

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Secretary Julián Castro

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by the former mayor of San Antonio, former Housing and Urban Development Secretary, 2020 Presidential candidate, and host of the podcast Our America, Julián Castro, where I ask him: Can A House Divided Stand? Welcome to "Getting Curious." This is Jonathan Van Ness. We have an iconic, very major guest who I'm so excited to welcome, Secretary Julián Castro. How are you today?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:00:38] I'm doing great. Happy to be here with you. Thanks for the invitation.

JVN [00:00:42] Oh, my God. My pleasure. So here's the thing. I, you know, our general question for today, I was kind of thinking is, how are we going to win this thing? Slash, you know, can a house divided stand? Because I feel like it is standing. Albeit, shakily, you know, right now. But in researching you for this interview, I did not know that you interned in the Clinton administration. And this is my hypothesis, and I'll share it with you. You're 44, right?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:01:18] 45. In fact, I'm going to turn 46 in like two weeks. Yeah, so I'm getting older and older.

JVN [00:01:23] Oh, my gosh, well Happy Pre-Birthday.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:01:25] Thank you.

JVN [00:01:26] No, so you're 45. I'm 33. You know, we have a lot of Gen Zers who are going to be voting in some of their second elections, obviously, Gen Zers were huge in midterms of 2018. They will be a huge deal this election. And I think that so much of the frustration for people that are, you know, liberals, you know, more on the left of center in the Democratic Party. So many people my age and younger feel that a lot of, a lot of the biggest mistakes that we've made in my lifetime have been because Democrats went too far in trying to satiate the right in whether it was DOMA or whether it was the mass incarceration bill, you know, basically, like, giving you Republican Lite so that we could get some control. I feel like that's kind of the narrative. Maybe I'm right. Maybe I'm wrong. But I just kind of want to know, like, what was Capitol Hill like in the 90s?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:02:14] Yeah. That was, that was such a crazy experience for me because it was my first time really away from my twin brother, Joaquin. We had never spent much time apart. This was, I was going out to D.C. for the first time. I'd never seen it before. I had an internship in the Office of Cabinet Affairs at the White House for about six or seven weeks in the summer of 1994. And so this was right before the Gingrich revolution, when Republicans swept everything in November of 1994. They took control of Congress, you know, dealt President Clinton like a major blow.

JVN [00:02:52] So Clinton wins in '92. This is, like, the first time that, like, you know, an incumbent president gets beat since whatever, since Reagan beat whoever that nice man was, that Carter.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:03:05] Carter, yeah.

JVN [00:03:06] And so, yes Carter. And so it's kind of a huge deal that, you know, Bush 1 gets upset because that was kind of like an upset victory. Like Perot kind of had a little bit of like a thing there. And so then basically in those midterms, there's like a Republican just they wipe us out. Like House. Senate. Is that what you're saying?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:03:24] Yeah, that in the midterms of '94, but I was there as an intern at the White House that summer leading up to that huge Republican victory in '94, and I did feel at the time, like the Clinton administration was, you know, it was, it was battling on all different fronts. It was trying to get a Crime Bill passed, but it was also fighting the healthcare fight at that time. That won the first round for expanding healthcare in our country. And so it was a very active spring and summer in 1994.

I was only 19 years old. And so, you know, I don't-, I can't say that I had the biggest insights into everything that was happening at the time except to say that you could tell that the politics that were being played. You know, I came from San Antonio, Texas. And so for me, all of it was big time politics. All of it was colorful. All of it was new. And it seemed for a 19-year-old, so consequential too. And, you know, that was one of the reasons ultimately that I decided to go into politics and public service because I felt like, "Oh, wow, you know? It feels like you can make a difference if you do it right."

JVN [00:04:47] I mean, it absolutely does make a difference. And I just, I just think that for so many people that are young and disillusioned, we just don't know about the stuff of the 80s and 90s that has set up some of the systematic issues that are just so frustrating for us to, you know, that want to see change. I know that you're one of those people too. So I just, I think the dynamics of Capitol Hill in the 90s and, like, literally the six months that you

just described are like, where is the documentary? I need to see it because I think it would just really help. Right?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:05:19] That's right.

JVN [00:05:20] So the Crime Bill. So what was that? And I mean, that was the year of tough on crime. And that, like that was that 1994. Like being there then and reflecting on that time, I mean, and having been a lawyer and an elected leader in that entire time since. What do you look back on that era with?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:05:41] I think it was overreaction. I think that there was, it was obviously, there were a lot of people who were involved who had a good intention. And I knew where their intention came from, look, I, in the early 90s, I remember sitting in a car after school across the street from my school, my public high school, and having to duck into the backseat of the car because people were shooting at each other. And in the early 90s, maybe '93 or '94, my hometown of San Antonio had more drive-by shootings than Austin, Houston and Dallas combined. If I remember correctly. This was an era where the incidence of crime was greater, and so I understand why people were searching for solutions. "OK, well, what can we do here?"

But I think what happened was that on a number of points, there was an overreaction. Whether it was three strikes, you're out, or the way that the laws that were put into effect disproportionately hurt communities of color, especially the Black community and vulnerable communities. I think of things like criminalizing homelessness. In a number of ways, there was an overreaction. And so that was at that time, you know, all of that was brewing. And with the benefit of, of what we've seen since then, we know that there are better ways to do these things, that we need to reform our criminal justice system. We need to ensure that, especially when it comes to communities of color, that we're not over policing, that we're not over incarcerating. In fact, that we go back and we, we undo this system that has put too many people needlessly into prison, has created this pipeline and that, that involves, you know, reckoning with that time period. For sure.

