getting the assault weapon ban, the law of the land. You ended up with midnight what Newt Gingrich referred to as "midnight basketball." All the after school programs legitimizing for the first time, funding for social services, and activities for kids, and 100,000 community police officers. Did it come with other things? Yes. John Lewis and other people voted for it and I will say if you're going to have to do what you had to get passed. I understand there were some things that people didn't like, but in the--if you go back and look at the moment in time it was either the assault weapon was dead or you worked with 12 Republicans who would be supportive. And that's how, David, legislation whether you like it or not, gets done. Now people can look back and forget certain things, and I understand that, but now they don't write the history about the assault weapon being dead. They said we'd like to renew something that Bill Clinton put the law in the land and there hasn't been gun control done since that time.

Axelrod: [00:32:34] Let me return to Hillary for a second. You mentioned you tangled with her.

Emanuel: [00:32:40] Yeah.

Axelrod: [00:32:40] And she obviously played a big role in that, in that administration. What did you learn

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about her, positive and negative, that--that caused that--that you think back at now and say--had impact on this last election?

Emanuel: [00:33:02] Let me--can I just say one thing before that? When I survive, because I said what I said to Mack McLarty. I--it goes to your first question. I think one of the things I give my parents credit for was to always respect authority, but never accept it. And it's contradictory. And because you have to have respect for the office, the president of the United States. But, I being told you're fired and I'm saying no. So you have to have the courage to challenge it while accepting its authority.

Axelrod: [00:33:30] I remember by the way telling you to come home, it's over. You're saying, essentially you did a blue Tarski thing and said it's not over until I say it's over.

Emanuel: [00:33:40] That's right. A lot of you lot of my friends said just leave. They're not loyal to you. You should leave. Including you.

Axelrod: [00:33:45] Right.

Emanuel: [00:33:45] And those were friends who were looking out for me. And I don't know--

Axelrod: [00:33:49] How much of this was the Emmanuel gene, this notion that Emmanuel aren't allowed to fail that you weren't going to walk out of there--

Emanuel: [00:33:58] I can't believe you're wasting time in this, 100 percent. You know the answer, yeah--not 99, 100 percent. The idea that I would come home having failed, I could not do that to my family.

Axelrod: [00:34:10] Alright, talk about Hillary for a second.

Emanuel: [00:34:12] Rather than me? I really was enjoying the other [crosstalk].

Axelrod: [00:34:14] We're going to get back to you.

Emanuel: [00:34:17] So, I would say--how much--you know, it's not--it's a good question, it's not a fair question in this sense. I think Hillary would tell you that Hillary, first lady of the first year of Clinton's administration, is not the Hillary secretary of state et cetera. There are attributes and traits that play all the way through.

Axelrod: [00:34:36] Positive and negative?

Emanuel: [00:34:37] 100 percent positive and negative. Very driven--driven to get success, knowing her brief, wanting to make change. Quartering no criticism. And my--when I ran into her it was because I was actually advocating not to do with--fire the travel staff. It wasn't worth . . .

Axelrod: [00:34:58] For those who don't remember, this was about a controversy in the White House that led to a political problem.

Emanuel: [00:35:05] And a congressional investigation. And I was--I had the gumption to tell her then, you know you shouldn't do this and nobody else would do it. And everyone else said have Mikey go do it. So I went and did it and I thought it was a mistake. That said, she was--wanted order. And I think that's a good thing. She was disciplined. She was focused, didn't get distracted. On the other hand, she--now here's one thing I will say: when I got NAFTA done and the assault weapon ban, even though I was in her doghouse for a while, she said you've earned my respect and was the first to say--

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Axelrod: [00:35:46] We're going to get you a window.

Emanuel: [00:35:50] Yes. But it will be painted it won't be real!

Axelrod: [00:35:54] Do you think that--you've known them for almost 30 years now--do you think that all of these battles and all these problems that they've had, the various investigations and so on--the pummeling by the--do you think that that contributed to a sense of guardedness that hurt her in this election?

