

Center for American Progress



SPECIAL PRESENTATION:

**“*NEW NEWS OUT OF AFRICA: A CONVERSATION WITH
CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT*”**

MODERATOR:

**GAYLE SMITH,
SENIOR FELLOW,
CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

SPEAKER:

**CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT, EMMY AND PEABODY-WINNING
JOURNALIST, CIVIL RIGHTS CRUSADER**

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MS. GAYLE SMITH: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Center for American Progress. I'm Gayle Smith. I'm a Senior Fellow here and it gives me a really terrific honor and a lot of happiness to introduce someone I think is a hero to and for all of us and who I'm also delighted to claim as a friend of many years, Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

Many of you know Charlayne as a hero of the civil rights movement, as a prominent and eloquent reporter on McNeil-Lehrer, on CNN, as the voice of some extraordinary reporting from NPR, and importantly as an author. Charlayne has a new book that's available in the back: *New News Out of Africa*. It's an exceptional and an important book for a couple of reasons. One is, obviously, we don't know enough about Africa and to have more to contribute to our education, our debates, our understanding, and importantly our action is critical. But for it to come from someone who is able to tell the story of Africa with honesty and clarity, while at the same time giving the African people their due dignity, is quite extraordinary.

So I hope you will join me in welcoming Charlayne this morning. What we'll do is we'll have a bit of a discussion up here and then we'll open for questions. So welcome Charlayne, and we're delighted that you're here. Charlayne and I last saw each other in a parking lot in East Africa.

MS. CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: We frequently meet in parking lots. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Charlayne, this book is something very different; we don't have many things like it. But as you know, those who cover and talk about Africa are divided in to what's called the Afro-optimist and the Afro-pessimist camps. There are people who either think that everything in Africa is fine, can and should be defended, or the glass is something less than half full. And it would be interesting if you could tell us about your thoughts in writing this book and how you would address that question. Is the glass half full or is it half empty?

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: You forgot the Afro-realists.

MS. SMITH: Afro-realists, Afro-pessimists.

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: I think these labels are a little strange. I mean, I know that we inherited the term Afro-pessimism after a book by an African-American reporter and one of the things I say in *New News Out of Africa* is that as journalists, even when we believe, we can't allow ourselves to drown in it. We go to these places and things happen. I talk about the four Ds of the African apocalypse: death, disease, disaster, and despair, which is the prism through which much of the international community views Africa. And as you know, there is death, disease, disaster, and despair, but there's a whole lot more to the continent. And I've always not particularly liked the term objectivity because we are all products of our backgrounds and our histories and our experiences and I certainly am. I mean, I'm drawn to Africa in part because I'm an African-American. I am interested in particularly this face. Look at this face. This is beautiful, but this is also the face of Africa.

Women on the continent are everything: they're the future of the nations in which they live but they're the poorest of the poor, they're the sickest of the sick, they are the most infected with HIV, they have high rates of maternal mortality. And as an African-American woman, I choose to look at this partly because I'm drawn to these women, but partly because their stories are important. So I have this double prism, this double vision. I mean, Dubois talked about it years ago in another context when he talked about being a black person and an American – two warring ideals in one dark body. Well, mine aren't warring; I've resolved that. I am who I am. At this age if I don't know, it's going to be really bad.

But I choose to focus on things in part driven by my own background and experience and as a result my experiences covering black people in America, in urban America particularly in the '60s after the Kerner Commission report that said that the cities had exploded and everybody was surprised because none of the reporters, most of whom were white, went anywhere near the black communities – some call them ghettos – of America. And no one was able to see the simmering rage that was there as a result of lack of services, et cetera, et cetera. And I also find that same is – and that's when the Kerner Commission recommended that more people of color be brought in to the media because, as I also say in the book, you have to go there to know there. And when you go there and know there in America, you realize that black people are more than athletes and sports figures, they're more than dancers and singers and entertainers, they're people like everybody else who have a range of problems: some good, some bad, some indifferent. And the same is true of Africa.

And I think the perspective that I bring to it is to look at people on the continent and try and portray them in ways that are recognizable to themselves. And I've never had people of color in America or Africans in Africa say to me, why don't you paint a rosier picture of us? What they want is reality. They want to be reflected in all of their multifarious existences and eccentricities, et cetera, which includes death, disease, disaster, and despair, but it also includes things that are totally unrelated to that and it also includes heroic efforts within the context of death, disease, disaster, and despair.

