Civil Rights and the Press Symposium
Keynote Address: Hodding Carter III

Saturday, April 24, 2004

Dean David Rubin: I am happy you all could be here today. To draw an analogy, I feel like I'm at Cooperstown on Hall of Fame Weekend, and we have all of these fabulous journalists who covered the civil rights movement all gathered together in the same dining room at the same time. It's as if we were at the Otesaga (Hotel) in Cooperstown and we were looking at all the great Hall of Famers coming back. It's very exciting for any of us who have any connection to journalism and remember that period.

My first and strongest and still most enduring image of Hodding Carter III comes from when he was the chief spokesman for Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in the Jimmy Carter - no relation - administration during the hostage crisis when Iran was holding 300-some Americans. As I say, he was chief spokesman. I remember not so much what he said, but I remember watching him on television, and thinking, I didn't know him, "Jeez, this is one honest guy, intelligent guy. This is a guy who has respect for the electorate and for our own intelligence. This guy is charismatic. This guy is good-looking. This guy is really terrific."

When you think about the respect he showed for truth, for openness during that very difficult period and you compare it to what we're hearing from spokespeople from Washington today, in a time of arguably equally great danger, it makes at least this person weep for what we have lost. I have seen Hodding in other roles, and was privileged to work with him in one of them. I must say, as far as I can tell, Hodding is able to master whatever role it is. I worked with him on a public television program about the press called “Inside Story” in 1980, which was a half-hour weekly program, critiquing media performance, sorely needed today. Wish we had it, but there wasn't enough underwriting to support it. While we were on, we did some good work. Hodding was the anchor and he was the spiritual father of it. He hadn't ever done this sort of television show before. He had obviously been on television a lot. He had never hosted a show. It took him about 10 minutes to figure out how to master that skill and he did. He did a great job at it.

He's a terrific teacher, faculty member. He was the Knight Chair in Public Affairs Journalism at the University of Maryland between 1995 and 1998. He is now the president of the Knight Foundation, where he is doing an equally good job, excellent job of supporting many journalistic projects. In fact, it was a gift from the Knight Foundation that created our Knight Chair in Political Reporting, which Charlotte Grimes occupies. If not for that gift, no one is here today. So Hodding can take a lot of credit for that. In his role as storyteller, raconteur, and terrific imbiber of spirits, he also cannot be matched. I didn't have the privilege,

however, of knowing him when he was at the paper that his father founded, the Delta Democrat-Times in Greenville, Mississippi. Our Hodding himself was there between 1959 and 1977 before he joined the President Carter Administration. He was a reporter, an editorial writer, managing editor, and editor, and did all of that before joining the administration.

His father, Hodding Carter, Jr., won the Pulitzer Prize in 1946, for editorials calling for racial tolerance in Mississippi. If you can imagine what the situation in Mississippi in 1946 was, for a white man to write these kinds of editorials. You can see the kind of courage that marks the Carter family, and they put up with boycotts of the paper, cross burnings on their own lawn, death threats. I'm sure Hodding is going to go a little bit at least into that. If he doesn't, I'm sure you will have questions for him about what it must have been like at that time. His family and that newspaper are central to the responsible journalistic response in that era to combating racism in the United States. I've long felt Hodding could do anything. He's already done a lot of things. He could do anything. He would have been a terrific senator from the state of Mississippi. He would have been a terrific university president at any university in this country. He could have been Secretary of State himself. If he had ever run for president of the United States, I would have happily stuffed envelopes for him and given him all the money I had. We are fortunate to have him here today, my friend, Hodding Carter.

Hodding Carter III: I'm sorry. Hi, I'm here! There's no response to that. I'm reminded years ago, I was on a colloquium in Tulane with James Dickey, the late poet and writer from the South. Jim Dickey was many things, but a true imbiber of many spirits, he was the maximum leader. He arrived already having maximum imbibed, and I was in a town – New Orleans – where my mother and my great aunts were all there. They were present in the audience. We were going to talk about the nature of the changing South. This was about 1971. We give our little pieces, and I suddenly realize he's drunk as a skunk. Whatever he has to say is not going to track. I have this dead, serious, and I have to add deadly dull speech which I give, which puts all the students to sleep. They love every word he's saying, so much as they can make it out. The first question, they said, "Who do you see the ticket being that will successfully carry the South?" At which point he leapt to his feet, grabbed my arm, and put us up in front of the audience. They cheered, and that was the high point of the entire night. It went downhill from there.

