January 11, 2008

BILL MOYERS: Welcome to the JOURNAL. It was, as you know, a good week for John McCain and Hillary Clinton.

MCCAIN/CLINTON: Thank you!

BILL MOYERS: But not for pundits in the polls. Just take a look.

NEWS COVERAGE: In New Hampshire today, change is the campaign buzz word but Hillary Clinton maybe feeling like she's running into a buzz saw. I think what you're seeing in the Clinton campaign is a campaign that's reeling. How does she kill this impending sense of execution? This sort of sick feeling that this woman is going down. A definite sense that the Clinton campaign if not imploding is definitely beginning to fall into a crater. Here's another thing to look at Edwards could come in second. He did that four years ago. And that would be the end for Hillary Clinton. I think this thing is so over that if she has a 100 million dollars she better spend 95 of the 100 million in New York State cause she'll lose there too.

BILL MOYERS: Not exactly. The race wasn't over it was just beginning.

NEWS COVERAGE: A new day in New Hampshire at this hour and what appears to be...A lot of scratching their heads trying to figure out exactly what happened here. I'm going to spend the next year in analysis trying to figure out why we were so wrong. No, I mean all the pundits were wrong. I will never underestimate Hillary Clinton again.

BILL MOYERS: For our take on the story of the week, we turn again to Kathleen Hall Jamieson, the director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. She keeps an expert eye on politics in the press and the habits of voters. Her calling is to mine the facts hidden in all the spin. You'll find a video of our conversation last week on PBS.org along with a list of many of her incisive and helpful books. Quite a week, right?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Yes. Very interesting week.

BILL MOYERS: What's the story now?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: I think there's a story under the story. In the final days between Iowa and New Hampshire, Hillary Clinton and John McCain both conducted a campaign in a very similar fashion. They sat down or stood up but engaged voters. They listened to questions. They engaged in substantive detail and at length. And in McCain's case, interestingly, he's done this in the past, when the voter disagreed, he would hand the microphone back to see if he'd persuaded the voter and let the voter speak again. Take the microphone and continue the exchange. This is the kind of campaigning that gives Iowa and New Hampshire a privileged place in the order for a reason if the nation's able to see it. But what did you have to do to see it? Well, you had to watch a whole lot of CSPAN.

BILL MOYERS: The real story to me in New Hampshire was this incredible organizing campaign that Hillary Clinton not just in the five days between Iowa and New Hampshire but in the weeks leading up to New Hampshire.They had 4,000 volunteers. They knocked on 105,000 doors in New Hampshire. I mean, that's almost a third of the households. They had an amazing organization out there to turn out the vote. And the press never picked up on it.
KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: But that's not the whole story. In the Hillary moment, characterized very differently by people-

BILL MOYERS: The moisty moment?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Well, whatever adjective or adverb you use, Hillary Clinton has this moment in the diner.

BILL MOYERS: The national press was cynical. Clinton is hoping that showing that other side will bring women in particular to the polls, almost as if she had done it deliberate. We don't know whether she did or not. But the two significant newspapers in New Hampshire didn't cover the event at all. And local television coverage in New Hampshire was pretty matter of fact about it. It became a bigger national story than it did a local story.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Mm-hm. But what's also interesting to me is you're not sure whether she did it deliberately or not.

BILL MOYERS: No, no.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: I live in a different world. When Governor Romney becomes emotional talking about soldiers coming back from the war in Iraq in the context of having sons-- when he gets emotional talking about his father, as he did Thursday of this week-- when President Bush reports becoming emotional and you see him being emotional in circumstances, when President Reagan, in one of the finest speeches of his presidency, recalls the boys of Pointe du Hoc and the men who took the cliffs and his voice is quavering and he speaks of Lisa Zanatta Henn who came back to Normandy because her father, who has since died, wanted to come back and she's representing him, and he is on the edge of tears when he says it, we don't say, "Is that real?" We accept it.

Why is it that we raise the question about whether it's feigned with Hillary Clinton? Is it that we assume that because Hillary Clinton is so calculating, she must be able to do this? Is it because we assume that that's not really who she is? Must be fake? Or alternatively, do we have a view of personality that says we all have a range of possible facets of personality and sometimes some are on display and others are not? Why would we not accept at face value expressions of emotions from candidates? I do. I don't question it. Now, you know, you may say that's naïve. But I don't think someone not trained as an actor is going to be able to counterfeit emotion in a credible fashion. And I find all of these expressions, Democratic and Republican, to be credible.

BILL MOYERS: In watching the Obama camp respond to her victory in New Hampshire, I thought we saw a precursor of the campaign to come. I want to show you a little sound bite of Jesse Jackson, Jr., Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr.-- who is a strong supporter of Obama, as he tries to put Hillary Clinton's camp on the defensive about, quote, the Hillary moment. Take a look at this.

JESSE JACKSON, JR.: We saw a sensitivity factor...But there are a lot of issues for which we can be emotion on this campaign.

BILL MOYERS: What do you think?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Much of the commentary about that moment is simply a Rorschach read on people's ideological relationship to Hillary Clinton. The question for the electorate at large is: Does it speak to her capacity to lead? It's the same question that one should ask of everything one sees of candidates.