I mean, the people who are working in rural areas on HIV with no compensation – you know, they go and they bathe the sick and they do whatever they can even when there are no medicines but they bring comfort and they have this spirit of we can do this, we can do something about this. And then you have the example of someone like Pauline Malefane who comes out of a township in Cape Town, poor township where most of the people are unemployed, where the school systems all during the apartheid era were like our Jim Crow schools in the American South: separate and totally unequal – just a terrible set of conditions under which people have lived for many years.

Now, Pauline happens to have a beautiful voice and she was singing in the chorus of a production of Carmen, the Bizet opera Carmen, and the director had recruited voices from all over South Africa. Now, you've been in South Africa so you know how lusty and wonderful they are. And so she's in the chorus and they're singing and the opera – the Carmen character they brought in from Europe and she also had a beautiful voice, but it didn't hold up to these very lusty South African singers. And the director realized he had a near disaster on his hands – speaking of death, disease, disaster and despair – and he was despairing. And then – I don't know – sometime in the night it occurred to him and he went to Pauline Malefane and he said,

“Pauline, do you think you can do Carmen?” Now, this is three weeks before the production was to be filmed – to be presented, because later it became a movie. This was the live stage thing. She just about fell over but she said, “You know, inside of me I was shaking, but I said of course.” And over the next three weeks she said she ate, breathed, slept Carmen and then she stepped out on the stage and I was there that night when she debuted and it just brought tears to your eyes and chill bumps to your arms and she was amazing.

Now, the township out of which she came is still there, still poverty stricken, et cetera, et cetera, but she has gone on to star in the movie, Carmen (unintelligible). It was done in Isi (ph) Zulu. And just so confident – you know, she’s just simply amazing. Those stories don’t get told, of people and in their ordinary and sometimes extraordinary existences.

And then of course, as you know, in 1960 – am I answering too long?

MS. SMITH: No, you carry on.

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: In 1960, British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan talked about a new wind of change blowing across the continent of Africa. And he was talking about – he said this in front of the all-white parliament in South Africa, in Cape Town, and he said that he was heralding in the beginning of the end of colonialism and the beginning of the independence of nation-states in Africa. And of course, you know, the next 30, 40 years actually led to a dead end for a lot of African countries for many reasons, not least being Western complicity with some of the worst tyrants in the history of the world, but they stood as bulwarks against communism so the West supported them and let them do anything they wanted to to their own people, so that’s the legacy that many Africans are living under today.

But now there is indeed a second wind of change blowing across the continent and when you ask Americans, you know about NEPAD? They look at you. NEPAD, kneepad? What’s that? You know about peer review? No. Because people are talking about corruption and are we going to send aid and where is the money going to go, but they never heard of NEPAD. Now, if I had been there when the Africans came up with the concept of NEPAD and the principles that go with it, I would’ve said can’t you think of a sexier title? Not very interesting. It doesn’t play well in sound bites. But these are new principles that will hopefully as they were put into place, usher in or be blown through the continent by this second wind.

NEPAD calls for African leaders and their governments to practice good governance, to put in place sound economic and fiscal policies, to respect human rights, and to empower women, among other things. This is a reformist agenda that the Africans themselves, who now have this mantra, “African solutions to African problems,” that they put in place. This is the deal – part of the bargain that they’re striking with the West: if we do these things ourselves then we would like you in exchange – the West – to participate with us, to cooperate with us in rebuilding our countries.

And then peer review is revolutionary. Throughout the colonial period, borders in Africa were sacrosanct. As I said earlier, you could do anything to your people within your borders including steal them blind, torture them, kill them, bury them in places that couldn’t be found, and no other African leader would say a word.

Today, a good number of African countries that belong to the African Union, the origination that took the place of the Organization of African States, have signed up for peer review so that prominent Africans like Graca Machel, the wife of former president Mandela and the others of equal prominence if not visibility, would go into a country – South Africa has just gone through this; I don't know who their reviewers were. Rwanda has completed it – and actually assess their record of governance and economic and fiscal management and human rights and empowerment of women.

