

TOM PUTNAM: Good evening. I'm Tom Putnam, Director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. And on behalf of all my Library and Kennedy Library Foundation colleagues, I express my appreciation to this capacity audience for venturing into the stormy night, made all the darker by the end of daylight savings time, to attend tonight's forum.

Kennedy Library Forums would not be possible were it not for the support of our underwriters, including lead sponsor, Bank of America, along with Lowell Institute, Boston Capital, the Corcoron Jennison Companies, and the Boston Foundation. Our media sponsors are *The Boston Globe*, WBUR, and NECN, which will rebroadcast this forum on November 10th at 8:00.

The morning after he was elected President, John F. Kennedy held a press conference in Hyannis that was marked by a rare occurrence, a standing ovation from the press corps that had covered him in the campaign. One imagines the response was genuine, but it also gave fodder to Richard Nixon and his supporters who felt that the press had been easier on JFK in hopes that he would win.

Years later, Nixon's vice president would call the press "an effete corps of impudent snobs with a built-in liberal bias." Using the famously alliterative words written by the last William Safire, Spiro Agnew stated, "In the United States today, we have more than our share of the nattering nabobs of negativism. They formed their own 4H club – the hopeless, hysterical hypochondriacs of history."

So the questions we explore tonight in a more contemporary context are not new. What is the proper relationship between the press and the President? How, in his or her analysis, does a reporter examine the issues while neither lifting a candidate up nor tearing him down? And how does the relationship between a candidate and the press change when that person takes the oath of office and becomes the President of The United States?

After a few months in The White House, JFK, who was known for his friendships in the journalistic community, was asked if he had time to read as much news as he did when he was a candidate. “Yes,” he quipped, “I’m reading it more and enjoying it less.”

We planned this evening’s forum to coincide with the one-year anniversary of last year’s presidential election. And I was brought back to that date over the weekend in reading Richard Wolffe’s engaging new book, *Renegade: The Making of a President*, which offers the epic story of how a political newcomer with no money and an alien name grew to become our nation’s 44th President. The story, indeed the subtitle, is in keeping with the venerable historian, Theodore H. White, a native of Dorchester, who wrote the first *Making of the President* book on the 1960 campaign, which earned him a Pulitzer Prize.

As has been observed by many, there are a number of connections between John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama. But in reading Mr. Wolffe’s depiction of events taking place one year ago today, I was struck by one critical difference. John Kennedy came from a storied American family with extensive contacts in the national press and media. After voting in Boston, he returned to Hyannisport to await the election results with his large family who had canvassed the country on his behalf, urged on by the family patriarch, who had used his own context and financial resources to help fund the campaign.

On the day before his election, Barack Obama discussed the news with the nation that the last living person to raise him, his grandmother ‘Toot’, has lost her struggle against cancer and passed away in her sleep with Obama’s half sister at her side. And a few hours later, in a scene in which Mr. Wolffe opens his book, then Senator Obama emerged from his section of the plane to greet the members of the press corps that had been traveling with him, and to thank them for having shared the extraordinary campaign process with him. Despite a protracted and often painful campaign in which he exposed himself to

intense examination by the press and the American people, Mr. Wolffe explains that part of Barack Obama's success was the ability to remain an often inscrutable character, and when necessary, to hide himself away from media scrutiny.

The job of the reporter during a campaign is to lift that veil on both the policies and the personalities of those who seek our nation's highest office. And when the President begins to govern, reporters are duty bound to explain his motivations, intentions, and the effects of the decisions he's making. We're so pleased to have with us today two journalists with unique insights on Barack Obama and the question of how the press has covered him, both as a candidate and during his first year as President.

Lynn Sweet is the Washington bureau chief for *The Chicago Sun Times* and a columnist for *Politics Daily*. She's covered Barack Obama for many years, including his campaign for the U.S. Senate, his years as Senator, his presidential bid, and now his Administration. In 2006, she reported on Barack Obama's trip to Africa, including his visit to his father's native Kenya, and also accompanied him on his campaign visit to those pivotal swing states of Jordan, Israel, Germany, France and England, where he was welcomed so sensationally that his opponents tried to use his international popularity against him, likening him, as you'll recall, to Britney Spears, among others.

Closer to our home, Lynn Sweet was the reporter who recently asked President Obama about the arrest of Professor Henry Lewis Gates, Jr. during a summer press conference that was supposed to be all about healthcare legislation. His blunt response to her question ultimately led to the famous beer summit in the Rose Garden.

Richard Wolffe is a columnist for *The Daily Beast*, a senior strategist at Public Strategies, and a political analyst for MSNBC. He covered Barack Obama's presidential campaign for *Newsweek*. In his new book, *Renegade*, which is on sale in our bookstore and which he will sign at the conclusion of today's program, he shares with us his front row seat at

Obama's announcement to run for President on a frigid day in Springfield, Illinois, through dozens of primaries, caucuses, a national convention and general campaign, through to his victory speech on a warm night in Chicago. Before joining *Newsweek* in 2002 as diplomatic correspondent, he was the United States diplomatic correspondent in Washington, D.C. for *The Financial Times*.

The Obama Administration has been critiqued for its handling of the potential swine flu epidemic and the issue of the availability of the H1N1 vaccine. As you've read in your program, that issue has come home to roost here tonight, as unfortunately our third panelist, Ryan Lizza of *The New Yorker*, is home recovering from a case of the flu. We wish him well and hope to have him again with us here in the near future.

We're pleased to have as our moderator Boston's own Callie Crossley, known to many for her weekly commentary as part of the *Beat The Press* segment every Friday evening on WGBH's *Greater Boston* program with Emily Rooney. Callie is a frequent participant in Kennedy Library Forums, having interviewed Roger Wilkins, Ann Richards, Jesse Jackson and James Hood, the man who integrated the University of Alabama, all on the stage, as well as participating in forums focusing on her role as producer of segments of the *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years* documentary series for which she won an Emmy Award. She's also served as a producer for ABC News and is currently Program Manager for the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard.

To discuss the presidency and the press, Barack Obama and the journalists who cover him, please join me in welcoming Callie Crossley, Lynn Sweet, and Richard Wolffe to the Kennedy Library. [applause]

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Good evening. It is wonderful to see all of you tonight, as always. I think it's really interesting to think about anniversaries. Typically, we think of anniversaries on a joyous occasion – weddings, birthdays, holidays. But to think about

the anniversary of a momentous occasion as the election of President Obama in an historical context makes us look at them in a different way. And so I want you to think about anniversaries as kind of a marker where we take stock and we look back to see how far we've come and we're looking forward to see where we may be going. So that's the context tonight.

I thought about this time last year and all of the excitement in the press about the election of President Barack Obama and the newspapers that were selling out. I mean, in these days and times, newspapers were selling out. Remember that, okay? The Pointer Institute for Media Studies did a special book just capturing all of the fantastic covers, headlines of that night from all the newspapers. And the television stations were doing election special after election special, and other kinds of interviews with President-Elect Barack Obama and his wife. There was just so much thrill in the air. Everywhere that you looked, you couldn't go anywhere and not hear about it, be talking about it with somebody, hear it on the radio, see it on television, read about it.

And so now we are one year later. And I turned on the morning news shows and there was barely a mention of the anniversary of the election, which I thought was kind of interesting. So I thought I would open the discussion with our guests tonight and ask them were you surprised by that? Because as I checked in during the rest of the day there's a little bit of talking about, "Yeah, it's the anniversary," but not much. Richard?

RICHARD WOLFFE: Well, first of all, thank you for having us here and thank you for the wonderful introduction. This is such a revolutionary moment for the press. But there's very little that surprises me anymore about how people cover things. I thought it was obvious. This was obviously an historic moment. Maybe people are saving it for the day after, whatever results we get tomorrow. But what we've seen so far suggests that people's memory, in today's media, is even shorter than it used to be.

And I think that does have something to do with the economic times, the stresses the industry is going through, and the way the news cycle is getting more and more compressed down to Twitter time.

