

Center for American Progress



SPECIAL PRESENTATION:

“THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF THE JOURNALISTS WHO WERE THERE”

MODERATOR:

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CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

FEATURING:

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POST*; EDITOR-AT-LARGE, *WASHINGTONIAN MAGAZINE***

**JACK NELSON,
FORMER JOURNALIST, *LOS ANGELES TIMES***

**BARBARA REYNOLDS, FORMER COLUMNIST, *USA TODAY*;
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**CARL STERN, FORMER JOURNALIST, NBC NEWS; J.B. AND
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MR. MARK LLOYD: Again, thank you for coming. My name is Mark Lloyd. Welcome to the Center for American Progress. We're going to do a program today that's going to look at Media and the Civil Rights Movement, and I just want to thank you all for coming. We're going to go for about an hour and then take questions for half hour after that hour is up. As you can see, we've got a large panel. We're going to try to move through this quickly. And I just wanted to start out by thanking Rhian O'Rourke for putting this together along with Anna Soellner and the help of Theo and Alex and Michael Nguyen and Anne Shoup, and, again, thank you all for coming.

My name is Mark Lloyd as I said. I'm a senior fellow here at the Center for American Progress. The achievement of the basic American right to use public places, to engage in business transactions as equals, to travel without fear on the public highways, to live where we choose, to go to adequate schools, and to vote: these civil rights for Latinos, for Native American Indians, for Asian-Americans, and for African-Americans – these civil rights are enjoyed today because Americans – old but mostly young, rich but mostly poor – were willing to risk their lives and their fortunes. These civil rights enjoyed today are not the victory of Democrats like John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, or Republicans like Earl Warren or Everett Dirksen, but make no mistake: these victories, these civil rights that we enjoy today are because of progressives. It took a progressive spirit to move beyond the status quo, to ignore the conservative calls to go slow, to change the way things were done in the South and the West and the North.

The civil rights struggle resulted in affirmative action for women and an increase in the rights for young people, yet it was appropriately called at that time, "The Negro Revolution." The greatest force behind what we now call the civil rights movement was the discontent of black Americans and a deep-rooted belief in the American conviction that all of us are created equal. And so it is fitting that we celebrate today this great American movement during Black History month. As a former journalist, of course, I think today's focus on media is appropriate. I was inspired by the courage of reporters' voices shaking as they described dogs and fire hoses trained on young black protesters. I was impressed by the clarity and intelligence of reporters who were telling us what was going on in Congress and the White House and Supreme Court. Despite the fact that I never, never saw a reporter who looked like me, their work inspired me to join their ranks. I've left those ranks to reform media because I'm still inspired by the reporters of the '60s and the '70s. I left those ranks because I'm convinced that the struggle for civil rights in America is not yet over.

And so our program will seek to tease some of the recollections of the journalists who covered those days of marches and protests and riots, and talk a little bit about what has changed with the media and what those changes might mean for our continuing struggle.

We have with us a group of award-winning journalists; any one of which could go on for at least two hours about the civil rights movement, but we have only a short time with them and as I promised we will make sure that we have an opportunity to get your questions because that's why you came here to participate and engage in conversation with them.

Joining us to my immediate left is Chuck Conconi. Chuck was former journalist for the *Washington Post*, editor-at-large for the *Washingtonian* magazine, came to Washington to work for the *Evening Star* and covered the district building and the civil rights movement including the assassination of Dr. King and the Poor People's Campaign.

Next to Chuck is Helen Thomas. Many of us refer to her as the First Lady of the press. White House bureau chief for many years – (laughter) – for UPI. Helen watched civil rights movement unfold from the White House, and so we're interested in her perspective. She observed presidents from Kennedy to the current Bush contend with the struggle for reform in our country.

Next to Helen is Jack Nelson. Jack worked for the *Los Angeles Times* for 37 years. An extraordinarily distinguished reporter who I've had the fortune the study over a number of years. Born and raised in the South; began his career in Biloxi, Mississippi; worked with the *Daily Herald* there, and was later a reporter for the *Atlantic Constitution*. Dangerous times to cover and dangerous places to cover civil rights movement.

Next to Jack is my friend, Barbara Reynolds. Reverend Reynolds is a former columnist for *USA Today*, reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, an ordained minister and adjunct professor at the Howard University School of Divinity. Author of several books including the award-winning biography of Reverend Jesse Jackson, a good friend of Coretta Scott King – the late Coretta Scott King who did so much to preserve the civil rights movement.

And last but not least, a fellow broadcast journalist, Carl Stern was for 26 years NBC's reporting authority on the U.S. Supreme Court and the Justice Department. Earlier in his career he covered the civil rights movement in the South and he is now the Maurice Shapiro Professor of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University.

Let me start with Helen. Helen, if you could just give us a very quick anecdote – a story that for you really summarizes the civil rights movement and what it was at that time.

MS. HELEN THOMAS: Okay. I'm a Detroiter. I went to integrated schools, but at the same time it was a town where there was a great divide (unintelligible) and so forth. And I think it was to the regret of my life that we had two of the largest race riots ever in this country in Detroit: end of World War II and 1968. My greatest moment in reporting – and I say this and I've said it in books – was when I was sent to the Supreme

Court as part of the United Press team when we all knew the great decision *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* was going to be handed down. I was a gopher. I mean, I was low-man on the totem pole, but I was thrilled to be a part of it.

And when the decision came down to this press room – and, of course, it was the days before cell phones or any other kind of quick transmission – the decision was put in a pneumatic tube and we had the most fantastic, really brilliant reporter to be in charge of the team. He got the decision, pulled it open and announced the decision. It was a flash, and we were all – I mean, goose bumps because for me, I had no idea what that decision would mean in our society. I mean, it was still a struggle for the schools, but it was so all-pervading. It meant discrimination was wrong and out and equality was right. So that was my great moment.

I want to take one issue with you. The Warren court, I think, was very important, and LBJ. It was LBJ – when he came in, he started the Great Society and he started in – he had been a Southerner, so-called, in the Senate and he initiated the Civil Rights Act, which really caused a lot of pain with his former colleagues and voting rights for blacks in '65. A group of senators came to him – came to the Oval office and said, “What is this, Lyndon? When you were in the Senate, you were a Southerner.” He said, “I’m president now – president of all the people.”

MR. LLOYD: Thank you.

Barbara?

REVEREND BARBARA REYNOLDS: Well, I was in civil rights movement – I never will forget working in Tennessee – Brownsville, Tennessee trying to register blacks to vote. We almost got killed in Brownsville, Tennessee. There were roadblocks and I was very naïve. Born in Columbus, Ohio, didn’t understand racism at that level that someone would try to kill me just because I was black. So in Brownsville, Tennessee when it almost happened, I began to understand racism from a visceral level that someone would really kill me because I did not look like a white person.

Later, as a reporter with the *Chicago Tribune*, it was in '69, I was called to the home of Mark Clark and Fred Hampton. I had known Fred Hampton, who was a member of the Black Panther party. He was a pretty nice guy I thought. He would have been a lawyer, he said. He was a member of the NAACP, but he was also a Black Panther. I walked in as blood – I walked in – on the door on the west side of Chicago, there was blood on the floor, blood on the mattress, blood everywhere, a hundred bullet holes in the wall. At that time in my young life, I thought there would be such a thing as justice for people who did wrong things because whatever he had done in this system of justice was supposed to have trials, but he was assassinated. So in my young life, I thought justice would happen and people would pay for their crimes. It didn’t happen to people – and the people who shot him down. They still walked around. There was no justice. So when Rodney King happened, I had learned that there is still much to do because we still

have to be on the battlefield for justice. Then there was Amadou Diallo who put his wallet up and people literally shot him over, I guess, 18, 20, 21, 30 times.

So as a child of the civil rights movement who almost died just trying to be a human being, to see the progress now – and, of course, the lack of progress where people could look at Katrina people and call them refugees; that our government could look like at people like – that were Americans and just go on with business as usual.

So I saw it, I was a part of it, and I'm still hoping that I can live to see a day when we all can be treated as human beings.

MR. LLOYD: Thanks, Barbara.

Jack Nelson?

MR. JACK NELSON: Well, I opened up the Atlanta bureau of the *Los Angeles Times* in 1965 and that's when I really began to cover civil rights. I went directly to Selma, where Dr. King was leading the voting rights marches. And I'd have to say that his leading of the voting rights marches was by far the most interesting part of what I covered.

