PANEL 3: KENNEDY AND JOHNSON

TOM PUTNAM: So if we could have your attention. We'll now go to our next panel on the Presidencies of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: So now it is afternoon, so good afternoon. And remembering that we're honoring two Presidents, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, here's a little something from Abraham Lincoln that seems to fit this afternoon: "The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just." That seems to be very appropriate for our conversation about civil rights in the United States.

We ended the conversation in the first panel having looked at the Double V victory, World War II, the Cold War, the personal responses of people like Ernie Green of the Little Rock Nine to what was happening in terms of the violence, and the movement by both Truman and Eisenhower -- though they not be supporters of social equality -- to do some things that moved the country forward with regard to civil rights.

Now we come to the terms of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson, typically regarded by people who think of the modern civil rights movement as two Presidents that were very much associated with civil rights. We think we know those stories. The question on the program is to ask how legislation was moved forward; what were the forces that inspired the legislative process by these two Presidents to advance actual civil rights legislation. We certainly have the panel to do that.

Let's start -- because I like a little context -- after we leave Eisenhower and now it's John F. Kennedy's time, what was happening in the country in terms of the NAACP, in terms of what lawyers were doing, Kenneth Mack, in terms of the restlessness of the black community about where civil rights was. Because the Little Rock Nine was considered a victory of sorts, but yet, we were so far from legislation. Kenneth Mack, I'll start with you. Supply the context for us.

KENNETH MACK: What was going on in the country? Several things. First, the *Brown* decision had been decided. It had been unevenly enforced. There had been the Little Rock crisis. But really, nobody knew whether and when, or how school desegregation would really happen in the South.

The Justice Department was trying to force existing civil rights laws, but there were holes in existing civil rights laws. It was mentioned earlier that under President Eisenhower's watch, the 1957 Civil Rights Act was enacted, the 1960 Civil Rights Act; they gave the Justice Department additional powers to enforce civil rights, but there were still very significant constraints on what the Justice Department can do.

The NAACP is caught up with the struggle to implement *Brown v. Board of Education*. Then there's Martin Luther King, who was catapulted to prominence with the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 and '56, but King is also looking in 1960/'61 for ways to push the movement forward.

So the context was that a lot had been done – desegregation of the military, *Brown v. Board of Education.* President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy were both racial liberals. They were actually comfortable with social equality. They were personally comfortable around African Americans, which distinguished them from most of the predecessors in the Office of the Presidency, but still nobody knew what the next step was. In fact, the next steps were driven by things and people who were outside of the Office of the President of the United States, outside of the Executive Branch. The next steps were driven by African Americans and whites, segregationist whites, in the South.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Harris Wofford, John F. Kennedy first had to get the Presidency, and in acceding to the Presidency, he had to deal with some of the issues of civil rights, some of what was going on that Kenneth Mack has just described after Eisenhower's Presidency. How did he

do that? And how did he use civil rights at that point as a candidate, before he actually got into the chair as President?

HARRIS WOFFORD: One day, shortly after I was hired by Kennedy – I'd been campaigning for him on foreign policy grounds, even though he had supported the jury trial amendment in 1957 of the first Civil Rights Act since Reconstruction. He was in trouble, but I was arguably for Kennedy on foreign policy grounds. He picked me up on a corner in Georgetown. He knew I had joined the staff by then, and he hadn't had the civil rights background I had had with Dr. King and promoting civil disobedience, talking about it at least, since writing a book with my wife on India and Gandhi, et cetera. And he said, "Now, in ten minutes, tick off the things that I ought to do if I'm President, to clean up the damn civil rights mess." So I had my moment, I had my ten minutes. [laughter]

CALLIE CROSSLEY: What did you say?

HARRIS WOFFORD: Well, among other things, I said, "With one stroke of a pen you can sign the executive order eliminating discrimination in federally assisted housing that the Civil Rights Commission had recommended and was sitting on Eisenhower's desk for six months." Something like that. He said, "I like that." We talked about the problem of the Southern legislators' filibustering any legislation. So he jumped at the idea of executive action. And I had five or six other points. A few days later, he called me in and said, "Sargent Shriver has convinced us that we should have a civil rights section of the campaign, not just a minority vote section, but a civil right section that would have black and white leaders and Hispanic leaders, Walter Reuther, and Mennen Williams, all the black leaders that we could get actually to join the campaign. We've learned about your ties in those years. Would you go down and work with Sargent Shriver?" I already had gotten to know Shriver separately, and knew that he was somebody I enjoyed more than anyone for the next ten years that I've had in my life.

So night and day we were in the civil rights section. A key part of it was the Democratic platform, which was the most far-reaching political civil rights platform that any party had ever had, even the Republicans in their abolitionist period. It was an extraordinary one that went even further than they wanted, because Chester Bowles was the chair of the Democratic Platform Committee and he assigned several of us on civil rights to have a maximum platform, and then a minimum that we would fight for because he knew he would have to compromise with the Southerners, and he wanted to have the maximum. And we had two good ones: minimum and maximum.

That morning Robert Kennedy got up on a chair in the caucus of the Democratic leaders on the floor and said, "Today's the day for the platform, and the civil rights platform is strong. We want the Kennedy delegates, every one of them, to go all the way with Bowles's platform." I went and reported to Bowles that that was the command, and he said, "My god, I don't know what will happen." And the Southerners didn't balk and the whole maximum got adopted, somewhat by accident, which Kennedy avowed and campaigned on a number of times.

Then came the call to Mrs. King, and then in due course I became an assistant to the President for civil rights, having first urged Louis Martin, our key colleague -- an African American, wonderful colleague in my lifetime -- and they wanted him in the Democratic National Committee. Twice on the edge of signing the executive order on housing, the Southern legislators came to him and said, "First, if you sign that, we will not support your housing and your economic plan." And the second time he delayed it, they came and said, "We're all up for election, and we're going to lose the South; there are a lot of us, if you sign it."

Twice when I was booked to go and explain the executive order on Martin Agronsky's radio show, the canceled at the last minute. And the pens started flowing -- the civil rights movement decided to send pens saying "one stroke of a pen." Allegedly when the pens came in, the first huge bundle, he said, "Send them over to Wofford, he got me into this." [laughter]

On executive action, he formed a sub-Cabinet group on civil rights, which he asked me to chair, in which every Cabinet department had to have a member of the sub-Cabinet committee on civil rights. We met regularly to move and to support each other in how much each department could do. Kennedy launched it, supported it, and then the Freedom Riders rode.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: So you would say he was good on civil rights.

HARRIS WOFFORD: I'm just giving you a beginning.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: I'm just trying to get you to characterize it, because before we …

HARRIS WOFFORD: I came in due course to realize that what many thought was weakness or unreadiness …

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Gradualism.

HARRIS WOFFORD: … gradualism, et cetera. Al Sharpton interviewing Chris Matthews recently said, "Your book has convinced me I was wrong -- that he was just a gradualist and didn't have a commitment to civil rights." I recommend his book because just looking at it cleanly now -- from the Democratic platform, to the call to Mrs. King, to the executive actions that were taken, to the two weeks after the worst violence of the Freedom Riders -- the order to the Interstate Commerce Commission was to design regulations that would end segregation in interstate housing, which is the happy end to that story, going through his submission of the Civil Rights Bill and the great speech.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: So not gradualism for you. Pretty good. Okay, let's let it sit there for just a second. I'm going to go over to Roger.

HARRIS WOFFORD: You're the moderator.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: [laughter] I'm going over to Roger for a second. Roger, if you could pull together the middle of this thread. So Kenneth has talked to us about what's happening. There is an ongoing -- I would say persistent -- belief that Kennedy came late to civil rights, despite what he may have said on the campaign trail and despite what Harris Wofford has just told us about his setting up the civil rights division. You worked for Kennedy and Johnson. I wonder if you could pull that middle together for us and give us your assessment of where he was. Did you see him as a gradualist?

ROGER WILKINS: You couldn't be black and alive after Ernie and his schoolmates and other black youngsters in the South on Freedom Rides … And they're getting their heads whipped because they want decent education, and the President is nominating judges who you wouldn't jump over the moon to put on the bench if you were me. I worked for Kennedy in the campaign and never supported a Republican; I'm a Democrat all the way.

When I got to Washington, there was a sense I had that many of the white guys who were in charge of civil rights, present company excluded [laughter], really weren't steeped deeply in it and didn't understand how deep and nasty and hard and mean the racism in this country still was, and pretty words weren't going to fix it. And it made it impossible for me to, first of all, continue as a lawyer who was going to make some money, which turns out I didn't do to my wife's unhappy dismay. [laughter] But you couldn't live in this society, this heated, racial society and not get in it, and get in it with force and effort. And I thought that the Kennedys were nice people for being so rich, [laughter] but that they didn't really understand the depth and the awfulness of America's racial problems.

There wasn't any quick thing to do, some clever, "Oh, have Mack Bundy come in here and say something clever, and maybe we can figure out how to do this." That's not how you could do it. There was no way to do it but for people to get into the trough and go and use years and years and years, all their lives, to change it.

