

TOM PUTNAM: Good evening. I'm Tom Putnam, the director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. And on behalf of John Shattuck, CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation and all of my colleagues, I welcome you on this cold winter night, as many of us continued to be warmed by the recent event in our nation's capital--

[applause]

--and intrigued by what their effect will be on our political landscape. Let me first thank the underwriters of the Kennedy Library Forums, including lead sponsor, Bank of America, along with Boston Capital, the Lowell Institute, the Corcoran Jennison Companies, the Boston Foundation, and our immediate sponsors, *The Boston Globe*, WBUR, and NECN.

When our two guest speakers were last at the Kennedy Library, the question in the air was whether Barack Obama would be the 44th President of The United States. Let's view this clip from an October 20, 2006 forum three months before Senator Obama officially announced his candidacy.

[clip]

[applause]

Bob Herbert made a number of other playful but ultimately unsuccessful attempts to get Barack Obama to officially declare his presidential intentions here at the Kennedy Library that day. But the Senator did not deny his interest, stating, "The reason you go into politics or any form of public service is to have some influence, to create some sort of change. Obviously the President has the most influence, so it would be disingenuous to say that I have not thought about what it would mean to have that platform, that unique office."

A few months later, Gwen Ifill participated in a forum with Charlayne Hunter-Gault when the looming questions were in regard to the Democratic nomination, could Senator Obama shake Hillary Clinton's mantle of inevitability, how would the race and gender clash play out, where would the African-American vote fall on that match-up? Over time, we all witnessed the answer to the ultimate question, "Can an African-American junior Senator from Illinois be elected President of The United States?" Yes, he can.

[applause]

But as Gwen Ifill writes in her new book, *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama*, "Barack Obama's relentless and disciplined giant-slaying campaign is by no means the only story. This book will tell the rest." Gwen Ifill is a graduate of Simmons College and began her distinguished career as a journalist with *The Boston Herald American* as a food writer. Though for those of you still using her recipes, she joked with David Letterman the other night that most of the cooking tips she offered in those days were made up from thin air.

While at *The Herald American*, she also covered the school busing crisis in Boston, and over the course of a 30-year career has worked at *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, NBC News, and serves now as a senior correspondent for *The News Hour* and as moderator and managing editor of *Washington Week*, perhaps the most reflective half hour of news analysis airing on television. [applause]

I would be remiss not to note that two of the politicians profiled in Ms. Ifill's new book, Newark mayor Cory Booker and Louisiana speaker of the house, Karen Carter Peterson, are also recipients of the Kennedy Library's New Frontier Award given annually to honor exceptional young Americans under the age of 40 whose contributions in elective office are changing their communities and their country with their commitment to public service.

In her book, which is on sale in our bookstore, Ms. Ifill analyzes a variety of issues related to these and other successful African-American politicians, including Massachusetts Governor, Deval Patrick, who, as direct beneficiaries of the Civil Rights movement are forging a bold new political path.

There are some parallels of course with the generational politics of John F. Kennedy who often ignored the admonitions of party elders to “wait his turn.” I was reminded of the legendary 1956 fight for control of the state Democratic committee when young Kennedy loyalists wrested power from the political machine of William ‘Onions’ Burke, the rotund onion farmer from Hatfield and legendary chairman of the Massachusetts Democratic Party.

Ms. Ifill describes a similar changing of the guard moment during a meeting of Civil Rights leaders in which veteran activist, Julian Bond, coached his younger colleagues this way: “If you perceive that I have a torch that represents power and you want it, you shouldn’t be asking for it, you should snatch it.” Perhaps the natural political cycle of young replacing old- that is the heart of many of the issues so thoroughly analyzed in *The Breakthrough* can be summed up by modifying the famous Kennedy line, “Let the word go forth from this time and place to friend and foe alike that the torch has been *snatched* by a new generation.”

Our moderator this evening is one of our nation’s leading commentators, Bob Herbert, an award-winning *New York Times* columnist whose columns examine our national politics and issues facing the disenfranchised. Where else but in his columns would you learn that nearly half of full-time private sector workers in The United States get no paid sick days? Who else would state so clearly that attempts in the 1990s to “change welfare as we know it,” resulted simply in taking money away from needy kids?

Mr. Herbert has been a frequent participant in Kennedy Library forums, discussing his book, *Promises Betrayed: Waking up from the American Dream*, and providing a soldier's view of war during the 2006 Presidential Library Conference on Vietnam and the presidency. He'll return to the stage on Sunday, February 8th to discuss poverty issues and social justice challenges facing the new Administration with Marian Wright Edelman and Dolores Huerta. I hope many of you will join us.

The day after Barack Obama was elected, Henry Louis Gates wrote that the election, "...did not wipe the bloody slate clean. His victory is not redemption for all past suffering. Rather it is the symbolic culmination of the black freedom struggle, the grand achievement of a great collective dream." To discuss the full ramifications of that achievement, and how and whether other emerging African-American candidates will experience their own political breakthroughs, please join me in welcoming to the Kennedy Library, Bob Herbert and Gwen Ifill.

[applause]

GWEN IFILL: Hi, Bob.

BOB HERBERT: You did it.

GWEN IFILL: I did.

BOB HERBERT: Congratulations. You guys will be fascinated when you read this book. We were talking a few minutes ago about how the idea for this book came about, you know, how it arose. I was going to ask you, you know, how did you think of it. But you told me a little bit. So why don't you tell the audience how this stuff got started.

GWEN IFILL: I've been approached to write books for awhile. And I always say, "I don't really care about that subject." And I had been given some very good advice that if you were going to write a book, it had to be something that would live in your head that you didn't mind dreaming about at night. And lord knows, that was true.

I will tell you that I had dreams, in the writing of this book, of one or the other of these candidates standing at the foot of my bed lecturing me that I should be up writing at the time instead of sleeping. But what happened was, I thought I would write a book that was-- turned out to be kind of a collective accumulation of a lot of my experiences covering politics, which, one way or the other, at different stages in my career, have intersected with race. Not because I set out to cover race and politics, but because one way or the other, every job I've ever held, somehow I've ended up being at a place to witness, what I call 'sandpaper politics', the friction of change, people, power shifting hands.

When I was a student here at Simmons, was the mid-'70s. Busing crisis was in full cry. And I was covering the Boston School committee, Pixie Palladino, the whole crowd. And I didn't know then, but I was also witnessing the kind of friction that happens when power shifts hands. In this case, Boston had been through it before, the Irish and the Brahmins. But in this case, power was shifting hands between Roxbury and South Boston, poor people basically fighting each other for a piece of the same pie while rich people watched them fight.

And watching that was interesting. And I filed it away. I moved to Baltimore where I saw-- I was there when the first black man became mayor and then the first-- He got the appointment. And then the first elected black mayor followed. And the city was at a tipping point, 50% black/50% white. And something was shifting there.

I moved to suburban Washington, I saw it happen again. I started covering Jesse Jackson's campaign in 1988, saw it happening again. And I began to see there was a theme. Even I could see there was a theme here. And what was interesting to me about Barack Obama was that he was the leading edge of this story that was forming in my mind, that it wasn't just him (because lord knows, I didn't think he'd be President, not this time, not now). But at the time when I was approached to write a book about Barack Obama, I said, "I think there's a better and more interesting story out there."

And the story is about a whole generation of folks who are doing what he's talking about doing. They are really well educated. They're taking up the reins that their parents left for them. Their parents did this, a different kind of breakthrough. They campaigned on behalf of Civil Rights laws and public accommodations laws. They got the legal underpinning in place. And then their children came along and were able to pick up those reins and take advantage of it.

And they went to Oxford and they went to Harvard. And some of them went off to make money, then went into politics. A lot of them decided not to go to Wall Street, and instead to choose politics. So they were worth looking at. And it didn't take long before I began to identify four people, five people I decided who I could just tell their stories — Cory Booker, the brilliant mayor of Newark, New Jersey; Artur Davis, incredibly smart, ambitious politically astute Congressman from Alabama, who, in his lifetime (he's 40 years-old) thinks he can get George Wallace's old seat in Montgomery. May happen. I've learned not to say never. But it's remarkable watching how he processes this. Barack Obama, of course, and Deval Patrick, the Governor of Massachusetts.

And the one thing these men all had in common is that they were audacious about their ambition, in a good way, and that they didn't just say, "I want it," they said, "This is how I can do it. And I can do it by speaking differently and by speaking beyond race, not rejecting my race," not making it a race-based grievance campaign the way so many of

their forbearers did, but making it something different. That struck me as so much more interesting that just writing about Barack Obama. A lot of people were going to be writing about Barack Obama. Now, he ended up being a handy peg on which to hang this story on, but not as good as I thought-- but better than I thought he would be.

