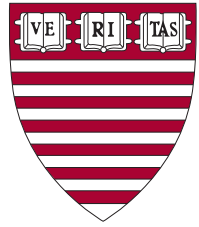
Theodore H. White Lecture on Press and Politics

with

Taylor Branch

Joan Shorenstein Center
PRESS ▪ POLITICS



▪ PUBLIC POLICY ▪

Harvard University
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The Theodore H. White Lecture commemorates the life of the reporter and historian who created the style and set the standard for contemporary political journalism and campaign coverage.

White, who began his journalism career delivering the *Boston Post,* entered Harvard College in 1932 on a newsboy's scholarship. He studied Chinese history and oriental languages. In 1939 he witnessed the bombing of Chungking while freelance reporting on a Sheldon Fellowship.

In 1959 White sought support for a 20-year research project, a retrospective of presidential campaigns. After being advised by fellow reporters to drop this academic exercise, White took to the campaign trail, and, relegated to the "zoo plane," changed the course of American political journalism with the publication of *The Making of a President,* in 1960. The 1964, 1968, and 1972 editions of *The Making of a President,* along with *America in Search of Itself,* remain vital documents to the study of campaigns and the press.

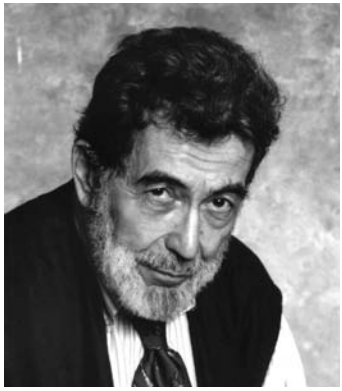
Before his death in 1986, White also served on the Visiting Committee here at the Kennedy School of Government; he was one of the architects of what has become the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy.

Taylor Branch is the bestselling author of *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63* (which won the Pulitzer Prize); *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963–65;* and *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965–1968.* His new book, *The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President,* is based on 79 conversations between Branch and Clinton in the White House, between 1993 and 2001. Initiated by President Clinton, the project was intended to preserve an unfiltered record of presidential experience.

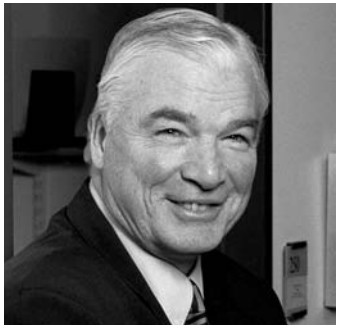
Branch graduated from The Westminster Schools in Atlanta in 1964. From there, he went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on a Morehead Scholarship. He graduated in 1968 and went on to earn an MPA from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University in 1970. He was a lecturer in politics and history at Goucher College from 1998 to 2000. Branch served as an assistant editor at *The Washington Monthly* from 1970 to 1973, Washington editor of *Harper's* from 1973 to 1976 and Washington columnist for *Esquire* magazine from 1976 to 1977. He also has written for a wide variety of other publications, including *The New York Times Magazine, Sport, The New Republic* and *Texas Monthly.*

In 1972, Branch helped run the Texas campaign of Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern. Branch's co-leaders in the effort were Bill Clinton and Houston lawyer Julius Glickman.

Taylor Branch received a five-year MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1991 and the National Humanities Medal in 1999. In 2008, Taylor Branch received the Dayton Literary Peace Prize's Lifetime Achievement Award, presented to him by special guest Edwin C. Moses.



For 51 years, **Nat Hentoff** was a columnist for *The Village Voice* where his views on journalistic responsibility and the rights of Americans to write, think and speak freely led him to be acknowledged as an authority on the First Amendment. Born in Boston in 1925, Hentoff received his BA with highest honors from Northeastern University and did graduate work at Harvard. In 1995 Hentoff received the National Press Foundation Award for Distinguished Contributions to Journalism. He serves on the board of advisors for the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. Hentoff is the author of many books, including *The War on the Bill of Rights; Living the Bill of Rights; Speaking Freely: A Memoir; Free Speech for Me—But Not for Thee;* and *The Day They Came to Arrest the Book*. A jazz expert, Hentoff writes on music for *The Wall Street Journal* and *Jazz Times*.



David Nyhan was a columnist and reporter at *The Boston Globe* for 30 years. A graduate of Harvard College and a Shorenstein Fellow in the spring of 2001, Nyhan was a regular participant in Shorenstein Center activities before, during and after his Fellowship. Nyhan died unexpectedly in 2005. In his eulogy Senator Edward Kennedy said of Nyhan, "Dave was a man of amazing talent, but most of all he was a man of the people who never forgot his roots….In so many ways, but especially in the daily example of his own extraordinary life, Dave was the conscience of his community." The hallmark of David Nyhan's brand of journalism was the courage to champion unpopular causes and challenge the powerful with relentless reporting and brave eloquence. In his memory, the Shorenstein Center established the David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism.

The Theodore H. White Lecture
November 12, 2009

Dean Ellwood: Good evening everyone. Welcome to the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum.

This is a very special night because this is the night of the David Nyhan Prize and the Teddy White Lecture. I'm also very pleased that Carole Shorenstein Hays is here with us. Carole, as many of you know, is a remarkable producer and champion of Broadway plays on both coasts. So, it's especially terrific that you could be here representing the Shorenstein family. Walter Shorenstein wanted to be here with us tonight, but unfortunately had a fall recently and is recovering well, but he was not able to join us. So, Carole, thank you for being here with us.

The next speaker is Alex Jones. He is the Laurence Lombard Lecturer on the Press and Public Policy, and he's the director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. He covered the press for *The New York Times* from 1983 to 1992, and he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1987. He co-authored, along with Susan Tifft, who's also with us here tonight, a wonderful book called *The Patriarch: The Rise and Fall of the Bingham Dynasty*.

In 1992 he left *The Times* to work on *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind the New York Times*, which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. He's been a Nieman Fellow, he's been all around, but the reason he's here tonight is because of his extraordinary leadership at the Shorenstein Center.

With his new book, *Losing the News*, he has helped us in the most difficult set of problems that I think we face in the media today and how we can take ourselves to a much better place for the future. These various titanic institutions are under great pressure.

So, with no further ado, to introduce our two spectacular recipients tonight, Alex Jones. (Applause)

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, David.

Each year this night is a very happy and special one of celebration for the Shorenstein Center. As some of you already know, the Shorenstein Center was founded in 1986 as a memorial to Joan Shorenstein, a truly remarkable television journalist, who died of breast cancer after a distinguished career.

Her father, Walter Shorenstein, endowed the Center as a place for a focused search of the intersection of the press, politics and public policy. Walter Shorenstein not only made the Center possible, but he has remained

vitally interested in what we do and has been our unstinting supporter and friend.

As David said, he could not be with us tonight, but his daughter and Joan's sister Carole is with us, and I ask you to join me in recognizing the Shorenstein family's great and ongoing support. (Applause)

A bit later you will hear from our Theodore White Lecturer for 2009, Taylor Branch. First, I have another task to perform which is an honor but always a rather bittersweet one.

In 2005, we at the Shorenstein Center lost a great and much-admired friend, David Nyhan, when he died unexpectedly. Some of you did not know David, and I want to speak of him briefly as we this year bestow the fifth annual David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism.

David Nyhan was a man of many parts: a devoted family man, beloved friend and the best company in the world. He was a real Boston guy: a big handsome man with a mischievous smile, sparkly eyes and the rare power to raise everyone's spirits and make it seem like a party was starting just by walking into the room. I saw him do it again and again during his time as a Fellow at the Shorenstein Center.

But tonight we honor David Nyhan, the consummate reporter and political journalist, which is the role that occupied much of his life and at which he could not be bested. David was a reporter and then a columnist at *The Boston Globe,* and his work had both a theme and a character. The theme was almost always power, political power, and also especially the abuse of political power by the big shots at the expense of the little guy.

He loved politics, but he also loved politicians. As a group he respected them. He felt they were often given a raw deal and judged by a standard that was smug and sanctimonious, two things David never was. But if politics was the theme of David's work, the character of that work was a mixture of courage and righteous anger, leavened by a great sense of humor and the ability to write with both charm and passion. He relished a fight with a political figure or perspective, yet had a knack of seeing beyond the surface of issues and the baloney, to the heart of things, and especially to the reality of what was going on.

He was a self-avowed liberal and not defensive about it. As a columnist at *The Globe*, he was a battler, a no-holds-barred advocate. But he also was surprising to his readers because his take was always most of all David's; he was his own man, and he called them as he saw them.

In his memory and honor, the Nyhan family and many friends and admirers of David Nyhan have endowed the David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism to recognize the kind of gutsy, stylish and relentless journalism that David Nyhan embodied. David's wife, Olivia, could not be with us tonight, but his daughters, Veronica and Kate, are here, as are some

members of the Nyhan family. And I would like to ask them all to please stand. (Applause)

This year the David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism goes to Nat Hentoff, a columnist and wordsmith of the highest order, and without question supremely in the tradition of David Nyhan, the one he set by being his own man and calling them as his brain and his heart sees them. The thing about Nat Hentoff that David Nyhan would have liked best is his absolute determination to speak his mind, and it doesn't hurt that Nat, like David, speaks with a Boston accent. Nat is 84 and as you can see he is unable to be with us tonight in the flesh, but we have him via satellite from New York.

Nat Hentoff was born in Boston and grew up in Roxbury, went to Boston Latin School and Northeastern and did graduate work at Harvard and studied at the Sorbonne on a Fulbright Fellowship. But his passion wasn't journalism in those days of the early 1950s. It was jazz.

Each year the Nyhan Prize is chosen by a distinguished group of judges that included, until his tragic passing a month ago, Jack Nelson, the legendary reporter of *The Los Angeles Times*. The judging group also includes Marty Nolan, another legendary journalist who grew up in Roxbury with Nat Hentoff. Marty knew that I was going to be doing this introduction tonight and he wrote me: "Imagine a combination of James Madison, Duke Ellington, Henry David Thoreau, I.F. Stone, Dizzy Gillespie and a bunch of others. Imagine them all as one teenager on a Blue Hill Avenue streetcar heading toward Boston Latin School; that's Nat Hentoff. Madison, Izzy Stone and Duke Ellington in one man; that is indeed Nat Hentoff."

He's published many books on jazz, such as *Listen to the Stories: Nat Hentoff on Jazz and Country Music*. But listen to the titles of some of his other books: *Does Anybody Give a Damn? Nat Hentoff on Education; Our Children Are Dying; A Doctor Among the Addicts; The First Freedom: The Tumultuous History of Free Speech in America; Free Speech for Me—But Not for Thee: How the American Left and Right Relentlessly Censor Each Other.* That last title is very Nat Hentoff because he declines to follow any party line.

I used to read his weekly column in *The Village Voice* with a kind of fascination, as he thundered for free speech and civil rights and much of what might also just basically be considered the liberal agenda, while he also thundered against abortion. He was no one's man and he never has been. His political writing has appeared in *The New York Times; The New Yorker*, where he was a staff writer for 25 years; and many other publications. He also writes on music, especially jazz not surprisingly, for *The Wall Street Journal*.

I shall give the final word to Marty Nolan: "He fell in love with jazz and became its champion, its translator and its troubadour. He fell for the

First Amendment with a ferocity that sometimes astonishes the politically correct who might want to censor others."

For Nat Hentoff, this is a homecoming to Boston, the city that he never really left because he took its heritage with him, like another Latin School product, William Lloyd Garrison, who became a fiery abolitionist newspaper man. It was Garrison who said, "I am in earnest, I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch and I will be heard." That's Nat Hentoff, our 2009 Nyhan Prize winner. (Applause)

Mr. Hentoff: Duke Ellington used to say, it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing. And I'm going to try very hard to live up to a little of that. And maybe it helps that I went to the William Lloyd Garrison Elementary School in Roxbury. I wish I were there, but there are certain unwanted dividends of age. But for me, the best dividend is survival as a working reporter at 84. I've never had so many deadlines, and I'm working on two books.

David Nyhan—whom I much admired, and I am singularly honored by this prize in his name—wrote in his final column for *The Boston Globe*, "You never worked just for the ownership; you wrote for your readers… and for yourself." Me, too. And I also write, in my head anyway, for my mentor principally and he's just been named, Izzy Stone. Izzy told me early on, if you're in this to change the world, get another job, but get the story. Izzy's reporting did make change because, as David Carr recently wrote in *The New York Times*, "he carried significant sting because he used the music of fact, not cant." And Tom Wicker said of Izzy, "he never lost his sense of rage." Neither have I.

I last saw my other main mentor, George Seldes, when he was well into his 90s. It was in the morning in his hotel room. He was doing what I do every morning, tearing leads for further stories out of newspapers, not on the Internet. Without even a good morning, he handed me some of those clips urgently instructing me, you ought to look into these. Long before we met, I found my calling as I later realized reading George Seldes' four-page newsletter. The subtitle: "An Antidote to the Falsehoods in *The Daily Press*." I saw stories there I'd seen nowhere else, like the lethal link between cigarettes and cancer, not covered then by *The New York Times* or any other leading papers.

