Civil Rights and the Press Symposium
Killing Jim Crow: The 1964 Civil Rights Act

Saturday, April 24, 2004

Panel: Phyl Garland, Richard Valeriani, Jack Nelson, Ernest C. Withers, Haynes Johnson

Professor Bob Lissit: In relating to these people, it is relevant, I managed to get shot at by white segregationists in a pick-up truck in Columbia, South Carolina. But then balanced that by getting rapped on the head by a brilliant young revolutionary named Lee Trap Brown. To top that off, by being unable to originate from our NBC affiliate – I worked for NBC – in Jackson, Mississippi, because they called us the "Nigger Broadcasting Company." Wonderful. Anyway, I will introduce, as did Lynn Flocke, all five of these people and then we'll let them talk. The reason that I mention that I am almost of the age of some of these folks is because I am going to try to give you a little bit of an understanding of who some of them are because I know some of them a little beyond the history. I share with Phyl Garland, on the far end, the privilege of being a graduate of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. We were there at the same time. But, the thing that's interesting about that, we found last evening, we both have the same ancient book on our bookshelves – an old, dark blue-covered book – called "Interpretative Reporting," by a famous journalism professor named Curtis MacDougall. We learned well because, even at a conservative, extreme right-wing university called Northwestern, Curt MacDougall shocked them by running for the Senate as a Socialist.

Phyl is just finishing teaching at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. She's going to finish her career in about a month.

Phyl Garland: In teaching! Not in writing!

Lissit: In teaching! That's one mistake. Herb Kaplow would recognize this. Phyl worked for The Pittsburgh Courier, a black newspaper that once had a national circulation of nearly 200,000. Something you should know about that paper, and Phyl has talked about this in the television program certainly, that it was an advocacy newspaper. She thinks she said that that's appropriate because the white press certainly didn't represent a black point of view. A quote from Phyl: "There's nothing more glamorous and exciting than being a member of the black press during the period before blacks were accepted in the mainstream. Being a movie star or a major athlete was about the only thing that could have been more glamorous." I know Phyl wants to talk a little bit about how all the stories weren't about big people. That will be Phyl Garland.

Next to Phyl on this side is Richard Valeriani. I knew Richard at NBC. Richard spent 31 years, chalked up more than half a million air miles traveling with Henry Kissinger, and only regretted there weren't frequent flyer miles. He was a super fireman – wars, invasions, revolutions, he was there. He reported from Birmingham, from Philadelphia, Mississippi, from Selma, Alabama. I'm going to quote him. I won't quote him. He's here. Why quote him?

Richard Valeriani: Go ahead!

Lissit: He was hospitalized in Marion, Alabama, as they said in the Syracuse Post-Standard yesterday. He was clubbed by a white segregationist. Fortunately, I know that there was no lasting damage except a strange chronic mathematical deficiency. To this day, Richard is unable to distinguish between 133 and 1/5 and 136 and 3/5 in the running of a mile by a thoroughbred racehorse, which is his passion. He said, if not for that passion, he might have been a major network anchor.

Jack Nelson, to give you a sense of his presence in Washington. I moved there in 1971. Jack Nelson's presence was such that whenever people wanted a respected and savvy member of the press, I'd hear them talk about it and some of them would say, "Get Jack." I didn't know what that was. I kept hearing, "Get Jack." I thought it was some new, sophisticated, electronic equipment. I finally asked and someone said what that meant was, "Get Jack Nelson." He was the Washington correspondent and then bureau chief for the LA Times, winner of so many prizes, including the Pulitzer on investigative reporting at the world's largest mental institution. He's an author, a major reporter during Watergate. I'm going to borrow from a former CNN Washington bureau chief who introduced Jack once by saying, "His sense of fairness and integrity has led the way in journalism for years. He's a class act, an example to all of us." Now for Phyl Garland, Richard Valeriani, and Jack Nelson, each one deserves applause.

Introducing Ernest C. Withers as a photojournalist would be like saying, "Willie Mays played baseball." It's accurate, but it doesn't begin to tell the story. Just a quote from the Chrysler Museum of Art, in Norfolk, when it showed an exhibition of his work. The program said, "Withers could be called the original photographer for the civil rights movement. His book on the Emmett Till murder became a motivating influence for the push towards equal rights." He was on the scene in Memphis, as we've heard, during the assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. He covered the killing of Medgar Evers, numerous bus boycotts. By the way, he also photographed Willie Mays.

If I were to try and introduce Haynes Johnson, we would be here until Monday morning, giving you a full bio, or at least until Sunday night. He doesn't have that long because he's very busy. I don't know where to start. He followed Hodding Carter in the Knight Chair at the University of Maryland. He's written books – "The System," "Lyndon," "The Working White House." He's been heard nationally on “The Today Show,” on “NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.” He was a national correspondent for The Washington Post, assistant managing editor for The Washington Post. Just an endless series of projects. He’s working on a book now and was before he took a taxi to the airport this morning, and will when he gets back from the airport tonight. In this context here, he won a Pulitzer Prize for distinguished national reporting on civil rights in Selma, Alabama. I’m leaving out so many things, I can’t even begin to tell you. Haynes Johnson.

I want to start with Phyl Garland because she wants to talk a little about smaller stories.

Garland: I covered the part of the civil rights movement in a somewhat different way from most of the people who’ve been appearing on your panels. Most were either in radio, television, or daily newspapers, where you do breaking news. You get it when it happens, then go in and find out, and do in-depth stories. I worked for a black newspaper, was very proud to be with the Courier, which was a weekly. It was 14 editions in different parts of the country. Therefore, you couldn’t go with just something that happened unless it was a story that no one else had presented, which often was the case, too. Particularly, during World War II, when black war correspondents were the first to be certified by the State department, discovered all sorts of things, such as the fact that German prisoners of war were treated better than black troops who were denied food and were given wooden guns to practice with in their drills. There were stories that they broke of an investigatory nature, because just the simple news sometimes had been covered by the mainstream press.

