

Seeking Common Ground: Civil Rights and Human Rights With Harry Belafonte Moderated by Anthony Lewis

John F. Kennedy Library and Foundation
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Harry Belafonte

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DEBORAH LEFF: Good evening and welcome. I'm Deborah Leff, Director of the Kennedy Library, and on behalf of John Shattuck, the CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation and our sponsors, WBUR, Boston.com, *The Boston Globe*, the Lowell Institute, Boston Capital, and The Boston Foundation, I'm delighted to welcome you this evening.

Normally when I'm up here, I quote President John F. Kennedy. But tonight, as the Kennedy Library launches a multi-year effort to bring together America's civil rights movement and human rights efforts world-wide, I'm drawn to the words of the President's brother, and Harry Belafonte's friend, Robert Kennedy, who said:

"We must recognize the full human equality of all people, before God, before the law and the councils of government. We must do this not because it is economically advantageous -- although it is, not because the laws of God command it -- although they do, not because people in other lands wish it to be so. We must do it for the single and fundamental reason that it is right."

The right thing to do. That defines our speakers this evening. Our moderator, Anthony Lewis, has won two Pulitzer Prizes during his many decades in journalism, most of them with *The New York Times*, and there is no more eloquent writer on human rights, civil rights, values and justice.

And our main speaker tonight is a man who Professor Henry Lewis Gates noted "was radical before it was chic and remained so long after it wasn't." Harry Belafonte is a man of the first platinum record ever, the creator of "We Are the World," which brought \$70,000,000 to fight the famine of Ethiopia, the first African-American to win an Emmy. Immensely successful and a world-wide star, Mr. Belafonte could have taken the easy road, but he never has.

It was he who bailed Martin Luther King out of the Birmingham jail. It was he who wouldn't perform in the south during the period of segregation. It was he who helped to organize the March on Washington. He railed against apartheid in South Africa. Civil rights and human rights: Harry Belafonte has used his extraordinary intelligence, vision, talent and visibility to bring those issues to the world's attention.

Now, one of the terrific things about being at the Kennedy Library is being able to host an evening like this. And a second wonderful thing is our access to film footage of years ago. And while I'm not going to show you Mr. Belafonte singing "Day-O," or "Matilda," or starring in "Carmen Jones," there is one clip that I very much want you to see.

[Video clip:]

HARRY BELAFONTE: Hi. My name is Harry Belafonte. I'm an artist, and I'm not a politician. But like most Americans, I have a great interest in the political and the economic destiny of my country. I'm sitting next to Senator Jack Kennedy. As a Negro and as an American, I have many questions, and I'm sure everyone does, about civil rights, about foreign policy, about the economy of the country, and about things that will happen.

JFK: And I want to make it very clear, Harry, that on this question of equality of opportunity for all Americans, whether it's in the field of civil rights, better minimum wages, better housing, better working conditions, jobs, I stand for these things. The Democratic Party under Franklin Roosevelt stood for them.

HB: I'm voting for the Senator. How about you?"

VOICE OVER: Vote for a leader like Roosevelt. Vote for John F. Kennedy for President.

[End of video clip.] [Audience applause.]

DEBORAH LEFF: Ladies and gentlemen, Anthony Lewis and Harry Belafonte. [Audience applause.]

ANTHONY LEWIS: Ladies and gentlemen, I want to say one thing first before this program starts. Maybe it's a matter of local or personal privilege. One of the great editors of this country and this city, Tom Winship, died yesterday. He was not just a great editor, but a great citizen, somebody who cared every day of his life about what happened here in Boston and Massachusetts and in the United States, and the world, for that matter. But he didn't just care. He worked hard every day to change the things that were not right, and I thought he was an inspiration for all of us. And I just wanted to say that, say how sorry I am about his death.

Mr. Belafonte, I want to begin with what may be, in part, a sentimental question. I was a great admirer of Robert Kennedy. We've just heard him quoted, to great effect, I thought. And we know how you felt about his older brother. Will you tell us something about how you felt about him? Did you support him for President in 1968? And I think what matters to me -- it's an unanswerable question, but I hope you'll answer it -- what would this country be like today if he had lived, Robert Kennedy?

HARRY BELAFONTE: Having been victimized by McCarthyism and having shared the anguish and the pain of so many others who were victimized by McCarthyism, my introduction to Bobby Kennedy was on the dark side. His relationship to that committee and what it did to so many American lives tainted our sense of him. When he became Attorney General, it was with some sense of anxiety, to say the least, that we looked upon this appointment, because we knew that our movement depended so heavily on the federal government and on what that government and the administrators of that government would do.

And certainly, in the way in which McCarthy conducted his business, an awful lot of life in America was caught up in the witch-hunt. It wasn't just about communism. It was about all of it: about Americans, about freedom; it was about blacks, it was about white, it was about women, etc., etc., etc. And when Bobby Kennedy was appointed as Attorney General, we had occasion to meet fairly quickly, as a matter of fact.

Dr. King asked some of us to discuss what this meant or would mean to us, and after many aired their feelings about Bobby Kennedy and their great doubts about him coming to our assistance in some meaningful way, Dr. King made the observation that regardless of what his history had been up to that moment, we had to view him in a new context: a man whose hand was on the throttle of justice and who was going to have to be dealt with on the issues that we were facing. And that although there was much for us to bemoan about what his history had presented, it was to be our task to find his moral center, find if there was a greater truth in who he was and to work on that and to win him to our cause. And a lot of us looked at that moment with some sense of bewilderment and frustration, but we were given our direction and our directives, and we did just that.

We decided to approach Bobby Kennedy based upon the truth of our struggle and the honor of our mission and to test his knowledge of us and his knowledge of poverty, his knowledge of racism, his knowledge of pain and see the extent to which we could grade him and know the extent which -- how much work we would have to do in order to get him to see our vision and to embrace our cause. Let me just say that as much doubt as all of us entered into this relationship with the Attorney General, it was to the same extent that we embraced him in the end.

