June 6, 2008

BILL MOYERS: Welcome to the Journal.

I never thought we'd see this in my lifetime. When I was growing up in the segregated south the Democratic Party was the bastion of white male supremacy. The inequality of the races was a given, God-ordained and immutable. Women were okay, as long as they kept to their place. And now look what's happened. A black man and a white woman battled each other to the wire for the nomination by a party that turned itself upside down, inside out, and around in my lifetime. Barack Obama was born the year John F. Kennedy took the oath of office as President of the United States.

JOHN F. KENNEDY: I, John Fitzgerald Kennedy do solemnly swear . . .

BILL MOYERS: At his inauguration, I stood in the clear, cold weather and felt a shiver, not from the weather, but from the hint of things to come. Two years later, Obama was a toddler, and I was 27, and there was Kennedy on television proposing a civil rights bill to end the awful discrimination enforced on black people throughout America's history. It was 45 years ago next week — June 11, 1963 — and the President asked, "Are we to say to the world — and much more importantly to each other — that this is the land of the free, except for the Negroes; that we have no second-class citizens, except Negroes; that we have no class or caste system, no ghettos, no master race, except with respect to Negroes."

JOHN F. KENNEDY: The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section of the State in which he is born, has about one-half as much chance of completing a high school as a white baby born in the same place on the same day, one-third as much chance of completing college, one-third as much chance of becoming a professional man, twice as much chance of becoming unemployed. . .

BILL MOYERS: Tragically, Kennedy was assassinated as Congress was still battling over his civil rights bill and Lyndon Johnson was thrust into the White House. I went with him and saw Johnson take up the cause. Martin Luther King marched, and Lyndon Johnson maneuvered, and on the 2nd of July in 1964 the President signed the Civil Rights Act into law. The fight wasn't over; he knew it. The President told me, "I think we've just handed the South to the Republican Party for the rest of my life — and yours." Sure enough, the backlash was so bitter, and the Republican Party, once the party of Lincoln, so exploited it, that I figured this country would have a serious woman candidate for President long before any person of African descent. As the choice came down this year to one or the other, is one of those shifts that democracy and history take when we least suspect it.

BARACK OBAMA: Because of you, tonight I can stand before you and say that I will be the Democratic nominee for President of the United States.

BILL MOYERS: Now, the young African American man whose very life defies the grim odds laid out by President Kennedy, will become the nominee of the party that once embodied white supremacy. Whether you like Obama or not, whether you intend to vote for him or not, America has just made another great turn away from the fierce grip of a savage past. Stay tuned.

BILL MOYERS: The news of the democratic presidential nominee is sinking in around the world as well. Banner headlines marked this historic milestone — from Uruguay, Japan to Kenya.

Even the conservative Times of London notes that the Obama campaign has, quote,
"rekindled America's faith in its prodigious powers of reinvention — and the world's admiration for America."

And surely, after a little time to reflect and celebrate, the news is sinking in for Obama himself, news that may manifest itself in two simple words: "now what?"

To contemplate that question and more, I am joined by Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Ron Walters.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson is familiar to viewers of this program. She's the director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Here is her latest book — PRESIDENTS CREATING THE PRESIDENCY: DEEDS DONE IN WORDS.

Ron Walters turned from politics to scholarship after working as Jesse Jackson's issues director during his two campaigns for the democratic nomination back in the 1980s. He directs the African American Leadership Center at the University of Maryland, where he teaches government and politics.

Among his eight books is this newest: THE PRICE OF RACIAL RECONCILIATION, and this one — FREEDOM IS NOT ENOUGH: BLACK VOTERS, BLACK CANDIDATES, AND AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS.

Good to have you both with me.

RON WALTERS: Good to be with you.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Good to be here.

BILL MOYERS: Let me ask you this, I mean we're talking about a man who, four years ago, was in the State Senate of Illinois. Was elected to the United States Senate. Served two years before he announced, "I'm running for President." He's only 46 or 47 years old. And he's taken the democratic process by storm. The democratic nominating process. Is this about him?

RON WALTERS: No. You cannot understand this election with respect to Barack Obama alone. And a lot of people have tried to do that. And it simply doesn't make sense. What has happened is that I think that he is he has tapped a vein, you know, in the American people about profound change.

When you look at the state of the American economy. When you look at the fact that people are losing their homes. When you look at the fact that they're embarrassed about our standing abroad. The way in which this war has turned out. The American people have come to the end of their generosity.

Not only with this Administration, but I think with the conservative movement. With the Republican aspect of that. And so I think what they want to do is they want to turn, and he's been able to articulate this. I think what Barack Obama did was to see, in the 2006 election cycle what happened. The American people said, "We want change so much we're gonna turn the control of the congress from Republican to Democrat." And then, in the special elections since then, we're gonna do the same thing. So he says, "Well, sure, this is what's going on here. I'm gonna build a campaign around the theme of change. And I'm gonna be able to articulate it better than anybody else. And I'm gonna use movement language." We-

BILL MOYERS: Movement language?

RON WALTERS: We.

BILL MOYERS: We. Plural.
RON WALTERS: We. We are going to-

BILL MOYERS: We the people.

RON WALTERS: This is about you. That's what-

BILL MOYERS: We shall overcome.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: And, yes, we can.

RON WALTERS: That's right. And all those-

BILL MOYERS: And, yes, we can.