BOB HERBERT: Now, the great John Lewis, he's quoted in your book as saying, "Something is happening here." And it's obvious that it's a big deal that Barack Obama has been elected President. But how profound a change? We know that these are ambitious political figures and that sort of thing. But how profound a change are we really witnessing in terms of the shift of power in a broad sense to black elected officials?

GWEN IFILL: I don't know yet. I do think that there's something different happening here. I would never disagree with John Lewis on almost anything. But I really wouldn't disagree with him on this. I think there's a shift. I think this feels different. I talked to Al Sharpton for this book. And his argument was, this is nothing new. We saw this happen with black mayors, when Carl Stokes was elected in Cleveland. There was a whole generation of black mayors who didn't do that much for black people in the end. So this isn't all that new.

I think he's wrong about that. Because I think that there is a broader sense of what these new black politicians are trying to accomplish. They're not just trying to speak for their base. They're trying to speak, in fact, beyond their base. In fact, they're counting on the base to be there while they go off and court other people, and then they'll come back.

When they talk about helping black people who don't have healthcare, they say, "How do we fix healthcare," and black people will benefit disproportionately. Their argument is outside/in instead of inside/out. So what's interesting and significant about their ascension is that they found a different way to talk about the same issues. And almost all

of them still care and want to talk about those issues. They just discovered, they think, a more effective way of doing it.

BOB HERBERT: Now, you mentioned ‘sandpaper politics’ already. And that’s a thread that runs through the book. Talk a little bit more about what sandpaper politics means, and how you’ve seen it manifested in the course of researching your book.

GWEN IFILL: I’m smiling because sandpaper politics is as often intra-racial as interracial. That is to say, power concedes nothing without a demand. And so therefore, just because this young new bright cohort popped up and said, “We want these jobs,” didn’t mean that folk who had it before said, “Okay. Here.” And so as a result-- You know, when Barack Obama first ran for office, for President, even when he first ran for Congress, people looked at him and said, “Who are you? We don’t know you. You’ve got a funny name, and you didn’t do all the stuff you were supposed to do to get here. Just go stand in that corner.”

Andrew Young, the, you know, icon from Atlanta, the U.N. ambassador, former mayor and lieutenant to Martin Luther King was, you know, sitting in front of a group in Atlanta one night and said, “Well, you know, I think Barack Obama should be President.” They all broke out into wild applause. And he said, “In 2016. He’s not ready yet.” And he went on with what was a really kind of loopy explanation about why he wasn’t ready. You know? “He’s a good man, ’cause, you know, his family’s Chinese.” What?

But what was interesting was how uninformed it was, because he didn’t know him. I had other black elected officials say to me, “I don’t know him.” And that was code for, “I don’t feel comfortable. I’m not going to give up anything to someone who I didn’t give my blessing to.” It happens, every single elected official I talked to in the course of reporting this book has mentioned that, that someone said to them, “Wait over in the corner. We’ll get to you.”

And in fact, both Artur Davis and Cory Booker had to go up against entrenched black officials in order to win office, more than once, because they were going up against what had become an entrenched black establishment, political establishment. And no one was willing to step aside yet, as someone described it to me, as leaders who wanted to carry the gavel to the grave. They didn't want to do this.

Vernon Jordan said, you know, he was the only black leader he knew who stepped aside before someone forced him off the stage, when he stepped aside from the Urban League. So this was a big struggle. We're used to race struggles in this country being black versus white, or black versus Latino, or something involving people taking things from one another. Indeed, this was a fight within the black community about who should have the power, and a generational shift that was more significant than a racial one.

BOB HERBERT: When you think about it, it's, I guess, surprising to us because it's new. But it's very logical, isn't it?

GWEN IFILL: It is.

BOB HERBERT: I mean, as you point out, power concedes nothing. So when Jack Kennedy ran, you know, like, "Who is this guy," you know?

GWEN IFILL: It's true. But it never had happened in the black community because we're so new to it.

BOB HERBERT: We didn't have the old-timers yet. In fact, I'm not sure how it happened that this first wave of black mayors and other elected officials got old enough to be the old guard to be shoved off the stage. I'm not all that happy for personal reasons about what's going on here. But that's for a different--

GWEN IFILL: That's a different conversation.

BOB HERBERT: That's for a different discussion. This is not in your book, but I'd really love to get your insight here. Obama himself, how-- What do you take away from the Barack Obama phenomenon? I went out-- The first time I met him was in 2004. He's running for the Senate. A woman, who I really trust her judgment said, "Bob, you should go out to Chicago, because there's this guy. There's this black guy running for Senate. And he's going to win," which I thought was a little strange right there. I didn't think-- blah, blah, blah.

GWEN IFILL: We are so brilliant.

BOB HERBERT: Oh, all over it. "And his name is Barack Obama." And I said, you know, "If it wasn't you on the phone, I would hang this phone up now, because it just sounds ridiculous." And she said-- She was from Chicago. She said, "I know him. He's extraordinary. Go out there and you won't regret it." And obviously she was right. So I wrote this column that was kind of prescient, even though I had no idea about the presidency then.

But that is an insane amount of time to go from having the Democratic nomination for Senate in Illinois to being President of The United States. We know that he is young, gifted, smart, handsome. I'm going to get upset here in a minute. He--

GWEN IFILL: --has a gorgeous wife, beautiful children.

BOB HERBERT: He's a fantastic speaker, charismatic, all of that. All right. We understand that. It's almost understandable. It's not quite understandable. But really, how do you explain the phenomenon? How is it that he turned on the entire country, that we

had that extraordinary scene on the night that he won the nomination, followed by the extraordinary scene on the day of the Inauguration this week? He's turned the entire country and much of the planet on. What is it that you see going on? It's more than just a charismatic political figure.

GWEN IFILL: You know, as with this book, timing is everything. I think Barack Obama came along at a moment in history. I mean, we would have never thought he should run for President this year necessarily. But he came along at a moment when people were exasperated. And they wanted to hear something different. And he had found a way to say it. He had found a way to-- You know, people look back on the Reagan years, whether you supported him or not. And the one thing that remains true is that he was hopeful. And he tapped into this instinctive hopefulness that Americans have about themselves and about their country.

Barack Obama, I think, discovered that he had to do a couple things in order to win over people who thought his name was funny and his ears were big, all of which were true. One of them is, he had to make himself as non-alien as possible, which is some trick when your ears are funny and your name is... (inaudible). Whatever. He had to find a way to say, "I'm more like you than not like you." He had to find a way to turn his immigrant experience into something everybody could tap into.

I can't tell you how he did that, because there are so many barriers to what would make him accessible. He had to find a way to win over people who wouldn't necessarily support him and not alienate his base, which is used to being catered to first. It was quite a trick that he pulled off. So it couldn't be just his natural brilliance that made it happen. There had to be something at work in the country that was amenable. Part of it was a failed presidency and a debilitating war, and, in the end, a catastrophic economy.

But it wasn't just that. People were ready for change in all kinds of levels. And that word, 'change' of course is overstated and overdone. But there's a reason why Hillary Clinton came so close to getting the nomination as well.

Now, it's possible that because she was identified with a previous Administration, that worked against her in an era where people just wanted to start fresh. But also, we are drawn as a nation to the idea of youth and energy and hope. And he was able, in one person, not only to embody all of that, but also to do it in a way that distracted you from the fact that, "Oh, he's a black guy. Who is he? I don't know anything about him." He managed somehow to make himself accessible to people.

I think there are a whole lot of people trying to figure out how to bottle that.

BOB HERBERT: They're not going to be able to.

GWEN IFILL: Well, they're not going to be able to because, in the end, the way he pulled it off was, he had all that going for him, but he also had a real hard-edged idea of the politics of this. How do you do it? Where do you go to win a primary? What are the hurdles that you have to pass in order to be considered credible? You have to raise money. You have to create a base that didn't exist before. You have to win in Iowa. You have to prove to black voters that white voters will vote for you. Because as quietly as it's kept, black folk were not onboard until white folk got onboard. They were waiting to see, "Really? Okay, fine. If you say so, then okay."

And then South Carolina, it was all over as far as the black vote went. But there was a lot of skepticism up until that moment. So you combine all of that and I don't know how you bottle it. But that's what he was doing.

BOB HERBERT: And then there was one other factor which we'll get to a little later. But that's the generational aspect. Younger Americans really do see the race issue--

GWEN IFILL: Completely do.

BOB HERBERT: --much different. Can you just talk about that a little bit?

GWEN IFILL: Sure. I mean, I have young people in my life who look at me and say, "Why is everybody so worked up about this?" And I say, "Well, look, it's-- Oh my god, it's history." And they look at you and say-- And then you look-- You go where they go and see how they socialize and see where they go to school, and see the access they have that, nobody marched for them in their lifetimes. You know?