I've been listening to stunning people talk this morning. I was, just to put it bluntly, moved to tears by the opening session and the opening graphics and music. I mean, moved to tears is not an exaggeration. I was really moved to tears. Listening to this bunch of friends and acquaintances and folks who have been there reminded me that maybe my task needed to be something different. So I've torn up a fair amount of what I meant to say because a keynoter coming four hours after something begins is in any case a contradiction in terms. I think what I wanted to say would have been a footnote rather than a keynote. So I

would rather talk a little bit about reality on the ground in the South, and for those who evolved into what are now loosely called heroes today.

I want to tell it to you from the point of view from my own family. It's important to students, in particular, and young people that you do not somehow get the impression that there are some people who emerge full-blown from their mother's womb as heroes, or that there were a world of us whites who, in the South from which we came, arrived fully-clothed as integrationists ready to make the leap into the new society with every word we wrote and every reporter we directed. It was undoubtedly true of some of those who covered us. It was not true, it was not true of those of us who were both Southern or owners and were editors. It was a long, hard, slogging journey. Mine was a lot easier than many because of who it was that I followed.

Let me just tell you about my family. My grandfather who was the first William Hodding Carter believed that the proudest moment of his life was being personal secretary to James K. Vardaman, the “Great White Father,” the redeemer of the working white against the bourbons of Mississippi, a racist of the first order, a man who was proud of the kind of phraseology, which would include such things as, "You educate the nigger, and you get an educated baboon." My grandfather thought he was a great man. I thought my grandfather was a great man. He was a man of stunning personal integrity, a man whose standing in his own community among whites in Hammond, Louisiana, was very high, and a man whose wife had to shame him out of retaining his Klan membership.

So it was only in his latter decades that he no longer would proudly put forth that membership. He had a son, William Hodding Carter, Jr. My father did not emerge in Hammond, Louisiana, as a great integrationist in 1914, 1920, 1925. He went off to a far-distance school because he had a distant uncle who was willing to pay the education of all of his nieces and nephews arising from the family of 11, which was my grandfather's family. They sent my dad off to Bowdoin, where he encountered for the first time a black man with whom he was supposed to have direct relationship as an equal. He found it to be an overpowering and almost impossible experience. He left Bowdoin somewhat better educated, but not necessarily more attuned to the need for change. He wanted a reporter in New Orleans for UPI. He married my mother, a New Orleans girl. The first job he had was with AP in Jackson.

I have to say, The Associated Press for a large part of its history, it was a direct tool of publishers. When publishers barked, AP danced. AP decided they had to dance in the early 1930s because the coverage of these two boys working in their bureau in Jackson was offending a number of the publishers in Mississippi, who were opposed to a new sales tax being put forward by that man already mentioned, then-governor Theodore Bilbo. They were providing straight coverage. So he was fired. They determined from that day he would never again work for somebody else. He went directly home to Hammond, Louisiana.

Race is the last thing on his mind. He found a tiny little daily newspaper in Hammond, Louisiana, population 400 at the time to reach 10,000. The one objective as far as anyone could tell who has read copies of that paper which survived for a couple of years, was that their main objective was the destruction of Huey Long, the second most powerful politician in America, only behind Franklin Roosevelt.

It will not surprise you to know that the victor in that contest was not Dad. He went out of business crushed by the end of the 1935 year. I must say, preceded, however, in metaphorical death by the literal death of Huey Long, who was assassinated somewhat earlier in that same year. He got a call when he was up listening to a man doing a review of a book he had in progress. The man was Robert Penn Warren, the place was LSU, and the book was going to be “All the King's Men.” A friend of his he had known from New Orleans, who was from Greenville, Mississippi, said, "Now that you've banged your head against the wall, why don't you come up to Greenville? They're looking for somebody. I know William Alexander Percy and others would like to back you." We went there in '36. The five men besides Percy who backed him did not ever get over their mistake because they thought they were bringing a firebrand local fellow who cared about community, which they got.

They did not know they were getting a fellow who was going to go through an evolution which never stopped throughout his entire life. Before the '30s were over, he was doing things which - I have to tell you, you got to know this - were considered revolutionary in most of the South, and, in Mississippi, of course, were simply anathema. Such as putting Jesse Owens on the front page almost within the year that he arrived there with his little competitive paper after he won at the Olympics in Berlin. Such as before the '30s were over, deciding – listen to me carefully – that it was proper that you would put the honorific "Mrs." in front of the names of black women, as opposed to the normal address in most Southern newspapers, a first name only; or, if you were lucky, "a Jackson woman," but never a "Mrs." These are ridiculously tiny things. Each one of them was considered to be a direct assault upon our way of life, white supremacy, and the continuation of Jim Crow. Dad went off as a Neiman in the second Neiman class. I think that had as much effect on him as anything. He worked for PM, a new newspaper, for a little while. I think meeting a lot of Communists affected him, also on PM. Then being overseas in North Africa during the war.