JVN [00:07:56] I got to interview Senator Elizabeth Warren, who we both supported after your campaign. And obviously we love Senator Warren. She was explaining to me that in the 80s, that was kind of the era when, like, Washington, D.C., cared about middle American families. And then, like, basically, like, the Reagan administration took unions and was like "uh uh," and, like, just made, like, all this stuff happen. And so it was, like, the Reaganomics. And it created this, like, huge economic disparity that I think in some, the, the, the building blocks of like the top one percent and, like, this just this gigantic disparity that we're seeing, they were sewn then.

Like, those seeds were sewn back, and I mean, they're probably sewn before that. But I just, I feel like there was such a sharp rise in economic inequality in the 80s and it did make homelessness worse. And it, and when we think about the problems that we have now with police brutality and some of the, you know, and criminalizing homelessness. A lot of, I think, the issues that came up are really, you know, they were crimes of poverty and victims of violence. And, you know, and then, and then also this economic system of making money off of incarcerating people, went along, continues to go along with it at the same time. Is that accurate?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:09:12] Yeah. I mean, so many of the seeds of the inequality that we see today, the challenges, you know, they started to accelerate in those Reagan years in the early 80s. I mean, first of all, he comes in and drops the top marginal tax rate tremendously and the capital gains tax and scapegoats people who are poor, paints this image of urban America as filled with lazy welfare cases. And of course, there's also a racialized component to that. And so it was a time when success, and thus successful, in other words, the wealthy were glamorized. And, by policy, were made more successful. And people who were in poverty. People were not doing well, you know, they were scapegoated. They were caricatured. They were, the policies made it harder for them to succeed.

At the same time, we were sapping traditional investments that we'd made in public housing, in public schools, not keeping up with investing in infrastructure that puts people to work and building up the military industrial complex, at the same time, with the Department of Defense budget just continuing to go higher and higher and higher, and back then, big ticket item Reagan had was his Star Wars program. So in so many ways that set the stage for the inequality that we're all grappling with today. It's not like that was the only cause, but that was an accelerant of it. No doubt.

JVN [00:11:04] Right? So you're 19. You're in Washington, D.C. for the first time. You interned at the Clinton White House. Then you finish up your, your time in D.C. and you go back to San Antonio and you become the, if I'm not incorrect, the youngest city council member of San Antonio. Like ever. Right?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:11:23] Yeah. So I went to law school and then got back in the year 2000 and right away ran for city council when I was 26. And at the time, I was the youngest elected city councilman in San Antonio history. You know, jumped right into it. I was also starting to practice law. So juggling both of those things. But basically, I had a passion for trying to make sure that other people could have the same kind of opportunity that I'd had

and getting into local politics was one way to make sure that I could help change things for the better, in my own community.

JVN [00:11:59] Your ability to bring the idea of intersectionality into politics and into your presidential campaign and just into your, into the vernacular of mainstream people, I think is so important and revolutionary. And I respect it and look up to it so much, and I really appreciate that. And before we really get into that, it's, like, I feel, like, just such this frustration of, like, after watching the Republican National Convention this time. I remember so clearly in 2016, having just finished up, like, a 10 day hour, like, a 10 hour long day of work behind the chair at the salon I worked at in L.A. and I was driving home and listening to Donald Trump deliver his acceptance speech back then that painted a similar picture that was grappled with, you know, fear and anxiety. And, you know, "we're losing our control and there's violence." There's-. It wasn't the narrative of the America that I felt like I lived in or, you know, have lived in since. I just.

So how, how can we reach across? And I'm always struggling with the idea of, like, do we try, like do we go for the 50 percent of the people that didn't vote because we have such low voter turnout? Or do we go for the people that are kind of on the fence? Or like, what do you think the magic sauce is to getting people to understand, like, the, the context of what has led us to here? Because we do have so much news and just stuff flying at us all the time, how can we get people to kind of understand what the fuck happened?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:13:29] Yeah. I mean, here's the thing. I mean, it is harder than ever before to summon a common sense of purpose and of unity in this country. I remember President Obama in an interview talking about a moment that he remembered where he had gone to, I forget where overseas, but to where the International Olympic Committee, the IOC, was going to decide who was going to get the Olympics. And Chicago at the time was in the running. And in this interview, President Obama said that, you know, when the announcement was made that Chicago did not get it. That there was some glee, some applause by people on the other side of the aisle. And that, you know, that struck him because traditionally we've been about "OK, of course, we want that, our America to win that kind of competition. You know, that, that would be something special for all of us." And that was just one small moment. But to me, it really spoke to this larger challenge that we have of being so polarized. And you really have different problems in there because we're polarized. But now people are getting more of their own information that fits their bias, whether on Facebook or Twitter or even Instagram or watching Fox News on TV or, or MSNBC or whatever it is. Right?

JVN [00:15:03] Yep.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:15:04] Then on top, on top of the fact that everybody's getting their own information. You have disinformation. I read a poll yesterday, results of the poll, that said 57 percent of Republicans believe that QAnon is either mostly true or somewhat true. I mean. You're talking about, you're living in a different world than from somebody else. Right? So you have different information. You have disinformation, and then you have people that for whatever reason, just don't seem to care. People that don't follow any of it and sometimes, you know, there are legitimate reasons that people are tied up. They're just trying to survive. They're, you know, they're trying to get by. They don't have time to hop on the Internet and read the latest news or even sit in front of the TV and watch it.

