

Civil Rights and the Press Symposium
Setting the Scene: The Landscape of Civil Rights & Press
Coverage

Saturday, April 24, 2004

Panel: Charles Moore, Dorothy Butler Gilliam, Claude Sitton, and Karl Fleming

Professor Charlotte Grimes: We are particularly privileged this morning to have with us Chancellor Kenneth “Buzz” Shaw. Chancellor Shaw has been at Syracuse University as the chancellor for 13 years. Over those years, he has been a strong supporter of diversity in the faculty, among students, and in our educational mission. One of his many legacies at S-U is the university’s commitment to being a student-centered top-notch research institution. Chancellor Shaw is stepping down at the end of the school year, but he is not stepping away from Syracuse University. After a well-earned leave next year, he will return as a member of the faculty to teach in leadership studies. So we are especially delighted to have Chancellor Shaw with us today as our host to welcome you to Syracuse University. Chancellor Shaw, thank you.

Chancellor Kenneth Shaw: Thank you very much, Charlotte. It is a pleasure to greet you on behalf of the university. This is a very important time - a time to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Brown v. the Board of Education, and, of course, the 40th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act. And I thank you, Charlotte, for your efforts and connections which made possible our bringing all these great people together and giving our students and faculty and members of the community an opportunity to hear from this very important group. The terms “Jim Crow” and “separate but equal” almost seem quaint today, but for probably many of us in this room who have a living memory of it, we will never forget those times. Those of us who were alive when these two critical decisions in our nation’s history were reached remember all too well the pain and the suffering that these terms truly describe. We remember because many brave journalists and photographers, several of whom are being honored this weekend, brought the often-horrific words and images to us via our newspapers, our radios, our televisions. Police dogs, fire hoses, clubs, faces contorted with anger and pain – we saw, we learned, we felt all about this.

But we also read and listened and watched as brave men, women and children asserted their rights often at great personal peril. We were shamed – many of us – inspired, angered, hopeful, despairing, determined. As this critical story of human struggle unfolded before us, no matter our perspectives on these events, it was perhaps the first time in our history, in modern history, it was impossible for us to say we didn’t know what was going on. Yes, we knew. That was because the press was there reporting to us – frequently under great danger, getting the

story, come what may, involving the ideals of journalism to provide a voice to the voiceless, and to speak the truth to power. I look forward to learning about what comes from this very important symposium, and I wish you a highly productive time together. Syracuse University and its renowned S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications are very proud and honored to be your host. Ladies and gentlemen, enjoy this time together, and let's share some great memories. Thank you.

Professor Grimes: I should have told you that I am Charlotte Grimes, the Knight Chair in Political Reporting. I have to tell you that we do have a disappointment. One of our panelists, Vernon Jarrett, is unable to be with us this morning. Vernon had surgery for throat cancer this winter, and he is still recovering. We are very sorry that Vernon couldn't make it. But, of course, we send him warm wishes for a speedy recovery. Before we move on to our wonderful panelists, I need to say thank you to a few special people. When I first proposed this symposium a year ago, my Newhouse colleagues were all wonderfully enthusiastic and supportive. But one in particular quickly stepped forward to offer his own extensive connections and experience. And several of our participants are here today because they got a phone call from that colleague, Francis Ward. Thank you, Francis.

Every reporter needs a good editor. And for this project, I have had one of the best. My guiding light throughout the planning for all of this has been Gene Roberts. Many a Sunday, I would call him at home for advice and help. He was always patient, informative, and wise. And many of our participants are here today because I was able to say those magic words: "Gene Roberts told me to call you." Thank you, Gene.

And as we put this together this past year, one person was always ready and able to make it work. She did it all with military precision – Nancy Austin. Nancy has been tireless, incredibly efficient and always great fun. She took my crazy ideas and made them practical. She could even make Parking Services do what she wants them to do. Thank you, Nancy. Back in the winter, Claude Sitton asked me if I could promise no snow and good weather. I told him that I would put my wonderful graduate assistant in charge of the weather. That graduate assistant is Andrea Faville, who is absolutely multi-talented. And, as you can see, we have a glorious sun-shiny day. Thank you, Andrea, for another job well done.

And, as you know, we are here this weekend to commemorate those landmark Civil Rights anniversaries: the 50th anniversary of Brown v. the Board of Education and the 40th anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Those two events transformed our country, thanks to the courage of the civil rights marchers and demonstrators who challenged injustice. Tomorrow, you will hear from one of the bravest of them –Congressman John Lewis of Georgia. We are also here to celebrate outstanding journalism. With us this weekend is an extraordinary

group of reporters, photographers, TV correspondents, editors, and publishers, who lived up to the highest calling of a free press. They reported those important stories, and, like the civil rights marchers, they often faced hostility, intimidation, and violence. But they told those stories with courage and eloquence. And their courage stirred the nation's conscience.

One of the many things we try to teach here at the Newhouse School is the fundamental principle, "If the press does its job right, our democracy is strengthened." The journalists with us this weekend did that job damned right. And as you will hear from them, I know you will be inspired, and I hope that many of you will go out and follow in their footsteps. Tomorrow we will also reflect on how we keep trying to do that job right in our increasingly diverse society. Our panelists will tell us about emerging civil rights issues. And it's important to remember to cover them. And it's also important for us to remember that the civil rights story is not over. Thank you very much for being with us. Now I'm going to turn things over to my colleague, Mel Coffee, to get us started with our first panel. Thank you again for being with us.