You have to be honest about these things, and this next sentence is not going to be a very nice one. But it was really hard to try to get into civil rights and make it better and get the Administration to do more when you got the sense that you were moving around in several conglomerations of fairly arrogant white guys, many of whom had never had anything to do with race at all until they got in the thing.

Now, Harris had my exculpation for all of that. He was one of the white guys that people could go to early on in the President's term; he was the good guy. But there were a lot of guys who just wanted to be near the top, and guys who didn't know a lot. So I got lucky. I made a contact inside the White House, Ralph Dungan – remember Ralph? He was assistant to the President, a nice guy. I was in foreign aid and Ralph would come, or have me come, and we would talk about issues at the top of the foreign aid program. And then it would always turn to race. Then I would really argue hard and say that the President needed to be pushed.

One of the things I used was "stroke of the pen." We believed it. Where's the pen? What's he doing about it? Then you had the President when he was campaigning had gone through Alabama, and had seen the governor, whose name was Patterson. And the President-elect said, "Oh, he's a man I can work with." Well, Thurgood Marshall, who was a close family friend of ours, I grew up knowing him, he said to me, "What is the President saying that for? That man's a rat. He's just terrible. He's going to make such trouble in Alabama." The feeling was not expressed that harshly, but there was a feeling that this Administration was feeling its way and that the Attorney General, who was in charge of this stuff, was being a tough guy. The Administration was full of tough guys. Is he tough enough, was one of the things that people asked if somebody was being examined for a job.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Let me ask this question before I get Charlayne into this conversation, because you said something that's very important, particularly after our first conversation, and that's about the appointment of federal judges. Whereas Eisenhower worked very carefully to

make certain that the judges he put in place were pro-civil rights to the extent of his ability, Kennedy did not do that. As a sop to those Southerners, of one you speak of right now, he appointed segregationist judges. The impact of that, Kenneth Mack, if you would?

KENNETH MACK: Well, the impact of it was huge. Just to take one of the judges he appoints, Harold Cox, in Mississippi. Harold Cox was proposed to the Eisenhower Justice Department as a judicial appointment, and Herbert Brownell laughed when he heard Harold Cox's name, "You couldn't possibly appoint this guy." When Kennedy comes in, Harold Cox gets appointed. Cox was probably about the worst of the lot, but there were many like him. Kennedy's problem was that the Democratic Party still was, in part, the party of the South. Eisenhower did not have that problem. So Kennedy had a number of Southern Senators, segregationist Senators, and he had to decide whether he's going to do something that will make them unhappy, because they can make his life unhappy also by blocking his legislation, by riding herd on federal administration, by depriving programs of money. And it's one of many instances where it requires a little bit of confrontation.

The President and the attorneys all shied away from that confrontation and appointed a number of segregationist federal judges in the South, and this was very, very important. We understand the role of the judiciary in Little Rock, the role of the judiciary was always key in the civil rights movement. Civil rights protesters get arrested. Are they going to get out of jail? We're going to have a protest. Will there be an injunction against the protest? State courts want to enjoin a protest. Are the federal courts going to act? In fact, even as far back as the Montgomery bus boycott, what most people don't know is that the federal judiciary helped save the Montgomery bus boycott; they won the boycott because they filed a lawsuit and they got it in front of the federal judiciary. Eventually, the US Supreme Court declared the Alabama segregation statute unconstitutional.

So federal judges were going to be key to whether or not the movement was going to succeed or fail in the South. The Kennedy Administration put a number of federal judges in who issued

rulings that were contrary to law. Harold Cox would speak in racial epithets from the bench, would refer to African Americans as monkeys, things like that, and this was someone who Kennedy put in. In fact, the judges who the Kennedys liked, of course, were the Eisenhower appointees on the 5th Circuit, because when the district court judges invariably ruled against them, they had to go to the Eisenhower judges in the 5th Circuit to get basic constitutional rights for African Americans in the South. So the federal judges were key.

ROGER WILKINS: Can I continue just on this road? Because when you are sitting inside the government and you're seeing that and it's your party and your President, you're in a terrible mess. So you have to do what you have to do, and that is to point out to the President of the United States that they were responding to Ernie Green and his colleagues. You look at the picture of Elizabeth Eckford and that girl yelling at her and screaming with her face all in a rage, you've got to say, "Come on, the government I work for? Come on, move and do something."

Ralph would say, "Write it, Roger. Roger, you know this stuff. I don't know this stuff; you write it." So I said all right. I'm going to ruin my career, but I'm going to write. I said to myself, What are you? A man or a bunch of … you can't ask yourself that question if you're not ready to give the right answer. [laughter] I did give the right answer, by my lights, and it came back from Bob Kennedy like a rocket out of a thing you knock down tanks with. It was really tough: "He's green, he doesn't know what he's talking about. He'll certainly never get an appointment in this department as long as I'm Attorney General." That changed some stuff. You've got to change things to respond to these people. Period. I'll be quiet. [applause]

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Okay! So we're talking about the one-two combination of street versus court, and Kenneth Mack has told us about what's happening legislatively. Roger Wilkins has told us what's happening inside the Administration, as well as Harris Wofford, and I think that's important to know.

Let me just, if I can, parenthetically explain who Elizabeth Eckford is for those who do not know. Elizabeth Eckford was one of the students who was going to be a part of the desegregation of Central High School, along with Ernie Green and the rest. She's captured in that iconic photograph where there is a woman screaming at her and there's a mob behind her, and she's trying to get on the bus. By way of running us up to this point in time, there is a wonderful book by David Margolick now talking to both Elizabeth Eckford and the woman screaming at her. So you should read that book.

Now, going back to the streets versus the court, because what we have going on here are people who have become black history, like Charlayne Hunter-Gault, who are watching this and seeing this, and wanting to be a part of the energy that Ernie Green talked about. And you become a pivotal part of this story, of pushing the Kennedys toward looking at dealing with civil rights in the way that, to that point, John F. Kennedy had not. Tell us the story.

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: Thank you, Callie. I'd sort of like to pick up where Roger left off, because as I listen to all of the people talk about what was going on inside, I kept thinking about the young people in this audience. And I want to say to them that it was young people like you who changed the minds of the Kennedys. I just did all this research for this book I'm going to promote in a few minutes [laughter], but I'm living with this now in a way that I didn't even live with it when I became the first black student at the University of Georgia. That was, to me, a solitary thing.

But I was encouraged by what else was going on with the students in the movement. We had the precedent of Ernie and the Little Rock Nine, and Ruby Bridges over in New Orleans, who was even in a way more poignant than you guys because you guys were at least 11th and 12th grade. She was in the 1st grade, and she had to walk through this mob. 1st grade!

And we talked about the continuity of history. When Barack Obama was running for President, he went to Selma. One of the things he said there was, "I stand on the shoulders of giants." I was

so happy to hear him say that, because as Ernie said and others have said, black people have been struggling for equality since they were brought over here in chains, and it built and it built.

As I was writing my book about the students who actually did change the minds of the Kennedys, I had to go back to all of those people in the NAACP and other organizations who had been quietly working since those guys came back home, including my father, who was in the Truman Army, who held the heads of black soldiers who were shot on the battlefield. And yet, they couldn't come back home, even injured, and enjoy any of the privileges of the other whites.

So all of that had been going on and germinating and simmering. When these young people hit the streets, starting in Greensborough in 1960, when they sat in at the lunch counters, that unleashed young people all over the South and eventually in the North, because in order to get the attention of the Kennedy Administration, they got white kids from the North to go and study non-violent protest in, I think it was in Ohio. And some of them went South to do sit-ins and demonstrations, et cetera. Some of them were sent to Washington, because they were white and they thought that they could get the attention of the white Administration, with a couple of exceptions here, to protect those young people who were demonstrating for equal rights in the South.

Now, all of this was happening as I applied to the University of Georgia. I don't think it was necessarily school desegregation stuff at that point. When I entered in '61, it was the first successful desegregation of higher education at that point in the South. And Robert Kennedy came to my college, University of Georgia. I desegregated in January of '61, and the desegregation order was given by a white Republican judge, William Bootle. Kennedy came in May of '61 to speak at the Law Day ceremony. By this time, the consciousness of the Administration had been raised to a certain extent, and the state representatives, none of the top officials of Georgia would attend, because they were afraid of what Bobby Kennedy was going to say.

Here I was, one of two black students on a campus of 20,000 who had rioted when we went into the university. But that calmed down after about three days. We didn't have to have Ernie's troops come in. [laughter] So Kennedy is coming and I'm saying, I really want to hear what he has to say, especially since all of these Georgia legislators were so concerned about what he was going to say. I spoke to a sympathetic professor -- most of them didn't speak to me at that point, but he did -- and he got me into the room. Sure enough, he started with the whole notion of the Cold War. That was his context for saying you have to obey the federal laws. I wrote about this in my first book. I was sitting somewhere invisible in the classroom of maybe two or three hundred students.