So I don't think that's a very healthy thing. I do think that has had a sort of loop back into the political process. So people say, "Well, it's been nine months already. How come everything isn't changed?" Nine months. The system, in case you need a foreigner to tell you, is not designed to make things move in nine months. I mean, this isn't an elected monarchy. So I'm kind of amused by how the time expectations seemed to have accelerated after the election. So we're in some weird time/space continuum. I'm not surprised, but I do think it's still obvious for people to look back and say to people, "Okay, you had these hopes and expectations. How has he fared?"

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Well, Twitter time aside, the press loves an anniversary. I mean, that's the hallmark of what we do: "One year ago today..." So were you surprised at so little attention was paid to it?

LYNN SWEET: Well, I think this is the beginning of the beginning of weeks of anniversary look-backs that will end at the anniversary of the inauguration, January 20th. I do want to say first of all, thank you for having me here. It's an honor to be here tonight. I love the idea that we are talking about the Obama presidency because, you know, clearly there's a lot of interest out there that will extend many years.

I was telling Tom and Callie and Rich when we came in that I looked at this building with great interest because I was trying to figure out where this Obama Library will be sited in Chicago just a few years from now, when I realized what a magnificent site you have here for this.

See, I think, to get to your question, that the November 4th mark is the beginning of what will be a series of look-backs, a series of stories and articles, Twitters and everything else about what's he done. We see the beginning of this already, that key advisors – David Axelrod and Anita Dunn – have packaged themselves, made themselves available for interviews. They know this is coming.

So, Callie, I think that this double anniversary, in a sense, whether you want to mark it at the election or in the Inauguration, everything you think has been absent so far, I bet you'll see in the next few weeks.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Okay. So let's go both ways for the two of you. And I want you to do two things. Go back and think about what you wrote at that time that was prescient and also what you wrote that was off the mark, shall we say, wrong. Let's start with you.

RICHARD WOLFFE: Well, everything I wrote was prescient and nothing I wrote was wrong, except for all the bits that were wrong. You mean through the whole campaign or just the election?

CALLIE CROSSLEY: No, I mean at the time of the election and, you know, all that was happening. What did you write at that moment now that you see was prescient?

RICHARD WOLFFE: Oh well, look – the most prescient thing I did was deciding to cover this guy, Barack Obama. At a time in early -- actually late 2006/early 2007 when just about everyone else on the Magazine I was working at at the time, *Newsweek*, wanted to cover Hillary and Rudy, I said that Barack Obama was the only story that interested me.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: And why was it?

RICHARD WOLFFE: Well, partly because -- and this isn't rocket science -- I didn't think it was going to be a Republican year. So, you know, it had to be a Democrat. You know? I don't know why there wasn't more competition for this thing, but anyway. Had to be Democrat, and therefore, it was down to the Clintons because it was a joint effort, or somebody else. And I had watched John Edwards briefly in 2004. And I'm not saying I had any particular insight, but I listened to him give his "To America" speech, which was just a fabulous speech, you know, brilliantly written, powerful, just on point, on poverty for a Democratic audience, really just a compelling thing. And his delivery was extraordinary. And, you know, the motions and the hand gestures and his eyes moistened at the right time, it was just beautiful.

And then two hours later, I heard him give exactly the same speech with the same hand motions and the same moisture in the eye. And I felt like such a chump. And I thought he was a total fraud. I thought it wasn't going to be John Edwards, which left me with very slim pickings. And on top of that, I thought Barack Obama ... Look, I'd read the book, which was just a compelling, extraordinary piece of work of self-reflection and identity in America, an extraordinary piece of writing. And that's how it all came together. So that was the most prescient thing I did.

The most stupid thing I ever wrote, if that's what you're asking ...

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Well, I mean, at that time, during the time at the height of the excitement, was there something you wrote like, "He will..." I don't know, whether ...

RICHARD WOLFFE: I think we all got too wrapped up in the polls and the sort of horse race of the Clinton/Obama epic. And that didn't help us cover the policy that really mattered. Because through the course of this campaign, two years, just the extraordinary national security challenges, the collapse of the economy ... And by the way, the economy didn't collapse at the time the stock markets collapsed. They had been

collapsing for a year or more. I don't think any of us really factored the real world into our coverage. So I wouldn't say there's any one thing. But as a matter of perspective, we didn't let the real world interfere enough with our campaign and political coverage.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Okay. Lynn?

LYNN SWEET: Well, on the plus side, I think the point I would want to make here is that I always saw a path for Obama. I never got too involved in poll stories. I can't even imagine I wrote many of them at all. I always saw that. And I think I was accurate in my coverage in saying there is always a path for him to win. I mean, you'll see, some of this is by the absence of what I didn't write. I never wrote that, you know, Clinton is overwhelming. You know? There were tons of stories I would read all the time by people that I thought, no, there is always, always a path for him to win the nomination during the long primary.

The way I came to that partly was because I did listen very carefully to David Plouffe, the campaign manager, and some of the other people. And it was, in the primary, a mathematical march to these delegates and super-delegates. And when I realized that math always was there ... You know, some days the path was like a four-lane highway. Sometimes the path was a single lane road. But it never closed. And I think my coverage reflected that there was always a way to getting the nomination.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: How much advantage did you have? Because you covered him before, well before his name was in capital letters.

LYNN SWEET: I think the advantage I had mainly was I was a better tea leaf reader. As time went on, the advantage I had I think is that I knew the characters. The other thing I think that I knew from the first time I heard her speak is what a terrific speaker and personality Michelle Obama was. I mean, I write a column about her called "The Daily

FLOTUS” now at *Politics Daily*. And I have watched her. She had some trouble during the campaign where she was afraid she would become a liability.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: For my audience, FLOTUS -- First Lady of The United States. Continue.

LYNN SWEET: Thank you. So I would think, you know, in terms of where I’m giving myself the pluses, it’s recognizing that she was Barack Obama in soprano, in her speaking ability, and never closing the door. The minus I would say is that (as Richard noted) we had the collapse of the economy and none of the reporters ever – *ever* – picked up on that early on. And we didn’t particularly press on the Afghanistan war. Obama’s candidacy was predicated on his opposition to the authorization of Iraq war. Much, much was written on that. But the war he supported never got the attention that it deserved, compared to the war he opposed.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Now, let’s just get down to it. You two people were in the tank. Right?

RICHARD WOLFFE: That’s the question?

CALLIE CROSSLEY: That’s the question. That’s what they said. They said that the press corps was essentially in the tank, and that the more elite of you were really in the tank.

LYNN SWEET: Well, actually, let me take this, because the Obama campaign had their pecking order of press. And I was not at the top of it. And I think of people who know my work would probably say that I gave realistic, everyday coverage. And I don't think anyone would ever have accused me of [simultaneous conversation] ...

CALLIE CROSSLEY: So giving a towel to Richard, who was in the tank. Okay?

LYNN SWEET: No, no, no. I'm not doing that. And please don't take it that way. I'm just saying, for me, when you framed it this way, Callie, as there was some elite press that was in the tank, I wasn't part of that club.

RICHARD WOLFFE: I think Lynn's independence speaks for itself, and her questioning is legendary. So nobody can cast aspersions. I can say that I've been accused of being in the tank for everyone and nobody. And the bias question is kind of cheap and easy to throw at anyone covering anything. I'd like to take it back a step and say there is always a need, in fact a necessity, for reporters in any field to develop sources and build up trust and understanding and insight into the people they cover. And politics is no different from medicine or the police beat. You know, if you're covering crime, you need to know police officers and get close to them. And there is always a tension there between the distance you need as a reporter and the urgent necessity for the readers' sake to develop relationships and insight and break news.

So is it easy to say people are biased? Well, yeah. The question is is the coverage fair? Is it tough? I would say, taken as a whole, there's a lot of selective memory in how people criticize the press coverage of the campaign. People say for instance he got nothing -- and this was started by the Clinton campaign and extended through the McCain campaign -- people said that he never got anything but great press. Well, gee. As I remember, 2007 when he was a pretty crap candidate, Barack Obama was beaten up for months on end because he couldn't debate. True. He really couldn't debate. His poll numbers were going nowhere. His donors were getting frustrated. I mean, it was not a happy time.