But I think that we have to address both of those things that I found that the best way to get people involved who don't seem to care or want to be involved now, if you're in politics, is to deliver results. You have to show people why it matters. You know, if you're a Democrat and you believe in improving education, you need to figure out, OK, well, what are you going to do? What are the concrete things that you're going to get done that will improve it in a meaningful way for their kids? So the people that are on the sidelines right now, not really paying attention. You can at least show them why it matters and connect it to their lives.

For the folks that are getting hit by disinformation, I just feel like these platforms need to step up a lot more. I mean, Facebook today announced that they're not going to accept any political ads, new political ads, one week before the election. So they're taking baby steps to do what I think we need to do to ensure that, you know, we're more on the same playing field in terms of the information that we're getting and the perspective that we're getting, that, there's always going to be a diversity of opinion and a disagreement about what the facts mean. But we do need to work toward getting to, getting to, "Hey, these are the facts." If there's one thing that I think Donald Trump has, one way that I think Donald Trump has hurt us more than any other, is this idea that everybody has their own facts, that the facts themselves don't exist, are different or can be manipulated because he's doing that, that's dangerous for us well past when he's no longer president.

JVN [00:17:44] Yeah, I think that's, what is, continues to be something that is so frustrating about dealing with him as the president. And also, you know, so many Republican people that are enabling him. We're going to take a really quick break and we'll be right back with more Secretary Julián Castro after this. Welcome back to "Getting Curious." We have Secretary Julián Castro. We were just talking about, you know, Celeste Watkins-Hayes who is an incredible author and writer who we've gotten to interview on "Getting Curious" before, she, she talks about the HIV social safety net and this idea that, you know, we're all on this same ocean, but, like, we're all in different boats. And so I think that just the gigantic inequality that has created this kind of. You know, the idea that facts themselves

are subjective and just kind of the, the, the unease of everything at the moment. That's kind of what we were talking about. What I want to kind of pivot to is the idea of intersectionality and politics. And I think that you have such an incredible view on this and idea on this. And so I'd like to just ask a general question of, can you explain to you what it means to bring intersectionality into politics?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:18:55] All of these dots are connected. And also when we walk through a world, when we intersect, or when we, when we interact with people in the world, we have different identities. And all of those identities bring something to bear in how people perceive us, in how we're treated, how we treat others. And, and they have an impact on policy too. Right? And so in my presidential campaign, we wanted to make sure that we were thoughtful about how all of these different things intersect. We're talking about police violence. Right? And the fact that for the Black community especially, oftentimes excessive force is used. Well how does that intersect as well with, for instance, the LGBTQ community? Because for transgender individuals, especially, there are similarities, some differences as well. But they also have been targeted. And the, the lack of, the lack of change or lack of movement in policy to address these issues has been very similar. In terms of people being ignored, people not being believed, the resources not being invested to change things.

And at the same time, people leading daily lives where they're having to grapple with this reality all the time. And so, you know, I wanted to make sure that during the campaign we took a lens that was nuanced, that looked at people in a way that's consistent with the lives they are actually leading. And didn't, did that for identity, but then also, you know, these issues intersect. If you really want to lift folks up, it's not just about housing, which, you know, I had been the housing Secretary and familiar with, it's also about how that connects to their job opportunity, their health, their health outcomes, their, their access to fresh food, their transit access, all of those things. So when I think of intersectionality in the context of policy and politics, I think of: how do we see people for the lives they, they lead, who they are and all of its fullness. And then how do we also see across these different policies that often are siloed?

JVN [00:21:41] Yes. So that brings up a lot for me. I was like writing down a lot 'cause like I had so many questions as you were talking about it. So first of all, that is, it feels like a whole hearted approach to politics. As you know, wholehearted as, like, Brené Brown would say, and sometimes I feel like mean soundbite-y policy that, you know, it makes, it's easy to demonize poverty. It's easy to demonize trans folks. It's easy to demonize nonbinary individuals. It's easy to demonize anyone that doesn't fit the description of a white man because that's what this country was wired to lift up. I mean, literally, because, you know, when our Constitution was written, it said all men were created, but the catch

was, is that the only people who counted as men was, like, white men who own property. Like everyone else, like, didn't.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:22:31] Yeah.

JVN [00:22:32] Literally did not qualify. And literally, there had been people that, you know, for hundreds of years argued that very point that I just said. I was just listening to "1619." And, you know, it's incredible. And it's, it's, for me, what also comes up a lot of times is that there is such fragility even around like, you know, Senator Tom Cotton or-, his name is Tom Cotton, right?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:22:54] That's right. The Arkansas senator.

JVN [00:22:55] Is it? OK, good.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:22:56] Yeah.

JVN [00:22:56] Yeah. It also, I mean, his name just sounds like such a racist white trope that I couldn't remember, if that's, like, literally his name and I didn't, whatever. Sounds like, whatever. So he, he was, you know, he's so threatened by the idea of this. And I think really what makes America great is that we are allowed to own the facts of what this country has done. And you can say it and you don't get, like, thrown in jail because that's, like, freedom of speech. But really, what Donald Trump is threatening and what his supporters are threatening, they are throwing in people in jail that are saying what this country has done. They are throwing protesters in jail. We are getting put up in-. I mean this, to me, I feel like this is like all hands on deck. Ring the fucking alarm. Holy shit. Like it's really going down.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:23:40] Yeah, that's true.

