

Panel 3 Q&A and Group Discussion

(The following is an unedited transcript.)

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Wonderful, thank you very much. Before we get into questions and answers, please give this panel a wonderful round of applause.

(Applause.)

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: And I'd like to start the questioning off because as Leila pointed, McDowell pointed out before, we've got to go to the next step in this exchange, and some people have made recommendations and so I am, and so I'd like to follow up on some of them, and then everybody can join in.

One, Shaila, I was struck by your youth and you'll excuse me for doing that -- but that's important, and the importance of you --

Shaila Dewan: Well, I'm much older than I look, actually.

(Laughter.)

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: That tells you she's young, I don't know anybody who would say that except somebody who's really young.

(Laughter.)

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Okay, me too.

(Laughter.)

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: I would like to hear from you what you think has most contributed to your ability to process what is important in identifying lives of people who primarily don't get their voices heard, and their problems don't get portrayed. You said that's your job, and that's what Jean Robinson was saying earlier reporters need to do their jobs, and you're doing that job -- why? What makes you do that?

Shaila Dewan: Well that's, I mean -- curiosity, that's why I became a journalist. I mean, it's about empathy and understanding and I, just to answer that question I just sound totally hackneyed and clichéd, but I think mostly curiosity.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: How did you get that curiosity? You don't know? Think about it, because --

Shaila Dewan: Church, I got it in church. No, I don't know.

(Laughter.)

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: We need to try to package that, and we need to come back.

Leila, you had -- ?

Leila McDowell: I think one of the things that we've been doing after each panel discussion is picking your brains on solutions. And Amy represents a solution that has been put in practice, which is just the tremendous growth and influence of Democracy Now. It's truly -- and I think that's why -- our culture today has not been to applaud, but because of the work that you've done is so distinguished and so significant, that people felt compelled to offer that applause. It's often the only place you can get news, particularly about Iraq and other issues.

So, clearly one solution is what you're doing, which is building some alternative media where there are many voices represented, and we don't just hear about Iraq policy, for example, from non-Iraqis, you know, who sit in the Pentagon.

But I'm curious about other recommendations that you might have and that other people might have. One of the things that has come up that's, I think, an interesting, that would be an interesting thing to talk about in terms of recommendations, is the media lore that you represented, Shaila, when you said, Poverty is not news. And that has become such an accepted adage in the press, and -- but as someone said earlier, death and taxes are always with us, as is poverty, but they're covered all of the time -- so I'm wondering in challenging that adage, and Mike, I think you began to talk about that, that if you dug in on poverty as deeply as one dug into other issues and said, What's new about this, what's happening now? Is there a new wrinkle, is there a new development? What did so-and-so say about poverty, we have poverty still with us, that's news, it should have gone away by now! You know, that it could be news.

So, I'm curious about any recommendations for you know, for making poverty news rather than just saying it's got to be a new development but beginning to reverse the lore that's very, very dominant in the press that poverty in and of itself is not news, as is labor now becoming not news, you don't know many labor reporters, it's not news, when in fact there are always significant developments in both of those issues.

The other thing that I would be interested in your recommendations on and other people may have some other questions about recommendations that came up from before was this question of how do we begin to get other voices in both the editorial debates, which now are between largely the right and right of center, and in the news coverage? So that often, the people whose voices that you're doing such an incredible job channeling, Shaila -- which I think we've seen that in your coverage -- often are not the ones who are sought on policy. Yet, they are the ones who are most impacted by policy -- FAIR did a study about that where in the Katrina coverage, the victims are all African- American, but when asked what should we do about this problem, the answers all come from white males, predominantly.

So, if you all could dig in a little bit on what would be some recomm--, what are some solutions to some of these issues? That would be really helpful for us as we work to try to make recommendations through the Kerner

Commission on how to deal with this dearth of coverage, qualitatively and quantitatively, of race, poverty and inequality.

Michael Fletcher: Well, you know, I think there needs to be more pressure placed on news organizations to think more deeply about these issues. I mean, I think at the Post, just one example, a couple of weeks ago two of our top political writers left the paper, and it put us into a snit, like, We're going to revamp political coverage, these guys are going off to work on a web-based publication, and we're going to hire more people around politics, and, you know, I think the Post did a pretty good job of politics as it is, but it's a focus. They're meeting three days a week talking about what's going to be on this political website, all of our meetings on the national staff are about how do we enhance our political coverage, what are we going to do going up to '08.