RON WALTERS: And there are all of these other people-

BILL MOYERS: That's interesting.

BILL MOYERS: 'Cause the age of me, which is what the 80s were about-

RON WALTERS: I. Yeah. I.

BILL MOYERS: I, you know, and me, to the age of us and we.

RON WALTERS: Well, no, not so much the age. We're talking about this campaign.

BILL MOYERS: Oh, all right.

RON WALTERS: Because all of the other candidates thought it was still the age of I. So they came out there and they said, "This is what I will do for you. I have been in the Congress forever and Washington forever. And if you just follow me."

And he was saying we and you. And this is the movement language. This is a whole different thing. So what he was doing was empowering the American people to follow him in this movement for change. And none of the rest of them got it until it was too late.

BILL MOYERS: What do you think about that?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: I think that the disaffection with the Iraq war was very strong and very palpable, I think economic anxiety, strong, palpable. I think dissatisfaction with the Bush Administration on many grounds, strong, palpable. And I think there are times in which the young come into politics, now they sometimes don't stay, but they come into politics.

They come into politics in time of war. They're more likely to turn out the vote. They come into politics in time of economic anxiety. I think the young were there waiting for a candidate who could harness their aspirations for a different kind of future.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: We know that the young generation that entered politics when FDR was running for President came in as Democrats and they stayed as Democrats into old age. We know that the generation that came into politics during the Reagan revolution, so called, was far more likely to stay Republican over its younger years into its middle aged years. What is exciting for the Democratic Party about the candidacy of Barack Obama, and he has the youth vote. Hillary Clinton had the seniors vote. He has the youth vote.

RON WALTERS: Well-
KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: And that's the future.

RON WALTERS: But not only the youth vote, you know. And I've tried to caution people about simply saying that this is only a constituency of youth and blacks. Because if that were the case he wouldn't be winning in all these white states. I mean, he has a very significant American population behind him.

And let's be very clear about that. The young people, yes, they came in between 2000, 2004, something like 40 million new young people came in. And they are poised to go further than that this time around. The long history that you just cited is absolutely correct.

The problem we've had is keeping them in the electorate. Because they've come in and then they've come down. The difference that I sense is that now there has been an infrastructure built around turning them out, about letting them know what the issues are.

This is the MTV generation. This is the internet generation. They're involved in fundraising. And so we now have this mechanism that you didn't have before that is likely to keep young people somewhat interested in involved in campaigns. And I wouldn't be surprised if this time the difference between 2004 and 2008 isn't six million. And about 40 percent of those African American young people.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: And one other thing, if you're just involved in a campaign, there's always a chance that you don't then carry on that level of activism. We don't have that many campaigns. But what the Obama campaign is doing is setting up a training structure to train this cadre of newly involved individuals, not all of them young.

This cadre of newly involved individuals in how to produce change. If you actually create agents of change then their obligation is not simply to participate politics every four years, or every two years, but to now create a different kind of community.

The community organizer who is running for President is trying to find a way to organize politics differently in this country. And if he succeeds he transforms the political landscape. Because imagine that you have this large active group, it follows politics more closely.

As a result, it holds politicians more accountable. And, importantly, its issue agenda is more likely to be treated seriously. And I may tend to over weight the young in this for this reason. When you have a group that under-votes in proportion to its population as much as the young have traditionally done, that's the group that can create a huge amount of change if it just starts voting in higher numbers.

Because politicians don't talk to your interests if you don't vote ordinarily. And if the young start to vote, look what happens. Instead of saying, "Well, let's have this social program which you'll pay for, great grandchildren. You'll pay for, new young generation out there." Now you have a group that's at the table thinking in the long term. Because it has a long horizon.

RON WALTERS: But I think he has to do something to make that possible. And that is I've argued that he has to institutionalize, that is to contribute to institutionalizing their power outside of government. Because-

BILL MOYERS: How did he do that?

RON WALTERS: Well you know, there have been people who have done that. They have run for President and all of a sudden they have, you know, fighting for America, this organization that they've created with chapters and fundraising structures. And things like the ability to intervene in congressional districts and to call up members of Congress.

BILL MOYERS: Build a movement.

RON WALTERS: That's right.
BILL MOYERS: Progressive movement that happened.

RON WALTERS: Well, this is happening-

BILL MOYERS: Populist movement.

RON WALTERS: If you look at the Republican side, since 19— mid 1970s, they have built this amazing infrastructure of organizations. So that their ability to deal with a public policy agenda has not just been all these people inside government. It's also been in this tremendous apparatus outside of government.

BILL MOYERS: Jesse Jackson's campaign in 1988 — you worked on it — was perceived to be a black campaign. But Obama's campaign has not perceived to be a black campaign, has it?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: When I heard a commentator say, when Senator Obama announced that he's running to be the first black President, I said, from my cultural tradition, he's running to be the President. He's running to be our — the President of all of us.

RON WALTERS: That's right.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: And, to some extent, to say that he's running to be the first black President, I knew what the commentator meant, but I thought that was problematic for that candidacy. I think it misunderstood the candidacy.

RON WALTERS: Well, I think you're right. And that media has sort of a tradition of overemphasizing race in everything. But your point, I think, was very right on about them perceiving Jesse to be a black candidate. Even though, in that campaign, we tried to reach out to whites at every instance. But this was the height of Reaganism. And-

BILL MOYERS: The 1980s.

