

Center for American Progress



WITH LIONS GATE FILMS PRESENT:

**A SPECIAL SCREENING OF *CRASH*
FOLLOWED BY A PANEL DISCUSSION**

MODERATOR:

**CLYDE WILLIAMS,
VICE PRESIDENT,
CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

SPEAKERS:

REP. ARTUR DAVIS (AL-7)

BRENDAN FRASER, ACTOR

PAUL HAGGIS, WRITER/DIRECTOR

MICHAEL PEÑA, ACTOR

REP. HILDA SOLIS, (CA-32)

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CLYDE WILLIAMS: First I'd like to bring up the director of the movie, Mr. Paul Haggis. Would you please come forward?

(Applause.)

MR. WILLIAMS: Secondly, I'd like to bring up Mr. Brendan Fraser, who is also an actor in the movie; Mr. Michael Peña, who was also an actor in the movie; and I'd also like to bring up Congresswoman Solis and Congressman Davis.

PAUL HAGGIS: I'll shift one down this way and you just sit here.

BRENDAN FRASER: Everybody is a director. (Laughter.)

MR. WILLIAMS: What I'd like to do is first give the director an opportunity to tell a little bit about the movie and his vision for the movie, and then we will let each person have an opening statement and reference to their participation in the movie or their reaction to the movie.

MR. HAGGIS: Wow. Thanks so much. I guess I don't have much of an opening statement because you just saw the film, so I don't need to really introduce it. It was a passion piece; something that was rolling around in my head for about 10 years. And I woke up in the middle of the night one day at 2:00 o'clock in the morning with the idea of it and wondering about these two kids who jacked my car and decided to write the movie from their perspective, and then just started following strangers and wanted to see how – if a movie could be made about people who were strangers bumping into each other and how they effect each other, and so it was no grand scheme. It was a simple thing.

Brendan, what was your – how was your –

MR. FRASER: Hi. I'm Brendan Fraser. I read this script a year and a half ago, I think, when it was first available. I was moved by it incredibly because it seemed to me to take such an unflinching stare right in the eyes of prevalent issues that just aren't discussed as specifically as they are as in the performances you saw tonight. And I was struck by the equality that Paul endowed each of the characters with and in the sense that each and every one of them seems equally responsible and equally reprehensible for their actions. And as Paul says, this film in many ways is a – what's the catch phrase? – an equal opportunity offender, with the exception in my belief with – of one character who you see on the one sheet on the poster who's the locksmith, and that's Michael Peña's character, who was by far and away the most evolved, I think, of everyone that you met tonight.

MICHAEL PEÑA: Well, actually like I got the script from my agents and they were just flipping out about the script. And it was – I thought it's one of those kind of things where you just have to do it, you know. It's like – you know, looking the way that the character did and doing the kinds of actions that he did and proving almost, you know, some people wrong that have certain ideas about this kind of character is one of the things that I just fell in love with. And I actually read it and thought, wow, what a great emotional ride, almost like a big Hollywood movie would be, except it's – most of it was, you know, dialogue or whatnot. And I was – you know, I really wanted to do what the character did and also say the kind of words that, you know, this person would say, like, when he's down, you know, saying that awesome story, you know, with his little baby girl. It was like I just want to be a tenth of that guy.

MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

HILDA SOLIS: I'm Congresswoman Solis, and I represent a part of Los Angeles that is depicted somewhat in the movie. I represent East Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley so it's hard for me to speak right now because I feel like my heart is in my throat because so many things that I saw portrayed I read about every single day in my newspaper, car jackings, people being killed, and innocence, the young child, the young little girl, the innocence, the purity that she portrayed, and the hope and aspirations of my community, and my community is very diverse. In fact, my family – I mean, we have different ethnic groups that are married – intermarried into my family, so we have very different experiences in Los Angeles.

So I think it's a good depiction of what's going on; not only there, but in other cosmopolitan areas and it's something that has to be said and I'm glad that you portrayed this gentleman in a positive light because so often Latinos, Mexican-Americans – and I happen to be Latin and Mexican-American, (foreign phrase) and Mexicana – and we're not often portrayed in a positive light. I mean, even in Washington people think that I'm the secretary or the staffer. They can't assume that I could be a congressperson, so we have a lot of stereotypes out there, so I think that this is a good start.

