HODDING CARTER LECTURE ON CIVIL RIGHTS & THE PRESS

William Raspberry

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PROFESSOR CHARLOTTE GRIMES: I'm Charlotte Grimes, and I'm the Knight Chair in Political Reporting here at the Newhouse School. And it's my privilege and special delight to welcome all of you here for a very special occasion. This is the first Hodding Carter Lecture on Civil Rights and the Press. This is such a special occasion for many reasons. First is that this lecture series celebrates something rare and precious. It celebrates journalism of conscience and courage. This kind of journalism is too seldom practiced today. But I think it's a kind of journalism that we here at the Newhouse School still try to teach and to inspire in our students who, after all, will be the next generation of journalists. Second, this lecture celebrates the careers of two remarkable journalists: Hodding Carter Jr. and Hodding Carter III – a father and son who practiced that journalism of conscience and courage at a dangerous time and place, Mississippi in the days of Jim Crow. You'll find more details of their careers on the back of your program. And I hope that you'll read those carefully and be inspired by that. The Hodding Carter Lecture of Civil Rights and the Press also grew out of an extraordinary symposium that we were lucky enough to have here at Newhouse last year. And it included Hodding Carter III and 18 other courageous journalists of the Civil Rights Era. This lecture is meant to keep alive that spirit. In a few moments, Dean David Rubin is going to also give you the best reason for why this is such a special occasion, and that is introducing our first lecturer, William Raspberry, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for The Washington Post, a voice of conscience and, I'm pleased to say, another Knight Chair.

Before we move onto that, I need to thank some very special people who have made this possible: Mylinda Smith, who worked all the logistical miracles to get all of us here; and helping her and me every step of the way were Jeff Jackson, a doctoral student here at the Newhouse School, and Kyla Campbell, a broadcast journalism student in our graduate program and my graduate assistant. A very heartfelt thank you, Mylinda, Jeff, and Kyla. If you would help me thank them. (applause)

This is a particularly appropriate time for us to reflect on the press's role and responsibilities in covering civil rights. We have the Patriot Act. We have concerns over Muslim Americans and how they're treated. We have the issue of gay rights. We have continuing issues of racial, ethnic, and gender equality. Many, many reasons to reflect on what are civil rights, who is entitled to them, and what is our role in the press in covering those. Last year at our symposium, we marked the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education ruling and the 40th anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Events that changed this country. Just 45 days ago there was another anniversary: 40 years since the Bloody Sunday march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. On March

7, 1965, about 525 Americans began to walk across that bridge on a journey seeking the most basic rights of citizens – the right to vote. But those Americans had long been denied that right because of their race. On that Sunday, Alabama state troopers met those marchers with charging horses, billy clubs and tear gas. That night, in a vivid example of the role the press plays in stirring the nation's conscience, ABC News interrupted its broadcast of, all things, "Judgment at Nuremberg," to show those horrifying images of Americans assaulted by agents of their own government. The nation was shocked. Five months later, Congress enacted the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In covering Selma and other struggles of the Civil Rights Era, the press fulfilled one of its highest missions: We told an important story. Civil Rights still is an important story. Telling it is still one of our highest missions. As Hodding Carter III put it at our symposium last year, "What's never yesterday's news is the story of equality."

So, again, I thank you all for coming to reflect on this important role and this important story. I'd now like to turn everything over to Dean David Rubin to introduce our first Hodding Carter Lecturer. Thank you very much.

DEAN DAVID RUBIN: Thank you, Charlotte. In her introduction, Charlotte made reference to the fact that our guest tonight, Bill Raspberry, is himself a Knight Professor. And he is, he's the Knight Professor of the Practice of Communications and Journalism at Duke University. So he really has two jobs at the moment: He is a teacher at Duke and he is now a once-a-week columnist for The Washington Post. And he commutes between Durham, North Carolina, and Washington. He teaches courses at Duke on the history and impact of affirmative action and equal opportunity on the effects of socioeconomic changes on families, children, and communities; on the ways that citizens seek political power; and on the press and the public interest. He won his Pulitzer Prize for Commentary in 1994 writing columns on such subjects which have been typical of his subjects throughout his career on crime, on AIDS, on the nation of Islam, on violent rap lyrics, and on – in general – race relations in the United States.

Two recent columns of his are worth mentioning to you to show you his sensibility and they may occasion questions that you may have for him when he's finished because I know Bill will be happy to entertain questions. One focused on the media in which he coined a term that I love and which you are free to use called the "Foxidation" of the news media. What he meant by that was the effects of the Fox News Channel on the way in which the public perceives the role and the purpose of journalism in our society. That is, Fox presents itself as fair and balanced and yet they are anything but fair and balanced. They present a particular political perspective. Bill Raspberry's view in this column was that if the American people begin to believe that all news outlets are like the Fox news outlet – that is, there are those on the right, there are those on the left, there is no one in the middle – then, in fact, they won't know what to believe when it comes to truth; that there will be no one in the news media that the public trusts to deliver the truth. Further, Fox, if it continues to be successful economically as it has been, may force other media – first, other cable channels; then, other over-the-air television news channels; and finally, the print press – to go in the same direction. And as you can imagine this column was very unhappy about the "Foxidation" of the news.