And I don't know whether they give them an A, B, C, D grade or 1, 2, 3, 4 grade of star, star, star or what, but they have a mechanism for measuring these things. And it's a voluntary thing. It's new. We don't know if it's going to work, but it's part of a new wind of change and I think that it begs for the involvement of the international community, which is why I think *New News Out of Africa* is important because if Americans in particular see that there are efforts on the part of Africans themselves to put their houses in order, it begs for them to participate. But if they don't know these things are going on – it's like when they had – one more thing about this. I talk about this often because it struck me so deeply: there was a picture on the front page of the *New York Times* last year as I was finishing this book of this beautiful red garment. And I looked closer and it was a woman wearing this garment and in her arms she had her baby who had just died from starvation in Niger. And behind her was her husband who had this – the expression was beyond agony. And the headline was about the famine, but the subhead was about how nobody was responding to appeals to help relieve the famine. And I believe – there were all kinds of reasons given, but I believe it's because the average American only gets a steady diet of death, disease, disaster, and despair out of Africa and as a result even though their humanitarian instincts may be as alive and well as ever, they look elsewhere than Africa because they say what's the point? If it's never going to change, this is not a good investment of my time, emotions, or money, which is a shame because that isn't the full story of Africa.

MS. SMITH: Well, I think obviously this book is something that's going to go a long way towards correcting that and I'm struck by a couple of things you said about confidence, one of the really moving things that I have seen in Africa in the last ten or 15 years is a resurgence of confidence, whether at the leadership level, at the popular level, to the extent that when I come back sometimes and people say, "Oh, you were in Rwanda" and look alarmed, and I say "No, it's very inspiring." People are kind of shocked by that.

I think that in the States we're seeing maybe a moment that could change things. There are many people here today and a lot of people who work with us that work on Sudan for example and on the issue of Darfur, which has mobilized a very odd assortment of groups who are now working together for common cause – a lot of students who sustain that involvement. I find that we get a lot of people who come to the Center and tell their organization is around town hungry for more information about Africa, interested in going there, interested in doing something.

Cracking open the media coverage is obviously a big piece of the challenge because I think if people are not indifferent, they're paralyzed by the sense of intractability. And if I could just ask you, if you were on television every night which I think we would all support, and you were able to identify two or three things that Americans should really understand about Africa

that we just don't get, and that if our aim is to engage with Africa on an equal basis, to see a world where we talk about global events in the world with Africa as part of it rather than as a separate topic over here, what are the key things that we just don't get? And obviously you've got a lot of stories in here that I think answer that question and any of those you want to refer to would be great, but just don't go too far because everybody really needs to read this book, so don't be telling like the whole book here. (Laughter.)

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: As I said earlier, I think that you have to go there to know there. And aside from CNN based in Johannesburg, there is no full-time international media presence – American-based international media presence on the continent. It's the typical "if it bleeds, it leads" syndrome, if you have a flood in Mozambique where a baby is born in a tree everybody goes there. Right now everybody – and rightly so, everybody is trying to get into Darfur although it's a pretty daunting task because Khartoum doesn't want reporters in there like Zimbabwe doesn't want reporters in there.

But more people have to be on the ground so that it's not okay let's go and focus on Africa for a week because you get a little bit of a feeling, a little bit of flavor of this that and the other, but it's not the textured, layered experience of day-to-day life. It's still that odd thing. And I just don't think it can happen in a week. I mean, I've been there now almost ten years and I just finished a five-part series for NPR on poverty and I thought I had seen it all, but I went to five different countries looking at maternal mortality, infant mortality, girls' education, rural poverty and one other thing – I can't remember right now what it was – just poverty in general, land issues, land reform in South Africa that one was. And I saw new things: I saw things that just blew my mind. And, again, I've been there ten years and I've been a lot of places, but I'm still seeing new things.

And I think it's good to do series; I think it's good to do documentaries. It would be hard for me to single out any one thing, but let's look at the Congo for example. As you say, people say you go to Rwanda and people were still thinking about genocide there and the (unintelligible) and Hutus killing Tutsis or in South Africa they say even to me today, "Oh, aren't you scared to live there? Aren't you afraid of being murdered?" When in fact most of the murders – the rate is high, but most of the murders are occurring among people who know one another and a lot it is in those poor black townships where people are just frustrated and acting out, they call it femicide – a lot of domestic violence.