He came back on fire, on fire as so many young people did. You heard earlier about the young blacks coming out of the war saying, "This was going to be our new war. We were allowed to fight for America overseas. We're against the fascists. Now we fight here." Some Southern whites came back the same way Dad did, and a fever hot-peaked. In the few months that he wasn't still in uniform in '45, he wrote the editorials that won the Pulitzer in '46, which was about where I come in, because we moved back from Washington where we had been for all of World War II to Mississippi in time for him to win the Pulitzer, and for me to

understand that I was the child of a nigger-loving, Communist, Jew-bought - all the words that one of you or two of you used earlier were directly addressed to the 10-year-old in the schoolyard starting in 1945, '46, '46 on. A position I understood myself to be in. Dad was well understood to be, at best, a moderate. No Northern liberal could have addressed him as a liberal or an integrationist, nor could they on his writing, which was prolific. Before he died, he had written 22 books, of which well over 16 or 17 were about the South. You can follow his own evolution there.

He was as much a defender of the South as a critic. Except that in every critical movement, when the moment of decision time came, he made the right decision. So having absolutely been opposed to the notion that the courts should abandon precedent and knock down school desegregation before '54, upon the decision wrote an editorial which said that it was "right morally, it was right politically, and it must be obeyed, but hold on to your hats - this is not going to happen overnight, so let's cool it." That editorial was not enough to bring what was soon to come down. As he noticed that there was in the Klan - despite everyone's rhetoric - had pretty much been dead in the South since the '20s - he noticed there was a growing reaction which was taking the place of the Citizens' Councils, which had been founded in the town 27 miles away, and that they were both secretive and efficient in their purging of those who, for instance, suggested that they wanted to go to white schools, so-called, or vote. He became increasingly opposed to them. The famous peace call, “A Wave of Terror Threatens the South” – a nice, understated headline that didn't help them at all – that ran in Look in '55 and led, and I just say this as a fact, to a boycott that existed of our paper outside of Greenville in our trade area from 1955 to 1969, a 14-year-period in which, on the average year, we had to wait five months to get out of the red every year. The biggest profit margin that that paper made in the average year and the first 14 after '55 was $80,000 before taxes. We were surviving essentially on his skill as a writer outside that place. The pressures were real.

Something I have to say to you because it’s a fact. I never knew a day in any home we lived in in Mississippi in which there was not a gun in every public room. I cannot remember a day in my life as a newspaper man in which there was not a gun in the editor's drawer until 1964, when my brother killed himself with a pistol, and I decided that guns were probably not the safest things to have around. I cannot remember a year or period from 1946 until about 1971, in which the commonplace was not the phone call, the threat and the like. And I cannot remember a single time that anybody actually showed up, which is point one. We were terrified. Dad was terrified. I was terrified thereafter. Nobody killed us. They couldn't even put us out of business. But in that period, many people were being killed, and many others were being thrown off the farm, out of their jobs, run out of the state, and run out of the region. Those are, in fact, both victims and heroes; heroes in ways that none of us, particularly in the white press, deserve ever to be applied because let me say something to you categorically: I

know a lot of papers in that period that went down because of bad management procedures, of bad management. I never knew a daily paper anywhere that went out of business because of its editorial stance, ever, anywhere, under any circumstance. Some of us came close, but we didn't go down.

Believe me, the only thing you thought about if you owned your own paper was not your brilliance shining brightly in the salons of the Northeast. It was whether or not you were going to stay and survive, whether or not you were even going to survive. That was a major factor. I want to repeat, we did survive.

Now let me tell you about me, the third generation. Dad was constantly evolving. The only book ever written about him was called, “The Reconstruction of a Racist.” A grabby title, a cutesy title, but most of the words in that book were right even though the music was wrong. It's not a bad deal. So 1954, and I'm off at Princeton University, a school I'd never seen before I arrived there in 1953. I knew nobody who had ever gone there, didn't know why I was there after I got there, but there I was. I was what passed for affirmative action at white Princeton in those days. I came from a tiny Mississippi public high school. I'm sitting there and I run into one of my classmates, whose name is John Stennis Jr., from Mississippi. He said, "Have you heard about the Supreme Court desegregation decision?" I said, "No, what?" He said, "They have ruled segregation in the schools is unconstitutional." I said, "My God! Have they gone mad! We know we've got to get there, but we shouldn't do it by court edict. We've got to decide this for ourselves." I was an enlightened Southerner of my time because I thought we ought to get there. But I sure as hell didn't think we ought to do it.