Poverty, as I said, you know, when an issue of poverty comes up, no one's going to say, Don't write about it, but there won't be that institutional investment. And part of the reason for that, I think, is because when we write about politics we get a lot back, we hear back from that constituency of people who will, you know, sort of nit-pick, you know, every line of the story. And we live kind of in this echo chamber, so it kind of gets reinforced, you know, like our friends are the people who work on the Hill or work in political campaigns.

So, I think you need to have people who care about poverty communicating with the paper. I think that's one start.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Jay, could we have Jay first?

Jay Rosen: Who puts the pressure on and how do we do it?

Michael Fletcher: I think it's advocates, people from the outside. I think people on the inside can do it as well, but it's a lot easier for us to do it when, you know, when there's just, even, you'd be surprised, things like letters to the editor. Comments, just a quick e-mail to the editor of the paper. When they start hearing about things, it doesn't take a lot of those for them to feel that there's a trend out there, you know. They get six or seven e-mails and all of a sudden they're sensitized to things. But if they don't hear about stuff, you know, they don't think, it's not part of their reality.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Jay?

Jay Rosen: Well, if you want to find out why those two political journalists left the Washington Post to start their own organization, you can go to my web blog pressthink.org where I have an interview with John Harris who quit the Washington Post to start his own political news operation, and one of the reasons that he gave for doing that was that this was a chance to recover his voice, basically, to recover a more personal journalism. That's going to be a, I think, a trend, you're going to see that more, and organizations like the Eisenhower Foundation have to think about addressing those people who are, I think, recovering a journalistic voice.

But to get back to your question, if you put into Google or News another search engine idea of the intellectual scoop and read about that, you'll discover

something interesting. This is an idea that I've seen floating around the last couple of years. The intellectual scoop is a news article that announces not a new event or a new report, but a new idea for interpreting what's going on out there.

So, an intellectual scoop might be -- I think this was implicit in some of what you said, Harold -- that actually it's Hispanics moving blacks out of the picture that's causing as much difficulty as black/white relations. And that's, the idea of a new interpretive frame that can be used to explain poverty can get around this problem of poverty not being news.

What people mean by poverty is not news, is not we don't want to write about poverty, what they mean is, a persistent state is not news. If it's a persistent state, it cannot be reported as news. And so you have to figure out what is different today. And the idea of an intellectual scoop can help. And if what people outside the press can do is put into the heads of friendly journalists and reporters -- I have an intellectual scoop for you, here it is -- and that might be one way.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Okay, if we can go to Amy, and then Shaila, and then Alan.

Amy Goodman: Well, talking about solutions, I think it's very important to challenge the corporate media -- the papers of record, the networks, and continually demand that people's voices be heard, outside of the standard the ones that are constantly quoted.

But also, it's really important to support independent media. Which is very much based in people's communities. Talking about the growth of Democracy Now, we started on a few dozen community radio stations at Pacifica Radio. And then five years later in 2001 we went on public access TV in Manhattan, and then on the TV satellite networks, the independent channels that are public interest channels they're set aside in the same way that public access TV is. And this is very important, the politics of this.

These are the few places in the media that media activists have fought for, saying, If a cable industry, Comcast or Time-Warner or any Cablevision come into town and get a monopoly, they have to give back to the community. Because they get the monopoly. So they have to support some public interest channels. And that is what public access TV is in communities.

So, we went on to a few of those, and then when we'd go onto that, a radio station would say, Can we also run you? In satellite television, the public interest channels is Link TV which is on DIRECTV channel 375 and on Dish Network, channel 9410 and Free Speech TV is 9415. And the reason I say all the names of these -- I don't mean to sound like an advertisement -- but we do need to advertise these. Because they don't get the cross-promotion that the networks give each other, or the cable industry gives to the other channels. And yet, they are the places where you can find the most authentic voices, people without means who have access to something very powerful, the most powerful

institutions on earth -- the media. The way that people are projected to the rest of the world, and where the rest of the world understands us.