He went from Selma throughout small counties, interviewing young black people who some of them were veterans of World War II, some of them were veterans of the Korean War. They couldn't register to vote. He was in predominantly black counties and some counties where the black population was 70, 75 percent. There was not a single black official in the county. There were no black jurors. There were not black voters.

He went to a small place called Gee's Bend, Alabama, which was an all-black community of about 800 families. To get there you'd have to go over, in wet weather, a muddy road of about 10 miles, and of course a dusty road when it was dry weather. And he'd spoken at a church – a Black church there where it was heated by potbelly stove and a naked light bulb came down and old black women sat on the front row wearing shawls. And he stood there and told them, he said, "You are somebody. You are as good as the best black – white person in Wilcox County." And you could tell that these old black women had never had anybody tell them anything like that before and they all sat on the front row and shook their heads. And when Dr. King, who was the best speaker I ever heard anywhere – when he stopped speaking, there weren't a dry house – dry eye in the house, and that was including reporters. He was a most inspirational speaker and I think that seeing Dr. King speak that throughout the voting rights march, it made most of us who were covering the voting rights marches understand that this was a campaign that was going somewhere.

And I think long before it was over, we knew the Voting Rights Act was probably going to be passed, not only because of what he did, but because of the wrath that he brought out among the real diehard segregationists in the South who attacked all the civil rights demonstrators. And this was the first time, of course, that scenes like this had been

shown across the country on television and galvanized the American public. So I think most of us knew that this was going to be the end of segregation, at least by law – Jim Crow segregation. And it was the end of it, not just on the Voting Rights Act, but you could go down in the South today – and I go down there quite a bit because I still have relatives living in the South – and you can go into places where there are blacks who control the politics in different counties. You have black police chiefs, you have black judges, black prosecutors and certainly black voters.

It used to be back in those days, if you went to a courthouse and you saw a black at the courthouse, the black would either be pushing a broom or would be a criminal defendant. Today, they are very much a part of the justice system.

MR. LLOYD: Great.

Carl, please?

MR. CARL STERN: Well, I'm going to get emotional too. Do you feel it? Isn't it? Forty years – forty years later we still tremble when we think about this. This was perhaps – I'm sure – the most emotionally draining, intense experience in our reporting lives. To have been in a black church at night in Charleston or Port Gibson or someplace like that and to have these people around you, singing and you had this sense of the social injustice and you knew by – you knew if there was a God in heaven, things were changing and you could feel that change. You could feel the geologic plates moving under your feet. You knew big changes were occurring in this country. And none of us, I'll bet, had ever had an emotional experience like that, even though in those days they didn't do a lot of live stuff, so – (laughter) – you had managed to get your composure back by the time you did your stories.

I was in New Orleans for the Clay Shaw trial when I was sent to Mississippi for the first time. A black worker at a tire plant, Wallace Jackson, had been blown up in his pickup truck. He was the first black man who'd been promoted into a certain production department at the plant. And I got as far as Jackson and I was going to have to drive – took a plane to Jackson. The first thing I did was I went into the bathroom and I tore up my membership card – I'm sorry, Barbara – in the NAACP. I didn't think it was a good idea to have that in my pocket. (Laughter.) I'd gotten that when I lived in Cleveland.

Then I went over to Natchez. I got to my motel and I took out my typewriter and I put it on the desk. And this motel was by the highway; no shades or curtains on the window. So if I sat there at night typing, it's a dead giveaway. And I mean dead giveaway. These – as Mark said, these were dangerous times. So I went to the only other place where I could sit with a light overhead and type – (laughter) – the commode, right? The bathroom, and that's where I wrote my stories because I was afraid, frankly, to be seen from the highway.

And these were really bizarre times in many respects. The sheriff held a news conference the next day at which he made it clear to us that this had to be the work of

outsiders, this killing of the black man. And how did he know that? Well, nobody had mentioned the plan to him to do anything like that. So it had to be the work of outsiders – weird and bizarre times.

Just a year before, Frank Reynolds of ABC had been driven out of town – out of Natchez at knife point, but they were on – under a – they were on good behavior because they were trying to attract industry and so everything was all smiles.

I actually had breakfast with Roy Wilkins at the Admiral Bimbo in Jackson, and he was tea drinker, just as I am, and when his tea arrived, the bag broke and there was little bits of tea leaves in his tea. And this pretty young thing – a white waitress who had brought the tea – was just in tears for fear that he would think that she had intentionally sabotaged his tea. I'm sure he had no such idea, but everybody was a little bit on pins and needles at that point. Anyway, we'll talk more about it, but I just wished every reporter today could have what we had, which was at one moment of our lives living that – with such intense emotions in what you reported. There's nothing in my life, not even the Saturday night massacre, Watergate, resignation of presidents, all that kind of stuff – nothing has even come close to the days of the civil rights revolution.

MR. LLOYD: Thanks, Carl.

Chuck?

MR. CHUCK CONCONI: This is difficult, emotional when you bring that up. Something happened to me two years ago. I'm going to bring it into a different perspective. I was down – I had to go down to Mississippi to do a story. I hadn't been down in Memphis since the morning that King died and I flew out of here at 3:00 in the morning in a Braniff cargo jet to get down there. I had to pay a cab driver something like \$50 or \$60 to take me in town and he had a pistol next to him. I went down with Haynes Johnson who had won his Pulitzer the year before covering Selma. I was working at the *Star* then. And he had – I said, "What are you doing with a gun?" And he said, "Some black son of a bitch puts his face in my window, I'm going to blow his head off." We got there but – so I'm down in – staying at the Peabody Hotel – this is two years ago, and I had not been to see the site of the assassination at the – what was the hotel called again? The motel that –

REV. REYNOLDS: Lorraine.

MR. CONCONI: The Lorraine, that's right. The Lorraine – where I had been that morning where the blood was still on the balcony. And I knew it wasn't that far and I – before I was leaving for Mississippi, so it was about a seven-block walk in the warm, hot summer day, and I walked down the street and into the neighborhood which is kind of a barren neighborhood and I turned the corner and there it was. And it has been preserved – it is now a civil rights museum – it has been preserved to exactly the way it looked like then. There is a Cadillac and another car of vintage parked right below the balcony where it took place. And as I walked into there, I had a delayed reaction. I

started shaking and quivering and it took me five or 10 minutes to get my emotions controlled so that I could walk in and go through and see the site.

If you've never been there, it's a remarkable place. They preserved – they have put Plexiglas walls and have preserved the room where King had stayed when he walked down the balcony. And then there's a tunnel that goes under the parking lot and goes to the building from which the shot was fired. And I was reminded – I hadn't thought of it at that time, there was – you know, we watch television now and there's so much caretaking with police procedure. I walked up there and the police let me walk right into the bathroom, stand by the tub, look out the window where the shot had been fired just to report.

I mean that is the way it was – and I was one of those young people, I grew up in Ohio, too, in a little town called New Philadelphia, Ohio. I had – there were no blacks there. I grew up, went to Catholic schools where they taught us that it was wrong and I thought I was – could become an objective journalist. You know, objectivity was what they taught me both at undergraduate school at Kent State University and graduate school at Northwestern. I found covering the civil rights movement there was no such thing as objectivity. Segregation was wrong. I could be fair in my reporting about it, but I couldn't be objective.

There are a lot of other things if we get a chance that I think I learned as a young naïve reporter starting out in Chicago and worked at the *Toledo Blade* and Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, but if we have time, I'll relate more.

MR. LLOYD: Wonderful. Just incredible stories that you're all providing. You know, we talked very briefly early on, and I want to try something just to get your reactions. We've mentioned Dr. King, we mentioned – and I just want to get your reaction to some names here. Bobby Kennedy.

MS. THOMAS: I thought he was a great humanist, that he was incredible. I think he could have been president if he had not met his fate, and he picked up a cause. He had a following and enthusiasm, spirit.

MR. LLOYD: Fannie Lou Hamer.

REV. REYNOLDS: Well, Bobby Kennedy first of all taught us to have a kind of vision that Fannie Lou Hamer had, that Coretta King had: to not see justice, but to dream a world that might not look like that, but this is what I'm going to work for. They all shared that prophetic spirit. Fannie Lou Hamer was beat in Southern jails because she wanted in Mississippi for people to have the right to vote, and she was beat. She walked with a limp. She said, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." That was her motto, and the voting now – the people who are in elected office now have to thank Fannie Hamer for laying there in those backwoods jails, and she never have made the front page like some of the others but she took the heat and the weight. And we really owe her a great deal of gratitude.

MR. LLOYD: Bob Moses. Any – anyone remembered Bob Moses? Any reactions to Bob Moses?