RON WALTERS: Yes. Yes. And the conservative tradition. We didn't have an opportunity then to do what he's doing now. Because, right now, what we see, in the words of many of our analysts, is that the conservative movement has crashed into a wall. And people are beginning to see around it and through it for the first time.

BILL MOYERS: If Hillary Clinton had been the nominee, wouldn't she also be representing as historic a correction as Obama is representing?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Yes. And if Hillary Clinton had been the nominee she would have looked back to a tradition that included Shirley Chisholm as a woman, but also as an African American, who helped set in place assumptions that a woman could aspire to the presidency. And that a woman could be qualified for that job.

We always assumed, in studying gender and politics, that the barrier for a woman was going to be Commander in Chief. That a woman would never pass that threshold. And that, as a result, you might have highly qualified individuals, who were women, who would aspire, but they wouldn't get there. Well, Hillary Clinton, according to the polls, is considered by the public to be an acceptable commander in chief.

BILL MOYERS: Are you saying that we've overcome, in both counts, some very important barriers here?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: I believe that we have. And I think the challenge is to ensure that this moment is a moment that we will look back on and say, "And the general election did nothing to falsify the moment now."

BILL MOYERS: Well, that-
KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: It did nothing to say that there was false hope in this moment. Then I think we can say we've had a good election.

RON WALTERS: Well, see, this is the caveat that I was thinking about as you were talking. Here's a woman who has a very unique situation, a unique history with the American people. But certainly with the black community.

This has been very alienating, the way in which she has run. And for example, just the other night, after the last two primaries, there was a moment there where she could have been very graceful. And, yet, I think what she wanted to do, and there's some understanding of that, was to play this out. To say, "I want to finish on the terms that most women understand. And to stand my ground," and so forth and so on. But the context of it, again, is you're playing against another historical era. Another historical fact. We may never have this again. And so what I'm wondering is, will these things pertain if you don't have all of these special circumstances to deal with? When a woman runs for President.

BILL MOYERS: Ron, I have a good colleague here in this building who is an African American woman. And she was on the verge of tears the other day after Tuesday. Because she was both joyful and heartbroken. And she expressed it to me in the hall later.

She said, "You know, I have always wanted to vote for the first viable black candidate, and I've always wanted to vote for the first viable woman candidate. And here I had to make this choice." I couldn't bring myself to ask her what her choice was. Did you have any sympathy for the African American woman torn in this season?

RON WALTERS: I do. And this certainly came up in the South Carolina primary. Where the reporters were asking a lot of African American women what they do. And the studies, of course, tell us that race is more dynamic than gender in terms of political choice. Especially in the black community.

And that has its own history in terms of the way in which one interprets and experience of African Americans. But I think that the way in which people also parse their pride about this moment has to do again with the elevation of race — Martin Luther King Jr. and the progression. But there is some criticism, I must say, just to be truthful in the black community. Because you don't hear him addressing, very often, the specific issues that are part of our condition. The specific expectations that African Americans have, were he to be President of the United States. Why doesn't he do that Ron?

RON WALTERS: Because he is somebody that wants to be President. Seventy percent of the population is white. And so I can — here, again, you have these clash of agendas. Clashes of experiences. Clashes of interpretations.

And clash of agendas. And I think that you have to give some credence to the black community. Because there is also a sophistication there which says, "We kind of understand what he has to do." So we're not gonna press him to wall to do that. We know that if he gets that job he might do something, you know, to alleviate our condition.

BILL MOYERS: You have said if he succeeds. Now, back on the ground, where facts remain facts — what happens now? What does John McCain and the Republican Party do to deal with this phenomenon you've both been describing?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: If the town hall proposal that is offered by Senator McCain is accepted by Barack Obama we have an electorate right now that has been paying more attention to politics in the primary season than ordinarily we see in primary seasons.

BILL MOYERS: And by the town hall proposal you mean the idea that they would go out together and have —

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Televised town halls, perhaps weekly, for ten weeks over summer. And what the possibility exists that an electorate that is more attentive than we have seen in the past, and more energized. Look at this unprecedented amount of primary
voting.

Now, instead of saying, "Okay, summer vacation, we'll come back to politics after Labor Day," stays attentive through summer, at a level that increases its ability to understand some of the complex problems the next President has to address.

BILL MOYERS: Is it to Obama's gain to do that? Or McCain's gain? Why would-

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: I think it's — I think they both benefit.

RON WALTERS: I'm not so sure that he benefits, that Barack Obama benefits from that. What we saw in the debates, in the primary season. He does very well in a stand up kind of a framework — he's a great speech maker. He can read the teleprompter and so forth. When I put him up there-

BILL MOYERS: Obama?

RON WALTERS: Yes. And then I put John McCain up there doing the same thing clear advantage, as far as I'm concerned, goes for Obama. So why would Obama's people bring him down from that perch where he's so good and put him in a context where John McCain is good?

John McCain is good in sort of this kind of format. He is not very good with teleprompters and standing up.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: I disagree.

RON WALTERS: Alright.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Because I think that, in the clash of competing ideas, these candidates are both going to look good and strong. And I think the advantage that he gains as a prospective President is worth the possibility of also having Senator McCain on that stage looking better than he would be if he were delivering stump speeches. Which he will not be doing across summer in any paid format to reach the electorate.

RON WALTERS: I agree. I agree.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: That we can be sure of.