And all of a sudden I heard -- Bobby Kennedy had talked about how the South had helped deliver his brother and a few other things; I think I quoted part of the speech in my book -- then I heard him say -- because I'm just sitting there thinking, Oh, this is very interesting: Cold War, Soviet Union, communism, democracy -- and he said, "The graduation of Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes from this university will be a major step in our war against communism and the Soviet Union." [laughter] I said, "Excuse me?" [laughter] At which point I was no longer invisible because everybody turned around and looked at me in the room.

Then he went on to articulate in the clearest terms that any federal official at that level had done to say that "the primacy of federal law will be supreme in this country, and you're going to have to obey the law whether you like it or not." At which point there was grumbling and mumbling and when he finished, I think I was probably the only person who stood up. Maybe Hamilton Holmes, the other black student. We were applauding wildly. [laughter] I said to my professor, "I have to meet this man." So he said, "Well, come with us." So afterwards at the reception, I was introduced to him, and he just said very friendly, "Nice to meet you." And I said, "I liked what you had to say about that communism thing." [laughter] And he sort of smiled.

That was in 1961. When John Lewis left Howard University on a Trailways bus to go on the first Freedom Ride, he left his will behind, because he thought that there was a real possibility, and he

was right. He wasn't killed, but Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner were. Those young people left their wills behind. They had strategies. The Freedom Riders were really trying to get the attention of the federal government to get these states to uphold the law, which went back to the *Boynton* decision, and maybe even before. You lawyers can help me with this. It's in this book, but I can't remember all of that. [laughter]
But there had been decisions going back to the '40s that ruled out segregation on interstate commerce, yet there was still segregation on the buses. The blacks still had the back seat.

The Freedom Rides were aimed at forcing the federal government, not to create anything new, but to enforce the law. And it took these young people, fearless and ready to die, in order to get the attention of the federal government. And even once they did, there were little … You can read about it in my book [laughter], because I did research that I didn't even know about in order to explain the role of young people in making America live up to its promise of equality for all.

We talk about Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King didn't start the movement. He was one of many. There were tensions between these young people in the SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the NAACP. The NAACP was upset because when these young people would get arrested, they would have to go bail them out and pay the money. But they didn't want to listen to the NAACP in terms of how they were doing this because the NAACP was gradualist -- important because they were winning cases, like the 1954 *Brown* decision, but that was a slow process.

These young people were saying, "We've got to move faster." The 1954 Supreme Court decision said, "separate but equal, the lie of separate but equal with all deliberate speed." When I applied to the University of Georgia in 1959, that was four years later and no deliberate speed. So these young people were saying the time is now, and as Martin Luther King used to say, "The time is right to do right." They forced even King to be more militant. When King got arrested in Atlanta, protesting with the students, he didn't plan to get arrested but he did.

ROGER WILKINS: And upscale black people in Atlanta didn't expect it either.

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: Well, no, but there were a lot of black older people then and you had these schisms because courageous black people who had been fighting for generations for equality, but you also had those who had been tormented and beaten and killed. When they looked for Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner, and eventually found them 40-some days later in the river, in the process they found so many other black people who had been murdered, and nobody even knew where they were.

So things were going on even before King and Rosa Parks. They deserve all the credit, but all of those unknown giants on whose shoulders the President, then-candidate Obama, said he was standing, they were nameless people fighting. But the young people in the South, in the '60s, were the ones who forced the Kennedy Administration to do what was right, and ultimately they did.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: So let me talk about what became a signal event of young people that pushed John F. Kennedy to then get this civil rights legislation through. And you've mentioned the Freedom Riders and their incredible story, but I want to broaden out the question in this way: How did a man who, during his campaign, Harris Wofford, said, "Praise the sit-ins" -- the sit-ins which you referred to in Greensborough -- he said, "If you've got to go for freedom, sometimes you have to sit down." I'm paraphrasing his quote. How does he go from there, to appointing segregationist judges, to upsetting Roger Wilkins, into being pushed, pushed, pushed until with the brutality visited upon those Freedom Riders, really made him then move to do something in terms of concrete legislation?

HARRIS WOFFORD: In the first place, it isn't just the Kennedys that had to be moved. Public opinion had to be moved. Southern legislators had to be removed or moved. And Charlayne, I want to read the book, I'm sure I'll love it.

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: Oh, you will. [laughter]
ROGER WILKINS: Go buy her book.

HARRIS WOFFORD: I will buy it! [laughter] The documentary, *The American Experience* documentary that's been shown and reshown recently …

CALLIE CROSSLEY: That's *Freedom Riders*. It's by Stanley Nelson. You should see it; it's an excellent movie.

HARRIS WOFFORD: Kennedy sent a message after the first sit-ins saying, "You have shown that the new way to stand up for your rights is to sit down." Now, they rapidly learned the Mississippi judge was a terrible mistake. Charlayne brought up Robert Kennedy, because he's a crucial part of all the questions we've asked so far. He called essentially all the signals on civil rights while his brother was alive. The President looked to him for civil rights, not to me at all, in that sense, or to Louis Martin. He looked to his brother Robert. His brother, Robert, by the way, liked very much dealing with the uncle of Roger Wilkins, the head of the NAACP.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Roy Wilkins.

HARRIS WOFFORD: Roy Wilkins. To support Kennedy, he said, "Harris, if I'm honest, I will tell you that the one person who I think has fire in his belly to end it, because of what he's seen in the South, is Lyndon Johnson." And then he said, "But don't worry," he said, "my wife is not only a Roman Catholic, but passionately in love with John Kennedy and she wouldn't sleep with me if I didn't support John Kennedy." [laughter] You can see why Kennedy had an affinity toward Roger's uncle. [laughter]

Robert Kennedy. Burke Marshall is the third key person who was the Assistant Attorney General for civil rights, one of the wisest people I ever knew. He was very cautious, very concerned with making federalism work, as you'd know if you followed the dealings with Governor Wallace and

the dealings with the governor of Mississippi and getting Mr. Greyhound to carry the bus to the next stage and seeing it through, and seeing all the force of the federal government through. They did everything they could to get the local police and the local government to …

CALLIE CROSSLEY: But Harris, why was the Freedom Rider violence, why was that such …

HARRIS WOFFORD: It isn't just the Freedom Riders, it's all the sit-ins. It's the four little girls in Birmingham being killed; that had an enormous impact. It's the fire hoses and the Birmingham experience. All of that changed them from not having civil rights as a top priority. John Kennedy's draft of his inaugural address, after this campaign, to the great disappointment of Louis Martin and me and many others, in the first draft we saw two days before he gave it, had no reference to civil rights.

Now, we didn't notice then because we were focused on civil rights. He had no reference to any domestic issue whatsoever until Louis Martin and I got two words added at the last minute: "at home." The quote we heard at the beginning of the day, "We're committed to human rights at home and around the world." It was about 24 hours before he spoke that he added "at home."

His main interest in life until then had been foreign affairs. He wrote a book about it at 19 or 20, *While England Slept*. I never had any doubt that he wanted to end segregation, but I had plenty of doubt as to its priority for him, until the protest movement in blood on too many occasions stirred him, which is a huge historical fact.

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: I just want to add one quick thing.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Hold on one second.

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: The media.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: One second.

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: I'm been a moderator, too. [laughter]

CALLIE CROSSLEY: I'm going to let you say it, just hold on one second.

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: Okay.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: I've got to move this because we've got questions here. So I need to get a couple of conclusions made, so that people can follow this. One is: what you have said is that he came cumulatively, after all of these incidents happen, to move towards civil rights, moving away from foreign affairs as his priority. I understand that.

HARRIS WOFFORD: So did his brother, but for different reasons.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Okay, got that. Let me just finish so that people who don't know the history understand. After the brutality was visited on the Freedom Riders is when he made his famous speech to America saying, "This is a moral issue." First time a President has said that. This then put into place the push toward the legislation. Now you may speak.

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: And it follows on to you, because I have to say that it was the activism of the young people and some of the older ones, but it was also the media. This goes back to this foreign thing. It was still the Cold War. When those kids got on that bus, and I have a picture of them in this book [laughter], with the bus burning and them sitting on the road choking to death from the smoke, it was the first time that the international media got on to this story. That's when the world got involved in this, and that's where the foreign issue of, again, the Cold War took place.

One final thing and I'm finished. They still were reluctant to support those students, and it was the maneuvering of the Kennedys. They secretly got the Voter Education Project to fund a voter registration drive so that they could stop these embarrassments to them. Although some of SNCC was very much opposed to it, but that's when the Kennedys moved the civil rights activists over into voter registration. You still had a lot of violence, but it wasn't the same kind of overt demonstrations like you had with the Freedom Riders and the sit-ins. So you still had the Kennedy Administration slowly trying to manipulate something to their advantage so that they would look better in the eyes of the entire world over and against the Soviet Union and communism.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: One more thing before you speak, Roger Wilkins, and that is just to put a button here, so that people can follow the history because this panel is supposed to be about Kennedy and Johnson, and we have not mentioned Johnson's name except in passing. Is that to say that when he pushed the civil rights 1964 legislation through …

ROGER WILKINS: This is Johnson you're talking about?