He also discussed a recent report of the Urban League, which commented on the gap between black America and white America. The conclusion of the report was critical of this gap and calls that the government and that white America do more to close the gap. But, he noted in his column that three-quarters of black America has entered the middle class. Now I'm quoting from the column. He wrote, "Wouldn' t it be interesting to examine what the members of that growing black middle class have done and are doing to help their fellow blacks close the gap?" He's convinced that those blacks who have achieved success must now prepare the rest to walk, as he put it, "through the educational and career doors" that he believes have been open to them over the last 30 or 40 years by the government and the rest of the society. Well, in my view, this is a courageous thing to write. I don't know that a white columnist could have written that without getting a lot of criticism. Some of you will remember that Bill Cosby, about a year ago, was very critical of black parents for not doing the job in raising their own children that they should. He took a lot of criticism for that, although he also got a lot of support. This is not territory in which one blithely walks. But Bill Raspberry did it and called for black self-reliance and responsibility. He is indeed the conscience of the black community and the conscience of this country. He is just what we would want a journalist and a columnist and an educator to be.

He grew up in a small Mississippi town, Okolona, population today 3,500. He went from there to Indiana Central College as a history major. It still exists, now called Indianapolis University. He graduated in 1960, served in the military, joined The Washington Post in 1962, where he has been ever since. By 1965, he was covering the Watts Riots in Los Angeles. For that work, he was named Journalist of the Year by the Capital Press Club. He began his column in 1966, where it appeared in the local section of The Washington Post. It was so successful that it moved to the Op-Ed page in 1971, where it was been ever since. He is now syndicated, so he is not just appearing in The Washington Post. He appears nationally. His column is now in about 200 newspapers across the country. In 1997, he was named by Washingtonian magazine one of the top 50 Influential Journalists in the national press porps. He holds 15 honorary doctorate degrees; so you may also address him as Dr. Raspberry if you like. The citation that Georgetown read in 1984 upon presenting him with the honorary degree, I think, sums it up very well. "He has shown us what we are, but he also has shown us what we might be." Bill Raspberry.

WILLIAM RASPBERRY: Thank you very much. And thank you for braving the Syracuse weather to be here tonight. I understand that summer was yesterday. It is an honor, approaching a thrill really, to be tapped to give the first Hodding Carter Lecture at the Newhouse School. The Carters have always been journalistic heroes of mine – not that they did everything I thought they should have done, but they did something at a time when the norm was to do nothing and to be justified in doing nothing. I am humbled by this. I thought, just to get us off on a solid footing tonight, I would begin my remarks with a quote from Hodding Carter III, one of the two Hodding Carters for whom this lecture series is named. Some 28 years ago, when "little Hodding," as he was called, then the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, was talking to a Washington Post reporter about his role – that's what the reporter had gone after, his role in the Civil Rights Movement. Hodding said something that was, I thought, quite disarming: "Look," he said, "I'm not interested in creating or perpetuating any myths. We," the Carter newspaper family, "were not members of the Civil Rights Movement. We were not the cutting-edge folks. We were people who led a newspaper in a small town. We survived. In surviving, we preserved our integrity and tried to move the process forward." I thought that was particularly disarming. We tend when we look back to lay out for ourselves bigger roles than we in fact had.

Hodding's remarks have prompted me to make a similar disclaimer tonight. First, though I started my journalistic career during the Civil Rights Movement, I was not a participant in that movement. As a reporter on the city staff of The Washington Post, and before that on the Indianapolis Recorder, I was not sent off to Selma or Little Rock or Birmingham. My role was to cover the local movements to desegregate city buses and movie theaters and housing developments. It sounds really weird to you that we had major picket lines and campaigns to force the Safeway grocery chain to hire black checkout clerks. So this was important stuff. But it's not the stuff that comes to mind when you hear about the Civil Rights Movement. In my small way I did what Hodding said he did. I did what I could to try to move the process forward.

I grew up, as a couple of people have told you tonight, black and poor, in the totally segregated small northeast Mississippi town of Okolona. Life, I don't need to tell you, was unfair. But I may need to remind you that it wasn't miserable. Children have a way of finding a modicum of happiness wherever they are. I've been to many parts of the world and seen children playing in dirt, in rags, and having a great time. I wasn't dirty, and I wasn't in rags, but I was living under American apartheid and still having a pretty good time. I was not unaware of the unfairness in which my life was unfolding. But thanks to some special circumstances – two special circumstances come to mind – my life was a great deal better than you might imagine and that simply knowing the skeleton of the facts anyone might have imagined it to be. The first special circumstance was that I grew up on the campus of tiny Okolona College, a little junior college, two-year college, with a high school attached that never had more than 200 students – all of whom were always black because it was in the dark days of segregation. And yet, something about that little college and the people who worked there gave them the sense that it was their duty to prepare us, really prepare us, to make it, to manage our lives in a hostile environment. And they did that. They did that. They strengthened us in ways I don't yet understand, but I hope in some way I can begin to replicate.