Then I worked for Ebony magazine as a general editor and writer and later as the New York Bureau Chief for Johnson Publications. And a magazine having a monthly deadline means that you, again, have to tailor what you present so that it will stand up for about a month sitting on someone’s coffee table. Therefore, the story has to be perhaps in more depth, or present it in different dimensions than a daily newspaper would be. In examining the civil rights movement, there were some breaking stories that everyone covered. For instance, the March on Washington, which was a major event for the whole nation and not just for those of us who were journalists. The Courier covered it by having a group do the big story – King and the officials – but also in various cities, where they had editions, that reporter would cover it from the angle of the people from that city. In the display downstairs, you saw the front page of the March on Washington – the huge picture of the crowd and then the lead story. But in various editions, the lead story was accompanied by a story from Detroit or Philadelphia or Chicago on the role that those people played in how they responded to it. My story in the Pittsburgh Home Edition, which was where all of this was put together, was on the Pittsburgh delegation – why they went, how they felt about it, and what they did. I wrote down on the “Freedom Train,” as we called it, and interviewed people in transit and marched with them, also taking notes full-time and getting background. I just have to say it was the story of something that you read about in the papers, but if you were there, you would never forget it, because I had witnessed something I had not seen before, nor since.

The city had been emptied out in terms of traffic, people on the streets. Many had fled town. I think they were afraid there might be some sort of upheaval. There was a kind of peace that prevailed. The people coming in from the various parts of the country were as one, it seemed. Going into the march, people helped each other, they looked out for each other. "Are you all right?" Someone was hobbling. It was a strange ambience of love and brotherhood that I find difficult even to explain at this point. When Dr. Martin Luther King made his speech, it was though if a couple of centuries from now, someone says that he walked across the reflecting pond, one would be inclined to think it might have happened because that was the height of the ethereal in that march. It was a news story, but it was also something that I personally feel I was affected by. I don't expect ever to feel that way again, because I haven't felt it since.

On the way back from the march, people watched out for their neighbor. "Is your car all right?" if someone was stalled. It occurred to me, why can't people act this way all the time? Why do we have to have one day, and shut down Washington when people actually act like decent, concerned human beings? Having seen that, I say that anything is possible, and it is. As for some of the other types of stories we did, one was of a white mailman who was killed – he was shot to death – he was trying to march from Baltimore to Washington, D.C., to deliver a letter to Jack Kennedy and then to continue on to Jackson, Mississippi, to deliver a letter to Ross Barnett, who was then governor of Mississippi. This, we wondered, as journalists, why a white man who had nothing to gain would undertake a solo march that was almost certain to mark him for death, and it did. This is the kind of story we did behind the scenes.

How many of you have ever heard of Bill Moore or William Moore? You're about the only one because you covered him. We were astounded because, from the black press, in the black press, there was a great deal of interest in support from others. We couldn't do it by ourselves. It was essential to have support from other people who wanted change. Moore was the ultimate example. The paper sent me up to Binghamton, New York. That's not terribly far from here, which is where his family lived. I spent a couple of days up there in Binghamton with his wife and family, found out more about him. I was deeply moved by what I heard. This was a man who had an education – he was a graduate of Harper College. He had done some graduate work. He read philosophy and usually carried a book with him. But he had had a problem. He had had a breakdown and spent 18 months in a mental hospital and then had been in recovery since that time. He was a person who also believed in doing things and acting on his impulses. Way back in the 1950s, he founded a group called Mental Health Anonymous. So the people who had suffered from mental illness could get together and find someone who could listen to them. It was an early support group, which he founded. Then he founded another group when he was in Jacksonville, Florida –

Search – which enabled psychiatrists to be lined up so they could refer outpatients to them when they were in that part of the country. He was a man who believed in doing things.

But he worked as a mailman, carrying his mail from place to place. He was married to a woman who had been married before. She had three children, and he raised them and was very loving towards them. He was really concerned whenever the conflict broke out during the movement – this was during the 1960s. James Meredith had been denied admission to the University of Mississippi, and he had been attacked and injured. He was making a freedom march, so Bill Moore decided he was going to complete James Meredith's freedom walk by carrying these letters. Therefore, Meredith's march would have been his march as well. We looked at the letters. One of the reasons I found out why he was so concerned and touched by this whole situation is because he had lived in Mississippi when he was a boy and had relatives there. He loved the people of Mississippi – they were honest, they were warm, and he considered them his friends. But when the movement broke out, he could not understand why the white people of Mississippi were behaving as they were, because this was contradictory to what he had known of them as a white boy living in that part of the country. He wanted to get them to rethink what they were doing.

He set out from Baltimore. He had gone to Baltimore. He had the long plan in mind. He also had joined the Black Postal Workers Union Association when he was in Baltimore to show his support. They picketed against a theater that did not admit blacks. He was a man of action. He wanted to do something. His ultimate quest was to get the people of Mississippi to come to their senses and stop behaving like that. He received a letter from his aunt when he let her know that he was coming. She sent him a letter explaining that he was a disgrace to his family, it was awful, why was he doing such a thing, and that her home was closed to him. He was no longer someone that she would even receive. So his own family turned against him whenever they found out he was doing this freedom walk on behalf of civil rights. This hurt him but did not stop him.

He set off. He went to Washington. But they wouldn't let him give the letter to President Kennedy. They suggested he drop it in a box, which he did. But he continued and was shot and was killed. But I just wanted you to hear two or three paragraphs of this letter because I'm certain most of you will never find it in most places. It was the letter he was carrying to Ross Barnett:

"The end of Mississippi colonialism is fast approaching. The only question is whether you will help it to end, already lost, creating bitterness and hatred, as did the French."

He referred to the French and the British and the differences in which they resolved their empires in earlier paragraphs.

"For our sake as well as for the Negroes', I hope that you will decide to try the British way. The white man cannot be truly free himself until all men have their rights. Each is dependent upon the other. Do not go down in infamy as one who fought the democracy for all which you have not the power to prevent. Be gracious. Give more than is immediately demanded of you. Make certain that when the Negro gets his rights and his vote that he does not, in the process, learn to treat the white man with the contempt and disdain that unfortunately some of us now treat him. Sincerely, William Moore."

Some might say this man wasn't all there because he had written a book earlier called "The Mind in Chains – Autobiography of a Schizophrenic." But when I read what he said, he makes a whole lot more sense than a lot of other things that I read by other people. It's a shame that we don't remember the Bill Moores as we should. Hodding Carter referred to another one of the people that we wrote about in Ebony. Going behind the scenes, talking to people, and making the issue come alive through the experiences, and the people who were living through the revolution, as we called it, or the movement.