CALLIE CROSSLEY: No, no, Kennedy. After he died, it made it possible then for President Johnson to be able to push forward the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the '64 Civil Rights Act. He had teed it up, in other words, at that point based on his cumulative understanding of what was happening based on the pressure from the streets and the courts, based on the inside pressure from the Administration, based on the understanding that there was an international force to be dealt with as well. And now you may speak, Roger Wilkins. [laughter]

ROGER WILKINS: My mother told me there would be moments like this. [laughter] Don't be on a stage with colored women. [laughter]

The point that I would like to make is that from inside … I don't tell this story often, but here we are in the down and dirty so I'm going to tell you something. John Lewis of SNCC was beaten by

officers on horseback with truncheons in their hands. And they really beat him. I always believed from those years that John was the bravest man I had ever seen in my life, with just unbridled courage, and a quiet man, not a flash, not a big shot.

At a small meeting in the Attorney General's office -- the Attorney General's name was Nicholas deBelleville Katzenbach -- I think he had been a professor at Chicago Law School, the University of Chicago. In any event, all the leaders in the Department of Justice who were involved in race at the time this conversation took place, because it was about the Freedom Riders and it was about kids thrown into Parchman Prison in Mississippi. It was the hard time. The Attorney General of the United States looked up and quipped, "Well, you know, some people say that John's been hit on the head so many times he just doesn't have any sense anymore." There were some people who tittered and laughed. I was the only black person in the room, and I said, "Nick, that's just wrong. You can't say that, and you can't think that. These are American citizens. They want their rights. They're doing what Americans should do. And you shouldn't denigrate them that way." "Oh, I didn't mean it, Roger, I didn't mean it." And as we're walking out, his PR man said to me, "Congratulations." I said, "Congratulations for what? I didn't win nothing in there." He said, "You got Nick to discuss black people as human beings, not as legal specters out of the old books."

It wasn't terrible in the Administration, but it wasn't easy either. And you really had to go after it, and you had to go after it hard. You had to go after it to keep the faith with Ernie. I didn't know Ernie. Well, I did, too, a little bit. But I didn't know Ernie. But you had to keep the faith. Brave children? The United States government is not prepared to move all forces on this kind of stuff? So. Period.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Okay. The incident in which John Lewis was beaten on horseback was in Selma, Alabama. It was a voting rights campaign. He is now Congressman John Lewis, for those who don't know.

I have some questions here, beginning with Professor Mack. You noted that both President and Robert Kennedy were comfortable around African Americans. To what would you attribute this level of comfort displayed by both, especially Robert Kennedy, who often rallied in urban neighborhoods and traveled to South Africa, et cetera.

KENNETH MACK: Well, one thing not to discount about both the President and his brother is that they came from Boston. Needless to say, it's a place where there were many white people who were not comfortable around black people. That would be an understatement. [laughter] It's hard to say why that's so. But there are many things on which we can be maybe less than satisfied with the early years of the Kennedy Administration, but that's one thing that distinguished them from many people who were around them here in Massachusetts, and certainly distinguished them from most of the predecessors in federal office. So I don't know where it comes from.

I would say Robert Kennedy probably felt it more, back to the time when he went to law school at the University of Virginia, of course, which was a Southern law school. And even at UVA he put himself out. I think he had a confrontation, with the president of the university over racial segregation at the University of Virginia. So Robert Kennedy clearly felt it; John Kennedy felt it in a certain way, too. And even though they didn't always do as much as they might have, that feeling that the ability to interact socially with black people was something that they had. They thought it was a moral issue that black people couldn't get served at a lunch counter. It just seemed inconceivable to them. Certainly that's part of what finally moved the President to condemn segregation in moral terms in the middle of 1963.

ROGER WILKINS: I think you also have to say that the difference, the change in Robert Kennedy was enormous, made enormous by the murder of his brother. He really became a different kind of person.

And the one thing I'll say is this: I said to Marian Edelman, who was a black woman who was doing very good civil rights work in Mississippi. When Robert Kennedy started running for Senate or President – I don't remember what he was running for -- but she supported him, Marian supported him. And I said, "Marian, why do you support Robert Kennedy after all this stuff we've had with him?" She said, "Roger, we were down in a very poor place, a poor black place in Mississippi. Black people were so poor and the kids were dirty and they were just kind of gooey. And he came in there and he walked around, he picked up those children and he patted their heads and gave them water and he held them to his chest." She said, "I wouldn't do that. That's why I'm for him." [laughter]
And when Marian is for you, that's a good thing. [laughter]

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Is there not a dichotomy between those who have many responsibilities and who must be elected – ie, Presidents – and people who are pushing a particular issue – ie, the Gandhis, the MLK Jrs.? And is it thus true that those such as Presidents will never move as quickly as those championing an issue want them to?

HARRIS WOFFORD: Can I? The answer is yes. You know this joke about Franklin Roosevelt being persuaded some big move needed to be made and he said, "I agree with you completely. Now go out and force me to do it." [laughter] Now, Kennedy didn't say that. I was present when he gave the bad news in a private session to King, that they would not be introducing civil rights legislation in the first Congress, contrary to the platform. It was a major moment, and for a long time they argued, reasonably.

King never made Kennedy comfortable. Roy Wilkins did. Although Roy Wilkins may have pushed harder than King did. It was a remarkable exchange on just the point you made. Kennedy said, "Look, we know there's no chance for the bill to move. The Southern opponents have far, far more votes to keep a filibuster and to make it impossible to pass. To push it now, we'd lose our capital for the civil rights idea and for ourselves. It doesn't make sense. So we need to do everything we can do short of legislation." King pressed for a new Emancipation Proclamation

that would be an across-the-board set of actions of the boldest kind. And Kennedy wasn't ready for it. When we left, Martin Luther King, as we went out of the White House grounds, said, "You know, I had hoped that he was going to be the President to understand this problem, the political skill to solve it, and the moral passion and urgency to see it through. I'm really convinced that he's got the first two, and we'll have to see about the last one."

Alexander Hamilton said the Constitution wasn't adopted because of the argument of the Federalists. It was adopted because of the harsh logic of events. You could say the Kennedys started way down toward ground zero in terms of understanding or a commitment to priority to civil rights. By the time John was killed and even far more by the time Robert Kennedy was killed, they were way up there. They were committed in ways that no President had really been on the firing line committed before.

ROGER WILKINS: But Harris, there was a thing in that Administration that in the beginning they were dumb. I mean, just really almost ignorant.

HARRIS WOFFORD: I think so, too.

ROGER WILKINS: They thought I was Roy's kid. They didn't know Roy didn't have any kids and that I was Roy's nephew. So they'd send messages to Roy, and I have to say Johnson tried it, too. They came to me and they said, "Why are they doing this stuff in Birmingham?" Kids are out of school and the people are being beaten on the heads by cops. A major Kennedy domestic issue and civil rights guy came to me very quietly at a party. I barely knew him, and he said, "Is there any way to talk to Roy Wilkins, your father? To get them to stop this in Birmingham? It's a terrible thing to put those kids in the street, and they should be in school." I said, "You know something? These kids are learning self-involvement. They are learning that they can control their own world. They are changing the world. And it's more than any lesson they will ever teach those kids in those crummy, segregated schools that they prepare for them." I'm telling you. That was the way they were. That was the way they were. [applause]

CALLIE CROSSLEY: So let me ask this question then, because I've got to get Lyndon Johnson's name in this conversation [laughter] before we end, and we're at the end. Is it fair or accurate then that Lyndon Johnson receives, I would say, most of the credit for civil rights. President Kennedy, however dumb he was at the beginning, came around at the end and teed up this legislation. Is that accurate and fair?

HARRIS WOFFORD: No, I want to say that Kennedy, if he was anything, wasn't dumb. On this issue, Chris Matthews's book I recommend; you'll see that he stresses how Irish he was. It was not Southern legislators primarily that slowed them or made them very cautious. It was their assessment of what the white backlash in the North and West would be.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: We're going to accede that. I want you to answer my question about Lyndon Johnson now.

HARRIS WOFFORD: Lyndon Johnson, when he signed the first Civil Rights Act, he said something like, "We Democrats have lost the South for the next 20 years or three generations." Lyndon knew what it was like in the South. The Kennedys were scared, and South Boston's reaction to segregation was not quite as violent as Birmingham, but it was shocking. They, like Lincoln about the Emancipation Proclamation, did the best timing. Johnson was wonderful, but he coasted on the tragedy of Kennedy with all of his skill. He deserved the most total respect for the achievement of piloting it through, but it was all those events that happened before him, including the Kennedys' commitment.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: All right, Roger, if you would answer that, and then I want Kenneth to answer that. But we are at the end, so I'm going to ask you to be brief and busy.

RICK WILKINS: Briefly recap your question.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Is it fair and accurate, or both, that Lyndon Johnson pretty much gets the credit for being the civil rights President on legislation that was teed up by the Kennedys?