BILL MOYERS: It wasn't just Clinton the press got wrong. I mean, McCain made a comeback, too. But listen to what the press said of him after Tuesday. McCain has been left for dead, Chris Matthews said. This is the guy who was left for dead, Chris Wallace. Left for dead months ago, New York Daily News. Left for dead politically, Washington Post. Pretty much considered all washed up, which I guess is better than being dead, Katie Couric. Nearly written off just a few months ago, Tucker Carlson, MSNBC. But who had buried McCain in the first place? The press. What do you make of this?
KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Well, now, first, when you blow through a whole lot of money that you've raised and you've got a staff shake-up that's not simply the press. The press was reporting something out there in the external world. But the death metaphors in this last week have-- they've been astonishing. Coming into Iowa there was a headline on one of the cable networks that said, "Death match." And it was Romney versus McCain. And then a person says--on MSNBC, "For her to beat Barack Obama, she'd have to tear his head off." Well, if you tear someone's head off, you kill them.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: NBC says it's been described as a death match. Well, where was it described as a death match? On MSNBC. Another pundit said, "It's do or die for John McCain." You know, John McCain actually did face death. I don't think death by metaphor is probably going to be lethal to him. But what this does to your sense of what's happening in the election is it demeans it. It creates a context for viewing this that makes no sense if you're trying to find political substance. It's the ultimate of tactical coverage. In the past, I used to worry about sports metaphors. You know, will you land the knockout punch? 'Cause I didn't like the idea that you had to knock someone down in order to win. I didn't see how you could do that anyway with discourse. But now it's worse than that. Now you're going to actually kill the person.

BILL MOYERS: Mark Feldstein teaches journalism at George Washington University and he's quoted in the Washington Post this week describing political reporters as superficial sports writers. Covering the campaign is like joining a cult with a cocoon-like bubble as you travel from event to event. There's a lemming-like quality. I mean, he's talking about all of us in politics. There's some truth in there, isn't there?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Actually that point is relevant when you're talking about sports coverage. But this is even worse than that. In what context would this talk be appropriate? "It's Rome. It's the coliseum. These are gladiators and one of them won't come out alive." Now, imagine if the electorates being positioned as the people in the bread and circuses of Rome watching gladiators. That's the only context that makes sense of those metaphors to me. And if you look at McCain coming back from the dead, you know, this is a medical story. That's much more interesting than politics.

BILL MOYERS: Well, it's a theological and religious story.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Yes.

BILL MOYERS: Talking about John McCain. John McCain had a very good week for a 71-year-old man who, just a few years ago, was either dead or toast, right?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: And the operative word in this sentence is "71 year old." The press is, with ruthless efficiency, reminding people of age. And John McCain, by maintaining a campaign schedule that would be daunting to any of the much younger candidates, is saying back, "I can handle this." He also, whenever he's questioned about the age issue, does something that's interesting. He goes back to his youth when he first swore the oath that took him into the military. And from that he argues that he's shown leadership that demonstrated-- leadership for-- he says for patriotism, not for profit, a sly dig at Governor Romney when he led a squadron.

And you then are reminded he doesn't have to say it about his time as a prisoner of war. Then he talks about 20 years fighting in Washington and being involved in every major national security debate of the time. He's trying to translate that age indictment into an affirmation that he's able to do it. But his most effective moment was not his; it was Governor Huckabee who stepped in a debate and said about Senator McCain, "If you knew his 90-some-year-old mother, you just wouldn't raise that question."

BILL MOYERS: Explain this to me. Last week on television before New Hampshire-- McCain said he didn't think the American people minded if we were in Iraq for 10,000 years. Earlier he had said it would be fine with him if we're in Iraq a hundred years. And despite those statements, he had a big advantage in New Hampshire among Republicans who disapprove of the war in Iraq. Exactly contrarian to what he has said is his position. What do you think of that?
KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Well, first, his statement in context is analogizing this into the fact that we have troops still in a number of places around the world.

BILL MOYERS: Korea.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: And that we're not concerned about that. We're concerned when we take loss of life. So we have to be careful not to misread his original statement. But more importantly, when one of the pundits on Wednesday night on television said, "Look at this. He's-- people who disagree with this position support him and this position support him. They just didn't know what his positions were," there's an alternative interpretation. They knew exactly what his positions were. And they said, "He's a man of integrity. He told us what his position was on the war. And he said, 'I'd be willing to lose the presidency rather than do what's wrong for the country.'" And he took that position on the war when it was unpopular. And he continued to take it with people in New Hampshire who said, "I oppose your position." And he's taken positions on a number of issues that Republicans don't approve of. And he hasn't been backing down.

If people say a person has integrity and consistency, they may vote for him for president because that's what they're looking for in a president. And they may simultaneously say, "I disagree with you on the issues." And I know this will seem like a strange segue, but that's part of the reason that George W. Bush was reelected in 2004. People went into the voting booth saying, "I don't agree with some of his stands on issues, but I know where he stands.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: One of the things that intrigues me about the way in which Senator McCain is campaigning is that he's putting things on the table that I think need to be on the table, including global warming. One of the things that I think is important about the candidacy that Fred Thompson is offering is that he's talking about Social Security and he's put together a detailed, and as a result, a controversial plan. I think we need to ask the entitlement question. We need to find a way to discuss it intelligently and we need to take it on, Medicare and Social Security. But overall, what isn't being talked about the future? The big tough issues in which there are tough choices.