The difference to me at the age of 53, whose father was involved in Civil Rights and marched, and it was always clear to me the connection between what was happening in Washington and what was happening in my house, there is just-- A year later, I mean, a generation later, when we all have access to these things, it's a little harder to explain to them why it matters and why it's different.

Deval Patrick talks about this a lot, about the one generation leap that he made from the south side of Chicago to a situation where his daughter has traveled the world. And he is amazed by it still, even though he's in the middle of it. We're all kind of amazed by it. But that's hopeful. I mean, it means that we get into lots of discussions about, "Why are we talking about race?" I'm sure you get into these discussions, too. But it's because race still matters, but it doesn't matter in the same way.

BOB HERBERT: Your book is called *The Breakthrough*. But you wrote that you were never able to settle on a single generic definition of what constitutes a breakthrough leader. Try and come as close as you can for us.

GWEN IFILL: Well, I started out with a preconception, which is always a bad idea. My preconception was, they all went to Ivy League schools. They're all about 40-odd years-old. I mean, I basically took the Barack Obama cartoon and tried to see how many people I could fit into that.

But then as I began to talk beyond these four people, I found the Mayor Shirley Franklin of Atlanta who is 60 years-old, but in her way, was a breakthrough. I found an attorney general in Georgia who is not real popular among a lot of black politicians in Georgia, but he's the only statewide elected black attorney general in the country. And he's a tough law-and-order kind of guy. But he was a breakthrough. I mean, he went to University of North Carolina on a fencing scholarship — fencing. What? [laughter]

I mean, you start, you realize one of the things you've always known, which is we're not monolithic. And so my effort to put everybody into a box, a monolithic box about what a breakthrough black politician was kept exploding in my face. I kept meeting people who didn't fit the box, but it didn't mean they were any less historic as a cumulative effect. And so I had to just step back and say, "You know what? Maybe I'm doing a disservice to try to define it generically."

BOB HERBERT: I once mentioned to Ed Koch that I had been skiing.

GWEN IFILL: How did that go?

BOB HERBERT: And he said, you know, "I didn't know black people skied."

GWEN IFILL: He said it out loud. Wow.

BOB HERBERT: I mean, he didn't even think it was odd that he was saying that. What if I told him I had been fencing? [laughter]

GWEN IFILL: He would have said, "A black man with a sword. Ah."

BOB HERBERT: And now I understand what happens when you're on the wrong side of the generational divide, because if a young black fellow said to me that he had been fencing, I probably would have said, just like Ed Koch, "I didn't know that black people fence."

GWEN IFILL: Exactly.

BOB HERBERT: So we need to move on.

GWEN IFILL: By and large, they don't.

BOB HERBERT: Many of these breakthrough leaders, not all of them, but many of them, a crucial aspect of their careers is that they have to reach out for white votes. And they need, you know, a fair amount. They cannot get elected with just carrying the white vote. Cory Booker can in Newark, but a lot of these--

GWEN IFILL: But he got a big Latino vote, a big Portuguese vote. I mean, yeah.

BOB HERBERT: But your book seems to tell us that there still is a pretty profound difference in the way the country and politics is perceived by blacks and by whites. And, you know, Barack Obama did not win the white vote in this country. He got 43% of the white vote. I thought it was interesting that he did not even win among college educated whites, although he got more of the white vote than either John Kerry or Al Gore did.

So in this breakthrough era, which I think we are in (I don't think there's any question about that) what are we to make of the idea that even though you can have an African-American President and win handily, big victory, we still have these very different perspectives based on race?

GWEN IFILL: We're always going to have different perspectives. But the country is changing. It's not just about black and white. And in fact, a lot of the white voters who resisted Barack Obama, for reasons other than the sheer, they just disagreed with him on politics or resisted him because of race, they are about to be outnumbered in a big way.

Revise(?) ...(inaudible) my remarks about linking all these politicians. Because if there's one thing that's true, it's that they all got elected because of coalition politics. They built coalitions that allowed them to not have to rely on any one group. So I actually, I look at the glass as half full when I look at the 43% that he got. Because it's shocking that he got more than John Kerry. How did he get more white people to vote for him than John Kerry? What was going--

BOB HERBERT: He won North Carolina.

GWEN IFILL: What was that? I mean, how did that happen? I don't know. I do not know. White people in the room, can you help me? My point being that he relied on white votes, but he also relied on people who were reaching across all kinds of other lines. And it then in the future it turns out that that will end up being as or more important than the black/white paradigm we've all gotten used to.

Cory Booker is a good example because in Newark, Newark is not majority black, as quietly as it's kept. It also has--

BOB HERBERT: I actually thought Newark was majority black.

GWEN IFILL: It used to be.

BOB HERBERT: You're probably right.

GWEN IFILL: Yeah, used to be.

BOB HERBERT: I was covering Newark when those Civil Rights activists were still in power--

GWEN IFILL: And I think it was. But first of all, a lot of people fled the city, black and white. But that's one of the interesting things about it. Let's set that aside for a moment.

[simultaneous conversation]

He still had to win by-- That's only way to do it. And the only way you can govern successfully, which is probably the next part for all of these candidates-- Because getting elected is one thing; governing, as Barack Obama is about to discover, is whole 'nother (sic) thing, and as Deval Patrick discovered, was a whole 'nother thing, really complicated, and a whole lot more mountains to climb ahead than behind.

BOB HERBERT: Right. Now one of the weird things- and this is made clear in your book- you have these African-American candidates and they have to present themselves one way before white voters and another way before black voters. And demands are made on them, either implicitly or explicitly by each group. You can't be too black in front of the white electorate. And then you turn around--

GWEN IFILL: And if you want to know what that means, we can demonstrate--

BOB HERBERT: Yeah, that's one of the questions. I got a star beside it. But then you can't be too black in front of white audiences. And then you come before African-American voters, and, in some sense, you have to define yourself as black enough. That's a little crazy-making, isn't it?

GWEN IFILL: It's crazy-making. And it's something that every single person I talked to for this book can tell you stories about. Lisa Borders, who's the city council president, Atlanta, says, "Wait a second." This is in a debate: "I did what they told me to do. I got the education. I learned how to speak clearly. I got the advanced degrees. I raised my child. My child is a great producing member of society. I did all these things right. And now you're not going to tell me I'm not black enough? What is that about?"

Mayor of Philadelphia said the same thing. People called him elitist. And he said, "I grew up in West Philadelphia. What's elitist about that? My father was a plumber's assistant. What's that mean?" And then of course Obama, that question was raised about him. I decided, at some point, I needed to get to the bottom of it. And finally someone explained it to me. Actually it was Kendrick Meek explained it to me, the congressman from Florida. Which is that, in the end, all people are wanting to know, when they ask you this question is, "Are you down? Are you with me? Are you like me? Are you going to speak for me? Or are you going to betray me? Are you going to sell me out?"

That's the code. That's what's happening in barber shops when people ask, "Is he really black?" They're not saying, "Is he black?" They're saying, "Is he really going to be true to his people?" And once they settled among themselves-- Now people don't give him a lot of credit, but Barack Obama spent a lot of time on black radio. Only black people know this because who else listens to black radio? But he spent a lot of time calming the waters on that level, trying to get people to get-- you know, tell little funny stories that, you know, only we get, you know?

And it worked. It worked. He calmed that down. But everybody who's ever decided to do this racial coalition building politics, crossing these lines, has had to figure a way how to speak.

Now the danger of course is you can't be seen hanging out at Sylvia's too often with Al Sharpton. You know what I'm saying? Because then he becomes a little too black. And one of the interesting things that went un-remarked upon in this campaign is the maturity with which someone-- political maturity that someone like Al Sharpton demonstrated. He knew that he would be a drag. Kwame Kilpatrick, who is now in jail in Detroit, knew that if he appeared at an event before he went to jail with Barack Obama, this would not be good for Barack Obama. There were certain people who understood that they could taint the candidate.

And instead of getting up and complaining and leading a march, they stepped back and said, "Okay, let's get elected and then we'll talk." Now we don't know what happens next. But it was an interesting change in the way that people decided to relate to one another. And it was something that Barack Obama was very fortunate, because there were fights he didn't end up having to have in public because were willing to step back.

BOB HERBERT: I agree. And certainly people like Al Sharpton and many others stepped back. But it wasn't just them.

GWEN IFILL: There was a very funny skit on *Saturday Night Live* at some point which showed Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton trying to get into Barack Obama rallies. You see this? It was one of those cartoons, those animated sketches. And every time Sharpton showed up, he had a dog collar that would shock him. And every time Jesse Jackson showed up, they would send him to be ambassador to Zobotu. [laughter] It was very sneaky and dead-on.

BOB HERBERT: Sharpton did behave himself.