As for what we do now in this craft of journalism, we are in what Bix Beiderbecke titled his song "In a Mist." I recommend Alex Jones's *Losing the News* book because he shows we are not foredoomed to do that. But what I tell journalism students who ask me what their future may be is what one of the best and brightest of all us reporters, David Halberstam, told journalism students at the University of California, Berkeley, just before his

fatal car crash. "This," he said, "is your chance to be paid to learn…learning every day. Going out every day and asking questions."

Jazz, my other passion, has been called the sound of surprise. As a reporter, digging into stories, I find out a good deal of what I expected to find turns out sometimes to be surprisingly different, and therefore, more accurate.

No matter what the future is of what we do, print, digital or who knows these days, even extraterrestrial, I hope that those joining us now and into the years ahead will be continually energized by what I consider Louis Brandeis's subhead to journalism, "Sunlight is the best disinfectant." I also hope the new practitioners of journalism will feel, as I do every day, the excitement of the unexpected, also that they'll experience, as David Nyhan wrote as he was leaving, that they'll experience the continuing dividend of "fascinating folk, rascals and rogues, as well as heroes." For me, how else would I have gotten to meet and even hang out with Malcolm X; John Cardinal O'Connor; Dr. Kenneth Clark; Duke Ellington; Bayard Rustin, organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. Bayard never lost his zest for being, in Duke Ellington's phrase, "beyond category." So were those others I mentioned.

Getting to know and sometimes expose Dickensian figures in the public square and not in the public square, as well as in legal black holes, resulted in Izzy Stone, who was frequently out of step and isolated by his colleagues and almost everybody else. Izzy told me, I have so much fun, he said, doing this I ought to be arrested.

One last thing, I dedicated my first book long ago, *The First Freedom: The Tumultuous History of Free Speech in America*, to the newest generation of students through the years. All the years since, reporting on schools around the country, I found, and I still find, that most of the few students acutely aware of the First Amendment are in the student press, which was briefly brought into the First Amendment by the Supreme Court's glorious 1969 Tinker decision: Neither teachers nor students "shed their constitutional rights…at the schoolhouse gate."

But increasingly the high court, despite the fury of Justice William Brennan, whom I also got to know, the high court has weakened that decision through prior restraints and other gag rules from school principals and boards of education.

The American Civil Liberties Union and the Student Press Law Center helped these free press defendants in court, but adult reporters and assignment editors are largely indifferent. We need to join these battles for the future, not only for the future of the press. As Mr. Jefferson warned, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects

what never was and never will be." This is all the more true now as President Barack Obama continues the Bush-Cheney assaults on the Constitution, sometimes even going beyond them.

Thank you. (Applause)

Mr. Jones: I think you'll agree you have heard the authentic Nat Hentoff. Thank you, Nat.

Mr. Hentoff: Thank you.

Mr. Jones: Theodore H. White was also a consummate reporter with a passion for politics. He came to Harvard on a newsboy's scholarship and went on to a very distinguished career as a journalist and also a historian. Indeed, Teddy White, as he was universally known, changed political journalism and politics when he wrote *The Making of the President: 1960*, about the Kennedy-Nixon campaign. For the first time, he raised the curtain on the warts on all sides of presidential campaigns, and changed forever the candor about the decision making and the human drama that is now at the heart of campaign coverage. He followed that first book with three more *Making of the President* books in '64, '68 and '72. No doubt *The Making of the President: 2008* will not be a book but an industry.

Dan Balz, one of our seminar speakers tomorrow, who is here tonight, has written one of the very best with Haynes Johnson. It's called *The Battle for America 2008*. Yet, Teddy White's books stand as smart and groundbreaking examinations of what happens and why in the mainstream of political campaigning. And it is fair to say, I think, that Teddy White's heirs are the journalists of today who try to pierce the veil of politics, to understand what is happening and to then analyze and deliver the goods to those of us who are trying to understand.

Before his death in 1986, Teddy White was one of the architects of what became the Shorenstein Center. One of the first moves of Marvin Kalb, when he became founding director, was to raise the funds and establish the Theodore H. White Lecture.

This year the White Lecture is to be delivered by Taylor Branch. Taylor Branch came of age in a way and in a place that Southerners like me understand very personally. He grew up in Atlanta in the 1950s in a segregated world that may have looked benign in *Driving Miss Daisy,* but was not. It was a world of colored-only water fountains and separate entrances to movie theaters and lunch counters where black people were forbidden to sit and have a cup of coffee. It was the world that spawned Lester Maddox, who became governor of the state of Georgia using an axe handle as his symbol of implacable violent resistance to African-Americans who would presume to demand equal rights.

It was also the town of a spellbinding preacher named Martin Luther King Jr., who had a dream that transformed this nation. For Southerners

of Taylor Branch's generation, which is my own, the civil rights movement was the crucible that pretty much put you on one side or the other, politically. He found himself on the civil rights side. And after graduating from the University of North Carolina and getting a master's in public administration at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, he found himself sucked into journalism, a natural path that others like him had taken.

In his case he started at the top, journalistically. He went to work for Charlie Peters, the much-beloved and genuinely legendary founder of *The Washington Monthly*. The signature of *The Washington Monthly* was that it not only did ground-breaking political journalism, but it expected its journalists to think as well as report and write. Dan Okrent, who has known Taylor Branch from those days, recalls that his copy arrived in sentences and paragraphs, finished, polished.

I do think you need to take into consideration that Dan Okrent and Taylor Branch got to know each other as poker-playing buddies and guys who, with Charlie Peters, adjourned to Saratoga for a week in the summer to go to the races. (Laughter)

Just as Ray Charles famously did only one take when recording his songs, Taylor Branch seemed usually to do one draft first. With Charlie Peters he wrote his first book, *Blowing the Whistle: Dissent in the Public Interest*, in 1972. He went on to become Washington editor for *Harper's* and then became a Washington columnist for *Esquire.*

And he had interests beyond politics. One of his best books is *Second Wind*, written with Bill Russell. It is considered by the cognoscenti to be one of the best books on basketball ever written.

But his real destiny was something else. In the 1980s he set out on a journey to write the definitive account of the life of America and civil rights, through the prism of the life of Martin Luther King. The first volume was *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954–1963*. It won a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Critics Circle Award for General Nonfiction. This renowned book won the respect and admiration of those who had been skeptical that a white man—a white Southerner—could do a credible job on this complex, sensitive subject. His first volume made it clear that he was going to produce a masterpiece.

The second volume, 10 years later, was *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963–1965*. That was followed by a MacArthur genius grant and the National Humanities Medal.

Then, in 2006, eight years after Volume II came the final volume, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years 1965–1968*. The entire series totaled nearly 3,000 pages of historical rigor tethered to the craft of a journalist who could interview and dig and report, and needless to say, he can write.

More recently he gave us the most candid and clear-eyed look into the presidency of Bill Clinton we're apt to get in *The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President*. It is an up-close, behind-the-scenes account of the Clinton presidency, gleaned from interviews in the White House with the president while his presidency was unfolding and unraveling. Between 1993 and 2001, Taylor Branch visited Bill Clinton 79 times in the White House to tape a sort of secret diary. Clinton got to know Taylor Branch from their shared involvement in the McGovern campaign and reached out to him to be his Arthur Schlesinger, an in-house historian. Teddy White would have been deeply envious.

Late at night as he was driving home to Baltimore after his sessions with the president, Taylor Branch would record his recollections of what Clinton had said, along with his own thoughts and impressions. It is these ruminations that make up the core of *The Clinton Tapes*, which President Clinton urged him to write.

Our Theodore White Lecturer this year is a historian, a journalist's journalist and a man who took up the burden of telling the story of perhaps the most important national issue of his time, and then to become confessor to a president. We could not have made a better choice.

Our Theodore White Lecturer for 2009, Taylor Branch. (Applause)

Mr. Branch: Thank you, Alex.

I'm very happy to be here. I'm happy to be giving a lecture in the name of Teddy White, whom I only met a few times, but I studied a lot. And to be under Nat Hentoff, I wish he could be back up there. He kind of kicked us in the shins on the way out. I'm going to kick us in the shins on the way in.

My title, "Disjointed History: Modern Politics and the Media," is really an introduction to grapple with serious problems that we may be sleepwalking through in our era in journalism, through the prelude to the equivalent of the Weimar Republic, if the state of the country is as bad as it seemed to me, traveling around on a book tour for this last month.

The Clinton Tapes just came out, something I worked on secretly while I was finishing *America in the King Years*, and in many respects it put me on a different planet from most of the public discourse that we have shared through our journalism. To put it bluntly, the question I want to pose to you tonight is, to what degree has poor performance contributed to the slow evaporation of mainstream journalism in our era?

My Clinton project, recording late at night with the president, put me in a different world watching this and listening to what the president was saying. It was secret—we managed to keep it secret for eight years. In the interest of public disclosure later, we had to be quiet and secret. But

it began and ended in profound disillusionment over the performance of modern journalism. This was a hard lesson for both of us.

I got to the University of North Carolina in 1964, newly converted against my will to an interest in politics from a pre-med plan and a love of football and girls and nothing else. The very first course I took was in political philosophy, captivated by the civil rights movement and beginning to worry about Vietnam. And on the first day of the political philosophy course, the professor astonished me by saying that if we wanted to solve problems of truth and justice in the world through philosophy, we had to begin by reading *The New York Times* every day.

In the interest of public disclosure later, we had to be quiet and secret. But it began and ended in profound disillusionment over the performance of modern journalism. This was a hard lesson for both of us.

In Chapel Hill, North Carolina, for me a Georgia boy, this was shocking. I had barely heard of *The Times*, but this professor had enormous influence over me and I did. And I've read *The New York Times* to this day, and developed an idolization of the paper, in part because of the performance of its civil rights reporters in the heyday of modern journalism, of Claude Sitton and John Herbers and Gene Roberts who were risking their lives to cover the Freedom Rides in Birmingham and Selma.

President Clinton did, too. Even Hillary was converted from her Goldwater-girl background by the performance of the civil rights era, and she loved *The New York Times* for its performance and its contribution in that era.

We had an apartment together in Austin, Texas, for the McGovern campaign. We were 25 years old. People have asked me since, did I recognize that Bill Clinton was likely to be a future president, and I say, are you kidding? We lost Texas by 30 points. We didn't think either one of us was qualified to be dogcatcher. (Laughter)

People have asked me since, did I recognize that Bill Clinton was likely to be a future president, and I say, are you kidding? We lost Texas by 30 points.

And indeed, by the end of that campaign, we parted for 20 years. I didn't see him for 20 years in a pregnant disagreement. I told him that I couldn't understand why he was going to go run for Congress. Like the Energizer bunny, this era didn't seem to phase him whatsoever. Hillary and I were

both much more disillusioned like our generation, that here in the midst of this great war raging, and the promise of the civil rights movement perhaps disintegrating, and riots and disagreement and polarization, that in the midst of this, through this campaign we spent most of our time refereeing the pettiest of disputes among Texan politicians over who sat where in the motorcade, who rode where and who sat where on the dais.

President Clinton, Bill Clinton at the time, said to me, Taylor, if you want to solve problems in the world, possibly even the Vietnam War, you've got to build up your tolerance and capacity for squabbles over who rides where in the motorcade, because that's where things start. And you've got to go through human nature rather than disentangle and sit above it like you writers, which I thought was uncalled for at the time. (Laughter)

But essentially what he was saying is that writers retreat behind a pose of just imagining themselves away from the inconvenience, the stubbornness of human nature, and that politicians can't afford to do that.

I thought it was just his ambition talking, and I went into journalism saying I thought there was more integrity there and that I couldn't take the pettiness of politics anymore. And that launched my career and launched me on a separate trajectory, so that I didn't see him for 20 years, until he initiated this notion, having said, I can't tape my phone conversations, I want to do the next best thing, let's have a diary, let's leave it all there. If we can keep it secret, I'll be candid and we'll tell the story.

And the very first story he told me shocked me, saying, Taylor, I have been stampeded by the press and trampled entering the White House in 1993. And when he was leaving in 2001, he said, I was trampled by another stampede on the way out the door. And I said, what do you mean? And he said, well, let's take gays in the military. Gays in the military dominated the first six months of my presidency. It was not my idea; it was on the front page of *The New York Times* on the first morning I woke up in the White House.

On January 21, 1993, there was a photograph of him delivering the inaugural address. Next to it, page one, column one, top headline: Clinton Set to End Ban on Gay Troops. He said, it's pretty obvious when you look back on it that that was not the result of deliberations by my administration. We were out at the inaugural balls while those presses were rolling. We hadn't even found where the offices were or how the telephones worked, and we had spent the whole transition working on what we had run on in the election: the economy, all these economic forums down in Little Rock, our stimulus package, getting out of the recession. That's what we had run on and that's what we're going to do. But we woke up on the

first morning, and this is the story that seized and stampeded the first six months.