Just as an indication of the influence of that little school, I don't want to dwell on this, I was at a reunion of the school just last year. The school closed in 1964, and yet every three or four years we have a reunion – not of classes, classes were never big enough – we have a reunion of the whole school. Anybody who ever went there from 1902 to 1964 who's still ambulatory will come and will talk about what a wonderful thing that school did for us. That's the first special circumstance of my life.

The second special circumstance was that I grew up in a household headed by really quite extraordinary parents. They both were my teachers, by the way. My mom taught me English in junior high, and I credit her with any sense of rhythm or grace my words may contain. My dad taught shop. I credit him with the sort of pragmatic side of things. He taught me that both tables and arguments tended to be shaky unless they stood squarely on all four legs. You had to think about this stuff.

I wish I could find some way to give every child growing up something approximating my luck in choosing my parents. It's the greatest thing I ever did. They never made their peace with racism, but they did teach their children, they did teach us not to define ourselves solely in terms of race or allow others to do so. Mom, who turned 99 two months ago, and Dad, who died in 1991, when he was 89, had to make do with small victories that mid-century Mississippi afforded them. A letter Mom wrote, I was already away at college, describes one of those little things. I'm going to read it to you. It's long, but I didn' t want to cut it, just read you the whole thing if you'll bear with me:
"Dear Son,
Last week, Daddy and I were witnesses concerning discrimination in voter registration in Chickasaw County. The civil rights lawyer from the Justice Department in Washington made monkeys of those 'W Folks.'"
She couldn't bring herself to say anything that looked like racism, so she called them "made monkeys of those little W Folk."
"The deputy register, Mr. Mose Johnson of (inaudible) Grocery" – and I remember him from my childhood – "was given some 12 hours overnight to reconsider and change his testimony. When they returned, his lawyer asked Mr. Johnson, 'Have you had the opportunity to review these forms and do you wish to change your testimony of yesterday? ' Answer: 'I have, and I do.' They brought out photostatic copies of several applications and tests, among which was Howard Gunn's" – Howard Gunn is somebody who went to school with me – "which had been marked 'failed.' They found the only error was that Howard had signed his name on the wrong line. So the federal judge ordered Howard registered on this application without further delay. Then they pulled up a form by a white man who had testified that he could neither read nor write. This was one of those, Mr. Johnson had said the day before, he had never seen. A

handwriting expert from the FBI had stated that at least a hundred of these applications had been filled out by the same person. And that that person was Mr. Johnson. At this point, the defense lawyer's only job was to keep him from being convicted of perjury. So he asks, 'Mr. Johnson, who wrote this?' Answer: 'I might have written some of it.' 'Mr. Johnson, who wrote this?' 'I, I think, I wrote it.' 'Mr. Johnson, who wrote this?' 'I did.'
"Then the last page of the exam. 'Mr. Johnson, how much of any of this did you write?' Answer: 'All but the signature.' On and on for twelve tests of three pages each. Then the judge ordered him to come before the bench. This is when the verbal whipping started that no one present will ever forget. The judge told him that the office had been run with unparalleled stupidity and that it was a disgrace and disservice to Chickasaw County. He told him, among other things, never to come before his court with false testimony again, and that he was strongly tempted to use his prerogative and deny him the privilege of not perjuring himself by changing his previous testimony. 'I do not tolerate lying under oath.' Mr. Johnson cried. Wiping his nose just like a child. Hubert Thompson" – that's a friend of the family – "was about to push Daddy off the seat, nudging him with his elbow, making crazy noises in his throat. I managed to keep a straight face until I got to the door. I ran into an adjoining room. Daddy" – my father – "thought I was having a spell or something. But I told him, I just had to grin once or faint, for my face would not hold its pose much longer. There was no Negro who testified that day who didn't have a B.S. or an M.S. degree. Only one white person had one year of high school. Most of them stopped at second grade and have forgotten that. Daddy, Mr. Raymond Gilliam, Mr. Amos Kirk, and I are the only registered Negroes in the county. And I have the distinction of being the only woman."

I read you Mom's letter for a couple of reasons. First, I wanted you to have some sense of the sort of parents who raised me. But, second, I wanted you to have some sense of the realities of black life in the old South. It will seem weird to you, perhaps, that the simple act of trying to register to vote would require any bravery whatever. It did. And indeed there were places where it was unthinkable even to make the effort. This is the South where I grew up, and I refer to it now, not to tell you how rough my life was - in truth, it wasn't. My hope, though, is that, the circumstances of my growing up might provide a little context for discussing two other entities that were growing up at the same time: the Civil Rights Movement and the press.

I make a distinction that may be important to you between resistance to Southern apartheid that was always present if not always newsworthy and the Movement, which was a special thing. Somebody was always standing up to the white man, even in Mississippi, or trying to vote, or making a claim on a so-called public institution. Often such people were looked upon by black and white as a little crazy.

