

Celinda Lake: Well thank you very, very much. I want to thank Alan and Yvonne and others and I apologize to the panel, and a far more esteemed panel than I am, for having to leave before the panel has concluded. What I want to do is just share with you a little bit on what are the attitudes of the public right now about race, poverty, and what's been happening in terms of those attitudes, and how recent events affected that. Then I'd like to share with you also, very briefly, some analysis that was done by others on content of the media, which does definitely affect the public.

Poverty is on the agenda for the public and it has definitely increased in salience, but I would say that it's still 20 to 25 points less of a concern than war, terrorism, the economy, and healthcare. To the degree that we want to effectively address poverty issues, I think we need to ask if we view them through the lens of poverty, which seems like a narrow dialogue in some sense, or if we view them through some of the issues of the economic priorities, like healthcare, which to people would seem like a broader dialogue.

Half of Americans think that they see a lot of people struggling in America, including working families. If there were one message I would leave for this forum, it is the degree to which it is important to link poverty to work. Work is a central value and people have no idea how many working families are in poverty. The overwhelming victories for increasing the minimum wage, many of them with no media behind them, showed the power of this theme.

People feel strongly that work should be rewarded. Our dialogues are much less successful right now, even when we talk about two Americas or the poor versus the not poor than when we talk about the working poor. Moreover, the public is really looking to come together and they are much, much more responsive and more interested in dialogues that talk about things that can affect all Americans or about what America should be like united, they don't like what they perceive to be divisive dialogues.

People think that there is poverty in their local community and they also think that there is poverty in both urban and rural areas. Suburbia tends to be more likely to think itself exempt from poverty, but urban and rural areas tend to think that there is poverty in their local communities. And there is a big gap today, I think, of uniting these two forces, urban and rural America, which would move politics together much more forcefully.

Originally Katrina, for a very brief moment, helped set the agenda around poverty and race, but it has quickly been reinterpreted by the public as a case of incompetence and corruption. And while there are certainly -- subtle and not so subtle -- racial overtones to that, the public by in large has moved on from Katrina, if you will, unfortunately. Really the only concern we find for Katrina remaining is in the Gulf States and among liberal Democrats.

People do think that poverty can be dealt with effectively. That's a very important point because America thinks there are a lot of big problems on the agenda right now. They're not looking for more intractable, difficult problems. They're looking for problems that can be solved. And people think that something can be done and should be done at their local level. This is not just a national problem in their minds. They think there should be community efforts and local efforts as well, which is very, very important. But again, people respond much more to programs that they think are affecting either the most

vulnerable, seniors and children, or the working and that affect benefits, wages, healthcare, education, which they perceive to be universal programs rather than targeted programs.

So sharing some of the data with you, 68 percent of Americans believe that poverty is a big problem in our society today and that's a pretty substantial number. Forty-nine percent of Americans say that it is a top concern. That's still about 20 points under healthcare, the war on terrorism. People who tend to be most concerned about poverty tend to be racial and ethnic minorities, those making less than \$25,000, and those with a high school education or less. And unfortunately, for many of these issues, we really do live in two Americas and poor America does not vote.

Just to give you a statistic, 96 percent of the voters in 2006 were fully insured. Uninsured America did not vote even in these Democratic elections. Fifty-one percent of the voters say that in their community there are a lot of people struggling to make ends meet, and what has shifted is that people don't think this is in some other place. Rural and urban America particularly believe that poverty is in their own communities.

Obviously again, lower income people and racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to think that poverty is in their community, but in general when people are looking right now for things to do within their own communities, poverty is still on that agenda. There is a big racial gap in terms of perceptions of poverty, and around how many people in my own local community are struggling to make ends meet. Nearly half of whites say that there are a lot of people in their own community struggling to make ends meet. Substantially more people of color agree.

You can see here major, major differences between urban America and suburban America. Unfortunately, politicians care most about suburban America. However, in these last elections rural America played a bigger role. Rural America is also disproportionately represented, in terms of political power, on the Hill. You'll notice the concern about poverty and the number of people perceived as struggling equal in urban areas and in rural areas. However, often the dialogue around poverty tends to be focused in people's minds as an urban dialogue not particularly a rural dialogue.

There is also tremendous ability to talk about poverty in general. For example, when we did the minimum wage campaigns, had no idea what minimum wage was and had no idea how much the minimum wage added up to. Americans aren't very good at math and so they had no idea what the minimum wage generalized to in terms of the amount of money that you'd make in a week and how much you could afford to raise a family on. Those numbers were powerful to people. Similarly, thirty-nine percent of Americans say that you need more than \$40,000 to have a family of four make ends meet. This is not a luxurious lifestyle. And 64 percent of Americans say you need at least \$40,000 or more to have a family of four make ends meet in today's world. So again, there is potential for a very, very strong dialogue around the working poor.

Another place that we're starting to see increased awareness and increased responsiveness is paid sick leave, for example. People are stunned at how many people do not have paid sick leave in this country. Many voters believe it's illegal not to offer paid sick leave, so again, capturing people's attention with a more universal dialogue, I think, is

going to be more successful than capturing people's attention with the most extreme dialogue.