I said, well, Mr. President, couldn't you just hold a press conference and say, wait a minute, we'll get around to that, we hadn't even chosen our first priority yet, we'll do it later? He said, Taylor, that's why you write and I do the politics. If I had done that, the next day's story would be, Clinton repudiates plan, he's run over by his generals in revolt, gays and lesbians are furious and the administration is in disarray from the start. He said, in retrospect, that's not much worse than what happened. (Laughter)

I said, how did this thing happen? He said that the only way he could figure it was that a reporter went to one of his young aides during the inaugural parade and said, did the president mean all 468, or whatever it was, campaign promises? Yes. Does that include the promise to integrate gays and lesbians in military service? Yes. Is he serious about this? Yes. Therefore, headline.

No reporter on any other newspaper suspected, as far as I'm aware, that this was a press fiat rather than any sort of deliberation by the administration, an administration that hadn't even entered office or done anything like it. But, of course, then he and I got to go through the results of having gays and lesbians in the military—the most inflammatory inheritance from the 1960s among his campaign pledges, the opening vignette in the presidency of the first baby boomer from the 1960s.

We had amazing stories of Senator Robert Byrd coming in. Five days the president has been there in the Oval Office delivering a long and learned lecture to other senators about the Roman historian, Suetonius, and how he wrote that Julius Caesar had an affair with the king from Turkey, and set every wag in the Roman Empire saying that Julius Caesar was every woman's man and every man's woman, planting the seeds of homosexuality that destroyed the world's greatest military empire, and this senator will not stand for that here with gays in the military. (Laughter)

And then, the other senators jumped in and started saying, well, Senator, that's very interesting about the Roman Empire, but those Roman emperors seemed to ravage people of every sex and win wars for centuries. I don't know that you get that out of there. And as for the Bible, anti-homosexual rules didn't make the Ten Commandments, whereas lying and adultery did, and we all know plenty of lying philanderers who make pretty good soldiers.

It went back and forth and he finally said, I looked over at Teddy Kennedy and I didn't know whether he was going to start giggling or jump out the window watching this debate on a brand-new president on an issue that dominated the first six months of his presidency.

Then, of course, came Whitewater. From the *New York Times* story, no one to this day can put what Whitewater was in one sentence, whatever it was, but it lasted for the entire eight years of his presidency and morphed into Filegate and Travelgate and accusations that he had murdered his best friend, who had committed suicide.

And he said that Hillary was the last holdout against his request to have a Whitewater special prosecutor, saying this, from her work on the Nixon impeachment committee, would destabilize the whole balance of powers, that the special prosecutor would be unaccountable to anyone, that the president would, as long as the special prosecutor was there, not be able to superintend the executive branch of the government, because any effort that he took in that regard would be seen as self-interested, and it would undermine not only the supervision of the FBI and the Justice Department, but the other executive branches as well. And all over allegations that predated the presidency and, therefore, could not belong with the only legitimate purpose, a presidential investigation, which is an investigation of presidential powers. Therefore, it is wrong, you shouldn't do it, Bill. And he said, the whole country was in an uproar. What can I do? What do you have to hide? This is the only way to answer these questions. If you just submitted all the answers more candidly, this would already be over. He said, that's what they said in *The New York Times*. I admired *The New York Times*. I believed them. Hillary was right, I was stupid, the biggest mistake of my career.

Then, shortly after that, we ran into another one, Waco and the Oklahoma City bombing. We had a session on the night of the Oklahoma City bombing. Chelsea came in while we were talking to say that she was writing a homework assignment on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its conception of evil. And we're sitting there dealing with the reports of how many people are dead in Oklahoma City, and whether it's a foreign terrorist or not.

And the president said that the most surreal thing, from the standpoint of somebody interested in the press, was that after Timothy McVeigh, a corn-fed Iowan, turned out to be the one who set this bomb, killing Social Security workers and their children in nurseries, the worst act of terrorism to date in America, that the House and the Senate held hearings, not on excesses of government hatred, but they held more hearings on Waco, which was his motivation for blowing up. He said, this is *Alice in Wonderland*; we have a prime example of anti-government hatred turning into terrorism in this country, and all the hearings are about Waco, as though this were justified somehow. Not one hearing into the motivation of Timothy

McVeigh, who was executed without very much understanding whatsoever of his crime.

The president was angry in his first term, more than I would like to admit. I kept telling him, I don't think you need to do this. All presidents fuss about their press coverage, but you're doing it a lot. When he did it, though, he would never be angry very long without starting to figure out why.

The president was angry in his first term, more than I would like to admit. I kept telling him, I don't think you need to do this. All presidents fuss about their press coverage, but you're doing it a lot.

Bill Clinton is a puzzle solver. He was trying to figure it out. Why? First of all, he said, there was a perfect storm from the 1960s, which is why I seem to be bedeviled by it. In the 1960s, when it became unfashionable for conservatives and George Wallace to defend segregation, he invented language to attack the government that was promoting integration, to attack pointy-headed bureaucrats and tax-and-spend liberals. And he made government itself an object of scorn. He said at the same time, liberals came apart over the fact that it took so long for the government to respond to civil rights, and that liberals made the Vietnam War, so that "liberal" became a dirty word among people on the left before even on the right. And it's virtually become extinct and our whole political debate has collapsed behind the notion that government is a malevolent force, which is not historical and it's certainly not patriotic. So, we tried out that idea.

Then he said, Taylor, you know when we first came to Washington, you would go out on Connecticut Avenue and see reporters eating from their sack lunches or going to Scholl's Cafeteria for a $3.50 lunch. Now they have $200 martini lunches. Maybe the problem is that they don't care anymore about the politics that matter to ordinary Americans, about welfare reform, about the earned income tax credit, about the things that we're doing. There's something wrong with the press that they don't deal with the right issues.

Then he said, maybe it's the end of the cold war. For 50 years we had this great balance of world threat that gave substance to journalism and why we care about all these issues. Then it evaporated in 1989. There's no longer any hook that makes these matters serious, and it allows us to have politics just for entertainment, and we've slipped into that.

Finally, he said, in 1994, in some of these talks, there's fragmentation in their markets and maybe these people don't have any choice except to be

more tabloid, to try to keep up with their competition. Then, by the second term, he's saying, I hope with reelection that maybe some of the silliness and tabloid distraction from the issues that matter to the American people will diminish.

But then, Whitewater kept going, and not only that, it turned into a new scandal, also started by *The New York Times*, called Chinagate, the suspicion and the charge that President Clinton had sold nuclear secrets to China for campaign contributions. Not to mention Al Gore in the Buddhist Temple praying and the charges that they were selling the Lincoln Bedroom and so on and so forth. And it went through the whole second term all the way down to a nuclear scientist, Wen Ho Lee, serving a year in solitary out in California, out of Los Alamos, on allegations that utterly collapsed by the time that Clinton left office. But it collapsed too late to help him.

Attitude can trump fact. It's not new in American politics.

But these were amazing headlines: President Ignores Evidence of Nuclear Spying, Virtually Whole Nuclear Arsenal Compromised. These are serious things that went on for four years.

And then, of course, finally he said he was kicked on the way out the door by a hook-line-and-sinker scandal that his people had removed all of the Ws off the computers and had vandalized the White House on the way out the door, and that he had pardoned Marc Rich. And that he was a Bubba, no good son of a bitch, on the way out the door, which foreclosed any objective for empirical evaluation of the long-term trends of the Clinton presidency, some things that look pretty good now: 4.2 percent unemployment; 20 million new jobs; a balance between military and political objectives in all the wars, almost zero casualties; peace efforts on four continents; and paid down $600 billion in the national debt, with surpluses in the last 18 months, on a course to pay off the entire historical national debt of the United States by next year, 2010. We're a long way from that now.

Attitude can trump fact. It's not new in American politics. I grew up believing and being taught that the Civil War had nothing to do with slavery, and that all of America was thankful to the Klu Klux Klan for rescuing us from the evils of Reconstruction, which allowed this country to ignore the Thirteenth Amendment, guaranteeing the right to vote for a century. These things happen.

But in our time we have had an imbalance in journalism over things that matter; that is hard to explain. At the end, I do not say that poor performance and entertainment and spitball journalism—or, as I put it, high-school journalism, to make all of journalism about who's cool and

who's not cool, and that sort of thing—is the sole cause for the trivialization of our public debate. Sad as it is, so much of it is two sides saying that the world would be perfect if the other side just dropped dead, with no thought, really, on either side. That our modern journalism has allowed this to be the public debate is a great tragedy.

I don't think that it's only poor performance that's done it. There are enormous structural, economic, technological challenges that are hurting the form of journalism today, but not the content. And what I am saying is that poor performance has made the decline far less glorious than it should have been if more people were standing up, asking the hard questions, that a citizenship journalism, as opposed to a consumer-based, let's-have-fun journalism, would promulgate.

There's always fun in politics, there's always entertainment, there are always good stories and room for I. F. Stone. But democracy is hard.

There's always fun in politics, there's always entertainment, there are always good stories and room for I. F. Stone. But democracy is hard. There is a reason that it didn't exist for 2,000 years. Our founders understood that you've got to think hard and ask questions all the time in order for it to prosper. And the first journalism was citizens looking for a market rather than a market trying to figure out if it could afford citizenship. And if we're going to rescue modern journalism, it's going to need more thought and it's going to need more contribution from universities outside of journalism to recognize that these civic ideas are hard. That even on something as silly as executive pay, that there's more to the debate than a desire to have a pay czar to take their money away versus leave it alone and have a free market, that these are issues of governance and people ought to be thinking about how to remake the system so that these things cannot prevail as an issue of corporate governance, political governance and the way our system works.

The first journalism was citizens looking for a market rather than a market trying to figure out if it could afford citizenship.

We need thought. We need better journalism. And I submit from the experience of *The Clinton Tapes*, which is admittedly eccentric, done mostly in secret and just sprung on the world in the last week, that we have serious problems about our perspective on what matters and what does not matter in modern journalism, as well as modern politics.

Thank you. (Applause)

Mr. Jones: We have time for some questions and I would invite you to address the question to Taylor based on what he has said, and also, if you have parenthetical kinds of thoughts, we'd like to hear them, too.

I'd like to ask the first one. In this litany that you gave about Bill Clinton's tenure, you did not mention the words Monica Lewinsky. I wondered why.

Mr. Branch: I can't imagine that there's new information that people need about Monica Lewinsky that I could bring to this forum here, although I do write about it in the book; he mentions it and it's obvious. To him, politics from the 1960s ought to have ennobled our sense of what politics can do, that on balance it did amazing things. It lifted freedom not only for black people and ending segregation, removing terrorism, but also for women and for white Southerners and all that. It should have enhanced our view of what politics can do, and instead it spawned this era of "government is bad."

His mission was to lift the veil, through performance, of the cynicism that he thought was distorting our public discourse. And he was fighting against the scandal mongering and the tabloids, and he said, I might have had a chance, but I lost it all through Monica Lewinsky, because I gave my enemies a sword. It allowed them to say, see there, he's corrupt and politics is no good, and to evade all of the rest of the stuff that I mentioned.

Now, I mentioned it to you overly provocatively from his point of view. But certainly from the point of view of balance, Monica Lewinsky is significant in the sense that he forfeited the effort to get people to have a better balanced appreciation of what does and doesn't matter to the great mass of voters.

Mr. Reidy: Taylor, you mentioned at the outset that you were on a book tour and you encountered all kinds of public opinions. Is there anything but cynicism in the people that you've just been seeing for the last few weeks?

Mr. Branch: That's a good question. I've been on a book tour for a month. What I've seen more than anything is fear. Anxiety—fear may be too strong a word—but really strong anxiety that they don't understand what's happening.

But in response to *The Clinton Tapes*, which is a strange book, I mean it's kind of on my shoulder going into the White House hearing the president vent and tell stories and everything else. What they've reacted to more than anything are the personal parts about him and Hillary and Chelsea, and Chelsea growing up and that sort of thing.

Hillary came in one night while we were having a session and said she just had a dream about Henry Kissinger, and could I help her interpret it? (Laughter)

People love that stuff. And I think that in a way it's like a refuge from all of these really tough issues. Because if he's right that our public discourse needs to be rehabilitated in the face of all of these problems that they think may be swamping the economy, then that's a really daunting task and they'd rather read about Chelsea's correspondence with Gabriel García Márquez, and some of the stuff that's much more personal.

Mr. Malik: Good evening.

Based on your in-depth knowledge of King and the civil rights movement and the aspirations of that movement, what do you think the people at that time, and King particularly, would think of Barack Obama's election and his performance thus far? Easy question.

Mr. Branch: Well, I always hesitate to speak for Martin Luther King; he's actually been dead longer than he was alive. That's a long time. This was not something on the horizon of possibility in 1968. Look at Harvard in 1968 as compared to now; I don't even think there were any female students, or at Yale, and very few minorities, and now it's one of the most amazingly diverse places on earth.

