

Panel 2 Q&A and Group Discussion

Fred Harris: All right. Well, we've got a lot to chew on here, and in our time remaining now we will go to the audience, yes Elliot Currie?

Elliot Currie: Thanks to the panel, I thought that was great. I wanted to pick up on what Martin was just talking about, how they blame the media. As I've listened to what everybody's saying and being one of those adults who actually is addicted to newspapers and couldn't do without -- my sense is it isn't that the media, either the print or the electronic media, don't cover poor people or poverty, it's that two things are missing.

We see a lot of stories about poor people, but they tend to be presented as isolated bundles of pathology -- they're doing bad stuff or they're suffering. Even in the case of Katrina, we saw a lot of suffering. People will be bombarded with this for a long time. And on a less intense scale, you see this on a daily basis in the newspaper.

But what's missing are two things. One is, there's no analysis of where this problem comes from. There's no sense of structure, for example. Take the Katrina issue again -- you had a vast amount of coverage of people floating in the canals in New Orleans and of people's houses falling down. There was this sense of discovery as someone pointed out earlier this morning that, "Oh my gosh! We've discovered there are poor people down there."

We kind of congratulated ourselves about that discovery, but I didn't read anything that said, "Wait a minute, how come there's all those poor people down there?" "Where did they come from?" "How can we have Third World conditions in a state of the United States, the world's richest country?" "What is the connection here and where did it come from?"

It's not that we don't have analyses the media could use. As an academic, I like to think that we academics churn this stuff out. But it is very difficult to get that stuff into the media, the kind of analytical, structural level analysis of the problem.

The second thing that's missing, is a sense of poor people as agents of constructive change on their own behalf. It's like what Martin was saying about the middle class, but a little different. The fact is, you don't see much coverage of people doing things like politically mobilizing themselves for change; people creating community-based programs, like the kind that the Eisenhower Foundation studies and replicates. You don't see enough coverage of that.

You get the sense that you can't do anything about these problems. So it induces this kind of passivity, particularly if you were to put these two things together. You put together the fact that there's no analysis of the source of the problem, with the fact that there's no coverage of people doing successful things to combat it. The message that you're sending to the public is one that induces

passivity and induces a kind of apathy, a kind of pessimism about the possibility of change.

Fred Harris: Good, responses?

Steve Rendall: I have a response to that.

Fred Harris: Yes, Steve --

Steve Rendall: Brilliant. That is a problem that lacks analysis. I'm going to differ, however, with some of the earlier panelists and say that we at FAIR were not all that fond of the New York Times series, "*How Race is Lived*," mainly because we saw it as a series of individual stories about how racism affected individuals, without that sort of analysis that looked at institutional racism and the detrimental racism that we face. I would say there was a much better story a couple of years before which was not about race in name, but was really about race, and that was David Protess' work with his Northwestern University students in overturning the death penalty in Chicago and raising that issue across the country.

Fred Harris: Any others? Yes?

Martin Gilens: I wanted to agree with these previous comments. We do need more analysis, but we need it in a specific kind of way. I mean, I love analysis, that's what I do for a living, and there should be a place in the media for that kind of in-depth, serious examination of structural factors and so on that lies behind many of these individual experiences. On the other hand, I don't think you can reach the mass public that way. And the trick for journalists, or the challenge, is to find ways to integrate those kinds of structural concerns; and kinds of structural information into stories that will grab readers and that can be told through the experiences of individuals. That's not easy to do, but it does seem to me that that's the most fruitful direction.

Fred Harris: Christy Hardin Smith wanted to respond.

Christy Smith: I wanted to give a really quick response. I started blogging with my blogging partner, Jane Hampshire a little over a year ago, and one of the things that we have found as our traffic on our blog has increased exponentially over the last year or so, is that people are really very hungry for a space where they can congregate and discuss a lot of these issues. They feel as if people in public life are not addressing things that impact them on an individual level. They're dealing with having to pay the bills every month and not having enough income at the end of the month to pay all of the bills and feed their family -- we see this with a lot of the Medicare Part D coverage where you've got a lot of elderly folks who are on fixed incomes who can't buy their drugs. You see this overwhelmingly, a lot of folks feel like their day-to-day issues are not being addressed because they don't have the money to hire a lobbyist like Jack Abramoff to go to Congress and give them a voice.

And I think in some ways the success that we've seen in terms of blogging -- across the board, whether it's conservative or liberal blogs -- has been giving that voice to people who felt like they were voiceless. And there are a lot of blogs

that address issues of race and poverty. They have the same problems in terms of getting that message out sometimes that those like the Eisenhower Foundation have in terms of grabbing the media. I think Jay is absolutely right that there's that internal decision by someone, somewhere that nobody wants to hear about. But that's not what I'm hearing in all of the feedback that I get every day -- I write an article, I put it up on the blog and I immediately get feedback from of my readers.