JVN [00:23:41] There is such a concerted effort to say that America has no issue with racism and to say that America has no issue with racism. You know, is, it's just outrageous. And you know, we were saying LGBTQ people. I mean, Pride was started as a revolution against police brutality because of the systematic oppression and targeting of LGBTQ folks in New York and all over the country. But I mean, I my-, I myself have experienced that, like, being pulled over in full drag in Tucson, Arizona, at, you know, 18 years old, minding my own business in college. It's scary as fuck.

Civil asset forfeiture is, like, another thing that I've been thinking a lot about and how literally, like, it's been legal for police to, like, loot civilians who've been charged of, like, no crime. Like, just anywhere, anytime. "I think I smell some weed in there. I think you seem

drunk. I think that you maybe-. I think, you know what? I saw you take some drugs out the window back there. Give me your money." That is literally what police officers can do. And that's what civil asset forfeiture is.

And I myself find myself so frustrated with the continued videos and images of police brutality. Black folks dying day in and day out. And it's not always Black people there are some white people there, but why do we have a militarized force prowling the country, robbing folks? Being judge, executioner, jury, judge in five minutes or less in some cases? And it happens, like, all the time. So how can we all be unfrustrated enough?

Because here's the thing. Either we're gonna be bargaining with Donald Trump or we're gonna be bargaining with Joe Biden for the next, like, four years about, like, how we're gonna deal with this, like literally, like, highly militarized police force in our country. So, and I kind of think the Republicans, like, kind of have us, that Republican National Convention was some highly done propaganda, and I think people ate it up a little bit. So I feel scared. I feel like you're a really inspirational leader, and I bet you don't feel scared. So how can you make me feel less scared about us not losing again? How can it, and what can we do to, like, not freak out about all of the news and, like, make really good decisions, you know?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:26:00] You know, a lot of people have already taken the first step, which is to make their voice heard. We had people in streets all across this country over this summer who were protesting police violence and calling for real dramatic changes. That's important. Now, I mean, what people have to do is they have to follow that up by keeping up the pressure. I mean, that means sending the emails to council members and the mayors. I mean, showing up to the citizens to be heard. It means asking candidates who are running for city council or mayor about these issues because oftentimes they're not asked about. So they go to back of mind when somebody actually gets elected to city council or to the mayor's office too often. What it also means is we got to grapple with the fact that we have a lot of police unions in this country that have become toxic. They are 100 percent behind the officer no matter what. A good example of that was the two officers who were disciplined for what happened to a 75-year-old Buffalo man. And people may remember this video.

JVN [00:27:09] Yes.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:27:10] Where they pushed him back. He fell back and hit his head. I mean, it's just, it's just terrible to watch that. Well, those officers, two of them were disciplined. Well, what did the union do? They applauded those officers and-.

JVN [00:27:30] And people walked out. And people walked out of that union, didn't they? Because they were going to maybe discipline.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:27:34] Yeah.

JVN [00:27:35] And then Fox News, like, runs out a headline news, like, these police officers are taking a stand against this lawless violence for, like maliciously attacking a 75-year-old defenseless man.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:27:46] Yeah. I mean, in the case of George Floyd, you had police union leaders who were smearing his character after he was murdered by a police officer. They were smearing his character. Instead of constructively calling for change in policing, they're just, too oftentimes, they are toxically defending the status quo, a status quo that harms communities of color, especially Black Americans.

And so for citizens that are out there, make this an issue. Local governments negotiate police union contracts. Every three years, every five years. Yeah. That's where the action is at. A lot of the action with disciplined, accountability, transparency. It's there at the local level because they're the ones that deal in police union contracts. That means that you don't, you don't need to wait for Mitch McConnell and the United States Senate to pass the George Floyd Justice and Policing Act. If you're concerned about this issue in your local community. Go and talk to the mayor. Go and talk to your city council member. Find out when the next police union contract is up for negotiation. Shine a light on that. Make your neighbors aware of that, because oftentimes, far too few people actually pay attention, so they don't put the pressure on the politicians to move things in a better direction.

JVN [00:29:15] That's a major thing. So. So short of like, you know, just like your main street as a mayor, being taken over like a massive protests, like, what's something that a constituent can do that like when you come into your office or if like your aide calls you, you're like, "Oh, fuck? Like, that Nancy Joseph, found out about those police, you know, doing that thing again and now she's going to-." Like is it a letter?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:29:38] I would say, let them know, send an email and also call and let them know that you're active in the community and that you, you fully intend to spread the word about the response that you get. The other thing is, if you were a supporter, if you voted for a council member or whatever, the elected, whoever the elected official is, whatever their position is, if you voted for a politician and they're in office and you want to try and get them to do something on an issue, you should use these magic words, that, "I was happy to support you whatever year their election was. But I'm disappointed to see X,

Y, Z. And I want to know what you're gonna do. Because I want to tell my friends whether they should support you, you know, or not." Also, I wanted to say on the police. Just if I could fill in a little bit on the police violence.

JVN [00:30:43] Yes.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:30:44] You know, during the campaign, we put forward an entire plan of how we could reimagine public safety and reform our police, including some of the things that have already been proposed out there, banning chokeholds, demilitarizing our police, more transparency, accountability, having a database of officers that have been let go because of, you know, they've done bad things. I'm glad that some of that has been taken up in Congress. But there is a lot of work to do, in local communities, people can get some of that done and they should, you know, call and write an e-mail and go to Citizens To Be Heard. I can tell you from having been on the city council of San Antonio for four years, then mayor for five years, sometimes you think that it doesn't make a difference, but especially in numbers, it does make a difference.