MR. NELSON: I remember Bob Moses, but I – to tell you the truth, I didn't really cover Bob Moses. I mean, he was certainly one of the leading figures in the civil rights movement. Let me say one thing about Bobby Kennedy though. Kennedy really did believe in civil rights and he really did believe in the rights of blacks. And I remember covering him when he went to Old Miss and he landed in Oxford, Mississippi, and I'll never forget there was a young white guy who came up to him while he was walking down the fence shaking hands and looked at Kennedy and said, "Why don't you get a hair cut?" (Laughter.) And Kennedy didn't say a word, but he just looked at him with those cold, steel blue eyes and he just faded into the background. I mean, Kennedy was a real presence down there and when he spoke at Old Miss, he had the audience with him throughout.

MR. LLOYD: Carl, you were going to jump in there?

MR. STERN: Well, I was just thinking we're really leaving something out in a way. We're kind of suggesting that this was all a product of the Kennedys and Johnson and so on, and I think it does a disservice. It understates the extent to which there was a national commitment to do something about this problem that cut across party lines and which is a kind of unity that is sorely lacking today in this age of spin and expediency and focus groups and all this kinds of stuff.

It was the Nixon administration and John Mitchell at the Justice Department in '69 and '70 and '71 who pursued affirmative action through the Philadelphia plants, committing the federal government to do something about inequality in employment. It was the Supreme Court at the Warren Burger in 1971 in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg case which put a constitutional floor under bussing and an unanimous decision, just as three years earlier in the Green case out of Virginia, and it said that these freedom of choice plans had to be eliminated, root and branch, and other kinds of racial injustice.

This was a commitment in which cut across the leaders and rulers of America. And today, would we get that? Well, I would hope so, but I don't want to be overly confident.

MR. NELSON: Carl, I –

MR. LLOYD: Let me let Chuck get in here. Go ahead.

MR. CONCONI: Well, what I want to get at, it's more – it's less to do with individuals, what I've noticed than it had to do with people. And it was, again, the learning process of the young boy who grew up in Ohio at a small town and had never seen anything, and I started noticing as I began covering the civil rights movement at the *Toledo Blade*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and then down here that it was – it kind of really

was a people's movement more than anything else, and it came out of the churches and I didn't understand that. I kept saying, "What does everybody have to be a Reverend something or other?" (Laughter.)

As a matter of fact, when I was hanging around with the SCLC people – Southern Christian Leadership Conference – people in Atlanta, they used to tease me because I would tease them about it, and then they started calling me Reverend Chuck. But the point that I learned was that that was safe. It was safe place for a black leader to be in. If you were a reverend, you pretty much had a job and you are protected. So you were in a position that you could lead, where somebody else who had been in the business community couldn't.

Another thing I learned not knowing what it was like to grow up black was the black middle class – the ones who were better off, when they traveled, what a problem they had. Say they were coming from Miami to Washington, or traveling from Washington to Cleveland; there was a structure in the black community, particularly where you could call people along the way, so you could not be embarrassed, a place where you might be able to stay and spend the night or you could have a meal or they would tell you where you could go to a bathroom. I mean, can you imagine just going on a motor trip from Miami to Washington and having to structure all that because you couldn't pull along the side of the road and do it? That was something that we white reporters, as you said earlier – said the reporters didn't look like you that were covering the story, and we didn't, but I think a lot of us really learned how to cover the story.

But again, rather than the means of people, it was the people themselves in the churches and in the communities that was the heart of the movement, which was what Martin Luther King was able to stimulate.

MR. NELSON: Let me – let me – let me just say one – (laughter).

MR. LLOYD: We got – we've got a half hour.

MR. NELSON: Mark, one thing very quickly about –

MR. LLOYD: Yes.

MR. NELSON: – what Carl said because I don't think it should go unstated that while the Nixon administration did do a few things, Carl, I don't think they should be put in the same category as LBJ or Kennedy –

MR. CONCONI: Here, here.

MR. NELSON: – by far, because number one, the Nixon administration played the Southern strategy when he was running for reelection, but in addition to that the civil rights division at the Justice Department did so little coverage at one time that there had to be a tremendous shake up in the civil rights department.

MR. LLOYD(?): Points made.

MR. STERN(?): I don't think that's entirely accurate. I traveled with Jerris Leonard, the civil rights chief, through Louisiana, for example – Baton Rouge, Alexandria and so on at a time when Brian Landsberg and his people had 400 law suits going against school districts. I think – all I'm just saying is we may understate their commitment. Was it all that it could have been, should have been, as much as the Kennedys and so on? No.

MR. NELSON: Okay.

REV. REYNOLDS: Well, I wouldn't give that much credit to either one of them. (Laughter.)

MR. LLOYD: So with that assistance, Barbara, let me – let me change this and see if we can talk a little bit about the press at that time. Was the press different then, Helen? Do you have any –

MS. THOMAS: When I started working life as a copy boy at the old *Washington Daily News*, now defunct, they didn't – there were many slayings on Saturday night in the black neighborhoods. They never covered them.

MR. STERN: Those were cheap stories, they were called. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

MS. THOMAS: No, that's right. And the point is that the – I think people's awareness – they were aware. I'm angry at myself. When I came to Washington, it was a sleepy Southern town. I could go – at the Press Building there was a snack bar; I could go and get a cup of coffee and even sit down in, you know, this kind of a place, but a black would have to walk in – they could get a cup of coffee, but they had to walk out.

And one other story is that in terms of what everybody else have been saying, LBJ became aware – more and more aware of the whole problem when his cook, Zephyr Wright would drive with her husband from Washington to Texas, and there was no place to go to bathroom or to get a good decent meal. And one day he said – called her in springtime, President Johnson, he said, “Zephyr, I want you to go and open up the ranch. We're going to be there in a few days.” She said, “I'm not going.” He said, “Why?” She said – and she told him the story, and he gave her the first pen when he signed the Civil Rights Act.

MR. LLOYD: Wow. I didn't know that. Carl, I know that you want to get in here on something else, but – yeah?

REV. REYNOLDS: I wanted to talk but – but from a perspective of, you know, I was in the news rooms.

MR. LLOYD: Yeah.

REV. REYNOLDS: I was the one was told first of all, “We don’t want to hire you because you’re black.” And then if that’s not enough, “We don’t want to hire you because you’re a woman.” You know, I was the one who – I was fighting for my rights and as a person in the South, but trying to hold on in the news rooms that didn’t want to hire in the first place, and would tell me that, “Well, we’ll hire you, but we know you can’t write.” (Laughter.) So – you know, so this is very important because we had a whole different life. It was not covering somebody else; it was trying to live as a human being, as a writer. You know, Countee Cullen said, you know, “How do you paint a poet black and bid him sing?” I’m sitting here saying, “How could I be a writer and survive in this context when even as I write the people around me say, ‘You’re not supposed to be there?’” But when I look at Oprah Winfrey, who by herself got people in Katrina homes to build, I think, my, look what the civil rights movement has done, because they wouldn’t have hired her at when I was coming along. So things have changed.

MR. LLOYD: Carl? Carl, I know you want to –

MR. STERN: I just want to make the point that we have changed. “We” being the community, the public. Today we are assaulted by this endless barrage of news. We’re always in overload about issues and stuff that’s on the air, for example. In those days, there was relatively little of that. At 6:30 at night during this period, we had a – sort of a national conversation when the networks were showing us for the first time what was going on down in the South with the fire hoses and the night sticks and the horses and all the other stuff. And people could concentrate, could spend some time looking at the stuff, letting the impact sink in, talk about it around the dinner table. That’s not what we do today. We’re all – our lives are organized differently. The news business is organized differently. I wonder – maybe our panelists have a view on this – I wonder if the same situation were occurring today whether this endless assault of news would make it – would have brought things to a head quicker or not, or perhaps it would have injured the process.

MR. LLOYD: Helen, what – Helen, what are you saying?

MS. THOMAS: I think definitely there’s a great awareness, but what is so clearer now – where is the outrage in this country on everything that’s going on? There are no leaders.

MR. CONCONI: Well, there is an overload. I mean, I think go back to what Helen said about it. It’s true. When I started my reporting in Chicago, I remember covering a pretty horrible rape of a black girl and I called the office and I said, “I got this big rape story,” and they said, “Is she black?” And I said, “Yeah, but let me tell you –” and he said, “She’s black, right?” And I said, “Yes.” And they said, “That’s a cheap story. Forget it.” And that was the way it was and it was frightening to deal with that.