GWEN IFILL: He did.

BOB HERBERT: Jesse had a little more trouble than Al did. But what I thought was incredibly interesting (and I talked to people about this during the campaign) black people in general low-keyed it throughout the campaign. I can't remember such an extended period of time when you didn't hear racial issues out there [simultaneous conversation]--

GWEN IFILL: Which is good and bad.

BOB HERBERT: Right, one of the things I want to ask you about. There was an understanding in the black community that it would be harmful to Obama's candidacy to have a lot of [simultaneous conversation]--

GWEN IFILL: --dirty laundry, yeah.

BOB HERBERT: --foolishness going on. And so it was kept cool. But the suggestion that people have to consciously think about that, the idea that black candidates have to present themselves differently depending on the makeup of the audience, and that sort of thing suggests that the interests of these two communities in a broad way, even there are a lot of interests that overlap obviously, are not identical, that there are issues peculiar to the black community that need to be addressed by elected officials, whether the officials are black or white.

Did these candidates talk to you about that? And do you have views of your own about that?

GWEN IFILL: It's complicated obviously. I do think that there are-- It depends on who you represent. The candidates who come from majority black districts don't have a big dilemma about this. They can cast things in racial terms and say, "This is good for black people," and no one's going to argue because that's who's voting for them. That's who their constituency is. That's who you're hired to speak for.

It's a little more complicated when you're speaking for a whole lot of people who don't necessarily see the world the same. You have to find a way to bridge those gaps. The mayor of Columbus, Ohio told me, the inner city of Columbus is devastated. He's trying to ...(inaudible) a way to build it up. But the way to build it up is to work from the outside, in, and speak to the tax-paying people, the broader outliers, inside the city, but still the more prosperous outer ring of the city.

And that if you get them onboard, they're going to provide support for projects which benefit the inner city. To him, he's still working on behalf of black people. But he's doing it by working outside/in instead of inside/out. It's probably a mature way of doing it. That's where the resources are. And he needs the resources. He can't just say-- No longer can candidates who are trying to run in a coalition building way say, "Give it to us because we deserve it," or "Give it to us because we're right," or even, "Give it to us." It's got to be, "How do we earn this?"

And that's fundamentally different from the way politicians, black politicians have been able to function. They haven't had the luxury. They had the luxury before of just speaking to black audiences about black issues. Now they have to find a way to redefine what those issues are and who they benefit.

BOB HERBERT: It'll be interesting to see how this plays out, because you're right about the demographic changes that are afoot. I think you're also absolutely right about the idea that black politicians have to build coalitions in order to win elective office. On

the other hand, I think that because of the economic situation that we find ourselves in, you're going to find a crunch. So you have candidates who don't even mention poverty.

GWEN IFILL: You probably know this better than anybody, Bob. Because I remember, at least on one occasion, having an Obama person call me up, desperately trying to get his phone number, because they were so concerned that he'd written what they saw as a critical column, which is basically, "Please talk about poor people, too." And they thought Bob just didn't understand. And this happened repeatedly with certain black commentators, most famously, Tavis Smiley, who would go on radio and say, "Hey, we still have to ask these questions. We still have to hold his feet to the fire."

And the listeners on his radio show rose up against him and said, "How dare you question him. Don't you know we have a chance here? Shut up." And he was shocked, surprised, amazed. But that is what-- the kind of pushback you got in a year like this when you're on the cusp of history. And [simultaneous conversation] people were willing just to let it go--

BOB HERBERT: And Tavis was an amazingly popular--

GWEN IFILL: He was.

BOB HERBERT: --guy.

GWEN IFILL: Oh, they turned on him.

BOB HERBERT: He got clobbered. But nevertheless, the issue is still going to be here. And I thought this was really interesting. I think Barack was telling you this. He said, he doesn't think it's possible to transcend race in this country. I want to get to this whole idea of transcending race and post-racial politics. But anyway.

Barack himself says, he doesn't think it's possible to transcend race in this country. And this is a quote: "Race is a factor in this society. The legacy of Jim Crow and slavery has not gone away. It is not an accident that African-Americans experience high crime rates, are poor, and have less wealth. It is a direct result of our racial history. We have never fully come to grips with that history."

And my question is that when people start talking about post-racial politics, they want to get past that history. And how do you come to grips with that history at the same time that you're getting past it?

GWEN IFILL: I made the mistake of using that term early on in my book research in a conversation with Joseph Lowery. When I attached my head back to my shoulders, I promised never to use it again. But it was an interesting point, because what we ended up having was this complicated conversation about post-racial and post-Civil Rights.

And the reason why I don't think there's any such thing as a post-racial world is because, why should there be? I mean, if people look at me and say they're color blind, I assume they're blind, because my color is fairly obvious. What they think they mean is, I don't hold your color against you. Well, why would you? Why isn't color a positive? Why isn't talking about racial issues a-- why can't that be considered a positive? Why can't you have a discussion that's positive about race in this country without people immediately getting their back up?

I get mail. Bob gets mail every day saying, "Why do you keep calling him a black President?" Well, I don't actually. But they want to ask all the time, "Why do you bring up race? Why can't we just forget he's black?" Someone said that to me today in a Web chat. And I said to them, "Why would we? What is it about him being black that troubles you?"

And that's what I think we have to figure a way to get past, where we can accept that we've made this history, where we can understand that there are things he brings and things he doesn't bring because of that history. But it doesn't necessarily have to be a conflict. We don't have to be fighting about it all the time. The fights don't go away. The problems, as he outlined there, don't go away. But by saying that, "Oh, well, we have a black President now; we're all past that," that's a little naïve.

BOB HERBERT: And if we look at the politicians profiled in your book-- And they really, I think, represent what we're getting in terms of black political leaders in this country right now. So I don't think that there's another group that we're unaware of who have influence. If they don't speak aggressively to the issues of African-Americans generally (and there, I would mean, working poor and poor people) and then poor people in general, if they don't speak to those issues, and if they don't address them, then who will? Who represents poor and black people in this country?

GWEN IFILL: I think you've absolutely nailed a question which has completely been unaddressed. When I decided to write the Barack Obama chapter, I had to figure a way to write about him in a way that wasn't what everybody else had written. And I decided to look at how he had treated race in the campaign, and how he had managed to erase race as a factor in his election.

And one of the things he did was what all politicians do, was he talked about the middle class relentlessly, all the time. Or he railed against the rich, but he never ever talked about the poor. Nobody talked about the poor. That's the point Jesse Jackson, by the way, was making when he made his obscene comments about wanting to cut off private body parts. He was angry because he felt that a lost opportunity was being had by this breakthrough black candidate to speak to people, for people who weren't being spoken to, and that you can't just get to them in this trickle down fashion that so many of these breakthrough

politicians have adopted, that, “If I help these people, it’ll help these people.” It doesn’t always work that way. And that if there is a lost opportunity in this breakthrough generation, it is that there are very few people speaking exclusively, specifically to poor people, poor people in general (take the color issue out of it), disadvantaged people.

They represented advantage. And it’s easy for us to embrace the notion that, “Look at that. Look how great America is,” and forget there are a whole-- I thought this on the way to the Inauguration the other morning. I was on my way to the Mall and I looked out the window at a guy who was walking up Florida Avenue in the district, which is kind of a tough neighborhood. And he didn’t look like he was moved at all by this Inauguration. All these people were walked past him, heading to the Mall like this. And he was walking the other way, going, “I just got to get to my job.”

And it’s important to remember those people are out there, too, and they haven’t bought into the idea that it’s a brand-new day because they have a black President.

BOB HERBERT: What surprised you in your research for this book?

GWEN IFILL: One of the things I set out to figure out when I picked the four people to focus on is that there were no women.

BOB HERBERT: God, you’re anticipating my questions. Go ahead.

GWEN IFILL: Well, you know, I had the hardest time. I kept talking to all these women I knew and saying, “Well, where are the women candidates?” And they’d say, “Oh, there’s lots of women.” “Are there any women of color?” “Well...” And then all the women in the Congressional Black Caucus I realized were 60 years-old or so. There’s not this young, rising start group of young black women. And I looked hard.

So I started asking, what am I missing? And I realized what I was missing is the same thing that's missing for women in general, which is that, women who decide to pursue politics as a career do it after they raise their families. Shirley Franklin was 60 years old when she became mayor of Atlanta. Nancy Pelosi raised her family before she became Speaker of the House. Hillary Clinton, Chelsea was out of the house by the time she decided to pursue-- Well, there are other issues there, but before she decided to pursue her big political career.

So it's no different for women of color. In fact, it's probably more of a challenge for women of color than it is for women of any kind, which is, the truth is, we're still the ones raising our families. And we're the ones making choices. And as a result, we're less likely to be in that top tier yet.