Emanuel: [00:36:17] Look I mean, Hillary's--Yes. The short answer is yes. You know--let me--I've never, I've said this before--but I've never said this. I think Bill Clinton, I want--I want people to hear this, so it's not taken out of context. He had--he engendered enemies to come after him because I think--they--he was a Roshak test of the 60s. Here was a guy that was a rock n roller, didn't serve in Vietnam, grew long hair, went to the East Coast universities, but was a Southerner who grew up on side of the tracks, who knew the Bible better than those who claimed it as their book. And they transferred to him, all the things that they hated about that period of time and that's why he was also a generational change candidate. But, she saw everything, and he did, as a ways in which you could--when your lives were like this and you were attacked incessantly throughout both personally and professionally. How could you not be guarded? You would be like crazy if you weren't.

Axelrod: [00:37:34] And do you think it hurt her?

Emanuel: [00:37:36] Everybody's strengths are weaknesses. Yeah, I think you know. And I also think it's not an accident that some people say that retrospective, you know what was the reason--I think she thought that she was supposed to do this and she needed a time in which she should have realized why she was doing it. Not that it was expected of her and that was missing of that effort.

Axelrod: [00:38:03] One other thing about the Clinton years that has some modern--that has some contemporary application--they dealt with a special counsel for many of those years, hanging over the White House. That ultimately led to impeachment proceedings against Bill Clinton. How debilitating is that for a White House to have a special counsel.

Emanuel: [00:38:26] Anybody tells you it's not is a liar. It's very debilitating. On the other hand, Bill Clinton did get a lot done because of his like spirit of the campaign that--

Axelrod: [00:38:36] And he was somehow able to compartmentalize it.

Emanuel: [00:38:38] Bill Clinton, and not somehow, he drove towards this ability to lock something on one side of the brain, focus on the other. I used to call him when I was a senior adviser on Sundays because he would be doing the crossword puzzle, watching March Madness, and having a phone conversation about policy and could do the crossword puzzle, know the score the game, because somewhere in the middle of a phone call would be yelling about a score and not lose sight of what the hell we were talking about. So that's how he did it man. He had--

Axelrod: [00:39:11] I got a--There's so much to cover that I don't want--

Emanuel: [00:39:13] I have to do one thing.

Axelrod: [00:39:14] Yes.

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Emanuel: [00:39:15] Otherwise my staff will get me. You know I do a podcast on Chicago's called "Chicago Stories.

Axelrod: [00:39:19] Yes.

Emanuel: [00:39:20] Can we reverse the roles and I do an interview with you?

Axelrod: [00:39:21] Yes, happy to do it [crosstalk].

Emanuel: [00:39:24] Because your bio is not as interesting as, but I'm joking.

Axelrod: [00:39:28] Well, we will see about that [crosstalk].

Emanuel: [00:39:32] One day you can tell why picked a call up when your wife was delivering.

Axelrod: [00:39:40] You ran for Congress in 2002. I just lightly touch on that. Here you were, a Jewish guy running in a--in a largely Eastern European Catholic district. I mean--

Emanuel: [00:39:53] That came up in the campaign as well.

Axelrod: [00:39:55] Yes it did. Yes, yes it did. I got to get this one thing in there because it was--I did your campaign. The most valuable find and the most surprising was your uncle Les. Les Malowitz, who was a sergeant in the Chicago Police Department. I guess he got to Lieutenant at some point.

Emanuel: [00:40:16] No, he's a sergeant in the 17th District Albany Park.

Axelrod: [00:40:19] Yeah in the district and had been for decades.

Emanuel: [00:40:22] Yes. Second watch.

Axelrod: [00:40:24] Which was shocking.

Emanuel: [00:40:25] Yes.

Axelrod: [00:40:26] But you know--but that became our best ad, I think.

Emanuel: [00:40:29] That--it was a--it was a joke and people repeat it to me on the campaign because you interview this cop about this guy who, assault weapon ban, Brady Bill, 100,000 cops and he says don't just--I forgot how it ended--

Axelrod: [00:40:41] He said I'll tell you that even if he weren't my nephew. Yeah, yeah. But how is it that your uncle--

Emanuel: [00:40:49] My mother's younger brother.

Axelrod: [00:40:50] Your mother was a civil rights organizer, your dad was this Israeli pediatrician. How did your uncle find his way into the Chicago Police Department?