The movement changed that. And I think we are today – for all the weaknesses that I see in American journalism today, we’re far better off than we were then. I mean, it was a gradual – a lot of us – and particular a lot – a lot of we reporters were concerned about the way they did it. I remember a group of us at the *Washington Star*, they used to run – there’d been a hold up: a black man wearing brown pants was seen running away. And we’d go – and finally, a group of us went in to the editor and said, “What does that mean?” You know, what kind of identification is that? A black man wearing brown pants or a white man wearing brown pants. It means nothing. We can’t do that anymore. We are able to stop it. You don’t see that kind of thing anymore.

But you’re right, Carl –

MS. THOMAS: We use black. (Off mike.)

MR. CONCONI: No. I mean they use black, but I mean it was just the identification. It was no identification, it just emphasized it was a black man because wearing brown pants was no identification.

REV. REYNOLDS: But have you looked at the White House press corps? Of course, you know, my friend, Helen Thomas said it all the time. But it’s too pale and it’s too male, and it was like that 30 years ago. There’s a few more, but you still don’t see people like me in the press corps as they should. It’s still 10 percent of blacks are making decisions in the news room. So it’s not – it’s not the way it should be. The public interest is not being served because the press is run by a group of people – mostly white men and suburbanites – who cannot reflect the values of America.

You look at, for example, one thing: during Katrina, there was a photo that said – showed people getting stuff from stores, so the caption said white people just happened to “find” the stuff, but black people “looted” it. So why do you have that kind of mind set? Because of who’s behind the cameras and who the executives are.

MR. LLOYD: Let me let Jack get in here. Go ahead.

MR. NELSON: Well, I was actually going to take you back since we’re doing recollections. (Laughter.)

REV. REYNOLDS: Please.

MR. NELSON: I was going to take you back to the media covering civil rights at that time because that was one of the things you asked about, and Chuck mentioned something about it’s hard to be objective. You couldn’t really be objective when there was a lynching. I mean, you couldn’t be objective when you saw an all-white jury turn a deputy sheriff lose and he had killed a black civil rights demonstrator and you could see the foreman coming out of the jury room and wink at the defendant when he came in. You just – all you had to do was to report the facts, so – but you couldn’t – you had to have an emotional feeling about that. And in over 50 years as a reporter, it was the only

stories I ever covered where I felt like I was really emotionally involved in covering the story, without any question.

The other thing is this, that at that time – and it's the only story that I've ever been on when this happened – you have reporters from competing news organizations cooperating with each other and that was because they felt the story itself was so important. When I first went to Selma, Alabama, for the *LA Times*, I'd just started covering the civil rights beat. One of the first reporters I saw there was John Herbers of the *New York Times* and he immediately gave me a fill on everything that happened earlier on that day. And the rest of that time of covering civil rights there, you saw reporters filling in each other so that you didn't miss anything because the demonstrations were going on all over the place. You couldn't be everywhere at once. The competing newspapers were delighted – or reporters were delighted to cooperate with each other because they felt the story was so important it transcended any of the competitiveness.

MR. STERN: I want to add just one short thing because Jack is – first time I was in Mississippi, it was Jack who led me around. He show me what it was like in the South and said, "I speak the language. You got to be careful down here, Chuck." (Laughter.) You know, so I remember that still.

MR. NELSON: That's true, you did have to be careful.

MS. THOMAS: Covering Johnson during – when they'd have a state dinner, one night they invited Sarah Vaughn and she performed greatly. We reporters followed her into the ladies room and she was crying and she said, "You know, 25 years ago I couldn't sit down in a restaurant in this town." And she was being entertained at the – or she was entertaining at the White House.

MR. LLOYD: Yeah. That in many ways is a story about how much it's changed in Washington, D.C. I mean, Chuck, what's your sense of that?

MR. CONCONI: How do you mean how do I see it?

MR. LLOYD: That Sarah Vaughn could not find a place in Washington, D.C., to sit down.

MR. CONCONI: That doesn't exist anymore.

REV. REYNOLDS: Par for the course.

MR. CONCONI: You know what? You can go anywhere now in Washington, D.C. What I like to respond to a little bit is the comment about not being enough black and Latino reporters out there. And this is something that comes up often, and I certainly don't want to be in defense of the establishment journalism and the kind of people who run the newspapers and publications and news media of our country, but there is a small

pool of black and Latino reporters out there. And it was explained to me once by a piece that Gay Talese wrote in the *New York Times* about people like me, Italian-Americans who – why there are so few of them around. And he said, “When you are rising out” – as blacks are rising out and Latinos are rising out – “writing and journalism is not the first thing you think about as a profession.” You looked to professions like law and medicine and business, and it takes a little while longer so that young blacks, young Latinos, young Italian Americans – I mean, my generation, there’s damn few Italian-American –

REV. REYNOLDS: Well, my generation has been journalists for 200, 300 years. My hero was Ida B. Wells Barnett. Some of you might know her. She was a great writer and journalist in Memphis. And when I was at the *Chicago Tribune*, I happened to know her daughter, who was Alfreda Duster and she used to say how this great black woman journalist could not even come in the building of the *Chicago Tribune*. So it’s not that we weren’t ready; we’ve been ready for 200 years. The doors have not been opened as they should be, but we’re ready.

The National Association of Black Journalists has more than 8,000 black journalists who are ready, but then that doesn’t mean the door’s open. You look on Sunday, you look at the *Meet the Press* and some of these other pundit shows, do you see us there? Gwen Ifill is there. She does a wonderful job. Oprah’s wonderful. Those are two people. We’re ready. I want the doors to be ready to open for us.

MR. CONCONI: I think they will be. Yeah.

MR. LLOYD: Carl, let me ask you ask this question because I know you covered the Supreme Court for so many years. Thurgood Marshall: we often now think of Justice Marshall and don’t always think of Marshall as the lawyer arguing the cases, and what was it like covering Marshall on the court?

MR. STERN: Well, of course, he was a force for consistency. I mean, from the ‘30s on after he had graduated from your institution, Howard, he was working – he toiled in the vineyard and brought a number of cases, particularly in places in like Texas to lay the groundwork for the important decisions that were to come later. At one point in his life, he was the solicitor general of the United States. At another point, he was on the court of appeals. This was, of course, after his service as the legal counsel of the NAACP Inc. Fund, as they call it.

The importance of Thurgood Marshall is not just in the legal strategies that he crafted. I think the most important thing is that he was always there. He was always there that others could look to and to some extent felt a certain obligation to. I think they wanted to do what he was seeking to do because they knew that it was right.

MR. LLOYD: And as a reporter covering the Supreme Court, as you’ve watched the coverage, are we covering the Supreme Court the same way now as you did for so many years?

MR. STERN: Well, I don't cover it now, so I don't know. Actually, I was thinking of – well, I did get into one fight with Thurgood Marshall, believe it or not. He seems like a very mild tempered fellow. But I don't know if this is relevant, but he was hearing in chambers an argument whether a certain electoral contest should go forth – a primary contest in New York City. And the press, of course, people like me wanted to attend this. We don't like proceeding – matters to be argued in the absence of the press, but this was going to take place in his office and he hadn't made any arrangements for the press, so I called him to try to set up a press pool and he said, "No, we don't want you." And I said, "Come on. You're the guy who's written so eloquently about the need for openness so people are going to have confidence in the fair administration of justice." And he said, "You guys are pains in the" – I'll say butt. He didn't say that. (Laughter.) Basically, he was saying it's their playpen, they make the rules. And we didn't get in. So he occasionally could be a hard guy to get along with, but obviously as a force in the civil rights movement, there was – perhaps other than Martin Luther King, there was nobody else we would give the same – enshrine in the same way.

MR. LLOYD: I'm going to ask all of you to comment on how media has changed over the years. And then we're going to throw to the audience and see if we can get some questions. So let me go ahead and start with Barbara. How do you think media's changed?

REV. REYNOLDS: Well, there's more venues of approachability. For example you have 24-hour cable television. Certainly that opens more opportunities. There's the internet. There's internet radio. There's satellite communication, so certainly there are more ways to get a message across. Of course, the networks are declining. So, you know, I see that there – you can use technology differently. And there's more African-American, Latino press of our own, so I think there's more availability.

MR. LLOYD: Jack?