I'm very happy to be here and I'm very proud of the abilities of our – of the production, the artists and the director, and Sandra Bullock, who I very much admire as a strong woman, who's always like out there – yes. So very proud of that. So thank you.

ARTUR DAVIS: Hilda, thank you. I'm Congressman Artur Davis from the great state of Alabama. It is very hard to speak after this kind of a movie. I'm reminded – I'll just make three points. The first one is, you know, we're in the world where performers occasionally do very well in politics and some of what we do day in and day out requires some ability of the performance art. It's nice seeing the real thing done expertly tonight.

Second of all, you know, we serve with a lot of very eloquent people: John Lewis, Barak Obama, Steny Hoyer, Ted Kennedy, a lot of people who really know how to make words come to life. I'm reminded after seeing this movie that for all the power of the

human language, the greatest eloquence of the story is that we transact day in and day out, and the greatest poignance is not necessarily in the form of words, but it's the way we play out our sometimes mundane seeming existence day in and day out and this picture captures that. All of the little ways that people intersect with each other, that's what the picture is about, and it's wonderful seeing that captured.

The final point that I will make – I found this over and over again – obviously, there was a lot of reference in this film to violence, the prevalence of guns, the actual physical violence in our society, but there's another kind of violence that you saw on display tonight. It's the violence of human anger. And the many myriad ways that we get mad at each other, and the many myriad ways that we play up the differences that we have, I don't think I've ever seen it displayed as vividly as tonight, and I'm very, very honored to be here with these people and this cast.

MR. WILLIAMS: Well, why don't we get started? I'd like to present the first question to the director of the film. What made you decide to tackle such a difficult subject matter? And what do you define as the most pivotal points in the movie as far as conveying the message that you wanted to convey with the movie?

MR. HAGGIS: Wow. I think I was motivated by blind stupidity. The – because it's not the kind of film that you write and get made in Hollywood. I mean, I wrote this and *Million Dollar Baby* the same year, and neither are films that are commercial or that would – and these are my first two films. And the – and so –

MR. WILLIAMS: That's a heck of a way to get started.

(Applause.)

MR. HAGGIS: Thank you. Thanks. But, you know, I was – been working in the television business for a long time, and took a break and said, I've got to redefine myself, and so I wrote this one on spec and wrote *Million Dollar Baby* on spec, meaning nobody was paying us to do it. And then we were lucky enough to find in Kathy Shulman (ph) and Bob Yarry (ph) independent producers who were brave enough to make it, because no one in their right mind in Hollywood was going to make this movie. It had no central characters. There were – there was no, you know, like two or three roles for the – or even one role for like the big star. They never thought we'd attract talent, and – but Bob and Kathy both really believed in it.

I guess I – everyone has – you're talking about pivotal moments. I'm not sure what the pivotal moments are in this film, because I wanted to leave a lot of that up to the audience. I – there's so many ways – I want to talk about the fact that we all embody these contradictions, that we have good and bad in all of us, and I wanted to present to you with some characters and let you judge them very easily at the beginning like, "Oh, yeah, I know this person, this person, this person. Good person, good person, bad person, good person, bad person." And then say, "Oh, yeah? Well, watch this." And just twist them around just a little bit until they become us, until rather than being able to judge that

person over there or over here, we go, “Well, all right, well, I didn’t like her to start with but now I start of do, and her I really liked. I’m not sure about her anymore.” And make us – let us laugh at things, and then go, “Should we have laughed at that?” And, you know, take us on a ride that really moves us because I think the most important thing in a film is to move us emotionally, and that’s what I wanted to do. I just wanted to keep you moved.

MR. WILLIAMS: Congressman Davis, you said in your opening statement that you’re from the great state of Alabama, a state that has played a very pivotal role in the civil rights movement, and most of it was negative, the image that we saw of Bull Conner and of the attack dogs and of the fire hoses and so forth. And now Birmingham is a city that’s considered the new face of the south, and it is one of the cities that black people find the most compelling and interesting place to live. What do you think has brought about that change in the environment of Alabama in the last 40 years?