Why don't we go and look at the Congo as a way of talking about how since 1998 – there were 14 wars raging on the continent then, today they're less than three. And while it's all fragile and there's still guns going off here and there's intimidation and violence during the elections, running up to the election, there is going to be a democratic election in the Democratic Republic of Congo in a couple of weeks. How do the people feel about that? How much do they know about the democratic process, and are they going to participate, how are they participating, and how are they living? And, you know, spend some time in these countries that are in a post-conflict situation and see how they're building their lives back up. There are some extraordinary things going on there.

So if you want to look at it through the prism of things that you know about, let's look at post-conflict. Let's look at Nigeria. As you know, there's so much – I just love Nigeria; it's so

big and robust and different from any place else on the continent. It's unique in its own way. But here is a country where Islam and democracy are working in compatible ways – you know there are issues, there are problems, et cetera, but here is a new democracy in effect.

Here is another wonderful development on the continent: that even as the leaders have talked about Africans solutions to Africans problems and the African renaissance, the people are buying into that and saying hey we want to be a part of this, we want our voices heard, so that in Nigeria for example, the other day the senate defeated a bill that would've given President Obassanjo a third term. Now, here is Obassanjo, who has been one of the architects of the idea of an African renaissance and NEPAD and peer review and has instituted reforms in the country aimed at rooting out massive actually corruption. I mean, not a lot of people have been tried or gone to jail, but a couple have which is better than in the previous existence. But here is a young, new democracy. We covered the election, the first civilian transitions from military rule, but what's happened in the country since? Can we go there and look at it when there isn't an immediate news story? This is a huge continent of 54 countries, over 800 million people; can't we find something that isn't horrible to write about, to record, to film, to make documentaries about? I didn't give you three things, but I gave you a principle.

MS. SMITH: No, but I think that principle is the right one because I think we're always going to think as Africa as something different and set apart and kind of interesting and odd rather than as a part of us in the world if we just visit from time to time for the sensational story.

(Cross talk.)

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: But you know who isn't thinking about Africa that way? China.

MS. SMITH: No, China is there big time.

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: Big time. I was in Khartoum for the second time – the other time I was there was years ago – and I was just blown away at how the city is growing, skyscrapers, modern apartment buildings, that I said to somebody what's going on here? They said the Chinese. I was in – when I saw you in Addis, the same thing. I went to a night club in Addis and there were these beautiful Ethiopian women in their lovely – those cotton, what do they call them? Those cotton dresses from Ethiopia? They're beautiful dresses, but I forget what they call them. And they were dancing these wonderful folk dances and everybody was in there, and I was in there doing this and doing this and over in the corner was a round table with about 15 Chinese. And they looked a little odd because they were not moving to the grooving like we were, but they were there. And I said to somebody what are they doing here? What is China? I mean, I know that Chinese generally do a lot of touring, especially in Africa, which is great, but there were so many, yeah, they live here. They're working here. They're everywhere on the continent.

Now, there's a big controversy now going on about exactly why they're there and they are extracting much of the wealth – some of the wealth of the country, but they're bringing things in, often to the dismay of local vendors because their textiles are competing with theirs, et cetera.

That's a very complicated thing. But they're not looking at the continent in the way that you just described.

MS. SMITH: No, not at all. I mean, they're looking at the continent as a huge untapped market. And they're way ahead of the rest of the world in doing that.

I'd like to open this up a bit because I'm sure there are some people in the audience who have questions for Charlayne. And if I could just ask if you'd raise your hand, we've got a microphone in the back. Yeah, let's go here in front. Thank you, Paige.

Q: My name is Peter Backof. I work here at the Center. I spent time working with the newspaper in Cameroon and I know that a big problem there is that a lot of the reporters – the best reporters that are coming out of Africa are getting hired away as press directors for international agencies or pulled away to Reuters or BBC or other international news agencies and there's kind of a foreign monopoly on news coming out of Africa. So if you could maybe speak of how this may be developed or what progress might be being made in making Africans more involved in producing their own news and being a better accountable part of their society.