JVN [00:31:40] And especially, like, listen and ask for when the union, police union contracts are up for negotiation because that's like a big deal. So then after you become mayor, then you go on to become the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, which is what Ben Carson ended up doing, which is, oh, my God. I mean, I wish up until 2016, I mean, I think I knew that that was a cabinet member. Like being a hairdresser in California and just, like, trying to, like, get my HIV meds and, like, feed myself and stuff. Wow. I didn't realize what a major job that is. And so you basically become that, the Secretary of HUD in '14 to '16. And how did you kind of bring that intersectional approach into your job there? And what also does that do? Like I'm pretty sure I know now. But for other people, I, maybe myself, too. What is the full range of what the Housing and Urban Development Department does?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:32:33] HUD was created during the Johnson administration and the job of HUD is basically to create more housing opportunity, especially for low income Americans. And so that includes investments in public housing, in what are known as housing choice vouchers, or Section 8, FHA, which insures mortgages, which, so that people who are not wealthy are able to actually get a mortgage and become homeowners. So it sparks housing opportunity throughout this country. When I was in office, we wanted to make sure that the most vulnerable communities were seen and that we could produce policy and investments that reached them. I remember, for instance, going and visiting a center in Los Angeles that was working with homeless teenagers. And hearing that in the community, up to 40 percent of homeless teenagers came from the LGBTQ community. Because people were often, young people were often either made so uncomfortable at

home that they felt compelled they had to leave or kicked out because they were rejected for who they are.

JVN [00:33:47] Yeah.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:33:48] And that we see this across the country, unfortunately. But that was a perfect example of how, OK, you know, you drill down and you have this challenge with how do we serve teenagers who are homeless? But it's deeper than that too, because you have especially gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary teenagers that have a particular challenge that end up homeless at much greater rates than everybody else. So the question is, OK, well, how do you address that? You know, we partnered with the True Colors Fund and we tried to make investments so that more opportunity to move from the streets to a sheltered environment or ideally, to housing, could happen. And. What I see today at HUD is both a lack of will and a lack of imagination. A lack of will to even fulfill the mission of the organization. I mean, the administration wanted to cut the budget by six billion dollars the first year they got there. And a lack of imagination. They're not even digging deeply into these challenges and they're ignoring the most vulnerable communities.

JVN [00:35:06] So they wanted to cut the budget by six billion dollars. But Ben Carson bought that fucking cabinet for like 35 grand in your old office?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:35:15] Yeah. I, go figure, right? I don't know. 31,000 dollar table or furniture set, whatever it was.

JVN [00:35:22] And you were there. I'm sure it was cute. I bet it looks good when you were there. He did not need to redo all that.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:35:27] It was perfectly fine. Yeah.

JVN [00:35:28] Yeah.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:35:30] I mean, come on. Also, you don't expect to be like, you know, you don't expect to have royal furniture either. When you're there, it, that HUD building is in a notoriously ugly building, built in a brutalist style from the 60s. And so nobody expects a super fancy place when you walk in there. But the larger point was that, they're just missing the boat. They're missing the boat on purpose and they're missing the boat at a time when so many vulnerable people out there actually require champions. They require a strong voice and doers, and they're not getting that from this administration.

JVN [00:36:11] And when you have homelessness and homelessness is criminalized and then you have so many folks that, like, you know, make LGBTQ things kind of criminalized in their home, due to their religious beliefs. And then those kids end up homeless, and then we're, you know, we're doing all sorts of different things to, to put food on the table and eat and pay your bills and, like, you know, find your way in the world is, like, so many LGBTQ youth are struggling to do because we've come through so many things and however more of those commas that you have in your intersectional-ness, the more difficult it is. You know, I had a lot of help. I know so many other people who've had it, you know, so much more, you know, just had it so much worse.

So. You know, you're, the Obama administration and you as Housing and Urban Development Secretary, were very, I think, effective and, you know, really good in your role, very much not missing the, missing the boat, as you say. But this one is so not. And we're seeing that, you know, there's this cycle. It's easy to throw people, demonize them, throw them in jail.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:37:18] Absolutely.

JVN [00:37:19] And it's just this, it's this vicious cycle. And thinking of things in a whole hearted way isn't as easy. And, you know, thinking of things thoughtfully and choosing love instead of fear, it is harder, not to sound like Marianne Williamson, but it's true. To choose love instead of fear is more difficult. And it's more difficult to give someone a chance than it is to, like, just make fear-based decisions. So how can we make intersectional thinking chic? How can we make it cool? How can we make people want to do it? Because a lot of people are just loving this whole, like, "Well, then you shouldn't have done that. Shouldn't have worn that outfit. Shouldn't have gone outside. Shouldn't have gone to the fucking protest. Maybe you shouldn't have, you know, been so loud."

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:37:58] It starts with, with education and understanding. And I think going forward for our, our country, it needs to start with the youngest Americans. People need to understand each other's histories. Right? The history of the LGBTQ community. And I know that's not just one community, but the community in this country needs to be told, needs to be taught in schools. I think Illinois a couple years ago became the first state to require that. Here in Texas, only recently did we get Mexican-American studies, for instance, even though 30 something percent of the population is, is Mexican-American. So that now more people are learning in this school. Some of the background there. You know, African-American, like, our kids need to grow up with an appreciation for what everybody brings to the table. And you know, people, a high school class is not five years of walking in somebody's shoes. But just, just more appreciation than I think folks have to learn later in life if they're going to grapple with these things. Alright? That's one thing.