Emanuel: [00:41:01] That's what Uncle Les also had a master's in history. He wanted to be a Chicago cop. He would say, since growing up. I used to say--and that's what he wanted to do. And he was and this is also a district with a preponderance of police and firefighters in the Jefferson Park area, Oil Bark Edge

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Brook Community that I represented. And Uncle Les wanted always to be a cop. My mother was involved in the civil rights movement and I, you know, and my grandfather. That's the beauty of Chicago is he could come here with a third grade education and his kids and his grandkids could go on to better things. And that was it not--you know what's interesting out of that? In that campaign, you remember I had to show that my birth certificate to prove I was from Chicago, not Israel.

Axelrod: [00:41:54] Yes. You were the original birther target.

Emanuel: [00:41:55] That's why I always had empathy. That's right. That's right. I always had admiration--both admiration and respect--for what Obama had to go through because it was never asked of other people.

Axelrod: [00:42:08] Yeah. You, while you were in Congress, and it didn't take long for them to come to you and say OK you can raise money. You know politics, you've got to run the DCCC, you've got to help us get the house back. And you did in 2006, what did you do? Now the Democrats are facing the same task in 2018. What did you do in 2006 that has lessons for Democrats in 2016--2018?

Emanuel: [00:42:34] You know that old saying that why do you rob the bank, because that's where the money is. I went to the districts where there was a potential to win. Like it doesn't take a lot of brains to figure that out. But you know if you looked at today, we have--we have all the urban districts, they have predominately all the rural districts.

Axelrod: [00:42:52] And there's some suburban swings.

Emanuel: [00:42:54] That's where the gold is for us. So you've got to go find, you've got to go to the districts, you've got to go find candidates that fit the district, not fit you, fit the people they're going to represent. Remember it's a representative political system. Second--

Axelrod: [00:43:06] That's a big point because there are folks on the left who suggest that you need more ideological purity--

Emanuel: [00:43:14] No. You don't need--you need, you need people that can espouse what they believe in and understand what it means to be a Democrat, but they have to reflect the party that they're going to represent which is the people in these swing districts.

Axelrod: [00:43:29] Would the recruitment piece be the most important piece?

Emanuel: [00:43:32] It is--it's very important, but I would tell you before recruitment: one of the things that's missing for this year that we helped create--I'm doing this by memory but 18 open seats. Right now there's only one retirement on the Republican side. They need to be using this break right now to have to force retirement. We picked up I think, I'm doing this by memory, almost, of the competitive ones, I think we went nine for 10 in open seats. It was almost a third of the 30 seat win and there's not a lot of [unclear] that's why I'm like don't think this is just about 2018. There's about 2020--

Axelrod: [00:44:04] You also have many more targets than they have today. I mean there are probably two dozen real pure targets and they need 24 seats to tackle back.

Emanuel: [00:44:14] We had, I think, when you counted it 54, almost, but so that's the thing. Recruitment is essential, running good campaigns is essential, having the resources to run those campaigns. What's changed today is it's less on the candidate, more on the outside groups as a real fundamental difference. It was then beginning, today it's at a different level. And you got to know--you've got to have candidates

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that reflect the districts. Can you beat somebody in a rural area? Sure. Do I think it's as likely as a suburban in a kind of like Philadelphia suburb, suburban Chicago, suburban--

Axelrod: [00:44:51] Southern in California.

Emanuel: [00:44:52] No, no, it's not. Although I will say one of the most important things happening, is this ruling by the court on the Texas redistricting, the ruling that's coming out in Wisconsin. That's going to change the map and that's going to give Democrats and if not this election over the next couple--

Axelrod: [00:45:07] Courts just ruled in Texas and there were two districts.

Emanuel: [00:45:12] Yeah.

Axelrod: [00:45:13] We're going to take another short break. We'll be back with Rahm Emanuel.

Axelrod: [00:45:26] I remember very clearly when Barack Obama, our mutual friend, was elected president in 2008 and shortly before the election, we were flying around, it was clear he was going to win. We were talking about potential Chiefs of Staff and we both agreed there was only one person for that job. We needed somebody who understood the operations of a White House. We needed someone who understood Congress. We needed somebody who knew him--was--had a relationship with him. And so it had to be you and you he said go and feel Rahm out about this and you said in, no uncertain terms, do not have him call me to ask me this. And you used language that I could use in a podcast, but I'm not going to use in a podcast. Why?