Mel Coffee: Good morning. Thank you all for being here. It's amazing to be here for me because there are so many people from Memphis and who wrote in Memphis newspapers. That's my hometown. And I grew up at about that time. I was born in 1960, but the image is very clear and very vivid to me. And as Professor Grimes was saying, it's exactly why I got involved in broadcast news – seeing what was happening and living it at the same time, and comparing what you were seeing on TV and what you were actually living. So it's a great opportunity to be here. The History Channel has nothing on what you are about to experience today. With that said, let's get started.

I'm going to introduce you to the people on the panel, starting first with Charles Moore. He is a photographer, a freelance photographer now, down on the far end. He was a contract photographer for Life magazine and The Associated Press covering the civil rights movement. His photos have been used in works by Andy Warhol. He has also covered the Dominican Republic civil war and violence in Venezuela and Haiti. We're going to start this morning looking at some samples of his work during those times.

Charles Moore: Thank you. Well, that's what we will do then. The most important, of course, was the civil rights movement. As a son of the South – by the way, I highly recommend a book called "Sons of the South" – all of those things that I had an opportunity to do and to cover, the war in Vietnam, were things that I wanted to do or maybe I had an assignment to do. The civil rights movement was something extremely important to me as a son of Alabama – but a very proud son. And I'm very proud to say that I think my values, the important values, came from the way I grew up. My fortune was in having a good family and in my father, who was, not in his early days, but later on, became a minister. He told me and my brother. He addressed us always as, "Son, you're not to do

this” or “You’re not to do that.” He also always said to us very firmly, “You never use that word” when we were talking about some of the kids that we played with or that we met. I will also say that my father accepted invitations that some of the country churches – that were at that time, they were “these colored churches out in the country.” But Dad was a friend of the black people in our area. So I learned a lot there.

To go on and have a career, I did not plan on being a journalist. I had no intention of being a photojournalist. I went to Brooks Institute of Photography in California after the Marine Corps and studied other things, commercial and fashion. But I am so proud. When I came back to my hometown of Tusculumbia, Alabama, I couldn’t find anything to do there. But then somebody said there’s a job opening with the Montgomery Advertiser, the Alabama journal, Ray Jenkins. I went down and interviewed with Joe Holloway, the chief photographer, and I got a job. It turned my whole life around. I became a newspaper photographer. I became a photojournalist. I am proud to this day that that happened to me because I don’t know where I would be other than that. But, anyway, I’m to show a few pictures. I don’t want to take the time from the panel. I have a DVD that I produced with the help of a very wonderful friend who is from the Philippines. And in my hometown now, Florence, Alabama, there are really a lot of creative things going on. She was able to help me through the pictures and putting together the DVD for this. It’s short, and that way I was asked to do this as sort of an introduction to the panel. I am proud to sit up here with these people. It’s awesome to see Karl Fleming and Claude Sitton. And there’s a man sitting in the front row here that’s a very precious friend of mine. You all know him, Ernest Withers. The last time we were together, we were together at the Smithsonian in a program. I just love this guy. I will go to Beale Street one day, which I swear he must own. He is “Mr. Beale Street” in Memphis. It’s a DVD, it’s only about 12 to 14 minutes, and then we’ll have the panel. Any questions about the pictures – hold it until everybody’s finished and we all have questions.

(Charles Moore DVD shown)

It took a while to get all those songs and words and a lot of research. Some of the stuff came from the Smithsonian. I want, though, to tell you that if you ever get a chance to hear of a wonderful singer by the name of John McAndrew. He sits at a piano, plays the piano, and sings his own songs that he writes. He wrote the song of “Birmingham.” A friend of mine, a neighbor of mine, brought a CD to me. I didn’t even know he was appearing at the Jazz Festival last year in Florence, Alabama. There is a huge jazz festival every year in north Alabama, and John McAndrew was there. He sent the CD signed to me, which he talked about my civil rights work with him. We became friends, and that is from a CD of his. He is a marvelous person. I’m so glad he’s a friend. He wrote that song. He plays it often. If you ever get a chance to hear him. We’ve got to get on with the panel.

Mel Coffee: This is where broadcast journalism becomes a little bit too concerned about time, but we do want to make sure we hear from everybody and give you guys a chance to ask a lot of questions, too. Continuing from your left to right, we have Dorothy Butler Gilliam. She is the Shapiro Fellow teaching journalism at George Washington University. She spent several years at The Washington Post from the early '60s to the mid-'60s, and then again from 1972 until this last June. She was covering, or did cover, for the Tri-State Defender in Memphis the desegregation at Little Rock Central High School – Dorothy Butler Gilliam. We have Claude Sitton. He's retired. He was the pre-eminent civil rights reporter for The New York Times. He won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for commentary for The Charlotte Observer in North Carolina.

Claude Sitton: Excuse me. It's The News and Observer. Or better known as the Nuisance and Disturb.

Coffee: I apologize in my efforts to keep things moving along. There's a reason I have my glasses. I should put them on.

Sitton: It's all right.

Coffee: Sitting next to Mr. Sitton we have Karl Fleming, who was a Newsweek correspondent who covered most of the major events in the South during the civil rights movement, including the assassinations of President Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, and Martin Luther King. And he also covered the trials of Jack Ruby and Charles Manson. This is your panel, a bunch of really great people to hear from. We'd like to start just by giving about five minutes or so to talk about why it was so important to cover this from your perspectives and anything that you experienced. Why don't we start with you, Dorothy?