BILL MOYERS: As you are talking, I'm thinking that just a couple of days ago the U.S. dropped 40,000 pounds of bombs on a suburb of Baghdad we don't know anything about the casualties. The Pentagon is hinting that it's going to send another 3,000 to 4,000 troops to Afghanistan where 27,000 troops are now bogged down in a war that's not going well. Atlanta and the Southeast are running out of water. A huge public hospital in Atlanta has gone under. Two million Americans may be losing their homes in the next few months because of the subprime mortgage crisis. And yet these are not being talked about in the campaign.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Well, and what I think is a concern is in places that we could talk about them, we're not talking about them well. Look at the exchange between Governor Romney and Governor Huckabee in the debate in which Governor Huckabee is essentially being challenged by Governor Romney about in net raising taxes over a ten-plus-year period.

MR. ROMNEY: Now, I asked you a question to begin with. And that was, net-net, did you raise taxes in your state by half a billion dollars?

MR. HUCKABEE: We raised jobs, we rebuilt our roads.

MR. ROMNEY: You know, that's political speak.

MR. HUCKABEE: You know, Mitt -

MR. ROMNEY: The question is -- you can avoid this issue by just saying --

MR. HUCKABEE: -- you spent tens of millions of dollars sayings all negative things about me. If someone raises a question, you say it's a personal attack. In fact...
KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Governor Huckabee is not acknowledging the tax increase. And I wish he would simply say, "Yes, I did in net. And here's what I did with it." But what he says instead is, "I built roads. Essentially I invested in infrastructure. I dealt with schools." If there's a penalty for the candidates who raise taxes in order to build infrastructure and the country's facing a situation in which we've neglected our infrastructure for 40 years. We had a cryptosporidium outbreak in one of our cities because-

BILL MOYERS: A what?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Cryptosporidium.

BILL MOYERS: Oh, yes.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: You drink water, you become ill. Outbreak, particularly if your immune system is vulnerable. We have an infrastructure problem that we are postponing and postponing. A bridge collapsed in Minneapolis. And now Governor Huckabee, as governor, did, in my judgment, was the correct thing to do. He invested in infrastructure and the campaign structure is set to penalize him because, you know, he raised some taxes in order to do that.

BILL MOYERS: All right. The campaign changes every day. We'll be back to talk about it. What are you looking for next week?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: What I'm watching for next week is whether the substance of the candidates' positions will get through in news and in the debates. Will you be able to say before the next time that there is a vote or a primary, "I can tell you that this is how Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and John Edwards differ and are similar on healthcare"? "I can tell you where the Democratic field differs from the Republican field on whether or not the Bush tax cuts should remain permanent." Where they stand in the Republican side on a pass to citizenship on immigration. Whether or not the candidates on each side have taken positions on the Iraq War and who supports a timetable, what is it, and what are its implications? Who supported the surge strategy first? And who now supports it?

If this next week is a good week for the electorate, more people will be able to answer those questions accurately and, as a result, cast an informed vote. And for those of us who can't vote next week, be on our way to casting ultimately an informed vote between the Democratic and Republican nominee.

BILL MOYERS: But if the press doesn't tell us that substance what does it say that our-- that as a democracy we allow our politics to be determined by bought ads and by a professional media whose interest is more often in personalities and bottom line than in the content of the candidates? I mean, our campaign seems designed to conceal rather than reveal the real world.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Well, and in moments that could be revealing, we don't seem to find a way to create mass access for the moment of revelation.

BILL MOYERS: Example.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Well, for example, I mean, take any of the exchanges in these days that help explain why Hillary Clinton and John McCain did so well, in which they engaged voters about real issue substance. Take those moments in which Senator Edwards talks about the patients' bill of rights and the dispute about what should and should not have been in it. It's a legitimate dispute.

There's a case to be made that some forms of lawsuits are bad and some forms of lawsuits are good. But let's hear the argument. And instead, we're engaging the politics at a high level of abstraction in which people are going to take on the special interests. But we're not exactly sure what that means. We're not exactly sure what they're going to be doing. And for practical purposes, everybody can fill in whatever that means to them. It's not actually a set of policy proposals. It's a kind of indictment of a certain form of status quo.
BILL MOYERS: But you notice that so often the mainstream press disparaged John Edwards for his anti-corporate-- anti-big money rhetoric. They dismissed him because of that.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: The interesting thing to me about the Edwards candidacy is that he's making an argument that is consistent in some important ways with the argument made by Ron Paul, Dennis Kucinich, and interestingly enough, Mike Huckabee, who takes on corporate greed. That doesn't seem to be a message that resonates very well when it moves into sound bites. And I'm somewhat bewildered about why not. And also, by the way, speaking of the Edwards candidacy, right now going into South Carolina, his home state where he's won a primary and has the endorsement of the steel workers in the state, he's being written off essentially as the third place candidate who basically can't survive beyond that. How, in fairness to his candidacy, can the media dismiss him when he may have at least some possibility of winning South Carolina? A possibility diminished greatly if you continue to talk about the fact that he can't win it.

So his message can't get through if he's in third. He got virtually no coverage on this last election night so his message couldn't get through there. And as a result, people aren't able to hear that message. And he's further disadvantaged because he's raised less money. And so if you want to ask, "How do you ensure that a message isn't able to get through?" put it in the voice of a candidate who carries, in the perspective of the media, no chance to be elected president.

BILL MOYERS: The campaign moves now from retail politics that you like in Iowa and New Hampshire 'cause the candidates can get close to the voters to big-- the wholesales you know in 20 states at one time. What changes?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: The candidates who didn't have money had a chance in Iowa and New Hampshire. Notice what happens with Governor Huckabee in Iowa. You know, notice. You know, Senator Edwards is outspent and yet does well in Iowa. Notice that Senator McCain, outspent, does well in New Hampshire. You can do that when you have retail politics, when you're not contesting in many states simultaneously. You still do have retail politics able to happen in South Carolina and to some extent also able to happen in Michigan. More difficult in Michigan 'cause it's just a more difficult state to get around in. But once you begin to hit those times in which you've got large blocks of state, now money starts to matter.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: And a disparity in resources potentially takes a candidate now, takes a candidate out of the race who might otherwise have survived had we still been able to see them in a retail environment which doesn't privilege money as strongly.