What I'm hearing is they want to talk more about this, but no one's listening to the fact that they really want to have this conversation. And I think that's why things like this Forum are so important to get that ball rolling again. I really think it's a two-part approach, it's this kind of thing -- the Forum -- as well as the political pressure coming to bear at the same time.

Fred Harris: Leila McDowell?

Leila McDowell: Thank you, Fred. I want to challenge the panel to come up with some recommendations for solutions. You all have done a really excellent, incredible job in sharing in a very profound way some of the depth of the problems. Gregory Kane talked about being very close to the local stories, which is something Colby King raised, but questioning what are some of the structural issues that underlie the phenomena. Dwayne and Eugene just both spoke about how, in some cases, race is obfuscated by the media, and in other cases, how it's over-emphasized on, because your voice on Iraq or many other critical issues is not necessarily given as much weight or as much attention by readers as it is when you talk about issues having to do with race, which is kind of the box that sometimes you're put in.

So, some of the solutions that have come up -- and I'd like to hear yours on how do we get, how to we address and redress some of the issues that you all have raised, both the lack of quantitative and qualitative coverage of raise, poverty and inequality and therefore the lack of it being part of the national discourse and the national narrative when it comes to policy.

So, some of the issues, some of the recommendations we've gotten to date include some way to work with journalism schools so that the old muck raking kind of tradition of journalism, journalists that are allowed to speak truth, no matter where the chips lay which we don't see in a lot of issues, not just poverty and race -- Iraq is a prime example of that -- so how do we increase the courage of journalists, when many young journalists, when you work with a lot of young journalists, are coming out of schools primarily focused in career and how to crawl that ladder and you know, we both go to some of the NABJ conventions, and that's what the focus is on. Not on qualitative issues about what is our responsibility as journalists. How do we change that?

The other issue that came up was, one other suggestion came up was -- do we need to go back to the days when there was some regulation over media under FCC rules? In order to get your license there had to be some recognition of the public good, you had to have a certain amount of content of news and public affairs and it led to a number of shows that, while maybe not ratings

blockbusters, did address issues of policy and raise America's black forum, Latino today, all kinds of shows like that.

Another solution that came up was that Colby talked a lot about, that even beyond diversifying race in the newsroom, it was diversifying experience. That you don't have people who come from the communities who experience the oppression of race and class talking about or reporting on those issues. So, should there -- I can't remember who, Emmett -- raised the issue of, part of that reason is there's no way they can't get into the newsrooms and be subsidized when they're interns, which doesn't pay any money. Do you compel subsidies for folks who are from a certain economic strata? What are some solutions around that?

And then I would say, two other problems that were raised that we need recommendations and solutions for. One was, you know, should there be some monitoring? I think, Jay you -- Martin, I'm Sorry, you talked a lot about, in looking at news coverage, Steve, you do that as, you know, your daily life, monitoring news coverage. If you monitor it and point out problems and inequities -- how does one hold a newsroom accountable? How do we create recommendations for, and solutions for accountability so that we can dramatically change this?

And last but not least, how do we address the problem that you all have that some of you have raised about editorial discourse? It tends to be a debate between the right and the right of center. So that whether it's the Iraq war of Venezuela or race and poverty, what we hear, you know is, one side to the right of center, and one side a little farther to the right of center. But the progressive voice -- I mean just to use an analogy on a rock, the voice that says Withdraw troops now is not heard in the discourse, you hear, Do we withdraw troops in two years, or do we send more troops in?

So, it's similar around race poverty and inequity and equality and some of you all have touched on that. So, how do we begin to change the editorial discourse, Eugene, you know from the post on Venezuela what the issue is there, but race, poverty and inequality suffer the same fate. So those are some things, if you don't mind digging in on, because we really want to record recommendations, I know C-Span, we're grateful that C-Span is here, which reaches many policymakers and about 70 million viewers and I think we want to look at just -- not just the problems, but what are the solutions that people can begin to raise an outcry for, that Eisenhower can recommend in the Kerner Commission.

DeWayne Wickham: I want to say a couple of things. One, I want to talk about journalists in response to your question, and I want to say something about journalism, about journalists.

I mentioned this in my remarks. We've got to do something to change the construction of newsrooms, the composition of newsrooms. This has been something that has been ongoing since 1968 -- the Kerner Commission urged us to do it, the ASNE said it would do it, the RTNDA -- the Radio and Television News Directors Association -- committed itself to do it, but in fact it has not been

done in any significant way. If you think all deliberate speed only applied to public education desegregation, look at America's newsrooms. Everybody involved in the news gathering and dissemination process is a censor. We all censor news in our decision-making process. This is a story, this is not a story.

We make these judgments through eyes that are shaped by our own experiences. This is why diversity is so important -- it's not about while journalists being racist or insensitive and black journalists being all-knowing, it is that we bring different life experiences to the process of news gathering and dissemination.