His press coverage got better when he started winning. And I've got to say, when you win things, as in sports, you tend to get better coverage. So I grant that. But then there was this whole period when he started losing a ton of stuff, and not just losing but he had

this whole Reverend Wright affair, which ran on for months. And I don't know. If you want to strip out all of the bad stuff, 2007, Reverend Wright, then yeah, you could construct a scenario whereby he only got great press.

But one thing I will say is that -- and people did studies of this at the time -- when the Clinton campaign started to complain about the coverage, the coverage got noticeably better for them. So it's a useful tactic. But let's not pretend that campaigns, rival campaigns, are the best critiques or people to critique the press. You know, my book, *Renegade*, I think you learn more as a writer, I think you learn more as a politician from failure than you do from success. I put in a whole chapter about failure. And to me, it was actually one of the most fun to write.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Well, let's just take everything you said as absolutely true. There then also was, of course, reporters like Lee Cowan saying that when he heard him speak, his knees quaked and he got a tingle up his leg. I mean, this did not help. Right?

RICHARD WOLFFE: Right. I think it was Chris Matthews who said he got a tingle up his leg.

LYNN SWEET: Part of this is ... And this is a case where, as you know, there's not one media, as if we're a monolithic group and we all had the same job to do, and people had different jobs. Some people were writing long form. Some people were looking, you know, for things different. I had hard news responsibilities. I was feeding a blog that was very competitive. I mean, there's something like being on a campaign bus -- and I say bus, not a plane because that's where we had Internet. And you know that you're writing something and then you're reading what somebody posted two seats away from you that you thought, "Holy hell, how did he know this?" And then you look up ...

RICHARD WOLFFE: ... or she.

LYNN SWEET: ... or she. The incident I was thinking was a 'he.' And then you're thinking, "Wow." And it just doesn't stop. One day I had my video camera and we were in New Hampshire. And one of the questions we wanted to know is when is Oprah really going to campaign for Obama? Now, if somebody was doing another kind of a story -- working on policy -- that might not have been as pressing. But Oprah's from Chicago. I'm a Chicago newspaper reporter. And there's no better story than having Obama and Oprah in one headline.

And I wasn't getting anywhere (no surprise) with the campaign on what the plans were. But I was sure there was a plan because time was getting short. So Obama's working the rope line at this event. This is when you could still get close to him. And one of his donors came up to him (and he did give a little extra time to donors than just strangers) and said, "So when's Oprah gonna campaign for you?" And he says, "Oh, she's coming out real soon, blah, blah, blah." He said something else. And then he turns and looks at me. I have that shot in the camera. So I go back. I don't say anything to anybody because, what do I need. I put it on my blog and I saw how fast it was virally, because one by one people came up to me quietly on the bus, "Did Obama say anything to you about Oprah?" And then another person said, "How did you get this Oprah story," you know?

It was a lesson in how fast it works. So the point being, people had different reporting duties that they had to do. And I think that informed them. Now in the beginning, however, when a lot of the 'in the tank' narratives started on the media, what I think there was was a lot of repetitive stories. And that helped start that media narrative. Many people were content writing the same story over and over -- "Have you heard? His father's from Kenya. Did you know it? Mother's from Kansas ..." -- instead of just doing other stories.

It took a long time for reporters to go to Chicago and just talk to the many people who he knew, who he dealt with, people that he knew from his law school. It took a long time for people to come to Cambridge and talk to people who knew him from his life at Harvard. And I think that's part of what got that going because there were a lot of puffy biographical stories that, in a sense, just repeated themselves, and that went on for a long time.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: It's always dangerous to ask people who were in the coverage to grade the coverage. But if you had to, now looking back, I mean, what do you think it was, given that you think that some of this criticism is unfair in terms of the 'in the tank' stuff?

LYNN SWEET: Well, I want to score it more like in the Academy Awards where you have different categories, not just one. You never give one Academy Award for anything. So I think, yeah, the major news outlets did a terrific job of dealing with issues, explaining policy differences. The websites of all the news organizations did a terrific job of organizing the campaign. So if you wanted to find out something, you wanted to look at video for yourself -- which made this campaign different, by the way. If you thought what the reporters doing wasn't what you wanted, you had a lot of access to seeing campaign events for yourself. So I would give the Internet, the non-partisan Internet, mainstream, an 'A' for just getting you basic information. I would think even the partisan blogs did a great job of telling you stuff. It might have not been what you wanted to hear. Now, I'm putting away the fascinating and the issues dealing with the Bill Ayers story and Wright, over what was true and not true. We might get back to that. And if you look at the major news outlets, at the coverage as a whole, you found out a lot of information about the campaigns by the time it was over.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: What do you think?

LYNN SWEET: Wait – one quick thing. Where you do have, I think, a harder job is when you look at local papers and local stories where reporters who might have had one shot at Obama or the campaign swept through. Those stories, I think, just were not as informed as they could have been, even about their own local issues.

RICHARD WOLFFE: I'm going to take a slightly different tack. I think a lot of the coverage was very good. But a lot of it missed the point entirely. Because politics isn't just sport, and to treat it as a sort of process-ey game, to focus on polls incessantly, misses the point. And it missed the point about why people got involved. They didn't get involved just to back the winner. And we saw actually positive, really positive engagement in terms of the number of volunteers who were out there, an increase in turnout. We're seeing it now with more direct action actually on the conservative side with the tea party movement.

And I don't think that we really looked at the policy or the times enough. And the one advantage you have over these extraordinarily long elections is that a lot of stuff happens. And so, you know, we should be testing these candidates, not just on whether they're going to win, but whether they can adapt to the times, the changing times. Because a year or two is a long period in which policies need to change. You can't just have your talking points and cling to them for a year or two. So policy, I just don't think it played enough of a role in the coverage.

And just to come back to your other point, look, any reporter who is unprofessional enough to go out there and say they were physically, emotionally moved, you know, they need to take a cold shower. Because you're professional. I'm not saying that you're un-human, okay? Because you come at it as a human experience. And anytime you walk into an arena with 12,000 people screaming their lungs out, you know, it's emotional. I go into an ice hockey rink. I'm sorry if anyone out here loves ice hockey. I think it's interesting. And when I hear people screaming and they're fighting, yeah, I can get

interested. But I don't feel, "Gee, this is where my soul is," you know? I feel differently if it's basketball, but that's something else.

Now, you know, as a journalist, you've got to have some professional detachment. And this is where I don't think there is a conflict between getting insight and having that detachment. And this is the point. The more you get to know people, the harder it is to idealize them or demonize them. I found covering Bush for many years in 2000 and in The White House that I actually couldn't really hate the guy. He was just too goofy to hate. Okay? You know? He's got a charisma to him and he's really human, faults and all. You know, whether you think he's a war criminal and a torturer, he's still a human being. And I'm sure I'm going to get into trouble for just about everything I've said in the last fifteen minutes. But I'm going to plow on regardless.

Obama's the same. He's a human being. So, look, maybe someone watching it on TV, I can understand the tingle a bit better. But a reporter who has seen news stories before, you know, especially anyone who's seen politics before, really ought to be able to calm down in a big moment like that.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Okay but remember now, this was big. I mean, this was not just a guy running for office as we've seen before. This said so much or said so little depending on how you looked at it, about where our country was, where the nation was, what we thought about certain things. Because that subtext of race was under there for the whole time. And by the way, I have to say that I don't think that race was covered very well by anybody in this campaign. So I'm giving all of you all a big 'F'. So how do you feel about that?

RICHARD WOLFFE: Thank you.

LYNN SWEET: Well, interesting. So, Callie, because there weren't enough stories? Or the stories that were written, you thought missed the mark?

CALLIE CROSSLEY: I think that most of the time what came forth was a devolvement into who was racist and who was not. And we never got to what some of the issues are, what people were really struggling with as they tried to say, "Gee, I'm going to vote for this guy, but I've got some feelings about it. And I don't know how I feel about it." I actually think, you know, not just because it's public radio, but I actually think that the public radio series that Michele Norris and Steve Inskeep did where they sat down with those York, Pennsylvania people for a series of reports, in which they just asked them very brief questions and allowed them to talk about it, was one of the best things that I'd heard that really got to some of the issues. But some of the other stuff ...