One of those who has been referred to frequently was Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville, Mississippi, who was famous for going to the Democratic Convention. Hodding Carter, I didn't realize, he was also with that group. Challenging the seating of the all-white Mississippi delegation, Fannie Lou was a woman who was known for having said, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired," which reflected the feelings of a great many people. I went to the South for Ebony and spent some time with various women, but primarily with Fannie Lou, whom I went to see in Ruleville, this small town where she lived. We sat on the front lawn of her small, modest house. She began to tell me what it was like to grow up as a sharecropper on a plantation in Mississippi. By the time she finished telling me about how she was so old when she got her first pair of shoes, she could remember the day. And how her mother had had nothing but rags to wear because once they finished growing their crops and their cotton and the owner took his, there was nothing left for them. They could not even buy food. They would have to go out and scrape and scrap for cotton, trying to pick up what might have been left on depleted fields to get enough for a bail so that they would even have to eat. Sometimes eating – having flower water for dinner. As she said, sometimes you see little kids, six years old, and they already look defeated at that age.

How she wanted so much to change things by registering to vote. She told me about how she studied so that she could pass the test on the Mississippi Constitution, although she hadn't even known that Mississippi had a constitution before. But she did it. And then, when she did register to vote, she had to flee for her life, staying with friends. Eventually, she was taken, captured by these men, who took her to a prison and put a gun on two black prisoners and told them they had to beat her or die. And they beat her. And beat her, she said, until her body was hard. And they beat her until she was beyond numb. The worst thing is she heard another woman crying, whom they also were beating. They were talking about taking them someplace way out in the woods where no one would ever find them. By the time Fannie had finished with her story, both of us were in tears. It made me feel, "You had to do something. You had to do something to let people know how these people were suffering."

I'm sorry. I always got involved in those stories. You couldn't help but get involved. Some people spoke and made others cry. I remember it and cry myself. But I was happy to have met Fannie. The other people I met – when I did a story on the first blacks who had been elected to office in Mississippi since Reconstruction. They were little, ordinary people like a barber or someone who had a little store or a housewife who ran for Justice of the Peace. After the 1965 Voting Rights Law went into effect, it wouldn't have meant anything unless these people who followed through by not only voting, but running for office, and they had. They are, to me, some of the great champions. Yes, I loved the leaders, and I loved Martin Luther King. But they also helped to make it possible.

Lissit: Next, and as I used to say to them in New York, save us a minute. Richard Valeriani.

Richard Valeriani: Well, thank you. When I asked Charlotte what I'll talk about, she said I ought to talk about 10 minutes. So I'll try and do that. First of all, I'd like to thank Charlotte, the Newhouse School, Syracuse University, for giving us "old farts," to quote Karl Fleming, a chance to reminisce and tell our war stories and embellish some memories. I compliment them for picking Hodding Carter to speak and, tomorrow, John Lewis. That's known as sucking up to your hosts.

When I was asked to come here, I was reminded of the story about the guy who survived the Johnstown Flood. For those of you who don't remember that, it was one of the biggest floods in the history of the United States in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, back in the '20s or '30s. Anyway, this guy survived and he spent the rest of his life going to lunches and dinners and talking about how he survived the Johnstown Flood. He died, he went to heaven, greeted by St. Peter. St. Peter said, "Is there anything you'd like to do?" He said, "Well, St. Peter, I know you have a welcoming dinner for the new arrivals. So after dinner, I'd like to talk about surviving the Johnstown Flood." St. Peter said, "Fine. No problem. But just remember: Noah will be in the audience." So, mindful of all the Noahs in this audience, I've put together some random observations and recollections with no particular coherence.

For starters, when I was covering Oxford and Selma and Philadelphia and Birmingham, I was not aware that I was covering a seminal period in American history. I was doing it story by story. I was covering the trees at the time. I didn't see the forest, which came much later. Several years ago, I checked into a Washington hotel. As I was walking away, the young black man behind the desk said, "Excuse me, Mr. Valeriani. If you don't mind my saying so, I'd like to thank you for everything that you did for my people." I didn't quite know how to react. I had sort of mixed emotions. I was kind of flattered. On the other hand, I was a little embarrassed because when I covered these stories, I didn't see myself as an editorial writer, as Hodding and some of the others here have done. I was a reporter, doing my job, covering my story. I knew the difference between right and wrong, but my job was to put the story on the air. As the cliché goes in our business, "When both sides are complaining, you think you're doing a good job." You've heard about how the white power structure - agitators stirring up all the trouble. They complained about that. The people in the movement complained that I wasn't helping them enough. I was trying to explain that that was not my job.

At times, I would say, one way to cover was to juxtapose a sound bite from Martin Luther King and a sound bite from Bull Connor, and you drew your own conclusion. Speaking of Bull Connor, was it dangerous? Yes, and I remember a quote, I think, from Bull Connor: "There are three things wrong with America: Communism, Socialism, and journalism." Certainly, it was dangerous. I'd like to pay tribute here to somebody or a group not represented – that is, the TV cameramen. They're the guys who got the pictures that you saw – the dogs, the hoses, the Bloody Sunday in Selma. They were really exposed because – even the TV guys could look around and see what was happening – they were focusing through a lens and didn't have any idea. What they were there to do was to get the picture and they got the picture.

We as TV reporters felt especially vulnerable because we were on the air, they knew who we were. It was especially dangerous – I always said it was more dangerous than war because war is impersonal. There's no bullet marked out there with your name on it. Bullets are flying. Here, they were gunning for you individually. When you talked to Claude about the coloration, I remember Karl Fleming used to get some good quotes because he'd dress up in his shit-kicker shoes and his good ole boy khakis and the hat with the toothpick in his mouth. He'd sidle up to these boys and talk to them. His drawl got a lot stronger in those days. Every time he'd talk about that, there was another guy by the name of Nicholas von Hoffman who worked for Chicago papers, "I'm going to do the same thing." So he showed up in spanking new shoes, and spanking khakis, and a spanking hat, he might as well have been wearing a sign that said, "I am a reporter" - from the North, right.

I agree with Gene Roberts, too, that this was the coming of age of television news. I'm not going to talk about the going of television news. There are some people these days who say that broadcast journalism is any oxymoron. I'm not going to get into that because that's not what this is about. These were the good old days of TV news. The impact, as Herb Kaplow pointed out, really was tremendous. The impact of those pictures out of Birmingham. The impact of Bloody Sunday in Selma – just extraordinary.

There's another point about that that I think is important. Those pictures caused the local coverage to improve exponentially because the local newspapers and the local TV stations couldn't report just the sheriff's version. As one of them once said to me – he called up the sheriff's office to get the story about what happened at a demonstration, he said, "Oh, we had a lot of trouble here. There was a bunch of niggers who just insisted on throwing their heads at my boys' billy clubs." You couldn't do that anymore because we had the pictures, and they couldn't just write it the way it wasn't anymore.