I lived in public housing for 20 years. I left public housing when I graduated -- the year I graduated from the University of Maryland's College of Journalism. For the past 32 years I've practiced this craft. It really is crucial that we change the composition -- we can't solve any of these other problems about coverage if we don't do something about the composition of newsrooms, that's --

Leila McDowell: And how do we do that?

DeWayne Wickham: We've got to be more aggressive in singling out those programs in higher education that train minority journalists. If you look at where foundations are putting much of their money in terms of journalism education, they go to majority schools. You go to the majority schools and you can't find very many minority journalists. I mean it just doesn't make any sense.

There was recently a collaboration of major foundations that put millions of dollars into these schools, but the students aren't there -- who are they training? That's part of the problem.

Journalism -- you see, a part of what we have to face is the changing nature of the craft itself. You know, I mean, if you look back over time, you talk about the partisan press, the advocacy press, there was a brief period of independent press, we are in a period of corporate journalism. If we're looking for corporate journalism to help us solve these problems, as have been evidenced by some of what has been said here, the reluctance to advertise programs that bring what some may think is bad news, we've got to find a way to develop new vehicles -- serious vehicles, not blogs -- serious vehicles for the delivery of news and information. Those that stand the test of time, those that are qualitative, those can be edited, those that can be held to a standard, we've got to find a way to do that.

Gregory Kane mentioned that on two occasions I sent him off to do stories and I guess people were wondering, What is he -- ? Why does -- ? USA Today is assigning the Baltimore Sun? For two years I ran the news section -- among other things I did -- Blackamericaweb.com. A non-profit website that allowed us to cobble together a staff of about 25 journalists around the country and we did creative journalism. We were able to do some very creative things there. Somehow we have to find that new window of opportunity, to practice this craft. It's an ever-evolving process, but we've got to find the new window of opportunity

-- maybe it's through some non-profit activity because the profit sector is sucking all of the wind out of journalism.

Eugene Robinson: I just wanted to -- everything DeWayne said but -- reporters have to do their jobs and ask the questions that they should ask. And this feeds into what Martin said about perceptions, you know, here's an example is, during Katrina the impression was -- why did people stay in New Orleans rather than leave as the hurricane bore down on the city, and the perception -- that question was not really asked to the people who stayed, and so the perception formed that these were people who were either too stupid or too lazy or whatever to leave when their homes were about to be destroyed.

When I went down to New Orleans, I just asked people - #NAME? reason, a perfectly rational reason -- in most cases they were caring for an elderly relative who was difficult to move, or for whom, or needed some sort of medical attention or whatever, or there was a specific transportation problem.

But, you know, do your job. And I am troubled by what DeWayne accurately described as a kind of timidity among black journalists, specifically, all journalists should do their jobs and ask the right questions, not just black journalists, but you know, we've got to make noise. That's what we got in the news business to do and somehow we have to instill that in the next generation.

The people up here make noise.

Gregory Kane: To piggy-back off of what Eugene just said about journalists doing their jobs, somebody in Baltimore much like Lucy Ricardo has some 'esplainin to do about those 20 juveniles arrested for murder this year. Like I said, they weren't born that way. Somewhere they've all had prior contact in the juvenile justice system. So somewhere along the line -- and they're not the ones that have to do the explaining, the suspects -- somebody in the juvenile justice system or the Department of Social Work has to do the explaining, because somebody dropped the ball with each and every one of these suspects, I began to suspect.

But in order to get to the root of what made them do what they do and what their background is like, we have to know what kind of juvenile crimes they committed and when, and then you run into the stone wall of, Well, you can't divulge the juvenile suspect's record, and in Baltimore we apply the rule so fairly, we apply it even after the suspect is dead -- there was one guy that we shot dead on the streets of Baltimore who had been arrested about 15 times for serious offenses and he was never confined to a juvenile facility, apparently, so apparently they thought it was better to have him out on the streets of Baltimore where he could get shot dead rather than in a juvenile facility where he could get treatment. Somebody has some 'esplainin to do about that one, too. Why was he out there, instead of inside at one of these places where they claim they give juvenile offenders treatment?

So, yeah, journalists do have to do their job and, you know, make people explain themselves. Because there's somebody who should be held accountable for that.

Fred Harris: All right --

Steve Rendall: I'd like to respond to the remedies, because I didn't mention any remedies before when I spoke but one thing that I would underline is, you know there's not a lot of new recommendations here. First, what I would say is the ASNE numbers need to go up. And there are some ways to apply pressure. I believe two journalists at the University of New Mexico, two academic professors of journalism put together a website where citizens could put in the name of their local paper and find out how diverse the staff is. We had them on our radio show, Counter Spin.

I'd say what we need in the media, too, is more white people talking about race and racism. Usually when you hear discussions of racism, it's almost always black people. Now, black people are not largely the problem with racism in the United States, it's white people and white institutions, more institutions than anything. So we need more discussions.