RICHARD WOLFFE: I thought coverage of race was actually one of the worst points, not because it shouldn't be covered, but the country was changing. And actually I had, I have to admit, some heated arguments with my editors at the time about this very subject. I felt that if you even just looked at the polls (and I know I've said we shouldn't focus on polls) but if you looked at the polls on race, on the basic core baseline question -- was America ready for a black President -- those numbers were shifting dramatically through the course of the campaign. So something was going on that we weren't really tracking very well. And when it popped up, it popped up in the context of actually Pennsylvania, and more broadly, Appalachia. I was kind of taken with a couple of things.

First of all, there was quite a lot of discussion about African-Americans and how would they vote. I actually thought coverage of white voters was monolithic too. And I had this one dispute with my editors where I said, "Look -- how come white working class voters in Wisconsin or Oregon are voting differently from Appalachia? There's something different about the culture that we need to explore, because there's no monolithic white vote that's responding to this guy in the same way. So what is that? What are the cultural

reasons? What are the socioeconomic reasons? There's something interesting in here.”
To which I was told that I was a stupid foreigner, I should shut up.

And so here's what the end result of that was. My magazine came up with a poll where they went out looking for essentially white racist voters. They did. They called it the racial resentment index, which is a nice term for racist white voters. And they screened out voters for, “Do you think civil rights has gone too far? Do you feel that someone at your work has benefited by affirmative action?” until they came down to white racist voters. And then they asked them, “Okay, do you prefer Clinton to McCain, or Obama to McCain?” And sure enough, the white racist voters chose Clinton over McCain by a big margin. And so we wrote this story: “Clinton ahead of McCain compared to Obama, by, (whatever it was) thirty points.” The fascinating piece to me was that among racist white Democrats (because this was the pool of people we were looking at) among racist white Democrats, they still chose the black guy over the white guy. Obama still had a lead over McCain among racist white Democrats.

And I said, “Look – there's a story right here – *right here.*” But it just wasn't the story people wanted to cover at the time, because there was Reverend Wright and there was Pennsylvania. And, you know, the track of race reporting was very conventional in a very unconventional election year. And this is a big country with a huge amount of historical and cultural variety. We as a press did not reflect that.

LYNN SWEET: Well, I disagree because I just think ... I would have to do a bit of a clip search. But there were articles written about a lot of the things that you've just talked about, maybe not in exactly that way. I think the difference is they just didn't get the attention and didn't have the staying power of some of these other stories.

Actually, almost anything we could talk about tonight, when you say, “This wasn't covered,” or, “That wasn't covered,” there was so much attention paid to this presidential

campaign by new forms of media and mainstream media. I will bet you, whatever you could come up with in the audience and you say, “Well they never covered the donut hole in Social Security,” we could find stories where they or their economic advisors did.

Now, the campaign was never race-centric. I’m not the first to point this out. This was not a re-run of Reverend Jackson’s campaign. It was never meant to be. The whole point of the Obama campaign was to do the post-partisan, poly-partisan, post-racial, post-this, post-that, young, aspirational, generational campaign. One of the legs of that campaign was not race. But obviously race was a factor.

And do I think when the campaign was in South Carolina for the primary, you had a lot of stories dealing with that. Now, some of these stories on race became stories of, “Is Obama a Muslim? What’s his background really?” So you had other issues to deal with having to do with his own fairly unique identity, which has more to do than race, too.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Well I guess what I’m thinking about is ... Yes, of course, there were some stories written. But the preponderance of them (I have to go with Richard on this) just never seemed to rise to the level that it should have been as something that journalists would take on. Of course, there were a number of bloggers all over the place talking about this. I’m not talking about journalist bloggers. I’m talking about the other kind.

LYNN SWEET: After Obama’s speech on race in Philadelphia [simultaneous conversation] ...

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Yes, that was the highest point. Yes.

LYNN SWEET: I would think that period spawned a lot of stories about race and how it didn’t have the staying power, because stories moved on and Reverend Wright never

went away despite the speech which became so important to the Obama campaign, they printed it. They had some handouts that made it look like the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence. It was almost on a poster that you would frame and put on your wall. Because obviously they were proud of the speech and thought it was important. For a man who gave a lot of speeches, this one was special.

So some of it had to do with coverage. Sometimes reporters like to lead coverage and think of things to write about. And they can move coverage. Sometimes you follow what the campaign is doing. Point to remember is that the campaign did not want to talk about race that much on their own. That race speech was forced on them.

RICHARD WOLFFE: Let me just pick up on South Carolina for a minute, because here's how the press actually played into the campaign's hands. The bar was set so low for Obama in South Carolina in terms of the white vote, because there was this weird outlying poll. I think it was an NBC poll actually that said he was only going to get ten percent of the white vote. There were columns being written saying he was now the black candidate, and that even if he won in South Carolina, white people would never vote for him anymore because he was too black.

You know, it was so stereotypical and so two-dimensional. And the bar was set so low that when the guy got, whatever it was, eighteen or twenty percent of the white vote, it was a major triumph. Well, you know, how is that good coverage of race or even where politics is? We were way too quick to jump into the stereotypes.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: I think we were just too quick not to understand that it was a subtext all the way through. And at different points I saw the race coverage as responding to incidents as opposed to journalists taking some of thoughtful, stepping-away-from-the-incident-provoked kind of thing and really talking about what does this mean. I know the campaign didn't want to talk about it, but when Michael Fletcher from *The Washington*

Post broke those stories about the vandalism and the attacks on the white Obama supporters, that the campaign tamped down, I mean, that was an important story to discuss and more than just, “This kind of stuff is happening.” But rather, “What does it mean?” And I didn’t see much of that.

What did you all think at the time, as you look back now, would be something that would carry through to today in terms of coverage, something that you knew? Now, you’ve already said the policy was not covered. And so are we seeing that come back now in the governing, in the first months of this governing, where the coverage has turned to, say, “He doesn’t know how to govern. His policy is whacked.” You know? What could you take from the campaign that you can see threads of being pulled forward?

LYNN SWEET: Well, one thread that is still there is Mr. Cool, unflappable, Barack Obama. That was a narrative. I have seen him through the years. I have seen him get mad. I’ve seen him get irritated. I’ve seen him get short. But he has this Mr. Cool image, the ‘no drama Obama’ campaign. And there has been that narrative carried through. There hasn’t been much turnover. There have been no dramatic personnel issues. And I would think that story is still being carried on.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: So there was a lot of criticism at the beginning when he was bringing people forward to appoint to various positions, and they would show up with all kinds of problems. And the question was: No drama Obama, how could he screw this up?

LYNN SWEET: But they got through it, right (and they shouldn’t have) the Tom Daschle, some of the vetting issues. But there weren’t that many. And they were replaced by people that were ... You know, I’ve never read anything negative about Health and Human Services Commissioner, Katherine Sebelius. So Tom Daschle was a few-days

story, and you went on. And some of the other appointments, it didn't come through. That was ancient history.

I think you're seeing the tougher stories now for the first time because you have some stories that just have to be addressed. Will Obama send more troops to Afghanistan? Will we be writing about a surge, which is a word that came into popularity under President Bush as it applied to sending more troops to Iraq? Will there be an Obama surge in Afghanistan with sending more soldiers?

In the end, will President Obama be able to create more jobs? Will your home be worth more? Or will the price be stabilized? Will you have your salary cut? Will you be furloughed? And if not, will it be others? And I haven't even gotten to whether or not he could pass health insurance reform.

And by the way, did this non-partisan bipartisan era ever happen? Well, gee, it hasn't so far because all of those big initiatives haven't passed only with Democratic votes. So the real world of governing has created new narratives, while some of the old ones are hanging around.

RICHARD WOLFFE: I'd say a couple of things. First of all, the character of Obama, he dominates the stage. And he does so in, I think, an opaque way. I mean, the reason I wrote *Renegade* was because here is someone who seems to be so out there in public, but I still think is a hidden character. So the question of who he is is still relevant today. I mean, I tried to answer it in the book as best I could. But I think there are many layers that need to be peeled away before we understand what he represents and where he really comes from in himself. So that I think is an ongoing question and an ongoing point of debate, that the coverage kind of loops around on.