MR. NELSON: Well, I think one of the ways it's changed is that you don't have nearly as many independent newspapers, for example, as you once had. You have much more – there is much more of a corporate press today. I hate to cite the example of my own newspaper, but the *Los Angeles Times*, which was taken over by the Tribune Company, which now is moving into new quarters here in Washington and it's in something called the Tribune Media Center. And so instead of having the *Los Angeles Times* Washington Bureau, which had great quarters on K Street and its own identity, it's now being – it's now in a building where you have the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Orlando Sentinel*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Hartford Courant*, and the *Los Angeles Times* and this, that and the other. And it's like – and there're big Tribune signs everywhere. There's no *Los Angeles Times* there and so somewhat I think it diminishes the big – the major publications to be so subjugated to the corporate world, and it is a corporate world. Certainly, it is in television. You've had the networks taken over by big corporations.

MR. STERN: There's another way of – things have not changed for the better in my judgment, which is the press has been bludgeoned by its detractors into this kind of

mindless idea that everything has to be balanced. You know, Hitler, good or evil? How – and let's face it, what was going on in the South in those days was pure evil, right? And it had to be reported as such; not just on one hand this, on the other hand, that. And I'm concerned that the press has gotten watered down – perhaps under the influence, Jack, of the corporate concerns has gotten watered down into a sort of a neutral in these matters, and I don't know if that is the role –

MR. NELSON: Let me hasten to say the *Los Angeles Times* is still a great newspaper. (Laughter.) Well, it is. It is a great newspaper.

MS. THOMAS: There's no question about that.

MR. NELSON: But I worry about it being overshadowed by the corporate culture.

MR. LLOYD: Helen, you've had several things to say on this. What's your quick response to this question? How have things changed?

MS. THOMAS: The press have rolled over and played dead, has lost it's – it's in a coma. It's been in a coma. It came out a little bit on Cheney and on this current situation. I think they have defaulted on what they should have been doing. Every day for two years in the White House press room, we heard in the same breath: "9/11, Saddam Hussein. 9/11, Saddam Hussein." When it was so clear the president was going to go to war at any cost, no matter what, the questions – they were mute. They went mute and they never have hounded the White House for news conferences, which is the only forum in our society where a president can be questioned.

I think, of course, in terms of the corporate rule the bottom line has become money. We always talk about newspaper business, but I never thought of it as a business. I don't think any of us ever think in those terms.

MR. STERN: No.

MS. THOMAS: We starve to death, really.

REV. REYNOLDS: It's true.

MS. THOMAS: And too little pay, long hours, but we love it. But the point is I think that the young reporters have somehow played ball too much.

MR. LLOYD: To Chuck and then we're going to go to the audience.

MR. CONCONI: Well, but it is a business. But the thing I agree with Carl is I think most of the media, even the major media – the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, not the *New York Times* since – have been intimidated. When you look at them,

you go, “Why are they missing? Why weren’t they digging in on the weapons of mass destruction?”

I mean, we have to depend on – what’s happening now – it scares me – is one of the most unreliable things out there: blogs. And I think blogs are incredibly unreliable because there’s no filter. You can write any damn thing you want in a blog and get away with it. But they are the ones that happen to be starting to put the press’s feet to the fire. And, you know, I got to give them credit for that because I agree wholeheartedly with you, Helen. I mean, I think we probably also should give you a round of applause. (Applause.)

MR. LLOYD: I agree, too.

MS. THOMAS: Everyone – everyone with a laptop thinks they’re journalists.

MR. CONCONI: That’s fine. What I did – that’s another thing. Yes. (Laughter.)

MR. LLOYD: So – questions from the audience. Journalists first. Is it – please, go right ahead.

Q: Yes, I’m Joel Wishengrad of World Media Reports –

MR. LLOYD: If you could stand up so we can see you.

Q: Yes, I’m Joel Wishengrad of World Media Reports, WMR News. We’ve seen over the last maybe four or five years a radical change between the Clinton administration now to the George W. Bush administration, and it’s partly, I guess, a throwback, but how would you as a panel view what’s just gone on in the South the last two weeks with the burning of the churches, obviously, Katrina, a lot of domestic-type problems that are unresolved, homelessness, whatever? And I don’t know whether it’s the Bush and Cheney and the Neocon revolution that’s just pushed to foreign affairs – what has been the result and especially with the vote in Florida and, of course, the vote in Ohio? Thank you.

MR. LLOYD: So you’re asking about the media coverage of these different events?

Q: Exactly.

MR. LLOYD: Please.

REV. REYNOLDS: The press has a very short attention span and I’m really appalled with it. It’s almost a numbness because you try so hard so long to change it. It doesn’t change. You – sometimes you think it never will change, but with Katrina, for example, I look at the front pages and I said, you know: “How could 1,200 people die?”

How could thousands still being missing? How could people be pushed out and there's no front – continuous –” For example, Michael Jackson, he got made 100 times the coverage of a major news story. You know, it titillated into following entertainment and reality TV, but how is Katrina not reality TV? How are the cameras not there?

But I do say that I have to salute CNN because they are there and they're not letting the issue die. But what's wrong with the rest of the journalistic establishment that do not – you know, O. J., that story where two people were killed and I'm saying I – I do not want anyone die, but to label that the “crime of the century” and not have a certain visceral rage to see the Katrina people not because they were black or not because they were white, because they were human beings, they were Americans. They were not refugees and dying and being pushed out, and there's no rage in the press. I wonder what is the rage this rage we had in the civil rights movement that when it was evil we spoke up and we said, “It's evil,” and we were going to get on the battlefield, we're going to get there, but this is like, “Oh, well. It's Katrina and now it's something else,” and it just rolls over.

MR. LLOYD: Carl, did you want to get in? Then we're going to get another question.

MR. STERN: Well, news staffs are exhausted. They are emaciated. I know they've been trimmed down a few people. Those who remain – I noticed a news show last night, half of it was spend on promotional pieces for the Winter Olympics, so how on earth do we have time for Katrina and all these other things that we talk about when we're doing cross-promotion for the other things that our corporation is pushing? It's just – it's a different world. We can get involved in a lot hand-wringing and so on.

The one thing I miss is the very thing that Barbara talked about. It always seemed to me that the most important thing a reporter needed, although you have to control it – you do have certain professional standards to observe, but you have to have a strong sense of outrage. And if you don't have that, don't get into journalism.

REV. REYNOLDS: That's right. Absolutely.

MR. LLOYD: Yes. Another question?

Q: My name is Jill Freeman. I'm currently with the National Writers Union. In 1965 or '66 I was a staff member with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference doing voter registration in Alabama and Mississippi. We didn't see any national press. And when I've gone back since as a researcher and looked at the microfilm of the major newspapers, I didn't see very much then either. It appears that the press dropped the story after Selma and the Voting Rights Act.

Now, that story didn't end. Indeed, it took a lot of hard work to get the government to implement the Voting Rights Act. For example, in the winter of 1966, SCLC ran a major demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama. As a far as I can tell, it was

only the Alabama press that gave us any coverage. In 19 – in the summer of '66, we ran major demonstrations in Grenada, Mississippi – same thing. I did jail time in both of those places as did other civil rights workers. In fact, in August of 1966, I was run out of the state when the *Jackson Daily News* which called itself “Mississippi’s Greatest Newspaper”, devoted two-thirds of an editorial page to exposing me; that included five photographs and an editorial which said, “Professional agitator hits all major trouble spots.” (Laughter.) I was 20 years old.

A month later, the Bellflower Church, which was our headquarters in Grenada, was burned to the ground. Where was the national press when we needed you? Where were you shaming the federal government into implementing the Voting Rights Acts so more of us didn’t have to get killed, get arrested, and more churches didn’t get burned?

MR. LLOYD: Jack, do you have a –

MR. NELSON: Well, you got to remember that they weren’t a lot of national press covering the South ever except for Dr. King. The *Los Angeles Times* had the Atlanta Bureau, the *New York Times* had an Atlanta Bureau, the *Washington Post* did not have an Atlanta bureau or a Southern bureau, neither did the *Chicago Tribune*, neither did other newspaper that I know of except for the *Wall Street Journal*. You really didn’t have much of a national press presence in the South except when you had the huge demonstrations. If you went over there on the voting rights campaign, if you’d have had Dr. King there, you’d have had the press there, but without Dr. King, you’re not going to have it. That’s just the way it was.

And the major newspapers in the South did not really cover the civil rights movement. They left it up to AP or the supplemental wire service, the *LA Times/Washington Post* news service. And as a matter of fact, when my stories ran in the *LA Times*, it was more important for them to run on that wire service because they would show up in the *Atlanta Journal* and that’s where Dr. King was and where SCLC was headquartered, and because it was also in the *New York Post*, and that’s where you had civil rights leaders stationed in New York. And it would run in the *Washington Post* because it was the *LA Times/Washington Post* news service. So it was very important for my stories to run in those papers even more important than running in Los Angeles at that time.