ROGER WILKINS: When Lyndon Johnson became President, it happened that my uncle was visiting me in Washington. And he said, "This is going to be good." I said, "Are you kidding me? What do you mean it's going to be good?" He said, "He's an old Southern guy, he talks all that Southern talk." I said, "That guy is not going to be good."
Roy said, "You're wrong. You're just wrong. This man cares. I've worked with him through the first civil rights bill since the Civil War and his heart was in it, his spirit was in it. He cares, Roger. He cares, you're wrong." My uncle rarely said, "You're wrong," because I was his beloved brother's only kid. He was really sweet to me. But he said, "You're wrong. This man cares. He's got a heart and he can be pretty mean to get what he wants."

CALLIE CROSSLEY: So it is fair that he should be called the civil rights President?

ROGER WILKINS: I think it's very fair. I think he really cared.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Kenneth Mack?

KENNETH MACK: I'd say it's fair, but I'd say for slightly different reasons. Johnson was a political pragmatist like Kennedy. I don't think if Johnson had gotten the nomination in 1960 that he would have moved with any more dispatch than Kennedy. Johnson took office at a different time.

I would give Johnson credit, though, for his legislative acumen. He had experience in the Senate that Kennedy did not. Of course, as most people know, it took a lot of work to get the '64 Act through. You had to get it out of the House without it getting amended to death in ways that would cause it not to pass. You had to get it through the Senate, where no filibuster had ever been broken with a closure of motion. You had to accomplish that.

Johnson worked tirelessly behind the scenes to accomplish that. He met with Richard Russell immediately upon taking office and said, "Russell, I'm going to run over you." Kennedy never said that. So I would give Johnson credit not for an additional commitment -- because I don't know that his commitment was any greater than the Kennedys' -- but for having the legislative acumen to get the thing passed. It was really, really hard to get the thing passed. Five months of debate to get it through. Nothing else was going to be considered while this thing was being considered, and Johnson did it.

CALLIE CROSSLEY: We're at the end and I want Charlayne Hunter-Gault's voice to be the last on this. I want you to answer the question from the audience. This person writes, "I read your book many years ago and was moved by your story. How did what happened to you shape your decision in years to come and shape your career?"

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: It's all in this book. [laughter] But I will say it's shaped me. I couldn't be an activist as a journalist, but I could be a passionate reporter for the things that I was seeing. At the time that I entered, black people were portrayed in ways that were unrecognizable to themselves. Throughout my career, I have tried to portray all people in ways that are recognizable to themselves.

Now, on Lyndon Johnson, very quickly, in my book, *To the Mountaintop*, it's written for young readers so those of you in this audience, it's for you, to understand everything that we've been talking about, because there isn't anything that we've talked about today that isn't in here. But it's in terms that you can understand. There is Lyndon Johnson's speech, which is a wonderful piece of oratory when he passed the Civil Rights Act. I would encourage you to go back and read it, because you'll get some sense of the heart that he put into it. Because this wasn't a speech that was put together by a committee; he wrote it.

To go to your point, he believed in this but he was also, like all of these politicians, you've got to realize politics is about realpolitik. Learn that word; you can Google it.

HARRIS WOFFORD: That's the speech where Johnson says, "We shall overcome."

CALLIE CROSSLEY: Thank you all to my panel – Kenneth Mack, Roger Wilkins, Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Harris Wofford. [applause]

PANEL 4: CIVIL RIGHTS THEN AND NOW

TOM PUTNAM: So if everyone could take their seats, please. Before we begin the last panel, we have remarks from two Presidents – President Jimmy Carter and President Bill Clinton.

> **PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER:** [via video] I'm pleased to know that so many of you have gathered in Boston on Presidents' Day under the auspices of the National Archives and the presidential library system to examine the history of the presidency and our nation's struggle to expand civil rights for all its citizens.
>
> I regret that I could not join you in person, because I have fond memories of officially dedicating the Kennedy Library when it opened in 1979 and returning to speak there last year. I understand that Ray Suarez, who moderated the forum with me last spring, is participating in this conference, as well as two civil rights heroes, a fellow native Georgian, Charlayne Hunter-Gault, and Ernie Green, who served in my administration. I salute them and all the distinguished panelists. I thank them for participating in this historic event.
>
> As I stated at the Kennedy Library dedication ceremony, quote: As a Southerner, as a Georgian, I saw first hand how the moral leadership of the Kennedy Administration helped to undo the wrongs that grew out of our nation's history. Unquote. I suggested that the struggle to promote equal rights and opportunities for all is ongoing and it must be shaped by the following principles: We're all Americans. We're all children of the same God. Racial violence and racial hatred

can have no place among us. And that the moral imperative of those who have led the march for civil rights during our lifetimes still remains with us today.

Having grown up on a farm with only black playmates and neighbors, I recognized the blight of racial discrimination and made human rights the foundation of our foreign policy when I was President. Since then, in our work at the Carter Center, the broadest definition of human rights has been the umbrella under which all of our projects have been conducted, including peace, freedom, democracy and the provision of shelter, food, education, healthcare, self-respect and hope for a better future.

Unfortunately, since 9/11 we are seeing an abridgement of social and political freedoms in our country and multiple violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in our efforts to combat terrorism.

Once again, I applaud David Ferriero, the Archivist of the United States, and all those involved in putting together today's conference. I am honored to have been asked to share these few words with you and especially encourage the young people who are in the audience today to pick up the mantle of Ernie Green and Charlayne Hunter-Gault, of Harris Wofford and Roger Wilkins, and to serve as our nation's next generation of leaders in this ongoing struggle to build a more just and equitable nation and a more peaceful world. Thank you. [applause]

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [via video] Good afternoon. I'm sorry I can't be there with you today, but I'm glad to be able to welcome you to this terribly important conversation. Though much has changed in our country since the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, our work on civil rights is far from finished. I saw this unfinished work firsthand, first as a Southern governor and then as President.

Through my administration's National Initiative on Race, I worked to bring our country closer together across the racial divides to prepare for a 21st century in which we're all bound together. I'll never forget the horrific string of arsons that destroyed historical black churches in the South and the work we did to put an end to them, to heal and to move forward together.

Today there are new challenges to civil rights and social practice both within and beyond our borders, and it's more important than ever that we have conversations like this, that we work to build a country of shared values, shared opportunities and shared responsibilities. Because we continue to believe that as important as our differences are, our common humanity matters more. So thanks again for being here. I hope you have a very productive conference. [applause]

TOM PUTNAM: Before we open this last panel, I want to thank four colleagues for all of their work and support of the conference. First my colleague, Tom McNaught, Executive Director of the Kennedy Library Foundation; Nancy McCoy, our Director of Education; Carol Ferguson, who provides all the technical support; and Amy Macdonald, our forum producer extraordinaire. [applause] I also wanted to recognize a young civil rights attorney who ventured down into the South during the Kennedy Administration as part of the Justice Department, working for John Doar, Judge Gordon Martin is here with us. [applause] And lastly, moderator's prerogative. You'll notice we took Charlayne's book away from her. [laughter]

So based on the last comment from President Clinton, he said there are new challenges in our world today for civil rights and social progress, and that's really what this last panel is about. I wanted to begin with Ray Suarez. President Carter just invoked God by saying we're all children of the same God. And when President Kennedy introduced his legislation, he said that we faced a moral crisis as a country and a people that was as old as the Scriptures and as clear as the Constitution. And clearly, Martin Luther King led the movement really steeped in religion.

You've written a book, *The Holy Vote: The Politics of Faith in America,* where you write about the advent of the culture wars and how religion has really become a polarizing feature of our current national politics and less successful, you write, "in helping us to create the blessed community." Is it no longer a wise or successful strategy to invoke religious and moral values to promote the cause of civil rights?

RAY SUAREZ: Well, you have to understand that if you invoke religion, it doesn't get you the same portion of the audience that it once did. At a time in our past when almost everyone in the country was, in some way, either lightly affiliated or strongly affiliated with one of the Abrahamic religions, and almost everybody in the country was culturally educated in it, you pulled in almost everyone listening to you when you invoked a common religious heritage for this country.

But the United States is so much more religiously diverse than it was earlier in our history. The largest single faith group, or the fastest growing faith group in the United States, is no religious affiliation at all. It's roughly 16-18% of the population, and growing faster than any religious group. We are no longer, as part of a common culture, educated and steeped in the language of religion in the way that we once were, where if a President used a line from a Psalm we would all know what it was. If a President used a line from one of the first five books of the Old Testament, we might all know -- or most of us in the audience might know -- who it was. So when you invoke it in that way, you may divide as much as you unite, which makes it a very, very tricky gesture.

Also, we have kind of a running sore in this country when it comes to making one people out of this 311 million of us, and that is what we're going to do and how we're going to regard Islam, the new kid on the block, the faith of millions of our fellow Americans yet regarded with unending suspicion, isolation and, as we saw in the cases of mosque-bombings and various kinds of vandalism, the lack of building permits and pickets outside various Muslim places of worship

around the country, we're not quite sure where to go next. Like with so many struggles in our history, where civil rights really involved making our arms wider, we don't know if we're yet ready to open them wide enough to include the millions of Muslims who are now our fellow Americans. So religion, how to regard religion and the place that religion has in making us one people is all still contested terrain in 2012 and only gets more complicated with every year.