Emanuel: [00:46:16] Well, because I knew that if a president asks, who's also a friend, but the president of the United States asks you to do something, you had two answers: yes or yes sir. And I didn't want to be in a position to have to say that because I've been to the White House and, David, you know me well enough. First of all, I was in the leadership now in the house. I'd been there only two terms. Amy and I and the kids had our lives set. You know how important that is to me. We had our rhythm of our lives set. And I had a career that allowed me to balance home life with my love for politics and not have to make a choice. And I knew what a new White House would require and I knew what a sacrifice I would be asking of Amy and I and most importantly my kids again. And I didn't want to be in a position where I was picking a loyalty and a responsibility to the president of the United States and one that I felt I had to my family. And so if he got on the phone, I didn't think I had the stamina to say no. And I didn't want to be put in that position.

Axelrod: [00:47:18] Which is exactly what I told him and I said give him a call I think he'll do it. And you did it.

Emanuel: [00:47:24] Do you know how Amy now refers to you now. You have a new first name.

Axelrod: [00:47:26] I don't want and I don't want to hear, but talk a little bit about what we confronted, what you confronted.

Emanuel: [00:47:35] No, we all did. And I want to say this, I mean I was the chief of staff and I know the role of the chief of staff, but I think one of the things that we had great was even through thick and thin, a culture of a team. So the best way I describe this any one of his things that he had done, would have been worthy of another president's entire term and he did five of them. The auto industry was collapsing. The only precedent was Chrysler. We didn't have Chrysler we had Chrysler, GM, and the entire auto industry. The financial sector under the savings alone was a segment, under President Obama, it was the entire financial insurance, everything in the final--

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Axelrod: [00:48:10] Was on the verge of collapse.

Emanuel: [00:48:12] You had it past recessions. This was not just a recession of the run of the mill. This was something bordering on a close to great depression. You had not a war. You had two wars and they were the longest in the United States and that is what I do by memory. And there were other things.

Axelrod: [00:48:26] Don't forget health care.

Emanuel: [00:48:28] That was. See I break this [crosstalk] That was on the inbox. That was not even before we got to his wish list. We had to clear out and do it in a way that allowed to get the economy moving, to get the auto industry, because I remember this like yesterday when I walked in and I was meeting with President Bush and Josh Bolten, the president said to me, "I'm going to tell the president tomorrow. I'll let them know that we're going to help the auto industry. Bet enough resources, twenty four billion dollars to last six weeks." The entire auto industry would in four weeks after that on January 28th by February would be over collapsed and through and millions of auto jobs in the industrial and manufacturing base of America. That was just one item and it was--we had set a point--

Axelrod: [00:49:22] What is it about him that allowed--that that allowed him to succeed and in many of these areas?

Emanuel: [00:49:30] I think, you know, I--I think one is I think Barack, the president is incredibly fearless. That's number one.

Axelrod: [00:49:41] Unusual in politics.

Emanuel: [00:49:43] Beyond fearless to the point that, you know, what I thought of it sometime times I thought that I was slightly on the side of reckless. And he did. On those items he didn't have an option. The stuff later in life of financial services, the financial reform, health care etc. those are things that he wanted to get done in what shape they got done, but the other ones you had to do. And I think the best example that fearlessness and has been told before, was that meeting we had in the Roosevelt Room when it came to the auto industry and no one was for doing it. If you were for doing it, you just wanted to do GM, not Chrysler. And it was 50 billion or 54 billion dollars and I think it was some like person that way in the back of the Roosevelt Room who was the only person agreed with the press. I think Goolsbee would tell you, I think he was against the whole thing and the President of the United States said we're in we're in, we're in for everything. And we went into go save the auto industry and it was publicly one of the most difficult things people working-- Even in Michigan, I think we had people in Michigan working to do it. Yes. And it turned out to be for his own re-election--re-election one of the best political moves, but one of the most--

Axelrod: [00:51:00] But it wasn't obvious at that point because it easily could have gone [crosstalk] he was you know--he's you know, he understood the politics we're not--we're not great on that let me ask you about health care. You know it's not--it's no secret that you are concerned about the politics of health care. And that was your job to be concerned about it. In the context of today, are you surprised that the Republicans have had such a hard time unwinding all that which you were involved in passing?