King's refrain always was we've come a shockingly long way on the promise of democracy, but we still have a long way to go. I think even with the election of Barack Obama, which is a stupefying and unexpected foothold on freedom, we still have a long way to go. And objectively speaking, we have all of these forces of disintegration that are every bit as powerful as the forces of optimism and hope. So, I think he would feel menaced.

I think even with the election of Barack Obama, which is a stupefying and unexpected foothold on freedom, we still have a long way to go.

Remember, when I was doing the diary for Bill Clinton, I was working every day on Martin Luther King, my mind was back in the 1960s. And once a month or every three weeks, I'd get yanked down there to ask him these questions late at night and then I would go back. But when I was doing it, the big thing to me, the impression I gathered over the time of working, was that I think Martin Luther King would be more impressed, on balance—and this is before Barack Obama—with things that have happened outside the United States than inside the United States, as far as the witness of the freedom movement.

Non-violence, which has more or less been eclipsed, there are very few people who speak up for non-violence, even though you can make a very good argument that it was the most powerful idea to come out of that era and had the greatest influence, non-violence has had a much greater career

outside the United States. I don't know how much it's discussed even here at Harvard, but it was in South Africa and it was in Gdansk for the Polish ship workers, and it was when the Berlin Wall came down and the Velvet Revolution. It was in Tiananmen Square, which it didn't win but is not forgotten. Those are modeled on sit-ins.

Non-violence has had a much greater career outside the United States.

And so, in many respects, nonviolence and the witness of the King civil rights movement has gone out into the world, which is great. And in an ironic way, I think its antecedents and its underpinnings are less appreciated in its home than they are anywhere else.

Ms. Ryan: Hi, I'm Julia Ryan. I'm a freshman at Harvard College.

My question—and I sympathize greatly with your disappointment in journalism today—but I'm wondering where can one go to find good reporting, where one can educate themselves about politics in a way that is unbiased and clear?

Mr. Branch: Well, there's lots of good reporting going on today including in *The New York Times*. It's just got a lot of silliness in there, like a page-one story over whether Barack Obama plays basketball with too many men. Why is that on the front page?

So, there's a lot of good reporting. I think the lesson is that citizens are going to have to take far greater responsibility in the future for finding things that actually educate rather than pander to them, and that have good information in the sense that our validators and our filters are no longer as reliable and they may not be around, they may literally not be there. And if that's true, then we are in for an amazing time of reconstituting the best values of journalism, which will be out there, there will be people practicing them, they'll just be harder to find. So, it's going to put a greater burden on every citizen to educate himself or herself through diverse means, rather than simply listening to Walter Cronkite every night and reading *The New York Times*.

Ms. Murningham: Hi, I'm Marcy Murningham. I'm with the Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative here at the Kennedy School.

We heard Nat Hentoff speak earlier to the fact of the failure of journalism to establish a link between cigarettes and cancer. And your statements seem to be about the abuse of power, that issues like CEO pay are really more than just pay, it's about governance, it's about the disjointed dislocation of power, which is a cancer on the body politic.

I wonder what you might have to say about another area, I think a sleeper issue that is not getting a lot of attention. And that is the role of the

gambling industry with respect to its infiltration of state legislatures state by state, and its predatory practices with respect to threatening again the free will of the people and its relatively addictive tendencies to do damage to the body politic.

Mr. Branch: Well, my friend Dan Okrent here hired me to write an article for *The New England Monthly* 25 years ago, because the modern era of lotteries, which was the beginning of state-sponsored gambling, started in New England, in rock-ribbed New England, New Hampshire of all places, as a way of avoiding taxes. And Danny asked me to do an article on the history of lotteries.

And it is remarkable. Every lottery starts with the promise that we're going to have a drawing once every two months and we're very cautious. And 10 years later they're doing lotto games and Keno every five minutes, and all that inhibition is gone. Sooner or later the public catches up to the fact that these odds are no good and they're being robbed. And so then they have to invent some even more ridiculous game to spike it and have a billion-dollar winner or a hundred-million dollar winner. It is a life cycle of addiction.

State-sponsored gambling rests at bottom on the citizens playing other citizens for suckers.

But to your point, state-sponsored gambling rests at bottom on the citizens playing other citizens for suckers, which goes against the bedrock principle of what a compact of citizens is all about. You can't escape that and it takes root in an atmosphere of contempt for what government can and can't do. So, the government is bad, which I would argue has been the dominant idea in national politics. Everybody's running against Washington since the 1968 election.

Is the atmosphere, the corrosive atmosphere in which gambling can sell this notion that the state itself should promote gambling, preying on those people who go. And very few of the people that promote it play the games, because they're too smart. It is a sad thing and it's very corrosive.

In the 19th century, the Louisiana lottery was the nationwide lottery. One of the great marketing campaigns of all time was that they got General Beauregard from the South and there was a big Northern general from the Civil War and they both drew them together to get the Louisiana lottery going. And it took 30 years to strangle the Louisiana lottery, which was called the Serpent and it was all over the country.

Even in that era, they were trying to get rid of it—it's hard once it gets going. It has already, under our noses, seeped into every state—Arkansas was one of the last holdouts—there's now the new Arkansas lottery, and

they have posters for buying lottery tickets outside the Clinton Library, which really stunned me.

Mr. Friendly: Hi, Taylor. Andrew Friendly.

Mr. Branch: Andrew, you should say who you are.

Mr. Friendly: I spent a number of years with President Clinton, as his aide.

Mr. Branch: That's where I met him.

Mr. Friendly: The first part of my question is, at the beginning of the administration, when you talked about gays in the military, I'd argue a little bit about how *The New York Times* was the one promoting the story. Certainly they ran the story first, but I have a feeling that it was probably the opposition party who planted that story and made sure it was there to dislodge the president's administration from the first step.

But second, not one person is the voice of any one newspaper, but I think the president's relationship with Howell Raines or at least the view of that relationship with Howell Raines certainly clouded his impression or his view of *The New York Times* as a whole. Maybe if you could talk about that and the conflict between two Southerners of the same generation, but that was certainly a driving force of his relationship with the paper.

Mr. Branch: Thank you, Andrew.

He talked about Howell Raines a good bit and that's in the book. But I think it went beyond that. He also talked about Maureen Dowd and Jeff Gerth and lots of other people, who by the way, so far as I know from my publisher, the only two people who have lodged formal complaints against *The Clinton Tapes*, saying they were unfairly treated, have been Jeff Gerth and Maureen Dowd—(Laughter)

—who have world-record nerve in my view. But, yes, he did talk about Howell. That gave him another whole angle about Southerners and people trying to prove that they were the right kind of Southerner or whatever. That was very deep.

But at the same time, if *The Washington Post* came out with a very critical series about his handling of Somalia in Black Hawk Down and he highlighted that, said it was very good journalism, it was really tough, because he said it was on the merits. It was the stuff that was extraneous and *ad hominem* that upset him because it was not on the merits. He complimented *The New York Times* for good stories that were adverse, too, but it was the trivial obsession that upset him the most.

And you may be right that gays in the military originated with political opposition working with the reporter to try to get somebody on the record to say this was the first initiative. But it doesn't excuse it. The story that that was their first choice of what to emphasize is false. And that shouldn't

be surprising; it's obvious they wouldn't start with that. They were totally ambushed by this thing.

And so, to present it as though the administration has decided to make it their first choice, and then we're all reacting to that and saying, oh, that was a terrible first choice, or they're not handling it right. But we're all doing it on the playground established by that story, and the story was false, whether or not it had collusion from political opposition.

Mr Kalb: I want first to say how much I've enjoyed reading your stuff and listening to you tonight.

My question goes back to Alex's first question to you, I don't think you answered his question.

Mr. Branch: About Monica Lewinsky?

Mr Kalb: Yeah, I don't think you answered it. He asked why did you not talk about that, and my question, not Alex's but a follow up is, if you were back in your days as a reporter, how would you have handled the Lewinsky story? If you were an editor at *The Times*, would you have put it on the front page? Would you have had follow-up stories? Were you surprised by the way in which that caught fire in all of journalism? Help me out.

Mr. Branch: Well, the Lewinsky story is five years into the Clinton presidency. It's made possible by the fact that over those five years the other scandals—Whitewater, on and on and on, up to and culminating in Paula Jones—had eroded our understanding of what a proper investigation of a president should be to the point that a sitting president is compelled to answer questions about his sex life under oath without boundary. That is the serious thing about Monica Lewinsky.

Once it happens, that in the course of this deposition, that a sitting president has to sit there on a case that predated his presidency and answer questions about his sex life—of course she also swore that they didn't have this affair too, under oath. So, they both swore it didn't happen. But it came out that he had sworn it didn't happen and there were people who doubted it and she was an intern and then a huge uproar.

I don't have a terrible problem with how it was covered once it came out. I have a problem with how we got there in the first place, we totally degraded our sense of what a presidential investigation ought to be about.

Mr Kalb: But didn't we get there in the first place because of what he did?

Mr. Branch: No—remember, the blue dress is in 1997, it comes out in 1998. The whole first term was before he met Monica Lewinsky. All of these scandals that established the notion that the president is under perpetual

investigation on things that wander everywhere and degrade our sense of what a president is supposed to do. That is his defense.

I did talk to him about Monica Lewinsky. But my book is not a historical evaluation of Clinton, it's a primary record, and unlike journalists, I did not see it as my job to wrestle his accountability to the ground because this record was for 10 years from now. It wasn't an evaluation of his performance in the moment, which is what Evan Thomas says, that I should have gotten more information about Monica Lewinsky. I talked about virtually every subject that he was comfortable with, but he's absolutely right, I didn't. With all that was going on in the world, every time I went in there you would see the world on his face, you see why people age. To have made that a priority, and of course it would have been late anyway, because I didn't even know about Monica Lewinsky until the story broke in 1998. And we talked about it. We talked about it during the impeachment trial, by which time Hillary was already his fiercest defender on impeachment, which was hard for me to reconcile and understand.

The significant erosion for people who are interested in public policy occurred before even he heard of Monica Lewinsky.

But no, I didn't push it that much. But I did agree with him that the significant erosion for people who are interested in public policy occurred before even he heard of Monica Lewinsky, let alone the rest of us.

Mr. Jones: Final question.

Mr. Parker: I'd like not to talk about Monica Lewinsky, I'd like to talk about the president's Russia policy, because it seems to have left in its wake so much damage in the countries of the former Soviet Union and Soviet empire, in particular the distrust of the Russian people of America, and a willingness on the part of Russia to attempt to play a great power role in areas of key American interest, whether Europe or Iran. What was going on in Clinton's mind allowing those policies to develop?

Mr. Branch: Well, I'm not sure I accept your premise, Richard, that it was within his power to have spawned a smooth transition to democracy within Russia. I think he worked on it a lot, or at least he said he did. Now he may have failed; he certainly spent a lot of time. It was in the context of one of many discussions about the awesome task that faced Boris Yeltsin in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Empire, to create free institutions in an empire across 11 time zones, menaced by old Communists and imperialists, nuclear weapons lying around everywhere and the Mafia, and infant institutions. And Clinton is trying to decommission the nuclear

weapons and he's trying to deal with Boris Yeltsin. He said he thought it was the most difficult geopolitical task for any national leader on the globe that he knew of at that time.

And he said, let me tell you what happened just the other night. The Secret Service called me at 3:00 in the morning and said that Yeltsin had escaped Blair House in his underwear and was out on Pennsylvania Avenue three sheets to the wind trying to hail a taxi to go get a pizza. (Laughter)

What do I do?

And then he said the very next night he escaped again. He didn't get out of Blair House, but he eluded the Russian security guards and went down in the basement and was trying to sneak out the basement, again drunk, but dressed, and ran into an American Secret Service guard with the Russian agents coming behind them. And they had a confrontation of agents in the basement, not sure that it was Yeltsin.

The point he was trying to make, he said, we're trying to work with Yeltsin to accomplish almost impossible things, made more trips there than anywhere. He said in 1994, Hillary and I both have a bad feeling about what's going to happen in Russia just walking around. The authoritarianism is very strong there, the chaos, the fear of the Mafia. You know, the first thing the Russians asked for when he went to Moscow, they wanted Louis Freeh, they wanted Louis Freeh to go and tour the Soviet Union because they saw him and J. Edgar Hoover as a magic bullet that could inspire them to get rid of the Mafia. That's what they wanted. They wanted Louis Freeh, and he explained why that was so.

Mr. Parker: Does he not regret not sending Louis Freeh?

Mr. Branch: Well, his relations with Louis Freeh weren't very good. I don't think he could send Louis Freeh anywhere, that was part of his problem. He told me this story because he said the handicap in dealing with this is that Boris Yeltsin is not just your jolly Russian who likes his vodka. This is a hardcore alcoholic who has lived a hard life. And every now and then—this wasn't then, this was much later—he said that he would allow Yeltsin to denounce the United States because he had to for political reasons back home.