BOB HERBERT: Did you have fun doing this book?

GWEN IFILL: I did. I had fun doing this book because I was constantly surprised all the time. I would have these delightful conversations with people like Cory Booker's parents, who come in once a month to help him out in Newark. And walked down the street and discovered that people in Newark were surprised to discover both his parents were black. They thought he was biracial just for no reason.

And the day I ran into them, they were coming back from a visit to a nursing home where they were handing out condoms. I didn't want to know why.

BOB HERBERT: That's in the book. And we did want to know why.

GWEN IFILL: I know you did. No, they told me why, but I don't think-- I thought it was getting off the point. Turns out, this is an issue. Anyway, they-- But no, along the way, you meet people you didn't expect to meet. And you're delighted to meet them.

Today, I saw the President appoint as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, a young man I interviewed for the book who is a lawyer in San Francisco. His wife is the head of the Bay Area ACLU. His sister-in-law is the district attorney in San Francisco. They're this amazing, accomplished family. And then today, I saw he became Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. I'm glad to know him. He's smart, interesting guy who knocked on doors in Iowa, and tried to convince old black people to come out to vote because he convinced them that Barack Obama could win. Basically stories like this, which made you think, "Oh, I didn't know you and I'm glad to know you." Because it tells you all kinds of possibilities. And it also provided me a frame through which to view this election. This election was so interesting in so many ways. But what I do every day is to put on my blinders and put my nose to the grindstone and try to find a way to tell today's story. And it doesn't give you the opportunity often enough to step back and say, "What is the full meaning? What is the arc?"

And the book gave me a frame to say, "This is about more than him. This is about more than us right now." It's about a whole movement, a whole shift that's underway. And it allows me to explain things, like, why are we talking about ...(inaudible)? How do we speak to-- Among ourselves? How do we speak across lines? It was really helpful for me, just as a reporter and as a human being, to understand a broader-- to have a broader understanding of why this happened.

BOB HERBERT: When you were, let's say in the early days of your career--

GWEN IFILL: You mean last year? [laughter] Yeah, right. Go ahead.

BOB HERBERT: You'll define--

GWEN IFILL: I already said my age, so I'm busted.

BOB HERBERT: When did I think the 53 year-olds would be youngsters? In the early days of your career, you were telling us that you would come upon these stories, as we all did, that were these racially charged stories. After awhile, you know, you'd wonder if anybody could make any progress anywhere. I remember when it was a big deal to have an African-American mayor of a city. And it was, like, convulsions when David Dinkins became mayor of New York. It's, like, oh my god.

You weren't thinking about a black person getting elected President. But what did you think about in terms of political leadership in this country, and the direction we were going in? And how hopeful or optimistic were you?

GWEN IFILL: Well, you know, my father, who I referenced earlier, has been-- He died in 1991. But even then, he did not subscribe to the notion that there's one person who should be speaking for our entire community. He was exasperated at the idea that people had appointed Jesse Jackson or whomever as our spokesman.

And that was the idea that we were not monolithic, that we didn't all need the same things. What this book also allowed me to do was to get to the bottom of that question, this idea that it wasn't just one person, that we weren't even asking for the same things, and that there was more commonality than difference in the way that we were functioning now. And we had to acknowledge that. Our Civil Rights organizations have to acknowledge that. It's the reason why the NAACP has struggled over the years. They're always in some sort of upheaval for the last 20 years or so, and much of it recently has been generational. And at some point--

BOB HERBERT: Ben Jealous is-- what?-- 35 years-old--

GWEN IFILL: Thirty-five years-old and new head of the NAACP. But he was not selected without drama. And so at some point, you have to adjust the movement to suit

where the people are now. And one of the few, one of the earliest people who got that was Joseph Lowery, who, you know, is 87 years-old. He marched with King, as they all say. But, in his case, he did. But he got, early on, that Barack Obama was-- there was a shift here that was a necessary shift that had to happen. And that was kind of important to capture as well. So, you know, there's something happening under our noses. And we usually don't know it till after the fact.

BOB HERBERT: And it is complicated. And to go to your point about people not being monolithic, it's so clear in the book, because there are these commonalities which constitute the breakthrough. But you have Barack, who's a separate case, one, because of his particular qualities, but especially because he's President. That's of a different magnitude from the other things. But then you have a Cory Booker, mayor of Newark. And then you have a Deval Patrick here in Massachusetts. And their experience, I mean, Barack is, new President, but he's been, you know, a U.S. Senator. Their experiences are really different. Barack has been, just, on a tear politically, unbelievably successful. Cory had a hard time--

GWEN IFILL: He did.

BOB HERBERT: --in Newark. And Deval had a hard time here, but in different ways. Can you talk about that a little bit and talk about the extent that you think or they thought race contributed to their difficulties.

GWEN IFILL: Well, we have this romantic notion in this country that we'll get something fresh and new and shiny, and everything will be fine. But in fact, it turns out, you have to know what you're doing, and that governing--

BOB HERBERT: "Oh, there's that."

GWEN IFILL: “Oh, that.” And that there’s governing, there’s politics. And if you don’t know how to hire a staff or that’s a good idea maybe to just, I don’t know, get a Lincoln Town Car. These are unforced(?) political errors that experience would probably have solved. Willie Brown, the former Speaker of the California House, mayor of San Francisco, writes in his book about how, when he-- Now, Willie Brown is not known for being (how do we say?) low-key. He’s a flashy guy. He went around in his Mercedes Cooper, his Porsche, whatever, when he was in Sacramento.

But when he became mayor, he knew this was not going to be acceptable, and that it would be unnecessary fight for him to try to be flashy. So he calmed down and he got his suits made by a different tailor maybe, you know, or got fewer of them. Now, he got away with flashy in San Francisco, because it’s San Francisco. But he also understood that as an urban mayor, he had a different thing he had to do. And that was a political instinct.

When you’re brand-new, you’ve never even run for dog catcher before, you have these bright shiny ideas about how you’re going to save the world and transform a city and transform a state. And you buy into your own press clippings. There are people just waiting for you to trip. And so when you trip, yeah, maybe race has something to do with it, but maybe you should know that race is always going to have something to do with it.

My mother used to always say to me, “So, just”-- You know, what did she say...? You had to be careful where you were, because if you were there, your name would-- If you weren’t there, your name wouldn’t have been called. So I was always to blame whether-- the fight broke out, I had anything to do with it or not. Her point was, so-- My parents’ point was, so what that it’s not fair. Didn’t you know that’s the way it works? So your responsibility then is to factor that into your thinking, to not do anything that will play into stereotype.

Sure, it's not going to be fair, if that's the reason that's driving them. But that's part of the penalty of being a breakthrough; someone is always going to raise it. You have to decide whether it matters or not. I look back in retrospect at the kerfuffle that built up around this book before anybody knew what it was, prior to the Vice Presidential debate. And at the time, I was blessedly in a bubble and not paying a lot of attention to it. But I look back on it now and I realize I should have seen it coming, because there are certain people-- not a lot as it turns out. I'm shocked how few there were, really. But they were very loud. There are a few people who decided it was not possible for a black woman to write a book about a black candidate fairly. It had to be a puff piece. I had to be in love with Barack Obama or else why would I be writing the book?

Well, they were not capable of thinking in a more complicated fashion about what I might be doing. Fine. But I take the hit. I take the hit because that's the way some people, I think a really tiny minority of people, will see the world. And it's the way they factor it through. So let them do it. And then you take the hit and you pick up and move on. And if you made a real mistake, you clean it up fast.

BOB HERBERT: One of the points I want to make before we go on is-- Because, you're right, this stuff is complicated. This is, without question, a much less racist society than it was 30 or 40 years ago. I mean, it's not--

GWEN IFILL: I think that's fair to say.

BOB HERBERT: --even-- you know? I think that it's--

GWEN IFILL: Partly because of the laws that have been put in place to punish--

BOB HERBERT: Yeah. I think the differences are astonishing. I think the fact that the younger generation views race in such a benign way compared to their elders, as a whole,

I think is amazing. And I also think, and not just because Barack is President, but obviously that's a big symbolic aspect of it, the Civil Rights generation won. And all the American people who had really the good views about race and the way we should relate to one another, and that sort of thing, they prevail. But there are still--

GWEN IFILL: --pockets--

BOB HERBERT: --problems out here. So I just wanted to mention that. I wrote a column saying that the United States should take a bow. And I think that that is really true. We're in a hell of a different place in 2009. One, I can't even believe it is 2009, but we're in a hell of a different place in 2009 than we were in 1965, so. Who impressed you, putting Barack aside? He's an exceptional example. But who impressed you as you did the legwork on this book?