So, when you have a public access TV station, the community can go in and they can make their own media. Aside from being a tremendous place for media literacy, when you're actually making your own media, you can be broadcast to millions of people. In the urban centers of this country, it is remarkable to turn some of the best and worst of television you can find on public access TV. And sometimes people find out, for example, when they want to get Democracy Now on their public access TV station, they say, Well, where is our public access TV station? Well, we don't think we have one. And in fact, they don't. And then they go to the city council and they say -- where's our public access TV station -- they find within the cable charter, My goodness, Time-Warner has a deal with the city that they will give millions to support a public access TV station, it's just never been activated. Because no one knew. And suddenly they are getting their stations, and they are subsidized by the cable industry, because that was part of the franchise deal.

We have to preserve these public spaces, find them, shore them up. They are the closest to the ground, they are the places where people can talk to each other. Low power FM stations as well. The FCC now having to license hundreds, then thousands all over the country, and they're very, very important, because it's where you start to hear voices of leaders in their own community -- not the ones who are anointed by the corporate media that don't truly know who those indigenous voices are, but people themselves deciding.

And independent media, I really think, is coming into its own. Its very important. The fact that the corporate media got it so terribly wrong on the whole issue of weapons of mass destruction -- it's much bigger than that. Exposed more than the Administration and the politicians that voted for war -- it exposed the media. That's what it exposed. People said, how did everyone across the board get it so wrong? So, they started seeking other places. And I think that's why independent media is flourishing so much.

And the final point I'll make is the issue of neutrality and how critical that is to this discussion. The telecommunications and cable industry are writing the legislation in Washington to privatize the Internet. And it's absolutely critical that people write back to preserve net neutrality. So, whether you have money or not, and no matter what there's going to be a digital divide with even access to the Internet in places in this country and around the world. But you don't have to pay to have your website accessible. So if you go to Google or ATT.com, but if you go to Democracy Now or maybe a ballot website in India, it may come up in 15 minutes, or it may come up tomorrow. That is not acceptable. And it's really important people focus on that issue of all of us being able to communicate on the internet.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Shaila?

Shaila Dewan: I was thinking that, if -- this is not exactly a solution, but it's a suggestion -- to put aside for the moment the idea that poverty should be

covered, and make the argument from scratch, pretend you're sitting across from Gregory Kane trying to convince him to cover it -- really to set aside your assumptions and say, Why is this important? And that can generate some ideas about how to get it covered.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Alan, you're next, or do you want me to hear the rest of the panel? Okay, good.

Harold, you're next. You need a mike.

Harold Meyerson: Yeah, strange about that. A couple quick suggestions. I mean, so often in journalism, the general tendency in writing about just the way things are in the economy is a kind of cheerleading sensibility. And the fact that the American economy has changed so fundamentally over the last 15-20 years or slightly longer, and that this cheerleading is increasingly a ridiculous and inadequate response to you know, really the diminution of the middle of the economy, which is tens of millions of people's lives, is something that I think needs to be raised when we sit down with editors of newspapers and talk about this, one thing I would raise is -- what the hell is the business section for, anyway? Why -- what exactly about the profits here are so great, if the profits are just being retained by a relative handful of shareholders?

Conversely, some journalistic outlets are increasingly on to this story, and I think we need to give credit where credit is due and praise the L.A. Times long series on these kind of changes, or every time Lou Eugitel in the New York Times writes a story noting, Hey, you know, half as many people, twice as many people have dropped out of the labor market now than were out of it 40 years ago. That's kind of dry stuff, but it gets to the kind of fundamentals against which our individual stories of poverty and desperation are set.

I'm a judge in my spare time, of something called The Hillman Foundation. It was something started by the old Amalgamated Clothing Workers which, in its current incarnation is called Unite Here! Along with I'm a judge with Katrina Vanden Heuvel of The Nation, Henry Kurtzberg of the New Yorker and several other folks for socially conscious journalism.

And, you know, we are amazed every year at how much good work among the oceans of dreg is actually out there. The TV award we gave last year was to, I think, the NBS- affiliate in St. Louis, The Nightly News, which had done this unbelievable report about this company owned in St. Louis and the way in which these copper mines they own in Peru are poisoning hundreds of people every year, spent months up in the Andes doing this -- you know, a TV station in St. Louis that had this sense of commitment, did a kind of Mike Wallace confrontation interview with the CEO of this company -- there isn't enough, we don't have a way, we don't have a way to kind of make a broader audience aware of the kind of stories we need to celebrate and say, Aha! Look at that, why can't you do this? And we sure need to think of one.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Okay, Laura?