What happened during my lifetime is that these acts of craziness became more and more frequent and attracted more and more attention. What drove this development? White Southern hubris for one thing. The white South might have succeeded in resisting desegregation decades longer if half the resources they devoted to maintaining the separate had been devoted to producing the equal. But they didn't think they had to do it. So there was not even any pretense at delivering on racial equality until racial separation came under serious attack. Then, too late, there was a flurry of school building and school fixing up and painting and other attempts to stave off the inevitable. But by then too many black folks had gone a little crazy.

Another contributor to that craziness, by the way, was the involvement by black G.I.'s in the fight to make the world safe for democracy in World War II – only to come home and find themselves treated with less dignity than the German POWs some of them had captured during the fighting. The Germans, after all, were white. Harry Truman's bold move to at least partially desegregate the Armed Forces was in part a response to the growing sense of indignity among black returning G.I.'s.

There must have been a score of reasons behind every act of resistance. But the major engines of change surely included the Supreme Court's 1954 decision outlawing segregation of the public schools, the 1955 lynching of young Emmett Till, the launching later that same year of the Montgomery bus boycott, the 1957 desegregation of Little Rock's Central High School, and the 1962 enrollment of James Meredith at Ole Miss.

And, of course, Martin. I may surprise you at how little I talk about Martin Luther King Jr. tonight. He remains a personal hero of mine, an extraordinary human being, fully meriting his Nobel Peace Prize, and the accolades that have been laid upon him. But you know about Martin, and so many young people especially, when they think of Martin, think of him as the sole creator and director of the great Civil Rights Movement. And as important as he was, he was not the only one. I credit him with one incredible thing, and that is accelerating the abandonment of fear among us. It was already happening with these acts I described as acts of craziness. But, at this time, and it's still a matter of some amazement to me, black Southerners were laying aside the fear that had worked in tandem with white brutality to convince them that change was simply not going to happen. That it wasn't in the cards. And when they stopped being afraid, without knowing what lay beyond not being afraid, the Movement started to grow up.

And so in its herky-jerky way, it was American journalism starting to grow up. It's hard to remember, but until the 1950s, I'd say, Americans got their news mostly from local newspapers. And local Southern newspapers were not gung-ho to tell the story of the black struggle against the evils of the prevailing system. The first response of the local papers in the South was to ignore the fledgling Movement, and the second was to blame it on outside agitators. Much of the early coverage was the work of the black press, small weekly newspapers, and famously, Jet magazine and Ebony and Gordon Parks, who didn't really cover the Movement so much. But he produced photographs that conveyed a dignity of black Americans without talking about their blackness that, I think, may have done a good deal to change some attitudes. I'm talking about the work that appeared in Life and Look and places like the Saturday Evening Post. These were extraordinary photographs that were not all that self-consciously black; they were just beautifully done portraits of human beings. I think it may have taken the edge of fear and otherness off for some Americans.

And Jet. Jet's grisly photograph of the battered and disfigured body of Emmett Till galvanized black America. Slowly, the larger Northern dailies – The New York Times, The Washington Post, and others – took an interest in the story of the Southern resistance, the Southern craziness. That put a lot of pressure on the local dailies. When the national papers come down and they're writing stories that your readers are reading, the local dailies thought they had to do something, too. And however reluctantly, they got on board. The press was growing up.

Then came what I believe to have been the crucial growth spurt – the entry of network television news. I won' t attempt to lay out the whole story tonight, but you can get access to the late Henry Hampton's "Eyes on the Prize" TV series that ran on PBS, do so. I say this particularly to the students in the room. It's very hard for a print journalist to make this confession. But words just cannot convey in the way that film can what was happening in those days. The fact that Hampton used actual news footage makes the work even more forceful. I must tell you that even many black Americans didn't fully grasp how truly dreadful were the conditions and attitudes of Southern whites until television in all its black-and-white urgency brought us the images of the police dogs attacking Civil Rights demonstrators in Birmingham, of would-be voters being knocked to the ground by powerful fire hoses, of the hate-twisted faces of the New Orleans cheerleaders – that's what they called the mothers who were resisting school desegregation, "the cheerleaders." They brought us these images of hate, of resistance, of unreasonableness, and of the reasonableness of the people who were protesting. And they brought us the images of people like Mose Wright. Mose was the uneducated uncle of Emmett Till in whose home Emmett was staying when he came down from Chicago to Money, Mississippi. It was at Mose Wright's home that the knock came on the door that night and said, "You got this boy in there; we want to talk to him." And Mose felt he had no right but to deliver the boy up, and he thought they really were just going to sort of scare him. The problem is that Emmett didn't scare easily and they wound up, well, you know what they wound up doing. I don't want to rehash that. All I want to remind you of is what television is able to do.

Mose, knowing it could mean his life, decided to testify against the men who had done this thing to his nephew. And he had to hide out for several days before his court date. Now he’s on the stand and they ask him, “Can you tell us who it was that came to your door and asked for your nephew Emmett?” He said yes and he named them. “And is this man in the court room?” Mose said, “Dar he” (There he is.). And those two ignorant, uneducated, unlearned words were an expression of resistance, of commitment, and of incredible bravery. Mose had to leave town, but he made his statement. It almost doesn’t matter that the men who did this thing to his nephew were not convicted because Mose was convicted of the need to do what he did. And so, through Mose, were thousands of others.