The transformation of Bobby Kennedy for us was very, very significant. It was a great victory for human behavior, a great victory for that which could be done that appeared undoable. White, Irish-Catholic, anti-communist, wealthy -- all of these were, for us, obstacles. And as we greeted each obstacle and dealt with Bobby Kennedy, he found his humanity, he found his sense of caring. And it was not without its difficult moments. We had clashes, and we had differences of opinion.

A lot has been written about meetings that we had -- one in particular, when he called for a meeting with James Baldwin and Lena Horne and Dr. Kenneth Clark and others. And at that meeting things took a fierce moment, and he was quite upset and quite angry and quite frustrated, and we were of the sense that we would lose him. But to the contrary, what that evening did was awakened a lot in him. I think it made him go back into life, into his own life, and begin to measure how he would do things, or would like to do things.

And slowly but surely, he became much more involved, he became more hands-on, he became more directly exposed to the environment in which we were all living, and identified himself with much that we were trying to achieve. And in the end, of course, we all know that he turned out to be this remarkable human being. And I have often asked myself the same question that you've asked about what would have happened had he prevailed, had he survived.

I think much that we face in the world today would not be the way it is, had Bobby Kennedy lived and had he become the President of the United States of America. I think his will and his honor, I think his political intelligence and his own passion for what he'd come to understand about the poor, the black, the issues that were our issues had possessed him, and I think he would have directed the affairs of this nation, and indeed the world, in different conclusions that we are experiencing now.

ANTHONY LEWIS: Thank you for that very moving answer. For me personally it was a very moving answer. Changing the subject, actually, we're preparing to come on the stage, the stairs. You spoke of just having been at a conference -- I think a film festival in Colombia?

HARRY BELAFONTE: Yes.

ANTHONY LEWIS: And I asked you whether they talked about anything except films, and you said, "Yes, they

talked about politics -- politics in Colombia, politics in the world. And I'd like you to tell us a little something about that, because it was really interesting.

HARRY BELAFONTE: Let me frame my answer by just positioning the audience -- a little bit of my history and work. I was very much involved in the Peace Corps, and I had been appointed by John Kennedy and guided by Sergeant Shriver as a Cultural Advisor to the Corps, and helped in the early days in shaping policy and helping recruit across the length and breadth of the nation, and going to places around the world in order to speak on behalf of the Peace Corps and our mission. And those journeys very early on gave me a lot of opportunity to meet people who are still very much colonized, especially in Africa. And in that experience I found that my whole being and my humanity was profoundly touched and stimulated by what I found among people -- poor folk, peasants, people in struggle for dignity in life and freedom. And I found in them a great sense of commonality out of my own history, coming from that environment.

I was born in Harlem, in New York, in the Depression, 1927, just at the doorstep of it all, and my mother was an immigrant woman from the island of Jamaica. My father was from the island of Jamaica, as well, and a seaman, and very rarely at home, and for all intents and purposes my mother was a single parent. And her feistiness and her strength and her clarity was really quite remarkable, considering that she'd never been to school, had no formal relationship with the world of academics. But she consumed an awful lot of information. She listened a lot to radio, and she listened a lot to Roosevelt, whom she had a mad love relationship with. Roosevelt hung everywhere in our house [audience laughter], and she quoted him all the time. And whatever he said was gospel truth and was policy for us to follow and to embrace. And that instruction and that insistence on her part did much to shape my life. So being in the world of people who are underdeveloped or living in underdevelopment -- not their underdevelopment -- was not something that I had to learn. What I found was that my constant relationship to that environment sustains my own humanity, gives me great clarity politically and certainly stimulates my intelligence and makes me quest for knowledge and to know more than I would ordinarily have been either willing to do or able to do, had it not been for this journey.

Going to Colombia in South America and going to the film festival was a little bit different than most people would suspect. Festivals in other parts of the world carry a larger mission than just talking about how films sell. It's not quite as narcissistic as one would suspect, knowing what goes on at the Cannes Film Festival and what goes on at other festivals where we just sit around all day long anointing ourselves and speaking to our glory or our ingloriousness, as the case may be.

When you get into a place like the film festival in Cartagena, which is what I was invited to come to, you get the opportunity to meet great men and women of enormous intellect who deeply care about art, who understand the power of film and what it does, and that can give you an analysis of the world around you and where you come from that sometimes are more insightful than what you know, living in the belly of the beast.

Their vision of Hollywood outdistances my own acrimony on that environment and that place. When you sit in Cartagena and the film festival there, you meet people like a man by the name of Gillo Pontecorvo, one of the greatest film makers of the 20th century. He did a film that had a huge impact on the world called *The Battle for Algiers*. And then you meet people like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who's a Nobel Laureate and a Nobel Prize winner, and an intellect who will sit and take you through information and ideas and thoughts that will have your head spinning. So this is the environment that I go to.

And invariably, the films that you see talk to the human condition in a most dimensional way. I saw a film, for instance, from Brazil, called *Behind the Sun* that speaks about initiative and violence and family feuds, and a lot that is very pertinent to life today. Yet it took place back in the early 19th century in Brazil, and through metaphor and through the art of that film, we learned so much. I saw another film there about Bolivar, about the wonderful way in which the character was treated in very contemporary terms.

So when I go into this environment, I am exposed to an awful lot, and no sooner do you get into this rhythm than all of a sudden you're talking about death and violence to the peoples of the country. There's a place that they have in Colombia, right outside of the city of Cartagena called the Nelson Mandela Village. In this village are thousands of the displaced peoples of that state, and they come in all sizes and shapes and colors, and it is a teeming mass.

The one thing that they have -- a couple of things that they have in common is the great pain and the violence that they experienced and also the great poverty they are relegated to. When you talk to the artists and the people around, this is what we talk about. And it is extremely refreshing, because when I am around the Hollywood scene and I talk to my colleagues around the issue of celebration of film, these subjects are not only never discussed, but dare you to raise the subject and you'll find that you're instantly being distanced from the rest of the crowd.