I tell you that because I came back to Mississippi out of the Marines full of bravado into the election of Ross Barnett as governor of Mississippi. Dad was out of the country at the time. I didn't know from diddley. And suddenly I am writing the editorials and having a hell of a good old time. Of course, Ross rolled over us and annihilated everything, and became the governor responsible in the first instance for what happened at Ole Miss. At Ole Miss, I had been over there covering it up until the day before, came home, sent another reporter back over that night. Thank God I wasn't out there somewhere in the tear gas when it took place. The year before, Dad had given a speech at Brown. When it was over, he was asked a question, "What do you think about what has happened to the Freedom Riders down in McComb?" They had made their way through Alabama. "What do you think ought to be done?" He said, "If the government of the United States is big enough to take on the Soviet Union, it's got to be big enough to take on mobsters in the streets of McComb." They said, "What do you think ought to be done?" He said, "Well, they may have to use marshals?" "What if that doesn't work?" "Then they have to use troops." The Jackson Daily News ran a headline the next day that said, "Carter Urges Troops to Integrate Mississippi." We lost 10 percent of our circulation within the next three days. Ten percent.

I offer you that because on the day of Ole Miss, September 30th, my last editorial, and it was my editorial because Dad was writing a residence down at Tulane, said, "The governor of Mississippi is guilty of sedition. He must be put in a federal penitentiary." We lost 15 percent of our circulation that day. That night, of course, we hung around with guns outside our house all night. Then I want to tell you about hanging around with guns all night. My dad came riding up from New Orleans and my uncle was pulled out of bed to go with him. My newly-married brother was pulled out of bed, and they drove all through the night. We stayed up all night, and they arrived about four in the morning, and nothing had happened. We all went to bed that night about nine, exhausted. They burned a cross that night. The only time we ever had a political ally in office - the sheriff – ever, was that period. About four days later, he called up and said, "I've caught who did it." It was three kids… three kids. I'll always thank God that they didn't come that night because we were scared out of our skulls. We all had shotguns, we all had pistols - me, an off-duty deputy sheriff friend of mine, an old buddy who was a Lebanese restaurateur. We would have killed them… we would have killed them. As stupid a way to have done something as I could think of, I want to tell you, I was scared enough to shoot a rabbit if it had jumped, let alone a guy coming with a cross.

In '62, our editorial policy, folks, was law and order. It was not go out there and do the right thing, because morally we ought to be integrated. I want you to understand that. In fact, many of the heroes you hear cited from time to time had not yet gotten their way past the notion of law and order being the doctrinal thing, not integration being the doctrinal thing. We were all coming out of the most wretched aspect of American history, wrenching ourselves out of 350 years, and it did not come easy. I was walking in big shoes under a big shadow, for which I should have thanked God and did. But, believe me - I did not leap overnight into a position that somebody can now go back and read what I wrote in those days and say, "That boy was a really wonderful liberated integrationist." I see some of my friends here who know damn well what I was writing back in those days. There's no point in pretending otherwise.

The reason I say that is, what I was writing in those days, what was the exceptional different kind of writing, which I heard the phrase "20 newspapers in the South today" - I think that's stretching by two to three - but about all that they were because the average Southern newspaper was as bigoted, as racist, as committed to the status quo. It wasn't just Grover Hall, who was a madman in his own right. It wasn't just Grover, who was a conspirator among editors in the South with the forces of reaction. There wasn't a state that didn't have those: Harrison, Georgia; the Hennemans here; you name them – Shannon down in Shreveport, who were not conspirators with the segregationists, which is to say, the political order in trying to retain white supremacy. It was the way it was. The white Southern press en masse never really got there until well into the '70s. I'm looking at old Seigenthaler. He had, on behalf of the administration, a couple of conferences with people in '61 to come up to Washington to talk about what was

going to happen when Meredith finally got in. How do we think things ought to proceed? John and I always differ a little bit on exactly what took place there. It doesn't really matter. My memory is the only thing that matters when I'm telling the story.

The one thing I can tell you is, they brought us up separately, black and white. I was in the white group that was brought up to answer "What do you think will happen?" A lot of the guys who were with me including some much braver and much more liberal than me, were suggesting all we had to do was show the federal flag and things would be okay. I said, "No, actually, it's not going to be okay. You're going to have to use, at the very minimum, marshals, and you're probably going to have to do worse than that." And John said, as my memory tells me, "No, Hodding. We Southerners are all Americans. When they see the flag, they will salute." It was only three weeks later that one of those saluting sons-a-bitches had put John Seigenthaler in the ditch hit upside the head while he was trying to save the Freedom Riders from what came to them in one town in Alabama. I always thought about my fellow Southerners saluting when they saw the flag after that and was confident that it was going to be the name of the game. Well, each of us got to where we were going eventually.