RON WALTERS: I agree.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: And I think the — if what Senator Obama is seeking is a different kind of politics that yields a different kind of governance we have to find a way to find campaign forums that let candidates reach to some complexity about difficult issues that require cost and trade off. And-

RON WALTERS: After he's President.

BILL MOYERS: You see, what's different about this is, as I listen to you two, is that in the Senate McCain and Obama were collegial. And both of them have a sense that there is — that this old age of Nixonian politics has run its course. And that they may, in fact, want to have a collegial campaign.

Remember, Barry Goldwater and John F. Kennedy had agreed to campaign in 1964 by traveling the country and having debates together. It could be that the pendulum has swung back to the kind of collegially that doesn't work, necessarily, in primaries. But just might be right for this new era that some people think we're entering.

RON WALTERS: Well, the differences are so sharp. I mean, I think that might work if the differences weren't as sharp as they are. And I think when you have differences in, both in
foreign and domestic policy, that are so wide — trying to arrive at a collegial, you know, agreement on these things, especially with a different party, is really an onerous task. I mean, I wouldn't bet on that.

BILL MOYERS: Really?

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: But it's possible to say that one is respectful without saying that one is trying to find a forum in which one compromises.

RON WALTERS: Oh, I hear you. I do respect —

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: I mean, I think these are both candidates disposed to be respectful to each other.

RON WALTERS: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: I think if you put them together in an environment in which they articulate as forcefully as they could their alternative positions, they could do it in a way that would be respectful and informative for the electorate. And I think it would be great television.

RON WALTERS: Okay. Alright.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: I also think that there are areas in the national agenda right now, we have a broad national agenda right now for the next President. This isn't just simply a presidency about one or two issues. This is a presidency in which the next President has to confront and confront quickly a whole series of things —

RON WALTERS: A whole series of issues.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: -that we have not done what we ought to have done about.

RON WALTERS: That's right. That's right. That's right.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: And if you want to move to governance as expeditiously as possible, I think you have to have a different campaign structure. And so the question becomes what would let it work for both of them that would involve the electorate. If it weren't gonna appeal to an electorate and drawing and audience, it would be useless.

RON WALTERS: But I'm not so sure about that. Because, you know, if you have, and I've been using this word, as very few analysts have, and that is a landslide. This is likely to be an overwhelming electoral result in the fall. And, if that happens, you have a President who really has the advantage of a honeymoon that might last a year or two.

In that context what you're trying to do is to achieve as much as possible as quickly as possible with the forces that you have. Not necessarily taking your time to build sort of a collegial or bipartisan you may not need in both houses. So I think that a lot will depend upon how this thing turns out in the fall.

BILL MOYERS: I'm respectful of both of you, but I have to be mindful of the time. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Ron Walters, if in fact these two men do meet, one way or another this summer, come back and let's critique their performances. Thank you both.

BILL MOYERS: We'll be back in a moment for a look at what news might be slipping under the radar. . .But, first, remember that this is the time we turn to you to be the public in public broadcasting. This station needs your support.

BILL MOYERS: We like to hear from you to know what you're thinking of the Journal. So right now we want to share some of your comments that have had us talking. We brought
filmmakers Phil Donahue and Ellen Spiro on the broadcast to discuss Body of War, their documentary about Iraq War veteran Tomas Young.

MOTHER: This is my Tomas. This is when he went into Iraq.

TOMAS YOUNG: I don't need to come out here to my living room and see a flag and a purple heart to tell me what situation I'm in.

BILL MOYERS: Here's what some of you had to say:

VOICE 1: I love my country and I voluntarily took an oath to defend the Constitution but sometimes I feel like our elected public officials take advantage of our volunteer army's benevolence. It's like they are trying to squeeze the patriotism out of us by putting us in no-win situations. . . Richard Spencer

VOICE 2: We saw your show on Body of War and it became clear to us what is the quintessence of true patriotism — displayed by a man of self respect, honor, courage, and universal humanity. Syed Amir Bukhari

BILL MOYERS: And lawyer Philippe Sands uncovered which top American officials were behind the global trail of torture:

PHILIPPE SANDS: It's not just that a crime was committed. It's that there's been a failure to take responsibility. There's been a cover up from the top in terms of pointing the finger to people who should not take blame for what has happened.

VOICE 3: I have been an international teacher for ten years, and never thought I would see a day where my own government would condone torture. . . Elizabeth Wyant

VOICE 4: The problem is that no one in Washington ever really pays for their transgressions. The Iran Contra class of '86 is still running around D.C. collecting paychecks. Until someone does pay for their crimes, the behavior in D.C. will not change. Andy

VOICE 5: In all the conversations about torture, we don't usually hear about, or from the survivors themselves. These are real people with families who try to put their lives together after suffering the unimaginable. . .. Denise Curry

BILL MOYERS: And finally we aired a report on skyrocketing food prices and how our nation's costly farm policies have helped the wealthy few even as many people go hungry.

ROSABELLE WALKER: Right now in my house, I got two halves of a green pepper in my freezer. Period. No food — I got some canned goods on the shelf. No food in my house. No money to go buy it.