Dorothy Butler Gilliam: Thank you very much. I really appreciated that very powerful DVD. It's very important. I'm going to frame my brief remarks in the context of the black press. Even though I spent of my approximately 38 years in active journalism, I spent about 35 of those years at The Washington Post. My beginning was in the black press, and I think in order to put into context what you've seen on the DVD and what you'll be seeing today, I think it's important to start there. The black press was the media that covered what was really happening in black America during the many years when the white press ignored it. I would say it was not until the Brown decision of 1954 that the mainstream press paid any attention to the black population except to note its criminal activities and to note primarily crime. But there was very vibrant, active life in black America. Importantly, after World War II, black soldiers came back to America determined that after fighting for democracy abroad, they were determined that there was going to be more democracy at home.

The black press was very much a part of this. They started what they called the "Double V Victory Campaign" – V for Victory at home, but also V for Victory

abroad. Interestingly enough, it was the black press that really helped to push the Civil Rights movement. Had it not been for a very active black press working from approximately 1910 to 1950, I think the civil rights movement would have had a much slower start. I was fortunate to have been trained in the black press. I started at the Tri-State Defender right after I finished Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. The boss there was a man named Alex Wilson, who was a tall, gruff, ex-Marine. I was 20 years old, so I was very much a novice and also very much a person who did not have the major coverage of the Little Rock civil rights movement. In fact, the Tri-State Defender is in Memphis, and that's only a few miles from Little Rock. My boss, Alex Wilson, had been very carefully following the plan for the integration of Little Rock Central High School. He had watched the machinations of the segregation of Southern politicians, especially Governor Orval Faubus.

So he went to Little Rock to cover in September on September 3rd - that was the day that integration was to begin. He was there when Faubus called out the Arkansas National Guard on the pretext of preventing violence. But in reality it was to block integration. Wilson was part of a small group of journalists who arrived at Central High School to cover the integration, but some of the parents who were there thought he was one of the parents of the Little Rock Nine. So it immediately set upon them to beat up these men who happened to be journalists. Ernest Withers is here. He can probably tell us the names of the other people who were with him. I don't remember that. The point is, Alex Wilson was very brutally beaten that day by the mob when he tried to cover the integration of Little Rock, Arkansas. Now he had told me to stay back in Memphis – I was too young, I didn't know how to cover such a complex story, and he was absolutely right.

But, of course, once the television images started coming to Memphis about the beatings and all that was going on, I was determined to get to Little Rock. As a matter of fact, Ernest Withers and I and his secretary in the office of the Tri-State Defender, we drove to Little Rock and went to the home of Daisy Bates, who was the person who was shepherding the Little Rock Nine into the high school. I know I'm going over the five minutes, but if I could tell this one incident. One of the things that struck me as a young person who had grown up in an entirely segregated environment – I was born in Memphis, but I actually grew up in Louisville, Kentucky – I had attended all segregated schools. I had to use all the hand-me-down books from the white schools. We were in these inferior physical dwellings that you saw on the DVD.

I had not come face to face with a lot of personal violence because we lived in very segregated circumstances. So to see the rage and the contorted faces of the white parents in Little Rock, as they met these young children who were trying to get into the school. I think who stands out in my mind is Elizabeth Eckford. She was this one African-American young woman who was not with the initial group that tried to enter the school. Somehow she hadn't gotten the word

that they were all going together. So she was there alone. To see a crowd of whites turn on her and scream at her and throw rocks at her was, to me, a very frightening experience. It was just an inkling of the true depth of the problem of race in America. To see that huge crowd of whites turn on a single child in order to keep her from entering the school, it was a horrifying glimpse into what this true racial problem was in America.

I felt very fortunate to be a journalist and to have chosen this as a profession. Because with all the difficulties, I was going to have a chance to be one of those young African-American people who was going to be able to see this and tell that story from the perspective of somebody who had actually experienced what had gone on in segregated America – the psychological impact, the day-to-day feeling of how it was to be separate, the day-to-day feeling of being told that you're "less than." In my case, my challenge was, once I became a reporter at The Washington Post, being able to deal on a daily basis with being one of those people to be the first black woman at The Washington Post. Having to deal with fellow employees who didn't speak to you, who would see me on the street and pretend they didn't know me. These were very difficult things to encounter as a young reporter. I will get to the issue of talking a little bit about covering my most memorable experience, which was covering Ole Miss in 1962 on the next go-round of questions.

Coffee: All right, thank you. You talked about face-to-face with violence as a reporter. I want to ask all the panel about that, what it's like to do that. We'll get to that. Next, we'll hear from Claude Sitton.

Claude Sitton: Mr. Moderator, I was told I'd have 10 minutes. I prepared a tight 10 minutes, but if you'd not like to hear that, I'll just skip my opening remark.

Coffee: We would love to hear your 10 minutes, and I promise you if you timed it out at 10 minutes, we have a little orchestra sitting in the back of the room here.