I want you to know one thing: in the period between 1954 and 1971, 17 editorials were given out for editorial writing, and nine of them went to white Southerners writing about desegregation. But you've got to go read what it was that a lot of us wrote in that period. Law and order was the heavy strain of the first six of them. Then, little by little, the ones got closer and closer to going beyond law and order and into making the absolutely moral case for integration. It was a hard thing for us to get to. For me, when I was a kid, I took one of those tests, in which they tell you, by the basis of the test, what you ought to do with your career thereafter. My test was so far off the chart in subjectivity that they said, "The one thing you can never be is a journalist." I say that only because about 1964, I decided the only thing I couldn't be was only a journalist. That about the time the boys got killed over in Neshoba County, that writing about it wasn't enough for me anymore, which was what put me into the one thing that nobody did talk about, which was when I became a totally dishonest journalist and went into politics. I was not a civil rights worker, it is often said. I was not. I wish I had been, but I wasn't. But I was increasingly a part of what flew out of the Freedom Democrats of 1964, part of the effort to make the Democratic Party truly democratic.

So, 1968, I was co-chairman for the delegation for Mississippi. The other co-chair being Aaron Henry, the great man who ran the NAACP for Mississippi, which replaced the white delegation. Why do I tell you that? Because when I came home, my dad called me up from New Orleans and said, "Will you tell me one Goddamn thing? They wanted to kill me on a regular basis when I just wanted to get the vote, or that somebody who indeed had the competency to have the job. And, here you run all over hell and gone, and they don't seem to be giving a hoot about it. You're constantly on the TV with Aaron Henry and

you're up here." I said, "I have no idea about that." About a week later, he was up visiting. I was over at Leland, Mississippi, as an honest journalist, for the Humphrey ticket, debating some Wallace-ite and some Nixon-ite, up on this podium with gas lights flooding, and the crowd out there in the dark. And Dad and my uncle and my brother come over to make sure I'd live. They're back there. I go last, and as I get up to speak, the entire police force of Leland, Mississippi, all six of them, come out and they get in front of me. They do the logical thing to protect me - they turned in and looked at me. I got a small message. I get about halfway into it, I start hearing, "Shut up, you son of a bitch." It was quite vigorous. When it was over, the chief of police said, "I've done about all I want to do for you, y'all get out of town." We got out of town and went to some old coffee place out on the highway. I said, "What the hell was all that back there?" My brother shuffled his feet and said, "That was your father trying to quiet the hecklers." Which is another way of telling you, whatever dangers may have come, believe me, they never actually physically came to me. Enough.

What I simply am trying to say to you is, a lot of us had to come a long way in the business. A lot of us had to learn as we did it. The people we were covering or the people we were allegedly speaking for, the people we were allegedly trying to protect were the ones who were dying. I saw Bob Moses the other day in Miami. For those of you who don't know Bob Moses - a legendary “snick” (SNCC, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Council) kid in south Mississippi. In the early days, a man that equally legendary today for what he's doing in mathematics education within central cities across this country; most particularly, my old town of Jackson, Mississippi, where he teaches right now. I saw him the other day and I said, "I'm going to have to tell you a story because I'm trying to purge my soul in anticipation of going over to this thing about heroes in the Southern press. Say, remember when you ran into me in front of the federal courthouse back in 1964?" He said to me, "When are you guys going to quit red baiting us?" I said, "What the hell are you talking about?" He said, "You know, that damn story you wrote. About those pieces of material in the “Freedom Houses” which were teaching people how to build Molotov cocktails." I said, "Well, Bob, I'll tell you what. The day that I quit writing about that is the day I quit writing about Klan instruction on how it is that you fire up a cross. I can't think of a dumber thing than that." He said, "Well, by God, it was red baiting, and when you do it, you know what you're doing." I said, "Well, it may be, but that's the end of it. Here's the deal. I will now agree that we probably shouldn't have emphasized it as much, if you will now agree with me I wasn't red baiting.” It was a stupid Goddamn thing to have Molotov cocktail instructions inside the “Freedom Houses.” We didn't either one actually shake hands on that one.