Emanuel: [00:51:38] Let me say this. I want--I was for doing health care. I was for doing not losing so much time on it. And I do think it had a consequence that you have to measure because we also now don't have a choice of our Supreme Court nominee: they do. And there are political ramifications because he lost the House and Senate in 2010. Go forward. Once you give a benefit--they're not wrong on this, it's very hard to take a benefit away--second is once you commit yourself to certain things like preexisting

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condition, it's very hard to remove a piece of the puzzle, once there's a principal piece of the puzzle.

Axelrod: [00:52:14] And and that's totally embedded in the public...

Emanuel: [00:52:16] The public--that's--I would say for health care, pre-existing condition coverage is the third rail in the way Social Security is for retirement. Which is you can't mess with it.

Axelrod: [00:52:28] What do you think about the White House as you look at it today? I mean how do you assess this presidency and particularly how the White House itself has run?

Emanuel: [00:52:37] I mean if those stories I just read before we walked in and did this, David, I mean if it's true, I don't know if it's true, that Kelly had no idea what the president of the United States was going to say yesterday.

Axelrod: [00:52:49] He wasn't even supposed to take questions.

Emanuel: [00:52:51] And I look I just I said this before something. It's not like I'm a genius. I'm not worried about Kelly. I'm not worry about Kelly for the staff. I'm not worry about the staff reporting to Kelly. The biggest problem Kelly is going to have was that the principal wasn't going to actually play by the Kelly rules. And so it's not a surprise to me and I think this is you have a president they cannot function within order, within a system. Who cannot be disciplined to message to ideas to policy goals. And I think it's hard to describe this as a modern White House. It may be a postmodern White House. but it's not a modern White House.

Axelrod: [00:53:26] Where--How does it end?

Emanuel: [00:53:27] It's going to crash. You're watching a slow motion crash in my view.

Axelrod: [00:53:33] And has the crash manifested itself?

Emanuel: [00:53:34] Look the biggest test of it will be whether on a core issue like taxes--health care was never a core Republican issue--the real question is, if they--I think they've already jettisoned tax reform for tax cuts--if they cannot see their way to this, then you have the first true example that they cannot govern. [crosstalk] Although I think health care is an example of that. But taxes will be the kind of the cherry on the cake that this is, if you can't get that in [unclear]. It will it be like us not being able to deliver some form of health care.

Axelrod: [00:54:15] You came back in 2011 to run for mayor, you confronted a lot of very difficult problems, deep fiscal problems: the problems in the education system and so on. I don't need to remind you of that, but I want--the one that seems the knottiest is the juxtaposition of crime and policing, and it's still knotty.

Emanuel: [00:54:38] Can I say one thing, you know the fiscal position Chicago today is better.

Axelrod: [00:54:43] Yes.

Emanuel: [00:54:44] And recognize it's better. The economy is at of the high points. And we just last week again released another set of data points that are reading and math scores and attainment for our kids are setting national standards. The crime issue and the policing issue are intimately tied and you are correct. We have made progress in the past. That's all gone. They are rooted in a whole set of issues, some economic, some public safety, some poverty, some cultural, some around gun control, some are of

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criminal justice. And everybody always says let's deal with it as a public health issue. Well, we have to look at everything then and analyze it if it--now because my dad is a pediatrician, we're going to look at his health issue: we have to look at all aspects and we can't wall off certain aspects that are uncomfortable. We are in embarking as a city and doing a lot of work on cleaning up the police department so it's more [unclear], more professional, and more proactive. And accountable to the public it serves. And it's you know in really truly embrace community policing as a operative principle philosophy rather than an office and make sure every officer knows that there are going to be held accountable on the other hand they're going to be responsible for engaging in being part of the community, not just patrol it. The second piece is to as it relates to gun violence is to deal with--there is a real element where if you, if all you are exposed to is economic despair, a pattern of violence and drug dealing that becomes a culture in and of itself. And you've got to break that up.

Axelrod: [00:56:34] But the question is why is why why is Chicago more subject to this than other big cities?

Emanuel: [00:56:40] Well first of all, we're not more subject to a riff [crosstalk].

Axelrod: [00:56:45] What I'm talking about is the violence--the rate of violence in Chicago, the rate of homicides.