VOICE 6: I can tell you from experience that my entire income goes to food costs and my family's food stamps don't cover more than one week's worth of food expenses. It is more challenging than even you know. Susan Winters

VOICE 7: Do not forget that even though there were, (and are) abuses of the farm program, that the farm program saved thousands of farmers from bankruptcy as recently as the late 90s and early 2000s. . .we cannot throw the baby out with the bathwater so to speak, and vilify all farm payments and farmers. Don

BILL MOYERS: Keep your comments coming — by mail, e-mail, or on the blog at pbs.org and we'll keep reading.

ANNOUNCER : We now return to Bill Moyers in the studio.

BILL MOYERS: If you flipped on your television these last few days there was no escaping
former White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan. He was on just about every television show except "Desperate Housewives" and "Sponge Bob Square Pants", he was relentlessly flogging his new, tell-all book, What Happened.

SCOTT McCLELLAN: This is an indictment of the culture in Washington. . .

BILL MOYERS: McClellan says boldly that the Bush Administration ran a "Political propaganda campaign" to mislead the American public into supporting the invasion of Iraq.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: Good evening, I'm pleased to take your questions tonight. . .

BILL MOYERS: While there's nothing surprising in the book, this one-time insider confirms what just about everyone knew — that America was deceived, with the media's help.

Here with me now to talk about the deception, how the media responded and other news stories lurking under-reported beneath the radar are John Walcott, Washington Bureau Chief of McClatchy News, one of his ace reporters, Jonathan Landay, and Greg Mitchell, known to many of us as the watchdog's watchdog. He edits the influential magazine of the newspaper industry, Editor and Publisher, and is the author of this new book, SO WRONG FOR SO LONG: HOW THE PRESS, THE PUNDITS — AND THE PRESIDENT FAILED — ON IRAQ.

BILL MOYERS: Welcome to the three of you.

GREG MITCHELL: Thank you

JOHN WALCOTT: Thank you

BILL MOYERS: There's been all this media frenzy about Scott McClellan's book. Did McClellan, whom you know, did McClellan do a good thing in writing this book?

JOHN WALCOTT: I think on balance, yes. This is one of the first times, I think, that a member of the President's inner circle, one of the Texans who came to Washington with him was regarded as being very close to him, has gone this far in denouncing what the Administration did with respect to Iraq and has come right out and said that they deceived the American people. And that is news.

BILL MOYERS: But you've been — you started writing that five years ago—

GREG MITCHELL: Right.

BILL MOYERS: -six years ago.

GREG MITCHELL: Well, that's what I mean. It's not news-

BILL MOYERS: You were saying that the Press Corps, television and press in Washington, complicit.

GREG MITCHELL: Right. Well, that's — again, it's different coming from the chief White House spokesman than coming from me — you know, for better or worse. But you know, I — that's what I mean. I think what's troubling to me is the response to that. The media has not responded by saying, "Boy, we really got caught out here, and we really need to look at what we did wrong. And we're, you know, we need to report on what the mistakes we made and what we — you know, what we've really learned now."

JONATHAN LANDAY: What's disappoints me is that here was an opportunity, once again, but a very large opportunity for major news organizations to do the mea culpa they never did, to admit that they indeed failed to do what they're supposed to do, failed to be the watchdogs they're supposed to be.
And yet we saw exactly the opposite for the most part. And I was just left breathless by some of the things that I heard where you heard correspondents say, "Well, we did ask the tough questions. We asked them to the White House spokesmen," Scott McClellan and others. And you say to yourself, "And you expected to get real answers? You expected them to say from the White House podium — 'Yeah, well, there were disagreements over the intelligence, but we ignored them'" when the President made his speeches and the Vice President made his speeches. No, I don't think so.

GREG MITCHELL: Yeah, what Charles Gibson said. We wouldn't — I don't think we would ask any different questions. I mean, it's shocking-

JOHN WALCOTT: Well-

GREG MITCHELL: -to me that someone would say we would even with the chance to relive this experience and so much we got wrong — going to war is — which is still going on over five years later, all the lost lives, all the financial costs of that. And then to look back at this, you know, this terrible episode in history of American journalism and say that if I could do it all over again, I'm not sure we would ask any different questions.

JOHN WALCOTT: Well, I'm not — I don't know what questions ABC or anybody else asked. They may have asked all the right questions. The trouble is they asked all the wrong people.

BILL MOYERS: Yeah, if asking the question you all proved that asking the question is not essential unless you ask it to the person who can really tell you what you need to know.

JONATHAN LANDAY: And you have to take the time to find those people. It's not in-

GREG MITCHELL: And you have to play it up a lot.

JONATHAN LANDAY: It's not-

GREG MITCHELL: You can't bury it.

JONATHAN LANDAY: You know, these people are on the — this, you know, this grind to get the thing out, you know? We gotta get it out right away. You know, we got live television going on. We've got, you know, 24-hour cable TV news. We gotta — when do you have the time to sit and cultivate sources to get them to talk to you about what essentially is top secret information?

JOHN WALCOTT: Yeah, but there are some terrific reporters in television — you know, at the Defense Department in particular. Jim Miklashevski at NBC, David Martin at CBS. What I think happened in part was another problem, which is they have sources. Believe me. I wish I had some of the same sources they have. But whatever information came from those unnamed anonymous sources is trumped by Donald Rumsfeld at the podium or Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice saying, "We can't allow the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."

BILL MOYERS: Over and over again.

JOHN WALCOTT: Over and over again on camera. And that trumps the kind of reporting that John and Warren Strobel did from these mid-level guys who actually know that there's no prospect of any smoking gun let alone a mushroom cloud. And so when it gets to packaging television news, it's picture driven, it's celebrity driven, and that doesn't allow much room for this kind of hard-nosed reporting under the radar.