REP. DAVIS: You know, one of the things that’s brought it about is I think we all start to recognize just how imperfect we are. The whole logic of white supremacy, the whole logic of the segregationist era was that there were pedestals in this society and some people belonged on certain places within those pedestals. Maybe we’re figuring out now as a country and as a region exactly what this film captures: that there’s this wonderful equivalence that we all have, and it’s based on our common frailty. You know, sometimes we think our equivalence is based on the great things that we have in common, and every now and then it’s based on the frailties that we share. And, you know, we’re struggling with that. I mean, I say without any sarcasm or irony that my state is a great state. I mean, we are the state that led the way in the south.

You could argue that the second Civil War is the civil rights movement, which I believe it was. You could argue that the Appomattox and the Gettysburg and the Shiloh and the Antietam of the second Civil War all happened in my state of Alabama, so we’ve led that path, but we’re far from perfect. Many of you in this room know that just last November we had on our ballot a provision of our constitution that says that black and white people can’t go to school together, and it’s been there for years and years, and it’s, of course, no longer in force, but it’s an ugly piece of that document. And by a margin of 50 point some percent, voters wouldn’t remove it because they thought it was about raising taxes instead.

So the final observation that I would make is I think people want to do enormous good in this world. The thing is, we get ourselves confused. We get diverted by distracter issues. And I come again back to that point what I think the movie talks about. We have gotten so good at elevating our differences, and we’ve gotten so good at focusing on what separates us, if we want to make any progress and the progress that we’ve made in the south has been based on our pulling ourselves back to an understanding of our similarities.

MR. HAGGIS: Yeah, I just wanted to say that the – you’re talking about the civil rights movement and the great struggles there, and I’m reminded of the conversation I

had with Reverend James Lawson very recently who was right there with Martin all the way through. And you asked him – I asked him questions what it was like, and he said it was some pretty scary times, but he has never been as afraid for this country as he is right now, and for that – for a man who has been through that, that is something.

REP. DAVIS: Try being in Congress right now. That will make him afraid.
(Laughter.)

MR. HAGGIS: Yeah, I imagine. Exactly. I don't – yeah. (Laughter.)

MR. WILLIAMS: Well, my next question is for Mr. Fraser. You basically play a politician in the movie as the DA. And when we were outside talking you said this is your third trip to Washington, DC. And basically I got the impression you don't like to come here too often, which as the Congressman just alluded to is a very difficult place these days. But what is your take on the impact of morality as far as the way that we are trying to define it here in Washington, DC, on your industry and what you do on a day-to-day basis?

MR. FRASER: That is an excellent question. Point number one: The last two out of three times I was here it was because it was freezing cold and it's nice to see the tulips, so I'm happy to be here.

How can we address issues of morality in Hollywood? Well look, there's a time and place to use a vernacular and a language and to behave a certain way in films. There's a time and place where, in my view, a prop that's used to convey a meaning such as a handgun or a weapon belongs nowhere else but on the screen of a movie theater. And there's a time and place that we're all living in right now where all these things are being subverted I think for all of the wrong reasons, and audiences are being condescended to and patronized, frankly, in my view. And I think that we deserve better than that.

Now, there's something to be said about artistic integrity, and I believe that directors and actors and producers, while they may be the harbingers of the tastemakers, per se, they're also the ones who bear the responsibility of bringing you the truth, but it's really down to you to decide. I don't think that personally those kinds of decisions should be made by committee, should be made for you, and I don't think anyone – and I challenge anyone to disagree with me in the room – would find anything that happened on this screen here tonight to be outside of the ordinary of any experience of any young person up until the age of at least 13. They would understand what's going on.

A film like this is very, very important, not only because of the social relevance that it carries, but it can be used as a teaching tool. In many ways, this is both a cautionary tale and a morality fable. It's down to you to decide who's right and who's wrong. There are thorny questions that are asked. Awful, awful things happened on the screen and some really noble things happened in unlikely places, but it's really up to you to decide.

If you walk out of here tonight and you tell some people that I saw this movie. It's called *Crash*. No, no. Not the one by David Cronenberg. It's different. (Laughter.) You've got to see this, because it's going to inspire dialogue. It's going to stimulate a discussion. If there's any way to see our way to the end of this problem, you've got to take one step, and the first way to do that is to acknowledge that there is a problem.