BILL MOYERS: Well, as this campaign moves on we'll be back to talk about it. Thank you, Kathleen Hall Jamieson.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: You're welcome.

BILL MOYERS: Here's one of the intriguing and lingering questions of the week: how is race shaping politics this year? The polling in Iowa was right on - showing Barack Obama winning there. So what happened in New Hampshire? The polls predicted another big Obama victory - Did they just get it wrong -- all of them -- or was there more to it?

One Obama supporter put it this way in a widely circulated essay on the web: "The exit polls in New Hampshire were accurate for the Republicans and for the second tier Democrats. The only miscalculation was the amount of support for Obama. That miscalculation is about race. Iowa caucus goers stood by Barack, in part, because when voting with their bodies, in front of their neighbors, Iowans are held accountable. In the quiet, solitary space of the voting booth, some New Hampshire voters abandoned Barack."

We'll never know but as now the contest moves to Michigan, Nevada, and South Carolina where over half of the electorate is African American. But it's not as simple as numbers-race never is. That's why I invited Shelby Steele to our studios. Shelby Steele is one of our foremost public thinkers. His scholarship and ideas have earned him a senior fellowship at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and an influential audience in the public square.
President Bush honored him with the National Humanities Medal in 2004 for his "learned examinations of race relations and cultural issues." For his bestselling book, THE CONTENT OF OUR CHARACTER: A NEW VISION OF RACE IN AMERICA, he received the National Book Critics' Circle Award and now he is out with another one. It's called A BOUND MAN: WHY WE ARE EXCITED ABOUT OBAMA AND WHY HE CAN'T WIN. And it's well worth your time.

Shelby Steele, welcome to THE JOURNAL.

SHELBY STEELE: Good to be here.

BILL MOYERS: The subtitle of your book, why we are excited about Obama. Are you excited about Obama?


BILL MOYERS: Are you rooting for him?

SHELBY STEELE: I can't say that. You know, our politics are probably different. But I'm proud of him. And I'm happy to see him out there. He's already made an important contribution to American politics.

BILL MOYERS: But you go on to say why he can't win. Now, that would seem to suggest you don't think he can become President.

SHELBY STEELE: My gut feeling is that he's going to have a difficulty--a difficult time doing that. The reason I think that we don't yet know him. We don't yet quite know. What his deep abiding convictions are. And he seems to have, you know, almost in a sense kept them concealed. And a part of the I think infatuation with Obama is because he's something of an invisible man. He's a kind of a projection screen. And you sort of see more your — the better side of yourself when you look at Obama than you see actually Barack Obama.

BILL MOYERS: You say in here that his supporters want him not to do something, but to be something.

SHELBY STEELE: Yes.

BILL MOYERS: To represent something. What do you think they want him to be?

SHELBY STEELE: I think to be very blunt about it, in a lot of that support is a desire for convergence of a black skin with the United States Presidency, with power on that level— the idea is that to have a black in that office leading a largely white country would be redemptive for America.

BILL MOYERS: Redemptive?

SHELBY STEELE: Redemptive. Would take us a long way. Would indicate that we truly have moved away from that shameful racist past that we had.

BILL MOYERS: That's perfectly logical isn't it?

SHELBY STEELE: Yes, it is.

BILL MOYERS: And desirable. You seem to--

SHELBY STEELE: I want it.

BILL MOYERS: Yeah, sure. And women want it for--
SHELBY STEELE: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: In fact I feel for black women in this. Because they’ve got this first time unprecedented choice of a plausible woman candidate, as a Democrat, and a plausible black candidate.

SHELBY STEELE: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: They must feel a tension.

SHELBY STEELE: They have to. I think that the black community in general has been very conflicted about Barack Obama. Precisely because he’s been so successful among whites. And that makes black people nervous.

BILL MOYERS: Yeah. You say in here, white people like Barack Obama a little too much for the comfort of many blacks.

SHELBY STEELE: Yes. Yes.

BILL MOYERS: Why?

SHELBY STEELE: Well, the black American identity, certainly black American politics are grounded in what I call challenging. It's basically, they look at white America and say we're going to presume that you're a racist until you prove otherwise. The whole concept is you keep whites on the hook. You keep the leverage. You keep the pressure. Here's a guy who's what I call a bargainer who's giving whites the benefit of the doubt.

BILL MOYERS: Give me a simple definition of what you call a bargainer. And a simple definition of what you call a challenger.

SHELBY STEELE: A bargainer is a black who enters the American, the white American mainstream by saying to whites in effect, in some code form, I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt. I'm not going to rub the shame of American history in your face if you will not hold my race against me. Whites then respond with enormous gratitude. And bargainers are usually extremely popular people. Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, Sidney Poitier back in the Sixties and so forth. Because they give whites this benefit of the doubt. That you can be with these people and not feel that you're going to be charged with racism at any instant. And so they tend to be very successful, very popular.

Challengers on the other hand say, I presume that you, this institution, this society, is racist until it proves otherwise by giving me some concrete form of racial preference.

BILL MOYERS: Affirmative action.