There are a couple of people, a couple of people come to mind that I can think of, Jonathon Kozol, a brilliant observer of race and racism in the United States, Tim Wise -- there are others, too, I don't want to slight anybody -- but these people have a hard time getting on, getting National coverage, getting on the National news, getting into big newspapers. There are many other people, too, I don't want to just limit it to that.

I think we have to take back public broadcasting. We need to make more public space in our broadcasting, perhaps -- you know, the people, the 1934 Broadcasting Act says, The People own the airways -- so we have a right to determine just what portion of those we want to be commercial and what portion should be non-commercial. We think at FAIR that we should be able to take back some of those airways and make them truly non-commercial.

Also, existing public broadcasting needs to be made non-commercial and needs to have pressures taken off, it has to be truly independent, it's under way too much right-wing pressure from the Congress, from the CPB -- it does not operate independently, besides the fact that corporations are enormously important now in funding the shows that make it onto PBS.

And finally, people have to become reliant on more independent sources and academic sources. The thing about public broadcasting and independent sources is they don't have these pressures, those Wall Street pressures that say, Cut your costs, cut your newsroom and more narrowly focus on a demographic -- a rich demographic -- which usually means a white demographic.

Fred Harris: All right, Christy Hardin Smith?

Christy Smith: Just briefly, in terms of the diversification of newsrooms, I think for anybody who has seen the film Erin Brockovich there's an illustrative scene in that movie where they send one of the associate attorneys out to

interview some of the families, and the woman has clearly never been on a farm in her life, she's trying to wade through a horse stall area in her Prada pumps which are not doing very well in the pile of things that pile up in horse stalls, and she's clearly very uncomfortable in that environment. And you see that a lot in dealing with folks who are used to a certain kind of neighborhood, and a certain kind of lingo and a certain kind of interaction style and if you bring somebody from outside in, they stick out like a sore thumb, and they especially do that when they don't treat the folks that they're talking to with the level of respect that every human being -- no matter how low, how poor, how desperate, how pathetic, how whatever label you want to toss on them - - they all deserve that same level of respect and you don't always see that.

And, you know, I don't care how poor or how mentally challenged someone may be, they know exactly what you think of them and how you are treating them, whatever their color, whatever's going on with them from the moment you walk into the room a lot of times when you're that kind of person. And if that's the kind of person you're sending out to interview someone in West Baltimore, or West Philadelphia where I lived in grad school or any number of places around this country, people are going to pick up on that and they're not going to be honest with you. They're going to close up, they're going to close that door down, you're not going to get any good information out of them and you're not going to get those stories and the information that you need to really talk about what's going on.

And I think one of the things that you get with the diversity in the newsroom, is you not only get someone who can communicate on whatever level they need to communicate with somebody in that neighborhood, because they're from that neighborhood and they're comfortable with it. But they also make the other folks in the newsroom, who aren't so comfortable, aware of whatever problems they're bringing along with them and whatever baggage they're bringing along with them. So, it's an education process both within whatever neighborhood needs to be covered, and in the newsroom itself. I think that is critical and very valuable in terms of editorial decisions. That's why I find it very troubling that people are not speaking up in those terms within the newsroom -- it's a very, very valuable discussion that needs to be had, a lot more frequently with folks who may not even realize what baggage they will be carrying into the news itself.

Fred Harris: All right --

Martin Gilens: May I offer something by way of solution here?

Fred Harris: Yes, Marty.

Martin Gilens: It seems to me there's two parts of the problem and one part is that for a variety of reasons, journalists don't want to do what we want them to do. And some of that's economic pressures and audience lure, and some of it may be sorts of backgrounds and experiences that people who are in the newsrooms have and so on.

But there's a second part of the problem, and the second part of the problem is that journalists are often unaware of what it is they are doing. And that's certainly true with regard to the pictorial representations that I studied and other aspects of the examples, but not only that.

And the solution there, or one solution that people have adopted is to make that unconscious process conscious by doing content audits of what their news coverage looks like over some period of time. And the example that I talked about in my book is the Seattle Times, where they looked at coverage of metropolitan Seattle. There was a period of time studied, and how minority groups were represented. They saw that it was not what they wanted it to be – it did not look good. They presented this information to the newsroom, and from that point forward they tracked how they were representing minorities in their own community. And if you look at the results, you see very dramatic changes.

Other newspapers have done similar things, I know the L.A. Times did that with regard to how women were represented -- so that's one tool that, to the extent that people want to do the right thing, can help them to do it.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: I just want to raise two issues in the genre of how do we fix this. Of course, we know the old African adage that Until lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.

(Laughter.)

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: It really goes to the observations about how many blacks are in the newsrooms and those kinds of assessments. But I add to that, calling on Steve's comment, we really do know that in regards to racism against blacks, blacks are not really the people who ought to be on the hot seat.