Laura Washington: Harold, things do go on in between L.A. and New York and Washington, D.C., so even in St. Louis, good journalism can be done, I think we forget about that.

Just to pick up on a couple of points that were made. Amy mentioned the Hispanic-owned medians and the study that shows the importance of media ownership among Hispanics, and I think that's true in general of communities of color, and I think that there needs to be more support and more attention paid to strengthening and bolstering what is, unabashedly in many cities and many parts of this country, advocacy journalism. There's a much deeper tradition of advocacy journalism among minority media than there are, minority-owned media than there are others, and nobody apologizes for that. And I think that that is very important to support that, that's often where a lot of the minority journalists -- especially of my generation -- got training and learned how to be, get into this business and learn how to be good reporters. And it's a place where they naturally gravitate to and maybe don't encounter some of the problems that you raised in terms of that conundra.

The Chicago Defender, for example, in Chicago is an historical paper which was largely responsible for stirring the great black migration, it's still around and it's still a daily but its struggling, but there's still a lot of young people that want to work there, and they need to find ways to fund internship programs and development programs to keep publications like that going.

WBOM which is an all -- the only black-owned all talk, well not only black-owned, but it's also the only all-talk radio station in Chicago, purely talk. Again, it's considered a place where the community can come together and talk with an uncensored voice, and those are things that we need to support.

And Michael mentioned earlier, pitching reporters, and targeting reporters and sending those letters, and as a journalist I find, I don't hear from people in communities nearly as often as I should, especially because I self-identified and through my own work have shown that I'm interested in doing these kinds of things. Michael is interested in doing this kind of work, Shaila is, and I don't think we hear from activists, and the non-profits and the people who are struggling out there enough, we don't hear from you enough. I'm really, frankly, surprised at how little we hear -- maybe there's this intimidation factor, maybe it's just like with us -- you're very busy, but I think we need to find ways to encourage more communication.

There's an organization in Chicago called Community Media Workshop, it's a non-profit that does precisely that, it connects journalists, media entities with stories in communities with organizations who are doing community organizing, doing non-profit work, it has a training program that helps bring folks who are working in the communities, helps them figure out how to get to the media and how to get their stories in the media. It has a tip sheet where it just sends out to journalists -- this is what's going on, this is what you can cover -- it has a source book and I think there are probably other organizations like that around the country, and I think that's something that should really be encouraged as well.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Great, we have a question here, and then Alan.

Norm Kurland: I'm Norm Kurland from the Center for Economic and Social Justice. And I have a question that relates to virtually everything that's been said. But Harold Meyerson talked about the need to report on new ideas, new paradigms, paradigms that will go beyond traditional capitalism or traditional socialism.

So, what some people would call not just the third way, but a just third way -- that is something that would incorporate basic principles of justice. Because if we're finally getting down to what institutionalized racism and institutionalized poverty and corporate media are all based on the structure, the existing structure that's a mixture of all, of both of those two paradigms. So, until we deal with institutionalized powerlessness, we're not getting to the essence of a democratic society. How do we get power from being concentrated, and therefore inherently corrupt, to a system where there's a systematic restructuring of power?

And from that I would say, power does follow property. The founders were right. And if you concentrate it, you're going to have concentrated power. So, then the question comes, is there a system, can we look at the Federal Reserve, the tax system, the welfare system, the labor laws, the system as a whole to say -- what kind of restructuring of a system, a new paradigm that would deal with the maximum diffusion of ownership, and therefore economic power? And that is, there are ideas out, people from the San Francisco area may have heard of Lewis Kelso and some of his ideas, and his writings, but unfortunately I think the problem of the media is not within the media. It's within academia and the ideas that are being discussed within academia.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Alan?

Alan Curtis: Does anyone want to tag onto that?

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Well, I thought you might want to tag on, if not we'll go for a response. Okay. Okay, does anyone want to respond to the issue of what the potential is for using models that are developed in the academy rather than the by the journalism community itself?