MR. LLOYD: Okay. Let’s take another question here.

Q: Many of you have commented on how the – how today there’s a lack of outrage and how the press has not asked a lot of questions, especially in the lead-up to the war. Do you believe that the press can only be as outraged and as investigative as the American people?

MS. THOMAS: You know, that – that –

MR. STERN: Yeah. I'll – I'll try that very quickly. That is a good question. I think part of the outrage, you know, the war – the worst thing that could happen was when we did away with the draft when you think about it now, because if there was a draft and people in our socioeconomic level, our children or grandchildren or whatever were threatened by the draft, there will be people out in the street protesting.

It doesn't affect you now and the American public is just sort of lulled into a kind of complacency. I mean, something may grow out of this with all the kind of craziness of this war that we got involved in, but nobody has a personal commitment. Do you know – I mean, look around this room. We don't have time to do that question, but you – I don't know anyone that has a son or relative of any kind that's in the military, but –

REV. REYNOLDS: Let me say, we're talking also about a class issue here because, you know, he didn't know anyone in the military. Let's go to my church, (The Great Calvary?) Holy Church and we have all kinds of people there –

MR. STERN: That's exactly what I'm saying.

REV. REYNOLDS: – in the military, but because our voice is not at the level that we can be heard, you have people making the decisions who say, "Well, look at the Congress. Look at the press." You know, the last time we looked, there was only one person in Congress that had a son in active duty, so we have a class issue here.

But the issue of rage and outrage is still a very good issue, but I can't put this all on the press in the sense that where is the outrage from the people who should be outraged? For example, where is the church? Now, we have to remember that most of your great movements started in the church. There are many preachers who have something to say, but they don't get the mike because the press has decided that only the religious right represents Christianity or the people of faith. So there's plenty of people out here who have an issue, who want to say something about the churches burning, Katrina, but they're not getting on *Nightline* and they are not getting on where they should.

MS. THOMAS: (You know what happened?) to Coretta King. I mean, the outrage of even these issues of peace and war and so forth.

REV. REYNOLDS: Right. And plus when they do stand up – Joseph Lowery stood up at Coretta King's funeral and made a statement about weapons of mass destruction. Well, the press and the left – the right-wing media pounced on him, beat him down to the ground when just the president of the United States showing up at the funeral

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(Cross talk.)

MS. THOMAS: Well, where are the ministers? Where are the priests? Where are they? They're not marching. They haven't hit the bricks.

REV. REYNOLDS: But they're not in the march.

MR. NELSON: But in answer to your question, though, can the public be outraged without press outrage? The public was not outraged about civil rights until civil rights was covered by the press, and so I think if the press did a better job of covering what the government's doing, if they did a better job of covering about the lying that's going on in connection with weapons of mass destruction, connections with al Qaeda, and everything else, yes, I think the public will become outraged.

REV. REYNOLDS: But aren't they afraid they are going to get fired?

MR. LLOYD: Let's get another question. Please, go right ahead.

Q: My name's Adnel Kateb (ph). I am an Arab-American –

MR. LLOYD: I can't hear you.

Q: My name's Adnel Kateb. I am a freelance journalist. I have a question which might be a challenge to your objective – to your journalistic objectivity. Do you think the presidency of George Bush will be remembered as a boost or a setback for the civil rights movement?

MR. LLOYD: Wow. Okay.

MR. CONCONI: I'll answer it very quickly.

MR. STERN: Yeah. You should.

MR. LLOYD: Do I need to repeat that? Do you want me to repeat that question?

REV. REYNOLDS: Yeah.

MR. LLOYD: So the question is: is the presidency of George Bush a boost or a setback for the civil rights movement?

MR. CONCONI: I'll simply say that it's a setback. I mean, I think that's the way the presidency – and the one thing you talked about the religious right – they are organized. That's why they get the–

REV. REYNOLDS: Exactly.

MR. CONCONI: And they're out there doing it. But I just answered that very quickly. Go ahead. Anyone else?

MS. THOMAS: I don't think the president is racist, but I think that there was a *New Yorker* cartoon after Katrina. It showed the president opening the door of the Oval Office and he's directing the aides to say, "Get me on the information you can on poor people." (Laughter.) I think the whole relationship – I mean, I think he's well meant. He's not so much on affirmative action – a few things like that. His heart's in the right place, but I don't think he knows how to really pursue these.

REV. REYNOLDS: Well, I think it's a setback. I don't think his heart is in the right place. He did file a suit against affirmative action. He has taken tax cuts away from the budgets that would help people who're trying to get student loans, who try to get Medicaid. There are 60 million people around here who don't even – can't even go to a doctor, and many of these people are people of color who are poor. So he has to prove to me that he is not racist and he hasn't done it yet.

MR. LLOYD: Carl, did you want to –

MR. STERN: No. It just reminded me of benign neglect, but you're suggesting it's not so benign. (Laughter.)

REV. REYNOLD: Malignant.

MR. LLOYD: Please, up here. I'm sorry. Thank you, Michael.

Q: Hi, my name is Sergio Gore (ph). I'm actually a student at George Washington University, and my question is: at the beginning, Hurricane Katrina seemed like a devastating effect on the country, but then all of a sudden it turned into a racial issue and it turned into blaming the president. I did not see as much blame put on the local authorities. Could you explain why that happened?

MR. LLOYD: So the question is, why did the press focus on the federal inaction and didn't focus on local inaction and responsibility?

REV. REYNOLDS: Well, first, that was so obvious because when the president came to – first of all, there was no action for the first two or three days. The president was in Crawford. He didn't respond. And then when he came, he said to Michael Brown, "Good job, Brownie," at the same time the cameras were focusing on people who were starving. There were bodies in the street. Babies were crying; they didn't have food. And just the non-reaction of the federal government – of FEMA, whose job – who gets millions and millions and billions of dollars to help people. People were saying, "Help," and the federal government did not respond. The fact that the people happened to be people of color – many people said if this was happening in a white suburban community, we could not conceive of the same response. But there's enough blame to go around.

MR. LLOYD: Carl?

MR. STERN: I think there's a simpler answer. It's like Willy Sutton robbing banks because there's where the money is. George Bush gets covered because that's where the reporters are: they are at the White House.

MR. CONCONI: Well, but it's also – in something of the magnitude, the federal government is responsible to (send help?). There is where you have to look first.

MS. THOMAS: Federal emergency.

MR. STERN: Federal emergency. That's what it was. That's where you go first.

MR. LLOYD: Okay. Let's – this gentleman up front here.

Q: Hi, Joe Kiar (ph), (unintelligible) Corporation. It's a very depressing picture that you're painting and one that just viewing the media for the last several years I concur with. Is there any reason or hope that the media will find itself and find courage and find resolve to report facts and to report accurately and not to dissipate things, as Mr. Stern said, "Is Hitler good or bad?"?

MR. LLOYD: Is hope alive that –

REV. REYNOLDS: Yeah. I think there's hope. If it's hope, there wouldn't be people like Helen Thomas and Jack and all of us here who keep trying to talk to people and say, "You've got to do better." I'm a professor where I teach religion and faith and I tell my students, "Come on and be a journalist because in my 40 years of being a journalist, I've been all over the world. It's been exciting. It's a great profession." We're not saying it's not a great profession; we're just saying come on in and do it differently. Be better than we were. Fight. Don't just sit there in the news room, and you know you disagree with the war and you know you want Katrina, and just sit there and just look at your paycheck. Yeah, sometimes you're going to get fired, thrown out for your convictions, but you'll still be able to look in the mirror at the end of the day and said, "I did what was right."

MR. LLOYD: Jack?

MR. NELSON: Well, you know, there's still some great journalism in this country. Let's face it. I mean, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* – they do great stories. They do great foreign stories. They have done a great job in many respects in covering this administration. I mean, how many times can you say that the president of the United States acted on information that he should have known, if he didn't know, was false? How many times can you report that there was no al Qaeda connection to 9/11? And they have repeatedly done that, so I do think – I think there is hope. I think that there's still great journalism out there and I think that – you know, I worry sometimes that they're not doing a good enough job. There's no question about that. And I think that network news really seems to be not doing a very good job, but, yeah, I think there's some hope.

MS. THOMAS: I think they're trying to make amends because they've looked back at the tremendous mistakes and the fabrication, plant the stories and so forth, and I think there's a certain amount of shame that have been tainted now with our profession. But I honestly believe that it's going to improve and the people now are aware of the tremendous mistakes that were made.

MR. LLOYD: So Chuck, did you want to – let's get some questions here.