I'm also going to pick on something else that Gene Roberts said because he suggested that The New York Times was our assignment editor. But this was the days of TV reporters: you had Herb Kaplow or the Chuck Quinns, and we did our own reporting. We got the story ourselves. However, it reminded me when he mentioned that. The most popular radio show at the time was something with Morgan Beatty on at night. Everybody wanted to work for it because it paid the biggest fee. During the time when George Wallace stood in the schoolhouse door at the University of Alabama, the producer of the show, a guy named Sumner Weiner, called up Tom Petit, who was going to do the story. He said, "Tom, The New York Times says - " Tom says, "I don't have The New York Times." He said, "Okay. Well, the Associated Press says." Tom said, "Sumner, I don't have the Associated Press here." "Oh, all right. Well, there's a story in the United Press that - " "Sumner, I don't have the United Press." So Sumner says, "You don't have The New York Times?" "No." "You don't have the Associated Press?" "No." "You don't have the United Press?" "No." "Well, how do you know what's going on?" So, we had to overcome the own prejudice of some of our people at the desk.

Talking about reporters, I like to quote from John Chancellor, which is the way I thought of myself: that I was a reporter – I came out of the Associated Press – who happened to be in television. Here's a curious footnote to that era. I was struck by the fact, you've seen the pictures and you've heard the stories. It was a time of great drama, it had great heroes, it had great villains, it had violence, it had fantastic music. Yet, to my knowledge, there hasn't been a first-rate novel to come out of that period. A movie, a musical, a play? I've always been struck how maybe it was too real ever to have some fiction come out of it that could compete with the reality. But you think back to the labor movement, Vietnam, all produced great literature, plays, and movies. As I said, these are random observations.

A word about the Noahs in the audience. I have been a member of several reporting fraternities: I've been with the White House press, the State Department press, the Pentagon press, the political campaigns, presidential campaigns, convention press, summit press. And, at a time when people still were interested in Latin America to some degree, certainly the networks, I was also part of that Latin America press that covered all the stories over Latin

America. I have to say that the core of the civil rights press corps, if I can call it that, was certainly the best of them all.

One other thing I want to say – these are random observations. I was lucky that I was involved as a young man because what happened led me to be very skeptical of prizes, of journalism prizes. When Claude Sitton did not get a Pulitzer for his coverage, I figured the whole prize thing, something wrong with it. I never paid any attention to it thereafter. I got some here and there, but I never took it very seriously when Claude Sitton did not get that. He eventually got one, but not one for what he should have gotten it.

Finally, a final anecdote. Some time last year, I flew into Washington, got off the shuttle, was walking out toward the gate, and I saw someone I thought I recognized. I went past him and thought, "I know him." He was hunched down, reading, writing something. I turned around, it was Haynes Johnson. "Hey, Haynes." "Hello, how are you?" So we chatted for a while – what are you doing now, why are you here?" I left, walked away. As I walked away, he called after me. He said, "Hey, Dick!" I turned around. He said, "We did some good work." And I think we did.

Lissit: That is the perfect lead-in to Haynes Johnson. Haynes was someone who did and still does incredible work. Haynes Johnson.

Haynes Johnson: I remember that conversation at the airport. It's like this. I want to be very personal here. I see all of these people that I know so well and admire so much. I mean this quite sincerely – these are the guys that made a difference. They all made a difference. Claude should have won the Pulitzer every single year. Gene should have won it every other year. These guys for courage alone and so forth – just incredible. I've been sitting here thinking – Walter Lippmann had a great phrase: "We're all captives to the pictures in our heads." And the pictures in our heads are indelible about that period. There's nothing any of us could ever blank out. We were there, we were privileged. I have never felt so intensely alive, so much a part of a story. It was the great American story. It was the great challenge of this democracy. It was born 300 years ago and it finally happened all these years later. The people that did it – John Seigenthaler, my friend, lying down clubbed. Karl bloody and so forth. John Herbers, and – I'm going to switch this because the pictures in my head of that period are so indelibly moving, and I had the thought that we were going through the final test for the democracy, and we had succeeded. We were trying to build a better country, and we challenged each other. Out of this was going to come a real period – yes, it was bloody; it was horrible; it was brutal, all the rest. I look back and I see my friend John Herbers here. I don't know if you remember this, John. I remember on the afternoon of June 4th, we had a very vigorous water polo game at the Ambassador Hotel the night before Bob Kennedy was killed. Coming up here I saw The Dallas Morning News, and it had a headline of "Civil Rights." Then underneath, "Marines storming ashore at Vietnam."

I remember at the end of Selma, where I had been almost a year, but in the middle, Dick, I remember you racing off to get shot at and clubbed. You and I wound up with the Marines in San Domingo before we went back to Selma. Then I was off to Southeast Asia after that. It was this kind of turmoil – you're being pulled back and forth from emotional scene to emotional scene. When King marched up before the Pettis Bridge, and he finally was able to move two blocks, from Browns Chapel to the courthouse. It had been blocked. You couldn't even walk two blocks. You weren't going to bomb the city, you weren't going to put heads on the poles. You were simply going to register to vote. That's what it was all about. It was that elemental, that simple.

When King got there that night, the moon was rising over the Alabama River, and he talked about peace, and he talked about nonviolence, and he talked about Gandhi. From then on, from that spring of '65, we went in to watch. We went in to Vietnam. I remember in February, when I was first in Selma, I saw the first bombing of North Vietnam. Lyndon Johnson was beginning to extend the troops into the elephant grass of Vietnam. Things were changing. That period we all went through was so intense and was so hopeful, and I don't want to put a pall on this, but you captured that sense of what was right. I think any of us who covered it, and we were privileged to cover it. I was privileged to cover it. I think that you were privileged to watch these guys and what they did. They made a difference, and that's what journalism ought to be about. That's what citizenship, I guess, ought to be about. I don't want to make a speech here. It was such a period that if we can't learn from it, and what went wrong and what's wrong, we're in another situation. Hodding said very memorably, I thought, "The greatest change in the South today, the fear is gone." I think that's right. I think we'd all agree. You don't worry about walking one block.