Harold Meyerson: Well, it's obviously an unfortunate intellectual trickle-down process which, in that sense, does make us you know, at the receiving end of good back and other ideas from the academy.

To move off of this, but in a slightly different way on diffusion of power, I think major journalistic entities need -- you know, and this is the last thing they are inclined to do -- but I think they need, we need to push them to have a systemic bias in favor of covering social movements.

It goes beyond how much coverage is devoted to labor, whatever. But given the way in which serious change in this country doesn't happen until there is sufficient push from these movements, I can, one would try to argue that a smart long-term investment for, let's say, a newspaper that has aspirations to

seriously getting just a little over the horizon on what's going to happen in the society should heed social movements more than they do.

The New York Times actually for awhile put Jason D'Paro, who had been their reporter writing on welfare, sort of on the intellectual right, just at the moment that the intellectual right totally ran out of gas. I mean, it was, you know, so I think this certainly, though, should be something that folks gathered around this table think about in terms of the kind of things you might want to push journalistic entities towards doing.

Jay Rosen: One addition on that?

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Turn your mike on.

Jay Rosen: Do you remember when, in Seattle, members of the G8 gathered and there were these tremendous street protests and it surprised everybody? Anybody that was paying attention to independent media at that time knew for sure that there was going to be trouble in Seattle precisely because of a social movement that had identified that event as an event that they were going to flood. And the rest of the news media was just completely shocked that this happened, where did these people come from?

So I think Harold's suggestion is actually a very good one, by appealing to the desire not to be clueless.

(Laughter.)

Jay Rosen: Not to be shocked by what happened -- because there's nothing a journalist hates more than feeling out of touch, unsavvy. The argument could be made that by tuning into social movements you won't be surprised and shocked the way you were in Seattle in, what was that? Nineteen ninety nine, yeah.

Amy Goodman: Just wanted to follow up on that, in 1999, the Battle of Seattle, Democracy Now of course was broadcasting there for the week, we didn't race out after it happened, but Juan, who's co-host on the broadcast is also a columnist with the New York Daily News. And so we asked of course, who on the whole team to go out with Juan and he asked his editors, he said, Would you send me out there, because it's going to be big. And they said, What's going to be big? And he said, Well, the whole protest against the WTO, and they said, The who? and he said, No, not the WHO, the WTO. And they had no idea, and he said, Well, please, and I said, That's ridiculous, no one knows about this, we're not going to devote our resources, though. It's one of the biggest papers in the country to doing this. So, we took Juan out and of course, the minute we got out there, and there was the battle in the streets, there was the New York Daily News calling, demanding stories every day, and that was on our dime, because we'd brought them out there.

But that's the difference. And it's absolutely critical that we -- it's not just, that's not just a point of view, that's how change happens in this country.

And just to respond to something that Laura said about, well, the African-American media is more point-of-view journalism -- I mean, I think the model of advocacy journalism is the New York Times, NBC, ABC, CBS, it's just a matter of who they advocate for. I'm excluding Shaila from this.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: We're going to have to bring this panel to conclusion shortly, but before we do that, I'd like to call on JoAnn Page who is a Eisenhower Trustee and the head of the Fortune Society. JoAnn?

JoAnn Page: I've been listening to this and the other panels, and I think what we're talking about is how assumptions get formed and built by the media.

I guess I want to ask a question and ask for advice -- because if I look to what's been successful, and I look at when the Kerner Commission did its report, and I look at the core assumptions that people were working out of, it was a time when a President could say, Let's have a war on poverty. And I think it was a time when if you asked people why people are poor, the answer might have been something like, Social conditions, racism -- I think we've shifted to a point where the answer is, Because it's their own damn fault, and maybe some of what they do is criminal and we should be locking them up. And the War on Poverty has shifted to a War on Crime, which looks an awful lot like a war on poor people of color who are addicts. And where, in so many of our communities, some kids get pushed through the criminal justice system, and other kids get pushed through college, and you can pretty much guess which way it's going to be by which community you look at.

The question I want to ask is kind of rooted in the sense that, if we think that showing how things are changes things, we might be wrong. Because it didn't change the Holocaust when people knew what was happening. And it doesn't change anything when people see what's happening in Darfur. And New Orleans lasted for a heartbeat, and nothing's changed.

