

Eugene Robinson: Thanks very much. Well, DeWayne is absolutely right, as always, on every point except one which is that I'm not a multi-tasker. I kind of think more sequentially so in, so in thinking about race, poverty, and inequality, while they're obviously all intertwined. I thought of them kind of individually in trying to figure out why we have failed so miserably, I believe, by we I mean the, you know, the media in this country in covering race, in covering poverty, and covering the widening gap between the haves and have-nots in this country and the way that those issues are interrelated. You know, I went down to New Orleans, it was three days after Hurricane Katrina hit, wrote what I saw, got a lot of letters saying, Why are you writing about race? Why are you writing about inequality? This was a natural disaster. I got a lot of letters that said that.

In the wake of Katrina we all said, we collectively, the media said, We're really going to focus on race and on race now and we're really going to write about poverty, and a year and a few months later I haven't seen it. I don't know if anybody else here has noticed a surge in coverage of race and poverty in the United States, so.

You know, I think we in the media are creatures, you know, we're like fishes who swim in the sea. We're, the way we think of our jobs is shaped by overall societal views and I think our society's view of poverty has significantly changed, certainly in the time that I've been in journalism, which is about 30 years. You know, we all used to be Keynesian economists, there aren't any more of those any more. We all used to think of government as an instrument that could be wielded for the common good. Society's thinking has evolved, it has changed and we now put much more focus on the individual.

So, for example, when you notice a correlation between families where there's not a stable marriage, broken families and poverty and you see those two things are correlated. So, the question is, does the poverty cause the family to disintegrate or does the fact that the family is disintegrated mire them in poverty. If you believe the former, that society is implicated, then it, that implies that society has a role to play in solving this problem. If you believe the latter, which I think is the view that our society has move toward, then it becomes the responsibility of the individual to, in other words, just keep your family together, just get married and you'll get out of poverty.

The way that plays into media coverage is if it's a societal problem we approach it that way, if it's an individual problem it becomes a human interest story, it becomes kind of a, you know, a feature about the striving family or about this person who succeeded or this person who failed or even this neighborhood that's fallen apart, but it never gets, we don't think of it in a way that can tie it into the larger society and into policy prescriptions that might, that might make things better. So I think there's been a real change in the way we think about poverty.

On race, you know, and again it's all interrelated, but on race I think, in many ways in the media we try our best not to see it and as a result we sometimes don't see it when we really should. At the Post, for example, we have a policy, criminal suspects, we don't identify them by race, criminal suspects are at large, somebody was shot and the suspects are, you know, two men age, about 25, medium build, medium height, whatever. Well, the police also in the police report would say that they are black or white or whatever. You know, the Post had decided years ago that well, you know, race isn't really relevant and so it seemed prejudicial in a way so we don't, as a matter of course, put race

in. That's just an example of how we believe we should be a color blind society. What that does, I think, is keeps us from seeing the ways in which race really does matter in this society and it makes people write to me after I've written that, I just saw a whole lot of poor black people in a third world situation in New Orleans and people write me and say, Well why'd you have to say they were black? What does that have to do with anything? I think people believe it shouldn't have to do with anything.

And finally, just about inequality, I was thinking as our society does become more and more unequal, the real separation is between the educated and the not educated because the educated are going to do pretty well and the non-educated are not going to do well at all. And, if that's the divide, journalists are definitely on the educated side, much more than when I started the business. I, when I started at the San Francisco Chronicle in 1975, most of the reporters, you know, had college degrees, certainly not all of them. My, three of the five editors on the city desk didn't have college degrees, as a matter of fact. You know, journalism was, you know, the society was different then, but journalism wasn't this high faluting profession where you have to, you know, have graduated from an Ivy League School or whatever.

Now, you know, journalists are very well educated and as a result I think our distance has grown from a segment of society that we should be writing about, but we don't, we're not part of that part of society and so we don't see it, we don't understand it, and we don't write about it very well. So with that, I'll pass it on.