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: There's definitely the interest on the part of the African journalists. I mean, one of the reasons they may be leaving Cameroon, as in other countries, is because governments are still hostile to the independent media. In Zimbabwe, every independent voice has been shut down. We were in Ethiopia because over a dozen journalists had been arrested and charged with treason and are facing even now the death penalty for – well, the government has accused them of being a part of the opposition, but as we talked to them, we didn't take a position or take sides other than to ask the prime minister to release them. But I mean the point is that what they were saying is that they're accused – the journalists – they're accused of being a part of the opposition because the government won't talk to them. And so when they report they're not going to stop reporting because the government won't talk to them, but as a result their reports are one-sided because the – and we engaged the prime minister on this and he agreed. He said himself the atmosphere between the media and the government was poisonous; it's his term. And he gave us his word that we would work to change that and to have his people, his officials be more accessible.

And this is part of the problem you have throughout the continent. For generations now, most of the media organizations in countries have been government and there have been very few independent voices. But now you're beginning to see a growing number of independent voices, but the mindset on the part of many of their governments hasn't changed – that they still must be supplicants and sycophants and there is an awful lot of corruption that has taken place because of government officials trying to influence or buy the stories. And it's a very difficult thing; you can't condone corruption, but a lot of these journalists are working for next to nothing and so they're easy prey for those who would want to bribe them to do stories that are more positive about whatever their issue is.

So you have this moment of transition that very much mirrors the transition that's happening in the whole continent, as a continent – and my second chapter is called “Baby Steps Towards Democracy,” and as the continent takes these baby steps, sometimes like babies faltering but nevertheless moving straight forward. The journalists are in that same situation:

they need a lot of support. Their salaries are often the lowest of the low. They often have to work in extreme circumstances. I mean, in Zimbabwe I'm so proud of those journalists because even though their organs have been shut – the newspapers have been shut and they can't get credentials to cover anything officially, but they still somehow get the word out about what's going on.

And what they do is they go to their homes at night and they work on their stories on their computers that are falling apart often, but they get it done, they download it onto disk, and in the night time when the security agents are elsewhere – sleeping or wherever – they go into internet cafes and download their information. That's how dedicated they are and they deserve support and I have a lot about them in there. The journalists on the continent are determined to take control of their own stories.

In Kenya, a young man by the name of Salim Amin, who is the son of a legendary photojournalist, Mohamed Amin, who died in a tragic accident some years ago – Salim has a wonderful documentary out about his father and him called *Mo & Me* getting all kinds of attention, but he and a group of other Africans, along with some Americans, are trying to set up an African network so that the means of production, as it were, would be in African hands. And I think would help and I think it would also help spur the international reporters to do a better job.

You see, I think that in a continent as large as Africa there's room for all of us, the international media as well as the homegrown ones. But years ago – have I told the story about coming in right? Years ago, I was working for the *New York Times* and I went to Harlem to cover a meeting of the Black Panthers, who were trying to reinvent themselves at the time – early '70s – and this Black Panther said that I couldn't come in because I worked for the man. Well, the *New York Times* was the man. I mean, or the old gray lady as they called her in those days. And I said, "But have you seen anything that I've written?" And he said, "No." And I said, "Well, give me an opportunity this time to report this story and if it isn't an accurate reflection of what went on, don't let me in next time but give me a chance." And this Black Panther said, "Okay, on one condition: that you come in right." And it just clicked, I had always tried to come in right but I'd never put it in those terms and I will be forever grateful to him wherever he is, he's probably running for office somewhere or may already be in office – things change.

But that's the directive that I think all of us, the locals as well as internationals, should always have in our minds: to come in right. And it's totally doable, but it means check your preconceived notions and your biases at the door. I mean, be informed of course, as I said earlier, by your own experiences and backgrounds and curiosities, but let's do real reporting. Let's let the circumstances on the ground determine what we write and how it's presented.

We have a lot of work to do with African leaders from the era where everything was state controlled and state owned. I mean, even now the television and radio – I think the majority is still state controlled and state owned, but even those voices are beginning to be a little bit more independent. As we know from our own country, dare I say, there's no love lost ever – it will be ever thus – between the media and the government.

MS. SMITH: Especially this week.