I remember one story, and then I'll just end it. Journalists are supposed to be dispassionate. You're not supposed to get involved in the story. I don't think it was possible not to be involved in the story of the civil rights movement. I remember after in Selma, when Jim Reeb, the minister from Boston, was clubbed to death. And then his wake for the next two days in the street for when he had died. I had become quite friendly with Reeb, and we had had a cup of coffee and a donut just an hour before we parted. I was going to go back to my hotel. Jim Reeb walked off this way. That's when he was clubbed to death. The next night – I was younger then; I had a temper; I had been in the Army three years before that – I was wearing a black raincoat at that time. There were a lot of priests there. I was out alone walking the streets and I saw some three or four guys start shouting at me, taunting me, cursing me. They thought I was a priest. I said – I never wrote this or told this before – "You sons-a-bitches, I'm not nonviolent." I started walking across the street. I got halfway across the street and thought, "You dumb bastard." I turned around and I left. But it was that kind of thing. That sort of feeling was indelible.

I want to apologize very much for having to hit and run. My dear friend, Mary McGrory, there's a wake for her tonight. When I was 24 years old, I was the night city editor of The Western Star, and I thought I knew how to write. But Mary was the great writer. I stayed up all night trying to make her stories better. I never helped her one bit. I'm very privileged to be here. I wish I could break bread with you, talk to you. Bless you. Thank you.

Lissit: As Haynes mentioned, Mary McGrory has died. Dick Valeriani made reference to another great civil rights reporter, Tom Petit, who cannot be with us now either. I want to use that as a way of introducing Ernest Withers, who has said there were some colleagues of his, too, that he wanted to refer to, who can't be here today. Ernest.

Ernest Withers: I'm Ernest Withers. I guess you heard him call my name. His first choice was that I would mention the men that could not be here because of death and goodbye. Lives of great men always remind us that we should make our lives sublime. Departing leaves behind us footprints on the sands of time. That was about four and even greater than four men that were a part of the civil rights writing force, the black press, the press, in the civil rights movement. The major two of them was Jimmy Hicks of the New York Amsterdam News and L. Alex Wilson. L. Alex Wilson was a tall, dark, military man who worked for the Chicago Defender, but had been sent to Memphis to the Tri-State Defender to generate it to be as impacting in America as the Chicago Defender. L. Alex Wilson was my boss. He was rough, tougher than my father, and anything he said to me, he'd always say, "Come here, boy. Do this, boy. Do that, boy." Only panelist here today is Moses Newson, who was a by-product of L. Alex Wilson.

Dorothy Gilliam came a younger girl to the Tri-State Defender – gung-ho and wanted to be a writer and go and cover the acts of civil rights. She arrived there a few nights ahead of Eisenhower, having sent the federal troops to Little Rock. L. Alex Wilson had been beaten down, which caused Eisenhower to send the federal troops to Little Rock. Because Alex Wilson's picture had been printed on the front page of (Arkansas Democrat Gazette) less than a half a day from the time of his having been beaten in Little Rock. The problem of Little Rock – sometimes unveils answers to certain questions developed because in Clinton, Tennessee, 15 miles from the University of Tennessee in east Tennessee, we had school integration. Frank Clement was part of the new wave of liberal politicians, and Tennessee didn't have as much problems as voter registration. So he that collects a black vote, he got the support of the massive black and other organizations. When the integration of Clinton, Tennessee, developed, these men told the governor, "You need to send the National Guard to maintain law and order." He made the mistake of saying that's why he was sending the Tennessee National Guard to Clinton, Tennessee, to maintain law and order.

But then came Little Rock and Governor Faubus. The White Citizens' Council of Little Rock told Governor Faubus, "Don't pull that trick on us that the governor of

Tennessee pulled on them. If you're going to send out the Arkansas National Guard, the Arkansas National Guard should be sent out to block integration." Which gave to the violence that erupted in Little Rock. I talk about these men – L. Alex Wilson, I talk about Ted Poston, I talk about Jimmy Hicks. I was less than 10 miles when Viola Liuzzo was killed after the March on Selma and the rally had occurred in Montgomery. I just barely – because of my ability to bow and smile – kept that Citizens' Council renegade group that stopped us on the highway from beating us to death.

Another group, missing Civil Rights workers, caught us on Highway 14 in Mississippi, when we were black press riding the highway. Another big problem, every time I see the eye on the prize and I see Uncle Moe's right (finger) pointing to (J.W.) Milam and (Roy) Bryant – the murderers of Emmett Till. The man walked up to me from a publication – I might offend somebody if I named the publication – and say, "Here, give me that roll of film, and give me that $10." That $10 was a third of what I had made. I got paid $35 for six days in Tallahassee County, Mississippi, which was a whole insult. I said, "Mr. Wilson." He said, "Boy, don't you say nothing to me. John sent you this money. You take it. Tail yourself back home." I took the money but it was a real meager amount of pay. Then, a man said here today, that his pay was $30 a week from a daily newspaper, so I feel that I was a little bit ahead of him. I made $35, and he made $30 for a week.

But there's so much to be remembered in the civil rights movement. This forum really gives breadth to it. I was invited to Nashville to Vanderbilt, and I went up there. I didn't have sense enough to go to Vanderbilt. I buttoned my coat, stepped up. Another man stepped up and said, "I'm John Seigenthaler. I'm the one that had them bring you up here." I felt real good when I got all of the information about Seigenthaler because it took a voice like him to persuade them to bring me from Memphis to Nashville.

I raised seven boys and one girl, married my high school girlfriend, chose a vocation totally opposite of what my father had for me. My father paid a lady to teach my brother and I to pass a civil service examination so we could be letter carriers and have a civil service job. Because letter carriers and people in the Postal Service made more than school teachers at that time. School teachers made $85 a month. My dad paid this woman, Mrs. Topley, but when I told my father that, "Daddy, I'm going to be a photographer." He said, "Boy, you are the dumbest person in the United States." After the death of Martin King and the violence that erupted, and he had heard that I had gone in the basement of the funeral home where Martin had been embalmed after they give the autopsy. His head had been cut open. I saw a Martin King that nobody else but me and maybe the embalmer saw. They had cut his head open, took his skull out, and set it on the side of the embalmer table. I had my camera and I didn't have the sense enough – probably had it, but I had more pride than sense, and I refused to photograph Martin. My love for Dr. Martin Luther King was that great. Every now and then a man goes around the country and beats that drum about my being in there, but I had the opportunity because I had been a part of the first black police out in Memphis by the Memphis Police Department.