And I urge the solutions to include the captivation for one of the -- co-optation of white reporters. Because when there's only one black and that black's gotta carry, as Boyd said, "the weight of the world of black people on his or her shoulders," that is very debilitating, a) it targets that person -- or even if there are two -- for retribution because the fact of the matter is that racism is very embarrassing. And that is why when our journalists who are African-Americans write about race, a whole lot of people get very agitated and say, Why are you saying that? Why are you embarrassing me? That's what they are saying, because they know very well that these issues that are being raised -- by the time they reach major media on the front page, it's not speculation. It really is reality.

And so there's gotta be some way of protecting these young journalists if you get them focused so that they are not fired summarily for raising issues.

And then I want to comment, just briefly, on the studies that you've done, Martin, about who's going read what kind of detail --

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: We talked in an earlier panel, in its decision of the Thernstroms, the bell curve, Charles Murray, John McWater, not only did they get coverage, but they got extrication. People were very willing to pull out these corrupted statistics that the Thernstroms used to prove that if nothing had

been done in Civil Rights, we would be just as fortunate now as we have been as a result of the Civil Rights movement. I've never heard such garbage in my life, but here it was in great, boring detail in the newspapers.

So, there is culpability in the news organizations for giving unfair time to people who sell a negative message. And that, I think, is part of what we need to address as we go forward, trying to figure out how to get back to where we thought we were when the Commission on Violence gave us a head's up.

Fred Harris: Bobby Austin?

Bobby Austin: Of course I want to thank the panel. Really great panel.

I am interested in one thing, and I have two questions. Since we are trying to get stories out in regards to the issues that we're talking about here, race and poverty, I was interested in DeWayne's reaction to Christy's profession, and that is blogging.

I'm very interested in knowing two things: one, are blogs becoming the new town crier and will they move newspapers completely out of existence? Two, do you have a solution for an organization like this? Because it seems to me with the multiplicity of avenues for people to use to talk among themselves, you can get the message out and you can solve the problem.

I'm not so sure problems are solved through newspaper discussions and debates. I think they are raised, and I think they are raised badly, pitifully, racist -- with racist vigor. The thing you're talking about, the Thernstroms. They didn't solve one thing, but they certainly proved a point -- that there were people willing to listen to the crap.

So, how did that help? Well, it certainly put a pall on American discourse about trying to find ways to assist people. So, are there more avenues DeWayne talked about, that we should be exploring? Or that we should be supporting, and bringing to the forefront so that people have far more to choose from when they get their news and how they will structure their own approach to getting things done and solved.?

Fred Harris: All right, DeWayne and then Christy?

DeWayne Wickham: Political flashback. I did not mean to suggest that blogs do not serve a useful purpose. They, in fact, I think, fuel the public discourse.

But blogs are not journalistic vehicles. They are not tested in ways that journalists and the work of journalists is tested. There are no copy editors, there are no assignment editors, so I mean, it's not journalism, but it is very useful for people to talk to one another in whatever way we can add this dialogue.

But we also should be cognizant of the fact that there remains in this country a digital divide, and there are many people -- particularly people of color - - who are not on the Internet on a regular basis, particularly outside of work.

DeWayne Wickham: Isn't it wonderful how we can watch the soaps now on the Internet? My wife keeps up at work.

Christy Hardin Smith: And she's going to thank you for saying that on C-Span.

DeWayne Wickham: Oh, I'm in trouble.

But, in fact, the issue is -- we've got to focus on how we find useful journalistic vehicles of the future. You know, someone once said to me, and I guess it was back in the seventies, What are you going to do when the century turns? You want to be a journalist? I said, What do you mean? They said, Well, there are no trees in space? Well, there now is a vehicle, it's the Internet. And I think if you begin to look at solutions, you've got to find one there. You don't need a printing press -- not only do you not need the trees, you don't need a printing press. You can take an Internet site and you can put up printed words, and you can put up images and spoken words. And so it really offers us, I think, a potential to create a communications vehicle that can be tested journalistically and that is relatively inexpensive, and that will allow us to address the issues that corporate journalism is backing away from.

Fred Harris: Christy?

Christy Hardin Smith: I don't think that most folks who blog or who read on blogs want to, in any way, replace journalism. I'm sure there's some people out there who do, but I'm not one of them. I think that what blogs do, is they add another layer of communication potential, and they also give -- at least in the way that we work our blog at Fire Dog Lake -- people not only a chance to discuss issues, but to coalesce around an active stance. There have been times when we have had our readers calling members of Congress about when Judge Alito was nominated, trying to get folks to filibuster because we felt that his nomination process had gone without the real questions that needed to be asked and answered in terms of the oversight hearings.

We've had our readers calling members of Congress about the minimal amount of oversight hearings on various issues. I look forward to the new Congress starting in January, because we have a chance to hopefully shape some of that discussion in terms of what's going on. And I think that's one of the things it's about. It's almost a hybrid of opinion journalism. It's kind of like the op-ed page, it's not so much the news stories.