Emanuel: [00:56:52] There's other cities David is you know dealing with this now. I say this and I mean we were making real progress. I've always believed though there is a Ferguson effect. We have a history of gangs in this city that's different than other cities. And anybody that comes in and looks as if who is a criminologist will tell you that we have a cult--not a cult-- an access to guns because of where we are geographically. And as you know--

Axelrod: [00:57:21] And by the Ferguson effect you mean police who are hanging back because--

Emanuel: [00:57:26] That's true [unclear]. But you know I just came back from the mayor's conference. You talk to all my colleagues, there's 27 of the 35 largest cities are seeing an increase in violence. Something happened in the last 18 months. That said, it doesn't explain everything. Chicago has is unique and also similar. We have a deeper gang culture. We have access to gun violence, to guns. That's different. On the other hand David there is something--there's another set of issues that are similar to other cities that make what's happening in Chicago while the numbers stand out not really be different than other cities. Look at Baltimore today for as an example or Charlotte that's up 70 percent right now.

Axelrod: [00:58:07] How much for the guy who can't handle intimations of failure? And you've been successful in a number of other areas as you point out here in the city. How much sleep do you lose over this?

Emanuel: [00:58:22] Well this one--look it's, it's not about that at one level--

Axelrod: [00:58:27] It's about a lot of lives here.

Emanuel: [00:58:29] Yeah I was going to say to you: at one level you're thinking about how do I measure myself. I've I've handled. There's not an issue from fiscal, pensions, education reform, full school day, universal kindergarten. The hardest thing I do is sitting in a living room with mother, as a father, and I and I always tell them. I would be wrapped around the axle and like this and it's the hardest--

Axelrod: [00:59:03] If you'd lost a child--

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Emanuel: [00:59:04] If I lost my own child and it's not you know the weird thing is for a lot of these mothers I've made my share of visits my share of phone calls. Bizarrely one of the only officials that ever calls them. And I never try to do it around press I don't do all that. And you're you know me well enough why does sits on me from my own family background and the sense of measuring whether my success. This has taken me to a different place spiritually. It's taking me different place of trying to question human nature and is taking me to a different place about these individual women I've met--mothers and grandmothers who I am in awe of their power that I don't think I possess because I don't think I could be where they are.

Axelrod: [01:00:00] Why is the president so persistently taking shots at you and Chicago on this issue?

Emanuel: [01:00:06] I don't think taking shots [unclear] but by nature that's me. I think there's a--I think the question is for him to answer. I'm guessing but I think there's a racial component to it. There's--He's taking shots of Philly on crime, he's taking he's taking shots at cities. He never takes a shot at a rural part of America on opiate crisis. You never. So I mean there is a you know I'll take--I've got challenges. I welcome their help etc. but if you notice he took on Philly, he took out Atlanta, and he took out New York. I forgot what other part of cities as it relates to violence. But he's never questioned another area-- a lot of elected leaders for failing to deal with the opiate crisis. And mainly though, if you look at those, it is a split screen. I think there's a lot of--a lot of this in my analysis I can be totally wrong but my view is it's interesting that he only deals with cities when it comes to violence. But he never deals with the violence around the opiate crisis that's got suburban and rural America tied in knots.

Axelrod: [01:01:16] The latest guy to take a shot is the attorney general sessions as we sit here today. He made a speech in Miami and attacked you for suing the federal government over their new restrictions on cities that are sanctuary cities well funding restrictions.

Emanuel: [01:01:36] Can I correct you? I never refer to us as a sanctuary city. We are a welcoming city. We welcome immigrants from all parts of the world who believe that America is a place for them and for them and more importantly for their children to achieve that dream in the way it was for my grandfather. So we are a welcoming city. I do not and I will not change Chicago's character and give up on a community that's found their home here. It would be turning my back on our future let alone our past.

Axelrod: [01:02:09] I get that piece. But but I'm asking you here's what [crosstalk] Sessions says, "rather than acknowledging soaring murder counts or the heartbreaking stories told by victims families, Chicago's mayor--that's you--has chosen to sue the federal government Sessions said for the sake of their city Chicago's leaders need to recommit to policies that punish criminals instead of protecting them to protect their citizens and not the criminals." The implication being that a lot of this crime is the result of immigrants.