I think the other thing is that that's where it's important for people of different backgrounds to raise their voice right now, as scary as that sometimes is. But to be part of that conversation, to lend their perspective. The easiest thing to do sometimes is to shut up and shut down. And, like, "Hey, that's not, you know, that's not my problem. Or even though it is my problem. I don't want to make my problem worse by putting myself out there." I completely understand that a lot of people don't have the luxury of speaking out. They'll lose their job. They're afraid of being targeted somehow. You know, sometimes they get hurt because of it. And we have a president right now that is basically encouraging that kind of scapegoating and then not condemning people.

JVN [00:40:10] Yeah, I think we can take the "basically" out now. I think like a year ago, I think we still had to say "basically," I think we're allowed to like, literally just say like he is encouraging. He is encouraging. He's actively encouraging. All of it. Yeah.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:40:22] I mean, just so. But. But the answer to that. For those who are able to do it, the answer to that is to be even more vocal. Is to use your voice even more and not to back up. Now, obviously, to do it in a nonviolent way and so forth. But, but. That's when you absolutely can't let your voice go silent. So that's what we can do now. And most importantly, we got a vote. I mean, you have to get out and vote in November if you want to change not only the tone of leadership, the character of the leadership, but also the direction of this country in November.

JVN [00:41:10] We're going to take a really quick break, and we're going to be right back with more Secretary Julián Castro after the break. OK. Welcome back to "Getting Curious." So here's the thing. I know why we always have to emphasize nonviolent protest. But I do feel like there isn't enough attention to the fact that why some of these protests have escalated into violent protests is because they have been peaceful protests that were agitated by, like literal white supremacists that get, like, bused in to some of these protests.

And also, it can happen where, because we have a highly militarized police force that is, like, charged with protecting and serving the peaceful protesters. Sometimes they are abused, victimized, beaten, tear gassed by this militarized police force that has no accountability to anyone, not the people they serve.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:41:57] You know, this idea, this term agitators thrown out there against these peaceful protesters, so oftentimes. We have seen both in history and just recently. Like these examples of agitators, people might remember the one of that guy who is all covered up, I think, dressed in black-

JVN [00:42:21] Umbrella Man.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:42:22] Yeah. Umbrella Man and breaking windows there in front of the protesters as though he were a protester to accelerate a response, you know, to provoke a response and also to make it look like those protesters had done that. But really, you know, was this right wing guy wherever he was from. Also, too oftentimes, you have some police officers that have, I think, the wrong mentality when they're handling these, these protests. They are overly aggressive and they end up provoking a response.

In San Antonio, I'll give you a good example. Here in San Antonio, just after the protests had started, the first couple of days were very peaceful. There was no back and forth between protesters and police. And then maybe about three or four days in, the San Antonio SWAT team, part of the SWAT team of the police department started using projectiles and tear gas in a way that had not been the case in the nights before. And there were folks that I talked to that would basically acknowledge that they had been overly aggressive. So in that case, that was what provoked the back and forth. Now, thankfully, we didn't see the kind of injury or death that other places have seen. In Dallas and Austin, they saw people, I think they saw, in Dallas or Austin, it was a guy lose his eye. You had people die because people had been hit by these, quote, unquote, "non-lethal projectiles."

But in so many instances that didn't have to happen, it's that you, the police force was overly aggressive. And so what do you call that? That doesn't fit into the narrative of Donald Trump and these other folks that want to paint these ordinary citizens who are protesting as somehow violent. And you know, that they're, they're there to make trouble. Well no, actually, the problem wasn't them. You know? Sometimes the problem has been with the police force and how it's responded, or with these agitators that really are setups, that are from outside groups that are trying to provoke something.

JVN [00:44:49] So I do want to go back to HUD just for a little tiny bit. I mean, you did so much to help build this organization up and to help lift people up, to lift vulnerable people up in and to help visibility and to help, help people across the country and then to watch Ben Carson come in and do what he's done. How are some of the issues that may be flying under the radar? I'm sure you still have connections and people still reach out to you, having been in that position. But what are some of the issues that Ben Carson and 45, that's what I called Donald Trump, because I heard it's like better to not call him his name. Like very Voldemort. But, you know, what are some of the issues that 45 has implemented, and Ben Carson that may be flying under the radar that we don't know about?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:45:29] Well, they tried to tear down the prog-, you know, Trump and Carson have worked together to tear down the progress that we made in the Obama administration to provide more housing opportunity and also to ensure that we have fair housing opportunity in this country. One of the things I'm most proud of that we did when I was at HUD was we passed a rule called Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing. And what it said was to cities, to counties, to housing authorities, if you get federal taxpayer dollars through HUD, then you have to become more serious and produce a plan on how you're going to ensure there's fair housing opportunity for everybody.