Although, we have done independent reporting on some stories - I've done coverage of the Scooter Libby investigation because I'm a lawyer -- I did a lot of reading of legal documents and have done that on other cases; and people on other blogs do independent analysis as well. But most of the time it's an op-ed sort of thing, it's an opinion of whoever it is that's writing.

But it's also immediate dialogue, which is such an amazing thing for people -- especially people who have had little to no ability to be heard. To have contact immediately with someone who not only wants to hear their voice, but wants to talk to them about what they think, and what solutions they see.

I did a post on a blog yesterday mentioning that I was going to come and speak at this forum, and talked to folks about it. On my blog, I've got social workers; I've got folks who live on fixed incomes and disability incomes; I've got folks who've lived through abusive relationships, I've got -- you name it -- all over the map -- foster kids who have grown up and are leading very productive adult lives, folks who aren't leading those kinds of lives. They are the voices of people who rarely get heard in the halls of power, because people don't take the time to listen to them.

And I think it goes back to the subsidy issue that you were asking about earlier. It's not just in newspapers or in newsrooms where that internship thing comes into play, it's also on Capitol Hill. They are not kids who can afford to live in D.C. -- with the housing costs what they are, and food costs and transportation costs and everything else -- their parents can't subsidize them. And if you're coming out of Watts, your parents probably can barely afford their rent, let alone subsidizing your year in D.C. That makes it very difficult for folks who are in power to have any understanding, if they didn't grow up poor, as to what their legislative agenda means to others.

Eugene Robinson: Can I just say one quick thing?

Fred Harris: Eugene?

Eugene Robinson: -- I really think that newspapers and blogs are approaching each other and creating a kind of hybrid zone. At the Post I do an Internet chat every week. We're starting to do some kind of social networking on the site where people can post comments and writers can respond. It's not just columnists who are doing it, but other writers as well. So, we're kind of very clear -- we're becoming more multi-media, multi-platform and reaching into the Internet because it's a lot easier than cutting down and pulping trees, and taking the pulp out and laying it on doorsteps.

And from the other direction you have blogs like Christy's, also websites like TMZ.com, which was the first to report on Michael Richard's racist rant at the L.A. nightclub. They got the video which was taken with a little digital camera in the Comedy Club -- I guess a reporter there brought it in -- they confirmed it, they put it up on their site, and that was actually their second scoop -- they were also the first to report on Mel Gibson's anti-Semitic indiscretion. It's a completely new forum. And I'm kind of curious about it and am tempted to go find out how many people they have working there -- I've talked to a couple of people, but I'd like to know more about that model.

Fred Harris: Steve?

Steve Rendall: I think blogs are really important for the reason that Christy just said, because they're like an op-ed page, and reflecting back to a comment that Leila made a few minutes ago, in our mainstream media most of the dialogue is really between the center and the right. We've shown this in FAIR and one study after another. If you look at the national discussion on television,

you will see many people who are allied with the conservative movement. You will see almost none who are allied with the progressive movements.

So, it's particularly important for progressives. But there also are, and I think Eugene made this point, there also are reporting blogs. There are things like Josh Marshall's "Talking Points Memo," which does a lot of reporting. I don't know what sort of -- to go back to DeWayne's point -- editing and how much vetting there is, even at a place like "Talking Points Memo," I think they probably do some editing. So, it's evolving.

Fred Harris: Pablo? --

Pablo Eisenberg: I'm Pablo Eisenberg -- this follows on one of Steven's points. Now, we who define ourselves as progressives or liberals tend to always associate with one another. We preach to the converts. And this meeting is no different. If you look at the roster of eminent journalists and people associated with journalism -- we're all sensitive, we're all progressive, we do good things, we're the good guys and good gals -- and what strikes me is the question -- are there points where, in fact, there is some missionary work going on by the good guys and the good gals? Are there mechanisms by which there's some proselytizing to increase the sensitivity of fellow journalists, commentators, non-profits like Steve's outfit, are there other venues? But just talking among ourselves seems to be missing the big point, and I'm just curious about what's going on in terms of the missionary activity of the good guys?

Fred Harris: Comments?

Gregory Kane: For the record, you're not talking among yourself, I'm a conservative. I will tell why.

Another story I didn't get to talk about -- there was a fellow in Baltimore, a friend of mine, A. Robert Kaufman -- I don't know if he's America's oldest living Trotskyite, but he's certainly Baltimore's oldest living Trotskyite. And, you know, any story about Kaufman is, by definition, a story about race and poverty, because that's all he talks about. He talks about the plights of poor blacks.

Anyway, last year he was attacked, he owns a house in West Baltimore. He was attacked by one of his tenants, stabbed and as a result his kidneys failed, and he actually needs a kidney, he has to go to dialysis three times a week. Just this past week, he was attacked again by another one of his tenants who hit him with a brick. And I want to ask him, Bob, how many of these beatdowns do you have to get before you become a conservative?