We also know that personal stories often resonate, and I heard the earlier panel talk about personal stories and the narrative that's important in terms of capturing the media's attention. One of the problems we have though, is that when people hear personal stories they have two reactions. Half of the time they want to fix the system, half of the time they want to fix the people. They think the people made bad decisions, they didn't finish school, they had kids before they could afford to, they had a substance abuse problem. It is very, very important when we tell that personal narrative that we make sure that it's told in such a way that people conclude they want to fix the system, not the people.

People believe that poverty can be reduced, but they're not overwhelmingly efficacious about it. In their own community they believe largely that poverty can only be reduced somewhat, not a lot, and people are very nervous about the overwhelming trends of the global economy in terms of pushing everybody's income down. You'll notice here, again, a big gap between white and non-white America. Non-white America, racial minorities, ethnic minorities tend to feel much more efficacious about our ability to do something about poverty than do white and Anglo voters.

People feel it's very important for officials at every level to deal with poverty. And in some ways I think our dialogue is too national. We don't have enough of a local dialogue. People think that with the global economy, terrorism, the war, there's certain things, national leaders are distracted if you will. They have other things they need to focus on. In that context, in some ways people believe that poverty is a more important issue for their local elected officials. However, we have very little dialogue about what a governor or a state representative or a mayor, what a local elected official could do, what a set of county executives could do about poverty and that demobilizes people.

Having said that, most people are not involved in what they perceive to be activities around poverty. And Americans lie like crazy about their level of involvement. Forty-five percent of Americans say that they are involved in environmental organizations, two-thirds of Americans say they go to church regularly. The interesting thing about poverty is people don't feel any need to lie about it. Only 19 percent of people say that they are involved in that activity. Ironically, they don't feel any pressure to lie about that level of involvement.

People think that the poor were the hardest hit and will be the hardest hit by Katrina-like disasters, although notice the number is only 53 percent. But 60 percent of Americans say race and poverty did not affect the level of preparedness, and 48 percent of Americans say that race and poverty did not affect the level of response. So, these numbers have come down quite dramatically, actually, particularly this latter one. This shows that the public has shifted their opinion from right after the days of the event, when they thought there was a major factor of race and poverty, and now they conclude it's corruption and incompetence and kind of a political incompetence that crosses party lines.

People do think that Katrina is a historic opportunity to address race and poverty, but frankly Americans have a nanosecond attention span, and Katrina is already in people's minds a dated dialogue. One of the biggest problems we have in this area is that we have no current dialogue to really engage the public around poverty and race. There's

no current urgency to this issue, no current incident that seems particularly relevant to the public.

The public also doesn't believe that very much momentum was created and, in this case, it's probably just saying the truth. They also don't believe that there needs to be a large commitment of resources to deal with issues of poverty and race. And again, people don't have a very coherent story about poverty and race in our culture and they certainly haven't concluded that it takes a major infusion of resources to deal with it.

These things didn't happen accidentally and we found a study that we wanted to share just very briefly with you about the trend in media coverage of the issue. Originally you saw very dramatic coverage of Katrina and very dramatic headlines and initially the analysis was all of disaster then poverty, refugee language, and racial language came in. But you'll notice, even at the height of the coverage about race, about poverty, people were being treated more as, so-called refugees than victims of poverty. That coverage was also still significantly under the coverage of language like "damage, President, rescue, Red Cross." As much as we think Katrina may have set the agenda, it was a very brief, kind of minor moment honestly, and it did not have the long-term lasting effect we would like. In fact, as this data shows, I'll let you read in more detail at your leisure, the lasting coverage of waste and incompetence was greater than the lasting coverage of race and poverty. And, in fact, when you ask people what the major conclusions that they drew from Katrina, it was that the administration was incompetent, that the administration was politically motivated in who they had in charge of FEMA, and that the states involved were incompetent as well.

In summary, a couple of overall thoughts. Poverty is on the agenda more than it has been recently, but it is an area where our dialogue, frankly, is completely inadequate to the task. Our dialogue tends to be nationally focused and we need to include more local and tie urban and rural stories together. It needs to be more community based so that people see that families in their neighborhoods, families that they deal with are affected by poverty and race.

Secondly, we don't have the central values that people want expressed. Our dialogue is not perceived to be universal, it doesn't talk about work and wages and benefits in a very compelling way.

Thirdly, even when we have compelling personal stories, people often conclude that they want to fix the person rather than the system.

And fourthly, people, and maybe in this case are just being realistic, people are very, very cynical about what can be done and what will be done to address this dialogue. And they tend to think that the advocates, the politicians, are completely insincere. We may agree with them on that. They think that the advocates just want more money and they don't think that's at the core of the solution. And so when we come not only to the analysis of the problem, but frankly, the offering of the solution, we have not yet identified a compelling dialogue to the public, particularly because we do live in two Americas even if they don't like it referred to that way. And poor America, despite all our efforts, is not voting in the same way that middle income America is. So, I thank the Eisenhower Foundation for attempting to make a major difference in this, and thank you for all the work that you do.