GWEN IFILL: You know, it's interesting. When I started-- I probably shouldn't say this. Okay, you'll keep it among yourselves. When I started this, I was going to write about Barack Obama, Deval Patrick, Cory Booker, and Harold Ford, Jr. And I thought about it. In the process of reporting, I had a conversation with Artur Davis. And then I set it aside, and a couple months later, went back and reread it, and was taken with how smart he was and how interesting he was and how ambitious he was.

And then I looked back again at Harold Ford, Jr., and realized, he was a good idea when he was running in 2006. But he lost. It wasn't clear that he had a path forward, back into politics (and, in fact, is now working for Merrill Lynch and working for MSNBC and getting married and living his life.) And so it occurred to me that he may have been a breakthrough politician once, but he was no longer on that path, at least not now, and that Artur Davis was clearly on the path. So he was the one who-- Of the four big profiles in the book, he's the one most people knew the least about. And so I felt the need-- I thought it would be a fresher story to tell.

BOB HERBERT: I didn't even know how to pronounce his name. And you clarified that point. This has gone so fast that I had to be reminded, I was supposed to be looking for a signal to wind things up. So we're going to do that. But is there something that I should have asked you that I didn't?

GWEN IFILL: Lots of things, I'll never tell.

BOB HERBERT: Those are definitely the ones that we wanted to know about.

GWEN IFILL: Yeah, I know. I know. Actually, one small point- it's not really about the book, but it's an interesting moment we're in about the Obama family. There is something fascinating about watching this family, which, politics aside, everything, there's something really interesting about the fact that they-- And it's not-- Someone asked me-- I guess what made me start thinking about it, someone asked me, "What do you think Barack Obama's family means for black people?"

And I said, "What do you think it means for everybody?" I mean, isn't that the family we all say we want, the nuclear family with the cute kids and the nice mother-in-law and the-- you know, the beautiful wife and-- I mean, what's not to like about that? It's an example for us all, and the fact that we can look at it that way and just take race and set it aside for just a second here, and understand that there's a certain fascination with their wholeness, which I think people are drawn to.

I personally can't get enough of watching that dance. Don't know the last time I saw something that intimate happen on a national stage. I'm not mad at him, you know what I'm sayin'? But there's something really interesting. And it takes us to a different place. We've never been in the position to analyze our politicians, or certainly our African-American politicians in this kind of this way, as something we want to be, as something

we aspire to be. So it's good for politics. It's good for black people. It's good for all of us.

BOB HERBERT: Gwen, thank you. We are going to take questions. I think folks are going to line up. It would be great if you kept--

[applause]

BOB HERBERT: It would be absolutely wonderful if you keep your questions short and to the point, which will give other people a chance to ask a question. So I guess let us begin.

QUESTION: I seem to think that, real difference in this campaign is the fact that he sort of organized his campaign with advisors who were of all different-- from different places, different opponents. In other words, it wasn't just one political group. It was a mixture of people, so that they could discuss things and have a discussion about it. And I think the thing that impressed people from the very beginning was this open discussion about things, the way they get all of the viewpoints in, and then they have a discussion about it.

GWEN IFILL: You know what? Can I just-- I don't think that happened at all. I think that Barack Obama surrounded himself with a lot of like-minded people. He knew what he wanted to do and they knew how to execute it. And they were amazingly disciplined. This idea, they all sat around and batted around ideas, and disagreed with one another? Didn't happen. And he wouldn't have been elected President if it had. But the idea that he left the impression that that happened is actually very interesting.

QUESTION: I just thought that the reason that he was so successful was that people didn't think of him as black as much as a guy who had lot of people around him of varying backgrounds.

BOB HERBERT: I do think that obviously people liked Barack Obama. They liked his idea. And they thought he was the man for the moment. I have to disagree. I think everybody saw that he was black, and had the fact that he was black very uppermost in their minds.

GWEN IFILL: And just one final thought, because I know we have a lot of other questions to get to. The other thing, you saw it as a man who was surrounded by people of different backgrounds. Black people saw it as a black guy surrounded by white people. That's not insignificant.

QUESTION: Given Barack Obama's multi-ethnic and international roots and experiences in places such as Hawaii, Kenya, and Indonesia, would you comment on the breakthrough that he represents for our nation in an international and global context?

GWEN IFILL: The world is watching very, very carefully, and never more so than after the last eight years. Bob and I were talking earlier about how shocking (I don't think it was even Bob; I think it was Paul) how shocking it is to travel now and hear people say, "Oh, my goodness, you did that? We wouldn't have done that." And they can't quite get the idea together with, "How did you elect George W. Bush and now Barack Obama? What kind of country-- How can you hold those two things together?" I don't know that I had the answer to it. But it is kind of nice to shock the world, isn't it?

BOB HERBERT: As an American, I need my medication.

QUESTION: Could you talk a little about your experience as the moderator of the last Vice Presidential debate, the challenges and the funny things that happened?

GWEN IFILL: Well, having Queen Latifah play me was the highlight of my year. You know? The truth is, Queen Latifah played me on *Saturday Night Live* four years ago, too, but no one remembers that for some interesting reason, because so many people were watching this debate. And also my other fear was that I would be played by the black guy in drag, you know? [laughter] Not so good.

The debate itself was interesting. As some of you may know, two nights before the debate, I was working at home in my office working on debate questions. Came downstairs, slipped, fell and broke my ankle. So throughout that entire debate, I was-- underneath the desk, I had my foot elevated. They built an elevator to bring me up to the stage. They had two very brawny football players bring me out on my crutches to seat me. And people later said, "Why didn't you stand up at the end?" I wasn't capable of standing up. So Sarah Palin's dad came over to me and said, "I heard you had a bum hoof." [laughter]

And I did have an opportunity to tell Vice President Biden and Governor Palin that what I slipped on, on my stairs were copies of their autobiographies. I won't tell you whose was the bad one.

QUESTION: Welcome back, Gwen. I'm Bose Doublefield Tey(?). We met when you were here moderating for Charlayne Hunter-Gault. It's wonderful to have you here. And I'd like you to talk a bit more about family and what the Obama family, as a first family, means to our country and to our world. And if you'd even contrast it to the Deval Patrick family, because I think it's a really interesting contrast. I was born in 1956 in Houston Negro Hospital. My mother's birthday is Obama's election day, but also Reagan's election day. Think I have a sense of history here. And I have two biracial kids. So they

see this world very differently. I think when you see Obama's family and the fact he's got a dad from Kenya, a mom from Kansas and all that, it really changes a lot of things. He brought his mother-in-law here, you know? Patrick, when his wife was under depression, was handling that really well, his daughter coming out. Just talk a little bit about [simultaneous conversation]--

GWEN IFILL: You know what it is, is-- And I can't speak with the same authority about Deval Patrick. Obviously he has a family which he's come from. He told me a story about (which he said a lot) but it's a story about how when he first came to Milton Academy and he went home to south side of Chicago for the first time, his sister Rhonda said to him, "You talk like a white boy." And his grandmother said, "No, he talks like an educated boy."

And that was the eternal conflict in that family. And so now he is in a different place, obviously, with the family that he's created here. The interesting thing about the Obama family is you can look at it and pick and choose what you see. I mean, his sister, Maya, is the daughter of his Indonesian (let me see) step-father and his white mother. So she looks completely Asian. And she's married to a Canadian-Chinese man. There's where the Chinese came. Anyway. And they have a daughter whose cousins are Malia and Sasha. And they look nothing alike, of course.

And then Michelle has a brother who's as tall and beautiful as she is, and is a basketball coach, and, you know, black like me, basically. And then he had his grandmother from Kenya at the Inauguration. He has a sister from Kenya, Auma. But you could look at his family, look at that tableaux that we saw there, especially election night when they came out in Grant Park. I thought, "Who are those people? Who are they all related to?" There was nothing the same there.

And the beauty of it is, I think people can pick and choose what they see in that family, whatever it's a blended family or whether it's a biracial family or multiracial family, whether it's a nuclear family or not, and decide to identify with a piece of it. It's really quite remarkable, because that's what the nation has now become.

QUESTION: I was going to take issue with you that I think the changing of the language that Barack did was the same thing as women, we have to do, when we change the-- which, from it being a woman's issue to a family issue. That changed the conversation as well. So I think that what Barack or Hillary had to do were both the same in regards to--

GWEN IFILL: Oh, I don't disagree with you at all.

QUESTION: --changing the discussions.

GWEN IFILL: Oh, I don't disagree with you at all. I think that every successful politician has to find a way to speak to different audiences in a way that they will hear you. And that's your responsibility or you won't get elected. I think that's true for-- whether it's about gender, whether it's about race, whatever it is.