Now, I think without question this film has absolutely defined it, and we can't walk away from it anymore. There's really, really no excuse. It set a standard, and it's our responsibility to try and set it straight.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. WILLIAMS: Congresswoman Solis, since we're talking about morality and we're at a point right now in history where we have to make some very hard decisions about what's going to happen with our country and with our government, and we see so many people, particularly on the far right, talking about morality as if they have a right to talk about it and no one else does; as if they own it. But yet we don't see them using this same terminology about morality when they talk about education, when they talk about healthcare, when they talk about the real reform that needs to happen with Medicaid and Medicare. So can you talk a little bit about what it's like today on Capitol Hill to be in the minority, and to really want to work on real issues when other people are talking about semantics and not about real solutions?

REP. SOLIS: Well, first of all, I want to acknowledge the Center for American Progress, because really to have this opening tonight and to kind of bring us all together is a statement in and of itself, especially in this town, because you don't hear about these issues as they have been presented to us in committees that I sit on, and that's part of the problem.

When you talk about not just morality, but censorship, our voices are being censored: members like myself who represent a district that is very much reflected in the movie, working class where a lot of these issues hit home, whether it's immigration, which you kind of touch on in the movie in that you have a housekeeper and people working that may look like they're out of status, but in fact you don't know until you peel away the onion and you find out really who these people are and what they're about and what they care about. So I think those are issues that we don't even get to talk about in Congress right now.

And in fact, we're going to be voting, I'm sure shortly the Senate will, on a supplemental bill that's going to deal with some very heavy immigration issues. And right now when you talk about guns and where they should be reflected, whether in the movie screen, I agree with that. I mean, I don't think there's a place, at least in my community, where we have drive-bys that occur almost every night. And young children

like the young child that was depicted was a – there was a young child that was killed in my neighborhood not too far from where I live in my district. And it's about this mentality – this gang mentality that says, the way you get inducted into a gang is by shooting someone, no matter who. That's your badge of honor, and that's how you get inducted, and nobody's talking about that on Capitol Hill. No one's talking about how to reach out to those individuals and really trying to change that, so it's – there's so many issues that I feel that we're just not really addressing, and – in addition to working conditions.

You see the small businessman, the Iranian background, the lack of assistance in knowledge and information that he has ability to access, because government has a lot of programs for businesses, especially small business individuals. And I see there's a real barrier where we're not doing enough. And this kind of movie I would hope could be presented in – you know, even in Spanish language, because if you really want to reach a bigger market, you might think about that, too.

MR. WILLIAMS: Congressman Davis wanted to elaborate also.

REP. DAVIS: I just wanted to touch on the whole question of morality and politics. To me, the essence of morality is a sign of what you value and what you don't, or what you esteem and what you don't, and all the time in this city that debate plays out. Some of you are aware that last week Congress passed an estate tax bill that would effect a total repeal of the estate tax. And whatever you think of that estate and your grandparents or somebody may own one for all I know, probably not, but the deficit tag for that estate tax repeal is \$290 billion over 10 years, and we were told last week by the leadership in Congress and by the administration that \$290 billion price tag is one we have to bear in the interest of a theory that it's somehow problematic to tax the states.

Four weeks ago, before we adjourned for the Easter recess, we voted on the president's budget and that budget slashes virtually every program that has built the foundation of community and decency that we have in America in the last 30 or 40 years. And we were told that, well, we'll cut these programs because we need to save money, and that's the inversion of morality that you see in this town. We can drain ourselves of \$290 billion of revenues for a theory around estate taxes, but we will not make the commitment to priority after priority. And the challenge of progressive people, I think – and I really thank the Center for leading in this effort – the challenge for progressive people is to put certain priorities front and center, to put them on the front burner and not the back burner and to call us back to this idea of national community. That's another powerful point in this picture.

We can be a community of people again. We haven't been for a very long time because we've become so fractionated and so delineated, but we can become a community again if we just have enough of a vision around the things and the values that should animate us.

MR. WILLIAMS: Next question is for Mr. Peña. You play the one character in the movie, I think, that everybody thinks is just an overall good guy. What is it for you as a Latino to play such a positive role, and what did this movie mean to you as an individual bringing something so powerful to the screen?

MR. PEÑA: Well, it meant – it for sure meant hope. You know, for a guy like that to look the way he does and then to – in the end turn out to be a really good guy, there's some parallels that ran in my life being in Hollywood and being stereotyped for those typical roles that I'm sure everybody comes across. And to actually in a sense win – in a sense put out this kind of product and stick out and believe in myself and say, like, you know what, I know that there's going to be something really good that I can sink my teeth into. And it happened eight years after I started acting, but it happened.