So I find that my regular beat has very little to do with Hollywood, though I love making films. And I seek my sustenance other places where what life is about is stimulating and gives me a chance to see what we do in

America with a greater sense of objectivity.

ANTHONY LEWIS: It used to be said of the United States, and still is, that it's the last best hope of earth. Do you find such a feeling in Cartagena? What was the feeling there about American policy and about America's place in the world?

HARRY BELAFONTE: Let me hasten to add that it's not just in Cartagena or in Colombia. It's in any number of places. I remember at the end of the Second World War and through my mother's vision of the world and what she thought Hitler meant -- this black woman in Harlem, who was with great sense of concern but courage -- encouraged me to volunteer to serve in that war in the United States Navy, and I was a munitions loader in the Navy.

And at the end of that war, the great promise the world had expected to be fulfilled and what the Allies had said, by the way Churchill spoke and certainly by the way Roosevelt spoke, what we said we were about in defeating fascism and white suprematism, and not just what black Americans expected to come out of this, our expectations were very high. Certainly if we were brave enough, courageous enough, and valiant enough, and go off and do marvelous things on the battlefields of the world in the name of democracy, we were going to be handsomely anointed when we returned, conquering all those things that plagued us so early on -- segregation, no right to vote, no employment, no education, and mass poverty -- would be swept under the rug in this new half of the 20th century and the great enlightenment which had embraced the world, and the victory, of course, of defeating the fascists.

That was not only my expectation. It was also the expectation of all the Africans who fought for and worked with the Allied forces, who were victims of colonization: the French expeditionary forces who were black from Africa; the British expeditionary forces who were black from Africa; the people from Vietnam and Asia who fought with our forces, all in the name of democracy. So the world was filled with this expectation. And we began to look for the reward in all of this, and we were very quickly aware of the fact that none of it would be accessible, or at least available to us without some more confrontation, maybe even violence. But the battle had only been partially won. In this expectation, we went through the civil rights movement, we went through McCarthyism, we went through all of it. And it was wonderful to see that even at that time, the immediate 10 or 20 years right after the war, people in the world still had expectations of America.

And even when I first heard about Vietnam and what was going on there, and then I read about Ho Chi Minh, how much he understood about this country when he was a student of our Constitution. And as a matter of fact, they drafted a constitution of Vietnam's Preamble very much like our own. And what all of these ... you know, when Fidel Castro first came here, what they expected, what so many in Africa -- Sekou Toure and all the others whom I have met and talked with -- America was looked upon as a place where all hope burned eternal.

Now, that was not quite the same heat that I feel when I walk around the world. First of all, there are very few people left to blame for what's going on. [Audience laughter.] Russia is out, communism is gone, etc., etc., etc., and all the rest that you can put to it, because there are a lot of things blurring the issues, if not exacerbating the pain. So now that so much exists that has filled this world with such villainy and such frustration, and in so many places, such hopelessness, people look to the place that articulates, at least out of its tradition, America articulated the hope that the future could be about.

So when George Bush gets on television yet again -- with so much frequency, incidentally -- and he speaks about this nation rallying to saving itself from the jaws of this fearful force that's out there, that have us caught up in this great war, people around the world don't know quite what we're talking about. [Audience laughter.] And although they have some sense of what our anxiety is and our pain must be, especially given how well we have lived and so very little happening to this country from external intervention, people are looking with great curiosity and with great concern about what is being said. It is no question that 9-11 was a great tragedy for all of us, and that those who put that package together must be dealt with and dealt with clearly

and precisely and justly.

But we're very spoiled here. We know very little about terror, except those of us who have been the victims of terror within our own circle, like black folk and the Ku Klux Klan, to get to the nitty-gritty. A lot of us have always understood terror and lived with it and knocks at the door constantly, and also other kinds of terror. Poverty is terror. HIV-AIDS is terror. Absence of education and ignorance is big terror.

And so the world has lived in a place that's always filled with terror, and when they look around for what can be done to fix the terror that they're experiencing, they find that America is in many ways central to the terror that they experience. They are being governed by tyranny and men and women of tyranny; they look to see who holds that tyranny in place. And more often than not, the buck stops on Wall Street, the buck stops on policy making in Washington, D.C.-- all that those regimes influence globally-- and they're partners in the mischief.

So I get the sense from people everywhere that America's not viewed with quite the same sense of hope, history and resolved anti-villainy as it was viewed when I was born, when we were on the battle lines and seeking to win our causes. People are beginning to look for new solutions. And the good things that come out of that is that they're beginning to look to themselves. In that looking to self, you'll find that in many places in the world, our foreign gifts and our policy and that which we deliver, is not quite that desired; people are not quite as concerned.

I just came from South Africa with someone that you interviewed not too long ago, Mary Robinson, and the International Conference on Racism. And I was amazed to see of the 30,000 people that gathered from around the world, how much feistiness there is among so many who are very bright, who are extremely well informed, who are articulate, filled with intellect and passion and concern and care, and who have values that we would embrace, who no longer look to us for guidance or help, and as a matter of fact, put us as Americans and America in a context that says "You are one of the problems we have to overcome, while we're overcoming all of the other things that affect us."

This is not to suggest that people are mindless or not mindful about the power we wield. But they know that that power does not necessarily bring humanity. It does not always bring compassion. It doesn't bring benevolence; it brings its own tyranny, as well, and people are now on guard and beginning to look for new analysis, new ways in which to define how they will live with us, how they will live among themselves, and how they'll live with the world around them.

And this was what was going on in Colombia, that is also a nation that's being victimized by failed policy, our armed forces, our young men and women in that nation. And the terror reeking there is astounding and its impact on the peasants of that nation is a great crime against humanity. And the banners under which we say we are there should be viewed with great suspicion, and people should make it their business to look at that which challenges the opinions that take us there and see if we cannot find a greater truth and another point of view and a way to deal with the things that affect us. It is true that drugs are a huge problem. But on whose side of the problem sits the greater mischief? Is it those who consume it and do so with some choice, or those who grow it, who in many instances do so and have no choice? Where sits the ethics here? Where sits the moral truth? Where sits the politics of all this? I think if we don't begin to look at this world through that kind of prism, with those kinds of questions, then I think we're in for a long haul of violence here. Right after 9-11, I had a number of things I was required, I was set to do. And going before the public to speak so soon after that tragedy put a lot of people in a very funny place. We didn't know quite how to speak to it.