But it was a reminder again, there was not exact connection between me and the movement, even as late as '64, or what the paper thought was this duty and what people in the movement thought this other press was doing - which was protective coverage as well. The guys that are sitting in the back of the room

right now and who were sitting in front of the room earlier and are going to be sitting in front of you right now were something else important. Whether it was Valeriani or Kaplow, who were bringing the news to the screen in front of you, or whether it was the “Johnny Appleseeds” of the print press going from town to town spreading a little information, they were circuit riders, brother. When they came to my town, telling me what was happening elsewhere, it gave me sense of connection, it gave a lot of us some sense of connection that we weren't alone. So all the other things that were important about what those traveling press from the outside were doing, it was that reminder that those who were doing this work weren't alone, less so for people like me than for people in the field. Years later, when I was listening to people criticizing the pro-democracy, pro-human rights forces who were trying to emphasize what was happening in the Soviet Union. They used to argue, "Hey, you run that stuff, you endanger them." I remembered us back there in Mississippi and said, "Hell, no. This is the only lifeline they have, which is to have this kind of coverage, this kind of connection with the outside world." It was something the press brought across the board, across the South, once, as Gene points out, it finally committed itself to the task of covering the South. I have now managed to do the great Southern thing, which is to filibuster long enough to evade almost any kind of questions. But, in the two seconds I'm sure they'll give me for them, I'd be happy to take questions on almost any subject except current foreign policy. I have no answers whatsoever on foreign policy except to go, "Aaaarrrrgh," but that's a different question.

Folks, I'm looking at some of the younger ones, and you're not one of the younger ones, Rubin. I remember how often it is that it is the students who are the last to participate in this because of, among other things, they're looking at all these old goats thinking, "How the hell do I ask the question?" Let me tell you, every one of us, folks, looked like you, and we were asking the really impertinent questions all over heck and gone. Jump on up here, you've got to have some kind of question.

What advice would I give your generation? I think the question was asked of one of the other participants earlier. The answer is always the same if you want to do journalism and if you want to be a reporter. You've got to commit yourself to the hard slog of getting the entire story, whatever it is, and pushing to get it out there. When I was teaching, they used to always say, "Hell, it was all very easy for you because your paper and whatever and you're telling." I'm just going to start with a proposition for you. In journalism, anybody who tells you they're promising you a rose garden is wrong, and if they tell you how bad journalism out there is, let me tell you the only possibility of changing it, the only possibility of changing, it is going to be from those who participate to do as such – demanding of change within, as we used to say, Southerners should make in trying to demand change in the South. It takes a lot less guts to say journalism has got to be better, working in journalism, than it took to be a black civil rights person saying the South has got to change or even for some Southern journalist. But learn the basics, go out and demand that you be given the opportunity, demand it again,

be willing not to take the job and tell them to “stuff it” if you can't be a straight journalist. I mean this, dead serious.

There's not an infinite supply of folks to do the jobs, so they seem to find an ever more infinite supply of machines to replace folks. You're just going to have to go out there and press it hard. I was asking myself a different question earlier. What would be the equivalent decision that would come down by the Supreme Court demanding people take stands which could be lethal to downright economically destructive? Let me tell you, what I could come closest to the moral equivalent which this Supreme Court will never give us. But given the texture of life, and where we stand, it would be for the Supreme Court to rule that in fact gay marriages are in fact constitutional and that bans on gay marriages are in fact unconstitutional. Reversing an entire doctrine of precedent and bringing down an utter change in the social order. I would suggest to you that the reaction that might flow from that decision would make the Southern reaction at the time of Brown not pale, but at least come into perspective. There are still issues out there about which social mores are involved, and in which high passion is involved, which remain yet to be dealt with. We'll see how well we do it.

Audience Question: What kept you going? Were the Ku Klux Klan bad shots? Is that the reason why they missed you?

Carter: You know, it's a funny thing. The Klan actually revived when the Citizens' Council and others and the legislative side proved that they couldn't contain it. From '54 to '64 is a period in which violence is heavy. It is not yet absolutely certain that things are going to change totally, certainly in Mississippi, despite Ole Miss, they were putting the lid on everything else. At the time it became clear - from the Civil Rights Act certainly in '64 on - that was the game was up. I think from the freedom summer on, the Klan revived. All of a sudden, the Klan is alive and well across southwest Mississippi, the famous Liberty, across southeast Mississippi, across northeast Mississippi. It was never heavy in the Delta where I was because the Citizens' Council being essentially the banker-lawyer-planner boys still controlled the apparatus there. They pretty much kept a lid on, though, there was Klan activity. Who was around and who made my hair curl all the time was de La Beckwith, Byron de La Beckwith, who was a salesman - after killing Medgar Evers - for a farm chemical company. One of our best friends' sons had a summer with him. After the third time that De La said, "Tell me again how the driveway goes in Carter's house, and what's the layout back there behind his house," I thought I was getting a message, if not his threat. So we started pulling the blinds at night instead of giving the sucker a clean shot.