And I'm really proud of that, and I'm growing up and everyone in – like, I'm one of those statistics where I think 80 percent of my friends growing up are dead. And it's an interesting fact, but my job as an artist – I'm not too politically aware, but my job as an artist is to put it out there as truthfully as possible; find out like all the subtleties and nuances that really make it real for me. And then hopefully to open your guys' eyes and hopefully relate to someone that might look different, but have the same kind of difficulties in life that we all do. And hopefully, I did my job.

MR. WILLIAMS: Well, we'd like to take a few questions from the audience, so is there anyone that has a question that would like to have answered?

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. WILLIAMS: We'd really prefer a question, but if you'd like to make a comment, ma'am, that'd be fine.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. WILLIAMS: Well, we'd like to have any questions at all.

Q: I had a question (off mike). My question is (off mike). I have a professional (off mike).

MR. HAGGIS: Yeah, do this. Check, check.

MR. PEÑA: Sibilance. Sibilance. (Laughter.)

MR. FRASER: Take this mike.

JENNIFER PALMEIRI: Thank you, Clyde. Antoine will pay for that tomorrow. Okay, so my question is for Mr. Fraser and Mr. Peña both. It seems to me that we have progressed. You know, we had like all these civil rights laws and we've progressed sort of as far as we can in terms of legislating how people should react and behave and

particularly with race, so we've sort of hit a ceiling on that. And I'm interested in – you know, you described how you grew up, right?

MR. PEÑA: Sure.

MS. PALMEIRI: So how – what do you think would help – what kind of leadership do you think would help change attitudes? Because it seems to me that I don't know that there's more – I don't know that there's more laws that we can pass that are going to – other than improving people's lives –

MR. PEÑA: Right.

MS. PALMEIRI: – economically or, you know, that can actually change attitudes, and so I'm interested to see what you think about that. And you, Mr. Fraser, as some – you know, as a white person who worked on this film with lots of different minorities and what your – and I'm sorry, I don't know your background, but, you know, I'm – but if – huh?

MR. PEÑA: Canadian.

MR. FRASER: Blame Canada. (Laughter.)

MS. PALMEIRI: Okay. But what if you – you know, coming out of this experience what you see as what – how we can change attitudes. I mean, obviously this film is hugely important in doing that, but I'm just wondering –

MR. FRASER: He's also Canadian, by the way.

Q: Oh, okay.

MR. PEÑA: Well, actually like we were just talking about that today, and one of the things is literacy. I – you know, I remember growing up and actually I – was it the *Washington Post*? I don't know, but we were talking about it. And I – you know, I put myself through prep school when I was a freshman and a sophomore. I worked three jobs – two jobs actually, and during the summer full-time jobs, which is a lot, but put myself through it, you know, in order for me to learn and hopefully for a brighter future. And I recognize it like – you know, the kids who always goofed off and never really studied and pursued their interests, those are the ones that went – you know, like, got in trouble the most. And this is like – that's my own reality. That's what I saw in the classroom, outside the classroom. Those that were bored and weren't really challenged and weren't interested in those types of studies, they're the ones who got very disinterested very quickly, and they're the ones who ended up making trouble.

And I was actually raised – and I think that there's – I think there's a lot we can do in – you know, as far as literacy goes and learning how to learn, and that's a huge

thing. You know, you just can't take it for granted, but learning how to learn is a very important point.

And I really didn't even read a book until seven years ago cover to cover. I was – somehow I passed high school. Hey, but – yeah, and it was like – and that's when I – and I decided for myself like, you know what, I'm an actor. I'm like I definitely want to master it someday. I don't know if it can – or it can be or – but I – yeah, I really wanted to. I really wanted to further my own studies. And now I'm like I read a book every week and it's great, and I get to learn and I get to do things like this and add all the interesting things that I'd like to, but I think literacy is a huge part.

(Applause.)