SHELBY STEELE: Affirmative action. Diversity programs. Opportunities of one kind or another. And so, there is a much more concrete bargaining on the case of challengers. And you go into any American institution today and they're all used to dealing with challengers. They all have a whole system of things that they can give to challengers, who then will offer absolution.

BILL MOYERS: And what are the--

SHELBY STEELE: Then we'll say this institution is vetted now. It's not racist anymore.

BILL MOYERS: One of the worst things that can happen to you in this country is to be charged with being racially biased.

SHELBY STEELE: Yes.

BILL MOYERS: Racial stigma.
SHELBY STEELE: You never get over it. On your obituary, it’ll be the first line. And there’s almost no redemption. The good side of that is it makes the point of how intense this society is in its desire to overcome racism and its past.

BILL MOYERS: Yes.

SHELBY STEELE: So it’s a good thing on the other hand. On the other hand, the bad side of it is that it has become a form of cruelty. And all you’re doing is terrifying whites. I wrote in the last book, WHITE GUILT. Whites live under now, we’ve underestimated the power of this. Whites live under now this threat of being stigmatized as race. Our institutions live under this threat of being stigmatized as racist and they’re almost panicked over it. What makes me sad there is then whites look at what happened to Don Imus. And now, they’re never going to tell me what they really feel.

Whites know never tell blacks what you really think and what you really feel because you risk being seen as a racist. And the result of that is that to a degree, we as blacks live in a bubble. Nobody tells us the truth. Nobody tells us what they would do if they were in our situation. Nobody really helps us. They use us. They buy their own innocence with us. But they never tell us the truth. And we need to be told the truth very often.

You know, America is a great society, a great country. Has all sorts-- the values have gotten us to this place where we are the world’s greatest society in many ways. Well, those values, yes, we had a history of terrible racism. But those same values will work for blacks. They will help us join the mainstream, become a part of it. But whites can’t say that because then they seem to be judgmental. They’re seen as racist. And so, no one says it to us.

BILL MOYERS: So you can understand though, why some whites would look to Obama as a redeemer from that--

SHELBY STEELE: They think that Obama is a way out of all of that. That he will bring an American redemption. And whites are very happy for that bargain and show gratitude and even affection for bargainers. Oprah Winfrey is the classic bargain who has also a kind of magic about her that I think again reflects the aspirations of white America.

BILL MOYERS: But she never challenges white America.

SHELBY STEELE: No. She--

BILL MOYERS: She's successful in part because she makes us.

SHELBY STEELE: She makes you feel that this aspiration is possible. That-- it's-- real. White American women love Oprah. Love Oprah. And so, she makes them feel that way.

BILL MOYERS: Bill Cosby did that with his--

SHELBY STEELE: Bill Cosby did that.

BILL MOYERS: Cliff Huxtable.

SHELBY STEELE: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: Remember? The--

SHELBY STEELE: But he made a big mistake, Bill Cosby.

BILL MOYERS: What?

SHELBY STEELE: He finally in the last few years has one of the iron clad rules for bargainers is they can never tell you what they actually think and feel. They can never
reveal their deep abiding convictions. Because the minute they do that, they're no longer an empty projection screen. They become an individual. And whites begin to say, well, I didn't know you felt that way. I didn't know you believed that. And the aura dissipates. If Barack Obama starts to say, you know, I really think there's a value to racial preferences even though it conflicts with equality under the law, people are, you know, that's a little too-- that's a little too revealing of who he might really be.

BILL MOYERS: So you're saying he can not serve the aspirations of one race without antagonizing the other?

SHELBY STEELE: That's right. That's right. They're two different agendas. And so his answer, this is the answer of all bargainers in a sense is to remain invisible as much as possible.

BILL MOYERS: What do you mean invisible? Because he's all over television.

SHELBY STEELE: He's all over television. But if you listen to his -- speeches 'change,' 'hope.' I mean, it's a kind of-- it's an empty mantra. I mean a surprising degree of emptiness, of lack of specificity. What change? Change from what to what? What direction do you want to take the country? What do you mean by hope? There's never any specificity there because specificity is dangerous to a bargainer.

BILL MOYERS: But, to be a successful politician in a presidential campaign in particular you have to engage a larger public. That's why so many politicians use ambiguity.

SHELBY STEELE: In Obama's case, there's more ambiguity. We have a pretty good idea. I mean, Hillary Clinton does the same thing, uses ambiguity. But we still have a pretty good idea of who she really is and what she wants to do with the country and so forth. John Edwards has probably got the straightest, most concrete message of any of them. We really know who he is. But Obama is still more invisible. We don't quite-- we don't know what he would do.

BILL MOYERS: You also say he has a nuanced view of whites. And that that's a problem for some blacks. I mean, why is it a problem to have a nuanced view of other people? I think that's what we all should have, right?

SHELBY STEELE: Well, then, we've let whites off the hook. And you know, you want to make blacks angry, start letting whites off the hook. Start saying that they're not all inherently racist. The fact that we can charge them with racism and have some degree of credibility is black power. And so, when somebody like Obama comes along, he is undermining the power of his own people in their eyes.

BILL MOYERS: By?

SHELBY STEELE: By having an open mind toward whites. By giving them the benefit of the doubt. By saying I'm going to presume you're not racist. And I'm going to treat you that way. I'm going to believe in the better part of you. And so, he flatters whites in that sense. Boy, you know, Al Sharpton doesn't do that.

BILL MOYERS: Jesse Jackson doesn't.