JONATHAN LANDAY: I also want to say one thing I think that it behooves the media to come out — major companies to say, "Yes, we got it wrong," because if you look at surveys today, the American public has lost an enormous amount of trust in the news media, in the people who are supposed to be watch, their watchdogs over government. And yet the number of people who trust the media is, like, 25, 26 percent.
So at a time when you have this problem, doesn't it behoove you to try and start fixing it?

**GREG MITCHELL:** There's been numerous opportunities actually just in the last few weeks for the media to do this self-assessment. And you remember the fifth anniversary of the start of the war. Almost no media self-assessment at that time. Pointing fingers at everybody but themselves. There was the 4,000 deaths in Iraq. There was the fifth anniversary of "mission accomplished." Another great opportunity for this. We had the scandal of the Pentagon media generals, as I call them -

**GREG MITCHELL:** We had that opportunity. Now we've had Scott McClellan. There's been at least six opportunities in the last two months for the media to do this long delayed and much needed self-assessment, self-criticism to the American public and it hasn't happened.

**BILL MOYERS:** But, you know, there are people in these large institutions and there are large institutions that do not believe they got it wrong. I mean, Fox News was reinforcing the Administration's messages back then and still does today. They don't believe they got it wrong.

**JOHN WALCOTT:** You know, if Fox News's mission is to defend Republican administrations then they're right, they didn't fail. One of the things that puzzles me about all of this, in Scott's book is this notion that it was the liberal media. I'm not — I don't understand what liberal versus conservative has to do with this. I would have thought that conservatives would be the ones to ask questions about a march to war. How much is this gonna cost us? What's the effect of this gonna be on our military, on our country's strength overseas?

I don't think it's a liberal conservative question at all. I think that's, frankly, a canard by Scott

**BILL MOYERS:** What about the experts who predicted that the war would be quick and bloodless? They were terribly wrong but they're still on the air today pontificating. I mean, there seems to be no price to be paid for having been wrong about so serious an issue of life and death, war and peace.

**GREG MITCHELL:** You can't be wrong enough I think is what the-

**JOHN WALCOTT:** Well, again, they are celebrities. And, you know, Tom Cruise can make a bad movie and go on and get paid, you know, millions for the next movie. It's the same phenomenon. A name is what matters.

**JOHN WALCOTT:** And it's about celebrity. It's about conflict. It's about-

**JONATHAN LANDAY:** Ratings.

**JOHN WALCOTT:** Ratings, the sort of energy you get from that kind of thing. And I think, I don't know how Greg feels about this, but I think there are some very serious questions out there about the future of old-school reporting and the business model that supports it.

**GREG MITCHELL:** Yeah, the cutbacks have been tremendous. And they've lost the virtual all-star team at the Washington Post just in the recent-

**BILL MOYERS:** - 100 buyouts recently-

**GREG MITCHELL:** And a lot of their best, very best reporters. So it's, you know, it is a major problem.

**BILL MOYERS:** Do you still encourage young people to come into journalism, if a young — if a 22-year-old Jonathan Landay or Warren Strobel walked into your office today and said, "I want a job, Mr. Walcott, because I wanna tell the truth about what's happening in Washington," do you say, "Good, come on in"?
JOHN WALCOTT: I ask if they have a trust fund.

BILL MOYERS: You're being facetious but-

JOHN WALCOTT: Only to a limited extent.

GREG MITCHELL: There's still much enthusiasm among the journalism schools.

JOHN WALCOTT: There is.

GREG MITCHELL: Journalism schools are bursting with people.

BILL MOYERS: But there are no — there are fewer and fewer institutions where they can go for the kind of salary and benefits and support that a journalist needs like everybody else.

JOHN WALCOTT: No, that's exactly right. And there are fewer and fewer places that are gonna encourage and allow and teach them to do the kind of reporting that John and Warren and others have done on Iraq and other subjects, the kind of reporting that, by definition, is unpopular. And-

BILL MOYERS: Unpopular because?

JOHN WALCOTT: Because the public doesn't wanna hear it.

BILL MOYERS: Doesn't wanna hear-

JOHN WALCOTT: Doesn't wanna hear the President lied to them. Doesn't wanna hear that the local police chief is on the take. You know, people don't like necessarily to hear all that kind of stuff. And when you're worried about, above all, your advertising revenue, you become more vulnerable to those kinds of pressures. You know, it-

GREG MITCHELL: Or career pressure. It's not necessarily good for your career either to be someone that certain sources won't talk to or-

JOHN WALCOTT: Yeah, that's-

GREG MITCHELL: -people don't like you, don't like your paper or-

JOHN WALCOTT: No, you talk about, you know, gee, who gets invited on the TV shows and who becomes a celebrity? Well, the skunks don't get invited to the garden party. And part of our job is to be the skunks at the garden party.

BILL MOYERS: Well, on that odor-

BILL MOYERS: What is the cost of all this? What is happening today that isn't getting the coverage in the media, television, press, everywhere, that it should be getting?

GREG MITCHELL: I've been focusing in recent weeks and there's a lot of this in my book on the surging suicide rate among U.S. soldiers in Iraq and among the veterans at home.

BILL MOYERS: Sort of the dirty secret of this war, isn't it?