Please.

Q: My name is Anice Jenkins and I'm with the Stand Up for Democracy in D.C. Coalition. It's a grassroots group here in D.C. for the D.C. statehood. And I'd like to know with the country going all around the world claiming that it's fighting for democracy, spreading democracy, why the fact that we have over 600,000 people here in D.C. which have no shred of democracy, no voting rights in the Congress? We have the adjoining states coming in here every day working where we can't tax them, so we're actually starving for money. We don't choose our own local elected judges for our judicial system. How can this not be a national civil rights story right here?

(Applause.)

MR. LLOYD: So Chuck, do you want to – do you want to – (laughter). You're with the *Washingtonian*.

MR. CONCONI: It's such a complicated issue. I mean, you know, I understand you. Part of the reason, I think goes back to the fact that the District for so many years was run by Capitol Hill and it was racist. It was because the District was one of the only cities in America that was so predominantly black and it was controlled by a lot of Southern congressmen. I mean, there was a time before we had this mayor/council government which we actually now elect where the District building was like being in The Raj in India. You went down there and you had two commissioners, and one was a Army Corps of Engineers general appointed by the president of the United States with the advice and consent of the Congress. And the police, the firemen – if they wanted a pay raise, they went to the District Committee on the Hill there. It's been a long way. I mean I think it's coming. I know it's slow. It seems that way for people in your Free D.C. movement, but it's such a complicated issue. And it should be easier, but it isn't.

MR. STERN: But don't look for it while Republicans are in control.

MR. CONCONI: Right. Exactly. (Laughter.)

MR. STERN: It's all politics.

MR. LLOYD: So we have another question out here. Let's go into this middle row here, this third row in – yeah. Thank you.

Q: My name is Chanel Hardy (sp) and my question is, as I'm listening to you talking about covering the civil rights movement and the emotion that it caused because of the nobility of the movement and the people associated with it, and this reaction to these overt and egregious acts of racism, but when you mentioned cheap stories, to me, KKK, white supremacy-type racism is a cheap story. It's real easy. It doesn't require anything of us. And so my question is now in the absence of this noble civil rights movement in all caps, are people of color sympathetic to the public and to reporters when they are suffering?

MR. LLOYD: Carl, so the question is –

MR. STERN: Let's go to Barbara.

MR. LLOYD: – given that – yeah. Given the fact that the clear problems in the '50s and '60s no longer seems so clear – things are much more complicated now – does the press have a problem viewing people of color in a sympathetic way now and does that problem translate into less coverage of the civil rights struggles today?

REV. REYNOLDS: I think I can speak to that. For 30 years, I had tried to get more blacks into journalism. So many of the people who came in my generation – I'm a little younger than some of the people here, so I was not at some of the places that they were. And some of the reasons I was not there because they simply would say, "We're not going to hire you because you're black." And so I don't think that people do – not be sympathetic. The fact that we went to college just like they did, we're just as smart as them – there's no reason that we're not writing editorials.

Go look at some of the editorial departments and see who writes 99 percent of all the editorials. They're not people of color who would look at a situation and see it totally different. I mean, I would have a problem if most of the editorials and most of the executives were African-American women. I'd say, "My God, what a narrow perspective." (Laughter.) But the fact that your news comes from people who live differently, they are not going to see it from the same perspective. So I don't think there is – it is a problem because many of our cities are becoming darker and the same people are running them and they still don't understand and they don't want to listen to you. So many people who have strong opinions are not welcome in journalism. I tell you that as a fact.

MR. LLOYD: Jack?

MR. NELSON: But your point is right, though, that you don't have Jim Crow laws now. You don't have any really open, overt discrimination very much at any place anywhere, and so it's much more difficult to cover that particular story. There is no civil rights movement as such. There is no demonstration going on. And so as a result, occasionally you will have a person write a story about problems in an area where blacks are being discriminated against because they can't get bank loans, for example, or maybe

they can't get housing in a particular area or something, but except for that, it's very difficult I think for anybody to find a story to attack the problem, although they occasionally do an overall story, but it's very difficult.

REV. REYNOLDS: No. In Katrina, they said, well, at least, Katrina showed us there were poor people in America. Well, my God. Just look where you are. We told you right here. Why did Katrina have to show you that there were poor people in America?

MR. CONCONI: It's possible to overstate this. I think the quest for social justice is still a very important component of what news editors are trying to cover in the papers, and it's a wonderful thing that they do that. And I don't see that they're interest in doing that has fallen off with the passage of time.

MR. LLOYD: Another question, please. Maybe – there you go. Right there. There's good. Please.

Q: Yes. My name is Ella Coleman and I've lived here now in this area, but I own my own publication, *Purpose* magazine, and I've done a lot of intern – had a lot of interns work with me through the years. One of the things I found out is that the mindset of young people have kind of changed over the years and a lot of the reporters in another generation. Do you think that technology and the influence of technology – meaning less in the thick of things, more behind the computer, more fabrication, more of all these other influences – has that really influenced the reporters of today, and in what way?

MR. LLOYD: So let me make sure I understand. Is the question, has new technology created a barrier for folks to do a good job reporting? Is that –

Q: To some extent. Has it influenced it to water it down like it seems to be watered down?

MR. LLOYD: Helen, do you think new technology is creating problems for reporters?

MS. THOMAS: There's no question you can be a lot lazier. That – my credo about journalism is nothing can replace being there and to see with your eyes. And I think there is a heavy reliance on that, but I don't know if that's really contributing to a big problem of reporting.

MR. CONCONI: Well, I think it does because I think you get isolated. I see so many young journalists, if they – they used to – editors used to tell you, you know, "There aren't any good stories in the office. Get out of the office," and it's true, but a lot of young journalists don't do it so much anymore. They rely on the internet and I'd see them (at the?) *Washingtonian* magazine with fact checkers and if they can't find it on the internet, they don't think it exists. (Laughter.) And you'll say, "Well, pick up the telephone and make a call." And even that – and that does – that does create – I mean, it

worries me about the isolation we're creating now. We don't understand and have a good enough feeling for each other because of that.

MR. LLOYD: So, Carl, you wanted to –

MR. STERN: The internet has multiplied our ability to acquire information in ways that just could not have been dreamed of 30 or 50 years ago, so the technology is extremely important to that process. I don't think it's a question of the information you acquire and the things you enquire into. The problem is that there is in a sense even in the age of 24/7 news coverage less and less getting on for some reason. I don't know how this happened, but we still get news and that familiar 16 oz. loaf, but that's only 4 oz. of journalism in it. Where did the rest of it go?

REV. REYNOLDS: Where's the bread. (Laughter.)

MR. LLOYD: You want to get the question –

MS. THOMAS: One newspaper (inaudible.)

MR. LLOYD: So let's take another question up here. Maybe here over on this side. That's good right there. That's good. Thank you. (Laughter.) Please. Thank you, Michael.

Q: Hi. Thank you. My name is Theresa Estancia (ph). I work with the Fulbright Scholarship Program in the Middle East and South Asia at the Department of State and I just want to – first of all, being the presence of this really impressive group and just thank you for all the courage that you display, and this opportunity. I just was just – one of the things that one of you all spoke about this lack of outrage and conviction of what's happening as opposed to what you lived through in the '60s and so many brave people in the civil rights movement, I feel like right after 9/11 there was this, from my personal view, as a private American citizen, I felt outraged myself at this almost what I'll label a climate of fear of questioning or covering what was happening, and it just felt, like Helen Thomas said, there was this coma going on in the media.

And I think it's much better, I suppose, the least last year or two, but I guess my question is how do you see the distraction that the young people or all of us have today from technology or this current administration – certain people's views, or – what I'm trying to say is do you really see what will it take for us to be outraged? I know we brought it up again to stand up for civil rights that are still not happening for all Americans, but especially the – in the African-American and minorities. Thank you.

MR. LLOYD: Helen, what would it take for us to be outraged?

MS. THOMAS: God knows. (Laughter.) Torture, torture.

MR. NELSON: Torture didn't outrage our reporters.

MR. CONCONI: Torture did not outrage them.

MS. THOMAS: Sending detainees to foreign countries to be tortured.

MR. CONCONI: Didn't outrage us.

MS. THOMAS: Putting people and scooping them up off the streets of Kabul and Baghdad and any other place in Iraq. Putting them in Guantanamo or Abu Ghraib and never charging them, never putting them on trial, never a conviction. I mean, where are the American people? That's not us. Surely that's not. But where are they? I mean, you have to insist on justice, in wartime or not. I think there is outrage out there. I remember during the Martin Luther King march on Washington, I was so impressed with a rabbi who had been in a Nazi concentration camp for years and he had a brief cameo appearance on King's program and he said that the greatest sin of all in the Nazi era was silence. And the silence, I think on the issues today where we're all ashamed – surely, surely there should be some reaction.