TOM PUTNAM: Charlayne, similarly you talked about the role of the media in the civil rights struggle in the '60s and how getting the media and getting those pictures. But also, today the media seems to be a more complicated picture. Is the media on the side of promoting the cause of civil rights today? Can it still be used as effectively as it was in the '60s?

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: I think the media are as confused, as Ray just talked about, as the American people over religion. We were talking just before we started about the multiplicity of media forums today. You've got the Internet, you've got your cell phone, you've got things I probably don't even know about. Some of these young people could probably help me out here a little bit. But there's so many different ways of communicating that it's hard to get any centrality of ideas put across, other than maybe on the *NewsHour*, right? [laughter] My former home, I have to say that.

The other thing that's very troubling to me – I live in South Africa half of the year and here the other half – and I have noticed in the past few years a diminishing pool of African American people in prominent positions on television. I don't know why it's happening. But there are very few who had the kind of positions they had post-1968 when the Kerner Commission, President Johnson's commission, cited culpability of the media in the riots, because there were no black people or people who looked like the people who were rioting, who could tell them, who could have told them about the simmering rage that was going on in those communities.

And there's simmering rage going on in this country today based on some of the same inequities that we thought we had ended with the Civil Rights Act and that kind of legislation. It's a ticking

time bomb. You've got the whole question that Michelle Alexander deals with in her book, *The New Jim Crow*. All these black men in prison, and often for … I started to say a word I can't say in this forum. For what kind of reasons shall I say? Reasons that aren't legitimate, let's put it that way. You did SOS earlier and you recovered very quickly. I couldn't think of a word that quite accurately described how I feel about that. But there is so much that is going on that is just beneath the surface and nobody's really drilling down into it and reporting on it. So what worries me about this proliferation of media is that the proliferation of media exists, but it's not drilling down into some of the very real social problems that we have in a society.

I know this is going to be controversial, but I'm going to say it anyway: we are not in a post-racial society. I'm sorry if there are those who think we are. [applause] But if you look at the data on just about every indication of progress in this country, you'll find black people pretty much at the bottom. I heard the other day that black unemployment is going down a bit, but it's still twice as high as white. Where are the people who are looking into these things and doing very good analysis of what's going on? So I'm very disappointed in the media today, with some notable exceptions. [laughter]

TOM PUTNAM: So again, there are so many things to talk about in this panel, but, Roger, one thing, we didn't talk that much about was your service in the Johnson Administration. Certainly, one of the hallmarks of that Administration was the passage of the Voting Rights Act. That Act also was really somewhat sacrosanct in our political culture for years, but now there seems to be that even that is a divisive issue and an issue of current political debate. Are we seeing a backlash towards voting rights?

ROGER WILKINS: I think that this fragmentation of the media gives a path and a mechanism or muscles to all kinds of nuts. There are people who are angry, people who want to put the wrong people, whomever they may be, back in their place. And they get places to speak, which are ostensibly decent. I've heard stuff on some of these news dispensers that aren't news dispensers at all; they're people who've got nasty fruit to throw into good communities.

It doesn't get better, it gets worse. I mean, it proliferates. There are some people who just went off here recently. I don't think we've figured out how to have free speech and freedom of the press and also decency, civility and truth. It makes it very hard. [applause]

TOM PUTNAM: Allida, and this again is a difficult question, such a large sweep, but talk about women's rights -- the failure to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. We're trying to kind of do civil rights then and now. But what's the struggle for women's rights in contemporary …

ROGER WILKINS: This is my school partner.

ALLIDA BLACK: Well, any place that I can sit with Roger. I'm not so concerned about passing the Equal Rights Amendment as I am about promoting and risking life and limb to say that women's rights are human rights; human rights are women's rights; civil rights are human rights; human rights are civil rights. [applause] I think that is the major issue of our time. I think the sort of unintended consequence, if you will, to echo Charlayne's point, look at affirmative action. Who did affirmative action help? It helped white women more than it helped people of color. So I think that women have a huge row to hoe, and I think that in many ways, despite the progress that we've made, there are still major stereotypes. I'm thrilled that Obama is my President, but I gave my heart and soul to Hillary Clinton. [laughter] I have known her since 1970, and I went to 15 states, 14 states. I knocked on 15,000 doors, and I can tell you the animosity that was still there for a woman running for President. I got that much more of that than I got racial epithets about Obama.

So there's an undercurrent here that we still need to address, which is why I am so enormously proud of both of them for figuring out a way to devote their incomparable energies to building a world that is defined by the values that we share. I think that for women what we've got to do is to figure out how to stand up for ourselves, talk for ourselves, build a community that is

inclusive, and say that women's rights also help men, they also help children, they help people of every religion, and that they are in fact fundamental standards of human decency.

Until we understand the problems of housing, of access to food, of access to education, the struggle -- if you look for last-hired/first-fired -- look at the teachers that are being let go; they're disproportionately women and they're disproportionately people of color. It's a systemic thing here. I think we have made significant progress, and I'm proud of that. But my great frustration, to the young people that are in this audience, is they are much more likely to know the stories of Charlayne and the stories of Ernie Green, and the incomparable courage that Roger has displayed throughout his career, than they are to what happened to women in the '40s, the '50s, the '60s and the '70s. And now with the new battle over contraception, I fear that we are going to go back into this whole thing again. So I'm pretty worried.

TOM PUTNAM: Let's switch to a whole different topic that President Carter brought up, Ray, and that's the question, again, of the civil rights of terrorist suspects after 9/11. You tell me that you reported on a story about that. Could you share that?

RAY SUAREZ: I was covering the arrest and detention of Jose Padilla and got very interested in it over time. For those of you who don't remember, he was arrested at O'Hare Airport and accused of plotting a so-called dirty bomb attack in the heart of a major American city -- that is, an explosive would be tied to a portion of radioactive material, which would then be scattered, rendering a place poisoned and useless, so it would have to be evacuated.

Jose Padilla was born in Brooklyn, raised in Chicago, lived in Florida, arrested in Illinois, and held without charge for two-and-a-half years, most of that time in solitary confinement in various kinds of restraints that also deprived him of his senses. So he couldn't hear things, he couldn't see things, he couldn't speak to anybody. Without being arraigned. Now, he was later tried and found guilty on charges totally separate from the ones for which he was arrested and held. So now he's been convicted to life in prison, and there he is in prison.

A bad guy? Likely. Found to be guilty of plotting against the United States. But it should arouse your attention. It should arouse your concern if you are an American and your fellow citizen can be picked up in the United States and held without being charged with anything for two-and-a-half years.

When I worked up a book proposal on the Padilla case and shopped it around to publishers, nobody wanted to print it because it was a downer, as one publisher said. Now, yes, that's one of the reasons why it would be a good book, frankly. It's a downer. It's a downer that it can happen. It's a downer that it did happen. It's a downer that Jose Padilla, because he was a Puerto Rican gangbanger and not the head of the local Lion's Club or Rotary, can be stuck away in a prison without anybody giving a damn whether he's even there or whether he was ever tried.

It should be something of tremendous concern to us all. And I have to say again, I'm not sticking up for the guy. If he's guilty of anything, then fine, let our legal system work and find him guilty and put him away for as long as the charges he's charged with merit his detention. But Americans should not be arrested in America by American law enforcement and then held without charge. That's Bill of Rights stuff. That's Magna Carta stuff. [applause]

I'm not an activist. I'm not a crusader. I'm just a guy who watches to see if people play by the rules. If those are the rules …The barons made King John sign that it was the rules in Runnymede in, what?, 1215. So those have been the rules for a long time. Two-and-a-half years without charge is an amazing thing, but it happened to Jose Padilla because of who he was. But what would it take in this country for it to happen to you? Or someone you know? Or someone who lives in your neighborhood? Again, not because he's a good guy; the courts have found he's a bad guy. But what our legal protections, what our civil rights exist for is not to protect the rights of good people; it's to protect the rights of people we suspect might be bad people. And the Jose Padilla case should be something that we don't forget very soon.

TOM PUTNAM: I want to switch gears just quickly and then get back to the panel. I know this is about contemporary struggles, but I want to take us back to Robert Kennedy's famous trip to South Africa so we can have the screen come down. He was invited by a group of students while he was a Senator, and after he accepted the invitation the head of the organization was actually arrested and was not allowed to greet Robert Kennedy. So a young woman named Margaret Marshall, who was a student in South Africa at the time, and we'll now hear her in this film clip in a film by Larry Shore called *RFK: Ripple of Hope*. Then we'll have a few questions for the panelists based on this short clip. So Robert Kennedy in South Africa, 1965. [film clip played]

Charlayne, you live in South Africa now and you've seen the transformation of that country and you were part of the transformation of this country. I wonder, how does the US look from an international perspective? Do people in Africa look to the US as a beacon of civil rights? Or are we losing that?