Sitton: I want to address my remarks to the students. Continuing stories demand that reporters and editors understand the central truths of the subject at hand and stay alert for the important changes in context and direction. Otherwise, daily coverage is just that – it dailies. It gives no more insight than some "Who Shot John?" piece in the local cop shop. That is why these facts are so important in covering what we now call "the movement." First, there was not one, but many movements. Second, there was not one, but many leaders. Third, whites as well as blacks played a role. Finally, the movements alone did not transform America. The historian Oscar Handlin summed up that last point early on in his book "Fire-Bell in the Night" when he said, "The movements alerted and alarmed Americans, and Americans in turn responded through the courts, the Congress, and the presidency. No nation could match the political, economic and social transformations that followed. Transformations, you say? Well, consider the South today and the South into which I was born. That was

the South that taxed the right to vote and punished blacks for even trying. That was the South of poverty and peonage. The South of Jim Crow and Lynch Law. If you were black, you drank from a public water fountain marked "colored." You sat at the back of the bus and never at the white lunch counter. You bought what clothes you could afford without having the right to first try them on. And if you resisted, these and other indignities, repressions, and injustices, a white policeman would come and lock you up.

The single biggest story of the civil rights era was the event whose 50th anniversary we celebrate next month – the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. I say that because it gave a people hope – hope that the old ways in race relations could be and would be changed. The initiative came first not from Topeka, but instead from Clarendon County, South Carolina. I was a student then and learned that the Clarendon movement from Richard Kluger's fine book, "Simple Justice." The movement stemmed from a request by black parents for one school bus. Whites already had 30 of them. A preacher named Joseph Albert Delane led the movement. Before it was over, he, his wife, and two sisters were fired from their jobs as teachers. His church was stoned, his house was burned, and he was shot at from ambush. And when he shot back, he was convicted of felonious assault with a deadly weapon. Then when he fled across the state line for his life, he was declared, officially, "a fugitive from justice." Clarendon was the first of the five federal court suits against public school segregation that brought the *Brown* decision. The lead lawyer was Thurgood Marshall, chief counsel to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and later, head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and a justice of the United States Supreme Court. Marshall executed one of those changes in context and direction of which I spoke. He argued not that schools for blacks merely be made equal, but instead that they be made no longer separate.

The struggle remained largely in the courts for the next six years. The Montgomery Bus Boycott drew national attention in 1955 and 1956. But it was the 1960 sit-ins by students from North Carolina A&T University that caught fire and swept the movements into the street and across the South and then the nation. Then came the 1963 Battle of Birmingham. Why was it important? First, it spurred passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which banned discrimination in jobs, in voting, and in public accommodations. Second, it taught the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Southern Christian Leadership Conference strategies that SCLC and other civil rights organizations used in Selma, Alabama, to win the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Here's another of those central truths about the movement. They were political campaigns but sometimes with much higher stakes. Participants might win or lose, but in some cases what they lost was their lives. Like campaigns for public office, movements cost money for travel, lodging, office expense, telephones, court costs and bond money to get your supporters out of jail. The money came from contributors. And contributions, as any Bush or Kerry will tell you today, come from news coverage. Free media, we

call it. There was and is fierce competition for that coverage. All six national civil rights organizations competed in that contest, including the NAACP and ex-chief Roy Wilkins.

One day in the early '60s, he sent a young lawyer down to Albany, Georgia – “Ol’ Benny” – to fly the NAACP’s flag in the “Ol’ Benny Movement.” Thought I hadn’t been there long when Mr. Wilkins called from New York to ask who I was. He was still having to pick up his New York Times every morning and read about nothing but Martin Luther King. The young fellow says, “Roy that’s because Dr. King is going to jail.” “Well, Vernon, why don’t you go,” asked Mr. Wilkins. “Roy,” Vernon said, “You want somebody to go to jail, come on down. I ain’t going.” That’s my old friend from Atlanta, Vernon Jordan, who later headed the Voter Education Project, the National Urban League, and President Clinton’s Transition Team before moving on to a full partnership in a New York investment palace. The movement produced many heroes, none more persuasively nationally than Dr. King. That was not because he was a saint, which he was not. No, his secret lay in three streaks. First, his recognition that change could come only through passive resistance to segregation non-violence. Second, his power to inspire blacks to unimaginable feats of bravery. Third, his ability to get blacks to do that which they knew was right. However, none deserves greater admiration than those who risked all they had with no hope, fame or fortune. I’m thinking now of a little old shrimp of a man named E.A. Steptoe. He plowed a hardscrabble farm down in Mississippi down near a town called Liberty. Not only is Liberty in Mississippi, it’s in the deep south of Mississippi. It sits down there on the Louisiana Line – gumbo and chicory coffee country, pasture land, and cut over timber, swamps and rattlesnakes – some of which crawled and some of which walked. Liberty serves as a seat of a county, and in that day, the county had 3,500 blacks of voting age, and only one – Steptoe – who was registered to vote, and even he had never dared to try. Steptoe and some field workers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, like John Lewis, whom you’re going to hear from tomorrow morning, were going to change all that. Gonna make some dreams come true. So they started a voter registration drive.

But things didn’t go so well. Sharecropping brothers were driven off the farms where they worked. Others were flogged. Still others were run out of the county. And one, Herbert Lee, was shot down in broad daylight at the Cotton Gin in downtown Liberty. The state legislator who did the killing was a white man who lived right across a dusty little country road from Steptoe. Steptoe, who not only led the voter drive, but also served as president of the Amite County Chapter of the NAACP. Not long after the killing, another reporter and I dropped by to see Steptoe, and we found the old man with some justifiable doubts about his future. “I’m right proud to see y’all,” he told us. “Cause as long as y’all are here, I know I got a few more minutes to live.” When he said he never quit trying to get his rights because without them, life wouldn’t be worth living. Mr. Steptoe spoke a truth that day, there in Mississippi, there near a town called Liberty. Central truths, context, direction – keep them in mind, whatever your subject. Thank you.