I’m going to say something now that may startle some of you. It’s so easy to see this thing in black and white terms: and God knows it was that. Of righteous black folks and evil white folks. There were some good white people – they were from the North who came down to help with the Movement. But the Southern whites were 100 percent evil. There is an interesting thing that I find if I go back to the South and to my Mississippi. I talk to a people of a certain age, white people of a certain age that is close to mine. They remember something that will surprise you. They remember always believing that segregation and discrimination were wrong. They always believe that, they say. When I first heard that, I said, “You’ve got to be out of your minds.” I’ve decided that they’re telling me the truth. They also believed that segregation and discrimination were right. I finally discovered what’s going on. This is the discovery of a career. On virtually every important public issue, most thoughtful people secretly believe both sides. They espouse the one and suppress the other, depending on what company it puts them in. White Southerners at that time needed to be on the side of the prevailing culture. So even though they had doubts about what was happening in their midst, they supported the prevailing view with varying degrees of enthusiasm. What happens is that those who were recorded on film or otherwise as strongly supporting segregation and racism were locked, and they had to continue being racist. That was the side they put out there. Unless, like George Wallace, they could have a Damascene conversion, if they could have a public turnaround, then they could get over it. But the others, if they were locked on the film, they were locked.

The ones who remember always having believed that segregation was wrong were those who never got recorded. They have, over the years, suppressed that part of their thought that supported segregation and let the other side come to the fore. The other side is not false; it’s not a lie. How can I say it? Twenty years from now, depending on how it finally comes out, you will remember your beliefs about our actions in Iraq differently than you may express them now. If this thing turns out to have been the launching of a wildfire of democracy across that part of the world, you will remind your children that you knew all along that the spread of democracy was a good thing. If it turns out really badly, you will say to your children you knew it was doomed from the start – because you believe both things now. You will emphasize one and suppress the other depending on the circumstances. I can't. I'm too firmly on the record as saying the war is awful and wrong, and it should never have been launched. I'm stuck.

Back to television, I should point out that television didn't do its vital work out of some conscience-driven commitment to the Civil Rights cause. The development of the Movement happened to coincide with the huge advance in TV news. The doubling – the doubling – of the evening news time slot, from 15 minutes to a full half-hour, and TV executives at the networks were wondering, "How are we going to fill all this time?" The Movement, with its imminently photographable moments, helped to answer that question. And it turned out to be one of the great symbioses of American history. I do believe that TV journalists may – though they may have been drawn to the Movement for other than altruistic purposes, and I think they were drawn for other purposes – came to see the rightness of the Civil Rights cause. Who could have failed to see it? The issues were laid out in black and white – in both senses of the phrase. The closer you got to the action, the clearer it became on which side justice lay. Gradually, the network correspondents and, I think, the reporters from the major Northern newspapers came to see themselves as collaborators in the Movement; not officially, of course. They were officially objective news reporters. But I expect that if you interview reporters who were on the scene in those days, they will tell you with a certain amount of pride that they helped this thing along. In Hodding's words, they helped to move the Movement forward. They take pride in that.

What I'm saying, I suppose, is that while a number of particular events helped to fertilize the seed of resistance that I say has always been in the womb of black America since slavery, and while a number of brave souls, black and white, provided what might be called the prenatal care for the Movement, it was the news media, and specifically television news, that was midwife to the Movement. I wouldn't argue with anyone who said that without television, there would not have been the Movement as we experienced it. Television helped in a way that I think is still not fully appreciated, in addition to what I just described. Much of the fight for racial justice was local. I told you I covered fair-housing demonstrations, attempts to desegregate the transit system, which – you won't appreciate this because of where you sit now – but the transit system in Washington, D.C., when they didn't have enough white male drivers for the buses and trolleys, recruited white female drivers before they would hire anybody black.

What I'm saying is that the Movement consisted of a lot of local acts of resistance and challenge and opposition. Some kids demanded to be served at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Some brave Black and White souls decided it would be a good idea to take a bus trip through the deep South to show the silliness of laws forbidding mixed seating. Some folks over here decided a Freedom School might be a good idea. Some folks over there busied themselves attempting to register prospective voters. Most often, the people doing one thing at one place didn't know the people, may not even have heard of the people who were doing another thing in another place. And yet, out of this hodgepodge of local projects came something called the Civil Rights Movement. How did that happen?

I'll offer a possible answer, but please permit me a side excursion to tell you how the question came to my mind. There's a lot of talk about whether there ought to be a new movement for racial equality and what it ought to entail. After all, isn't it crystal clear that the first movement didn't produce the equality we crave? I have argued that there have always been both external and internal barriers to black progress. A generation ago, the decisive barriers were external. We built a movement to demolish them. Today the decisive barriers are to a great extent internal. And we need to build a movement to overcome them as well. What will be the focus of this new movement? Health? Economic justice? Political empowerment? There's no end to possibilities. But, for me, the top priority would be to rescue our children. An astounding number of children are being lost to drugs, to hopelessness, to cynicism, to violence, to death. They fail at school, become parents before they become grown-ups, and reach adulthood without acquiring the education or the skills to earn a decent living. Our young women suffer the debilitating effects of low self-esteem. And our young men, who ought to be the strength of our communities, are more likely to terrorize them. We need a crusade to save our children, a crusade as powerful and as broadly based as the 1960s crusade for civil rights. We need a new movement. But how to build it?