One point of coverage there was a lot of and that has sort of ground to a halt because of the press (it's because I think politically the White House hasn't known how to sustain it) is the grassroots element of it, all of those millions of people who got engaged online. There is Organizing for America, which is what was left of Obama For America. And they claim that they've got millions of people, ten million people or so getting their emails. They're asking them to call members of Congress. It just doesn't have the same kind of verve energy to it. And that to me is one of the real problems of moving from campaigning to governing. What do you do with all of these people who want to take direct action? Again, you're seeing something similar on the right. People do want to get involved online, in person, in ways that we haven't seen for many, many decades. So it's a story that sort of ground to a halt. I'm sure it will revive in one form or another, maybe through a different kind of online outlet. But we haven't seen that transition very easily.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Is the tough coverage that comes when one is governing and no longer a candidate, has that been fair and appropriate?

RICHARD WOLFFE: Oh, look, this is the worst economy in two or three generations. And these are ugly times in terms of the public mood and in terms of public opinion. And politicians get a rough time as a result of it. I think that's perfectly justified.

The bit that I don't think is justified is the sort of impatience of, "Well, you should just be able to do whatever you like. You're the President." That's, again, not how Washington works. You know, Obama campaigned saying he wanted an impatient White House. That's exactly what he's got. But Washington isn't an impatient place.

So there is this tension here between the pace of change the White House wants, the pace of change the voters, people in the real world want, and the institutional inertia in Washington. So asking for things to happen on the economy I think is very relevant. But

asking why the White House has let Congress write healthcare, gee, I mean, if he cared about it, would it make any difference?

CALLIE CROSSLEY: There was an interesting article today by a guy from the AP. And he, looking back, was talking about President Obama and the White House's relationship with the media. And he says, in essence Obama's strategy is not to shape the media to his liking or to blame it for his troubles; it is both. And so that's bringing me to the Fox thing. There's a longer piece here, but Ben Feller says that he really understands how to shape media in the way that he wants it to go. Maybe people would argue that his stance against Fox is not the way to go. I'd like to get you on the record for what you guys think about that.

LYNN SWEET: Okay, so I think Fox is a separate question, and then the overall communications issue of the White House is second. A lot of what you see as presidential news is planned, managed, organized out of the press office. You know, they have a long-term calendar, short-term calendar. They decide there's an office, there's somebody has a job in the White House of booking White House guests on the cable shows and on the Sunday shows. These things don't happen by accident. And they decide if they have a story or an initiative coming out, will they, you know, give interviews to certain reporters from certain outlets ahead of time? The Obama White House looks at a person's outlet as much as they look at the person. They look at the reach of the outlet, the number of readers, who the readers are. Then the question and the thought bubble is what's in it for them?

Here's just an easier example dealing with Michele Obama. Today, she unrolled a program where she's having an initiative on mentoring. And guess what just came out last week? Last week, Mrs. Obama was on the cover of *Glamour* magazine (this is good cross-marketing) with an interview by Katie Couric of CBS News, where, guess what they're talking about? Mrs. Obama and mentoring. So none of this happens by accident -

- that they package stories and send them off to many outlets that are eager, willing to work with them this way.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Does that make you saps?

LYNN SWEET: Well, I think it recognizes, Callie ...

CALLIE CROSSLEY: ... stenographers?

LYNN SWEET: ... that you have a lot of outlets with a lot of reporters that have different audiences. And anyone in major national communications work today understands that there's not one market. It's segmented. You know, this section of the room might watch one thing, you watch something else, you watch something else. There's a reason to go to different outlets -- the comedy shows, women's magazines, men's magazines. I understand that. But I'm also telling you that this news that comes out isn't just truly news.

The other thing that's pretty interesting is a lot of reporters, including myself, now have to keep pressing the refresh key at WhiteHouse.gov, the website. Because The White House is putting out stuff that usually would come out in a press release. So they're totally into getting out messages in the way they want, often trying to get it as un-distilled by the mainstream press as possible. Now, what is your question to me about Fox?

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Well, was that a smart strategy?

LYNN SWEET: For them, I think they're lucky, as always. Obama has always been lucky in who his enemies are. And in this one, it was a fight worth picking because there was little downside. They were getting beat up on a constant basis by Fox. And they were able to, in their view, make some points. I don't know if this will matter in the end, if the

viewers who watch Fox felt that their views changed because the White House is calling them out, one way or the other. I think a lot of reporting that Fox does is very straight news reporting, that the White House shouldn't have ... I do take issue with them saying that they're not a news organization. They're a hybrid organization. And I think an operation as sophisticated as the White House should have made a little more of a distinction there.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Well, was it a mistake to elevate Fox on the level of the White House?

LYNN SWEET: No. I think for their purposes, there was little to lose. If air and print time is taking up discussion of, "Is Fox too hard on Obama and are they legitimate in what they say?" is probably a better day than having a Fox story come out on, you know, whether or not, on some issue that they're just beating him up on.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Now you covered Bush. Was the Bush White House, in terms of its manipulation or its attempt to manipulate the press, any different than what Lynn has described?

RICHARD WOLFFE: No. In fact, I would argue that they were pretty effective at it. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to survive 2004 and get reelected the way they did. The war in Iraq was falling apart in 2004. And even after 2004, but through it, the White House was pretty rigorous about targeting actually NBC for its war coverage, ultimately for describing the situation in Iraq as a civil war. That prompted all sorts of outrage and protests and letters from the White House. It's not unusual. And the meticulousness of the strategy ... You know, they don't like to say this in the Obama team but as a campaign and as a White House, they learned a lot from the Bush years. So none of that is unusual. Of course I'm the MSNBC guy.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Yes, we know. So you're parsing carefully.

RICHARD WOLFFE: Yeah. Let me just say this. I think the Fox dispute has helped both Fox and the White House. Fox hasn't just been engaged in tough coverage. They have done more than anyone else to promote the Birther movement, the tea party movement, the death panel story. I mean, this isn't just tough coverage. This is pretty fringe-ey stuff.

Now, look, are there people on MSNBC who say some fringe-ey things? Perhaps.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Some would say you appear on a show with one of them.

RICHARD WOLFFE: And some people don't know what they're talking about. But I will say this: there is a vast difference between people throwing out ideas and having them kicked around, people throwing out commentary and having it kicked around, and the single-minded focus with the force of repetition they take with these fringe stories on Fox. Because it isn't just once or twice. It happens relentlessly. And, you know, the Muslim rumors, again, the, "Is he really American?" This stuff just comes back again and again and again. And, you know, a fact-based news organization wouldn't return to it.

I can understand the commercial need for it. But there's a difference between healthy debate, tough criticism, inviting robust people's voices on cable news. It's cable news. But, you know, having robust debate and really this relentless focus on the fringe-ey stuff, Fox has clearly benefited from it in terms of its numbers. I think the White House has as well because it's laid a marker down. They're going to have to do it again if they really want to pursue this, because Fox is not going to back down from this.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: On the other hand, in terms of shaping media attitudes, the Obamas have just now been very open about their marriage, or so it seems, in a big

article in *The New York Times*, several other places. I wonder how you think that kind of coverage (you said we don't know him very well) works toward having people believe they know him and something of his personal life a little bit more. And is that, in the end, beneficial to him?

RICHARD WOLFFE: Well, Lynn covers the First Lady a lot. And she can speak to how, on a day-to-day basis, they sort of control this. But for a start, they've never been a freewheeling campaign or White House. So even in its earliest form, access to the family, access to him was already always limited. He's a highly disciplined person. The people around him are very disciplined.

So the impressions you get are very tightly controlled. Yes, it helps them enormously. I would hear from voters all the time through the course of the campaign about how much ... You know, you could talk about Iraq, or you could talk about economic policy or the state of the race, but people would come back frequently to the notion of having a young family in the White House.

One of my other interests is food. And you would be amazed at how many recipes the White House sends out every week, thousands and thousands of them.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Who are they sending them out to?

RICHARD WOLFFE: Regular people want to know what the First Family is eating.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Really?

RICHARD WOLFFE: Yeah, always have. It's an incredible point of interest, the human interest. And it's not irrational. You know? The presidency is a personal humanization, an embodiment of the country. It isn't just head of the executive branch.