Karl Fleming: Dorothy talked a little about the black media before the civil rights movement. I grew up in an all-white Methodist church orphanage in North Carolina. I was a kid reporter on the Wilson North Carolina Daily Times. This is down in the tobacco country of North Carolina. I was a kid reporter just as the Brown v. the Board of Education – the first ramblings of that were being heard. I rode around at night with a cop named Ray Hardis. He was a big, brutal guy. We'd drive down Main Street across the tracks, and the black people would bow and scrape and say, "Good evening, Mr. Hardis. How are you, Mr. Hardis?" They were terrified of him and with good reason. He bragged that he had killed two black people. That was not the word he used, by the way. One night, we were riding back and forth in these alleyways of shotgun shacks, and he stopped the car and got out. I said, "Where are you going, Ray?" He said, "I heard this son of a bitch belongs to the NAACP." I didn't say anything. I got out of the car and followed him up. He walked up on the porch to open the screen door, walked right into the house. This was at night. There was a chest of drawers against the wall. He walked over, opened the chest of drawers, and began throwing things out on the floor. I had said, "What are you looking for, Ray?" He said, "I'm looking for that son of a bitch's NAACP card." This old black guy comes out of his bedroom and said, "Evening, Mr. Hardis, you got a search warrant?" And he turned and his face got real red and he slapped him across the face and down on the floor he fell. He said, "That's one side of my Goddamn NAACP card, you want to see the other one?"

Now I would like to tell you that I went back to the Daily Times and wrote that story. But I did not. Such a thing in that milieu would have been unimaginable. I did report the events to my city editor. He shrugged and said, "Well, he's got a reputation of being a rough guy." That was as far as it went. That kind of news about black people did not get into the paper at all. Only, as Dorothy said, when they got into trouble. Or there was a page on Saturday called, "News of the Colored Community." This was where all the events of the world across the tracks would be reported. But I knew that was wrong what Ray Hardis did. I was horrified. Also I covered my first capital punishment case in that town where a black man was sent to the gas chamber for cutting a screen and crawling into a white woman's bedroom. She screamed, and he leapt out and ran. What his intent was, we don't know. No good, for sure.

But he went straight to the gas chamber in an all-white jury. That was prototypical of what the white media in the South was like before it began to have its consciousness raised, and, I must say, my own consciousness raised. When I went to work finally with Newsweek and we had to go to places with my good pal Claude Sitton to Albany, Georgia; Birmingham; Selma and Greenwood, Mississippi; we saw these unbelievably horrific things. I have to tell you I was physically ill many times. One moment lives in my memory and it will live forever. That was an occasion after Medgar Evers was killed. It was a march. These Mississippi cops waded into this crowd of women, children, and husbands, all

dressed in their Sunday best. They were carrying American flags, and they snatched the flags out of their hands and began to beat them. I can still hear the sounds of those clubs on the people's heads.

I saw lots of stuff like that, as we all did. And it was sickening. But there was also something very inspiring about it. We as reporters were unbelievably fortunate enough to be witness to this. Let me just close by telling you another story. One of the great fabulous figures of the civil rights movement is a man named John Doar. For those of you who do not know who he is, he was the front man in Bobby Kennedy's Justice Department during the civil rights movement. He was the guy who prosecuted the cases and got Meredith into Ole Miss and prosecuted a lot of cases about voter registration, including the first one in Haywood County, Tennessee, where black people who had been on these farms for three generations were run off these farms because they had the audacity to go down to register to vote. John Doar was a very brave and wonderful man – a Republican, by the way, of all things, from Wisconsin. He comported himself extremely well.

Some years ago we were together at some function and he told me this story. There was a judge also down there named John Minor Wisdom, also a wonderful man – also a Republican, by the way. But he had voted correctly and had ruled correctly in a lot of these school desegregation cases, and he subjected himself to cross burnings, bombings, fires. He was ostracized. But he did the right thing. John Doar told me one night that they were drinking in Chicago at some function. Judge Wisdom had a bottle of bourbon and they were going up the stairs to go to bed, and Judge Wisdom looked down at John and said, "Well, John, we didn't do anything to be ashamed of." I thought, "What a great epithet for life." As one gets older, you focus more on things like that. You look back and think about how you lived your life. I'm so grateful and so proud to have been a part of this event in history. And to have as my colleagues – so many people who live their lives in such a way that they can look back with some pride and humility and say, "You know what? I didn't do anything to be ashamed of." Thank you.

Coffee: I think I'd like to start by bouncing off that point that you just made. It's also one that Dorothy brought up earlier on. Considering these situations were so violent so often and so volatile as well, how do you separate whatever personal concerns you might have and bridle your individual passions so that you do focus on getting the job done, and get those pictures and get that information out there. How difficult is it to do that? What kinds of things were going through your head? Were you ever challenged enough to think about not doing it, or challenged to think about doing it more? Charles, why don't we start with you?