And that's what got me thinking: How did we build the first one? In the 1950s and 60s, even before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat and unwittingly launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which coincidentally launched a preacher named Martin Luther King, Jr., there were people across America working at various aspects of civil rights. There were voter registration workers; real estate testers; school desegregators; filers of class action suits; sit-in, wait-in, march-in demonstrators. And then something happened: somehow an umbrella was spread over all these discrete and independent projects. And a hundred separate undertakings became the Movement.

What I'm talking about is far more than nomenclature. The birth of the Movement changed attitudes, North and South, and it empowered the activists in a quite remarkable way. We saw change coming and we wanted to be part of it. We joined the vast alphabet soup of Civil Rights groups: NAACP, SNCC, SLC, SCLC. We joined picket lines, boycotted stores, marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. White people joined us from across America. Sharecroppers joined college students. Business executives joined politicians and reverend clergy, and America changed. So you see how I came to ask the question of how the Movement was born.

There are today people performing all the elements of a children's crusade – with helping kids with their algebra and their self-esteem, keeping them out of jail, talking to them about life, helping them to get off to a decent start in school, raising money for their education, helping them to attain – helping them to see their life possibilities. How we do raise an umbrella over all these things and create the movement I crave? The answer, if I am right, will disappoint you as it did me. It is that maybe we can't do it. I say that because I think the media, TV in particular, created the first movement. It will not, perhaps it cannot, create the second. Remember my description of how network TV news started to come of age and how that coincided with the coming of age of the Civil Rights Movement. Here, I believe, is what happened.

Every day, when America tuned in CBS, NBC, and later ABC to see what was going on in their world, in their country, we saw police dog assaults here, sit-ins there, Klan marches somewhere else. These things were happening in fact across a wide swath of America. If you plotted them on a map with little red stickers, you would have seen a very scattered-looking thing. They were happening without any consultation or coordination. There was usually no connection between them. Television brought them together for us. Introduced the activists to one another. And gave their independent undertakings a sense of a movement. Just because it all was clustered there in this half-hour of news. It looked like all hell was breaking loose in civil rights, and in a way it was. So, in this very special sense, television created the Movement. It is theoretically possible, I suppose, for television to take us from one program for children to another every evening. But I don't think it will happen. First, television is too grown-up now. There are too many competitors for TV's attention, too many outlets, too many stories, and – this may be the biggest reason of all – too much detachment.

We've cultivated in our business the notion that journalists ought to distance themselves from the stories they are covering. That's not wholly a bad idea. But – I don't make a judgment here – I'm simply saying, I don't think we're likely to go back again. Perhaps we can't. I tell you, when I look at what's happening on Fox Channel News, where the broadcasters aren't detached, I can't be wholly sorry for this trend.

We, in our business, must do the best we can to be good journalists and to cover the stories that are out there , to help Americans understand, as Charlotte Grimes told you earlier, something like the Patriot Act and its real impact of American citizens. Sometimes we ignore the details of that story, which are incredibly important, in favor of the "who struck John," of what politicians said what, and who opposed it, and how the votes are lining up. Sooner or later, we turn everything into a horse race. We need, from time to time, to help our people understand what is in that piece of legislation and what needs to be changed. We need to help America understand that the ethics battles that involve a Tom DeLay are not simply about partisan posturing, but there is something real at the core; that the abandonment of ethical principles in our highest legislature is not without consequences for the rest of us. We need to do that. But that's just good journalism.

Can the media ever again or soon again be midwife to a movement? Maybe my children's crusade will happen even without television and the press, even if not during my lifetime. But I'm afraid we can't depend on television to create it. If it gets built, and God knows I hope it will, maybe we'll just have to do it ourselves. I'll take your questions.

(applause)

QUESTION (inaudible)

RASPBERRY: That's a very powerful thought, which frankly hasn't occurred to me. I'd write a column on it if I can think of the lead. It's an interesting thought. We're a long way from all being wired, but we may have a sufficiency of it that we could do something with it. Let me tell you what one of the barriers to that is – whether it's the internet or some other mechanism. One of the barriers is a lesson over-learned from the Movement of the 50s and the 60s. And that is that if we have a problem, our proper and sufficient response to the problem is to demand that the society do something about it. And that works for the denial of rights. It works if you can't vote or shop or go to school or do all these other things. It does not work very well if the problem is not the denial of the opportunity, but the failure to avail oneself of the opportunity.