So, you know, I understand their fascination. It reaches a whole area of the country that isn't interested in hard news and politics. So it can be useful if they are dealing with policy and politics as a channel. But more often than not, it's kind of cute and human. And, you know, I can see why it works for the White House.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Well, speaking to the woman who asked about the dog at the first White House press conference, Ms. Sweet ...

RICHARD WOLFFE: Dog and beer.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Yes, that's right.

LYNN SWEET: Two for two. But it's interesting. Just so you know what Callie's talking about, at the first transition press conference by the time I had gotten called on, a lot of the very serious questions had been asked. This was the first press conference after Obama was elected in Chicago. And so the situation was such, because the important questions had been asked, and a lot of them (and it was near the end) I asked a question about, "Mr. President-Elect, what living Presidents have you consulted to get ready for the presidency? And everybody wants to know about the dog."

Obama got in trouble on that first question. I said living Presidents because so much has been written about presidents. This building is full of people who write about presidents, that I wanted to be clear that I wasn't talking about an academic answer where, "I've read this book. I read that book," but the living presidents. Obama got in trouble because he took a shot, not meaning, not on purpose, he took a shot at Nancy Reagan when he talked about séances. And then he talked about Bo, the dog. And we learned then that they wanted a hypoallergenic dog. Anyway. So that made some news. And he had to apologize to Nancy Reagan for taking the shot.

And then I asked about Gates. Now here's the thing, if I could just explain. Obama got network time because he told the networks he wanted to talk about healthcare. It was still a regular press conference. The press conference had no rules about what you could ask. So if the Obama team had just called up the networks and said, "We feel like having a primetime press conference. Do you feel like clearing the schedule for us?", they ran the risk of a 'no,' because they lose money when they do this. When he said, "I want to talk about healthcare," it was a potential that he might make an announcement, he had something to say, that this would be news that they could package.

If you just say 'press conference,' one thing. If you say, "Obama wants a press conference and will talk about healthcare," it gives a little more pressure, reason to run to give him the time. So by the time my question got around to being asked, I knew I was the last one. How did I know? Because the President said, "Last question." So I had a notebook full of questions that would have been health-related if I had been called on early. And then I knew I was the last. I was the tenth reporter to be called on. Of the ten, I would be the third one to ask a non-healthcare question. The other two you don't remember; mine you do because you saw in that answer about Professor Gates, where he talked about – stupidly -- the Cambridge police acting stupidly. It was a rare, unscripted moment.

Now, I was sitting there. And I heard the word 'stupidly,' and I wanted to -- I didn't do this because I wanted to look professional -- I felt like jabbing the guy next to me to say, "Did I just hear him right? Did he really say that?" Because it's rare. It's rare that he takes himself off-script. So that question, I asked because I knew that Professor Gates was a national figure. I figured they knew each other. I knew he had lived in Cambridge. Well, he lived in Somerset, but I knew he had ...

CALLIE CROSSLEY: ... Somerville.

LYNN SWEET: Somerville, excuse me. So I knew he knew the area. All were reasons I asked it. Now, I got tons of email on it -- why did I ask? It was supposed to be a healthcare press conference. I said, "Well, no. He was supposed to talk about healthcare. We were supposed to do what we wanted as reporters." But I thought it was a point where reporters can plow new ground, ask questions that had not been asked before. And even though a lot of the nation might not have heard about the dust-up between Professor Gates and the police officer, it was still something making national news and certainly was being talked about on cable. So all that is why I asked it. Now, if you wonder was I even surprised by the answer, I was. Because as I said, it was a very rare, unscripted moment where Obama talked with candor.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: The response, of course, was amazing. I wonder what you think about then the weeks and the weeks and the weeks and the weeks leading up to the beer summit.

LYNN SWEET: Well, the White House had first said that, "He said what he said. And that's it." But remember the press conference was on Wednesday night. By Friday, Obama came to the briefing room and made a statement because the controversy just escalated very fast. And the White House just felt they had to address it.

By the way, the White House had anticipated this question. They told me that. They told any reporter who would ask. They thought it was coming. They just didn't expect the answer that they got.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: So he hadn't rehearsed the answer obviously.

LYNN SWEET: Well, I don't think he rehearsed that answer. No. They expected it. And he just went off the script. Well, I don't mean a written script when I say that, that there was some sense of what you want to say, what you want to convey.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Off-message.

LYNN SWEET: Yes. And I think if he had said to his aides, “Boy, should I say that the Cambridge police acted stupidly? What do you think?” I think somebody would have pointed out that that would not be the way to go.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Well, we’re back today with people like Rush Limbaugh still accusing the press of being really, again, back in the tank with regard to the current issues that are at play, not giving enough attention to rising anger among the population about a number of things, particularly opposition to President Obama’s policies. So, again, we’re considering the source here. But having said that, I mean, I think he’s encapsulated what a number of media critics have said, that the press seems to be not being as tough as they could, even in these tough times.

LYNN SWEET: It’s interesting what Limbaugh does and some other hosts, you know, of the category of cable hosts who are in the vitriolic, opinionated category. They have to be against someone usually. It works for them, or to be dramatically for someone. Limbaugh could rally against the Obama policies. Or he probably understands that it works just as well to rally against the mainstream press. You know? He has a significant pulpit himself. He could just give out the information that he thinks is lacking. He, of course, chooses not to because it’s an effective tool for him to rally his own listeners and to get attention. It’s a very successful organizing device for his own show and his own popularity to cast himself as the one who is giving you the information you need, when in truth, there are many, many people out there discussing all kinds of things. And if you really want to know about something, it really is out there.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Is he an example, though, of people moving to so many different platforms to get information now? I mean, if you remember in 2004 there

wasn't even a YouTube. So we've come to a whole different place about where people get their information, how they assess it.

RICHARD WOLFFE: Yeah, more access to information, less informed people. Isn't that the irony of the Internet?

CALLIE CROSSLEY: More heat, not light. Thank you.

RICHARD WOLFFE: Look, if we're at the point where Rush Limbaugh is our media critic in chief, then we are in real trouble. [applause] Cheap, but true. Some of the toughest criticism of me and my book came from *The Weekly Standard*, who claimed that I was biased. I mean, pot meet kettle. I mean, this is just a nonsensical view where the bias police are some of the most shamelessly partisan people in American journalism.

So let's just take a gut check about, for a start, how smart readers are and listeners and viewers are. Okay? When people watch MSNBC or Fox, they know what to expect. It's not a surprise. It isn't like watching some of the broadcast news. And it's not like reading *The New York Times* when they go on blogs. People are pretty sophisticated, not maybe as sophisticated as they like to think. I think it's fairly hard to strip out all the bias and say, "Well, I can detect what the facts are," in the middle of one of Rush's rants. They are just rants.

But let's not, by some sort of fake degree of respect say, "Well, anything the guy says, because he has an audience, must be okay." You know? I'm not going to make any more comparisons because I'm getting into trouble. But just because someone has an audience, doesn't mean to say they should have credibility as a press critic. I just vigorously dispute that.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: All right. Well, we're going to go to questions so you can be critical.

QUESTION: Good evening. My name is Steven Goode, and I'm a teacher at the John D. O'Bryant School of Math and Science here in Boston. My question is directed to, I guess, both of the panelists. And I was just browsing through your book, so I'll make this a question.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: To Mr. Wolffe then, to Richard?

QUESTION: Yes. But I want a response from both. You mentioned that you understood the commercial interest in the shaky facts with Fox. Then you elaborated a little more on Rush and some of the other news outlets.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Rush is not a news outlet, just for clarification.

QUESTION: No, I know who Rush is. Well, he may disagree with you on that. My question for you is, in their own best interest, the outlets, the individuals and you yourself, both reporters, how do I use that in my classroom to teach my students the critical eye of understanding what really is news? And what should government do and what should media do? You represent media. So do you have a responsibility to the youth to teach them by speaking up to the networks, even your own network (which is certainly a lot better than Fox)?

RICHARD WOLFFE: Well, I'm not going to dispute that. I will say this. One of the things I try to do when I'm on TV is to try and relate my analysis to facts, to actual reporting that I can bring to the table. So there's a huge difference between what we do on some of these shows that you might want to compare. They're not apples with apples.