Moore: Well, unfortunately, we photographers couldn't conceal ourselves very easily because we had cameras. I remember one reporter that was with me in Mississippi actually came out in overalls – pretended to be a farmer. But we all were in danger. I remember Karl in Birmingham. That was pretty scary at times,

wasn't it, Karl? Claude, I remember you were there. It's a job that we do. Whether you're for war, you've got a job to do. But civil rights, like Karl said, it was an emotional thing for us. It was an emotional thing for me because I'm a Southerner by birth. This was not right. We did, we faced opposition from so many people and a lot of danger. We all have our war stories. You do what you have to do. Yes, it's difficult to be able to – I would not want to be a reporter. They had pads and pencils, or they had to remember, or they had tape recorders. They were in danger. As much as a photographer was. We had cameras and people wanted to smash them. I have a great admiration for the ones that had to stand out there and do it. It was a very dangerous time. Nothing was as dangerous for us as for the people who were really struggling for their rights. They deserve all the credit because they were the movement.

Sitton: I was asked by Gertrude Samuels, then a staff writer for the New York Times Sunday Magazine. She said, "Claude, aren't you scared down there?" I said, "Not all that much. I got protective coloration." She said, "What do you mean by that? You're black?" I said, "Well, not quite." We had different kinds of protective coloration. Sim Fenchers of Time Magazine and I were sitting in the bus station in the cold Mississippi when a group of freedom riders from Southwest Louisiana State University arrived. The first one was the basketball center – a big, tall guy came through the screen door. About that time, a couple of all field roughnecks started swinging in. Hopped up on the counter, ran down the counter, hop scotched over to the tables, and right up across the tables, and back out through the screen door without opening it. Fenchers and I were sitting there – back in those days everybody wore hats – we had on hats, we had on London Fog raincoats. We sat there drinking our coffee, observing all this. After it was over, the FBI, which had been sitting down the street in a car, came up and said, "Give us a fill in! Give us a fill in!" The next morning, the McComb Enterprise Journal reported that "Two FBI agents sat in the bus station drinking coffee and didn't raise a finger during the riot." Protective coloration.

Fleming: I had a crew-cut haircut in those days. I was often accused of being an FBI agent, and I never denied it. I just said, "I don't want to talk about that." Let me tell you my favorite story about Claude Sitton, who, by the way, was and is, in my view, the best newspaper reporter I ever ran up against. Absolutely relentless guy. I would be full of Jack Daniels and three packs of cigarettes and suffering from shattered nerves, and Claude would still be on the phone to New York updating his story. We were in Philadelphia. We were the first reporters when those kids got killed. We went over to the sheriff's office. Sheriff Rainey and Deputy Price met us, looking guilty, and pacing face, and, of course, denied everything. We knew those kids were dead. So we left and came back the next morning. We went back into the sheriff's office. When we came out into the, what passed for a rotunda in this little country courthouse, on the town square in Philadelphia, there was this huge mob of people there. White guys. They backed us against the wall. The leader of this mob began to berate us, in more or less, the following diatribe: "If you Goddamn Communist, Jew-loving, nigger-

loving reporters didn't come down here stirring up all this trouble, we wouldn't be having all these damned problems. You sons-a-bitches this, you bastards that. If you don't get the hell out of this town, you're going to get killed." All the while, we're trying to ease our way out the side door. We find a way out the door and Claude said, "Come with me." I looked across the square and there was this sign that said Turgin Hardware Store. I remembered that Claude had said that Turner Catledge, who was the managing editor of the New York Times, had an uncle in this town. So we walked over to the hardware store, and Mr. Turgin came out, and Claude says to him, "I'm Claude Sitton of the New York Times and this is Mr. Fleming from Newsweek. We're just good Southern boys, just like you are, and we're down here doing our jobs. We're not causing anybody any trouble. We're just doing our jobs. Mr. Turner Catledge said if we got down here and got into any trouble, we come over and see you and might be able to help us out." This guy is looking silent all this time, and he paused for a minute. He said, "Well, Mr. Sitton. If you and Mr. Fleming were down on the ground and these guys were kicking your brains out and kicking your asses, I wouldn't participate in that. On the other hand, I wouldn't lift one Goddamn finger to help you sons-a-bitches. And if you weren't for you Goddamn Jew Communist nigger-loving reporters down here, we wouldn't be having all this trouble. My advice is get the hell out of this town right now or you're going to get killed." So we're both outside and I said to Claude, "Good thing you got some influence in this town, or we'd be in big trouble here."

Sitton: I don't think Catledge ever forgave me for that either because the story got out and got in The Wall Street Journal, and Catledge thought that I was out of line to be dragging his family into it.

Fleming: We went back to the motel and these guys showed up – four guys in a Chevy, with two shotguns and a jar of moonshine whiskey. I went out to see what they were about. We talked a while, and they invited me and Claude to go out. They wanted to show us some farms. You remember the significance of this story. Three kids were found buried in a dam on farms. We took off. Nick Von Hoffman, who was from Chicago, hardly knew how to drive. It was slightly raining, it was getting dark and we wanted to get the hell out of there. So we're driving down the road and Nick is just creeping along in this funeral fashion. I said, "Nick, drive the Goddamn car!" He said, "I'm going the speed limit!"