It's so hard to say this without seeming to say more than this. But if our young people would simply avail themselves of the opportunity that does now exist, even if it's insufficient, that would be a stupendous, a tremendous explosion of progress. But it sounds too much like blaming the victim, and we don't want to say it. And perhaps white people can't say it to us. And if black leaders say it to us, they are afraid we will stop following. What happens when leadership power is grievance-based? The leaders discover that they need the grievance more than they need the solution to the problem. And so they nurse the grievance. Could the internet bust that one open? I don't know, but it's a lovely thing to think about. Somebody else. Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. Raspberry, thank you so much for coming to Syracuse University and the Newhouse School. You are now an Endowed Professor at Duke University. I'm a graduate of North Carolina Central University in Durham, my master's degree. I was arrested in Durham and Raleigh during the Civil Rights Movement that we fought in the 1960s. Can you give our audience a sense of Durham, North Carolina, 2005, what's happening in that city now? Durham for years was always a Mecca of African-American history – the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company there, the Spalding family, the Wheeler family. It was always sort of an oasis along with Chapel Hill in the Movement. But I haven't been home in some time. Could you, maybe for myself, a sense of what's happening in Durham now? With the government? What is Shirley Caesar doing?

RASPBERRY: As with all these things, it's a very mixed bag. I was talking to a friend, a friend who is older than you and older than I – there are such people – who grew up in the area, and recalls – when they were trying to inspire him and his classmates to do well in the world – would put them on a bus and they got to visit Central. They would take the bus to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, and they would get off and look at the buildings but could not enter them. Then they would drive up to Durham and to Duke, where they couldn't get off the bus. Those days are gone. What your question does is to remind me of something that's very, very awkward for us, of the colored persuasion, that the ending of segregation was not an unmixed blessing. There were institutions that sprang up, important institutions that sprang up, because of segregation, that did not survive integration. And you mentioned Durham and Fayettevile Street and (inaudible), which along with places like a certain part of Tulsa, and other little Meccas in America, were successful enough in establishing black businesses, they were given the moniker of the Black Wall Street or the Black this-or-that. There's very little – North Carolina Mutual is still there – but there's very little residue, except in the museums. of these Black Wall Streets.

One of the things that happened – and this is too long an answer – somebody did a study on entrepreneurship – not black or white – but entrepreneurship. They found out that much of entrepreneurial activity begins with a job loss, when things are tough, when you have no other option, you do what you have always dreamt of doing but always thought you couldn't maybe afford to do. And when we were without other means, we followed our dreams and developed businesses and struggled and pooled and did all these things, and then we learned to demand that these other things went away. It would be wonderful if we could keep both balls in the air at the same time: make the righteous demand but do also what we have to do. It's very difficult. Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: I see something as a former teacher in the schools of Syracuse. There's a scary thought about students. Unless this is your expertise in your (inaudible) – what I see in this community is that students do not want to read. They do not even care to look at an entire show on TV. They just don't care. They seem not to want to read, even the most interesting book. And I've had some really good books for the children to look at. They say, "What does it say? Tell me." Even after a little blurb, they don't want to follow through. Because of TV and because of things in print, it's not as exciting to them (inaudible)

RASPBERRY: This is a university, so your implied question demands a theory. (laughter) I've got one. It began with two technological developments: cable television, which brought us lots of choices, and the remote control-clicker that made those choices accessible. Can I speak from experience? I watch television alone at home now because nobody can bear to watch it with me because I watch the basketball game until there's a timeout. Then I'll click over and watch Matlock to see what he's doing. When there's a commercial on, then I come back. I can do all these things, and I follow every one of them. But if you don't happen to have the same sequence of interests as I, then "I'm outta here." What this combination of technologies has done, I posit, is to shorten our attention spans and to heighten our impatience. We are forever wanting to cut to the chase. You could not make, I know they're trying, you can't make "On Golden Pond" again. There are too many slow, lugubrious periods where nothing happens. There's nobody chasing anybody or beating anybody or having wild sex on the dining table with anybody. You need action these days. You can't have a book successfully that gets deeply involved with character development. These things take slow, long periods of time. And nobody has time for that anymore.

Even comedians. Cosby used to tell stories. They would last forever, and you were never sure what the punch line was. Now comics feel duty bound to jump from punch line to punch line. And if they can't find a punch line in time, they substitute a string of obscenities for it because that's also kind of like a climax, a high point, like a chase or an explosion. It's ruined us all. It' s coarsened our language and our discourse. It's ruined the way we deal with one another. And it's made us impatient with the work it takes to get out of works of art what people have put into them. So we turn to Fox Channel News or MSNBC or somebody who can tell us what this is. Cut to the chase. Give us the bottom line. Save us the burden of having to marshal facts and evidence and think. It's the damned clicker.

QUESTION: Was Bill Clinton the first black president? And if he was, why?

RASPBERRY: The short answer is because you guys elected him…no. I never fully understood what that means – "Clinton, the first black president." Actually it was Jefferson. (laughter) One does wish Clinton had behaved himself in his private life as successfully as he managed his political life. But then, you get the whole person.

QUESTION: Are you saying that people would say he was the first black president because of his behavior?