MR. FRASER: Michael has a lot of – getting to know him, he has a lot of modesty, so I'm going to speak on his behalf for a moment if I may. He's a fantastic actor who is coming into his own. And we're going to be seeing a lot more of him. It's just a given. It's just a given. And this is really just the beginning of, I think, what's set a standard, and a very high one, and it would seem almost retrograde to go backwards from here by way of comparing, which leads into your question about who I represent in the cast.

And to reflect on that, I have to think about the process that went into creating this. And Paul afforded us, I think, about a week and a half – two weeks; whatever we could give of rehearsal time, and it was used to read scenes, to become acquainted with each other, to have sweat-lodge kind of conversations about this. And in the end, pretty much realized that we needed to become very close. We had to be friends. We had to care about each other. I mean, there had to be a strong feeling of support because what we were doing essentially in this film is wearing who we are as individuals. We're wearing our ethnic makeup as our costume.

I'm going to say it again. We're wearing our ethnic makeup as our costume. I'm the white guy. I'm – in the structure of dramatic works, I'm like the king, all right, and then going downwards there's the lieutenants, and then there's the queen, all the way down to the pauper. I mean, there's even a court jester in there somewhere. And there's a reason for that, because we're telling a story at the end of it all. But you can see that clearly the guy at the top of the heap is fallible. I mean, you see a human face on him for sure, but you see someone who is a young man, who may not be very experienced and therefore lacks wisdom; who's inherently frightened, but he won't show that. He's on the rocks with his marriage, clearly, and he has a decision to make that could or could not lead to certain catastrophe, but he hands that responsibility off to his subordinates. What kind of man is that? Well, you saw at the end he was making sure that his door was locked. He was frightened.

How did I relate to everyone else in the cast? In the same way that I was raised. I was raised all over the world. I'm goofing on Canada, but the truth is, my parents are Canadian. I'm the fourth son of a bureaucrat who had our family traveling every three or

four years. I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana. We lived in Ohio; Detroit. I grew up in Ottawa. The '70s I grew up in Europe. I went to international schools. We settled in Seattle, Washington, back before it was called Microsoft, I think. And I went to the high school in Toronto and I earned a college degree in acting and – back in Seattle and made my way to Hollywood. So to tell you the truth, I really don't know who I am, per se. I'm conflicted, to say the least.

But anyway, what that added up to I think is in the grand scheme of things a blessing for me because it's given me the ability to see people for who they are, and I'm grateful for that. I was – I think I was very lucky to be raised that way and that's part and parcel for the reason why I'm an actor.

MR. WILLIAMS: Young lady all the way up at the top. State your name first.

MIPE OKUNSEINDE: My name is Mipe Okunseinde. I am with the Center for American Progress. I have a question for the director. It seems that in our legislation, in our leadership one of the most fundamental moral values that's missing is the whole obligation to the community and kind of your obligation back to your brother; everybody's family, everybody's part of one general community.

MR. HAGGIS: Yes, what we define as morality, yeah.

MS. OKUNSEINDE: Yeah. So – but at the same time when you're making a movie that's so much about the interconnectedness of life, you kind of run the risk of exaggerating it to a certain extent, and I was wondering how you were able to avoid making your story seemed contrived or making the coincidences seem overly convenient in order to push forth the point that we're all interconnected somehow.

MR. HAGGIS: I don't know. I thank – I'm glad you think it was that way. Thank you. This film has been seen by very few audiences. It comes out May 6th. So how I was able to do it? I guess just by continually challenging the characters, and by saying that we ought – I mean, we – I wondered when I was constructing – as I said, you know, you get in a fight, you're driving down the freeway or you're cut off in the street, and you have harsh words or you scream at the guy or you give him the finger next to you. I'm just wondering what happens to that person when he goes around the corner, you know? We know what happens to us, but what happened to that person? Did he get in a fight with his wife? Did he go home? Or did he get in a – and the responsibility we have to strangers and our need to be connected to people.

We hide away in our homes. In modern society we segregate ourselves thinking we'll be safe. We all do. We all self-segregate when, in fact, we have this deep need to feel the touch of other human beings. And so we create now in Hollywood these – or in Los Angeles there (ersatz?) city blocks, you know, where people come from hundreds of miles to walk up and down. It's – they think it's like, you know, Third Street promenade and Universal City walk and you have these things where people say, "Oh, yes, I'm going to a movie or I'm going to go shopping." Well, they can go to a movie and go shopping a

lot closer to them. They go there to feel the touch of people who are different than them because only there, only among strangers do we feel safe, paradoxically. You know, so – and so I just kept asking myself questions, and then asking the characters questions.