REV. REYNOLDS: You know –

MR. CONCONI: The silence is deafening. Yes.

MR. LLOYD: Jack, you said earlier that the civil right – we don't have a civil rights movement anymore. Is there – what do you need in order to get the outrage among reporters to cover the challenges that the young lady was talking about?

MS. THOMAS: They're not allowed to show it.

MR. NELSON: Well, I mean I don't really – I think Helen is right about that: reporters are not allowed to show the outrage, and it's a little bit different covering the civil rights movement in that the evil was so apparent there. I mean, everything was cut and dry. There was no on the one hand, this, and on the other hand, that. Here you have a president of the United States and all of his cabinet members and most of the Republican leadership, all saying the same thing, whether it's a lie or not. They are all saying the same thing and so there are a lot of people out there obviously who believe them. And so how you get outrage, I'm not sure.

I mean, Helen's exactly right. I mean when you look at the way we have tortured prisoners and yet we say we don't torture and yet there's all sorts of evidence everybody has cited that we do, including people within this administration who've said it, including people in the military, including people with the FBI who have said it. And we still have leadership in this country that says that we don't do it, so if we – so if they tell the American people that –

MS. THOMAS: (No apologies?) from Cheney who said, “We know where the weapons are.” Even after it was proved – two task forces from America that months and millions to try to find those weapons.

MR. LLOYD: So let me get two quick comments from Barbara and Carl, and then other questions from the audience.

REV. REYNOLDS: I think you can help teach young people. We can tell our stories. At a certain classroom I was in, I was talking about the war and one of my students said, “We don’t care about the war.” And I was very upset, went home very frustrated and then I understood that this was a teaching moment. So I had people come in to talk about the war, young people that they would listen to, and I put together a speak-out on the war and had people come in and tell people how it was about Vietnam.

And later on there was a protest where some of the students were invigorated and they – you know, we have to tell them their stories. I mean, some of this we don’t talk to young people. We just assume that they just have written it off and I think because they don’t hear us, an opportunity like this, Mark is just wonderful because we can tell our stories. The students are the ones who closed down the Vietnam War, you know. The students were the ones who had led the civil rights movement, so if we keep telling them and telling them, you know, pretty soon they’re going to listen and they are going to get out there. I mean, that’s the hope I have.

MR. LLOYD: Carl, did you –

MR. STERN: I learned something in the last hour I didn’t know before or hadn’t thought about before. We’re talking about progress that occurs as a result of a social consensus – a moral consensus being formed. Is it the press that produces that moral consensus or does it come from someplace else? I don’t think the press produces it. I think the press reflects it and they may accelerate it, but what I learned here, and I think you’re right, is that most Americans do go to church or some religious observance every week. So long as the churches, Barbara, are in basically feeding the interests of, shall we say, the social conservatives through the absence of these other concerns, it may well be we’re not going to get the kind of leadership and the concern about the need to change that the press then follows up on. I don’t know that the press can do this. It has to start someplace else.

(Cross talk.)

REV. REYNOLDS: I’m so glad you said that. You’re right.

MS. THOMAS: So the main stories have come through the whistle blowers –

REV. REYNOLDS: You’re right.

MS. THOMAS: – who have the courage.

REV. REYNOLDS: The churches have to say something.

MR. NELSON: I mean, it's amazing when you know people who say, "It makes me ashamed to be an American."

MR. LLOYD: Yes.

MR. NELSON: And I know a lot of people who say that. They say that they look at what's happening in many respects and they say, "It makes me ashamed to be an American." Well, I mean, that kind of takes you aback.

MR. LLOYD: Let's take one –

(Cross talk.)

MR. NELSON: It makes me ashamed to be an American when I see that we permit torture.

MR. LLOYD: – one last question here. Please.

Q: My name is Betty Miller and I am with the retired trade union movement, and I have a comment and a question. My comment has to do with what you said about Katrina and President Bush having to learn about poor people. I have always been aware of the fact that when Bush came to Katrina, he was lit up with lights by generators which had been brought in from Washington and that when he finished, the generators were packed up and went back to Washington while there were no generators at all in the auditoriums where the people were. I think that's an indication of how far or how great is the difference between our president and what is happening out in the streets.

But also I wanted to – my question is that while you talk about the influence of the churches, there was another great movement that was coming through at that time and that was the trade union movement, because if you remember, Martin Luther King came to Memphis when my union asked him to do that because the workers weren't being paid. It was a strike of the sanitation workers and they marched through those streets with signs that said, "I am a man." And the influence of many, many stories of that trade union movement, but the influence of the workers who believed that you could get paid regardless of the color of your face was an important part of that movement. And I wondered why you didn't give any credence to it?

MR. CONCONI: That's a good point. I mean, the weakening of the labor movement.

MR. LLOYD: Yeah. So Helen, did you get the question? Yeah. So the question is about the influence of labor union and the –

MS. THOMAS: Oh. That's right. And the very fact that after King's funeral, his wife flew to Memphis and carried on. This is fantastic. I mean, they're drama, the carrying, the involvement.

MR. CONCONI: Well, the labor movement had been one of the first movements going back to the '30s before the civil rights movement. It was a movement for good, but unfortunately it has been emasculated and pretty much destroyed. That's hardly much of a labor movement left anymore, partly through the fault of the movement itself. But when you do look back at the history of this country, they did some very important things. Now, they also did some racist things in some of the trade unions, particularly, you know, blacks couldn't get in. But in Memphis, in particular, I remember the – what started all that – what brought King there was when the mayor of the city says, "I'm not going to be the first Southern man ever recognize a black union." You know, that kind of thing. But it was. They deserve a great deal of credit and we did overlook it there.

MS. THOMAS: But the anti-labor, really, movement began with Reagan.

MR. CONCONI: Well, it actually began with, I think, go back – I'm going to go with Nixon.

MS. THOMAS: Firing thousands of air controllers –

MR. CONCONI: Yeah. It began with Nixon. I mean, Reagan did, yes.

MR. LLOYD: Barbara, did you want to get in there?

REV. REYNOLDS: You know, I just want to remind us that the civil rights movement – one thing about it, it worked. I'm here because of the civil rights movement. The labor movement did get better because of the civil rights movement. Then the women's movement got better because of the civil rights movement. Then when Mandela got out of jail, first thing he did was thank the civil rights movement. The same thing the Berlin Wall. So this was the movement that started in the African-American churches, but it had people – (affected?) all people involved in the civil rights movement. And I'm a mentor – Coretta King was my mentor and she had a feeling for all people. And that's what I hope we can get back to, that it's just not my people, it's your people.

There was something about America that once talked about its greatness and its value for all human beings and I think we need to come together and say what's good about us. And let's take the good about us and go on and be better so we can be respected not here, but even in the world.

MR. LLOYD: Thank you. Carl, let me ask you this. Did NBC become better because of the civil rights movement?

MR. STERN: Well, it did for a while. (Laughter.) Then other influences set in that I think weakened it as a news organization, but let's not get involved in too much

hand-wringing. As Jack pointed out, there's still a lot of great news coverage going on. Look at the *Times* stuff on the NSA eavesdropping and so I don't have to tell people in the audience here about that. And frankly, we live in a new era. We have to think new thoughts. Any news industry that has somebody like Helen Thomas exchanging profane barbs with Bill Maher on HBO or whatever it was last week is still a very vital and useful news medium.

MS. THOMAS: Thanks for the plug. (Laughter.)

MR. LLOYD: So I think we're about – we've got one minute left. Helen, do you want to sort of wrap us up and tell us what we've – what have we learned from the civil rights movement in the press?

MS. THOMAS: I think we've learned that passivity will never make for progress, and that we all should be reacting to injustice wherever it exists in this country. And we can all do something about it. Why are we here really? I mean, these subjects not only affect us, it affects the whole world. We were once on a pedestal. We had a halo on everything we did because of what we represented in this world. Now we are despised. I mean, can you handle that?

MR. NELSON: Exactly.

MR. CONCONI: Wow.

MR. STERN: Wow. (Laughter.)

MR. LLOYD: With that –

MR. STERN: That was a great ending.

MR. LLOYD: – will you join me in thanking all of our panelists?

(Applause.)

The Center for American Progress thanks you for coming, and again thank you very much.

(END)