First of all, we were dealing with our own personal emotions, let alone trying to understand the national psyche and where we were and what do you say to people, how do you bring hope, and how do you answer all this? And as is my great privilege and job, I turned to Dr. King, my friend, and I looked through his work, which often gives me the answer that I need -- quite often -- and I saw a little passage that had to do with violence and tyranny. And he said, you know, "Terrorism is the last utterance of the voice unheard." And do we have the strength and courage to look at ourselves through the eyes of our detractors and try to

understand why we're so hated? And if we can come to some clarity, do we have the moral courage to change what it is that we do to stimulate that hate and that violence?

And I think that's where we are now. Behind this great tragedy of 9-11, I think America's been given an excellent opportunity to really, seriously, in some in-depth way look at what we do as people. Many of us -- and it's true -- there is a great giving that's part of our nation, part of our culture, part of the way we are. It has been my experience that any time Americans are told the truth -- and more often than not, in very grand ways, backed up the honor of that truth and they deliver the goods. They must be given the truth. They must be given a chance at knowing.

And I think a big problem is Americans just don't know. We think we do, we act like we do. We're very arrogant with our ignorance. And I think that we should get off that dime and begin to look more deeply and to ... and it's the most minimal of things that we do, and see where in those things do we see this grist mill of global pain and anguish and frustration? [Audience applause.]

ANTHONY LEWIS: Thank you. A few minutes ago you mentioned as one of the examples of terror that people face in the world, HIV-AIDS. And the place that has the largest number of cases and faces a truly horrific problem is South Africa, where both you and I have deep, personal connections and interests. And we've all read about the reluctance of President Mbeki, the President of South Africa, to -- what shall I say?-- forthrightly face the problem -- at least that's my view -- and his skepticism about HIV as a the cause of AIDS. You know Mbeeki, and I wonder if you'd say something about South Africa, AIDS, and this question.

HARRY BELAFONTE: My relationship to South Africa and AIDS is through the work that I do for UNICEF. I've been with UNICEF now I think about 16 years, and I was recruited into that remarkable organization through a mutual friend. When we did "We Are the World," it was an attempt on my part to use resources that were available to me to try to raise global consciousness, and certainly most importantly, first and foremost, to raise consciousness in America on what was going on on that continent with the famine and to try to shake us out of our indifference.

And Jim Grant, who was the Director of UNICEF, was an American, born in China, born of missionary parents, a man who led that institution with remarkable dexterity of mind and great facility. And his humanity and his way in which he touched lives is really quite astounding. He could get us to walk through fire and quite often did. And he spoke to the use of self and trying to get people to look behind the question, to look behind what they are being told. And learning that from Jim and how to do it, and to doing it through UNICEF, has kept me on a constant journey with global violence issues that affect children, land mines, war, movement of populations across, etc., etc.

So when the AIDS issue first struck, as an African-American, and as one who has a strong relationship to the Caribbean region, the first onslaught saying the Haitians and the peoples of Haiti and the homosexuals of Haiti were central to this disease and the cause of it and its existence, was a stunning moment. It was quite bewildering. Only to find that upon greater scrutiny and tenacious investigation, we discovered that was not the case.

So how do you change this articulation? And so in that quest I find myself now, 2002, with Thabo Mbeki in South Africa, where the largest, as you pointed out, population of HIV victims live. Mbeki, I think, in many ways, is a remarkable man. He's terribly important, because the greatest experiment in democracy going on on that continent at the moment is in South Africa. Certainly, with what Nelson Mandela and his group left us as a legacy there was a lot to work with -- terribly creative. The absence of violence, as was expected at the level of civil strife and racial conflict, this was non-existent. And for a young person, or whomever it was, that would inherit this government after Nelson Mandela stepped down, was of great interest and curiosity to all of us, and I think, terribly important. One of the most important elections, I think, that was held in the world, was that one.

The United States was not there. Our President, our Vice-President, our First Lady, heads of Congress -- no

one. The very highest person in attendance in the American official body was Janet Reno. And the South African government took notice of that. So did Mbeki. So did Nelson Mandela. So did Harry Belafonte. [Audience laughter.] And that said something. When we did what we did, for instance, with the International Convention on Racism, the absence of an official American presence also said something.

When we fail to put our best foot forward and to lead and be at the forefront of truth and information and we abandon that responsibility in the name of some careless and sometimes not so careless political instruction or order, then I think we leave a huge space for others to fill. Now who fills the space that we don't, that instructs Thabo Mbeki? Who fills the space that we don't, that tries to bring resolve and solution to the table that people are in need of instruction and ideas and thought? Some of the people around Mr. Mbeki, I think are misguided. As a consequence I think sometimes he makes decisions that are misguided. Are they of such tragic proportions that the continent will sink? No. But if things are not attended to in a new and a more forward-thinking way, we're going to become victims of our own folly. I think the rest of the world will pay a price. Thabo Mbeki, I think, does not have the proper definition on what causes HIV-AIDS. Having said that, however, I think he's absolutely on target when he says what the pharmaceutical companies and what your government have suggested from time to time, in things and gifts, and what they want to bring us, is wholly unacceptable, and I think also misguided.

It is true that HIV comes from blood contact and sexual contact, all of that, and that science is vigorously working to try to find a cure. Thabo Mbeki says that's only one part of it. Very clearly, massive numbers of people that are dying in South Africa and the children that are effected, it's not just from the fact of the disease has intervened, but because there was a place for it to thrive. Ignorance, massive, massive poverty, myth, dislocation, absence of health care -- all sorts of things cause HIV-AIDS to flourish. And his position really is that while you're talking about a cure, in a medical/scientific context, you must talk about the mission to abolish ignorance, abolish all those other social failings that exacerbates this problem. And I will not look at a plan that does not integrate into it what we do about poverty and what we do about ignorance for that clearly is the biggest problem.