SHELBY STEELE: Yeah. They say you are racist until you prove otherwise. It's ironic. What Jesse and Al Sharpton do is make whites feel white. What Obama does is diffuse that. Is take the anxiety out of being white.

BILL MOYERS: What's the predicament he faces in particular in South Carolina which is the first primary where a huge number of African Americans will be participating? What do you see unique to his challenge there?

SHELBY STEELE: Well, you know, up until Iowa, he had a very hard time there. And a lot of the black leadership was apart and torn. Always with bargainers, in order to win over
blacks, they have to first of all win over whites, to the point where they seem to have real power. Then blacks will come over to them. So if in South Carolina there is the perception that Barack Obama is now a real candidate with a real chance to become the President of the United States, he'll pull over the black vote. New Hampshire probably hurt him with the black vote.

BILL MOYERS: Why?

SHELBY STEELE: Because whites voted for Hillary Clinton rather than him. And so, blacks say, Uh-huh, he can't make it. So, he will-- he has to win the white vote. He has to seem to be in command of that in order to get full support from blacks.

BILL MOYERS: And yet, the contradiction is you say that to reach the white vote, he has to do things that antagonize some blacks.

SHELBY STEELE: Almost everything he does... with this love affair he has with white America makes him very... in black America, it puts them on guard.

BILL MOYERS: You point out that the first thing that Barack Obama usually tells you about himself is that he was born to a white mother and a black father. Isn't that part of his political appeal, is that he transcends both black and white?

SHELBY STEELE: The fact that he has a white mother tells white Americans, signals to white Americans, that he has to give them the benefit of the doubt. That he can't think of white-- paint white Americans with a broad brush.

BILL MOYERS: He knows one...

SHELBY STEELE: As racist. He knows in the most intimate way that not all whites are racist. That I you have to go individual by individual. Well, instinctively white Americans perceive that in him and feel comfortable, feel more comfortable with him.

BILL MOYERS: And yet, at the same time, it's not all together positive, is it?

SHELBY STEELE: I share that background with him.

BILL MOYERS: You had a white mother.

SHELBY STEELE: I had a white mother and a black father as well. And I'm older than him. Grew up in segregation and probably had a different -- certainly had a different experience than he did. But coming of age as he did in the Seventies and Eighties and so forth when this black identity, this challenging identity was so intense--

BILL MOYERS: Black power, right?

SHELBY STEELE: Black power. Here's a kid being raised in an apartment in Hawaii by a white mother and two white grandparents with no connection either to his father as a father or to a racial identity. And you know, one of the themes I think that comes out of his first book, DREAMS FROM MY FATHER, is - almost an obsession with establishing himself as an authentic black. Of the feeling-- of achieving a sense of belonging. And I empathize with that. I went through a bit of that myself.

BILL MOYERS: You say that children of interracial unions often live under a degree of suspicion.

SHELBY STEELE: Yes.

BILL MOYERS: Why?

SHELBY STEELE: Because people know that you — I can remember in the Sixties, 'well,
your mother was white? Your mother was the enemy.'

BILL MOYERS: And you were collaborating with the enemy.

SHELBY STEELE: And so, you were collaborating. By birth, you were collaborating. You were at the very least, it was this sense of– there was a sense, you’re going to have to prove yourself a little more than the rest of us.

BILL MOYERS: Was there a moment you claimed blackness as your identity? That you definitively made that choice?

SHELBY STEELE: Well, and this is I think a difference in my case than Obama's, in segregation, you didn't get the choice. It was the one drop rule that applied. One drop of black blood and you’re black. That was the rule. That's what kept the wall between whites and blacks was this one drop rule. So I was raised with absolutely no ambiguity about that.

BILL MOYERS: Where?

SHELBY STEELE: On the south side of Chicago.

BILL MOYERS: Where Obama eventually became an organizer.

SHELBY STEELE: Yeah. That’s right.

BILL MOYERS: And he was raised in Hawaii and Indonesia.

SHELBY STEELE: Right.

BILL MOYERS: Because his mother moved there. And you think that environment made a different choice for him.

SHELBY STEELE: Yes. It intensified — it probably gave him a much more intense need to belong than I had. On the other hand, that background accounts for this fine successful highly educated polished young man that we see running for President today.

BILL MOYERS: You know, I’ve read that and it was very powerful. When describes four thirty in the morning. He’s just a child. His mother gets him out of bed out there in Hawaii or in Indonesia. And she makes him study. She makes him read.

SHELBY STEELE: She made him who he was. That’s right.

BILL MOYERS: His biography seems to be his platform.

SHELBY STEELE: But then, he turns around and says that maybe things are so desperate for blacks that they don’t need this model. That they can rely on black nationalism and blackness. Maybe it will give them, he uses the word an insularity out of which they can feel proud.Well, which is it? Is it your mama or is it Black Nationalism who's responsible for you being here? I want to know. I want-- I want you to-- I want you to-- what evidence do you have that Black Nationalism works? You know that what your mother did works. Why don’t you give her credit? Why don’t you build a politics out of that?

BILL MOYERS: But that seems to be me to be circumstance of birth — a lot of people not born with a mother like that or a father.

SHELBY STEELE: That’s-- yeah. But that doesn't mean it doesn’t - that that's not something that we ought to all be pressing for and asking for from all groups. Particularly groups like blacks in the inner city. If you don't have a mother that does that, you don’t have a father at all, what can schools do later on to overcome that?
BILL MOYERS: Who did it for you?