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: I think historically South Africans took great inspiration from our own struggle here in America. But I think increasingly there is a whole generation of South Africans -- we call them the Born Frees. They were born after Mandela's release. Their allegiance or even reverence for the past has diminished somewhat and they look very critically, increasingly, at America just as America is being looked at increasingly more critically around the world, which is why it's really important for those who have the opportunity to help America continue to stand as the beacon for civil and human rights and justice.

It's so coincidental that you would ask me this, because just as Ray was talking about the gentleman he reported on, I recently wrote a piece for *The New Yorker*, the blog, about a guy in South Africa by the name of Dr. Death. Well, they call him Dr. Death. His name is Wouter Basson, and he's a cardiologist who, during apartheid, created poisons aimed at killing anti-apartheid activists – cigarettes and chocolates laced with anthrax spores. They were working on a drug to make black women infertile so they wouldn't give birth to more anti-apartheid activists. That one never came off. They were also working on a poison that they could inject into

Mandela when he was released that would ultimately give him a heart attack that couldn't be traced back to that potion. That didn't come off either. But the other things did, including a potion they would give anti-apartheid activists and take them up into airplanes and have them handcuffed and inject a paralyzing agent into their body so that when they dropped them into the sea, even if they were strong and could swim, they wouldn't be able to because they were paralyzed.

Now, this guy is still practicing medicine in South Africa. He got through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Mandela in his effort to show reconciliation hired him after the end of apartheid. But now the health professionals are trying to strip him of his license because he didn't act in a manner consistent with the Hippocratic Oath. His argument is that he was a soldier following orders. We've heard that before.

So I wrote this piece for *The New Yorker* the week that they tried him. The final verdict is supposed to come down, it's continuing on the 27th of March. And at the end, I quoted -- I talked about how the pain continues to come back, even though people are trying to shed this pain from apartheid. But some people have a different view of it. There was a guy who called into the radio station and said, "I don't know why everybody's being so hard on what Wouter Basson did during apartheid when American doctors are injecting prisoners on Death Row with lethal injections and they are part of torturing prisoners at places like Guantanamo Bay whom they're trying to get testimony about terrorism things." What we should realize is that as much as many of our things in America have been beacons to others in the world, they're paying attention to our actions. And people, even those that are not formally educated, are very sophisticated. And they know more about what's going on in America than we know about what's going on in their country.

TOM PUTNAM: Allida, I wanted to use that clip to tell the rest of the story, which is that Margaret Marshall then came to the United States, was named first to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court and then its Chief Justice, and wrote the landmark decision that allowed

same-sex couples to marry, saying that that right was guaranteed in the Massachusetts State Constitution. Can you tell us about the struggle for gay rights and how that's seen. Is there a parallel with the earlier stories we heard?

ALLIDA BLACK: Yes, I do. I'd like to flip it for a little bit, because I was pretty down in the first part, what I was talking about. I live in Virginia and my legislature -- there's no other word for it -- they are Neanderthals. [laughter] My partner and I have been together for 21 years, and we have decided to get married. It was a big decision, not because we're not committed; we're more monogamous and more financially intertwined than any couple I know. But we were going to go to South Africa because Mandela got it in their Constitution. We thought what an extraordinary way to honor a man and a country that was really grappling with major issues. Then we decided to do it in the United States instead.

If I may be personal for a minute, I was an intern for Jimmy Carter. I wrote a grant that got $250,000 for Grady Hospital to set up the first rape crisis center in the South, outside of Miami. Grady would not hire any black counselors. So as only an arrogant, 21-year-old can do, I gave the money back. [laughter] I know, how stupid, right? But we set up the Multi-Area Rape Crisis Council, and by god, Sandra Flowers and I ran it, and most of the people that we saw were African American.

When I wrote a grant for the Carter Administration, when he was governor, to start up maternal/infant healthcare, they set up the program but they let me go because they thought that I might be a lesbian. Now, 20 years later, Bill Clinton is in the White House and my partner and I get invited to every Christmas party as a couple. I cannot tell you what that means. And now, a United States Senator is going to stand up and marry us. [applause] I ran the Atlanta Day Center. I have set up AIDs Atlanta. I have lost thousands of friends. I have three address books that I cannot throw away. I have seen people lose everything. Everything. I have seen kids die in the streets because hospitals would not take them. And to be able to stand in Washington, DC, the capital of my country, who I still believe in, warts and all, and will deck anybody that wants to

stop it, to be married in Washington, DC, in the War Memorial for World War I, which was built by multiracial school children in Washington, the only memorial in Washington that has black and white names carved around it, men and women carved around it, and to have a United States Senator stand up and celebrate my human rights and my relationship with my partner of 21 years is revolutionary. And I revel in that. [applause]

And if I may say one thing, when President Obama says that he stands on the shoulders of giants, I guarantee you that the people that will be with me are all the men I know who died and who did not need to die because our presidents would not respond to it. And now we have PEPFAR, we have a budget, we have a conference on AIDS, and we are doing something about it. Progress can come but, my God, is it painful. [applause]

TOM PUTNAM: So, Ray, this is a conference on civil rights and the presidency. We have the first African American President. What's the narrative here? And certainly one of the stories is the high expectations in the Latino community, for instance, on immigration reform and the Dream Act, and then a sense that a President who isn't meeting those expectations. What's the Obama narrative on civil rights?

RAY SUAREZ: The important thing to remember is that the argument is never over and the work is never done. With each succeeding generation comes more arguments about who's fully human and who's fully a citizen and who's got the privilege of being a full member of this great extended family. When the Founders drafted the Constitution, believe me, they never had any idea of Allida marrying her partner in the World War I memorial in DC. [laughter] And they never had any idea of Roger and Charlayne sitting up here. And they never had any idea about me either, frankly.

ROGER WILKINS: I haven't decided on you yet.

RAY SUAREZ: Well, all right. [laughter] The jury is totally still out, and I get that. But we always take on more because American is constantly widening the idea of what civil and human rights mean and never narrowing it, which is a great genius for people to have. If you're going to have a sort of habit that you keep coming back to century after century, there are worse habits to have, like biting your nails. So we always widen the argument.

When people were trying to get in public accommodations and mounting Trailways and Greyhounds and heading South, they didn't think they were doing it for people who wanted to go to the movies and were in a wheelchair and there was no way to the get wheelchair into the movie, but they were. They didn't think they were doing it for people who could get kicked out of their apartments because they were gay, but they were. So we're dealing with this constantly widening notion. Now, today, there are people who are not citizens of this country doing a lot of the work that gets done every day in this country. The challenge for us now, and there are people on all sides of the issue, is whether they are fully invested with a set of claims because they're human beings that they can make on us, not because they're citizens. Two different statuses.

So if they get picked up by a landscaper in the morning, they're standing on a corner near a Home Depot and a pickup truck comes by and puts five of them in the back and they go work all day, and then at the end the employer tells them to go get lost and doesn't pay them, to whom do they complain? Is this a human rights violation? Is this a civil rights violation? Is it something that they can turn to the local authorities and say, "I, too, have a claim on your attention, even though I didn't ask your permission to be here, even though I'm not a citizen, even though I'm not in your view a legitimate member of this community. Do I have a claim on your attention?" We haven't quite worked that out yet, whether that person does have some claim to the same humanity that I, as a citizen and you as a citizen, do. That's part of a long argument that goes all the way back to the original arguments in 1789. It's not divorced from it. It's not a separate thing from it. It runs like a thread through our entire history.

Whether they're working with produce that's sprayed with poisons that cause permanent nerve damage, cognitive defects, tremors permanently in your hands after you've worked picking vegetables for five or ten or 15 years, or terrible chromosomal damage that you then pass on to the children that you never even really thought about having some day; whether it means that you're a member of one of the four-and-a-half million people who live in mixed-status families in this country where some of the members of the nuclear family are citizens and some of them are not; some of them live in constant fear of deportation and some of them don't. This is a challenge to us today.

There is a legitimate argument that people who want to send them home are not all bad people, and they're not all racist, and they're not all wrong. Every country in the world has the right to control its borders and know who lives inside its country, so there is a legitimacy to that argument. But if you both use them, use them like human harvesting machines and steal their wages and don't send them home, well, that just seems to be a little bit too much. [applause]

ROGER WILKINS: Ray, since everybody's had all these negative things to say all day [laughter], I'll say a positive thing. Or tell you a positive little story. Well, first I'd say when you get to the place in life where I am, which is to say within 30 days I will step through the thing and, by god, I'll be 80 years old! [applause] I say to myself, by god, this is a different country than I was born into. It's so much a better … God knows there's terrible stuff still here – the banks, the Ponzis, and lots of crooks -- but look at you. Here we are. We wouldn't have been 100 years ago, I'll tell you that. And we did that; we Americans changed the country in extraordinary ways. But we don't tell the story very well. We tell the old stories of General Washington, good old Abe, FDR, but now everything on this stuff is too big for us, and I don't think it's too big for us.