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: I'm not going there. I mean, it does raise some serious questions. This is a senior citizen of democracy and we need to be constantly aware of the impact that our actions in this country have on those taking their baby steps to democracy. We are the role models, and so the things that we do that are good in this country are looked up to. And then when we do something that isn't good, they point to us and say, "Well, they did it." And so that's the justification for doing some things that are harmful to the people and to the public and to the notion and the ideal of democracy. It's important for us to keep getting it right in this country because we stand for so much in the world and I have been in places – I mean, you know, Africans tend to know a lot more about our country and the rest of the world than we Americans know about their continent and the rest of the world, and they watch it very closely. And it's very important for us to come in right and keep getting it right.

Having said that, I think it's really important for those of you like you, Gayle, who often interact with African leaders to say that as you present yourself as coming in right in terms of your embrace of democracy, freedom of speech and freedom of expression and freedom of the press is one of the foundations of a democratic society. And they haven't all got that yet. So we all need to work at coming in right: the leaders, the journalists who have some responsibility, who must – as we said to Prime Minister Malis (ph), you know, we're not our computers: we're human and we sometimes get it wrong and we sometimes act irresponsibly. We're not perfect, but that doesn't mean that we should be arrested and be facing the death penalty or be arrested and tortured as in some countries – I'm not talking now about Ethiopia – or arrested and have our arms broken as has happened in Zimbabwe.

Let's figure out ways that we can all be more responsible and mechanisms for dealing with our irresponsibility that are consistent with the crime, as it were – that's a terrible choice of words because it's not a crime to make a mistake. So we have to on the African continent work with the African journalists who want to take control and be a part of this emerging, hopeful renaissance idea which hasn't yet come to fruition, but it's a dream, it's an aspiration, and it's possible.

MS. SMITH: In the second row there, please.

Q: Thank you. Coralee Farley (ph), Social Policy Research. In the context of African countries taking responsibility and control, my question has to do with the perception, and if any peer review has been done there, of U.S. efforts in HIV and AIDS and the ABC kind of policy which is somewhat changed or distorted from the original concept. Have any African countries evaluated – done peer review of the U.S. program?

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: I don't know. I know that there is a lot of discussion and debate about ADC. In some countries, like Uganda, which had a sterling record in dealing with the HIV pandemic to the extent that they led the continent in model programs that actually resulted in reduction of HIV infections – I don't know if it's a consequence of U.S. policy and reading it the wrong way or what. I don't want to get in to that debate, but I'm told that the first lady of Uganda has been severely critical of the use of condoms and there is a movement now away from condom use, which is regrettable if it's true.

I actually have not been to Uganda, but this is what I'm told by some of the activists there. And that in fact HIV infections are once again on the rise. I've even talked to catholic priests and bishops in South Africa who take exception to the Vatican's prohibition on condom use because they have gone there and they know there, and they know what an unrealistic thing this is to be against or to not promote or not to have as one of the alternatives – condom use.

One of these bishops, Archbishop Kevin Dowling, has been very outspoken in Southern Africa because – South Africa because he works in an area where there are mining companies going on – mining going on. And the number one problem on the African continent is not AIDS, but poverty, which affects everything, including how you deal with the pandemic. And there are a lot of poor, young women and girls who right now don't see any alternative, but to perform as sex workers. So until you have some alternative means of earning a living – you can condemn the notion and the practice all you want, but until you have some alternative for these young women it seems to me the logical alternative would be to help them protect themselves.

I have a friend, Doctor Helen Reece (sp), a professor of medicine at the University of (unintelligible) who is running a project in the Hillborough (ph) section of Johannesburg, which is home to all kinds of illegal things, immigrants and people trying to make it. And she has a project with sex workers and part of it is helping them to protect themselves for so long as they have to earn their living this way. But she is also one of the leading scientists working on contraceptives, microbicides for women which will empower them in ways that they are not empowered now and which has caused women to have the highest incidence of AIDS on the continent. They are so vulnerable economically to men, who have some means, that they're not in any position to say no. And so they are subjected to sex without condoms, men insisting on relations skin to skin all over the continent in fact, so that if this microbicide could ever come to fruition – ever be fully developed this would empower these women to protect themselves so long as they are in this economically vulnerable position. So it's not even a matter of how you feel, your faith, or whatever: it's about the reality on the ground and dealing with that reality as it presents itself until you can create conditions that change it in a fundamental way.

Q: My name is Ervin Webb (sp) and I'm recently from Atlanta, so I applaud you in your strides in civil rights. I remember when you integrated the University of Georgia.

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: You're older than you look.