The civil rights movement – from the Emmett Till trial, from the Mack Parker incident, from the three missing Civil Rights workers, the death of Medgar Evers – I was photographing a man reaching over to stab a young black guy. I went up and took this picture. The man grabbed me, snatched me out, and pointed me out to the sheriff. The sheriff come, snatched my camera, tore my coat off, opened my camera, raised the film, opened the film out. Once he un-reeled the film and it saw the lights, meaning there's no more pictures. It was some great experiences, a lot of great experiences. A lot of great moments. I could tell you, day in and day out, having come out of the military, the black publications were not yet in wire service from the wire service newspapers – Associated and other press. They didn't give wire service to black newspapers. It felt my lot to go to the civil rights events.

The fortunate thing, most of all, about it, was the man didn't pay me for my film, so it happened to be my film. Years later, the only credit I had was that it was copyrighted, because he ran it when it was mine, because I bought my own film and kept my own film. A man came in and paid $250 for a picture of Milam and Bryant – the two brothers-in-law that killed Emmett Till. That was more than four times of what I made for the whole week down there. It hasn't been really, to me, about money. But I know that I lived 62 years with my wife, and she tells me, "If you're talking about love, honey, with no money, don't talk to me." My wife knows that love is about money.

There are a lot of great moments, having worked from Hoxie, Arkansas, to Clinton, Tennessee. The problems that developed in Fayette County, Tennessee – voter registration, people who decided that they wanted to vote in West Tennessee. If you went and voted, you were put off the farm as a sharecropper. The lawyer for the sharecroppers was a guy named Estes, and he was a military man. Went to the Memphis Army Depot and bought some tents. Another man gave permission for him to put the tents on his property. And as fast as they moved out of their properties, they could move in those tents. The crowd got so big until J. H. Jackson, the National Baptist President of the National Baptist Church Organization, was the highest pinnacle of a president that a black man could be. Martin Luther King's grandfathers, on both sides, had trained him in hopes that he would one day succeed Jamison and become president of the National Baptist Convention. As a result of this, Martin King and all of the young men that came on as part of the black church movement went and sought and solicited the strength of Dr. J. H. Jackson, who made a melodious address at his annual convention. Before they could inject the constitution and bylaws, someone would so move that, "We discredit the need for the election tomorrow, and we will vote J. H. Jackson president by acclamation." He did that for a number of years until we got to Kansas City. Once he didn't get a chance to get up and the man was knocked off the platform, and Dr. Benjamin Mays and all of the great men who were up there looking off, it was a great challenge to have been a photographer and to look down and to photograph a dead minister who had fallen off the platform and six ministers who – from each side – who had taken to be charged with murder. They ended up, it was an accidental homicide.

One priest came back to Memphis and said, "I ain't been near the jail. They're talking about me killing that man. I ain't been near the jail." I had stood there, took his picture coming out of the jail with the seal of the police station. He told me, "Don't you come in this church, no more, take no pictures." So many things had happened – good and bad. But the most important thing that I want to see one day, either one or a collection stamp with three great civil rights workers to commemorate their contribution to the civil rights movement. Not to take anything from any other writers because it took all of us to bring the water of the well to breach us until today.

Jack Nelson: I could have stayed and listen to Ernest talk for the rest of the afternoon. I want to say how impressed I am, though, at how full this room is on a Saturday afternoon. I was telling my friend Gene Roberts that I was really surprised to see so many students. He's a teacher, too, at the University of Maryland. He says, "You know how to get students there? They assign them something."

I'm not used to speaking to such a large crowd. I've spoken to much smaller crowds. This is a true story. Once when I was a reporter on The Atlanta Constitution, I spoke to the Atlanta Thirteen Club, and eight members were absent. When I opened up the Atlanta bureau of the LA Times in 1965 and first began to seriously cover civil rights – because when I was with the Constitution, I was an investigative reporter. The managing editor didn't want me to cover civil rights. I did go to Little Rock. I covered the police story more than anything else. I went down and covered the Tuskegee story. I really didn't cover much civil rights until I went to work for the LA Times. The managing editor of the Constitution didn't want me to cover civil rights because he said, "You're an investigative reporter. You have to depend upon a lot of law enforcement sources. It would wreck your sources in law enforcement." You know what? He was right about that, and I didn't protest it. I look back on it with great regret because I missed out on a lot of the early civil rights coverage.

I did go to Selma in February of 1965. It was a hot story at that time, worldwide. Only the Vietnam War was competing with it for headlines and space on the evening news. When I went there, Dr. King was leading the voting rights marchers, and I didn't know anything about the background of that or not very much about the civil rights movement. Since I had so little background, I turned to a valuable source – another reporter, a veteran civil rights reporter, John

Herbers. Herbers gave me a complete fill on what was going on. I wrote a very comprehensive story about it.

Later, I spent a lot of time with my old friend, Gene Roberts. We had been Neiman classmates in ’61 and ’62. We used to ride together the way that Claude Sitton and Karl Fleming did. He was with The New York Times, I was with The Los Angeles Times. We were competitive. I say that because, in my over 50 years of reporting, I don’t know of a single other story where reporters routinely did cooperate with each other because we thought the facts were so important to get out to the public. We did get emotionally involved in the stories. There’s no question about that, because I think we felt emotionally involved. It’s not that there wasn’t fierce competition at times. There was fierce competition between the various newspapers. We did write our own exclusives. We did do our own analysis on stories. When you had these huge demonstrations, it was almost impossible for a single reporter to cover the whole thing. We all did cooperate.

We’ve been asked to talk about 10 minutes here and to talk maybe about a couple of stories that you felt particularly strong about or you thought might be important. I’m going to talk about two that I later wrote books about. Both occurred in 1968. One involved the gunning down of college students on their campus, and they were protesting segregation. The other involved what happened in Mississippi, when the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan came for the Jews instead of the blacks. Both stories were important, but neither really penetrated the public’s consciousness at the time. Partly that was because 1968 was such a tumultuous year: the Tet offensive in the Vietnam War had shattered national confidence and spurred massive anti-war protests; Martin Luther King was assassinated, and riots that followed in major cities across the country took 46 lives; Robert Kennedy was gunned down as he campaigned for the Democratic presidential nomination in Los Angeles; the Democratic Convention in Chicago descended into chaos, splitting the party, and ensuring Richard Nixon’s election that November; the civil rights movement was cracking apart – calls for “black power” were replaced by the strains of “we shall overcome.”