You know, this was unfinished business from the 1968 Fair Housing Act, because what we see is that even today, housing discrimination exists. So we wanted communities to do more to address it. As soon as they got into office, they put that on ice and now they've gone back on it and said, no, we're not going to do it, at all. You know, these guys, they have a vision of America that's stuck, from at least half a century ago. Where basically it's OK that you get treated differently based on how you look, your, your gender identity, your sexuality, how much money you have in your wallet. Another example of that is when I was at HUD, we expanded what's known as the equal access rule. To protect members of the transgender community so that if they showed up at a shelter, for instance, that they would be accommodated according to how they're comfortable, to their, their choice. Put that into place, shelters across the country where, were, you know, complying with that, Trump gets in there with Carson and they put that on ice as well.

Again, going backward. It's OK to treat people differently based on who they are. So the question this election we really have is, look, do you want to keep going backward? Or do you want to go forward to an America that lives up to those highest ideals of our founding documents? That's been the story of this country. One of the beautiful things about our country, as much as people might disagree with, you know, one aspect of it or another, is that somehow, some way, we've had enough people that we're committed to making it better and better and fairer and fairer and more and more equal. The moment that we're at right now is that we are going backward. Are we going to keep going backward on that or are we going to return to our journey of progress?

JVN [00:48:21] I really just want to reiterate the point that you just made about the, that trans rollback of protections that was implemented, implemented, at HUD, is that for trans youth that are, you know, 18 and above are young people, for young women and young men or young gender nonconforming folks to be put in a, you know, to be left with a, to need a homeless shelter as their last resort is where they need to find housing. And for a young woman to be potentially, I mean, there are just, there's not cases and instances to back up this false fear mongering that has gone on from the right. I mean, we're literally putting young women in danger, young men in danger of being, like, I mean, they would

like you to believe that that would leave a cis gendered man masquerading as a trans woman in a women's homeless shelter. That's what the fear is, when in actuality, what's going on is we're having young women, young trans women being made to stay in homeless shelters, potentially with like fucking-. It's just not good. It's not good. They have to support people's gender.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:49:31] Yeah.

JVN [00:49:33] It's not good. And, and especially for LGBTQ young people it is unfairly affecting them so much more. And I think, you know, so often we want to say, like, oh, these Supreme Court rulings like it's not really that bad. This administration is always looking for some way to scapegoat trans people. We have all these state legislatures that are coming for trans, trans rights, trans access.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:45:55] No doubt.

JVN [00:45:56] It's just outrageous. I do want to kind of move into our kind of last segment, which is bringing it back to that original question. Can we win? I am nery, much nery, want to make it work.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:50:08] Yeah. I mean, what we can do is everybody needs to go out there and, you know, like, first of all, have a plan to vote because this president is trying to undermine everybody's ability to vote. Secondly, the thing that everyone can do is talk to their family and friends and coworkers, be the loudest person that you can about going out to vote. All of us have family members that we know should be going out and vote, voting, but they don't do it or they hardly ever do it, like, this is the election where you need to get them off the sidelines and into the voting booth. I mean, look, so far, so good for Joe Biden. If we believe the polls. But we also know that we can't trust the polls because, look what happened in 2016. Right?

JVN [00:50:51] Yeah.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:50:52] Yeah. But the only way to do that is to put your head down. Go vote, get other people to go vote, volunteer if you can. You can make phone calls from anywhere now. You can send text messages from anywhere. And this is what campaigns get volunteers to do. And so you don't need to be, you know, at the campaign headquarters or you don't even need to go into a field office. I mean, nobody is right now because of Covid. Volunteer. Contribute. If people can contribute five dollars. Ten dollars. Twenty five dollars. I mean, Biden outraised Trump this last month. They set a record 364 and a half million dollars between Biden and the Democratic National Committee. That's

shattered a record. Just to give you a sense of where we were four years ago. In August, Hillary raised 143 million. This past August, Biden raised 364 and a half million. And now he's going to have more money on hand than Trump does.

Money is not votes. That's true. But look, all, and that's 205 million dollars of that was small dollar online contributions. That means that, you know, people can make a difference in every single way. And so I would channel that anxiety that you might have for folks that are listening out there, of, "Ah, shit. Are we going to go through another night like 2016 where we thought there's no way this guy is going to win?" And then all of a sudden at 1:00 in the morning, the networks are making the announcement that he's the next president of the United States.

JVN [00:52:24] Here's the thing. I'm from a town that voted for Trump 2 to 1 in '16. Like, I'm from Illinois, but my hometown is, like, six hours southwest of Chicago. It's, like, right on the Mississippi River across the river from Hannibal, Missouri. Like it is, you know, win for Trump 2 to 1. And so, you know, when people were like, oh, he's not going to win. He's not going to win. It was like July of '16 where I was like, "I don't know, like people from my hometown and like in, all my," I had like clients.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:52:48] They liked him, yeah.

JVN [00:52:49] Like families from the Midwest. Yeah, loved. And I was like, I don't know where we're getting all this confidence from. But I was like, maybe, 'cause like, is like the *ex-Apprentice* like host really gonna be the president? But I also was like, I don't know, like I was, I was a lot more scared and really saw that-, like when Kellyanne Conway said we see a path to victory. I believed her. I believed her then and now, I don't feel completely not the same. I, I really want to have the blind faith. I really want to like. And I'm campaigning. I'm talking the talk. I am phone banking like I am. So but I don't know if I am, am I, like, literally asking, like, Secretary Julián Castro, to make me feel better about our nation's future? Do I have a question right now? I kind of can't tell. I. But so. But do you think we can win? We can win? We can win?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:53:39] Oh, absolutely. I believe, I believe that we're going to win. And here's what, here's why I think we're going to win. 2020 versus 2016. Trump won the election by winning the Electoral College and he won three states, Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, by 77,000 votes collectively. Do I believe that there are enough people who see Trump differently in those states now? Now that he has a track record, now that we've gone through Covid, now that people have suffered, now that the economy is a lot worse than it was a year ago or four years ago when he got elected and now that many people who might have voted for a third party, Jill Stein or whatever, they're like, no, no, I

gotta get serious now because the alternative is Donald Trump. He's not just a theory and they don't expect that, back then they thought Hillary is going to win. So they might have felt freer to vote third party.