Because that's what led me to become a conservative. I got enough beatdowns that, you know, eventually I became pretty ... see, if you're liberal you probably haven't had many. Trust me, you get yours -- but see, it doesn't take many beatdowns for me. I learned my lesson after one, two beatdowns. And, you know, that said, it pushed me over to the --

Steve Rendall: Has it stopped the beatdowns, though?

Gregory Kane: No, but it does make me want to question whether or not we should let the people giving the beatdowns out on the street, that's my point. But no, I am conservative, so this dialogue isn't strictly among liberals.

Fred Harris: Okay, now Terry Johnson.

DeWayne Wickham: I just wanted to say very quickly, Gregory Kane is bright and right about a lot of things, but he is not a conservative.

(Laughter.)

DeWayne Wickham: I have not met anyone of any political stripe that he agrees with on much of anything.

(Laughter.)

DeWayne Wickham: He writes for H.L. Minkin's paper, and I think he writes, in many ways, in a way that H.L. Minkin wrote. He just simply doesn't like much of anything.

Fred Harris: Terry Johnson?

Terry Johnson: Just a brief comment and then a question. This, sort of, failure on the part of the American media is really just a reflection of a general crisis in this country -- a crisis of leadership, a crisis of civic imagination, a crisis of education -- and it just seems to me that the media has never been ahead of the curve, you know, out front of social movements. So, I'm not sure how well DeWayne's test works. I mean, if the test is our ability to see social movements and new developments in media, journalism has constantly failed on that point.

But, is part of our failure also the inability, leadership -- particularly in the African- American community -- to articulate a vision of social justice? And to what degree does that impact the way we look at race and poverty?

DeWayne Wickham: Let me say this as someone who hates the term progressive. I am a liberal. I have not yet been chased from the liberal arena. But I see, what I think, is a very disappointing failure on the part of black leadership to address a broad range of issues -- not the least of which are some of the issues that Gregory Kane has spoken to today.

You have seen, and I assume many of you have purchased because it was on the best seller's list -- *The Covenant with Black America*. And I received an advance copy, I looked at it, and I saw what these elite black thinkers had to say about the problems that face black America, and I wrote a column as a liberal, in which I said that I was disappointed that it did not include these words: Thou shalt not kill.

I spoke to my students at North Carolina A&T State University recently, and Gregory Kane was there with me and he was surprised to hear me say that in 2005 more blacks were killed in the United States by other blacks than all of the blacks who were lynched throughout the entire period that Tuskegee University has records of lynchings in this country. In one year!

Somehow, you see, we've got to expand our notion of who we are, and we've got to expand the dialogue and the conversation so that we can get beyond talking to the choir. I think the resistance on the part of those who are in the middle, and maybe even some of those who are on the right -- the tone deafness that they had for our message is that the message tends not to acknowledge any problems. It tends not to acknowledge any failures on our part, within our community. And so we've got to get over that piece of it.

And it's difficult to do that when you've got folk in the media who are afraid to raise the issues because they are black, and they're a minority in newsrooms, and they think that somehow their careers will be adversely affected by raising these issues. Then you have a majority of people in the newsroom, those who are white, who tend not to know, tend not to see these problems in the way that we see them, so you've got this conflict of ignorance. And I think somehow we've got to overcome that.

Terry Johnson: Mr. Chairman, may I ask a follow-up question?

Fred Harris: What's that? Yes.

Terry Johnson: It seems to me that it has become, in some ways, sort of easy for us to talk about issues like crime. You know, when I talk about this new sort of vision in leadership, I'm talking about ideas, say, for example of abolishing prisons and investing in the least among us in different ways. Are those ideas out there? I guess, radical ideas to transform this society?

Are we hearing that in the black community, though? And I'm not saying just by the Al Sharpton's or Jesse Jackson's but within other groups?

DeWayne Wickham: Every year I bring together a group of black journalists to talk about issues of importance. This past year we had a black journalist down to the University to talk about Civil Rights in the 21st Century. We didn't talk about Affirmative Action, our focus wasn't on desegregation, we talked about issues like criminal justice -- wrongful conviction -- we talked about economic opportunity -- we're trying to look at issues through different lenses. In a way that I think will excite people.

But we also understand that if you want to have journalists raise issues of importance, they have to be well-versed in issues of importance. Too many journalists come to their craft lightly armed, intellectually. So, we're talking about these issues all of the time. We bring Gregory Kane down to talk about these issues. He's -- he positions himself, at least -- as far to the right as I am to the left, and I think he brings a wealth of knowledge, but also some intellectual energy to the discussion. And so we are trying to have these discussions and try to address these issues in ways that create. In February we're taking a group of black journalists down to Cuba to look at Cuba -- not from the perspective of a continuing Cold War divide between these two countries, ours and there's -- but we're looking at Cuba in the context of issues of race and poverty. What kinds of solutions do they have to health care? What kinds of solutions do they have to

educational issues that might be useful as we grapple with those issues in this country? So we are trying to do some creative things in that regard.