But I wanted to respond to something. I forget; I think it was you said. There earlier as to what do we ask of you, what – you talk about legislation and this and what can you do. What we ask of you, please, is to be brave. We have – the time for timidity is gone, you know. We have to be brave everywhere in our life, in Hollywood. You guys have to be brave here. You have to speak the truth and damn the consequences. You know, it's like and what's the worst that can happen? People will – well, there's a lot of bad things that can happen. But you know, if you keep speaking the truth, you listen – you know, what Gandhi said, what Martin Luther King said, you just keep speaking that truth, and that's what we ask you to do.

REP. DAVIS: Let me quickly comment on that just from the congressional – the politician's perspective on this, if you will. Bill Clinton is, in my mind, one of the great communicators ever in American politics. There's no question about that. And in my mind, the greatest speech that Bill Clinton gave was in 1991 in Macomb County, Michigan. Macomb County is a blue-collar, working-class part of that state. George Wallace, my pro-segregation former governor, carried that area when he ran for president of the United States. They cared more than anything in the world about banning bussing and preventing the kids from being bussed to school with black kids. And Ronald Reagan had carried the area. Bush won and carried the area.

Bill Clinton went to Macomb County in late 1991 and Bill Clinton gave a remarkable speech and he said in that speech that “I can give you a president who cares about quality healthcare for all Americans. I can give you a president who cares about rebuilding infrastructure and rebuilding education in our community,” but at the end of it he said, “But I cannot make you want to be Americans again. I can't make you believe that you have an obligation to each other, strong to weak. I can't make you believe that it matters to you how a child in a different part of the world or a different part of the country is educated. You've got to do that.”

So I think the important transformative work in this country, a lot of it frankly will not be done by people like us who are sitting behind desks in Washington, DC, particularly when we're in the minority politically. The transformative work in this country right now, I think, has to be done in the communities. And the courage has to be in the communities as we've got to have the moral ability to put aside our differences. We've got to have the moral ability to ask something more of ourselves. And I think that's the big challenge we have. And I think your film speaks to this. How do we challenge each other to not just accept the banality and the mundaneness of our differences? How do we challenge each other to try to rise to some other kind of ideal?

The final point I'll make, we've got to rediscover that kind of language in American life, the language of community. This young woman talked about it. We talk about ourselves as if we lived in different worlds right now. We have attached enormous

analytical and predictive and descriptive power to terms like black, white, Latino, Asian, and those terms are nothing other than just guideposts about how we look.

Bill Clinton loves to make a point that human beings are 99.9 percent identical in terms of our GNA – of our DNA rather, and the differences are greater within races than across racial lines, but we act as if that's not the case. So what we have to do is to find some way to rediscover that language of connection again.

MR. HAGGIS: And I think one more thing – if you don't mind – is that we have to be careful not to – whether we're in power, which hopefully God willing it will be – happen someday again or out of power, we have to feel – we just have to forget about feeling too good about who we are as Democrats or however we define ourselves because you have to remember that, yes, disgraceful things are happening now, but also disgraceful things happened under people who we really admire, like President Clinton. The way we treated Haiti under his leadership was disgraceful. The way we treated East Timor and things like this; it was disgraceful. So we have to be able to hold our own feet to the fire, not just those who we say, yes, those are obviously wrong – wrongheaded.

REP. SOLIS: I just wanted to add that for me when I see a movie like this, the underlying current for me is that there are a lot of people out there that are suffering, hurting, trying to get a better job, trying to have a better life, a decent life for themselves and their family. When you think about what's happening right now in Washington, you see the skyrocketing costs in our communities of gasoline. I see working-class people that are just at ends right now. How do they get to work? How do they provide for their families? And we're not addressing those issues right now.

We have an energy bill that's going to come up on Wednesday. They want to drill. They want to locate refineries in communities of color. We're not talking about that. We're not talking about the fact that we're going to spend more money to unearth resources that we're probably not even going to be able to see in six months of drilling. Hello? And we're spending an enormous amount of money. And guess who's controlling it? Guess who's writing the bill? The big corporations. It's not even the members of Congress. We're not even going to be able to debate the bill fully in our committee, so I'm angry. I'm angry. And I'm angry because I want the public to understand the kind of veiledness that's going on here in Washington.