MR. WEBB: Yes I am. I want to say about your comments about the Congo. That story has been caught between the aftermath of Rwanda and the current affairs in Darfur, but I think they said it's one of the ten least reported stories of the world. The Congo right now is making a lot of strides to correct that situation, correct itself, and to compile the democratic process, and I think that the media can do a lot because if Western and particularly U.S. media focuses more on what's going on over there now, it will shed light on the situation and allow the country to transition through the democratic process because there's a lot of tension there because of the elections coming up. I think Al Jazeera is setting up operations in the Congo and all over Africa as we speak. I don't know what NPR is doing, but there are outlets that go in and out to report on the big stories of disaster, but this is a story that we all could focus right now that would actually shed enough light to make it happen correctly, I think, because it would discourage people who want to have a fashioned election outcome the way they want.

Secondly, you made a comment about China. China is all over Africa. They've been there before the Cold War, during the Cold War, and they're still there now. And I think that's something we should look at and we should be doing more of. And I think Senator Barack Obama introduced legislation to actually have a U.S. special representative in the Congo, just like the UN has, so I think if the media focuses more on those issues and those kind of details, it would serve to educate the American people.

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: Thank you. I think one thing about the Congo and African solutions to African problems, South Africa is truly the engine of change on the continent and its democracy, although in 11 years and relatively stable is still also young, but it has involved itself in the rest of the continent often in ways that worry some people because of the business tentacles that are spreading out throughout the continent. But it has also gone in and as much as it had a hands-on involvement – it brought all of the worrying parties from the Congo into South Africa to Sun City – fabulous resort there – and just kept them there for days and weeks at a time with the highest level of South African government representation, including the president, hands on till two and three in the morning when we'd be asleep and they would call a press conference and we'd say, oh, no. It'd be three o'clock in the morning to announce some breakthrough.

And the South Africans didn't stop there. They are spread out throughout the Congo now helping people set out the mechanisms for this election. And I think that that's something Americans generally don't know about. Just the other day, I saw that the last rebel group that had refused to sign the peace agreement in Burundi, which has been broken starting with Nelson Mandela and, once he stepped aside, South African government officials of the highest level continued with that process and they've now come on.

So war breaks out and everybody parachutes in; peace breaks out and everybody folds up their parachutes and goes home. But this is an amazing story. Americans were so engaged in South Africa in the anti-apartheid struggle in part I think because they could almost empathize with it, given our experiences in the American South. And yet when apartheid ended, for me it wasn't that the story was just beginning but a new phase of the story was beginning. I mean, here is one of the greatest experiments of all time: a country that's attempting to change the direction of the economy – not the direction of the economy, but the involvement of the black majority in the economy, and if this, in fact, the policies that they put in place to redress those historical imbalances works, it would be one of the most radical and successful transformations in the history of the world as we know it. And yet apartheid ended, everybody folded up their tents and went home. And this is a fabulous thing that's unfolding there.

I mean, America has had its issues with the affirmative action and it's become a dirty word. They're even calling it other things now – diversity or whatever they're calling it. And in South Africa, affirmative action is not a dirty word, it's government policy and every layer of society is affected by it from the business community to the universities. Every aspect – government – every aspect of society has this government policy in effect.

And wouldn't it be interesting to see the difference in the way a black-led government executes affirmative action with a black majority and compare it to how it has happened in the United States? I mean, wouldn't that be interesting? We were so invested in the continent – in

the country up until Mandela became president; you would think that there would be a continuing interest in this, but nobody is there watching and it's fascinating to watch – at least it is to me. And it's fascinating to watch how South Africa is trying to refashion its role on the continent and also refashion the continent. Its president is one of the leaders and architects of the African renaissance. I just think that's interesting.

MS. SMITH: I think it's interesting and I have to apologize because our time has run out. It's interesting. I think importantly it's inspirational, and one of the greatest lessons I've had the privilege to learn from Africa is that it's the source of more hope than despair, and our thanks go to Charlayne for pointing that out in a way that is real, objective, honest, and insightful. And, again, I think there are a few more books at the back, but I encourage you to read it and I certainly encourage you to follow Charlayne's reporting. And from the bottom of my heart and soul, thank you, Charlayne.

MS. HUNTER-GAULT: Thank you, and I thank all of you.

(Applause.)

(END.)