Clinton's own advisors feared that Yeltsin was like Putin, what we see as Putin, and he would say, I had to reassure myself every now and then and I still believe it, that on balance we didn't have any choice but to work with him as hard as we could. And that somewhere underneath that, I always felt the guy who climbed up on the tank to forestall the coup that would have restored the authoritarian empire is still in there somewhere. And he thought that, he's still in there somewhere, but he faces a superhu-

man task and he's a hardcore, raging alcoholic. That's a pretty tough hand to be dealt.

Mr. Jones: Taylor Branch, thank you very, very much. (Applause)

I want to mention to you that tomorrow we will have a seminar that will take as its point of departure the remarks that Taylor has made this evening, with Alex Keyssar, Elaine Kamarck, Dan Balz and Renee Loth.

We are very glad to have had you all here. Thank you for being with us on this very happy night, and we are adjourned.

The Theodore H. White Seminar
November 13, 2009

Mr. Jones: Last night we heard Taylor Branch talk about the role of the press in both the specifics of its treatment of Bill Clinton, and also in sort of a pattern of cynicism that he believes, and expressed eloquently, has affected very adversely the way our government works, the way our democracy works, the way our society functions.

The way we have structured these seminars is that we invite people who we feel will have an interesting perspective on what our Theodore White Lecturer has to say, and we invite them to respond, either directly or by making comments of their own that are related, and then we have a conversation.

So, with that, I would like to introduce our group of responders. Starting at the right is Dan Balz, national political correspondent for *The Washington Post*, author of *The Battle for America 2008: The Story of an Extraordinary Election*, which he wrote with Haynes Johnson, and which was edited by Jim Silberman, who is also here. He also edited the first book my wife and I wrote, which makes us know just what a superb editor he was because he told us to go do it again when we gave him the manuscript originally.

Next to Dan is Elaine Kamarck, Lecturer in Public Policy at the Kennedy School. She came to the Kennedy School after a career in politics and government. She was one of the founders of the New Democrat movement, which really was the springboard for Bill Clinton's original election as president. Her book, *Primary Politics: How Presidential Candidates Have Shaped the Modern Nominating System*, has just been reissued in a paperback edition.

Taylor Branch, needless to say, needs no introduction.

Next to me is Renee Loth, who was, until July, the editorial editor of *The Boston Globe* and is now a columnist.

Mr. Jones: Next to Renee is Alex Keyssar, the Matthew W. Stirling Jr. Professor of History and Social Policy at the Kennedy School. He is a historian. His book, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*, was named the best book on the subject of U.S. history in 2000 by the American Historical Association and the Historical Society. And a significantly revised and updated version has been published just this year.

So, we have a distinguished panel. I would like to begin with you, Dan Balz. You heard some pretty harsh words about the press and the coverage of Bill Clinton last night. What do you think?

Mr. Balz: I have a number of thoughts about this, Alex.

I thought the broad question that Taylor raised was a very important question, which was, to what degree has poor performance contributed to a decline in mainstream journalism? I think that is a topic worth a lot of discussion this morning, and one that I know everybody in the newsroom that I work with thinks about all the time as we go through the changes that we're going through. I would recast that question in this way: To what extent have political polarization and technological change brought a new era of journalism that in some way may be contributing to a decline in performance?

I would like to also talk a minute about Bill Clinton's laments about press coverage, because I don't think there has ever been a president who has felt that he has gotten fair coverage from the press. I don't think we should take presidents' views of how the press covers their administrations as the final word on whether the press has done a good job or not.

I was struck as Taylor was talking last night about how Clinton was complaining that they had been kicked on the way in and kicked on the way out, and kicked on the way in on the gays in the military. And my recollection of the history of that, which I went back and checked last night, was that on Veterans Day, 1992, shortly after Bill Clinton had been elected, he gave a speech in Arkansas, a Veterans Day speech, a fairly innocuous speech. After the speech he was asked by some reporters, do you intend to keep your campaign promise on gays in the military? And he said, I want to. And the next morning, November 13, *The New York Times* led the paper with that, that he intended to keep his promise.

I don't think we should take presidents' views of how the press covers their administrations as the final word on whether the press has done a good job or not.

I remember then that the Clinton transition team was completely caught by surprise, that a policy that he had enunciated through the campaign with very little controversy suddenly became news because he was president-elect. But it is, in fact, the difference between being a candidate for president and being the president-elect. And what happened when he came into office, Taylor is absolutely right, the morning after the inauguration there was a story on the front page about gays in the military.

But it was not something offered up by some mindless transition aides. It was, in fact, the result of a meeting that had taken place the Sunday before the inauguration between Clinton and his national security advi-

sors, who had been wrestling with this issue from the time of the Veterans Day speech forward, as to how they were going to resolve it.

And they had worked out what they thought was an acceptable approach, which was to enunciate very quickly in the new administration that they intended to change this policy, but to give the Pentagon six months. This was a very live discussion that *The Times* did very good reporting on, put in the paper, and in fact, it blew up. And there's no question that it ruined the first 10 days of his administration and colored the opening of his administration. But it was not because the press suddenly had its own agenda or was finding some innocuous or insignificant policy to discuss, but, in fact, because it was one of the most important early stage-setters for what the Clinton presidency wanted to do to signal a difference from past presidents.

So, I think that you can go through this with any administration. You could go through the Bush administration and its many complaints about the way the press treated deliberations inside their administration, strategies that they were doing, blowing things out of proportion.

…today we are on a continuum of news. It's not a news cycle, it is a continuum of information, and the new pushes out the old, whether the new is more important than the old or not.

There certainly is a question of how journalism has changed, and I would say the changes have come even more dramatically since Bill Clinton left office than while he was in office. I think that in the Clinton era we had still a dominance by mainstream media, in a way that we do not today.

I would say some of the criticism of the press is entirely justifiable, that we are more scattered today, there is even more emphasis than ever on process over policy, there is more discussion of smaller things. I always like to say that today we are on a continuum of news. It's not a news cycle, it is a continuum of information, and the new pushes out the old, whether the new is more important than the old or not.

And nothing sticks in the way it did. The attention span of the press is much shorter, as is the attention span of society. Those are all issues that we are grappling with as we try to figure out the economic model that will allow us to survive and do good journalism. I think there is still a tremendous amount of good journalism that is being done. I think sometimes it is overlooked.

But if you look at this year, I think the coverage of the health care debate has been pretty good, both in trying to remind people of what is true and what is not true in terms of some of the charges that are being

hurled back and forth. It is an enormously difficult issue to write about well and intelligently and in a way that is accessible to people.

I wonder when we look back three years from now what we will say about the coverage of the debate that's now ongoing in the administration about what to do in Afghanistan. I put that in the context of the legitimate complaints about what happened in the run-up to Iraq, and whether the press fell down on the job.

You had to be female to understand what a mess this man was. And most of the men in the White House kind of missed it, and most of the rest of us got it and said, whoa, this is a problem.

I frankly thought that during the campaign we were not rigorous enough in forcing then-candidate and now President Obama to square the circle on some of the contradictions in his own message between the hopefulness of new politics, the idea that you could end partisanship and bring people together, and an agenda that for ideological reasons was almost certain to create wider divisions between left and right over what he was doing. So, there's a lot that we can continue to talk about.

I think this is a period of great introspection in newsrooms for many of the reasons that Taylor outlined. And I think that for those reasons what Taylor put on the table last night was very important. But as I say, I'll go back to my main point, I would not want presidents to be the arbiters of whether the press is doing a good job.

Clinton got covered very harshly but…he also was quite foolish in walking into traps. It was stunning to me the risks that he took.

Mr. Jones: Elaine?

Ms. Kamarck: I had a couple comments, some about Taylor's book, which I found absolutely charming, and part of it was that I saw throughout the book, Clinton was charming you, as he charmed so many people. And I think that part of the press coverage of Clinton was that in all those eight years, the guy was kind of a mess on the personal level. You had to be female to understand what a mess this man was. And most of the men in the White House kind of missed it, and most of the rest of us got it and said, whoa, this is a problem. And I think the journalistic community was always trying to get a hold of this and went to some pretty big extremes.

On the topic of the press, I must say that I thought Clinton got covered very harshly but that he also was quite foolish in walking into traps. It was stunning to me the risks that he took. I can still remember the day

when Dan called me at home and I was cooking dinner, and he said, do you know anything about this young intern? And I was like, this can't be. I knew other people, I didn't know the intern. (Laughter)

So, it was just like whoa, I can't believe this is happening. I think I told Dan that I couldn't believe it, it had to be a rumor, it had to be untrue, etc.

So, I think this is a unique guy, and he really has a lot of demons in him. And I think the press struggled for eight years, with mighty help from the Republican Party, on how to get a handle on that. I think it was completely irrelevant to his job as president, which then opens another question, the perennial question: What's the relationship between a person's character and public mission? Because I continue to think he was a superb president, and I think the record bears that out.

But the press got pretty nasty during those years and they got even nastier, I think, in some ways to my boss, Al Gore, because I can remember this whole spate of stories during the campaign about his mother-in-law's dog's drugs. There were things that were just so bizarrely stupid and irrelevant that were being pushed into a metanarrative about his character that just absolutely drove us nuts.

A good friend of mine, a respected journalist, swears that when Gore was at a labor breakfast and made fun of a song that his mother used to sing to him when he was a baby, that the journalist swore that he was being serious. Five other people in the room said he was being sarcastic. And it turned into a story about how the song was written in 1970 and here he was lying again. So, there was something that bled over from the frustration and the attempt to cover Clinton, into the Gore campaign, and it was very detrimental.

I think that the press decided that war was good for business. It's certainly good for television, that's for sure.

All of that, however, I tended to take in stride, and I didn't really get very mad about it until the run-up to the Iraq war. Here Al Gore and Bill Clinton were dissected by the press on a series of things that for the most part were thoroughly unrelated to the job they were doing.

And then, George Bush comes in and we have a run-up to the war, where first of all the CIA is leaking like a sieve and they can't manage to get their leaks into more than paragraph 23 of *The New York Times* story. There's INR over at State, there are pieces of the government banging drums saying, wait, this is the mistake. And I think that the press decided that war was good for business. It's certainly good for television, that's for sure.

So, I didn't really get mad about this until the Bush administration, until I watched this run-up where there was no serious oversight and no difficult questioning about sending people to war, among them my son. So, I got a little bit more upset about this than even normal.

I think that when you look at this historically, look at the press coverage in the Clinton era, okay, it was tough, he was kind of a mess, he kind of invited some of this, etc. And then, look at the press coverage in the first term of Bush and you have to say something was seriously out of whack. Hopefully it will come back to a more nuanced and sensible coverage of presidents.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Elaine. Renee?

Ms. Loth: Thank you.

Well, I agree with Dan that we in the working press got a little bit of tough love last night from Taylor Branch, who seemed to me to be in his presentation, sort of channeling Bill Clinton and Clinton's frustrations with the media and his coverage that every president is unhappy with.

But it made me think of that old line about this is the worst possible system except for all the others, because we've seen since the end of the Clinton administration and in the last five, 10 years what the alternatives are. And the alternative to mainstream media is appalling and much worse than anything that *The New York Times* could serve up.

I mean, we have a profusion of unverified, assertive assertions on the Web, bloggers and gossip and trivia that is far worse than anything that *The New York Times*, or any of the mainstream media, *Globe* included, ever produced. So, not to get too defensive about mainstream media, but I think that things could be a lot worse and are getting a lot worse. This is a profession that is on its knees.

In my exalted position as editorial page editor, I was frequently invited—*The New York Times* owns *The Boston Globe*—to go to many of these senior management meetings with *The New York Times* executives to try to puzzle through how we're going to survive this disruptive technology of the Web, and things are very bad. It's expensive to do genuine journalism. It's expensive to sue the Pentagon, and bloggers in their pajamas are not going to be suing the Pentagon.

So, as much as I respect and understand the frustrations of people in political power toward the mainstream media, I think that there needs to be also a discussion about how to preserve what is important and even sacred about mainstream journalism in this country.

One of the things that I was really interested in that Taylor said, is that acknowledging this new environment, there is an additional burden on the citizenry to become more educated because there is this undifferentiated mass of information out there. But civics education is almost non-existent

in the public schools. So how are young people expected to be able to evaluate news and information that they're getting from this mass of sources with no real referees identifying what the most important or what the most valid information is?

I think that something else Taylor said that sounded a little off to me was that the disruptive technology of the Internet and the financial problems it has caused for the mainstream media is responsible for problems or changes in the form of journalism but not in its content, that we journalists need to own the problems in the content. And I certainly think that we need to be responsible for all of the silliness and bad mistakes and ethical lapses of the press over the last 25 to 30 years. I've been involved in it, and they are many.

Civics education is almost non-existent in the public schools. So how are young people expected to be able to evaluate news and information that they're getting from this mass of sources with no real referees identifying what the most important or what the most valid information is?