Many would suggest, as he pointed out in a recent conversation, that sexual promiscuity among the natives of the continent is also a big part of the problem. We say -- when in truth, they would quickly make the case, and so does he, that probably the most sexually promiscuous society in the world is the United States of America. [Audience laughter.] The things that we do here are astounding, when you talk about sexual mischief and sexual misguidance, etc., etc. Yet we do not have the largest numerical number in relationship to HIV-AIDS, and we don't have the cure. So what causes this imbalance, if that is to be a litmus test as to what spreads it around? What is encouraging is the way in which the people in South Africa, the young in particular, have begun to take charge. There is a program there called Love Life, and it sounds like a rather simple throw-away statement, doesn't sound very Madison Avenue bright, Love Life. And yet this Love Life campaign has the largest gathering of youth of any organization that I've seen in the world. And the intelligence among the young that guide it, what they bring to the table in debate and discourse, and how they examine their internal need in local communities and what to do about it, is absolutely first class, and I think will become a model when we get through putting all the parts together, other places in the developing world to be guided by. The Kaiser Foundation just gave another \$10,000,000 to Love Life to use at their discretion with no attachments, because the work that they do is so effective.

And what I'm encouraged by is not policy by us Americans, and certainly not even some of the things that the South African government has failed to bring to the table. But it's what people are doing -- young people, particularly, where these communities are being invaded and what is happening in the debate among themselves and the way in which they're pushing, for instance, the religious forces of the country to begin to become more relevant. Because religion plays a big part in the ignorance and what's happening to the people of that country and the way in which religion treats the issue. But I am encouraged by people.

And out of all the villainy that we speak about, I think the young have begun to understand what my friend Paul Robeson told me when he said, close to his death in Philadelphia. And I asked him if the pain and the degradation that he experienced in this country, where he was and what he was that moment when we were

talking in this room, asked was it really worth it? And he said, "Absolutely." He said, "Although we have not obtained all the victories we would have loved to have had, perhaps the most important part of all of this is the journey itself, and the men and women that I've met along the way who have made all the difference. So just for the journey, I would do it again, to be among them. But if there's one thing that I've learned, I've learned that -- and you will learn it too, Harry -- " he said that, "No matter what you do, and no matter how well you think you've done it, there's young people coming behind you who just want to know what it was, and they're ... (inaudible), and you've missed the boat." But what they must understand, in the final analysis -- which is what's applicable now -- is that they must be responsible for themselves.

And I think that the extent to which we can have young people understand that they must take responsibility for what happens to them, and how they shape this nation, and where it goes, is exactly the same things we had to do when we wonderful, bright, marvelous liberals did what we did at the turn of the century and right up to and including today. [Audience applause.]

ANTHONY LEWIS: You notice, ladies and gentlemen, that it doesn't really matter what question I asked. [Audience laughter.]

HARRY BELAFONTE: I learned from you.

ANTHONY LEWIS: He had a wonderful answer, whatever it is. You've just, in a way, stolen what was going to be my last question. I so envy you, having known Paul Robeson, a distant hero of mine, that I was going to ask you about him, but you've spoken to ...

HARRY BELAFONTE: What? Did I already tell you something about him?

ANTHONY LEWIS: But I had another question before we go to the audience, another question that I wanted to ask you. It's really -- I don't know what kind of question it is. But you've used the word humanity several times, the necessity of having leadership of humanity. You described how humanity became the essence of Robert Kennedy's character, and so on. How do you think this country is going to get that kind of leadership again? Or perhaps I could put it another way -- a more personal way. Am I going to have a chance to feel about a president the way your mother felt about Franklin Roosevelt? [Audience laughter and applause.]

HARRY BELAFONTE: Well, I know one part of the answer, which is only if you come back to *The New York Times*. [Audience laughter and applause.] I will tell you this, Mr. Lewis. A lot of young people ask the same question, you know. And in many ways, it was easier for us, I think. Hitler was kind of clear-cut. He had the moustache, hair on one side, ... (inaudible). [Audience laughter.] But the little swastika and six million Jews in a furnace, it kind of gave you a very clear picture of what I get from this guy.

And also, the segregation signs in the south that said "For colored only," and "For white only" and the laws that said you couldn't vote, etc., that was very, very sharp, in black and white. And it also gave us the chance to test our own humanity again, and it gave us a chance to define moral responsibility and conduct.

Now that everything is in a shade of gray, now that everybody is laying claim to the truth, or to the greater truth, now that we have all this religion being evoked and God blessing us so much, I think, he's going to run out of blessings soon [audience laughter], or she [audience applause], I just have a faith in the belief that if we've been able to survive the darkness of slavery and the change that brought all those men and women here and build a society that is as remarkable and astounding as this is, we still have the capacity to look for our moral self. And through that moral examination, I think we might come up with leaders who would dare bring to the table the courage to speak out politically and find new ways in which to apply themselves politically, instead of constantly trying to take over existing, decayed institutions that no longer serve anything except villainy, and find a new voice for the 21st century, find new ways in which to do what we have to do.

Certainly, when I came out of the Second World War and I looked around at what was going on, it was hard

to find the leadership, just in the black community alone. Roy Wilkins did not speak our passion and our needs at the time. A lot of people didn't who called themselves the leaders. And what we went out and did as young people was to force new leadership into the arena, out of our own ranks. Dr. King was such a force. Malcolm X was such a force. Stokely Carmichael was such a force. Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker. Some good, some bad, some wretched, some not, but it was an enormous push. And in that context came Bobby Kennedy and a lot of people forced the issue. And you look at Cesar Chavez and you look at all the different races and, well, everything was in the mix. And I think we're on the threshold of that happening again.