SHELBY STEELE: My mother and my father. Period. I went to wretched segregated schools that were abusive. And then, I saw something else. I saw my mother organize that little community and shut that school down. And boycott that school. So, I saw collective action, too. Collective action -- there's a place for it. It can work. And they made it a better school. So, I'm here solely because of my mother and my father.

BILL MOYERS: What would have happened if you had rejected blackness in the way he has?

SHELBY STEELE: In the way he has?

BILL MOYERS: Yeah. I mean, in a sense, he's rejected it. You describe what whites see in him.

SHELBY STEELE: Yes. He has -- in a sense, you're absolutely right. In a sense, bargainers do that. Bargainers do business with whites. And they don't do business with-- usually with challengers. Barack Obama is the first black America to bring bargaining into the political arena. Barack Obama is saying, I'm going to give you the-- I'm going to treat you as though you're not a racist. And I'm going to simply ask you to treat me as though I'm not black. Treat me as just-as an individual. Well, it's a nice bargain. But boy, does it make blacks nervous. Our blackness is our power. We think. I don't think it is. But we have the-- that's the delusion I think.

BILL MOYERS: What do you think is your power?

SHELBY STEELE: I think our power is the same as it is for anybody, any other group -- the collective energies, imagination of the individuals within the group. We're no better than what our individuals achieve. Identity should be the result of effort and achievement. It's not an agent. It's not going to bring you there.

BILL MOYERS: But you can't escape a part of your identity because it is about, as you say, blood and color. You can't escape that.

SHELBY STEELE: You can't escape it. And I certainly don't want to escape it. I, you know, I am black and happy to be so. But my identity is not my master. I'm my master. And I resent this, you know, civil rights leadership telling me what I should think and what issues I should support this way or that way. And that's where-- in-- black America, identity has become almost totalitarian.

BILL MOYERS: Totalitarian?

SHELBY STEELE: Yes.

BILL MOYERS: That's very strong word.

SHELBY STEELE: It is. It is.

BILL MOYERS: What do you mean?

SHELBY STEELE: That you subscribe to the idea that the essence of blackness is grounded in grievance. And if you vary from that, you are letting whites off the hook. And we're going to call you a sell out. We're going to call you an Uncle Tom.

BILL MOYERS: At the same time you write, "when someone tells you you're not really black, you hear their words as a little murder."

SHELBY STEELE: Yes.
BILL MOYERS: What are they killing in you?

SHELBY STEELE: They're taking away something that is sacred to me which is that I'm proud of being-- I look at the history of my people. And coming from that kind of oppression, it's glorious. I mean, look at the-- just in the last century, we've created a literature - that is on par with the literature of many nations. We transformed music all over the world. This, from this relatively small group of truly oppressed people. So, that I'm proud of that. And you get a little sense of superiority.

BILL MOYERS: Well deserved I think.

SHELBY STEELE: Yes.

BILL MOYERS: So how is it that to be, as you say, a quote true black involves, and I'm quoting you, "a slight corruption, a little habit of betrayal."

SHELBY STEELE: Yes.

BILL MOYERS: Explain that to me so that I can understand how you feel about it.

SHELBY STEELE: If in order to be black, if I'm going to fit myself into the current identity, I'm going to have to betray impulses, desires, certain aspirations in myself as an individual in order to squeeze myself into this identity which is, again, grounded in grievance. Maybe I as an individual don't believe that's the biggest problem that I face. But I've got to pretend that it's the biggest problem I face in order to-- stay inside the group. Stay inside the church as we say. And I'm going to be a back slider if I start to say grievance is really not the central thing.

BILL MOYERS: You say in the book that to be black means you have to wear a mask.

SHELBY STEELE: Absolutely. Absolutely.

BILL MOYERS: Do you wear a mask?

SHELBY STEELE: All of this work that you see here came about because I dropped-- I got exhausted with the whole pressure to — from whites and blacks — to wear a mask.

BILL MOYERS: What kind of mask? What kind of mask were you expected to wear?

SHELBY STEELE: I was in academia. I was expected to be a challenger. You should be-- you should have a chip on your shoulder. You should be angry. If you're not, you're going to take the pressure off of this institution and we'll lose. So, that chip on your shoulder is our power as a minority group. Well, I just got completely fed up with that. And again, the self betrayal that it continued to force me into, I began to understand, it was going to be me or the group. And I was going to have a life or I was just going to be a kind of surrogate for blackness. And it was a very difficult-- I was scared to death.

BILL MOYERS: Scared?

SHELBY STEELE: Scared to death.

BILL MOYERS: Of what?

SHELBY STEELE: Because I knew the price that that one would pay for that.

BILL MOYERS: And that price is?

SHELBY STEELE: That price is that you — I don't want to over dramatize this or seem to be playing the violin— but you enter a kind of exile where the group identifies you as
someone who is a threat. And part of being black is despising or having contempt for people like me. For people who refuse to wear the mask one way or the other.

**BILL MOYERS:** I understand that in the context of the Sixties. Black Power, the Seventies, and in the Eighties with the Reagan Revolution and anyone like you who supported the Reagans, the conservative movement in this country were called Uncle Toms. I can understand. But today, it seems to me, and I may be naive about this, but it seems to me that-- with Obama, that Obama is the result of a transformation in race in this country.

**SHELBY STEELE:** I-- --

**BILL MOYERS:** So that you're no longer penalized for being a black conservative.

**SHELBY STEELE:** Oh, boy.

**BILL MOYERS:** Am I wrong?

**SHELBY STEELE:** I think so. You know, it's no accident that 92 percent of blacks vote Democratic in every Presidential election no matter what. The black identity is identified today with liberal politics and the Democratic Party. If you're not a Democrat, you're not all together black.