But I'm not sure I agree because I do think that form follows content, and that without the resources to support the journalism, which is a financial problem and a problem of form, changes in the form, the content, is going to be weaker.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Renee. Alex?

Mr. Keyssar: Thank you, Alex.

I wanted to pick up on two things that Taylor mentioned and that were intertwined. One, which hasn't really been talked about yet this morning, was Clinton's lament about the anti-government consensus emerging in the 1890s. After the 1600s it's all really current events. (Laughter)

That's a bad mistake because I want to make a plea for a certain kind of history. (Laughter)

This thing came up several times about Clinton's sense of this anti-government, anti-state that was contributing to it. I have to say that I found that remarkable because I see Clinton as being one of the people most responsible for that.

There's an emerging view among historians that the Clinton administration represented the ratification of Reaganism.

I think there's an emerging view among historians that the Clinton administration represented the ratification of Reaganism. And, in fact, a lot of what Clinton did was to plead for smaller government and run against

government. And I found myself thinking, even this morning, I would like to know what the press coverage was of the repeal of Glass-Steagall, which certainly did not represent the advocacy of an active government on the part of the Clinton administration. So, in a way I found it interesting that that was his perception, and yet I wondered about whether he was missing something in seeing that as really a key ideological prism that was affecting matters.

The second thing I want to comment about is the press and the growing importance or increased visibility of stories about trivia while the world is going to hell. That does seem to me to be a fairly legitimate complaint. In addition to all the stories that we all know, I have a new interest in Latin America. I was spending time down there and one of the things I've noticed is that, for example, about three-quarters of the stories that appear in *The New York Times* about Brazil are about some quite minor cultural matter. We have this enormous growing country with very serious questions about political autonomy in politics. And we read more about samba than about anything else.

That said, I really do have the historian's question of when is there a long-term trend in growing trivialization or growing focus on relatively unimportant stories. I'll relate one anecdote from my youth as a historian. Many years ago I wrote a book about the history of unemployment, and particularly focused on this region. It was long enough ago that it was before newspapers were digitized and thus searchable. So I spent about a year down in the State House library reading microfilm one day after another.

I had a particular interest in trying to get material about the depression of 1893, 1894 and spilling into 1895, which was one of the two or three most severe depressions in American history. And the scope of the downtime, for example, was far more severe. And in the Boston newspapers that I was reading, including, I have to tell you, *The Globe*, there was very little about unemployment. But there was this amazing story about how Colonel Breckinridge had been spotted in a New Hampshire hotel with a woman not his wife. And that story was showing up, it started about every three days and then it became a daily item, a daily front-page item in *The Boston Globe*, while people are starving in front of the State House. (Laughter)

So, I don't think this started in the 1990s, but I think it would be a very interesting research question, to try to understand what has changed and over what period of time. Maybe people in this room do know the answer to that. I don't think it's brand new. I suspect that it's worse than it was.

And the final question that I would address to the many journalists in the room is the extent of the allocation of resources on stories such as Colonel Breckinridge or some of the Clinton stories. I mean, is this really taking

resources away from covering more serious matters? I guess that's really the question at the end.

I suspect the editors of *The Times* with their front-page story about whether the White House basketball team is too male. Well, we're covering this serious stuff, too, and we'll give readers just a little leavening every once in a while. But is that really true or is this a loss of resources?

Mr. Jones: Taylor?

Mr. Branch: Well, I love all these subjects. Let me just say a few things.

First of all, on the notion that I was channeling Bill Clinton, you have to understand that I'm still on a book tour for a book published last month, about keeping these secret tapes. So, in some senses I'm giving the Theodore White Lecture at the end of the book tour that is consumed with Clinton.

That project was his initiative to do tapes behind the scenes for eight years, which I did, and I have a fairly eccentric book coming out now about what it was like to do that. One day those tapes will be in the Clinton Library for people to study verbatim. And there's an enormous volume of material there that represented, he said, his best effort, short of tape-recording his own phone calls. When we were negotiating this at the very beginning, also at his initiative, for a time I thought he was tempted to do that, too. He wanted to leave behind some sort of record from before the administration even started that was in the moment and that was more detailed and human, about how the presidency works.

There was a certain romance…almost a sacred quality about the importance of the presidency and about politics that was in [Teddy White's] journalism.

So that's the reason I was doing all that last night, not necessarily trying to put Bill Clinton's grievances before the world. But I wouldn't really shy away from it because that's what I know most about now, since that's what I was doing all of those years and couldn't talk about it for eight years, couldn't say anything. We kept it secret. A lot of people are gnashing their teeth and are mad because they didn't know about it. And I'm very pleased that they are, but I'm also very pleased that they will have this record because it was secrecy in the interest of openness, as paradoxical as that may seem.

Teddy White in his book, *Making of the President 1960*, capitalized an ordinary room in the White House called the Oval Office and now the whole world can't write Oval Office without capitalizing it. There was a certain romance. There was almost a sacred quality about the importance

of the presidency and about politics that was in his journalism. People emphasized that he got to the behind-the-scenes nature of the campaign and personalized it. But there was also perhaps a romantic nature about politics that was true then that is no longer true. It certainly lasted at least until Watergate, until 1972.

After all, Dan's paper was the only one that thought it was worthy of attention that employees of the president's campaign office were caught in burglars' gloves in the opposition party's headquarters in an election year, and that there might be something to that. Everybody else thought this might be innocent. *The Washington Post* was very much isolated in trying to bring this forward and viewed as kind of a cynical thing about the nature of the White House in that era. Surely we have a different era today.

Even apart from Bill Clinton, I have a memory during the 2000 campaign. Clinton sent me somewhere, and I had to go to Andrews Air Force Base and the press corps was there, about to go somewhere with Al Gore. And reporters that I knew told me out front at Andrews Air Force Base, we don't understand it but we all don't like Al Gore. We may agree with his policies more than Bush, but Bush is more fun and this guy is a stiff and we don't like him.

And there is a sense that things happen in waves in journalism. We're on a wave now that Afghanistan is corrupt, that Karzai is corrupt. It just started. There's no sense that he used to be not corrupt and is now all of a sudden corrupt— (Laughter)

—or anything, but it's just that we're on a high horse now that he's corrupt and we need to clean it up and what are we going to do about it? These things happen in waves.

But what is lost in the wave, in my view, is the larger transition from the period in which we all felt there was something at stake in politics, probably survival, through the cold war. That's one of Clinton's theories about the press, to the point that maybe there isn't so much at stake and we can afford to say we don't like Al Gore, he's not an alpha male or whatever they were talking about in the campaign.

The last thing I'll say is that personally this went back and forth between me and Clinton ironically because of our career paths, that when we separated in 1972 in the McGovern campaign, he was hard on his political career and I had been working in politics and thinking of staying in politics. But I'd had enough of it because it seemed petty, and so I was going to go into journalism because I thought there was more opportunity for integrity and idealism in journalism than in politics.

And whether I was charmed by Bill Clinton or not, I will tell you that there were many times when he was talking—and I agree with you, you

don't expect the measure of journalism to be what the president thinks, but quite apart from that—there were times I thought he was far more idealistic than the people I knew who were writing about him in a profession that I had gone into for its idealism. There is a corrosion about politics as a profession, and politics itself, that is unhealthy for journalism.

These waves of entertainment, it seemed to me, have gone beyond the skepticism that is necessary for the press to keep people accountable, to the degree that I think that we may be blind to how much we all have at stake in our politics. The respect and the importance that I think we should all have for people going into public service is to some degree in danger.

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So there were all of these theories that grew out of a very unusual, perhaps even eccentric, experience to have somebody sitting there recording with the president for all those years. So, I was presenting his point of view because it came out of that.

Mr. Jones: I'd like to ask you a question, Taylor, because it strikes me that you're probably uniquely qualified to address this. It struck me that this was happening, as you said last night, as you were finishing the third volume of your series of books on Martin Luther King.

Here are these two men, both of them enormously charismatic, maybe two of the most charismatic figures in my lifetime, issues of great importance in the case of civil rights, and of course, the president of the United States. And both who were, in the case of Clinton, pretty much paralyzed by a peccadillo that had a sexual nature, and Martin Luther King to a certain degree, also as Bill Clinton described to you, gave his enemies weapons because of his behavior which you have chronicled in your book.

The respect and the importance that I think we should all have for people going into public service is to some degree in danger.

I guess my question is this, when men like these two, these extraordinary men with unquestioned idealism, are undone by behavior like this, in the face of knowledge that they have enemies looking over their shoulders and seeking that weapon to do them in, where does the fault lie and how do you parse the responsibility for something like that?

Mr. Branch: Well, first of all I think you've got to be careful about the premise. King's private life was never an issue in public. Let's not project this backwards. Nobody knew that Martin Luther King was a philanderer during his life. You cannot find stories about King's private life—it didn't exist. In that sense, it's more in the John F. Kennedy era.

It was an issue behind the scene. It was an issue of blackmail. It was an issue between him and J. Edgar Hoover. It was an issue over communism more than anything else, which was what President Kennedy tried to use to control Martin Luther King. But King's philandering was a private issue and not a public issue. It never was.

The fact that he was wiretapped was not even known, certainly not written about, until the Church Committee, until the 1970s when it came out, and it was confirmed even, that he had been wiretapped by the FBI. When Ronald Reagan signed the law making Martin Luther King Day a national holiday in the 1980s, he famously said on that day that we will know in 50 years whether or not he was loyal to the United States, which was a misnomer when he said it, because the material that came out 50 years from then had nothing to do with the communist issue; it was the material relating to his private affairs. And even then people didn't know that.

It's different—King belonged to a different era when all of this was done in subtext, and it was not public. Clinton was menaced for many years over things like Vince Foster, before Monica Lewinsky surfaced.

But the gravamen of your question was, given the fact that Clinton knew that all of this was at stake and that his political enemies, if not the press, were after anything about him—Gennifer Flowers and all of those prior warnings that had been high on the radar screen—he knew that this was not the Martin Luther King era, and that if he had the most private of affairs, it could come up and validate all of the Vince Foster silliness that had happened, which is what he did. And he gave in to it.

And he did talk about it. He certainly said that it was not a judgment. People say, well, what was he thinking? He wasn't thinking anything. If it was a thought matter, he would have reached a different conclusion, and I don't think that's terribly surprising.

But the weakness, he said he cracked and it was self-pity. But the only way I can interpret that is that he said he had resolved to give up his philandering ways, given the stakes of it. And that resolve cracked in a wave of self-pity that he thought he was trying to do a good job, and the Monica Lewinsky scandal ultimately culminated, and I didn't realize this, in a period of enormous self-pity early in the second term, when he thought that the Whitewater stuff was going to subside and instead it intensified and was added to this whole thing about Chinagate that dominated the

second term. And he said, self-pity, his lifelong nemesis, got him feeling sorry that he was not only not going to get out from under the old scandals, but now there were these new ones that he had sold nuclear secrets to China for campaign contributions. And he felt sorry for himself and he cracked.

But that certainly doesn't make it a judgment, that certainly doesn't make it right. But in both cases, on the private life, apart from the journalistic context, apart from history, they both were philanderers, there's no question about that. And I can only say that it seems to me that I don't know that that is unusual. Lots of people in power have been philanderers back into the mists of history, from St. Augustine on down to Paul Tillich, just if you're looking in the field of religion, and certainly in the field of politics.

…self-pity, his lifelong nemesis, got him feeling sorry that he was not only not going to get out from under the old scandals, but now there were these new ones…

So, to me, that is part of the human mystery and I don't know if it's a unique or especially illuminating thing in what we're talking about now, which is a debate over the role of the press and the idealism of the press in American politics and how that might have changed in the last couple of generations.

Mr. Jones: Renee, when you hear that, does that square with your sense of what journalistic responsibility is?

Ms. Loth: Yes, in terms of the idealism of an earlier generation of reporters. I went to journalism school before Watergate, so to me it was kind of a '60s thing. It was an opportunity to try to advocate for social justice and help the underdog through the newspaper.

It was also far less of a profession and more of a craft in those days. Journalism schools themselves were kind of new. There were a lot of blue-collar people who didn't really have advanced degrees as journalists who did identify more with ordinary people. There is a certain class change in the profession, which has made a lot of reporters less in touch with ordinary people.

There is a certain class change in the profession, which has made a lot of reporters less in touch with ordinary people.

So, we've lost our idealism partly because journalists became famous. We could meet Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford. Look at this. It's the glamour of the profession really. I think you'd corrode some of that early idealism and there are a lot of things to say about where we lost our way. And I do think

that the media and politicians are going down together in terms of our cynicism about government and about public service, because we're tied by the hip in a way. So, I think there's a lot to be said about we journalists losing our idealism and looking for other rewards, fame and fortune, from the profession.

I guess I'm looking for what is to be done, as somebody said. How do we address that? I think there needs to be a whole reordering of the civics education as I mentioned earlier, and a whole new generation of young people need to be re-educated about what the media should be doing, what the press should be doing in a democracy. And then hopefully, from that new generation of young people will become a new generation of journalists who will have different ideals. That's really kind of pie in the sky, but we can hope.