What you can do with your students is most definitely teach them about their critical faculties, about what is a reliable source of information and what isn't, and by the way, how to try and corroborate sources of information. Just because *The New York Times* gets some things, most things right, doesn't mean to say it gets everything right.

So you've got to come up with multiple sourcing. It's one of the key lessons you learn as a reporter. It's one of the key lessons of art, actually. You're a science teacher. I studied art. Go watch *Citizen Kane*. People can tell stories from different perspectives. They can all be true. They're different perspectives on the same event. If you're going to use the power of the Internet and the modern media (it's all merging together as one mushball) students have to understand that they can use that power to get different angles on the same event. And then they're going to have to make their own judgment. Because there's not going to be a Walter Cronkite telling them, "That's the way it is." There's going to be their own brains telling them, "That's the way it is." And it isn't Wikipedia. To all the kids who are listening, that's no more reliable than anything you read on Rush Limbaugh's transcript. But you've got to use critical faculties. That's got to be the most important thing -- you're teaching science -- or any teacher needs to get across.

LYNN SWEET: Well, you asked a few things in your question. Let me take from the last one, first -- the responsibility of a reporter. I see myself often just as an explainer, as a teacher in a sense. I want to convey, in a very simple way, what is going on in whatever topic I'm writing about, if I'm covering something, covering a speech. And the students need to be taught to be sophisticated news consumers. And I think you can do this by using one news event and analyzing how different outlets cover them by showing them, "Here's a Sunday talk show. Let's look at how the opinion magazines"-- and just explaining to students.

I never was taught this (it probably would have been helpful) that just because something is called a blog or a magazine isn't enough. You have to say, "Is this a blog that has a

point of view? Is this a blog that's paid for and published by a special interest? What is mainstream media, a *Boston Globe*, *Newsweek*, *The Chicago Sun Times*, *Politics Daily*, non-partisan outlets just trying to get information to you? And when analysis is analysis, it's labeled that way.

The other thing is there's so much source documentation out there, that you can have people look at the sources themselves. This whole thing about death panels that carried on way beyond it being written about that it wasn't true, find case studies to do to say, "Students, be your own reporter here. Look at the legislation. Look at what it really says. Is it fair to call what this proposal is?" By the way, letting a doctor give a senior citizen a session and talking about end of life issues if they happen to have them, is that a death panel?

So I would just say there's an abundance of teaching opportunities and all kinds of tools. Is this a government responsibility? I don't particularly think so. I think it's just what civic education should be about.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: And I would encapsulate all of that by saying that what we're talking about here is media literacy, and it's not just for students. It's for all of us. And because media landscape has changed so that there is the "mainstream media" and everything else that's out there, there is difference between news coverage and people who are facile with the facts about current events. People often get that confused. And news is sourced. News, you need to ask the certain critical questions. Where did this come from? Who is the source? Who benefits by advancing this particular viewpoint?

And all of these kinds of questions help you to hone in on the factual details that will help you make a decision about whether this is valuable or information for you. And make no mistake – there are plenty of opinion journalists out there. But they are journalists. And

they're starting with a basic set of facts, as Richard has explained. And that's critically important. They're not talking out from under their armpit. Okay?

QUESTION: Did you all see a documentary called *Media Malpractice: How Obama Got Elected and Palin Got Targeted*? The part I wanted to focus on is the incredible difference in how Clinton was covered versus Obama. One thing that struck me was something that Obama said that wasn't covered which is, "We've been to fifty states, only two to go." Imagine if Palin had said that, what the coverage would have been? And it made me remember the coverage that Dan Quayle got when he spelled potato wrong. So I wondered if you could speak to these issues.

LYNN SWEET: So your question is going back to the primary. Did Clinton get tougher coverage than Obama?

QUESTION: Yes, and the documentary shows it.

LYNN SWEET: Well, I didn't see the documentary, so I can't speak to it. So let's put that aside, if you don't mind. I think Clinton did get tougher coverage in the primary than Obama. And I would have to do some research to give you examples to back it up. But that's my summary thought on the primary, yeah.

RICHARD WOLFFE: I think the gaffes were covered at length for lots of people. Why when John McCain would misspeak, were they not looped around and around the way Sarah Palin's gaffes were? It is a reasonable question. And I think the reason is that people thought that it showed some insight into how ill-prepared she was for those interviews in the first place and her place on the national stage.

So, you know, a gaffe. Well, people, they're speaking so much and so much of it is recorded. Honestly, all of us say things that sound stupid. I'm sure I've said many things

tonight that some blogger could take a clip out of and really embarrass me about. In fact, they probably are doing so as we speak. But, you know, does it reveal something about the character? If someone is highly driven and motivated for partisan reasons or for personal reasons to distort something, sure, they can go ahead and do that. But to be honest, you know, when Obama went bowling in Pennsylvania and he bowled 37, for weeks afterwards his campaign said he didn't really bowl 37 because he only bowled, like, four balls and there were kids bowling with him. Didn't matter. Didn't matter because people wanted to say he was basically effeminate and not really American and he was going to lose.

The media, and more generally, bloggers, commentators, will pick on a narrative that they want to sustain. And in a campaign with the amount of coverage that's out there, the amount of cameras, the amount of words that are written, you can justify pretty much anything. Whether it sticks or not comes down to do people sense that there's a basic truth or convincing narrative underlying it.

I heard people covering the 'fifty state plus two' comment. You know? It was a dumb thing to say. You know what? In New Hampshire, he said -- I want to get this right -- He said, "A time for come has changed." He did.

LYNN SWEET: I didn't see it covered.

RICHARD WOLFFE: It's in my book.

LYNN SWEET: Did you see the documentary?

RICHARD WOLFFE: You know, I did. And I thought it was horrible. Sorry. We disagree.

QUESTION: Good evening. Thank you for being here and thank you because we're all here as well. You spoke about the coverage of racism during the campaign. And I wanted to know what you think of this. I think there are people that voted with the President. They were drawn to him especially because of his lack of self-definition around the issue around race and color, what size house he lived in or where he went to school. And I think this drew millions of people, essentially. I mean, of course, that includes that. But I think this drew millions of people toward him.

And this person voted for the President because she felt a very strong sense of commitment with the political system. And she saw in him a willingness with making sacrifices, extraordinary sacrifices if necessary for the good of the American people. I was upset with what happened in Cambridge, with the Cambridge policeman. And I was glad that he apologized. I am troubled about Afghanistan.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: What's your question?

QUESTION: I'm coming to it. You know, I have concerns about healthcare. But when I do, I go back and I look into when he's speaking, for example, as he did on Dave Letterman last week. He said, "Well, you know, they called FDR a Communist and a socialist, too." I look into his eyes and people say ...

CALLIE CROSSLEY: I'm going to have to ask you to get to the question because people are behind you.

QUESTION: ... when you look into a person's eyes, you look into his soul. And I see that same ...

CALLIE CROSSLEY: What's the question?

QUESTION: I'm asking you what you think of this. I see that same political commitment that enables me to continue believing in his Administration. So I'm asking you, what do you think of that? That's what I'm asking.

LYNN SWEET: I don't have anything to say. I just have nothing to add to it. I'm just not sure what your question is. So let me take a pass. Don't explain. Let Richard have a chance.

RICHARD WOLFFE: Look, you had a personal reaction to him. And you're not unique in that respect. Is this person as President the same person that you felt you had a connection to is a sort of broader question. And, you know, one of his skills is to make people feel like they know him, when I think he also keeps a lot hidden. You know, one of the things that people are waking up to I think is also that he isn't as committed to progressive causes. He's much more of a centrist than people believed. But then they were hearing what they wanted to hear and seeing what they wanted to see. And that's a big political skill that he had, which has carried him a long way.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: I have to say that Gail Collins wrote a column during the campaign. Gail Collins is a columnist for *The New York Times*. And she said, after there was a speech and people were all upset -- "He's not supposed to say that" -- and she said, "Are you people listening? The man has said, he is a centrist, he is a centrist." And today one of the bloggers on The Huffington Post said, "We got what he said he was." So I just point that out. There're two places you can read.