The fact is, it never happened. It just never happened. I can only say secondarily - how did I survive? It's been alluded to gently, let me put it to you bluntly, a fair amount of whiskey helped. And sort of an approach to life called burning the candle at both ends and keep it going until they get you. It didn't

hurt. That was true as well. I'm going to go back to it. Seeing these guys come through helped a lot. Just sort of the concept. There was that tiny band, which I think that James spoke of. There were the Emmerichs down in McComb, who were good and decent people; there was Hazel over in the hills; Brandon Smith, who was a good and decent person; there was up in Tupelo a man who was too widely forgotten, who left his newspaper to a trust so it would never be owned by a group. There was this little handful of folks, and we all hung out together. We sort of bonded closely and saw a lot of each other. That helped a lot. It was sort of individual survival.

Audience Question: What are your thoughts on civil rights coverage today? And what advice would you give to reporters who are trying to improve?

Carter: The question is often raised on the conservative neo-con, "What civil rights movement?" "What coverage is necessary? That's yesterday's story." What's never yesterday's story is the basic question of equality, across the board of access, of treatment, of whatever it may be. Even the complexion of the people you're talking about changes, and the nature of it from the jury, from legal segregation to de facto, and all the forces that go into presidential segregation. The main thing you have to contend with in coverage is the absolute inertial desire on the part of the white majority not to be bothered anymore. "What do the women want?" Famous lines: "What do the Jews want? What can the blacks possibly want? They've got all the laws." Actually doing the hard business, going back to what was said so eloquently this morning, the hard business of putting in front of people's faces on a regular basis - whether they want to see it or not - the realities of life, the hurdles. It is imperative to cover the achievements and the accomplishments because not doing that, is a way to really turn off people. If, as I once sat down with a group of young black students at a university, they said, "Things today are worse than they have ever been." Forgive my French, I said, "I really love you kids, but that's bullshit." If you come out on that one, nobody's going to listen to you when you talk about the truth, which is that things are still terrible.

But that's a different thing. You've got to make sure you separate things out. Old Fred Pallage - at the 30th anniversary of those kids in Carolina doing the first sit-ins - we did it up at Bennett College, and I was moderating. Somebody said to Pallage, another reporter of the region, "So what's really changed?" He said, "Something which you have to know over and over again is true. Nothing else has changed. The fear is gone." That is to say, the sense that you are in desperate trouble if you try to bring change. That if you get out of line, if you don't tug your forelock, if you don't get off the sidewalk, if you try to register to vote, if you try to get a job. The notional thing – which is that it's worth your life to try to be a citizen – that is simply not there. If people don't know that that was central to white supremacy and to the preservation of our way of life and of massive resistance, then you've got to go back to your history books. That is gone. Which means that there is not that first great hurdle of impediment to

change, for whatever it is you want to do. Which is not to say, folks, that Gene Patterson couldn't take you to a couple of small towns in portions of Georgia or Florida or Mississippi. I couldn't give you a rough replication of the old days except, of course, these towns are drying up, blowing away, and they're down to virtually nothing. They're not "there" there anymore.

The conservatives were always right - you can't change people's hearts with law. That's something else I want to go to. But you can damn well make sure their behavior is different. As we go through the fight over the re-passage of a number of acts which are out there - starting with the Voting Rights Act - and you hear the argument that "It's all different now," quote them back to themselves. You can't change their hearts. You've got to have the law and the constitution to change the behavior. In this next set of great debates, it's going to be vital to keep that one in mind. My dear close friend Trent Lott, the senator from Mississippi, who ostentatiously wears an American flag pin in his lapel these days, when he was a much younger man, ostentatiously lets you know that those who rose the American flag in the morning were communist enemies of Mississippi. He was famous for that particular point of view, as were many of his mates who are now major figures in the Republican Party of the United States, who understood that the American flag in the '60s stood for the enemy and that you should in no way display it.

Audience Question: You talked earlier about your editorials with your paper, can you tell us a little bit about how you determined and developed reporting strategies?

Carter: The editorial position, I have to tell you, was one of care, care, care. Each step I can't tell you was part of a strategic plan, but it sure as hell did not all leap out at one time. It was very much informed by that old joke, which is so old, but forgive me, it's always is referential. This kid says to his grandfather, "What did you do in the war?" The grandfather says, "I survived." There was a fair element of just making sure you didn't get so far ahead. On the reporting side, however, there was one doctrine and one doctrine only: you covered everything, you sent reporters out there everywhere, and you hired kids who really cared about doing it and weren't afraid to do it.