What I started out by saying is that we-- These candidates have to say to you, "I am like you. I hear about your concerns." And the more things you are to them, the better chance you have of them hearing you and identifying with you, and knocking down the barriers that exist. I think a lot of groups have been slow to realizing that, whether it's women or whether it's people of color. Identity politics is not what it once was. And people can no longer get elected solely, at least not to statewide offices or to certainly the Presidency by saying, "I'm going to identify as just this." You have to broaden it out.

QUESTION: But I think the one thing that Barack has above everything, that people seem to overlook, is he's got leadership. He's got real management skills.

GWEN IFILL: You think people overlook that? Come on. That's why he got elected.

QUESTION: No, but I mean, they don't focus in on that as really the difference between him and the way Hillary's campaign was run.

GWEN IFILL: Oh, well. I think they do. I think they do. I think he showed himself to be an incredible manager of a campaign. And they can talk about it, but it's just a fact of life. It's what it is.

QUESTION: Thank you, Gwen. What can you tell us about prejudice, where it comes from? And what can you tell us about your prejudice and where it comes from?

GWEN IFILL: My prejudice? Whether I'm prejudiced? I love everybody. What do you mean? [laughter] Unless you say something mean about me, at which point I have no use for you. You know what? I truly am not a sociologist. I can't go there. I can only speak to the specific situations that I've asked questions about and I've covered. I don't go that deep, because I think that everyone certainly has some prejudice in their soul. But prejudice, I don't know what it means. And if you start to get into definitions about what prejudice is and how it's exercised, that goes farther than I can go, honestly. I don't pretend to know that much.

QUESTION: For about two weeks during the campaign, all America was watching Reverend Wright. And I was wondering if you would give some insight as to how the black community looked upon it.

GWEN IFILL: Sure. [laughter] I don't usually speak for the whole black community, but in this case-- [laughter] For years, I have heard Reverend Wright speak in different churches. I've been to his church. I found him deeply amusing and outrageous in the way

that a lot of black preachers can be in their pulpits. It doesn't look so good in snippets on You Tube. And so because of that, it doesn't matter whether he was a good man or not a good man. Politically, it was not sustainable.

He also seemed to get a little ego issue in which he could not step aside when it would be helpful for his candidate in the way that we were talking about Al Sharpton. Jeremiah Wright couldn't do it. He is still-- But he is a brilliant and educated man. He's not a crazy ranter, no matter what it seems. Well, take that back- he's got some crazy ranting characteristics.

But I was at a social engagement in Washington over the weekend. And I won't mention his name, because this wasn't a public case. But it was a significant black leader whose name you would recognize, who had been to see Jeremiah Wright speak this past weekend at Howard University, at their Sunday chapel services, and said, "He was just terrific. He was amazing. He was over the top." He was surrounded by white people who all went, "What?" They were unable to conceive of the idea that Reverend Wright didn't get to the position he got to be being good at what he did, and being a gifted speaker. He was completely identified in the end by being a hater, which he had these characteristics, which you could take big issue with, and which, in the end, Barack Obama could not afford to have near him. But it doesn't mean that he was completely a crazy person who had never done anything good in his life.

BOB HERBERT: I mean, for the longest time, it was a political plus--

GWEN IFILL: That's right.

BOB HERBERT: --in Chicago to be a member of Wright's congregation.

GWEN IFILL: It is argued that is why Obama may have joined it.

QUESTION: Gwen, I think the title of your book, *Breakthrough*, certainly applies to Barack Obama. But we're in the library of the other breakthrough politician of my lifetime, John Kennedy. And I have a strange affiliation with Obama. Because as a second generation American Catholic, I could sort of understand the issue of breakthrough from the black perspective, that John Kennedy meant a lot to American Catholics when he won his campaign. And talking to friends of mine, I could understand their feeling that Barack was going to be a breakthrough for the blacks.

I'm wondering if you can comment on sort of the arc of history that connects John Kennedy with Barack Obama, and by that I mean, Kennedy and Johnson signing-- helping to sign the Civil Rights Act, which was basically the death knell of Southern Democratic Party. And now when you look at the electoral map with North Carolina, Florida, and Virginia being in the Democratic column, and I think Texas probably in the next election or the election after, you're seeing a shift, that shift that we were talking about.

GWEN IFILL: May I suggest to you that you've just betrayed your generational bias, for this reason. I don't think most people looking back on John Kennedy anymore remember that he was a breakthrough Catholic candidate. They think of him as this young, hopeful, promising person who was taken too soon. The people who were completely-- who defined it as a great breakthrough for Catholics are waning. There are just not that many who think of it that way.

In the same way that I don't think thinking of Barack Obama as a breakthrough for blacks is a legitimate way of looking at it. When I talk, the breakthrough, these guys are black and they're breaking through. But they're not just breaking through for black people. They are breaking through, and the way that they have done it demonstrates that they're doing it for a broader group. And they're speaking to a broader group. And they've found

a way to code shift and to appeal in ways that aren't the way that someone had to appeal in the 1960s.

If John F. Kennedy had to rely only on the Catholic vote, would he have been elected?

QUESTION: Absolutely not.

GWEN IFILL: No. Absolutely not, which means he was a breakthrough and he was reaching across lines as well. Even though it was history-making and it is a history-making thing to have a black President, and it was a history-making thing to have a Catholic President, that's not all he was. And that's the same thing for these candidates as well.

BOB HERBERT: There were a couple of pretty heavy similarities, though, one in the sense that Jack Kennedy went to West Virginia and gave the speech on religion. And Obama had to give a speech on-- his speech on race in Pennsylvania. And then [simultaneous conversation]--

GWEN IFILL: Thanks to Jeremiah Wright.

BOB HERBERT: Right. And then the aspect that the last thing in the world Jack Kennedy wanted to talk about was his Catholicism--

GWEN IFILL: And the last thing in the world Barack Obama wanted to talk about was his blackness.

QUESTION: Hi, Gwen. You talked about childcare holding back women from entering politics as one factor. Can you think of some other things that might be holding back

women as far as entering politics, and what we can do as an electorate to help women like a Condoleezza Rice or Maxine Waters go forward more in their ambitions?

GWEN IFILL: I think Condoleezza Rice has her hand-- She's about done. She's, like, ready to go back to Stanford. But I do think that you make an interesting point. I had one woman who's involved in recruiting for women political candidates, saying to me that one of the interesting things about women is that they wait to be asked. They're waiting for someone to knock on the door and say, "Will you please come and run for this office?" And guys never wait to be asked. They're, like, "You know, I think I want this and I will take it now." And women are sitting around going, "Well, maybe if they ask me just right and raise some money for me." That is a big part of it.

And I do think that's why there are these groups which have sprung up, which their goal is to recruit and to bring and to tell women about possibilities. Think about how it worked against Hillary Clinton in a completely backward way, this idea that she had the nerve to want it. You know? C'mon. What's that about? So you have to find a way to accommodate our ingrained biases about gender as well as about race in order for people to break through.

QUESTION: This question is for Gwendolyn. I want to ask you--

GWEN IFILL: She called me Gwendolyn. I'm in trouble. [laughter] My mother used to do that.

QUESTION: I'd like to know, how young were you when you decided that you would choose a goal that many people would see as a breakthrough, for a black woman in America? As a 66 year-old black woman from Mississippi, when I see you on television, I am so excited to say, "I know her. I know her." [applause] It's such a heartwarming experience because I said to a little guy, about this high, very smart-- He kept talking

about Obama and et cetera. So he was at my house one night. I said, “Now, we’re going to watch *The Washington Week*.”

GWEN IFILL: You’ve made my day.

QUESTION: And they’re from Ethiopia. And ...(inaudible) say, “Since you said, Miss James Green, that you watch and you know her, we’re going to watch it, too.” So Gwendolyn, I’m so proud of you. And it’s just a joy. And I hope you identify who I am.

GWEN IFILL: Thank you. [applause] People calling me Gwendolyn, lord have mercy.

BOB HERBERT: From now on.

QUESTION: Hi. And on that note, I’d like to give you a shout-out from Simmons [applause] where we’re both fellow Simmons alum. What kind of a breakthrough was the newly appointed Senator Roland Burris? And if you don’t care to answer that-- No, I’m not. She’ll tackle it, but--

GWEN IFILL: No, I will. Actually-- Well, go ahead. Finish.

QUESTION: And on a totally different note, it seems that President Obama is going to have to-- He’s already moved to the center. So is there any room for a progressive agenda in the new Administration, and how you think he will deal with--

GWEN IFILL: Yeah, he never was in the progressive wing, really. He’s always been kind of in the center. You would think there would be room. It will be interesting to see whether there is. I do think that’s a big, important question. And whether there’s-- it’s now going to be considered within the Democratic Party disloyal to go to the left of the President, I don’t know.

BOB HERBERT: Such a good question.

GWEN IFILL: You want to tackle that, too?

BOB HERBERT: No, I mean, I agree with your answer.