GREG MITCHELL: Well, yeah. We've had — the Pentagon admits there's been 40,000 cases of diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder since 2003 among the veterans. The Rand Corporation, — no left-wing outfit — says there's 300,000 vets with serious mental issues going. And the suicide rate, you know, has been surging. So this is, you know, just one of many issues that we need to be focusing on now.
BILL MOYERS: The war's costing us $5,000 a second, $12 1/2 billion to $13 billion a month. Economists tell us the ultimate cost will, could be trillions of dollars. And yet that story gets very little traction in the mainstream press.

GREG MITCHELL: Yeah, it really took the Stiglitz's book to really get that going.

BILL MOYERS: Joseph Stiglitz, the economist-

GREG MITCHELL: And just as the McClellan book, for all its faults — it took the McClellan book to get the media at least talking about the responsibility in the war. So it's a bad sign when books have to launch, you know, launch newsrooms into-

BILL MOYERS: But why aren't other people picking it up and staying with the costs because this is having a rippling effect here at home? Infrastructure, schools, healthcare, and all of it-

GREG MITCHELL: Yeah, you'd think so-

BILL MOYERS: -that would seem to hit people in the viscera.

GREG MITCHELL: Most bipartisan issue, most patriotic you might say. It affects every American. I think Americans have made that connection. I think they made it long ago. There's always been this disconnect where people have said, "Well, you know, why is it that 60 or 70 percent disapproval for the President and for the war?" Why are so many people saying the war was a mistake?

You know, how is that supported by what's going on over there, despite the surge, you know? There's been a lot of favorable publicity about the progress under the surge, you know, accurate or not. But the polls aren't budging. And the reason is the people figured out long ago, long ago that the war was a mistake and that it's incredibly costly in the human and financial and even moral terms.

JOHN WALCOTT: I think the failure to report as probably aggressively as we should on the costs of this little venture, which are only beginning to count. I mean, you were talking about PTSD. Some of those cases aren't gonna show up for 20 years.

BILL MOYERS: Just like Agent Orange in Vietnam.

JOHN WALCOTT: Yeah. But with psychological ailments in particular, a lot of soldiers can keep them bottled up or keep them private, keep them within the walls of their house for some period of time. So we're not gonna know for a long time. But the more you talk about Joe Stiglitz's $3 trillion and PTSD and the state of our VA, which Chris Adams and others in our office have reported on very extensively, the more you're magnifying the price of your initial lapses. And I think a lot of people are just reluctant to go there.

JONATHAN LANDAY: Let me suggest something else. There are two wars going on right now that this country's involved in. And we've been pretty much focused on just one and that's Iraq. But, you know, there are 33,000 American troops in Afghanistan. And I don't think that gets virtually any coverage at all. I'm willing to bet that the percentage of time that's given to covering this other war, which most experts agree is a far more serious for U.S. national security than Iraq is.

And beyond that then you have the question of the tribal areas in Pakistan, which U.S. intelligence community says this is where the gravest terrorist threat to the United States lies. And yet this is virtually — I mean, people write about it. But this is a black hole virtually which the United States is deeply involved in that we don't see a lot of meaningful, I mean, in-depth coverage of.

BILL MOYERS We are hearing speculation about Iran and people are skeptical, frankly, about taking seriously the intelligence threats on Iran given how we were misled about Iraq.
JOHN WALCOTT: To be fair, Iran is a much tougher problem than Iraq ever was. The core of the Administration's case about Iraq was that Saddam Hussein supported international terrorism and, as John said, might give WMD to a terrorist group. That was preposterous from the start. Iran, on the other hand, does support international terrorist groups with a fair amount of enthusiasm.

So they're a different kettle of fish. Second, they do have a nuclear program. And no one really knows the full scope of it. They've never really come clean about it. No one is quite sure where all the facilities are. So in fairness, they are a tougher problem.

JONATHAN LANDAY: There's another huge difference. The Administration that once said that, you know, we'll go it alone if we have to, they don't believe in multilateral, I forget what the-

JOHN WALCOTT: Anything.

JONATHAN LANDAY: -multilateral anything, are working through institutions that they disparaged and ignored before the invasion of Iraq. The UN Security Council, talked about on Iran now. The UN Security Council, they've been pursuing diplomatic initiatives there for several years now. And they've gotten three rounds of sanctions.

And the International Atomic Energy Agency. They pushed to force the head of it out when he raised serious objections to what they were saying about what Iraq was doing with its nuclear non-existent program. They're working through that agency now, putting a huge amount of diplomatic coinage there.

JOHN WALCOTT: There's one argument they make about Iran that reminds me of the Iraqi craziness. And that's the one that says the Iranians would use nuclear weapons against us or against Israel. Well, both Israel and the United States have the capability to turn Iran into a skating rink. When you explode a nuclear weapon over sand, it turns into glass.

And the counter to that from some quarters has been as crazy as anything I've heard, which is, well, that we can't deter the Iranians because they're Shiites and they're all eager to commit suicide to hasten the arrival of the 12th Imam. So deterrents won't work against Iran because they're a bunch of crazy Shiites. That to me is as crazy as anything we heard about Saddam and his ties to al-Qaeda. That one, the fact that that one's out there concerns me.

JONATHAN LANDAY: That's on the other side of the equation, as well as — and I have to point out that we've heard the presidential candidates saying the same thing.