As I go around the campuses and I go around places and speak among the young, I get a sense that they're fed up with the diet as it has been fed to them, and they're all taking they're blood tests, they're all counting their cholesterol politically -- political cholesterol that's out here -- and they're saying, "Hey," you know?

I think the greatest villainy that helps frame my answer to the question you've raised is how much we're not hearing. CNN isn't giving it to us, and a lot of the newspapers that have now fallen into the control of a few empires that control everything -- the movies, the books, the publishing, the records, the music, etc., etc., etc.

What young people, I think, are looking for is where does this articulation then come from that gives them information, helps them with their mission of their turn at life, at least adult life? And I think people are looking for new ways in which to get information and new ways to talk to it. And if you had been at the conference on racism in Durban, South Africa and beyond the fact that it turned out the way that it did with the people, it was what you really had to understand that people went through who made \$2.00 a day to be able to get a ticket to come there to begin with. Just that effort must have been, in itself, of such gargantuan proportions, it boggles the mind. But they were there, and they were there with notes and pads and things to say, and they took great stimulus from one another from what they heard. Men from Afghanistan who were there, who were coming through that bloody experience. Women from Iraq and Iran and from Cuba and from Colombia and from Tacoma, Washington and from UCLA and from New York, and everywhere in the world. Humanity had gathered, and they didn't care very much about what the press was saying or not saying. Or do they have some relationship to it? Absolutely. But they were looking to one another: truth, answers, philosophy, thoughts. And now that we have the Internet, and we have these things that people are beginning to squeeze their way into possession of, I think they're finding that there's going to be a new level of communication and the way in which the young will be doing business in this 21st century -- with or without us. [Audience applause.]

ANTHONY LEWIS: Ladies and gentlemen, it's time for your questions now. I've eaten somewhat into your time because I couldn't resist, and I'm sorry. So would you please keep your questions short.

Q: It's just a wonderful evening. I'm so glad you're here. First of all, I'd like to know, who do you think are the leaders that will be coming up? Who do you respect that you think might be able to lead this country? And I'd like you to talk a bit about the Mideast. Who can help that situation, and is there anybody that can go in there and help it? I have many more questions, but those are the two that I'd love you to answer.

BELAFONTE: Well, one of the great leaders, I think, around today happens to be from the same family that Condoleeza Rice is from. And her name's Connie Rice, and she's a lawyer. And she just put together a firm out in California with four other women, and they're reeking havoc in the state of California with the issues that are on the table in America.

And if you want to get on the Internet and look her up and what she's doing, I think you will get a microcosmic look at other possibilities as well as a look at what is going on in the world at large and the way in which it's being done. She has -- out of Washington-based, it's called the Advancement Project. And she recently -- she was the Regional Director for the NAACP Legal and Defense Fund, and she left that work to become immersed in the work of the community, particularly the young and the prison population. And what she has brought to the table out of that journey, including the unveiling of the face of injustice and the corruption of justice, has been remarkable in her achievement as she's thrown the California court system into momentary chaos. I don't know if it's going to stay that way. It would be wonderful if it would, because in the chaos we

stand a chance. But through her example and the way in which she does things and her articulation, I think you'd find a great sense of what's around.

The Middle East's point of view? I dare say that as one of the earliest, at least in my circle, articulators of Israel's right to safe borders and being a nation, but then also coupled with the fact that when I was championing all of that, Ben Gurion was around, and I got to talk with him. And I got to talk a little with Moshe Dayan, as a military figure and what his vision was for Israel and where it had to go. And what a remarkable crowd of men and women they were. Like us, they've lost that. They've now come upon a time in their democratic expansion and growth, evolution, when villains are at the helm, just like we're experiencing. [Audience laughter and applause.] And according to my Italian friends in Cartagena, they're experiencing it too, in Italy.

I think that the only hope for a solution in the Middle East has got to be the extent to which the United Nations and the extent to which Kofi Anan is willing and courageous and able to step to the table and put such a provocation before us that even though it may cause brevity in his reign as the head of the U.N., it might put us on a course for international debate.

I was quite enthusiastic when I read *The New York Times* a couple of days ago and saw that he just told Israel "Cut it out," you know? Now, does this mean that Israel is exclusive to the villainy? No. But I think that we've got to begin to shake the tree and be more just in how we define what's going on and not be intimidated by what we've come out of traditionally. [Audience applause.]

Once again, you know, it's curious to me the extent to which the citizens of this country have no debate. People talk in such extremes and such sound bytes that it's amazing that we exist as a nation, as whole as we do -- so much ignorance around us in how we make our choices.

I think that Palestine has a right to exist with the same set of rights we want to see Israel have, the same sense of security for its people, and that that debate must be held, and it must be held among Jews and Arabs first and foremost. And we must insist that those voices bring honor to the table, and do ... (inaudible) can do to make it work.

Q: Mr. Belafonte, welcome back to Boston. Thank you for being such an inspiration and such a provocateur. I wanted you to speak on civil rights in the post- 9-11 world, particularly under the Ashcroft administration with regard to racial profiling and some of the challenges that we as Americans are facing in this new environment. And I also wanted to thank you for the role that you played in the men's health campaign, the ads that you've appeared in with your daughter and the radio spots that you've done around the country.

BELAFONTE: Thank you. I'm always struck by how we have come to define civil rights in the civil rights movement. Somewhere along the line, in being co-optive, as we were and are, but not for long, definitions have been turned upside-down. And when I talk to a lot of young people, somehow civil rights is some ancient antiquity, something that sits out there with the pyramids in Egypt and all other dead civilizations or past civilizations.

And since that is the perception, a lot of people don't even deal with it. They don't even read about it. They don't even go to the standard-bearers of that period to gain information and knowledge about how to apply what they did to the present and find that there are an awful lot of solutions that exist from the drawing board of that period left by great architects that we can call upon, because no greater design exists.