Gilliam: Well, I didn't have protective coloration, so it was a real different experience. I always put my remarks in the context of the larger number of black reporters who aren't here. You'll hear from one or two this afternoon. I worked for a couple of years at Jet magazine. There were so many black reporters who went down South and really showed so much bravery because their lives were at risk as much as the people they were trying to cover. I just want to talk about the time when I felt most frightened. Let me set the climate a little bit. You've heard a lot about the South, etc. But everybody knows that Mississippi was a case apart. Mississippi – a lot of black people called it one of the evil wonders of the

world. The violence was open. This legendary Senator Theodore Bilbo was the one who incited a lot of it. Here is the Ku Klux Klan dominating. Segregation was obviously written into the laws. But it was also written into the Democratic Party bylaws. It was enforced by this alliance of lawmakers, police forces, judges, sheriffs, White Citizens' Council.

I know there was one civil rights worker who called Mississippi a South African enclave within the United States, organized to keep Black people from power. Of course, the federal government around this time did very little except to ask Mississippi to change. When James Meredith in 1962 decided that he was going to try to integrate the University of Mississippi, that was a mammoth, mammoth thing. He had actually applied in January of 1961 and was denied admission the following month. Very quickly he was denied admission. Meredith took his case to the NAACP and they took the case to court for him. On September 10th, the Supreme Court ordered Ole Miss to accept James Meredith. At that point, I had been working at The Washington Post just about a year. The Post asked me to go down as one of a team of Post reporters who were covering Ole Miss. There were I don't remember exactly how many Post reporters, but I know the lead reporter was a guy named Bill Clayburn. But there were more than that. My assignment was to go and cover the black community.

How was the black community reacting to all of this? The first thing I did when the Post asked me to do this was to call Ernest Withers because I knew that if I had any chance of getting in and out of Mississippi alive, it was going to be because Ernest Withers was going to take me there and get me out. That's really how difficult it is. Ernest Withers is sitting here. You're going to hear from him later. Mr. Withers was the photographer of the story. His pictures were in The Washington Post along with my story. He suggested that I fly into Memphis, and I did. We met up, and we were driving in his car. His car, of course, had Tennessee tags. We're in his car, we're driving into Oxford. I do not remember how many miles it was. That's why I'm going to interview him while he's here. Only 70 miles from Memphis to Oxford? Interesting. It seemed much longer. But after Mr. Withers and I met, then we started this drive into Memphis. We were stopped on this drive – I don't know if they were sheriffs or vigilantes with gun racks on top of their cars. There were several instances when we were pulled aside. Mr. Withers got out and talked to whoever they were. I did not – I was hovering in the car. He talked us through. We got to Oxford. There were no places for black people to stay. Bill Clayburn and one of the other people from the Post were staying at the Sand & Sea Motel. (panel crosstalk - muffled conversation) At least you had a hotel to stay in. We had to find places to stay. Again, Mr. Withers was the one who carried me through. He knew people.

There were some nights when we stayed at the homes of black people he knew. One night I stayed at a funeral home. Just the act of covering the story was – to me, as a black reporter – felt very much what it might feel like any reporter in a war zone because there really was that kind of constant level of fear. While I

know my colleagues certainly faced dangers, the black reporters who did not have that protective coloration faced even greater ones. Just to bring this to a close, it really was a terrifying experience – being a black journalist in that environment. One night, Mr. Withers and I decided we were going to see Medgar Evers. That was again a tremendous experience. He was part of the story I wrote. This would be the last time I saw Medgar Evers because a few months later, he was killed. In terms of the violence, while it was difficult for everybody, I have to say that a lot of black reporters did experience those additional dangers and often with the indignities of not knowing where you were going to sleep at night, having to find a place to sleep. Perhaps as a woman, I felt that even more than the men. You're just a little bit uncomfortable when you don't know where you're going to sleep. We wrote the stories, we did it. I think it was an important part of the civil rights movement. I have to congratulate the black press because that was the press that kept the movement, and kept the courage, and kept the hope in the hearts of black people when they were feeling so alone and so invisible to the rest of America.

Sitton: I want to expose a conspiracy by the white press in Mississippi that has never been exposed before. One of the conspirators, Hodding Carter, is here today. What these guys used to do – you couldn't write too many rough editorials or even tolerant or even moderate editorials on civil rights in Mississippi and still survive. So what they'd do, one would write an editorial urging moderation and compliance with the law one week. And all of the others – about five of them – would pick up the editorial on the headline, "What Mississippi Newspapers Are Saying This Week." Then the next week, another one would pick it up. Then the others would pick it up and run with it. There you are, that's the way they got the job done more or less.

Coffee: Questions from anyone in the audience here?

Fleming: While somebody's thinking, I'd like to add just a minor footnote here. Arrogant, I was. But I was never so arrogant as to think that anything that I did was anything on the par with what the great black people who were putting their lives on the line every day. I don't know a single reporter who covered that era who had in any thought that "This story is going to make me a celebrity." I think reporters of this era – God knows, it's beginning to sound sure enough like an old fart talking – we were members of the working class and proud to be so. I don't know anybody who did it for the money. God knows the pay in my first job paid 30 bucks a week. In fact, all the reporters I knew had a kind of contempt for money and people whose main goal in life was to make it. Like publishers, right. I was in awe of black people who laid their lives. We got to leave, not often, but we did get to pack our bags and go home to Atlanta or wherever we lived. They had to stay there, and often they lost their lives.

Coffee: We were talking earlier about that. Do you think there's a sense of diminishing significance about that coverage then in terms of now or increasing

importance because of new discussions going on over civil issues and civil rights issues? Some of you had some thoughts on that. I know that some of you are also doing things to make sure that you do get journalism into high school so that you can get students even earlier. So let's start with that.