And movies like this are good because they show you a different side of what's really happening in society, but there's so much happening here on Capitol Hill that the public isn't even aware of. And so we have to support creativity and open access and outreach and we have to start disclosing that. And I am hoping that while I – the short time that I've been here that one day we will be in the majority and that I will be a ranking member on my committee so that I can talk fully about justice, environmental justice, and issues that we're not even talking about anywhere and –

MR. HAGGIS: And when we are, I think we have to be careful not to be where Brendan and his wife were in this movie, which in my mind were always good liberal

people who were pushed into this situation who then were able to justify their actions; to be able to justify anything in order to stay in power or in order to get what they need. We have to be really careful. As people, we can justify just an enormous amount of things, and forgive our own flaws. We have to be very careful about that in judging ourselves.

MR. WILLIAMS: Okay. We're going to take the last question from the lady back here who's had her hand up for a very long time.

Q: Sure.

MR. WILLIAMS: You've been very patient.

KAREN NUSSBAUM: My name is Karen Nussbaum. I'm with the AFL-CIO, the labor federation here. And I actually – it explains to me a lot that you're Canadian because this movie is very non-American. I'm not saying it's un-American, but it's, you know, political. It's artful. It's unflinching. It doesn't have a happy ending. It – those are all things that are not very typical of American movies. And as I sat here when you first started talking I thought, well, maybe he's a Brit, because how did this movie get written and made? And that's my question to you really is, how did it get made? Where did you find the support for this kind of film, which is really unique here? It's very similar to a movie like *Dirty Pretty Things*, but not very similar to movies here.

And what can we do as an audience to try to make sure that these kinds of truthful movies about our real condition get made more often?

MR. HAGGIS: Well, thank you. What you can do, the latter question, as I'll forget one, the second one before I get there, but is – I mean, these films have to be financially viable in order to get made. So – and everything's judged on opening weekend, so what you can do is tell 400 of your friends to show up May 6th and 7th, because if this one's successful – this is what happens. I mean, honest to God.

MR. WILLIAMS: Show up on May 6th.

MR. HAGGIS: May 6th, May 7th; those two days. I mean, what happens is I get – and we get power in Hollywood by delivering films that are – that make money. When *Million Dollar Baby* made \$100 million here and \$200 million overseas, everyone they said, "Oh, look, you know. The movies that are difficult actually make money. Oh, we should do more." And so I was able to take that little bit of celebrity and this and now I'm doing a movie about Iraq and what our responsibility is and what we're doing there.

And I went into Warner Brothers and they said, "oh, okay." And I said, you know – (laughter) – and they're going to do it, you know, so far. So if they make money and if we do them well – we don't want – this is – what I'm terrified of is that people will go out and they'll say – go – to your friends, "Go see – I saw this great movie about race relations. Did you go see it?" And it was like, I wouldn't want to see a movie about race relations. It sounds boring. You know, so – but – so don't tell them that because it's not

anyways, but it's a good drama, a good comedy, and then we have – if we're forced to think a little along the way, you know, it's a terrific thing. And how – and I think that's really what we can all do to just – is just make sure we support the arts; make sure we support things that we admire, so –

MR. WILLIAMS: One more question from the audience.

MR. FRASER(?): Do you think there's any chance we can get this screened at the White House? (Laughter.) Just thought I'd ask.

MS. : When there's a Democrat in the White House.

MR. FRASER(?): And honestly. I don't mean to be – I don't mean to be playing silly buggers here. I came to Washington just as much for a question-and-answer period as – I'm here for answers, too. I don't have them all. I'm really here to learn. I want to know. I really sincerely want to know. And by showing your presence here tonight and the faces that I see with nods of approval and thoughtful countenances, it's really very affirming to me – I know to all of us – that you're here. And another trick that will help make a film like this – show Hollywood that it is important and, therefore, the rest of the nation is if you buy two tickets on opening weekend. (Laughter.)

MR. : Take us.

MR. FRASER(?): Take us. I did it for –

MR. WILLIAMS: Could we have a round of applause, please, for our panel?

MR. FRASER: Thank you.

MR. PEÑA: Thank you.

(Applause.)

(END)