Do I think in all of that that there are enough people to overcome Donald Trump? Yeah. I do. And sure, he may pull in. He may pull in additional people that like his basically, grievance, racial grievance politics, white identity politics, frankly. But I think that more people reject that. And, and people that were off the, off on the sidelines last time, they're going to get into the voting booth, this time in Michigan, in Wisconsin, in Pennsylvania and in states like Florida that we only lost by a point last time. So that's why I believe that Biden is going to win. And, but the best way to ensure that because we can't take anything for granted is to do your part and make a plan to vote. Talk to everybody that you can. Obviously, Jonathan, you're doing that in spades. You're doing more than your fair share. You know, and I and many of us. But this has to happen at the family level. It has to happen, you know, with just regular everyday voters out there.

JVN [00:55:45] So, OK, yes, we're gonna, I know we're gonna start to wrap and then so you have your podcast. It's going to be coming out. It's called "Our America."

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:56:54] That's right. Premieres September 10th.

JVN [00:56:56] Yay! So we got to listen to that. I'm really excited to hear you. Basically, you're going to be talking to people who have different experiences, Americans who, you know, aren't necessarily people who we've known or heard of, but they have really unique experiences. And you're going to kind of help shed light on their experiences, amplify their experiences in a way that, you know, I think you're so amazingly positioned to do.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:56:18] Yeah. You know, I'm excited about this podcast, and "Our America" is really going to explore how the American experience shifts from one person to the next. And I've seen so many inspirational human beings over the last few years and their stories that too oftentimes go untold. And, you know, this is an opportunity for people to hear about the struggles that folks face, whether it's poverty or discrimination or other struggles, but also to do it in a hopeful way. And for us to talk about and think through together, well, how do we change that? How do we create an America where everybody can prosper, where everyone counts?

JVN [00:57:04] I cannot wait to listen. I'll be definitely subscribing and I just cannot wait to listen, I just want to say, I have two more little baby quick questions. One, I'm a recent Texas transplant. I just moved here. I love it so much. It's so pretty. I never knew.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:57:18] Where are you at?

JVN [00:57:19] I'm in Austin.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:57:19] There you go.

JVN [00:57:20] And I'm pretty sure, I'm, aren't I in Wendy Davis' district? I think I am. I hope I am. I really want to vote for her. But if I'm not in her district, then I guess I won't get to. But I. I just want to think that I am. I wear her T-shirt all the time. I love her, but.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:57:33] She's great.

JVN [00:57:34] Is there any other local races you're looking at. Any other things you're, like, is there like any other things around Texas that you're, like, you know, politically, you're, like, oh yeah, this person.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:57:41] Oh absolutely, yeah. So Texas I think is ready to go. It's ready to flip. 2020 is the year where I think we can get that 38 electoral votes in Texas. And they're great candidates, Wendy in the 21st congressional district, running against Chip Roy, the incumbent Republican. There's a fantastic candidate named Candice Valenzuela, who is running in Texas 24, in the suburbs of DFW. I set up this effort called "People First Future" to support and invest in bold progressives who are running out there. From Congress all the way down to city council and school board, because I think we need a great bench. And in Texas, we have a great bench that's out there and ready to lead.

JVN [00:58:22] So and then this is also part of it, like I. So, what do you want to do? Because I want to see you. I mean, don't we need to have Senator, in front of your name or like?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:58:36] You know, we'll see, for the first time in forever. First, it feels like forever. Like I'm not aiming for an office right now. You know, I still have a passion for politics or public service, but I'm not aiming at anything, that might change. So I'm keeping everything on the table, like, I haven't taken anything off the table and we'll just see what happens.

JVN [00:59:57] Well, let's just think about this for a minute, because it's 2020, and I'm pretty sure that that Ted Cruz and Beto was 2018. I remember it, came so close. So now the other, the other guy is, when's he up for reelection? '22?

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:59:12] Cornyn is actually up this year, and MJ Hegar, we got a great candidate going up against.

JVN [00:59:18] So not until, so not until 20 fucking 4. No until '24.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:59:23] Yeah, that's the next Senate race. And I think, by sure 2024, we're going to have a Texas that's very competitive.

JVN [00:59:33] So competitive.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:59:34] That's good news, no matter what, no matter who runs. But, yeah, it's, it's changing. You moved at the right time, Jonathan. We're glad that you're making us a, you know-.

JVN [00:59:41] Yeah, I'm going to help. I'm totally going to help.

JULIÁN CASTRO [00:59:42] A more open minded, you know, hopefully progressive state.

JVN [00:59:49] Well, I can't wait to see what you do and what's in store for your future. It's just going to be great. So you're amazing. And thank you so much for your time. You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Julián Castro. He's the former mayor of San Antonio, former Housing and Urban Development Secretary, 2020 Presidential candidate, and host of the podcast Our America. You'll find links to his work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe. Follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Emily Bossak. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, Emily Bossak, Chelsea Jacobson, and Colin Anderson.