Gilliam: There's really a lot less coverage about race today than even a few, 10, 15 years ago. There's been a conscious pulling back on the part of many media. It's a very bad idea that that is happening. As this nation becomes more multi-cultural – Claude mentioned the 50th anniversary of Brown v. the Board that we'll be celebrating officially on May 17th, but there's been certainly a series of celebrations already. We are at a point where the schools in many urban areas are re-segregating. Huge percentages of children still go to segregated schools. In many ways there has been a rollback of gains, and we're not reporting it, in general, as the media with the kind of analysis and the kind of interpretation that we need to do, that we need to report.

Moore: I believe all the above, but also I believe what we're doing today – Syracuse University – is extremely important because it's giving the opportunity to the people who were there, especially the writers, the reporters, the newspapers, the magazines, the photographers, to be able to speak out about it. When we speak at these symposia, there's probably something in the paper, the public knows about it. That is important, also, to continue to keep this issue before the public. It is not something that should ever go away. You don't want to return to any kind of country that we had at that time. I just want to mention heroes – three. Civil rights workers who gave their lives, and voter registration, and working there in Mississippi. My reporter Michael Durham and I would sit down, we'd hike through those swamps. We even rented a plane that flew over the swamps. We were there helping to find and to be able to photograph whatever happened – at "Danger Duke." Yes, I know I was threatened by the sheriff, I was happy to go back again when the FBI was arresting these people involved. Justice is served sometimes too late. But when the public is aware of these events in Mississippi that were so wrong, I was honored to be invited back to the 40th anniversary of the events that night. I was photographing the marshals outside and to see James Meredith and to be able to be with him that time, and to hear some incredible speeches. Keeping it before the public is extremely important.

Audience Question: I think the aspect of human behavior being beastly is not something any decade has copyright on. In the same time, the challenge of being dignified is co-opted by circumstances. I see in my recent relationship with the black communities at Syracuse, just systematically, I see black America has had its thinking co-opted by a high energy society for many decades. I look to black people in their suffering and in indignity held as being more thoughtful, possibly. I look to them as being more thoughtful and more dignified.

Coffee: Are you a journalist, can you frame your statement?

Audience Question: I'm a Religion graduate here. I think the beggars in Syracuse, New York are the most polite people. You figure it out if that's not the truth.

Coffee: Because we are so tight on time, do you want to frame a question for the panel?

Audience Question: How do we reach out as people, multicultural people to achieve dignity (through journalism and reporting)?

Fleming: I think we answered that already.

Coffee: Just getting involved and listening to people and telling those stories that are not told.

Audience Question: You talk about how there seems to be a great deal of spirit of cooperation among reporters of different news organizations you covered in the civil rights movement. How much of a necessity was it for safety, for access? How much did you put your competitive side to the side?

Fleming: Claude and I wrote together constantly. He was and is an irascible son of a bitch.

Sitton: Not him, when he was flying the plane we did ride together.

Fleming: Newsweek took a slightly different attack on the news than The New York Times, which was daily. But in part of it was because we were afraid. He would drive and I would type. I would drive and he would type. We stayed in adjoining motel rooms. We were always careful to be sure we got rooms at the bottom of the hotel. We were very careful about our telephone calls. He would not sit with his back to the door in a restaurant. I would tease him about this, and he'd say, "Prudent, Fleming, prudent." But we were scared. There was a lot of companionship of us being thrown together. We had to put the competitive stuff aside, for the moment anyway, and take some solace in each other's comfort and watch each other's backs as it were.

Coffee: We have time for just one more question.

Audience Question: In the summer of 1963, I was in Birmingham with a lot of college students from the North. Many of us stayed overnight in homes of white people who were very sympathetic to the black civil rights movement. I've often wondered that that was a part of the story that I didn't think was covered. There was this impression that every single white person in Birmingham at least had dogs

Sitton: Very good point. That's one of the faults that we have – most humans do – we oversimplify. We did not cover that aspect of the story except very, very occasionally. That's true - some of them did not want to be covered. We were there to cover the action. At least the daily newspapers were to cover the action. When you've got one person, and you've got fire hoses and dogs and demonstrators downtown, that's where you are. You're not out interviewing someone about, "Well, we've taken care of these people from the North who came down here to see what this was all about."

Moore: Ray Jenkins would agree with this. As someone living in Montgomery at the time and going out on all kinds of assignments and meeting all kinds of people, I will say – Ray would back me up – there were people that were fairly sympathetic. Not the majority, the majority, "Boy, get those people out of here. Send those Yankees home. Get those people that are demonstrating out of here." There were people who maybe were better educated, maybe they had more sympathy. There was that other side that some people aren't aware of, but that wasn't the important story. The important story was what was happening and the people who were demanding their rights. Dr. King was right.

Coffee: We really don't have time for more questions at this time, unfortunately. I know it's a conversation that can go on for quite a long time. But I do want to thank the panel for spending this time with us.

Grimes: I will thank Mel for doing such a great job. Thank you, Mel. Before our next panel, we're going to take a short break. Many of our wonderful guests have written books and we were lucky enough to get some of them. We probably don't have every one's, and if we don't, we'll find some way to get them around campus. Thank you very much, and we'll see you back here in 15 minutes.