

PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: HOW TO KEEP THE REPUBLIC



Courtesy of Jamie Manley and Axelrod Strategies

David Axelrod

David Axelrod got involved in his first campaign pamphleteering for Bobby Kennedy when he was nine years old. From then on—through his days as communications director for Barack Obama's senate and presidential campaigns, to a stint in the White House as senior advisor to the president, to his current gig as founding director at the University of Chicago's Institute of Politics—he has pretty much lived his dream. We met with Axelrod on August 18, 2014. Here's some of his advice for students.

On patriotism:

I was the son of an immigrant who came here with nothing; I ended up as the Senior Advisor to the President. I grew up in a housing development and my sister and I shared a room in a rental apartment that was probably about as big as from here to the kitchen. And I've lived my dreams. My father came here in 1922. If he'd tried to come in '23 when the very harsh immigration laws were put in place, he probably wouldn't have been here. And his life would have been different and I think less good. So . . . I believe in America. I believe in what America has been. I believe in the values that have been time honored and I think fighting for those is a worthy cause. And I hope young people pick that torch up because they're the ones who are going to have the greatest—by far the greatest—stake here.

On keeping the republic:

The greatest admonition I can give to young people is don't take what we have for granted. Democracy requires participation. I'm biased in this regard because I'm devoting my life to it—to this project—but I think they should get in the arena. And getting in the arena doesn't necessarily mean running for public office, although it could. It doesn't necessarily mean working in campaigns, although I think that's a good thing to do.... Be a policy advisor, a speech writer. Go to work for a not-for-profit that is trying to push for public policy. Be a journalist and communicate in a thoughtful way what's going on in the world. . . .

[D]on't surrender to the cynicism. That would be a tragic thing to do because I've seen it. You can bring about real fundamental change. . . . So my message is make a difference, get involved.