JOHN WALCOTT: Well, you wrote a story about it. JONATHAN LANDAY: I wrote a story about that and actually Obama has now dialed back on that. But both he and McCain were categorically saying that Iran has a nuclear weapons program, when that's not known right now. That's the big question.

BILL MOYERS: And Hillary Clinton at least hinted or suggested or insinuated the possibility-

JONATHAN LANDAY: She come-

BILL MOYERS: -of obliterating Iran if, in fact, they did attack-

BILL MOYERS: I mean, there has been some apocalyptic discussion.

JONATHAN LANDAY: Oh, absolutely.

JOHN WALCOTT: But, again, what's been lost in all of those conversations is the old notion of deterrents, which worked against Red China when we thought they were all crazy, worked against the Soviet Union for a long, long time, which had a much bigger
nuclear arsenal than-

JONATHAN LANDAY: Still does.

JOHN WALCOTT: -Iran ever will. Still does. And yet somehow when it comes to Iran deterrence is never part of the conversation.

BILL MOYERS: So what does, what do your sources tell you about this possibility of a military strike against Iran?

JOHN WALCOTT: Well, there certainly is a — I — there is a faction that is advocating it that, that believes that if this Administration does not take care of the Iranian problem before it leaves office, its successor, particularly if it's a President Obama, is unlikely to do so. So it's something we have to do before we leave; otherwise, we will never be safe. Israel will never be safe. And there are factions in Israel which feel exactly the same way.

And we've heard some noise just this week when Prime Minister Olmert has been in Washington, to the same effect, that this is a grave existential threat and has to be dealt with. So that issue's gonna be on the table until January 20th because one of the things we've learned is these people don't go away. They're still out there. They're still advocating.

BILL MOYERS: The people who believe in a-

JOHN WALCOTT: Who believe-

BILL MOYERS: -strong military response to these issues.

JONATHAN LANDAY: A lot of the people who believe that we needed to invade Iraq and that believe we need to take much more aggressive action against Iran are some of the very same people. And yet they keep being brought on television and quoted in newspaper stories, when their, you know, now, after this horrendous track record they had in Iraq. So you wonder how it is that there are people who have been fanning the flames for going after Iran. Some of them the very same people.

BILL MOYERS: So what should we watch for? How do we read the news these days?

GREG MITCHELL: You'd have to see whether the press this time would use the phrase "taking care of Iran." Now, what does that mean? Even if you do bomb Iran, what does that do? What is the aftereffect? What is the overall effect of it? What does it do to, you know, how many people do you kill? What happens in the wreckage afterwards? So if it's the media is — which it didn't do with Iraq — does it in this case then people will have a better understanding of what we're letting ourselves in for if we do attack Iran.

JOHN WALCOTT: That's an excellent point because the failures before the war on Iraq are probably matched by the failure to ask this question about invading Iran. Is it really gonna be easy? Are we really gonna be greeted with flowers and chocolates, as liberators, which is what the defectors told us? And one of the things this Administration has never been able to get through its head is the old saying that the enemy has a vote, that the enemy, whatever you do, they will respond in some way. And the Iranian-

JONATHAN LANDAY: Yeah, yeah. And the-

BILL MOYERS: Newton's third law, right.

JOHN WALCOTT: Not always equal and not all was exactly opposite and not all was immediate. But one of the things the Iranians can do very quickly is simply sink one oil tanker in the Persian Gulf or the Strait of Hormuz, just one, and the insurance rates will take care of the rest. And you'll have $200, $250 a barrel oil. So that's one thing to think about.
BILL MOYERS: How do you help us understand a report like this. According to Newsweek, during his Middle East tour in January, President Bush all but disowned the National Intelligence Estimate of December saying that Iran had suspended its nuclear weapons program. The President told the Israelis that he can't control what the intelligence community says, but that the NIE's conclusions don't reflect his own views, that there is an ongoing threat. Now, how do we, how are we to read that in the context of what happened five years ago, six years ago?

JOHN WALCOTT: Well, I think Scott McClellan gives you some insight into that when he talks about how in — curious the President is and how when he takes a position he simply sticks to it.

BILL MOYERS: I don't care what the facts are. This is my reality.

JOHN WALCOTT: Impervious to evidence. It is a faith-based approach to foreign policy.

GREG MITCHELL: Tom Brokaw called it theology is the word he used.

JONATHAN LANDAY: But I think there's something at play here. They have a nuclear program where they are enriching uranium in defiance, in defiance of the UN Security Council. The other irony here is that even though they're doing that, the fact is that the Administration's having a really hard time getting traction for its case. Why? Because it's lost its credibility on Iraq.

JOHN WALCOTT: Yeah. Some of the-

GREG MITCHELL: And the media has lost credibility.

JOHN WALCOTT: Yeah, that's right.

BILL MOYERS: On that note, John Walcott, Jonathan Landay, Greg Mitchell, thank you for being with me on the Journal.

GREG MITCHELL: Thank you.

JOHN WALCOTT: Thank you.

JONATHAN LANDAY: Thank you.

BILL MOYERS: These are troubling times if you believe, as many of us do, that as the press goes, so goes democracy. That's the subject of the fourth annual Media Reform Conference in Minneapolis this weekend. You can check it out on our website at pbs.org. And since this is pledge period on many public television stations, we hope you'll support this station.

That's it for the Journal. We'll be back next week. I'm Bill Moyers.

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