RASPBERRY: No, no, no. There's a combination of reasons. One of which is that he was the first one who got it and who seemed okay with us. We're crazy about people who seem comfortable with us – even if they're not good people. Jimmy Carter seemed comfortable with us, and he had trouble with the language. He couldn't clap his hands and stuff. (laughter) He seemed alright to be in the room with us and around us. I can't tell you, for people who have been despised and rejected as a group, for those who formerly did the rejecting, to say, "You're okay. I' m cool being here with you in your restaurant, in your bar, in your living room. I'm cool." You feel validated. I keep hoping that one day we will learn to validate one another. But that's coming.

QUESTION: You attribute the Civil Rights Movement to the press in particular, to the television medium. Does that scare you at all, when you think of this extreme power, influence that the press can have in creating such a strong force in history?

RASPBERRY: First, I'm not sure it has retained the power to do this particular kind of thing. I guess my most overwhelming emotion is of gratitude because I think what might have been the case without television – and it's not pretty to think of. People say that Supreme Court justices do read the election returns. I don't doubt that what the news media reported had some effect on that 1954 Supreme Court ruling. The problem is, we haven't got our heads together now. The media are accused by people on the right of having a left or liberal bias. You know what? I think it's probably true. I think if you looked at reporters and important newspapers across the country, they're probably at least slightly to the left of their owners. I think the reason is not that hiring editors go seeking out liberals. I think there's something about being exposed day-to-day to the realities of life and not to the theories that emanate from the think tanks that pushes you a little bit to the left. You see injustice, you see things that need fixing. And you understand more clearly than your mom and dad do at home, that the arguments you see in the newspapers aren't fixing anything. You think, "This ain't right. This ought to be fixed." I think journalists do tend to be left of center. But that fact, if it's a fact, has created a new fact. There are people who come into journalism now with the express purpose of being journalists on the right, who don't come into journalism to do truth and fight evil but who come into journalism to be a counterbalance. It's almost journalism as plot. And that's what one sees a good deal of on the cable networks, and increasingly among the commentators. It used to be that people who wrote Op-Ed columns – like me – were people who used to be reporters and who came to that fork in the road – some go to become editors and some go to become columnists, editorialists – but they come with a journalistic background. Now people laterally enter the field of commentary and come in with a purpose to do a certain kind of political duty, often. It's inconceivable, for instance, that somebody who used to be a police reporter and chase ambulances and cover school boards would have said yes to an offer to take $240,000 from the Department of Education to push No Child Left Behind. It's just inconceivable. Armstrong just didn't understand because he laterally entered.

A person who I know a little bit – Maggie Gallagher – who has had a career doing family and child issues, responded when somebody said, "You know, you ought to write a column," and so she wrote a column. While she was doing it, she was offered some work – not to tilt the column, some other work by the Department of Health and Human Services. And didn't understand because she was one of those lateral entries, didn't understand the whole – what's the word I'm looking for – there's a culture. There's a news-gathering culture that Charlotte and I are a part of. And we look askance at people who don't get it. But you don't get it if you enter laterally. Brit Hume gets it, he's just abandoned it. (laughter) But I'm not sure Hannity and Colmes get it. I'm not sure Bill O'Reilly even understands it. The culture is incredibly important, I think, to the work we do. And, by extension, to America. One of the seminars I teach at Duke has this theme – the press and the public interest. I'm asking myself, by pretending to ask my students, "Are we doing anything to warrant the special privileges granted us by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution?" And sometimes, I'm just made to say, "I'm not sure."

QUESTION (Inaudible)

CROSSTALK from audience with Raspberry. (inaudible)

RASPBERRY: From the who? What U.N? The U.N. is going right down the toilet (laughter).

CROSSTALK from audience (inaudible)

RASPBERRY: I tell you what. If I have to depend on the good Mr. Bolton to protect my rights in this regard. We didn't even talk about the extreme partisanship – what's the word I want to use? We are dividing ourselves so completely along, what I consider to be, petty partisan lines. Not over philosophies and issues and grand beliefs, but over temporary partisan advantage. That we have accepted the notion that anything goes. And so we can get a Bolton nominated for the U.N., and we can get people doing funny things with elections and not thinking twice about them. The result is good – not because it's done wonders for America but it elected our guy. So, sure, we'll do it. And they used to do it, didn't they? Remember Dick Daley in Chicago? We keep justifying – not just breaking the rules, and there' s always a little bit of that – but of telling ourselves that the rules really don't matter. There's an important difference between those things. It's the difference between a guy who cheats on his wife, feels guilty, and brings her flowers and treats her well for a while, and the guy who says, "Marriage doesn't matter. It's just a piece of paper, and my happiness is the only thing that counts." They're both wrong. But one is wrong and knows he's wrong, and the other is wrong and is making a philosophy of it. And the latter, I think, is more dangerous. But that's a whole different thing. I'll come back and we'll talk about that one.
(applause)

GRIMES: William Raspberry is always crystal clear. So we wanted to be sure that he had a way of knowing that we know that. We give him this to take back, as a thank-you for delivering the first Hodding Carter Lecture on Civil Rights and the Press. Thank you very much.
(applause)