So, in February of 1968, I went to Orangeburg. How many of you have ever heard of the Orangeburg Massacre - before today? So there are three or four. How many of you have heard of Kent State? Every hand in the room. I went to Orangeburg, where the students were protesting the segregation of the bowling alley, what became known as the Orangeburg Massacre. A squad of all-white state patrol troopers, firing lethal buck shots for a full eight seconds, caught the all-black students in a deadly crossfire, killing three and injuring 27. The trooper said that they had been fired on by the students. The first news reports out of there suggested that they had merely been returning fire. But we found no evidence, not only that the students never fired anything but that they had never even been armed. In fact, there never any was evidence that they had been armed. I gained access to medical records that showed the students had been shot in the back and in the soles of their feet as they tried to flee across the campus. Never before on an American college campus had students been shot and killed by state authorities. But largely because the victims were black, there was none of the public outcry that would follow the shooting of white students at Kent State. Can you imagine what the outrage would have been if the Orangeburg victims had been white students at Clemson, the Citadel, or the University of South Carolina?

Not long after the shootings, I co-authored a book, “The Orangeburg Massacre,” that detailed a massive official cover-up. Among other things that we disclosed that FBI agents witnessed those shootings but lied to the Justice Department superiors and denying they were even at the scene. My co-author was Jack Bass, who covered Orangeburg for The Charlotte Observer and now is a professor at the College of Charleston. Bass has carried on a one-man crusade that keeps alive a story that otherwise would be buried in the past. He has really shown what one man can do, what difference one man can make. Because of his dogged pursuit of justice in this case, the book remains in print, all these years through Mercer University Press. Two South Carolina governors have apologized for the state’s role in the massacre, and a film documentary is in the works. Bass also helped secure a pardon for civil rights leader Cleveland Sellers, who the state had prosecuted as a handy scapegoat.

The other story I want to talk about involves Mississippi’s White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the most violent of all the Klans in the 1960s – held responsible by the FBI for at least nine murders, 300 bombings and burnings and beatings. The Klan, after attacking blacks with virtual impunity, began targeting Jews for several reasons. Many of the college students who came down to the South from the North to protest segregation were Jewish. So were most of the lawyers who came down to the South to represent these students when they were arrested and thrown into the notorious Parchman State Prison. In addition, the Jackson rabbi and several other members of the state’s tiny Jewish community, were sympathetic to the civil rights struggle. The Klan first blew up a Jackson synagogue, then the rabbi’s house was bombed, and the rabbi and his wife narrowly escaped death. Then the Klan blew up another synagogue in Meridian. Finally, an informant turned over to the FBI a tape recording of one Klansman telling another, “We should blow up a synagogue during services.” The other Klansman said, “We can’t do that. There are women and children inside.” And he said, “Little Jews grow up to be Jew devils. Kill ‘em while they’re young.”

The FBI played that tape for Jewish leaders. They were so alarmed that they began plotting revenge. Younger Jews who had seen combat in Vietnam and the Korean War wanted to meet violence with violence. They talked about hiring a hit man in Chicago to come out and rub out some of the Klan hit men. One of them said he knew someone in New Orleans who could come over and break some arms and legs. Older Jews advised caution and working with the FBI to stop violence. The older Jews prevailed. FBI agents, working with the Meridian police department, agreed to set a death trap, and I do mean a death trap for two of the Klan hit men, Tommy Terrence and Danny Joe Hawkins. But it would have to be a secret "off the books" project. The Jews would have to reward money to pay informants to set up the trap. They did not want any record of this. The Jewish community raised $86,500. The FBI recruited two Klan informants, one of them, by the way, was Alton Wayne Roberts, who was at the time under a 10-year appeal bond for having been convicted in the killing of the three civil rights workers in Philadelphia. He actually had pulled the trigger in two of those cases.

He arranged for these informants to come out to a trailer on the outskirts of Meridian, which was owned by Meridian detectives. They showed the money to the Klansmen, and they showed a pistol. They said, "You can have either this" – talking about reward money, if they cooperate. "If you don't cooperate, you can have this" – meaning they'd shoot them. So, they decided to cooperate. The informants arranged for Terrence and Hawkins to bomb a Jewish businessman's house. The Meridian police arranged for the businessman and his family to evacuate the house before the planned attack.

Terrence drove up to the businessman's house that night, but he was not accompanied by Danny Joe Hawkins. He was accompanied by Kathy Ainsworth, a pretty elementary school teacher – a teacher by day, a terrorist by night. Meridian police, with FBI agents looking on, were stationed across the street. When Terrence got out of his car with a box of dynamite and started up the driveway, the police shouted "Stop" and opened fire on him. Terrence dashed back to the car, and Kathy Ainsworth leaned over to open the door for him. She got shot in the spine and keeled over dead. Terrence sped off in the car, chased by patrol cars. A mile away, his car crashed, and he jumped out and began firing a submachine gun at pursuing officers. He shot and critically wounded one officer before being shot in the leg. He dropped his submachine gun and hobbled up the driveway and tried to climb a fence. But the top wire was electrified, thanks to a white property owner concerned about black neighbors. The electricity knocked Terrence into some bushes and four officers fired at him with double aught buck shots, almost severing his arm. They pulled him out of the bushes and one of them said, "The son-of-a-bitch is still alive." Another policeman ran up and put a pistol to his head but other officers pulled him back saying, "Don't shoot him. The neighbors are here."

Terrence, only 19 years old, called by the FBI "a mad-dog killer and the most dangerous man in Mississippi," survived. He was prosecuted, served some time in state prison, and reformed. And his release from prison early to study was aided by a Jewish lawyer who helped raise money to put him in the death trap, and an FBI agent who became a born-again Christian and thought that Terrence had found the Lord. There's a lot more to that story: He became a minister in a bi-racial church in Washington, D.C. The Meridian ambush clearly was planned as a death trap, though. And later when I wrote "Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews," Meridian officers told me the plan from the outset was to lure the Klansmen into the bombing attempt and to kill them. The book remains in print through the University Press of Mississippi.

The Meridian story was important because, and it never got that much attention nationally, as the FBI noted in a memorandum that I secured under the Freedom of Information Act, the ambush "broke the back of the Klan in Mississippi. Klan violence, which up to this time had been a common occurrence, has for all practical purposes ceased to exist." Thank you.

Lissit: I have one quick question I want to ask. When you were doing this reporting on civil rights, did you all have a strong sense that this was a political story?

Nelson: Well, sure, you knew it was a political story. Certainly, there's no question about it. But there's no question that we were emotionally involved, as everybody else here had said. We had a civil rights seminar similar to this, except that there were 50 or 60 reporters involved in that one at the University of Mississippi in 1987. If you asked everybody who covered this story, they would tell you no matter what they covered – and I've covered every president from Richard Nixon through Bill Clinton, the impeachment proceedings against two of them, and all of the scandals in Washington during that time – all of this was exciting, nothing equals covering civil rights in the South in that era. There's no question about it. You knew you were in the middle of a peaceful revolution. You knew that society was changing, and changing for the better. You were right there in the midst of it. It was really something that we all felt deeply about. One reason we were glad to come here, too.