So that question of what it takes -- not just to shock people, or make people think something bad is happening -- but to shift it to the point where people see it, not as being about what's wrong with those people, but being about something that is about us and about needs change is the question that I wanted to ask.

And some of what's being said is truth, in a very shallow way, in the media. Doesn't take much poking under the surface to realize that it's garbage. You know, if you look at three strikes and you're out, and you look at what the hype was, and you look at who's in, and you look at a million dollars to lock a person up for life, and more people doing life sentences in California on marijuana-related charges than murder, rape and robbery combined, you don't need to dig that deeply under the hype to get to the story. But how do we get that out there? Because the underlying assumptions never get touched.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Thank you, JoAnn, Harold wants to respond, and also Jay raised that whole issue of a changed environment, not so much changed paradigm. And then we'll go to Alan Curtis.

Harold Meyerson: Well, of course there have been times where coverage of what's going on has affected things for the better, and I think the clearest example of that is the coverage that reporters, and then more and more of the mainstream media felt compelled to do of the Civil Rights Movement in the South in the sixties. It took awhile, but you know, you go back, you read some of this stuff, you read the Sainted Murray Kempton and the stuff he was writing from the past, and a slew of other folks, and then of course the TV images of what was going on in Mississippi and Alabama and that did have affect. And that did affect a nation's conscious.

But the nation has changed, and it's not just your own damn fault that you're in jail, it's your own damn fault if you're one of 30 million Americans who's been laid off in the last 15 years, and if you don't go an educate yourself, and you can't find a job which pays comparably -- which two-thirds of the people who are laid off and do get re- employed in fact, can't -- it's your own damn fault, too. And so our solution for all of this is go get yourself a better education, and the fact that China and India are turning out 8 million engineers a year who will do what you do, but you know, a lot cheaper, that somehow is your own damn fault, too.

And we've internalized this, you know, this is what we have been told by folks in both political parties, I think there's beginning to be significant pushback now, but you're right -- it's a different time than the more, you know, the time that actually put people in their social context, and it's a very long fight, I think, that all of us will have to wage to get back to that.

I apologize, I have to get back to putting out my magazine which goes to the printer today, and they're wondering where a few headlines are, so I'm going to have to take off, but please talk to these other folks, thank you.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Thank you.

Jay Rosen: Well, the example that Harold used when news coverage did have an effect, what we had was news coverage on the Civil Rights Movement in the South, plus a movement. So, the lesson is that you need both. And if you have oppositional news today in Washington but no political opposition, it's not going to make much of a difference.

And there is a huge factor in how effective news accounts are, but journalists don't talk about them much because it doesn't involve them, it's the political climate around them that actually ends up making the difference. And this is one reason why I suggested that this model inherited by Jacob Riis where, if we get the right stories in the press, then somehow the committee chairman will see that and they'll put the right policies into place -- it's more of a fantasy, really, than a description of how the political movement world works.

And so, without social movements, politics doesn't change very much, even if you had really good journalism about all of the social problems that affect us. And so, this relationship between movements and news accounts is where I think the answer to your riddle lies.

It was once said famously that the Supreme Court, you know, follows the elections returns. Well, so does the Court of High Journalism, it follows the election returns, and they know where the political center is. And in order to remain innocent, you don't depart very much from that political center, and that's the way it is in mainstream journalism, but today there are lots of alternatives to mainstream journalism, and I think that's where change is going to come.

If you are concerned with, how do we get our issues in the Washington Post this morning so that the political class will read about our issues and legislate accordingly, that is a fantasy.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Thank you, Alan would you please close this, Leila, I hope you've gotten some answers to you.

Leila McDowell: Just one thing, though, before Alan closes up, I think that one thing we wanted to try to get a little bit about, because again, this is less a discussion of, you know, how do we get our issue in the news right now and more looking at recommendations that we're going to be able to make to the world about some of the structural difficulties we face with our press right now that effect coverage of race, class, inequality, but it also affects coverage of the war, it also affects democratic debate, it also affects the lack of an informed electorate in this country, that therefore leads to decisions by voters that often is ill-advised because a free press is so critical to a democracy.