Even in my own journey, I find that often when I become perplexed, I go back to Dr. King's writings and teachings. And what's so wonderful about it is that in a moment of curiousness, the estate sold the rights to a lot of his work to Time Warner, and Time-Warner has just put out a volume that possesses all his sermons and all of the letters and many things that he did, and it's really quite well put together.

And people like Taylor Branch, who wrote *Parting the Waters* and *Pillar of Fire*, he now has the third volume coming out in his trilogy. There's a lot to draw from about the civil rights movement that's applicable now and a lot to draw from the history in general, by saying that whatever we did, the end of the Civil War and the Antebellum period when we flooded the Congress with our black congressmen and we had all those wonderful opportunities at our door, is exactly the same period in which we find ourselves yet again at this point in the 21st century.

We blinked. And in blinking, we let a lot go. And a lot of those who should have been at the forefront of carrying the mission forward got caught in the privilege of opportunity. So they got caught up in the system. And rather than being the opposition to the system, you became the apologists for the system. And I'm disturbed by that, deeply disturbed, because it has dishonored some of my friends and it has made it difficult for us to have articulation. That's not the best side of it.

But I do believe that the civil rights movement was not only very pertinent, but it's everywhere in the world, because most of the world is in civil strife and most of the peoples of the world are looking for civil rights politically. And it is always coupled with what this whole session is about and what this convening is about and what these lectures are about, and I understand that it's about civil rights and human rights.

And I think our human rights are seriously being abridged. I think we are in great, great danger. I really do. I don't speak in extremes and platitudes. I'm not an alarmist. As a matter of fact, I'm very much a realist, I think. But in that realist context, I think we are at the most critical moment of our time, because the mechanisms of politics are taking us to where the checks and balances are in jeopardy of our political system, all of that. The dissent is less and less. And when you can have the government taking over the way this administration has just acquired this -- and we have had so little debate and so little protest and so little reaction to it in an ongoing way -- the citizens of this nation are sitting in a place of great danger. Because if you look back at other realms that had such a pattern in their time, you will see what can happen with Ashcroft and the putting of our civil liberties and our rights on the line, to suspend our civil voice and the right to those voices. It's a dangerous thing to do.

And there's never been a moment where it was "just for a little while," you know? It is just for this moment. This moment will turn out to be forever. It's like the Triborough Bridge. I was told that once we paid that bridge off we wouldn't have to pay a toll. [Audience laughter.] That's when it was a quarter. Now it's \$3.00, and they're looking to get more. And I think that we Americans, you know, I think we need to have that ... it's no fun looking at yourself being a Paul Revere, but, you know, the British are coming. [Audience laughter and applause.]

Q: Hi. I first want to thank you so much for helping to open my eyes to the beauty of South African culture and for fostering the sense of benevolence within the music community with "We Are the World." It has helped to inspire my music. I've lived through racism in Georgia and I want to see a color-blind victory, not only in this country but also in South Africa. I have friends from that country and have recently seen Ben Kashin's (?) films on the conference you spoke of on racism, and it seems as if a similar kind of rift is forming between the haves and have-nots in South Africa. And I want to know what is being done to help to foster healthy and happy families in terms of schools and helping get employment for those that are living in the ghettos of Soweto and other places throughout the country of South Africa? And what could we in America do to help?

BELAFONTE: Let me say to the last question, we in America know what to do. The question is will we do it? [Audience applause.] I think that legislation after legislation has been put through to meet the crisis of many situations and many places. And you'd be amazed at the extent to which the law has not been fulfilled, the extent to which this legislation has not been carried out, the extent to which billions of dollars still sits stuck in the places where they were originally to be found and not put out into the marketplace or into the places where they are needed.

The work that I do in UNICEF is central to the whole issue of dealing with the inner ghetto life of a lot of

nations, particularly in South Africa. Beyond HIV-AIDS itself, perhaps the most devastating thing in South Africa is the crime and the violence. It has just driven everyone to extremes, unbelievable extremes. And it so permeates that social rhythm is completely out of whack.

And you take a look at what goes on in the surrounding regions. In Namibia, it's going on in Zimbabwe -- the destabilization, political upheaval, the conflict. I think that's all knocking very heavily at the door of South Africa. It is not too far away. If that regime is caught up in the kind of mischief that's around it, you'll find that the issue of education and getting to the schools and bringing the resources necessary to make the society wholesome will elude us. When, in fact, it isn't that we're not trying to deal with the issues of education. It is that to have education flourish, you must have peace. To have education flourish, you must have teachers; you must have an infrastructure; you must have those who are willing to commit themselves to this. And if all around you is so disrupted and is so caught up in violence and is so caught up in the mischief that goes on, you then will get huge frustration in trying to deal just with the problem itself of education if you don't deal with it in the context of all else.

And what we're trying to do in UNICEF is to find a way in which to empower the peoples of the community, in particular women, because it is no question in my mind the key to the wholesomeness of this century, and I think this millennium, really sits clearly, undeniably, at the doorstep of what happens to women. [Audience applause.] And I think the way in which I see communities taking over the educating of the children outside of the institutions themselves is clearly an encouraging, if not a very difficult task, but I think people are on the march and I think they will make a difference, and I think a lot else has to be put in place to make it work.

Q: Actually, the slippery slope of the Triborough Bridge has gone from 25 cents to \$3.50, not \$3.00, Mr. Belafonte.

BELAFONTE: Well, that's since I was last there. [audience laughter.]

Q: I'd like to follow up on the penultimate question, which was, I thought, fabulous, directly: the political repression of your dissent in the '50's and early '60's and tied into the political repression of dissent today.

BELAFONTE: Central to the playing out of the political repression of that period was in the name of terror. A nation had to rally around the greatest terror in the world at the time, which was communism and its expansionist reach. That in order to purge ourselves of these villains among us, we had to surrender much that had to do with our rights. And clearly, everything that was gained up to that period was under severe attack and severely crippled.