The media and politicians are going down together in terms of our cynicism about government and about public service, because we're tied by the hip in a way.

Mr. Jones: I was struck by one of the things that you said, Alex, and that Taylor referred to, about how Martin Luther King was in sort of the John Kennedy era of privacy. But you point out, rightly, that *The Boston Globe*, which is a legitimate mainstream newspaper, was devoting itself to exactly the kind of sex scandal that would suggest that if the president of the United States had been caught with this woman in a hotel, he too would probably have been on the front page of *The Boston Globe* in the 1890s.

What do you think accounts for this change? Was it Franklin Roosevelt's appeal to the press not to show him in a wheelchair or expose his own life? Was it a matter of the popularity of the presidency or the power of the presidency? Was this willingness for the press to simply protect these people?

Mr. Keyssar: It's a good question, Alex, and I don't know the answer. The hint, the suggestion that I'm offering is that it's likely that the pattern is not the one which we immediately want to leap to, which was that there was the certain Kennedy era, you don't talk about these things, and that now things have gotten worse and more trivial. The history over the last hundred years, hundred and twenty years may be much more undulating.

Part of the difference in the past, I'm speculating here, is that for one thing, the press in the 1890s and the early 20th century is much more of a partisan press, much more of a diverse press. For better or worse, when I was doing this research, Boston had like eight or nine daily newspapers

in 1900, and not all of them were carrying the Colonel Breckinridge story, because I got really interested in that. (Laughter)

I was briefly the world's leading expert on Colonel Breckinridge's affair.

A hypothesis would be that as we moved away from a partisan press and moved toward officially being called objective journalism, certain rules of decorum and press conduct were instituted. I'm guessing this may have been the case going back perhaps to the era of the '30s, because certainly the press did not consider what Roosevelt was doing off the record.

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You think back again to the late 19th-century story which is Grover Cleveland. Now, in that case, Cleveland's peccadilloes were hard to ignore because he had an illegitimate child. But he ran for president as the father of an illegitimate child, and he diffused it by admitting it, saying I provide some support. But it was all out there.

So, I'm guessing that maybe some shift in journalistic canons are taking place maybe in—

Ms. Kamarck: We're making eye contact. Come on, guys.

Mr. Keyssar: Okay, what's the theory?

Mr. Jones: Elaine.

Ms. Kamarck: Women. We're powerful finally, a little bit, in the 1990s. First time ever, okay? Believe me, in Jack Kennedy's White House, there were no powerful women. The women in Jack Kennedy's White House, you go read the various things, they were play toys. Women in the 1990s in pressrooms, in the White House, mattered, we actually got to do real things. We weren't there for decoration.

That changes the whole culture. That moves you out of the boy culture. You know the famous thing on Kennedy's airplane, wheels up, rings off? That's in one of the books. That applied to guess what?

Women in the 1990s in pressrooms, in the White House, mattered, we actually got to do real things. We weren't there for decoration.

From the Floor: What does it mean? (Laughter)

Ms. Kamarck: That was obviously applied to the candidate, the press covering the candidate, it was a man's world. In 1990 it stopped being a man's world. And the dynamics inter-

nally, whether it's a pressroom, whether it's corporate America, whether it's a White House, the dynamics are different. Behavior that was once kind of like, oh, this is cool because we all did this, is no longer acceptable.

Mr. Keyssar: But you don't want to make women responsible for the trivialization of press coverage of politics. (Laughter)

Ms. Kamarck: But that's the point, Alex, we don't think this behavior is trivial. First of all, if you want to be a serious woman in any organization, you are not, contrary to some public opinion, sleeping your way to the top. You don't want that kind of behavior going on. It's a big deal for women. It's a really big deal for young women. I can tell you the difference between the Jimmy Carter campaign in 1980 and the Al Gore campaign in 2000 was night and day the way men treated women.

Mr. Jones: In what respect? Explain.

Ms. Kamarck: In 1980 it was still kind of like an old boys' network. It was lots of fooling around and you always had to be careful, and it was hard to get taken seriously. Twenty years later there's a lot of change.

The history of women in this current wave of empowerment has been to get inside those places where informal deals are made and where power is traded.

Ms. Loth: I just want to add one little thing. This is why the men-playing-basketball story is of interest. A couple of men on this panel have said that that's trivial, kind of an example of what's wrong with today's political journalism. But deals get made on the basketball court just as they do on the golf course and so on.

The history of women in this current wave of empowerment has been to get inside those places where informal deals are made and where power is traded. And that's why it was interesting and important to women, and a legitimate story, that Obama had an all-men basketball game and why he started playing golf with Melody Barnes right away, the next day.

Ms. Kamarck: That's right, playing golf with a woman.

Mr. Jones: Taylor?

Mr. Branch: I want to offer from the very end of the book a story that baffled me, that upset me, that kind of straddles your comments. Because I think the comments about these things are important.

On January 14, 2001, as Clinton was about to leave office—as a historian, this is long before the secret tapes project was known—I was the Clinton defender on *Meet the Press* with Bill Bennett, David Gergen, David Maraniss and Tim Russert interviewing. It was a lonely job, I can tell you that, because it seemed to me, and I complained a little bit afterwards, that Russert would always, just before commercial he would go to Bill Ben-

nett to say, well, what do you think Clinton's legacy is going to be? And Bennett, of course, would say, the most scandal-ridden, corrupt, philandering president in our history, that's all he'll be remembered for, and so forth. And then, he would turn to me at the end, what do you have to say to that? I would get out half a sentence and we would go to commercial. (Laughter)

But that led up to what happened during the commercials. Because as soon as we cut to commercials, Tim Russert said to Bill Bennett, have you heard about Clinton's latest girlfriend? And Bill Bennett said, of course. He's already off the reservation, he's out there running around with women getting ready to leave the White House. And I took this seriously, I said, who is it? What is going on? Do you know who it is? And I was demanding specifics. Where did you hear this?

Instead of getting an answer, Russert picked up his two pencils and started beating on his desk singing, "Who Let the Dogs Out," which was a popular song in 2001. And Bill Bennett started singing, "Who Let the Dogs Out," and pretty soon everybody's singing, "Who Let the Dogs Out," not telling me anything about this, but it was kind of like inside knowledge that this was happening, and rather than substantiate it, they sang, "Who Let the Dogs Out." That's what I mean by press wave. And it's all men.

And then, of course, the red light would go on and they'd say 10 seconds and the pencils would go back down and we would be *Meet the Press* again. (Laughter)

Ms. Kamarck: That's a good story.

Mr. Jones: Dan, do you have a comment on any of this?

Mr. Balz: I had no idea about any of this. (Laughter)

Well, I think Elaine makes a very good point, and Renee, about the empowerment of women. I know from having been now on the campaign trail for a very long time that the arrival of women reporters as serious political reporters and part of the boys and girls on the bus now, has brought a different sensibility to the way people approach politics.

And Elaine and Renee are exactly right that women see, and not just the issues of sexuality and behavior, but a variety of other things differently. And so, the notion that the arrival of women on the campaign trail has in some ways caused this focus on scandal and character issues, and therefore that's a deterioration in journalistic values, I would side with Renee and Elaine on that. But that has been to the good.

We look back on certain periods as a golden era of comity—C-O-M-I-T-Y, not Jon Stewart—and bipartisanship and that we kept trivial matters or private matters private. And it is easy to, as Taylor said in talking about Teddy White, romanticize about the way things should be or used to be, that sort of thing. I think each era defines itself by the social, political and cultural mores of society at that time. And I think what we are seeing today

is a reflection of that, broadly. The sins that are visited on journalism today are as much of a reflection about the way society has changed as people's tastes and appetites, the way families live their lives, the way people get their information, and it's a different era.

I know when Haynes and I were starting out on this book, in our early conversations with Jim about the book on the campaign, people would say, well, describe what you're doing. And Haynes had this wonderful encapsulation. He said, it's Teddy White without the romance. And that was in a sense the way we set out to do the book about the '08 campaign. The idea that this was going to be a big, important, consequential campaign, we had no idea how interesting it was going to be, obviously, nobody quite did.

The sins that are visited on journalism today are as much of a reflection about the way society has changed as people's tastes and appetites, the way families live their lives, the way people get their information, and it's a different era.

But we wanted to do this in a way that was cold-eyed and that set it against a historical context, not shying away from whatever controversy would arise or sometimes triviality, but with that notion. And I think Haynes knew Teddy White very well. I'd met him once and only in passing. But Haynes understood that continuum upon which we have been operating as journalists. And the era we are in today is a different era, for worse but I think in some ways for better as well.

Mr. Jones: I'm not quite sure how this fits, but I want to tell it anyway. I remember vividly being at a newspaper publishers convention in the 1980s, when I was covering the press for *The New York Times*. And at that particular moment—newspaper publishers have always been very worried about something—and they were worried at this particular moment about *USA Today* and the idea that there should be no breaks on the front page and stories had to be shorter because people wouldn't go inside, and so on and so forth.

So, they invited the person who was the hottest ticket at the moment, which happened to be Tina Brown, who was at that time running *Vanity Fair*. And Tina came to this ballroom full of elderly publishers, all white and all male, and she told them, I'll never forget it, she said, the problem you have is not the length of your stories, people will read stories of any length, there needs to be a mix, and so forth. Your problem is you need to edit your newspapers for women. And you could just see them going, oh, and rolling back in their seats. And she said, no, no, no, you don't under-

stand. Men want to know what happened, women want to know what *really* happened. (Laughter)

Mr. Jones: Questions.

Mr. Okrent: More of a speech. (Laughter)

I'll try not to make it a speech. It'll be less than a half an hour, I guarantee it. (Laughter)

A few things I'd like to address. One thing that I think we are missing about the trivialization, inaccuracy, pure error, scandal that gets into American media is the need, the insane need, that news media have to be first, to have the scoop. The idea of the scoop goes back to a time when there were nine daily newspapers in Boston or 15 in New York, and there was a reason to beat the other guy out because you had a newsboy on the corner saying, extra, extra, extra. Today we don't have that. We just have this atavistic attachment to being first.

So, if *The New York Times* realizes during the campaign that *The Washington Post* is working on a story about John McCain's relationship with a lobbyist, they say, oh, oh, *The Post* is going to run that tomorrow, we'd better go with what we have today. And you had a scandal as a result of it, you had an unbaked piece of journalism. And this is aggravated further by the fact that this now happens not just on the deadline for the morning edition, but whether we're online with it at 3:00 or they're online with it at 3:05 in the afternoon. It just leads to lousy journalism for no justification. As citizens, do we care whether it's first? No, we care whether it's right.

The idea of the scoop goes back to a time when there were nine daily newspapers in Boston or 15 in New York, and there was a reason to beat the other guy out…Today we don't have that. We just have this atavistic attachment to being first.

Secondly, I want to make a defense of trivia. I urge anybody here to get a copy of *The New York Times* from November 13 of any year in the late '50s or early '60s. And you want gravity, this is like walking on Jupiter in mud. *The New York Times*, then our paper of record, really had articles such as the new ambassador from Peru arrived at the airport last night at 11:35 to begin his tenure here. There was nothing interesting except the occasional book review perhaps in *The Times*. There was good journalism, but there was mostly tedium.

Two things force trivia, as some people call it, into the newspaper. One thing: readers. They'd like the newspaper to be interesting, which is not an unreasonable thing to ask for. I'm not talking about astrology or comics

or sports or all those other things, but they're certainly trivia relative to whether we should be in a war in Afghanistan.

And the other thing that forces it is the presence of other media doing things that we can't ignore. If you take John Edwards, his sexual adventures, into consideration, it was *The National Inquirer* that staked out his room in a hotel and waited to get him and got the photograph. Once they had that, what was the rest of the press supposed to do, pretend it didn't happen? No, people are talking about it. It's online, the so-called mainstream press has to pay attention to it.

Finally, the Monica Lewinsky scandal. When I was at *The Times* as the public editor, I got a phone call one day from a woman who identified herself as Monica Lewinsky's mother and she had a complaint. She was a very nice woman. She had tried to get this complaint in front of *The Times* forever and nobody returned her phone calls. And she said to me, what I want to know, Mr. Okrent, is why is this called the Monica Lewinsky scandal? She was a 20-year-old intern, he was the most powerful man in the world. Whose scandal was it?

What I want to know… is why is this called the Monica Lewinsky scandal? She was a 20-year-old intern, he was the most powerful man in the world. Whose scandal was it?

End of speech. (Laughter)

Mr. Jones: John.

Mr. Reidy: Going back to the gays in the military issue, which both Dan and Taylor talked about. It seems to me the prominence given to small comments on this issue, basically to *The New York Times*, which is regardless of one's sympathy with gay rights equality, which I have, *The Times* has a massive agenda on gay rights equality. We could just discuss the society section, how they focus on celebrations and gay weddings. Didn't *The Times* overplay this, because it had nothing else to write about? This really isn't the most important issue at all. A lot of European countries have gays in the military without any problems.