So, I'm wondering -- and Amy talked a little bit about some of the legislative aspects around the Internet earlier, I know we've got to go pretty soon -- but if there's anything before you leave that can be said in the very nice sound bites of 30 seconds or so on actual policy that can deal with some of the structural issues that you raised today, or structural antecedents for what you raised today, that would be really helpful.

Jay Rosen: Not neutrality.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: So, Amy will probably echo that. Anybody? Okay, Alan?

Alan Curtis: Just quickly -- a persistent state is not news -- the level of violence today is as high as it was in the sixties, yet violence gets covered every day, poverty doesn't so what's the difference, question one. Question two has to do with the narrative, the needing to have a good story that people can relate to. Everyone says this, and I understand how necessary that is, and I am pulled into a story when it has that narrative.

But Ronald Reagan was a master of narratives and stories of welfare mothers who drove around in Cadillacs, and his anecdotes and great stories led to a very different place. So, my question is, doesn't a solid story also have to have some kind of a factual base or some kind of a statistical statement that says poverty is increasing or inequality is increasing? Can it just be the narrative, or does it have to be within a, some kind of factual framework?

Shaila Dewan: I don't think there's a hard and fast rule, but I have to take issue with the idea that violence happens every day and is covered every day --

there is tons and tons and tons of violence that is not covered because it's not news. I mean, I worked in the Police Bureau for two years in New York and I know that there were just jillions of crimes that weren't news, so just to offer a counter-point to that notion.

Alan Curtis: Well, Mr. Kane described all of the crime stories in Baltimore, so I was taking off on his --

Shaila Dewan: No, no there are crime stories, but there are always reasons, there are things that make them stories. Just the same way that there are things that make certain personal motive stories, there are things that make certain statistical shifts news -- did I say noise, instead of news? That's really interesting -- and there are things that make demographic shifts news.

Alan Curtis: There's not a theme in television that says, If it bleeds, it leads ?

Shaila Dewan: I'm not talking about television.

Alan Curtis: Okay.

Leila McDowell: But that was on my newsroom wall.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Any of the other panelists want to take a swat at that? Okay, we're --

Christy Hardin Smith: I want to be a fourth for the not neutrality recommendation.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Are you going to be a fourth for the not neutrality recommendation?

Christy Hardin Smith: And it passes.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Okay, press the button so the red light comes --

Chester Hartman: Okay, sorry. There's a hole I want to identify -- I'm Chester Hartman, I work for a small public interest group here in Washington called The Poverty and Race Research Action Council, and it picks up from one of your points about movements, as well.

Movements and smaller public interest groups do not have a communications capacity. We do not have a staff that's large enough to have a specialist in that area, and until both movement groups and small public interest groups can develop that capacity -- I don't know whether it's through Foundations giving them money or some centralized access to that source -- you're going to miss a whole lot of stuff that you should get.

And I don't know what the answer is, but I think it is a real hole.

Jay Rosen: There is a change coming. I forgot the name of it, but there's a new database that's been put together specifically for non-profit groups and the kind of groups that you're a part of with up to date information about media contacts, that is, the people in the media who either deploy resources, cover stories, man the desks, decide what gets in, and it is updated through the efforts

of volunteers gathered throughout the country who think that progressive media forces should have the same information that others do. Because, in fact, this kind of contact information is extremely expensive to buy, and those who have the money can buy an updated version of this, but those who don't are frequently clueless.

Chester Hartman: But unless there's a staff capacity to take advantage of those resources --

Jay Rosen: No, what I'm telling you, what I'm telling you is that through the intervention of the Internet and volunteer work, such a resource is available for free to these organizations which would be impossible for them to afford without a staff.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Let me just, let me just try to jump in here, because Chester is talking about if you have two and a half staff people, you cannot assign someone to take on that task because you can't afford it. And that's one of the things, I think is not really recognized about the shallowness of resources, human and money resources in the non-profit advocacy sector. These organizations -- even though the tools are there -- may not be able to access them, Chester?

Chester Hartman: No, that's correct.

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich: Okay, I'm sorry that we need to interrupt this dialogue, but it can continue, I invite you to trade places with the members of the next panel, we'll take a break of about 10 minutes and we will continue because we do need the continuity, and Leila has other questions that she wants you to address so that we come out with recommendations and not just different perspectives on the state of the art.