The greatest example, I think, for many of us, is what happened to the labor movement and what happened to the workers of this country, what happened to their vision and what happened to their values under the banner of purging the reds from their ranks and what happened to the labor movement when it became the possession of capital and it became the possession of political power, and what Meany(?) and others did when they betrayed the workers by lending their leadership to the villainy of the state.

I think we sit in pretty much the same place today, with some differences. But I would suggest that those differences against the bigger picture are really quite minor. I think in talking to people in the labor movement, they are not beginning to ask questions about what happened, and where have they been, and where must they go? So just recently at a conference among labor leaders we were talking about being more community involved, being more involved in the issues of race, having more hands-on with the justice system, etc., etc., etc. Going back into the community not just in the narrow parameters of what their particular rank and file might need in a particular job placement environment, but what does it mean in the broader context of the total community? When I look at Ashcroft and I look at what Bush says and how he frames it, when I look at how I just happen to be watching -- Well, the train was late, so we were watching the television screen in the train station. And I watched him speak -- I think it was Fort Bragg. He just gave a long speech to the military. And I was fascinated at how often those soldiers stood up and applauded like they did when he gave the State of the Nation speech, how clearly constructed his speech was to get that response, which gave me the

sense that everything he was saying was the American voice, was the truth, was the passion of this nation.

When only in part was that true, because what he said -- "And how can you say you're not for democracy and that we all use every fiber in our body to defend democracy?" Of course we will. But on whose terms, and in whose guidance, and under whose vision? That's the big question. And what he never tells you, he never clearly lets you hear what his vision is. He just shows it to you by what he and Ashcroft and others do.

And I think America has to wake up to the fact that we're sitting in a period when, if we are prepared to let our rights be co-opted as Ashcroft and others are constantly putting on the table, when you look at whom they're putting up for selection in the courts of America and what they're saying would be the people who mete out the justice to our citizens, you will understand the extent to which we are in trouble and how much like the '50's this is. [Audience applause.]

ANTHONY LEWIS: I'm sorry to say that I'm under orders to stop the questions now. I have to do it. We're already over time, and I'm really sorry.

Q: Reparations.

ANTHONY LEWIS: I'm sorry?

Q: I said reparations.

ANTHONY LEWIS: Go ahead.

Q: Thank you. It's only 148 years ago that Anthony Burns was arrested at Court Street downtown as a fugitive slave. Since that time a lot of work has been done free. I would like to ask you what is your view toward reparation for the slavery, the unpaid work for thousands, millions of people? Could you give us your view?

BELAFONTE: Yes. Directly I will tell you that we are entitled to and deserve and must continue to insist on reparations. [Audience applause.] Having said that, I hasten to add, I would hate to see us make the mistake that our Jewish citizens have made. A lot of black voices are constantly talking about putting a dollar sign on what we should have -- billions?, trillions?, etc., etc. And I find it hard to carry that debate forward to its conclusion.

Reparations for me, and what we should be looking for, is the fulfillment of democracy, [audience applause] all of the promises of this nation and the Constitution to all of our citizens. Affirmative action was, for me, a great step towards reparations. [Audience applause.] To kill that is to kill something terribly important for us.

And I'd rather know that every black child in this nation, and certainly in the world, would have a chance at education for free, to go through from beginning to the end of their lives in a learning process that would then enable them to be able to participate fully as citizens in what the world has to offer. [Audience applause.]

Our reparations must come in that sense, that on the benches of our courts sit judges who will rule to justice in the constitutional sense in the way that humanity and all people deserve. Our reparations have to be gotten that way. And I think whether somebody gets a million dollars or whether they get trillions of dollars, that's not it. I mean, Israel got billions of dollars from Germany, and now they sit at the doorstep of a new villainy in the lives of all their citizens. I think that money thing is a trap and we should be careful. [Audience applause.]

Let me just express my great sense of opportunity and privilege at being offered by the John F. Kennedy Library the opportunity to be here and to speak. And they really gilded the lily for me, because I'm unabashedly an Anthony Lewis junkie. And I guess they anticipated I might have resisted, for some reason, and come with the ... (inaudible) Anthony Lewis's willingness and presence to be here this evening, I felt once

again anointed, and I am very, very glad to have had this privilege. [Audience applause.]

JOHN SHATTUCK: I want to just say a few words at the end of this remarkable conversation. First and foremost, of course, we are deeply grateful to Harry Belafonte and Tony Lewis for launching what will be a far-reaching exploration of civil rights and human rights in our country and around the world. And I cannot think of a more extraordinary launch than the one that we've had here tonight. [Audience applause.]

You have shown the shape of the road behind us and you have given us a glimpse of the road that stretches ahead on this endless quest of humanity, Mr. Belafonte, as you say so frequently, for freedom and justice. Thirty-nine years ago President John F. Kennedy at American University in Washington, D.C. talked about this struggle in words that have the ring of truth today, as when they were first spoken.

"Finally, my fellow Americans," he said, "let us examine our attitude toward peace and freedom here at home. The quality and spirit of our own society must justify and support our efforts abroad. Wherever we are we must live up to the age-old faith that peace and freedom walk together. In too many of our cities today the peace is not secure because freedom is incomplete.

And all this is not unrelated to world peace. 'When a man's ways please the Lord,' the scriptures tell us, 'he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' And is not peace, in the final analysis, a matter of human rights: the right to live out our lives without fear of devastation?" In his conclusion, President Kennedy called upon his audience to join him in, quote, "showing our commitment to peace and freedom in the dedication of our own lives."

At the beginning of this evening, we saw Harry Belafonte endorsing John F. Kennedy. Now President Kennedy will return the favor in the only way that he knows how today, through this library, his Presidential Library that seeks to carry forward his legacy.

Harry Belafonte, through your art and your principles and your politics you have dedicated your life to the struggle for civil rights in the United States and for human rights all over the world, and you have made a profound contribution to peace and freedom. Because you have inspired us and continue to inspire us here tonight and onward, I am honored to present you the John F. Kennedy Library's Distinguished American Award. [Audience applause.]

Thank you very much, and good evening to all.

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