GWEN IFILL: No, I was going to try to push off the Burris question on Bob.

BOB HERBERT: The Burris question, that's all about Chicago and [simultaneous conversation]--

GWEN IFILL: It's all about--

BOB HERBERT: --craziness and *Guys & Dolls* and Blagojevich--

GWEN IFILL: It's all about generational politics, though. I mean, he's 71 years-old. I was struck by the day of his press conference when, you know, that very clever governor-- Got to give him points. He won that round. When he appointed him, they had Bobby Rush there, a former Black Panther, who's now a member of Congress, who beat Barack Obama in his first race. And Bobby Rush got up and said, "We need a black man. And that's why you should put him in there." I was struck by the whole retro notion of the whole idea, that in the year of breakthroughs, when we were talking about these young people, here was this 71 year-old former state elected official who wanted, you know, obviously another shot, and a former Black Panther talking in words that were so kind of race conscious and race limited in a year when there was this breakthrough going on. It seemed really to be a clash.

You know, I'm sure Roland Burris will be a perfectly good United States Senator. There are worse currently there. I would never name them to you. So there's no reason in the world why he shouldn't have the job, even though I'm sure Jesse Jackson, Jr. would answer that question differently.

QUESTION: I have a comment and a question. The first comment is, I think in some way, having you, Gwen, and Bob here, that you're a part of a breakthrough in some way. Look- here you have a majority white audience, listening to your opinion. And granted, I am a junkie, a news junkie. So I watch *Washington Week* every week. And I read your columns, Bob, every week, in *The Times*. But also I think it is critical and it means a lot to a lot of folks here that you're here to talk about this particular issue in terms of racial politics.

GWEN IFILL: Can I just say that last Sunday, I was on *This Week with George Stephanopoulos* with Donna Brazil. And we were backstage going, "I think this is the first time."

QUESTION: I think so, too.

GWEN IFILL: Don't let them know.

QUESTION: Right. Exactly. The question I have for you is, I mean, we're talking about breakthrough. And for Barack Obama, because of his unique background, I mean, everything, the moon, the stars, everything were in alignment to make this possible. Being half black, half white, mixed with Indian, Asian, whatever, African, and having a beautiful wife, and intelligence and all of that came together. Do you think that that can happen again? I mean, I'm really serious. I ask this [simultaneous conversation]--

GWEN IFILL: Sure. No, the hope-- I know this feels like a one-off, like the moon and the stars came together. But you know what? The whole premise of this book is that there is a whole generation, there are generations to come. They see this and they see the possibilities for the next step. There's no way in the world to believe that he would be the last.

I mean, it may be a black President now then a white President for 20 more years, and then a black President again. But I do think that when you knock down a barrier, doesn't easily spring back up. But it falls on the next generation to take it, not to wait for someone to say, "Oh, the door's open. Come right this way." Doesn't work that way.

BOB HERBERT: And also, just adding onto that point, I am just such a big believer in the idea of people getting used to something. The fact that this guy will be President, that we've had black people in high public office before now, more and more, the country gets used to it. And then, you know, at some point, a candidate comes along who is black or who is a woman, and suddenly that thought is no longer uppermost in your mind. It's, like, you know, what's the program?

GWEN IFILL: That's it, "Get to the next question."

QUESTION: Poverty, you talked about, was a third rail during the election. But now that Barack's President, how do you think he's going to address poverty? And how high up is it on his list of priorities to deal with this at a moral level?

GWEN IFILL: I don't know. I honestly do not know. I do think that he's got a lot of priorities that come before speaking specifically to poverty. I think if you pressed him on this question about how he's going to tackle his economic plan, he would tell you that fixing entitlements and taking care of people's tax, jiggering the tax structure and getting this economy back on-track is going to help the poor as well. I think that's what he would

say. But as far as speaking specifically, and going to give a big poverty speech, I don't think that's going to happen right away.

QUESTION: I just wanted to tell you that every Friday night between 8:00 and 8:30, my kids cannot even look at me thanks to you and your great show. I love it. Thank you very much. I look forward to it every week.

GWEN IFILL: Thank you. Let me ask you, are you drinking at the time?

QUESTION: No. [laughter] Well, actually one. I just have one.

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Jackie Joseph. I'm a senior at the John D. O'Bryant. Obama based his entire campaign on hope and inspiring the public to believe that we can make change. And now he's called the public, the American public to serve so that we can make this change happen. And I was wondering how you think this will happen, and how you view this, this service?

GWEN IFILL: I was struck this week at the Inauguration how many people-- It was a running theme everywhere I went where people said, "Okay. He's not going to fix it all. It's on us. We now have to step up." I heard it over and over again. It's not on him to say, "Oh, how's he going to make everybody work," even though they are doing things to try to engage people. But I have heard much more this sense of responsibility striking a tone among people who supported Barack Obama than I expected.

QUESTION: My name is France Belzan(?). I'm currently the SGA president at Simmons College. [applause] My question is, for young women that are looking to become politically active, what would your advice be for them if they're worried about being elected based on, like, them not having marital status or a family--

GWEN IFILL: It's hard. It's hard. Like everything else in life, it's not just about politics. You've got to make choices. They don't tell you that at Simmons. They don't tell you that. [laughter] They tell you you can do it all. But let me tell you, you can't do it all at once. So you decide and you prioritize and you pursue, but you never lose sight of what your dream is. And you find a way to get to it. Your dream might be trying to raise a good healthy family and having a full career. And you can accomplish that. But you have to really prioritize. That's the truth. [applause]

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Amber. I just wanted to ask, like, why did you decide to come down here and talk to us [simultaneous conversation]--

GWEN IFILL: I don't know. You know why? Because the audiences are always so smart and the questions are always so good.

QUESTION: Hi, Gwen. It's a real treat to see you in person and to hear you, like the rest of these folks. I just was going to ask you sort of a convoluted question, I guess, that-- Although the histories and prototype backgrounds of our previous presidents have been, shall we say, much different than Barack Obama's, as you were watching him grow and evolve, and it became more evident that, you know, he really did have something and he really did look like he was going to become President, were you surprised about his "lack of experience" and how folks talked about it compared to the other candidates?

GWEN IFILL: He didn't have a lot of experience. I wasn't [simultaneous conversation]--

QUESTION: That's what I mean. Were you surprised about him being able to break through the--

GWEN IFILL: I was surprised that he won. I was surprised that he pulled it off. I was surprised that he beat Hillary Clinton. I was surprised that he beat-- Well, I wasn't as surprised that he beat John McCain. I was surprised that he was the last one standing. I've covered several campaigns and I've never seen anything like it. And his experience was the least of the reasons why I was surprised. It was, there were a lot of hurdles, and he got over them. In the end, looking back on it now, I'm not so surprised, because I see how he did it.

QUESTION: But it wasn't the lack of experience that surprised you? I just was very surprised, because as you looked at the field of candidates, at different times, they all had, you know-- Some of them have pretty substantive backgrounds.

BOB HERBERT: One of the reasons I think that the lack of experience didn't work more against him was this really was a change election. People wanted a change. And the more experience you had, the more familiar people were with you, then the less you seemed to represent change, I think.

GWEN IFILL: I think that's possibly the reason.

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Sabina Yasman(?). And I had two questions.

GWEN IFILL: One.

QUESTION: Okay. I'll combine the two into one. [laughter] First, throughout the campaign, I have noticed that lot of the Asian-Americans, sort of left out. They didn't get as much attention as they should have. They're sort of seen as the, "They are making it. They are way up high. They have the better education compared to a lot of the other minorities." So your comment on that. And the second one is, once next four year ends or the next eight year ends, how will the racial interaction between different races--

GWEN IFILL: Ah, the second one is going to be really easy for me to answer, because I have no idea because my crystal ball is completely on the fritz. The first question, I think-- You know, I do think that what you're saying is the same thing that African-Americans said not long ago: "No one's speaking to us. No one's speaking to our issues." It changed when you began to get black candidates.

When you begin to get Asian candidates, you begin to hear a different kind-- theoretically, you begin to hear a different thing. It's all about who has the political power and who shows up to vote. But if you show up to vote-- and you can actually tip an election. You'd be surprised the amount of attention people will pay. And that's one of the things that's interesting about this election is there was so little discussion about immigration at all, which was this great hot button, hot topic for the last two election cycles. It went away because there were things that were more pressing on people's minds.

But also the way Latino voters voted in numbers probably also had a lot to do with changing some of the things that made immigration kind of a negative as a campaign issue. So I think the issues sometimes drive who's speaking to. But certainly turnout drives it as well.

BOB HERBERT: You have been a great audience. [applause] Gwen is going to be signing copies of *The Breakthrough* after the program. Gwen, thank you very, very much. Thank you so much. Thank you. [applause]

END