Mr. Parker: We do have gays in the military, this may come as a shock. (Laughter)

Mr. Reidy: Thank you, Richard. (Laughter)

Mr. Parker: And in the clergy. (Laughter)

Mr. Reidy: Didn't *The Times* give, I think, over coverage to promote its own cause, great cause that it may be? And this wasn't the most important piece of news, and probably hurt the advancement of gays in the military.

Mr. Balz: We should force Alex to defend *The New York Times* here because you were there at the time.

When Taylor mentioned this last night, I was immediately struck because I remember that day in 1992 and how surprised I was that *The New York Times* had led the paper with that comment. But so be it, newspapers make judgments for a variety of reasons as to what they do. *The New York Times*, unique among news organizations, has an ability to set an agenda, not necessarily because there is a political reason to do it, but because they find something newsworthy that others don't. You can look on front pages on any given day or week and wonder why in the world that story is on the front page, and why a story on A15 is not on the front page, it's human nature.

The New York Times, unique among news organizations, has an ability to set an agenda, not necessarily because there is a political reason to do it, but because they find something newsworthy that others don't.

My guess is that it went where it did on the front of *The New York Times* that day in November 1992 because it was the day after a holiday. And I don't know what else was on the front page, but I'm guessing there was no news that day. And there was no news in the Clinton speech about veterans, but Bill Clinton was the news of the moment. And so, there was a requirement for the people who were down in Little Rock at the time, and it was Tom Freidman who wrote that story, to produce news, no matter how significant or insignificant. It's the new president, the country is focused on it, everything he says at that point is newsworthy, and so *The Times* chose to do it.

Once it's there then it becomes something that the transition team has to deal with in a different context than they had thought about it. And as a result of that, I think my memory is right, they put John Holum in charge of trying to figure out how we sort through this. And as I say, by inauguration day they had come up with, with the help of Les Aspin, a plan that they thought would both satisfy their gay rights supporters, who were very important to Clinton's campaign and who badly wanted this policy changed and changed quickly, and changed from the presidential level.

There was a discussion at one point about whether to do it simply through the Pentagon, and the Clinton gay rights supporters found that insufficient, that they wanted a presidential statement on it. So, they came up with this compromise that *The Times* reported on the day after the inauguration. And then it further blew up because it was controversial. So, I think it's one of those things where the accident of no news and a new president ends up on the front of *The Times* and then things begin to spiral.

Mr. Jones: It's also the fact that it was the lead of *The New York Times*. I don't think there's any question about that.

Taylor?

Mr. Branch: I didn't of course know, I'm getting all of this from Clinton, so I didn't know about November. That's really good new information. I still don't know, there was plenty of news on the day after the inauguration. It was the inauguration.

The point that I would make, I'm not sure if *The New York Times* is doing this for its agenda or following up regardless. I'm not sure that the agenda is to advance the cause of gay rights. I think it's simply that this is a story that it's going to get credit for because it's going to be controversial. I'm not sure that it was the purpose to try to advance it, but they knew it was going to be controversial. And in that sense, they were right, I mean this is a *New York Times* story, that everybody knew was a *New York Times* story, that dominated the next few months of politics.

If *The Times* is trying to stick this on the agenda, I think that it's not so much to promote the cause of gay rights, but to get a story that it knows will get everybody jumping up on a chair.

Clinton said years later when George Bush was running, this is when he was saying this happened on the way in and on the way out, he said that this was an issue from the 1960s that was inflammatory, that was well chosen because he personified the 1960s. And he was talking about it in the context of George W. Bush, who was then running for the Republican nomination.

As an off-handed comment, early in 2000 Clinton said, McCain is running ahead. He said, my instinct about them is that they are polar opposites, that Bush is unqualified to be president but is very shrewd about running, that McCain might be a decent president but has no idea how to run.

And Clinton's illustration of how George W. Bush was shrewd in politics—we're the same age, we're both baby boomers, our formative years were the '60s. And George Bush deliberately projects the notion that he never noticed any of the fundamental upheavals from the 1960s over civil rights or Vietnam, and that is shrewd politics.

If *The Times* is trying to stick this on the agenda, I think that it's not so much to promote the cause of gay rights, but to get a story that it knows will get everybody jumping up on a chair.

Ms. Kamarck: And just one other thing, remember that one of the big issues in New Hampshire was Clinton the draft dodger. So it was the subtext throughout the '92 campaign, and particularly in the beginning of

the administration. Everybody was waiting to see how he would get along with the Pentagon. I love the section in your book where he talks about it, because I can never figure out exactly where Sam Nunn got so out of sorts with the administration and that clarifies that.

But it's a tempest that's waiting to happen. It's much bigger than gays in the military. Gays in the military is the top of this. It's all about the generational change. It's about the baby boomers who protested the war versus the baby boomers who fought in the war, and who are now running the Pentagon. It's a big issue.

And so, I don't think that was ever trivial, but sometimes a lot of these issues are tempests in a teapot because they're the shorthand for a bigger and more fundamental set of issues.

Mr. Jones: Richard?

Mr. Parker: I want to try a different theory about this idea of romanticism and the press in the '60s, and think about the idea that coming out of 1945, America had changed almost completely from the world it was in 1932. The levels of poverty had fallen dramatically. The shifts of power away from a concentrated oligarchy of wealth had been dramatic. Economists talked about the period of the great wage equality as the Wage Compression Era. And we then ran for a period of 30 years in a world in which there was a seeming distribution of power that was more equitable than it seems today, gender aside, and in which the threats seemed to come from outside in the form of communism.

It seemed to me that cynicism and a sense of fear of idealism is what overtook not just the press but the elite in American culture generally. And it's in elites that you manage and sustain core values that are held out as the public values both in a contemporary sense and to a younger generation.

And there was a sense of unity to the country, that it was the fact of civil rights and Vietnam, which shattered that unity and created a broken culture, from which the press was not separate but another part. And both intergenerationally as young reporters came up and acquired the coloration of cynicism as they looked back on what seemed to be the failures of the generation of the '60s to deal with Vietnam as a failure at war, and the incompleteness of the civil rights revolution, and the frustration of the women's revolution that both of the two of you were referencing.

It seemed to me that cynicism and a sense of fear of idealism is what overtook not just the press but the elite in American culture generally. And it's in elites that you manage and sustain core values that are held out as

the public values both in a contemporary sense and to a younger generation. I thought that was some of what you were trying to get at in your speech, which I very much admired.

I would disagree about some of your takes on why Clinton was covered the way he was. But I really would like us to talk about that core question of what happened to an idealism and was it based only on a sense of material well-being or was there a sense of a greater, more respectful, more coherent period that ran from '45 to '75, not encompassing all, but encompassing more than ever before.

And particularly the new members of the elite. When you look at the composition of the Harvard classes of 1960 and the Harvard classes of today, who comes to elite institutions, who goes to work for elite journalism, are very different from who did that. And that sense of wanting to defend that change was part of our idealism, in the sense that making that change hasn't really brought us a world of greater universal satisfaction. It's the core of our cynicism, is it not?

Mr. Branch: I think that's a very good point. And I would say that part of that foundation of idealism was a sense of confidence in the culture that was pretty broad.

Mr. Parker: The capability to change.

Mr. Branch: That we had come out of World War II, that we had licked polio, that we were going into space, that we were doing all of these things. There was a great sense of confidence in the culture, even before people realized yet how retrograde we were with regard to women's rights and a lot of these other things that came forward.

But on top of that I do think that the cold war gave a sense of command to the daily newspaper, because in every day's story, there was a presumption that survival in a thermonuclear age might be at stake in how we handled these very complicated issues with our sense of confidence. And once that was no longer there, the center and command also gave way to cynicism that said basically, this politics is for no larger purpose than to make us laugh at the circus.

Mr. Jones: Go ahead.

From the Floor: I guess I'm speaking as one of the youngest people in the room, but also as an independent media audience. I think you guys are all really smart and you do great work, but I choose intentionally to get my information from independent media and various sources. So, you should know that about me and where I'm coming from, and also the fact that I live in New York City and I ride the subway.

It's really depressing. At least half the people on any given car are reading either *The Daily News* or *The New York Post*, which are horrifying.

I don't know if you know about this film that came out this summer about Dan Ellsberg, *The Most Dangerous Man in America*, about the Pentagon Papers and the struggle there. I was brought almost to tears when toward the end of the film, I understood how these big papers across the country banded together to keep printing the Pentagon Papers, when the Nixon administration was trying to censor them. And I was just overwhelmed by that solidarity, that idealism as you guys were talking about, and righteousness.

In my conscious lifetime, which is not quite 30 years yet, that would never happen. Either it's because of the consolidation of the ownership or maybe even the people on the ground who are reading *The Daily News* and *The New York Post* every day, and that's sort of their perception of media. The population wouldn't back the newspapers in doing something like that and the ownership wouldn't allow it.

Do you think the journalism industry could come together and do the right thing over something that serious, like civil liberties?

Mr. Jones: I'm going to take a stab at that one, if you don't mind.

You're right, when the Pentagon Papers were published initially by *The New York Times*, they were enjoined and stopped. And *The Washington Post* started and they were enjoined and stopped. And then, *The Boston Globe* and *The St. Louis Dispatch* started and stopped. And then they won in the Supreme Court. They didn't win the right to publish them, or at least not to be punished for publishing them. What they won was a prior restraint ruling that said they could not be stopped from publishing them.

What is less well known is that when *The New York Times* stopped publishing the Pentagon Papers, Daniel Ellsberg, who very much wanted this information out, approached all three networks, CBS, ABC, NBC, offered them to them, and was turned down flat. These were all, of course, family-run newspapers, they were part of a world that is still there in its vestiges, but it's largely gone.

I really wonder if the corporate ownership of major newspaper chains back then would have done what the Sulzbergers and Grahams and the Taylors were willing to do. I don't know the answer to that, but I think that if they would not it's a terrible thing.

The one thing I want to challenge you on though is that the newspapers that still survive in this tradition, like *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe* and *The Washington Post*, don't have courage now. I believe they do. I believe they have covered things that have been in the face of bitter opposition from the administration. I'm not an apologist for them, I really am not, but I believe it's important to value what they did.

Dan said something, I think, that is quite true, there's a lot of journalism out there that's very good and doesn't get recognized very often. We

host the Goldsmith Awards in the spring, that's on investigative reporting being done by newspapers and news organizations all across the country, and some of it is absolutely inspiring and some of it was very dangerous, and some of it took a lot of guts by the ownership and by the people who did it.

So, I think we've got a problem. There's no question about that. But I think that the idea that there's nobody out there with the stones to do that kind of work, it's just not true.

Yes?

Ms. Spector: I just wanted to ask about the way that this continuum of news has turned politics into, I don't know whether you'd call it a soap opera or a reality show, and that people can now dip into the story of what's going on in politics practically 24 hours a day, and they expect to be able to do that.

And just as reality shows are storyboarded by their producers in order to follow a particular narrative—we think it's just happening but actually they have scripted it in advance—isn't that what the press is doing to politics? So that's why the wave you're talking about picks up something which already fits into the story that they want to be telling. So, at the beginning of the Obama administration, it is he's doing too much too quickly, now it's he's dithering over Afghanistan and compromising too much over health care. And they'll pick up on issues which fit into that.

I come from Britain, obviously, and at the moment it's how terrible Gordon Brown is. And so suddenly, a letter he writes to the mother of a soldier who's been killed in Afghanistan is all over the newspapers because his handwriting is sloppy, so it fits into this picture of he doesn't care, because the war is unpopular anyway. The mother of the soldier recorded the phone conversation she had with the prime minister, which has never happened, and the transcripts of that and the recording of that is suddenly publicized. And that's only because the press is wanting to pursue a story of administration in collapse, and that exactly fits into the narration they want.

But doesn't that come from politics in the first place, and the political consultants and campaigns are also trying to produce a narrative about their candidate or about their president.

Mr. Jones: I'm sorry to say we're out of time, but I want Taylor Branch to have the final word responding to this.

Mr. Branch: Then we'll go to commercial, I guess. (Laughter)

The question that I would like to address is almost a theoretical question. Where do those waves come from and why is there the wave that Gordon Brown is hopeless and falling apart as opposed to Gordon Brown is holding this economy together on the basis of his background, against

impossible odds? There was clearly a wave for the Iraq War in the run-up to the Iraq War that infected all of the newspapers, instead of a wave that we were ignoring lots of questions.

So, where do these things come from that seem in the modern era to lie beneath the impulses to great journalism and bad journalism alike, these pulses through the culture that seem to me of larger significance and not always healthy? And I don't know whether that's a technological function or a cultural function that they seem to come from somewhere that we're not conscious of. And we all react to them; it's like we're ants on a log going down the river and we don't know where they come from.

Mr. Jones: I'm sorry to say we're out of time. I want to thank my co-panelists, thank you all very much, and especially thank you, Taylor Branch. (Applause)