QUESTION: Hi. I'm an Obama supporter. And I think I knew he was a centrist. So that's one of the reasons why I voted for him. I thought he would be a very practical Democrat. But as an Obama supporter, should I be surprised or concerned that he isn't showing more communication skills? I thought he'd be more of an educator-in-chief. I was at an Organizing For America meeting to discuss healthcare reform here in Boston in

July. And almost three hundred people were there. We were galvanized. We wanted to do something. And we really weren't led in a particular direction. So I went to the listening tour meeting last week and there were about fifty of us. And the mood in that room was pretty negative. And these were all Obama supporters. And there were people saying, does Obama support the public option? Why don't I understand what he wants to do? So I'm not disappointed yet. But I am a little concerned.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: The message is confused for you.

QUESTION: Yes.

LYNN SWEET: Let me take a stab at this one. See during the campaign with all these workers, it was a pretty simple job to go knock on a door, have a coffee in your living room. Hope, change. Hope, change. You didn't have to get in the weeds of policy in a lot of ways to go out, knock on doors, you know? There are tons of great stories of people whose lives were changed because they got involved in the campaign and the relationships they met.

Now going and talking about legislation, which ended up being one thousand nine hundred and I think ninety pages, is something that you just don't do without a lot of work on your part before you go knock on a door.

Now what Organizing for America wanted to do is to keep all these people busy. And for the life of me, I know that they were organizing all these meetings in the summer. But it seemed to me more about keeping the organization intact than to advance healthcare policy.

One of the things that you see a lot on the Obama websites is, "Send in your story. We want to hear from you." Do you really think that this deep into the healthcare debate they

did not know? The stories are there. Insurance companies pulled their coverage from people when they need it the most. People with preexisting conditions can't get covered. Now, I could go in this room and we could be here until 4:00 in the morning. I'm sure everybody has a point to make on that story. So you want to do something, but at a point where members of Congress are working on it and there wasn't a simple defined issue within it ... You know, if I had said, "Go organize and say the death panel issue is not true. We want you to knock on doors and send out emails to that," that would have given you something to do.

I think the point is it's hard to tell people who want to be involved. At the moment there are committees writing legislation, and the White House wants to let them do their work. We have some broad outlines. We have meetings. Not all of them are as public as we thought they would be. But, you know, they're there. And in states where the members of Congress are Democrats and they probably, in the end, will vote for the bill, for the moment there's nothing for you to do. But they wanted to keep you busy. Your beef, if you have one, I suppose has more to do with the OFA organization than with the White House. And this isn't an arm of the White House. I mean, they run it. So I would just kind of keep your powder dry.

But I do want to give an example. I thought of one where you talk about Obama and coverage by the press. Remember, in February he had a joint address to the Congress. It was the one where Congressman Wilson stood up and said, "You lie," and that got coverage. Well, during the course of that speech, President Obama talked about putting a human face on stories, about a man from Illinois who had terrible cancer. (I think it was cancer. I forget what his ailment was.) And his health insurance company yanked his coverage and as a result, he died. I went and did a story looking at that issue. First of all, it was like pulling teeth just to get the White House to tell me the name of the man. It shouldn't be that hard. He didn't name him, but I wanted to check the facts. But it was easy enough to figure out who this man was. And then when I looked at the situation,

within fifteen minutes of Googling it was clear the man did not die as a result of losing coverage. But the way the President told the story wasn't the way the facts were. The man's sister testified before Congress, which her testimony was online. And she managed to get the man's coverage back in time. He never missed a treatment. He died four years later.

The Obama White House told me "Well, a newspaper reporter wrote this up and got it wrong," which he did. So they never vetted it. My point is when you talk about media coverage -- I wrote the story -- can you only imagine in another time and place if George Bush went before Congress and one of his stories about somebody the facts didn't pan out the way they were?

RICHARD WOLFFE: ... like yellow cake or anything like that. It happens. It happens to White Houses. You know? They don't vet things and the Presidents say things.

LYNN SWEET: Right. So look at how the yellow cake story got massive attention.

RICHARD WOLFFE: It was the run-up to war.

LYNN SWEET: The gist of what Obama said was true, that this insurance company did try to yank coverage. You shouldn't have to die to make the point, but he went too far. Be that as it may, that didn't get a lot of attention.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Well, that was also the night of Joe Wilson. Let me point that out.

LYNN SWEET: So anyway, just to make your point, I think the people involved in OFA have to take a hard look when they're asked to do stuff and say, "Is this a realistic use of us?" And if not, "Call us when ..." You know, maybe you might decide next time

not to go to a meeting if you really think there's something for you to do and realize that part of it is just to keep the gang together.

QUESTION: I'm from Belgium, Europe. My name is Eddie Nate(?). I followed the Obama campaign extensively and mostly MSNBC. If Fox is on the right, MSNBC is on the left. When you see from time to time Olbermann and Mr. Matthews, they go also off the line, I think so. On the other hand, it's not Limbaugh.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Question?

QUESTION: The question is, Fox wants to destroy Obama. It's a hate campaign. We here are in Library from a President that has been ...

CALLIE CROSSLEY: ... assassinated.

QUESTION: Do you not fear something will happen? Does the press realize that by doing such campaign, such thing as Fox, something ... Will they apologize after and say, "We went to far."

CALLIE CROSSLEY: We got it. Okay, to save time, let's go to all the questions in line at once and then we'll have them answered.

QUESTION: I'll be direct. This was going to be an historic election because of the economy. But far beyond that, we were either going to have the first African-American President or a first female President. And there's a lot of emotion in that. Can the speakers comment on the role of getting caught up in the change of history and how important this election was?

QUESTION: I just wondered what kind of self-doubt or self-confidence you experience as you undergo your reporting.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Okay. Self-doubt, self-confidence in reporting, did you get caught up in the emotion of the historic nature of the campaign and do you not fear that the reporting of hostilities and a hyperbolic hate leads to possible threats against the President.

RICHARD WOLFFE: Well, first of all, the gentleman from Belgium says there are sort of moral equivalents between Fox and MSNBC, but then goes on to suggest that Fox is on a campaign of hate that could lead to the assassination of the President. I think he kind of answers his own point. I think, by the way, the Secret Service has always been phenomenal around Barack Obama. He is protected more than any human being on the planet. So I don't have any fears with those guys around.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: But they say the threats against him were four hundred percent up higher, but continue.

RICHARD WOLFFE: They are tremendous men and women in the Secret Service. So I have full respect. And anyone who wants to cross them does with their peril.

Secondly, question about the history of it. This was a phenomenally exciting campaign for all sorts of reasons. Reporters tend not to be able to see the long sweep of history, but they do understand the thrill, not up their leg, but the thrill of covering a huge story. And all of these characters – Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, John McCain – they were all larger than life characters. We were incredibly fortunate to be covering them.

And the last question was self-doubt. That's a really great question. Reporters are wracked by self-doubt. Our ability to paper over the cracks of self-doubt is testimony to our self-delusion and the powers of alcohol. [applause]

LYNN SWEET: Taking the question is Fox on a campaign to unwittingly aid and abet somebody, I think the protection issues of Obama existed before he ran. I remember he mentioned in December of '06 that one of the issues that Mrs. Obama worried about was his personal safety. So those issues existed then. And once you get to the level of protection he's at, it's multi-layered. Everything Richard said is there. The protection level is maximized, no matter what it is, at maximum alert. So if there's a more heated environment or not, the protection is there whether or not it's needed, god forbid, a hundred times.

One of the reasons I like being a reporter is that it's very cool to look close up for yourself at history being made. There was no bigger historic story for me than watching a state senator from Illinois become the President of The United States in just a few years. So I would say, is it emotion? I feel privileged. Emotion I feel is, wow, I'm pretty blessed to be able to see for myself and report on this story. So that's a reason I'm in the business and have stayed in the business and love doing it.

Self-doubt, oh my god, we don't have enough time to talk about it. I always could see how I could do things better. And I replay stuff in my head. I'm still mad about stories I didn't do when I was a Cook County government reporter back when I was covering, you know, Chicago political figures. So I have a long catalogue of self-doubt.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Well he also asked about self-confidence. Neither one of you went there. So you must really be neurotic. And with that, thanks to Lynn Sweet and to Richard Wolffe. [applause]

Richard Wolffe will be signing books in the bookstore, so you can get his signature on your book. Thank you.

THE END