Fred Harris: Alan Curtis did you have a comment or a question?

Alan Curtis: Two quick comments and a question. Pablo, yes, we are sort of alike here but the process is, we're going to have these forums and then we're going to get to a forty year update on the Kerner Commission – on March 1st, 2008 – and then we're going to engage the outside world, and we hope that all of the Presidential candidates will engage in this process.

Greg Kane -- you made a lot of examples, frequency of articles -- those were crime articles and race and poverty were implicit in them. But what we're talking about is the frequency of articles like the following: we had an anti-poverty program, it's called welfare, welfare didn't work, we got rid of welfare. People in the welfare roles went down, but poverty's up.

People are now saying, kids who are 16, 17 are dropping out of school. There's a crisis there – they need GED's and job training. We're the only industrialized democracy that doesn't have a good job training program. It's the frequency of those kinds of articles that I think we're missing.

Finally, just a question on the blogging part. Getting into community journalism, which could be an exciting field for the future and serve as an extension of blogging, I was thinking about OhmyNews, in Korea.

Several years ago in one of the Korean elections there was a non-profit organization called OhmyNews, and they use cell phone technology, citizens – citizens journalists could call in things, could send in pictures to a central place where there was editing, they were at events, they could give a different perspective from the government. The government was thrown out and a new person was elected who thanked this non-profit cell phone technology, advocacy-based organization. The BBC has picked up on that, and has something akin to that today.

Is there any future in that sort of journalism?

Christy Hardin Smith: If I could just address that really quickly, I think we saw some of that in the Allen and Webb campaign in the last election. There was a lot of citizen journalism. There was a blogger who I know pretty well who was involved in a couple of videotaped fracasas with some of Senator Allen's staffers who didn't want him asking questions that were uncomfortable. Those fracasas got on TV and they went all over the place. There was another fellow who had been sent around to follow Senator Allen in the campaign and caught him with the whole Macaca thing and that was everywhere. So I know everybody saw that one -- I think there are some models for community journalism, maybe not in the same way, but I think just going back to the leadership question, on an individual level people who started doing blogs or who are involved with them, I think have stopped waiting for somebody else to be a leader, and they've decided that it's time for them to do something themselves.

One of the reasons that I got started on this blog was that I was so frustrated and fed up and disgusted with how things were going, and that a lot of people in political leadership positions were not talking about the issues that I knew or I knew needed to be addressed because I saw it every day in the courthouse. You know, you look at children in poverty and you think, why aren't we starting there? Why are we spending so much on the end result in prisons, rather than starting with kids who are at-risk from the beginning when the costs would be much lower? I mean, that's an argument that even a conservative could go along with, I would think.

So, you know, I think it goes back to a quote from Dr. King from one of his books on the Vietnam War, "a time comes when a silence is betrayal." And I think it's time for the silence to end. We all need to stand up and be the leaders that we want to see for ourselves.

Fred Harris: A final comment by Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: I think that's Christy's comment is a wonderful segue way into just an observation I want to make. We will begin the next panel with that, because that was my introduction to my chapter in "Patriotism, Democracy and Common Sense," I just think it's a great quote.

But I just want to point something out which cannot go unobserved upon. We sit here in a very multi-racial, multi-ethnic group, and so it is important to understand that just concern that Bobby Austin was raising, and that DeWayne and Gene Robinson addressed, is that there is not one African-American voice. There are many. And some of our voices spend our energy talking about hard data and what the evidence is, and how the analysis affects behavior. And yet, I guarantee you that when there is a press conference to present this and to examine it and to have these people who spend their lives as scholars forming it, we get calls from the media such as, Is Jesse Jackson going to be there? Is Kweisi Mfume going to be there?

I headed the Black Leadership Forum for ten years. My board was comprised of every civil rights leader in this country. And they came, they didn't send their staff, they came -- Joe Lowrey was chair -- you know the group. And so there were organizations with rich and long histories of, and documenting the progress and the lack thereof, and the behavior, and the lack thereof, of black people. And it was always a battle. It was always an uphill battle to get credible journalists in the room to listen to all of these other people who are just as prestigious, just as knowledgeable, but not as popular. And that is a problem - - we're still having people expect African-Americans to have one charismatic leader, and we're still being asked, Who is your leader? Well, we're just like every other group, we've got a lot them, believe me.

And so I think that this is an important observation.

Fred Harris: All right.

Fred Harris: Good. Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich will Chair the next panel which will start here in 5 minutes. In the meantime, lunch is being served, and the

suggestion is that you go and get a plate and bring it back in here and we'll start again, immediately in five minutes, but let's show our appreciation for this terrific panel.

(Applause.)