I think probably much of the responsibility of changing things should go after digging into people like me, like Ernie, god knows like you. How did folks make this country a better country? And what is it that we now need to continue? We can't just sit around in our fancy cars

and fancy houses and say, "God, we're a swell country" when there is so much more to do. And doing it is the best stuff. I will say to you that to have done the journalism with my dear pal here, to have done a little bit of TV, a little bit of shows that he is on, to be motivated by a picture of Ernie and his co-activists, they all gave great energy, but there's something that we need to do and that is we need more people building and fewer people reaching in to, "What can I get today? A bigger car than I had yesterday," and so forth. We can teach each other that America is worth taking care of. Our schools, our hospitals, our police departments, all these things need work.

One of the things that makes me almost cry for doing it is that I have a daughter who's about to turn 30. She could be working in the White House right now because she was a terrific campaigner, and most people who get a job in the White House when they're that age think that that's enough, they'll stay at the White House the rest of their lives. This young woman gave up the job and went back to school, to Yale Law School, because she has seen the issues of people coming to America and not being treated fairly, decently, honorably. She then took a little stint with the Service Employees Union, found a whole bunch of stuff that she thought needed to be changed and fixed, and so she's at Yale Law School and the first thing she's going to be is an immigration lawyer.

I just want to say we have to take care of this country. It's not going to be a terrific country forever unless we take care of it on a regular basis, not sniff and snoop. I could say I was a journalist and I was a lawyer, I was this and that, but basically I was a citizen. I was just a citizen who really thought the place was great, particularly when Jackie won the World Series, that was really great. [laughter]

TOM PUTNAM: I had a last question for each panelist, and you already answered the question that I wanted to ask you. Let me just quote briefly from Roger Wilkins's lovely book, *Jefferson's Pillow*, in which he writes that, "The greatest legacy of our Founding Fathers is the opportunity this nation allows each of us to engage in struggles for decency. Evil," he writes, "is a basic

element of nature. The seeds are in all of us. Good has to be manufactured and pushed energetically into public affairs. It is willed into the world by human effort." Roger Wilkins. [applause]

So we're running out of time. I have a final question for all three of you. Allida, what would Eleanor Roosevelt say to us today as we were leaving this conference?

ALLIDA BLACK: She would say the last thing that she ever wrote. Staying aloof is not a solution, it is a cowardly evasion. And that we cannot leave our problems to the government, we are the government.

TOM PUTNAM: And from Allida's book, there is a lovely quote from Eleanor Roosevelt: "You're going to live in a dangerous world, but it's going to be an interesting and adventurous one. I wish you the courage to face yourselves and your prejudices, and when you know what you really want to be and when you know what you really want to fight for, not in a war, but in order to gain a peace, then I wish you imagination and understanding. God bless you. May you win." Eleanor Roosevelt. [applause]

TOM PUTNAM: So Charlayne there's a lovely moment in your memoir where you're a young student at the University of Georgia and the phone rings, and it's James Meredith. James Meredith is in the process of trying to integrate the University of Mississippi, and at first you don't believe that it's him, but finally you do. Basically, he asks for advice from what he calls a fellow traveler. What advice would you give to the fellow travelers, especially the young people today who are either defending their own rights or the rights of others?

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: Well, again, to go back in history, my grandfather, who was a presiding elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, used to tell his son, my father, and his other son, my uncle, "Get an education, boys. That's going to be the key to your liberation." And I think that is what propelled so many generations of young black people.

But I think if we bring it forward to today– as a journalist I tend to ask questions much more than I give statements -- my question would be who is educating our young people, this next generation – I guess you call them now the Millennials, you all are the Millennials – to be the giants for the next generation whose shoulders you're going to provide to stand on. Edward R. Murrow used to talk about television as an instrument that could teach, that could illuminate, that could inspire. As I said earlier, I'm not sure that most television's doing that these days with the exception of Callie and Ray and the *NewsHour*. But we need people, citizens no matter what their ages, to be educated to the promise of this country, and one of the promises was, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me."

In just a few years -- and I forget the exact year, maybe 2020, 2025 -- two-thirds of the American people are going to be people of color. The people who are now in the majority are going to be in the minority. We have a lot of work to do in terms of understanding our fellow men and women, being receptive as we were to generations of immigrants going back to the days that they put those words on the Statue of Liberty. We've got to understand what kind of country we're living in and where our country is going, and how we're going to keep it true to the thing that makes you happy and inspired, that makes you happy and inspired, because the issues that you're dealing with now, even though there's controversy, when you get married, that's going to be another step towards acceptance. There are many things, all of the things that all of us hope that we're doing are helping. But we need more educated people to understand what this country is now, what it's becoming, and what we want it to be when it changes into the permutations that it's going to go through and what it's going to become in the future. [applause]

TOM PUTNAM: So I told Ray I was going to quote from his first book, *The Old Neighborhood: What We Lost in the Great Suburban Migration.* He writes, "We were among the first Americans. Why are we still strangers? The people we refer to as Latinos or Hispanics drew their first breath when an infant was born nine months after Christopher Columbus arrived in the

New World. Five hundred years later we bus your tables, watch your kids, pick your strawberries, lay your sod, and frighten you on darkened streets. We fill up your jails, fight your wars, and populate your dreams of immigrant invasion and fabulous sex. [laughter] Yet we are still strangers."

So Ray comment on how the Latino experience fits into this national conversation on civil rights. Your daughter's here. My two children are here. And I can't quite believe I talked about fabulous sex in front of them. [laughter] What's the advice that you give to young people today?

RAY SUAREZ: Well, right now I'm writing a book. I'm sorry I don't have my book here to hold up. [laughter]

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: You can hold up mine. [laughter]

RAY SUAREZ: But I'm writing a history of Latinos in America since the end of the Mexican War. And right now, I'm immersed in the chapter about the Latino civil rights movement which follows on the heels of the great struggles for black civil rights in this country. And whether it's the Brown Berets or the Young Lords or La Raza Unida, or in more establishment circles, Henry Gonzalez, or Ruben Salazar, these men and women -- Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta -- went to school on what black Americans did, organizing with their bodies, with their lives, with their passion and understood that those struggles are never over. Understood that it was going to be different because it manifests itself in a different way, and our history is different and the reasons we're here are different. But humanity is humanity and playing fair is playing fair.

Those people, those men and women were going to do what was necessary to make America pay attention. I don't think they could have imagined in 1965 -- in school strikes in LA Unified, in attempts to force integration and school lunches in Phoenix and the Rio Grande Valley in Texas -- I don't think they could have imagined a country where in 2010, for the first time, more children were born in this country who traced their ancestry to Africa, Latin America and Asia

than to Europe, for the first time ever. That's the front edge of the wedge that Charlayne was talking about.

America is still going to be built on that same DNA. America's still going to be America once that change happens and once those children reach their maturity and are running things instead of just being told what to do. So it means everybody has to stretch a little bit, and we did it before. We've done it before. We're constantly stretching and expanding that notion of who's worthy of my attention and my care and my inclusion. We're going to do it again, but there's a lot of stuff that happens between now and the time that we finally get it. There always has been. Every new people that has come to this country has had to get hazed first, and after they're hazed, then they're in, and once you're in, you eventually get to run things.

Just think of all the people who are just part of our common culture today, whose own parents or grandparents never could have done the wonderful things that they're doing. That's the great genius of America. We're going to get it right. We always do eventually. Roger's right when he says America needs constant care and watering, but also don't be discouraged, because we always do eventually get it right. [applause]

ALLIDA BLACK: And it's fun. I mean, we've talked about struggle, we've talked about violence, we've talked about death. But the friendships that you make in the struggle are friendships that are unbreakable. If there's reincarnation, they will last you lifetime after lifetime after lifetime. So for the young people that are here, go do this. If you're not doing it for your country, do it for yourself and do it for the profound relationships that you can make and the courage and the joy that that will give you. [applause]

TOM PUTNAM: In his memoir, Roger Wilkins quotes one of his mentors, Thurgood Marshall, who once told a reporter that he hopes subsequent generations would look back on his life and say, "He did the best he could with what he had." We tried to cover a lot of territory in this

conference, but I hope we did the best we could with what we had. I want to especially thank our wonderful conference speakers. [applause]

Let's bring the screen down, and let us end with the words of the man whose memory we honor in this Library, paired with images of the struggles, the civil rights and human rights struggles that we face today. John F. Kennedy.

> **JOHN F. KENNEDY: [via film clip]** The United States of America is opposed to discrimination and persecution on grounds of race and religion anywhere in the world, including our own Nation.
>
> This Nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and this is a matter which concerns this country and what it stands for.
>
> I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end, where all men and all churches are treated as equal.
>
> It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color.
>
> **BARACK OBAMA:** Change has come to America.
>
> **JOHN F. KENNEDY:** I ask the support of all of our citizens. Thank you very much. [applause]

TOM PUTNAM: Thank you all for coming.

THE END