A famous guy who a number of people here knew - now dead, God rest his soul - Foster Davis came to work for me in the summer of '64. Before he was going off to Columbia, he had come out of the military, he came to work for me. He was a Massachusetts boy. I sent him over because there had been some burnings of some “Freedom Houses” over in Indianola where the White Citizens' Council started, which were never called the White Citizens' Council, by the way. The Citizens' Council started, Foster came back, his clothes had been ripped off of him, he had a black eye. I said, "What the hell happened?" He said, "Well, I'm walking down the street looking for the place that had been burned down. These three guys were coming to me. They came up and said, 'What are you, one of

them civil rights agitators?"' He said, "No, I'm a reporter." At which point, they beat the hell out of them. He said, "What am I supposed to do? Can I fight back?" I said, "Hell, yes, you can fight back. At this newspaper, we're not pure. Go to hell, go to war." He got in more fights for the next five years on that paper than I can count. It was a great advertisement for our safety, if you want to know the truth, because he was about as tough a guy as I knew. We really covered them extensively. We tried to go to every meeting that involved anything about the community, white and black, we were out there full-time. Our circulation manager used to always come in to me. He was an old sag himself. I won't repeat, almost all whites were. He came in to me, "Buddy, every time I get that circulation up, you kick it in the head with one of those pictures or one of those stories." Because there we are, we're running all over the front page. What it is, is happening in this epoch of change. Which means an awful lot of black faces are running up there who aren't criminals or whatever, it was we were citing as being the only coverage in our past. A lot of stories putting forward an awful lot of demands. I had an awful lot of change agents.

Speaking of demands and changes, the paper over in Meridian, Mississippi, the nearest big town to Philadelphia, was owned by a family named Skewie's. They had one approach to covering the civil rights movement - you don't. You don't cover it. That was something else you go to know about a lot of Southern newspapers during those days. They figured, what you didn't cover would go away. The only reason the civil rights movement thrived was because of publicity, by which they meant, in the local papers as well as anywhere else. I want to just make one observation. With the exception of McComb, Mississippi, and up in the impossible town of Lexington, where Hazel Brandon Smith was, the towns in which the newspaper actually provided the most coverage of the movement were the towns which had the least absolute amounts of violence and "turmoil" during the movement days in Mississippi. I can't speak for anywhere else. Tupelo, despite the fact that it had one of the Klan formations arise from there. Nonetheless, Tupelo, Greenville, much of the time, even in a place where there was horror and murder - the latter part, in McComb. By coverage, I think we helped both provide movement, but also more stability in other places. In any case, folks, remember this: There's no argument ever good enough for not covering a story. There's never. Even when they win the argument, a lot of days, within the month, the year, they are going to come back and say, "Okay, we did it because we were afraid of this or did that. But we were wrong." The first order of business for a journalist is to cover the news. And the news is often the most sensitive thing that there is in the community - real news. And it needs to be followed. More young (people here). I'm shocked, already, it was up to four of you. Any other questions?

Audience Question: Knowing what you do now, do you think there's anything you could have done differently in your editorials and still survived?

Carter: The question really is, "Okay, I've described with exquisite care with which we evolved over time with our positions." Do I think in retrospect we could have done it earlier, is what you're asking, and still survived? I think my answer to that is "I don't know." Almost certainly answer is, having said I don't know, yes. But how much more? And when? I don't know. It was always such an iffy point at every point that we made each step. It may have been that whole hog would have gotten us there faster than bit by bit. The whole hog eventually got boiled, but it may have been less painful to have tried to put it all in the pot at one time. At the time, being on the ground, I figured they almost had us as it was. We just absolutely had to keep thinking about how far can we go and still be there covering the news and being a damn-sight better. One of the worst families in all of America in journalism was the Hedderman family in Jackson. I was once sitting with Tom Hedderman, who said something correct, which I have to also add here. He said, "You could not have survived in any other town in Mississippi." To some degree, you're also fortunate in things like that. I just happened to be a slightly different tradition in Greenville, thanks to a family named Percy, and thanks to the fact that we were heavily Jewish, heavily Lebanese, heavily Italian, heavily a lot of things other than WASP. That meant there was a lay of merchants who essentially saw the Delta Democrat-Times as standing between them and the normal inclination of WASPs when it comes to dealing with the dissimilar. So they supported us, even though they were not integrationists themselves. They supported us just enough to keep us alive, and there were a lot of towns that never would have been true. I think I'm supposed to go away. Thank you.