Valeriani: What do you mean by "a political story?" Was it politics? That's not how I saw it. I didn't see it as a political story.

Nelson: You can't help but think it's a political story because what you're doing is you're trying to change the government and laws. And that's politics. So, yes, it was a political story.

(Inaudible question.)

First off, I'll tell you about Francis Ward. Francis Ward was a reporter for the LA Times. He and I, along with a bunch of other reporters for the LA Times, were covering the Democratic Convention in Miami Beach in 1972. Francis, being the aggressive reporter he was, finagled his way into the Black Caucus at the Democratic Convention. His beeper went off, and then they threw him out.

He wants me to tell you about a guy named Milton Parker. I was in Bogalusa, Louisiana. It was one of the meanest towns in the world in those days. I wrote a story one time for the LA Times about how mean Bogalusa was because a police official told me one time, "You know why it's so mean? Because it's got the world's largest salt meld hill." It was just a nasty paper mill smell in that town. It was very mean. I had written about that.

I was there, and there was a guy named Richard Helms, an organizer for the original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan out in New Orleans, there with a bunch of reporters. He wanted to take us right across the river to Crossroads, Mississippi to cover this Klan rally. I didn't want to go over there at night for the Klan rally. That was pretty damned dangerous, you go over there at night to Crossroads, Mississippi, at a Klan rally. They kept saying, "Y'all come over, there won't be any trouble. I'll make sure there's no trouble." They all wanted me to go because I got that Southern accent, I can talk to those people, you know. So they all tried to get me to go. Finally, I said "Okay, okay, we'll go. But we gotta be careful." So we went over there.

Nick von Hoffman was with us. Richard Harkness with NBC, as Nick wrote, looking like Adolph Menjou at the Klan rally. We went there. There were about five thousand Klansmen in this field – about five thousand. Most of them were dressed in field clothes – overalls, coveralls, khakis, and so forth. About a dozen of them were in hoods and sheets. They had a flatbed truck that was used for the speaker's platform. The television Klieg lights were most of the lighting. A guy named Saxon Farmer, who was an oil distributor and a Klan official, started talking. He started talking about the Communist niggers, the Catholic-Jewish conspiracy. It was getting kind of late. First thing they started off and Saxon Farmer says, "Now I want everybody to bring in their guns down here and just put them in here because we got our own security guards here." Nobody turned in a gun. There were a lot of them out there. I knew that it could be a bad night.

It was coming near the end. I decided, I told these guys who had convinced I should go there, "I think we better leave." They said, "Okay." I said, "We better leave before the Klan rally ends, and they turn off these Klieg field lights, and we're out here in the middle of the field with these guys." We started leaving. All of a sudden, out of the corner of my eye, I saw this guy Milton Parker. Milton Parker was a nightclub bouncer, who when James Farmer came to town, had gone out with a big metal bolt and was about to kill James Farmer, when a Bogalusa policeman named Bernard Williams grabbed him by the arm and through him in the back of the patrol car. He was one mean guy.

He was leaving with two or three of his sons following us out to the outskirts. I told everybody, "Don't anybody look around, let's just go back and get this guy Richard Helms. He said there's gonna be no trouble." So we turned around, went back. I got a hold of Helms. Richard Helms said, "Okay, I understand." Somebody else said, "Milton Parker? Man, I don't blame you for being scared about that. Milton Parker – he's already burned down several churches and beat up several people around here. I don't blame you for being scared." He got on his walkie-talkie, "Get me a couple of guards over here." I told him, "Wait a minute. A couple of guards ain't gonna be enough." He said, "Okay, get me a dozen men over there." He got a dozen men over there. They put us in a plying wedge, it took us out, and that's how we escaped. We felt we were damn lucky because this guy Milton Parker was one mean guy.

Audience Member: Meanest son-of-a-bitch you ever saw in your life.

Nelson: He was. He was.

(Audience Question Inaudible.)

Withers: Ted Poston was with the New York newspapers. I knew him only on case coverage. I didn't know what he was noted for back in New York. I knew him because he came down to Fayette County, Tennessee, and John McPherson's mother, who was an older woman, was just fascinated because of his looks as a good-looking young black man. I knew him because Jimmy Hicks knew him. I knew him because Alex Rackley, a fellow that was with The Pittsburgh Courier, L. Alex Wilson, I knew him for that basically. My knowledge of men was channeled from the respect that men had for other people. Like I know this Seigenthaler man, every time I hear the name Seigenthaler, I think of a cigar.

Ted Poston was quite a guy that came out of New York representing a white paper. It was a white paper that he represented that made the effects of the 10 cities such a great success because black papers were running it, running it, and running it – it didn't make that much difference. Until the white New York Post, The Chicago Tribune began to support the idea, you had allegiance. Of course, people talked about - what do you think – even the Emmett Till trial was pushed by the Progressive Party of Chicago, because his mama got a lot of credit for sadness, but she didn't do any of the manipulations of making it a big, big story that it was.

Audience Question: One reason I ask about him was he made a lot of coverage for me at The New York Times. They used to call me the next day and say, "How come your stories weren't as good as Ted Poston's?"

Withers: Well, Ted Poston was an African-American, and he got close to the other side.

Audience Question: Everything I've heard today is absolutely profound, and so I will say that much. I heard Nicholas von Hoffman's name a couple of times now. I seem to recall him and that he was almost like a Saturday Night Live character – kind of an outrageous guy, funny man, he was on TV.

Valeriani: Right. He got a little wacky later in life.

Audience Question (Karl Fleming): I'm a good pal of Nick's, and I'm having dinner with him Sunday night. Nick started off working for Back of the Yards Project. He worked for a guy called Saul Alinsky, who was the first organizer in Chicago of poor people organizing about rent controls. Nick was just fundamentally an extremely misfit city guy, suddenly in the wilds of Mississippi. He was just totally out of place. He was so white. He is the whitest white man I've ever met. On top of that, he had this extremely effete way of speaking – high-pitched and very urbane, which also was totally out of place for rednecks. He was an extremely good reporter and not at all un-brave. He was just totally, as they used to say down South, "He was just as out of place as a bastard in a family reunion."