**BILL MOYERS:** That's why you say for Obama, liberalism is blackness?

**SHELBY STEELE:** Yes. Because liberalism is what he has to offer blacks - it's what he has to offer them and say see I still believe in challenging. And he's, you know, he talks in the rhetoric of the civil rights movement and does a pretty good imitation of Dr. King often. As he's putting on his challenging mask in order to capture the affection of black America. He has to be very-- has to touch that very lightly or white America will say we like you precisely because you don't do that. You don't challenge. And so, he has to touch it very lightly.

I've had whites come up to me and say, I don't know if you ever have any contact with Obama. But I saw him in the paper the other day with Al Sharpton. He shouldn't do that. They didn't consciously know why they were saying that. But I-- he's a challenger. Barack Obama is the anti Al Sharpton. Al Sharpton is probably his best ally among whites.

**BILL MOYERS:** Because they-- when they see Sharpton, they think Obama is a great relief.

**SHELBY STEELE:** That's right.

**BILL MOYERS:** A breath of fresh air.

**SHELBY STEELE:** He relieves the anxiety of being white. That's what Obama does. And that's why he's-- he has so much affection.

**BILL MOYERS:** I know so many white politicians who have made their way by accommodation, to corporate contributions, to wealth, to the constituency.

**SHELBY STEELE:** It's the very nature-- it's the very nature of politics, which may be why Obama is such a good politician.

**BILL MOYERS:** And you say he's not a revolutionary. He's not a reformer. And when I read that in A BOUND MAN, I thought, yeah, he's a politician.

**SHELBY STEELE:** Look at his background. He felt he didn't belong. He had to accommodate on the black side. Yet, he knew whites, he had-- he knew very well how to in a sense manipulate whites. He knew them better than he knew blacks in many ways. So-- and that became a kind of talent. This bargaining became a talent.
BILL MOYERS: He does have a talent for politics.

SHELBY STEELE: And he understands white people. He understands them. What he says in his-- when he was a teenager, he realized that one things whites love is a black who's not angry. So, he knew that when he was a kid.

BILL MOYERS: And you write that, “the black identity Obama longs for means that you must join a politics that keeps alive the idea of white obligation to blacks.” You think that's Obama's mission, to keep alive the white obligation to blacks?

SHELBY STEELE: I think that that's what he tells blacks. I think that when he speaks as he did in Selma, as he did in Harlem not too long ago, he puts on the challenger's mask. And--

BILL MOYERS: He also, and when he spoke at Selma, I remember seeing that on television, he used that inflection of the southern-

SHELBY STEELE: Yes, he did.

BILL MOYERS: Of the southern dialect that you don't hear in the rest of his speeches.

SHELBY STEELE: That's right.

BILL MOYERS: Hillary Clinton did the same thing by the way. She tried to.

SHELBY STEELE: Yeah, she was-- it was not pleasant to listen to. Sometimes, Barack Obama is John F. Kennedy. Sometimes, he's Martin Luther King. Sometimes, he's Stokely Carmichael in 1968. He has these different masks that are tailored to the audience that he's in front of. And he does it with such facility that you, one, can not help but wonder who's the real-- what's his voice? What's his inflection?

BILL MOYERS: What do you see ten years from now with race relations in this country? Are we going to deepen the American dream?

SHELBY STEELE: I think so. I think that these paradigms I'm talking about exhaust themselves. We just get tired of them. We begin to see through them. If I could see what's the difference between bargaining and challenging, it's only because it's so vivid. We've done it so long that we're-- it has a familiarity, a recognizability. And so, I think at some point we do become exhausted. But we've played this game so long. And masking is something that comes inevitably to minority groups who use it to survive. It was a survival mechanism in slavery and segregation. And we're still using it. We're still entering the mainstream using it. We will get tired of that. Our children will and their children will get-- will be even more tired of it. And will understand I think that the challenge of the collective is to produce individuals.

BILL MOYERS: I understand that. You know, I'm tired of asking black people questions about race.

SHELBY STEELE: Yes.

BILL MOYERS: I'd like to know what you think about Schwarzenegger.

SHELBY STEELE: That's a good sign.

BILL MOYERS: I'd like to know what you think about economics. I'd like to know what you think about money and politics.

SHELBY STEELE: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: I don't want to just know what you think about being black or--
SHELBY STEELE: That's right. And I want to talk about those things, too.

BILL MOYERS: But aren't we being naive in a culture that is still racially divided that race is always on the table, but it's also under the table?

SHELBY STEELE: Yes. Yes. We are-- it's still plagues us. And again, I think Obama was an opportunity to look at some of the forces that — I would love nothing more, I don't care what his politics end up being, liberal or conservative. I would love nothing more than to see him break through and into, this is my experience. These are my values. I know these work because they worked in my life. They are responsible for me being here where I am today.

BILL MOYERS: The book is A BOUND MAN. Shelby Steele, thank you very much for being on THE JOURNAL.

SHELBY STEELE: Well, thank you very much for having me. I enjoyed it.

BILL MOYERS: I did too. BARACK OBAMA: We always knew our climb would be steep. But in record numbers, you came out and spoke up for change. And with your voices and your votes, you made it clear that at this moment - in this election - there is something happening in America.

BILL MOYERS: That's it for the JOURNAL. I'm Bill Moyers.

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