Emanuel: [01:02:38] First of all, it's not the facts or the facts. You're allowed your own opinion just not allowed your on facts. Second, our shootings are down by 16 percent and in certain areas much much more. Third, immigrants as you said do not cause the bulk of this. This is unfortunately different communities in and of itself creating its own violence. Fourth, I was one that pushed and we passed in Springfield after 20 years stiffer sentences for repeat violent offenders. I was the only mayor that came out and praised Governor--Attorney General Sessions when he talked about using the federal U.S. attorney to go after gun crimes because I happen to think that's a piece of the solution.

Axelrod: [01:03:22] [crosstalk] It's about this is--it is at the core of this because he said, "Well Miami is doing it in there. And look how low their crime rate is." They're making the case for this policy against so-called sanctuary cities or welcoming cities as you call them.

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Emanuel: [01:03:39] Look Superintendent Johnson from Chicago put out his own statement and we've looked at it it's immigrants undocumented it says are not the driving force for gun violence. It's access to guns. It's repeat offenders who are back on the streets that need to be behind bars. And it is also about economic opportunity and job creation. Now I'm not going to talk about a private conversation with Sessions, but you know I was willing to talk about things that for after school, summer jobs forget--he has no interest in that. And you can't solve this problem if you're not looking at all the aspects and our status as a welcoming city actually encourages immigrants to work with police officers rather than create a wall of a breakdown in community policing. It's wrong on values wrong on the law and wrong on community policing. And their goal--

Axelrod: [01:04:26] And what do you think is driving it?

[01:04:28] I think they're playing politics with this. And that's what they're doing and they're using today-- before they used cities as a way of describing violence. As a characterization which they never use around the violence associated with opiates and the drugs that are in suburban and rural communities. Second they're using the immigrant community particularly as a way to create something that's not of us that we have to be frightened for. There's a politics to this and they're trying to make cities that are sanctuary cities and their data doesn't hold up it's not factually true. I mean the politics may be good for them but I'm going to be clear about what we're going to do and we're going to sue them. And it has nothing to do with fighting crime. Our suit does protect the principle of community policing and protects our values as a welcoming city. And they are on the wrong side of the law, the wrong side of the values, and the wrong on the side of criminal justice as it relates to community policing as a principle.

Axelrod: [01:05:28] You've been a mayor you've been White House chief of staff. You've been on the White House staff. You've been a member of Congress been in public service for a long time. Do you see yourself ever going back to Washington in some form or fashion?

Emanuel: [01:05:41] Only to pick up money for investing back in Chicago. No, I don't. I think actually this is a--I know we don't have the time for this--cities drive the economic intellectual cultural energy of the world economy, a hundred cities. Chicago is one of those world class great cities that does that. We are also in a period of time of political illegitimacy--are the last political structure that still has legitimacy but people that call themselves either from Chicago, New York, Berlin etc. because the government is local. It's low to the ground. It influences people's lives and they still feel like they can influence the decisions. That is not true of Washington. That is not true of London. That is not true of Paris. That is not true even of Tokyo. And today a mayor can make a decision like universal full day kindergarten or free community college. Things that I've done and influence we've got--we're the only city, you're going to be average [unclear] Free community college. You can make a decision make it happen and people feel a connection to it in a way that I think still creates not only political legitimacy. It is a major force in today's--

Axelrod: [01:06:50] So this last public job for you?

Emanuel: [01:06:52] Last one. And it's. And let me say this. I love the people, the city. I love the city. I love this job. It is, I'm and I've had as you noted since we've gone through it, I've had some really great jobs in public life. None of them all combined. Senior Adviser to President Clinton, Congress leader and Congress, chief of staff collectively measure up to being the mayor of the city of Chicago-- that is home for my family.

Axelrod: [01:07:18] Well Ron Madison, the folks in central Illinois are really proud of what you've accomplished.

Emanuel: [01:07:23] It was great, being great to be in central Illinois, great to be kicked off a soccer team

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and join the ballet team.

Axelrod: [01:07:31] Thanks for being here.

Emanuel: [01:07:32] Thanks David.

Unidentified Female: [01:07:34] Thank you for listening to the X-Files part of the CNN podcast network. For more episodes of The X-Files visit CNN.com slash podcast and subscribe on iTunes stitcher or your favorite app. And for more programming from the University of Chicago Institute of Politics visit [politics to you Chicago](http://politics.tuochaicago.edu) at.